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

ROBERT WARD

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: February 28, 2019

INTERVIEW

Q: Today's February 28th, 2019 and we are beginning our interview with Robert Ward. Robert, what's your date and place of birth?

WARD: September 17, 1963, in Baltimore, Maryland.

Q: Oh, all right, so quite close by to DC. It's always interesting when there are people who aren't from far away. There were even a few people in the Foreign Service from DC, but Baltimore is close enough.

WARD: Right. My father is from Missouri. He attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis, and while there he met my mother, who was from Baltimore. Then they married and started a family. He was in the navy. So, we moved frequently. I do not really have much connection to Maryland, other than having been born there, what with moving around every few years.

Q: So, you were in Maryland for only your early years?

WARD: For a year or two. Then we moved to South Carolina, and then to Rhode Island. Then, when I was eight years old, in 1971, we moved to Germany, which was really wonderful because my father was stationed at EUCOM, the European Command. It may seem odd if you are in the navy to be stationed in Germany, but it was a staff headquarters type job. I have four siblings, two older brothers and two younger sisters. Germany was a great adventure. I loved it. We travelled around the country. In those days, the early 70s, very few Germans spoke English, whereas today, virtually every German under 40 speaks English as do most Europeans. We were living on an American military base (Patch Barracks), attending an American school. That experience opened my eyes to the big world out there and gave me a desire to see more of it.

Q: Ah, okay. During your youth, did your mother work as well?

WARD: She worked at times but not too much because she had five kids and that was quite a job. My youngest sister had some serious health problems from birth, so she had to look after her a lot. In 1974, we went from Stuttgart, Germany to San Diego,

California, which we also loved, for three years. Then from there, in 1977 we moved here to Virginia. My father was at the Pentagon for four years. That was during my high school years. Then I went to college in Virginia.

Q: I understand. So, you wouldn't call one of those places, until Virginia, home in a sense. Did you manage to go through all four years of high school in Virginia?

WARD: I did. I was lucky because of course my brothers, one of them had one year, his senior year, in Virginia. He didn't like that very much, and my other brother had three years.

Q: Which high school was it?

WARD: It was Stonewall Jackson high school in Manassas. If you attend that school, you should know a bit about the Battle of Bull Run and our civil war history.

Q: Back then, how big of a high school was Stonewall Jackson?

WARD: We had about 2000 students. My graduating class of 1981 had roughly 500. It was then and still is a big school.

Q: What was the high school like in terms of diversity?

WARD: It was not very diverse. There were not very many black students. There were very few Hispanics living in the area. I have noticed, since I have been around this area for 40 years, the explosion of native Spanish speakers coming here, first the Central Americans in the 80s and later some South Americans and of course, a lot of Mexicans. Also, in the Falls Church and Annandale areas, Vietnamese and Koreans have immigrated, but all these areas were predominantly white, English speaking, with few foreign-born persons back in the 70s.

Q: Having been overseas, were you interested in the world history aspects or any other opportunities to follow your interest in international relations in high school?

WARD: Well, not much. In 11th grade we were taught American history and in 12th grade we were taught government. We learned mainly about our own federal government. We were aware of and following world events, such as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua, violence in El Salvador, and the long drama of our diplomats being held hostage in Tehran. I studied German in high school. I took it because I had already been exposed to it a little bit in Germany. I did not really learn much German in Germany because we were at an American school, and I was an elementary student, and we had a standard American curriculum. Looking back years later, I thought, I should have taken Spanish in high school. There is not much opportunity to use German in the United States.

Q: So, did you follow up the study of German in college?

WARD: Yes, I did.

Q: The reason I'm asking is, I'm just curious, by the time you reached the Foreign Service, how valuable were the courses you took in German? In other words, were you able to get a level three (fluency) in the language exam, or anything close?

WARD: I have talked to many colleagues about foreign language classes in college and/or high school. I believe that one receives a very shallow foreign language learning experience in college or high school. My nephews and nieces can barely say a word in Spanish or French and they took those languages. My wife was a French major in college and I could speak French better than she did because she had not lived in a French-speaking country, whereas I had. The German I studied in school was of very little utility when I joined the Foreign Service. In fact, I had forgotten most of it by the time I joined, as I had never used it.

Q: Okay. To go back to your high school, what were the classes that you were particularly interested in or did well in?

WARD: I always loved learning. I have always considered myself a lifelong student. To this day, I try to learn new things all the time. I read a news article recently that some people never read a book after high school or college and it shocks me. My father was a mechanical engineer and I was interested in math and physics in high school. I was not thinking about the Foreign Service initially. I thought I might become an engineer like him.

Q: Were you involved in any clubs or maybe boy scouts?

WARD: In California, my brothers and I had dirt bikes (motorcycles), and we loved riding them. In high school, I was in a ski club. We would go on ski trips. I played baseball from age 8-15. When I was in high school, we were living in Haymarket, a little town which is about 12 miles from Manassas. When you live in a rural area and you do not have transportation, you are restricted in what you can do. If you live in Arlington, Virginia you can walk to school and there may be activities in which you can partake after school. It is more difficult when you need transportation, so, unfortunately, I did not do as many extra-curricular activities as I would have had I lived in a more urban setting. The same thing is true with clubs, student government, and that kind of thing.

Q: As you're going along in high school, were your parents talking to you and your older brothers about college?

WARD: Well, yes. It was assumed we would go. However, I recall asking my senior classmates “are you going to college?' Only about half of them said “yes.” Today, kids assert a right to go to college and everyone seems to go. Back when I graduated (1981) a lot of kids were going off to become mechanics, plumbers, electricians, painters, equipment operators, welders, technicians of various sorts, or to work in construction,

which is now done by immigrants mostly, it seems. They just wanted to work right away. They did not see a need for a college education for their chosen vocations. Some of them joined the military, police, or became firefighters.

Q: Since your father was in the military, had you considered joining yourself?

WARD: I did consider it. In fact, he was suggesting at one point that I should do what he did, which is go to the Naval Academy or one of the other service academies. He did not push it, but he was recommending that I consider it. However, it is extremely hard to secure an appointment to one of those institutions. In fact, it was a miracle that my father got one.

Q: Really?

WARD: Yes, because he came from a family that was not well off. My grandfather had a hard time during the Depression, as did many, and he had no money to send my father to college. No one in my father's family had ever been to college, but my father was very smart, and he went to see his congressman. Imagine, you are an 18-year-old living in Missouri and you travel to Washington to see your congressman and you say, "Hey, I want an appointment to the Naval Academy." My grandfather was a blue-collar worker with no connections and no higher education. My father and some other students interested in obtaining the appointment to the Naval Academy took a test, and I gather my father scored the highest, so received the appointment.

Q: Okay, so when did your parents marry?

WARD: They married in 1958, after he graduated from the Naval Academy.

Q: Okay. Before we go on further with your life, some people take a lot of time and attention these days in looking up their ancestors—grandparents and so on...

WARD: Genealogical research?

Q: Yes. Has your family done any of that?

WARD: That is something odd about my father. He never would talk about himself or relatives. He always concentrated on his children. When you are moving around a lot, you do not see your relatives often, and there was no practical way to keep in touch in those days other than write letters, but what kid wants to do that? My grandparents, both sets of them, passed away when I was young. My mother's father was overweight and drank and smoked too much and he died at 65 and then his wife, my grandmother, died two years later. They were both gone by the time I was 15. I have done some research since then. I found out my mother's mother was the last of 17 kids and she apparently eloped. She gave birth at age 18. I suspect she may have been pregnant when she ran off, which would explain the elopement. I do not know if the family cut ties with her or what

transpired, but I never heard her, or my mother mention my grandmother's siblings (16 of them). Who knows where they are now?

Q: Wow!

WARD: My mother's mother's name was Rebecca Campbell, which is a Scottish surname. Her husband's name was Hugh Wagner, which is German. My father's side of the family is from Missouri. My father's father was an only child, so my father did not have uncles and aunts. It is a mystery to me whether I have some relatives on his side somewhere, distantly related. My father's name, Ward, has roots in Ireland and England. My father's mother, Mary Ellen Osman, has a Turkish surname. Thus, I suppose I have Turkish, English, Irish, and German roots.

Q: So, as you're looking ahead to college, what were your criteria?

WARD: First of all, I was looking to go in-state because my father did not have a lot of money. He was supporting three kids in college at the same time: my two brothers and me. I went to Virginia Tech. I liked it just fine. I was not looking for anything particular in college. I just wanted a large enough university that there would be a wide choice of electives. I found that.

Q: What were you thinking of majoring in? Were you still interested in science and math?

WARD: I started off as an engineering student and I thought that was what I wanted to do because I was pretty good at math and physics in high school and had taken chemistry. My first year in college, I took calculus and physics and chemistry, and these courses were extremely hard. Engineering courses in general are very difficult. I was studying constantly. I did okay the first year, but then I thought, "I don't want to keep doing this," for two reasons. One, I asked myself, "Am I going to do this for a living? I'm not enjoying this very much." It was intellectually challenging, but I was not passionate about it. The other thing was I thought I would be shortchanging my education because everyone I knew in engineering was studying the same courses each year. I thought, "When will I have time to study literature, history, economics, geography, psychology, statistics, geology, art, music, foreign language?" The answer is you do not. You have almost no electives because you have to take all these required courses that are all about engineering. I thought, "if I stick with engineering, I'll have a very incomplete education. I want a broad education." Thus, I switched majors to political science.

Q: As you began switching from math and science, what begins to interest you in the humanities?

WARD: I found all the international relations and all the political science courses interesting and relevant. I thought it was important to understand my own government regardless of what I did for a living. How otherwise can one be a good citizen, and advance our democracy if one does not have a basis of knowledge about the functioning of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, the political parties, their

philosophies, our history, etc? I enjoyed foreign policy classes. I was attending college near the end of the Cold War, although we did not realize how close to the end we were. This was a time of huge change. I was taking a class on Russia when Gorbachev took power, and all of us were wondering what was going to happen next. I had a great professor who was an expert on communism and on Russia.

Q: You did pursue German language in college as well. Did they have requirements for you in terms of speaking or anything like that?

WARD: In high school and college at that time, as I recall, teachers and professors were always focused on grammar, vocabulary, and written tests. There was not a lot of speaking, or very little emphasis on that. When you have a class of 30 high school students, how much speaking can each student get in each day? The class was not quite that big in college, but still, there was not an emphasis on oral communication. That is why when I came here to the Foreign Service Institute and studied Spanish, I was quite pleasantly surprised that the instruction focuses primarily on speaking, because that is what you need to do with a foreign language.

Q: Now, you're going along in college and you know, you're broadening your horizons. Right? Did you read for pleasure as well? Were there particular topics or authors or anything that interested you?

WARD: I took enough literature courses to get a double major (political science/English). That required studying and analysis, but it was also simply pleasurable. I was reading Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekov, Turgenev, Shakespeare, Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Poe, Hawthorne and so many others. I would have felt very ignorant had I graduated from college without having read a wide variety of literature. Most people do not have a lot of time to read novels after they start working, so I wanted to take advantage while in college.

Q: You never got the acting bug or, public speaking and—

WARD: Acting is something we all do every day. It is natural. When you are one of five kids, you do a lot of acting.

Q: I could imagine.

WARD: I was a sort of actor throughout my high school years. That is a gift I had, to mimic comedians and to make people laugh. I had a great memory for songs, movies, and skits on television. My siblings and I used to entertain each other a lot growing up, before the age of internet and cable television.

Q: The other thing that I meant to ask you as you were talking about this was about foreign travel. Did the university offer you or encourage you to take a year abroad?

WARD: Yes, my German professor did. He said that I should study abroad in Germany. I was thinking about it, I looked into it, but I eventually opted not to. I do not recall why. Maybe I just wanted to stay in the U.S., but it was also expensive to go abroad. I had no money in college. I was working part time just to have enough to eat. It was a bit difficult for me, financially.

Q: So, you worked while you were at University?

WARD: Some part-time jobs, and also, of course, every summer I worked full time. Also, I should mention, in the literature courses I took, I did a lot of writing. I was required to write essays frequently, and I was trying to become a good writer. That was a goal of mine. Writing, like anything else, is something you get better at the more you do. I started off not being very good, but I steadily improved. I worked very hard at it, and my professors would always tell me I wrote great papers. One of them said I had written such a great analysis of a short story that it could be published. I spent a lot of time and effort making sure I got the grammar correct, the spelling, the word choices, formulating logical arguments, employing rhetorical devices, etc. Writing well is immensely beneficial in the Foreign Service. I find even today that many officers in the Service have not mastered basic grammar, spelling, diction, etc. which always makes me shudder. Did they not pay attention in class? Do they not care? Both?

Q: Were there particular mentors in college who saw something in you and said, "You really ought to be thinking about [the Foreign Service]?

WARD: I do not think so. I never went to a counselor in high school like a lot of students do. On occasion, I corrected my algebra teacher in high school. She told me to become a mathematician. I did not know what I wanted to do with my life when I was 17, which is when I graduated from high school. In college, the same thing. I did not consult counselors. I talked to my professors all the time, but I did not ask them for career advice really. I think the political science department at Virginia Tech should have invited someone from the Foreign Service to visit. We are not far from Washington. I recall seeing one flyer posted on a bulletin board one time that said something about the Foreign Service.

Q: Is that when you thought, "I wonder if that might be for me"?

WARD: When you are studying foreign affairs, you start learning about embassies. Then you ask yourself, "Well, how does one get employed by an embassy?" I was thinking when I graduated, I would like to be a journalist, a foreign correspondent. I went and spoke to a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, a family friend, and he said, "The normal route is you start off working for a small newspaper in your hometown, and then you go from there eventually to the state capitol, like Richmond, and you are probably writing obituaries or such and then you are covering sports perhaps, and then you work your way up and finally cover the State House. Then you go from there to try to get onto a big paper, like the Washington Post, and then you start low again. Then 20 or so years into your journalistic career, you might become a foreign correspondent." I responded, "I

don't want to wait 20 years to go overseas. I want to go now." Thus, I thought about the Foreign Service or the military instead of journalism.

Q: Okay. So now you're thinking about work and possibly additional studies. What happened after you graduated?

WARD: It took me a year before I got into the State Department. For a year I was doing various jobs that were not very appealing or memorable. What can you do with a political science degree? I worked as a proofreader for a while for a company. Then I worked at Giant Food Corporation gutting fish. That was fun. Nobody wanted that job, but it paid well. I took the Foreign Service written test at one point. I came very close but did not pass it. I thought of going back to get a graduate degree, but a Master's in political science is not worth much and would have left me in debt. It was kind of a wasted year. After one year of doing various jobs, I got into the State Department, in the Civil Service.

Q: Okay. Now the test for the Civil Service is somewhat different than the Foreign Service.

WARD: Yes, it is like this: "Stand up. Are you breathing?"

Q: I didn't know, back then in the late eighties, how they differentiated entirely because I only had very brief civil service work myself, and that was over the summer at a military base. You didn't really have to fill out the long forms and do an essay or anything like that. You were expected to be there only a few months. So, I never took a civil service exam and I never really found out what it was like to have to do the whole civil service test.

WARD: It all seemed a mystery to me, how to get into this organization. It was not very transparent. I saw an advertisement for a clerk typist, and I said, "Okay, I'll do that, just to get my foot in the door" and that is what I got hired as.

Q: You were applying specifically to get into the State Department?

WARD: Right.

Q: Okay. So, you passed the exam. Where did they place you?

WARD: The recruitment division, with the Board of Examiners, located at a State Department annex in Rosslyn, Virginia. They put me in that office. They told me they had to do a security clearance for me, and that it could take months. Therefore, I was restricted to unclassified work, like typing and mailing letters and responding to congressional correspondence and this sort of thing. It was fine. Fortuitously, I saw a lot of material related to the Foreign Service test, which undoubtedly helped later. In addition, I was learning about the organization. I did that for six months. Then someone said, "Have you heard of the State Department's Operations Center?" And I said, "No,

what do they do?" Then I got my security clearance and went over to the Operations Center, which was terrific.

WASHINGTON/OPERATIONS CENTER

Q: What year did you join the Operations Center?

WARD: I joined the State Department in October of '87 and then in '88 around April I went over to the Ops Center.

Q: A few months later we overlapped because I was coming back from overseas. Operations Center was my first Washington tour. I got there probably in the summer of '88 and I remember you working there.

WARD: Everybody in the Ops Center was Foreign Service except for the Operations Assistants, as they called them. I was an Operations Assistant. Those employees were Civil Service.

Q: Now what were the responsibilities of the Operations Assistants?

WARD: The responsibilities were various. The Ops Center was considered the nerve center of the Department, open 24 hours. This was before the internet of course, and we spent a lot of time collectively informing the high-ranking officers in the Department what was happening, especially in the middle of the night when our Government was closed. We were the repository for all these telegrams/cables coming in from abroad, especially the captioned cables, the NODIS (literally “no distribution”) cables, and all these special handling cables, including some which said, "For the Secretary's eyes only from the Ambassador.” We would handle those, and print them in our office and distribute them, including some which had to be hand-delivered. We would also get correspondence from the other agencies. From CIA, DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency], DOD [Department of Defense], all this highly classified and codeword correspondence coming in, which we would again assemble, make copies if necessary, and deliver. As one of my associates commented, it was kind of glorified secretarial work, delivering messages to people. However, at the same time, we were able to see all this information flow. It was amazing for me because I started reading cable traffic from posts all over the world. Some of my counterparts were just delivering it, but I was actually reading as much as I could and trying to absorb it all.

Q: For someone who is interested in how the State Department operates and in the specifics that you can see in the cables coming in, it is the best place in the Department to learn about just about everything. So, you were interested, and you really did take the time to inform yourself about some of these things. It was a very lucky assignment for somebody just starting with the State Department and just as an aside, I was one of the watch officers. We did the same thing with the cables. When there wasn't a crisis, we were at our little personal computers. They were Wang computers. Hundreds of cables are coming into the Department from overseas and you have to put the distribution in every

single one. The Department had probably over a hundred offices, and you needed to distribute to every single office that might possibly have an interest. It was generally better to over-distribute than under-distribute because woe betides if a cable came in and the EB office of international postal whatever didn't see it. You would hear about the mistakes; you would never hear about having done anything right.

WARD: No one complained that they got a cable they were not required to get, that's right. We did the same thing. The Operations Assistants were also handling all the tickers, as we called them. These were machines constantly printing news stories. The four were AP, UPI, Reuters and FBIS (foreign broadcast information service). We had to make copies of relevant stories and distribute those to the right offices, and again like you said you had to know all these offices and so you had to learn a lot about the organization of the Department.

Q: Were you also working different shifts, as I was?

WARD: Yes. So, I would work one day shift or two day shifts, and then two evening shifts, and then two-night shifts or something similar, then start over again. This causes turmoil to your circadian rhythm.

Q: I was going to say that you were very fortunate that you ended up in this kind of job where you were on rotating shift work while you were young.

WARD: Yeah, with no kids.

Q: It gets much harder the older you get. How long in total were you in the Operations Center?

WARD: I was there about a year and a half. By the way, you tend to become a news junkie when you are there. CNN was playing constantly, 24 hours on television. One of the things we did as you will recall is for the Secretary of State every morning, we would get the newspapers, at 3:00 or 4:00 AM, cut them up with scissors and tape stories of foreign policy interest into a booklet, and then photocopy them. That was one of my jobs: to prepare the morning news clips for the Secretary and other Department principals. We all worked on that together. We scanned the *Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, LA Times, Chicago Tribune*. Of course, we would read all the stories ourselves or at least I did. During that time, I felt like I knew everything that was going on in the world, more or less.

Q: I can tell you that yeah, I remember that very well.

WARD: We also did the overnight brief. That was one of our products. We would tell the Secretary "This is what happened when you were sleeping" basically. It was a one-page memo, derived from the telegrams that came in.

Q: It's likely the Secretary looked at that, but it's probably just as likely that his staff had looked at it first and said, "You'll want to read this one," but we still spent those hours making sure that every single thing was right. Because who knows, one day the Secretary might read it.

WARD: Arguing over the content, the placement, the exact wording.

Q: Yep.

WARD: Occasionally we would connect the Secretary or other principals with a congressman, an ambassador abroad, or a foreign leader. We had huge telephone switchboards and the phone number of everyone in the Department and at our Embassies, as well as contacts at every federal agency. And Congressmen. I remember one occasion we connected President Reagan to Robin Raphel, whose former husband, Ambassador to Pakistan Arnold Raphel, had just been killed in a plane crash along with Pakistani President Zia al Haq.

Q: Fascinating. While you were there, and of course you're actually walking out of the office to other places because you're delivering things, does that give you an opportunity to begin networking in the department? You become like a known quantity?

WARD: No, not really, because you just deliver items. However, it did give me exposure to everything. Walking around the building, I could see that we had an office on American Citizen Services or an office on demining or a Bureau of Refugee Affairs. I started learning about the organization of the Department and what each office does. You do not learn that when you join the Foreign Service. New Foreign Service officers are sent overseas right away; they do not work in the Department in Washington first like I did. Thus, new officers have little knowledge or understanding of how the Department is organized and how it functions. By contrast, I had a very good knowledge of that before joining the Foreign Service. I definitely had a leg up.

Q: So, 18 months is probably the longest even a young person can tolerate those shift hours. What was going on towards the end of the 18 months in terms of your thinking for where you would go?

WARD: Actually, the rotating shifts did not bother me that much. The best was perhaps the 4:00 p.m. to midnight shift because I could get up late, go get some things done. Then when I went to work, there was no rush hour because I was going against traffic at four p.m. and when I left work it was midnight and there was no rush hour then either. I got home late, but a little after midnight is not too bad. Now, the midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift was tough. A few times, I almost fell asleep driving home at 8:00 a.m. Some of my coworkers would take a nap before going to work for the midnight shift but I was not able to do that. If you did two night shifts in a row, then you kind of adjusted to it the second night, but then you would get thrown off again when you worked a day shift. At any rate, that is not the reason that I left. I thought "I love this job. It is great, but I am not going to do this forever. What's next?" My goal was to get into the Foreign Service, but

they did not offer the test for a while. They were going through this period where they were revamping the test and there was a lawsuit and the process was stymied. Consequently, I was always looking at job opportunities posted in the Department, curious as to what else was out there. One day, I saw an ad that said they had some jobs that were "hard to fill." They listed three overseas jobs, one in Georgetown, Guyana, one in Kuwait, and one in Kinshasa, Zaire. They were all secretarial jobs. I thought, "I do not want to be a secretary, but I would like to work at an embassy, and if I go to Kinshasa, I will get to learn French. I will also see some of Africa." I volunteered for it and they said, "Okay, you got it."

Q: Now, what was the job officially?

WARD: Secretary of Econ section.

Q: To prepare to go, what happened next?

KINSHASA

WARD: Well, very little. You learn things in the Foreign Service the hard way. When they assign you, they often tell you "we need you immediately." This is what every embassy says. The first time you hear this, you do not realize that they say this every time. Thus, you are scrambling, packing up, trying to get on the next plane out there, and then when you arrive, they say, "You're here already?" When you have been around a while and you learn the system a little better, you say, "Wait a minute. I want this training, I need time for this and that," but at that time I was like, "Okay, let's go." I went out there very quickly with no preparation, but of course I read everything I could on Zaire before going.

Q: Did they give you French language training before going?

WARD: No, but they told me they would pay for a tutor at post. I got to Kinshasa and I had a tutor, which was good, but I arrived with no French, which is such a shame. I should have insisted on the six-week fast course that is offered at the Foreign Service Institute, and I would have done so had I understood the system better.

Q: Okay, suddenly the plane lands and you're in Kinshasa, kind of a different culture. What was that like?

WARD: The most difficult part was getting my wife to go because I was married at that point.

Q: So, what year did you get married?

WARD: I married in 1987.

Q: You were married before you started working?

WARD: Just a couple of months before I started at the State Department.

Q: How did you meet your wife?

WARD: We were working at the same restaurant in Manassas over the summer when we were in college. I went to school at Virginia Tech, but I came back to the Manassas area in the summer and lived with my brother.

Q: So, she's tolerating the crazy schedule at the State Department Operations Center, now you dropped this bombshell, "Oh, we're going to Kinshasa!"

WARD: It was not a bombshell, as I discussed it with her before applying, and she agreed to it. Even before we got married, I told her my dream was to get into the Foreign Service. It has been my experience that many people say "That sounds great. That sounds exciting. That sounds wonderful." They really love the idea of traveling overseas initially. Over time, they may sour on the concept, but upon first hearing it, it sounds very exciting, an adventure. She had studied chemistry, but then she decided she did not want to have a career in chemistry, so she was working as a teacher, which is a useful skill to have overseas.

Q: Had she had any international experience before?

WARD: No. She was from Virginia and had never been outside of the country, except for a bicycle trip after college for about four weeks in Europe.

Q: So, how did you acclimate?

WARD: I found then, and even today, that if you prepare yourself mentally ahead of time, if you learn as much as you can about the place, and if your expectations align with reality, you are going to do fine. You do poorly if you have expectations that are unrealistic, if you fail to inform yourself about conditions before you go, and if you expect things to be like they are in the United States. Obviously, I knew it was a third world country, fairly undeveloped, with limited availability of many things we take for granted in the United States. However, I went there with an objective: to learn French and to experience embassy work. I liked the idea of working in the economic section. I had taken a lot of Econ courses by the way. After I graduated from Virginia Tech, I started to work on a Master's in Economics at George Mason University in Fairfax, but I did not finish it because I went overseas. I thought that I would like to be an Econ officer in the Foreign Service. My plan was to absorb everything from the economic officers at the embassy that I could. I saw many upsides to going to Zaire, including a financial one (you get free housing). Of course, there were some hardships. We missed our friends and family. Telephones did not work very well, and calls were very expensive. Mail took weeks to arrive. There was no Internet, no Amazon or Netflix…

Q: At this moment in time in Kinshasa, what were safety conditions like and your personal security issues?

WARD: I did not know much about Africa and that is one of the reasons I wanted to go, to expand my education. Before going overseas, I did receive a brief introduction to some of the issues I would face, during FSI's Africa area studies program. In that class, the instructor asked, "What is the likelihood that the country you are going to will experience a violent coup or change of government?" We had people in my class going to various countries in Africa, many of which were politically unstable. I put down the chances as very low because Zaire was fairly stable with President Mobutu maintaining a firm grip. There is always potential for instability in these countries, though. In fact, right after I left Zaire, it fell apart. However, at the time, I was not worried about it. I must say it is a little unsettling when you are a white person in Kinshasa and you are walking in a market, and a thousand people around you are black. You realize that if someone says, "Get the white guy," you have nowhere to hide. I never felt scared or worried, but to say I was a minority would be an understatement. That felt odd and took getting used to.

Q: How long was the tour listed as?

WARD: Two years.

Q: Okay. So, it was a regular two-year tour. So, what was it like working in the embassy in Kinshasa when you were there? How large of an embassy was it?

WARD: I would say it was a medium-sized embassy at the time because we had some people there focusing on Angola, as well as those working on Zaire. It was August 1989 when I arrived. Zaire (the Congo today) is a huge country. Even though it is third world and poor, there was a lot going on there. I remember when my plane landed. I retrieved my luggage and then some guy grabbed my suitcase out of my hand. Several guys descended on me and I thought, wow, they are stealing everything. They were actually fighting over who would carry my suitcase because they wanted a tip, but I did not understand what was going on. It was chaotic, unsettling. The customs guy demanded my yellow immunization booklet and my passport, and I gave them to him, and he gave me back my passport and I said "Okay, where's my immunization booklet?" He said, "I do not have it." I responded "What do you mean? I just gave it to you." He never gave it back to me and kept saying he did not know where it was. I eventually left. Apparently, I was supposed to give him a bribe and then I would have gotten it back, but I did not understand that because I had just arrived in country.

Q: Wow. I imagine your wife was in a similar state of mind.

WARD: A few days before we were going to leave Washington, she said, "I am not going," and I said, "Well, okay, I cannot make you go, but I am going to go. I cannot flake out when I gave my word and I have signed up to do this." Then she buckled down and went anyway, and she ended up liking it a lot actually. She was very nervous before going, though. Anyone in their right mind would be, I suppose.

Q: Of course. First of all, you've never been abroad and—

WARD: Well I had lived in Germany, but she had not lived abroad. What you find in these small posts in the third world typically is the Americans stick together. Not only that, but we tend to socialize with Europeans. In Kinshasa, there was a British club, there was a French club, there was a Portuguese club, and a Greek club. We would go around to these different clubs and we had our own, the American club. These people became our circle of friends and acquaintances and they were all like-minded. We were similar in our education, outlook, western-oriented views and so forth. We saw them frequently, we went to dinner parties, we had our own theater group, and we played tennis together and softball and basketball. There was an American School of Kinshasa, teaching the kids from all these Embassies and American kids as well. My wife was working there, and she made friends with all the teachers and that became another social group for us. We planned a lot of events and trips around the area. In a small or medium-sized post in Africa, one does things in a group in a way that one does not when at a big post, or when in Europe.

Q: Did you travel a lot around Zaire while you were there?

WARD: I travelled around it a little. It was very hard to get around the country by car because most roads were built in the '60s and they had never been maintained or repaired. Unlike other colonizers in Africa, say the British or the French, the Belgians just pretty much tried to take everything they could from Zaire and did very little to develop it or prepare it for independence. They did not train competent civil servants, for instance. They just exploited the country, its resources, and its people. They took rubber, ivory—everything else they could out of the country and then said, "Okay, you want independence? Go ahead." Belgium is a tiny country, about 1/100th of the size of Zaire.

It was very hard to drive anywhere. This country, if you look at it on the map, is the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. It is gigantic. You can imagine how difficult it would be to try to put infrastructure in. If you see a satellite view of it, Zaire is green. It gets a lot of rainfall every year and so that damages the roads, as do big trucks. I did get to Moanda, which is on the Atlantic coast. We went there one time with some teachers for Thanksgiving. We took our own turkey with us, naturally. I also flew to Lubumbashi and worked at our consulate there for two weeks, which is close to Zambia. It is the copper capital, as they call it. Zaire had a lot of copper reserves in the Lubumbashi region. I also took a trip to a place called “Black River,” with my colleagues. That was harrowing because I slipped on a boulder and fell with my full weight on my hip. Fortunately, I was 26 years old and in good shape, with strong bones. Had I broken a hip, I would have been stuck out in the middle of nowhere, hours from a hospital, with terrible roads, in excruciating pain. That is kind of the extent of my travels around that country. My wife and I did take a vacation to Kenya, which was great fun, and we also visited Cairo, which we found dirty, overcrowded, and which made us sick (from food poisoning).

Q: Aside from the typical duties as a secretary, did the section begin also giving you additional responsibility?

WARD: Actually, I demanded it. My boss was all too happy to oblige. I would correct/edit/improve the reporting of the Econ officers frequently. That probably annoyed them, but it was a service to the section and to the embassy. As soon as my French became serviceable, I would go out and collect information just as the officers did. I was reporting on a number of issues and writing cables and memos. In fact, we had visitors from the office of inspector general (OIG) and they said, "Wow, you're doing the work of a junior foreign service officer." And it was true. We had this economic survey, which I was doing, and I used one of the FSNs as we called them at that time, the Foreign Service Nationals, to go out and survey prices of various items. How much is a packet of cigarettes, how much is a kilo of rice? All the items that we thought people typically bought in a basket of goods and we tracked it every month. Then we could determine the inflation rate which is important because this is a country where there are no reliable statistics. We had to do our own surveys and analyses. I was doing that—the monthly inflation survey, and other things like that.

Q: Because that is a really interesting way to learn about at least the city, if not the wider country because you're going to where people live and work.

WARD: Yes. Just down the street from the embassy, there was an "Ivory Market," although there was not a lot of ivory there. This is during the time when ivory was still being sold and elephants were being wiped out, although the practice had greatly diminished. At this market, they sold little chimps, among other things. One of my colleagues got really worked up about this. He wanted to save the chimps. He actually got authorities to confiscate a chimp being sold at one point, and they gave it to him. They did not know what else to do with it. He brought it to the embassy. Now, what was he going to do with a baby chimp? It was well-meaning, but somewhat hopeless. One cannot release a baby chimp into the wild.

One of my highlights when I was in Zaire was that Jane Goodall visited. I was probably the lowest ranking person in the embassy, and they said, "She's going to fly into Brazzaville," which is across the river from Kinshasa, "then she's going to take the ferry across." The ambassador and some section heads were down at the ferry landing waiting for her. I was going to lunch because I was not invited to be part of the greeting party. I saw this white woman walking down the street carrying a suitcase and it was Jane Goodall. I ran up to her, she was walking by herself, and I grabbed her suitcase. I introduced myself. She had crossed the river, but her ferry landed about a mile away from where everyone was waiting for her. I talked to her for a few minutes, then I radioed the ambassador (we communicated with radios), "Come back to the embassy. She's here." My boss, the Econ chief, spent a lot of time talking with her, as he was the control officer for her visit. His young daughters just idolized Jane Goodall, who became a mentor to them. They still have a relationship today, 30 years later.

Q: That's remarkable. I imagine she was there on behalf of protection and conservation.

WARD: Yes. That was her first trip to Zaire. She did not speak French, so my boss had to translate for her in her meetings with local officials. She was trying to get Zairian officials interested in the same thing she was working on, protecting chimps.

Q: So now beyond the monthly info economic costs, which is also interesting because your management or admin section would use that to make a determination for what they pay for locals, and if there is runaway inflation, the differential for the post. So, it had multiple values.

WARD: Yes. Inflation was under control for a while when I was there. Near the end of my tour, it took off and it became hyperinflation as economists say. That sparked riots. A month after I left, authorities kept issuing larger and larger denomination bills, and these were all being printed in Germany. The new bills denoted 50,000 zaires instead of 10,000 or 5,000. Some of the local merchants decided not to accept the 50,000 zaires notes that the military was paid with. As a result, soldiers could not buy anything with their money, so they just started smashing shop windows and looting. Imagine if the military is looting, who is going to stop them? No one. We had an official exchange rate and it was something like 150 to the dollar when I got there, but there was an unofficial rate, as there often is in these countries, of about 250 to the dollar. Naturally, the ambassador directed us, "You cannot exchange currency on the black market. That is not legal." Nonetheless, everybody with half a brain did it. You had to be careful about how you did it. My friend was the head of the American Chamber of Commerce. He always wanted dollars and I played poker with him. I would say, "Here is $200. Give me some zaires. However much this is worth." Then I would not count it.

Q: Did you have VIP visits?

WARD: We had a few CODELs [congressional delegations], but not many. Secretary of State James Baker came once, which was a big deal. I do not remember what exactly he was coming there for.

Q: Well the one thing I know about James Baker with regard to Africa was he had a personal interest in the agreement to end the illegal trade of ivory.

WARD: Yes. It was a major issue at the time. There were headlines with Daniel Arap Moi [President of Kenya at the time] burning confiscated ivory. Zaire had its share of elephants, but unlike Kenya or Tanzania, did not have the developed infrastructure. There were as many elephants in Zimbabwe or Zaire as in Kenya or Tanzania, but the former countries did not develop the tourist infrastructure. They did not have the huts and the safari lodges, the airports and the roads. They also had fewer big game hunters.

Q: The other aspect is that Zaire is a large country, not everyone speaks the same language and so on. What was your experience with the different language groups or the different ethnic groups that comprise Zaire?

WARD: That is exactly right. This is the case of so many countries in Africa. The Europeans carved up Africa willy nilly, drawing the borders of countries right through various ethnic groups with no regard to their tribes or the languages. Lingala was one of the big regional languages in eastern Zaire, but there were multiple other languages. Most Zairians spoke a language from their village, then they learned a wider regional language (Lingala or Swahili), and then they would learn French. French was their third language. They received very little formal education, so you can imagine the quality of their French. If you speak French like the Zairians do, as I learned to, then when you return to the Foreign Service Institute, the Parisian instructors there held their noses up as they were listening to me speak French. I agree with your point that communication can be difficult even amongst Zairians at times.

Q: Now you had mentioned that your wife was teaching. Did she share insights and conclusions she had about the country from the teaching that she was doing?

WARD: The teachers and other staff at the school got out a lot on weekends. As a community, they were another source of information on what was going on in the country, and they picked up a lot of the local customs and habits and tried different foods and so forth.

Q: Did you have much contact when you were in the Econ section with either Peace Corps or USAID?

WARD: Yes. I knew the Peace Corps director very well. One of his Peace Corps volunteers (PCV), when she finished working for him, started working for us in the Econ section. She was a very nice lady. These PCVs are so practical and down to earth. My boss, the Econ chief, would always host PCVs when they would visit the capitol from the interior. He characterized them as locusts who would descend on him and eat all of his food. He commented to me that some of them had a Christ-on-the-cross-mentality. They felt like if they did not suffer, their experience had not been real. Consequently, they wanted to tell you how they had contracted malaria and how they got diarrhea or some other sickness, and how rough they had it. He observed, "That doesn't help the local people any."

An American showed up one day at the embassy. He said, "I was a Peace Corps volunteer here a while back. I just came back to visit the country." I said, "Oh, well what did you discover?" He related that he had just returned to a little village where he had been posted ten years earlier teaching locals how to raise rabbits, and the rabbits would poop in this little pond and then the fish would eat that, so that would raise fish as well. He set this all up for them; they were all interested in it and following his instructions. Then, he left the country. When he came back to visit ten years later, of course, it was all gone, and when he asked what had happened, they told him they ate all the rabbits a week after he left. This is one of countless examples that often locals go along with our programs because we are directing them and are there overseeing and managing the projects, but the moment we leave, they revert to their former ways. I heard the same thing happened in Guatemala. The Peace Corps there were raising chickens and helping the locals. They

raised chicks into chickens, and then sold them all. Then the men took all the money, went out and drank all the earnings. Then they had no money to buy more chicks and the whole enterprise collapsed.

Q: There's always that possibility. From the point of view of the Econ section, what were the major things that you were trying to accomplish or what were the mission goals?

WARD: As I recall, a lot of times in the Econ section what we were doing was reporting. We had some commercial interests in Zaire, but American companies were hesitant to invest there because they were worried about the lack of rule of law, corruption, and political instability. They were worried about whether they could repatriate their profits. Zaire produced a lot of copper, diamonds, and rubber. We were reporting on what was happening in the economy because it affects the political situation. Is the economy growing or contracting? Is employment rising or falling? The government was always borrowing money from the international financial institutions. The government struggled to make their debt service payments and that had the potential to destabilize the economy, to jeopardize future borrowing. We were looking at mainly macro-economic statistics.

Q: So, you were there for two years. You weren't thinking of extending?

WARD: No. In fact, it was not even a possibility.

Q: Okay, how about the thinking that you had about joining the Foreign Service? Where was that going?

WARD: Oh, that was always on my mind. I was in Kinshasa from '89 to ’91. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and I had an urge to get on a plane and fly to Berlin. It was such an important moment in world history, and I felt like I was missing out on it, a million miles away in central Africa. Then, in 1990, Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait, and again, I thought, I am so far from the action. I would like to enlist in the army and go to Kuwait. It was all over in six months, but still, I kept feeling I was missing the action. In 1991, they offered the Foreign Service written test again and I took it in Kinshasa and passed it. They said, "you have to go back to Washington to take the oral test." So, my tour ended, I went back to Washington and they immediately placed me in another job, because I had not left the Civil Service yet. I was placed in INL [International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs], which was then called INM [International Narcotics Matters] and I started to learn about counter-narcotics.

I took the Foreign Service oral test, but I did not pass it. I was really heartbroken because I thought I did really well. In fact, in those days, they insisted that you not reveal anything about your background because it could bias them, supposedly. You should not tell them you are a graduate of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, for instance. I could not tell them I had been working for the State Department for four years. I could not tell them I had worked at an American embassy for two years. One of the questions they asked me was "Imagine that you are at an embassy in central Africa" and I almost laughed out loud. I felt like saying “I just left an embassy in central Africa four weeks

ago." I gave, I thought, very good answers to their questions. I wondered though, did they think I had been coached by someone or had received the questions in advance? I thought the scoring of the oral exam was very subjective. How did I not pass with my experience and knowledge? I certainly showed no nervousness and had great confidence. Maybe too much?

Then, I heard about the Mustang program, which worked like this: if you have been in the Civil Service for at least three years and show some sort of promise, then they would allow you to skip the Foreign Service written test and go right to the oral test. I had already passed the written test, but I thought, “I am going to check into this" because this would allow me to take the oral test again immediately, rather than wait another year to take the written test again. Thus, I applied for it. They said “sure, you are a good candidate." I took the oral test again, only a month after I had just taken it, and this time I passed it. The odd thing is I did not think I did as well the second time on the oral test as the first time, because questions always vary and you never knew what they were going to ask you. The first time I took the oral test, I answered all the questions very well, in my view. The second time, I stumbled on a few. I thought that I definitely did not pass the second time because I did worse than the first time. However, the second time they passed me. I thought, "Wow, the way they score these tests is so subjective.” I did not complain, though.

Q: Okay, so they let you know you had passed and now you have to have your medical clearance and your security clearance. Did that go faster for you?

WARD: I already had those. I already had a security clearance, and I had a medical clearance because I had just come from Zaire. These clearances are good for five years. They told me the same day that I took the oral test that I had passed it, so I said, "Great, when's the next A-100 class?" I knew there was one coming up in December of 1991 or January of 1992, but they said, “They are already full." So, they put me in the following class, which was March of '92.

Q: When you joined the Foreign Service, at that time, were you joining in a cone? In other words, do they offer you a position in a specific cone?

WARD: We have a joke that goes “if you do not like the personnel system, just wait a year, because they will change it.” When I joined, they had decided they were doing away with the practice of offering employment letters with specific cones to new Foreign Service officers (FSOs). We were part of the "unconed experiment.” The idea was you would start unconed and then after your second tour, when you were tenured, the Department would assign your cone. You would express a preference, but they would decide. So that is what happened.

Q: What was your A-100 class like in terms of size and diversity?

WARD: We had the distinction of being the first class that had more women than men. We had an equal number, but then one guy in the first week resigned. He wanted to go back to the private sector. We ended up with 23 women and 22 men as I recall.

Q: So, it was a good sized class. Any minorities?

WARD: Sure. I remember at the time when I joined, I was thinking I wanted to go to Japan or Russia. Both Tokyo and Moscow were available, but there was a Japanese-American guy in my class who obviously spoke Japanese and there were several Russian speakers, so I did not get either of those posts. The average age was 30 in my class. That was a change from decades earlier, when guys were coming right out of university and joining the Foreign Service from the Ivy League schools. It was almost all men in those earlier times. Of course, people came from all over the country in my class. There was a man who was in his early forties. He had just left the military after 20 years. There was a guy who was 21. He told us he was selling fish bait in Texas before joining. We wondered how he got into the Foreign Service. We had a lot of people who had been in the Peace Corps, or USAID, or another branch of government, or they had been working in the private sector. Banking or law. Most had some years of work experience after college, and many held graduate degrees. I was 28.

Q: Yeah. So, they had a little bit more maturity and they also knew how corporate cultures operate. What was the training you got in A-100? Was it useful considering that you had already been in the State Department?

WARD: It was a lot more useful to my colleagues than to me. Most of it I knew already, because I had worked at State for four years and at an embassy. The main thing I got out of A-100 is that I started networking with all of my colleagues.

Q: That was my next question.

WARD: The training was pretty good overall, I would say. There is some downside to sitting in a windowless room in Rosslyn listening to a bunch of talking heads every day. We were the last class to take A-100 in Rosslyn, by the way. It would have been useful to spend time in the State Department getting to know what the various offices are and what they do. What is a telegram? What is a demarche? How is the Department organized? You and I discussed earlier that we were distributing telegrams in the Ops Center, and I thought, "This should be a very simple algorithm for a computer to do," which they do now. Telegrams have “TAGS” which is a system of filing and distribution and all this is getting technical, but, "What is a TAG? What does this mean?" You do not learn such basic things in A-100 training. The training in A-100 is very broad and superficial. The answer to every question is “that depends” (on the country you are going to). We did an offsite where we pretended we were at an embassy, but it is not the same.

Q: Yeah. Having taken A-100, it was useful for me in that sense, only because I had never been to an embassy before, but for someone who had, I'm not sure how much you would really learn from—

WARD: I asked them if I could skip A-100, actually, so I could just go to my first tour. Of course, they said no.

Q: Okay, but then as you're completing A-100, you're approaching the point where you know you are bidding and you get notice of your first assignment. Since Japan and Russia were taken, what were your thoughts?

WARD: The first tour is directed, meaning you get assigned there, though HR does take into account your preferences and background. I had just come from Zaire, which was a difficult hardship tour. I thought, let's go somewhere nice. My wife certainly had some input, and I am sure that was the reason we put London first on our list, but a lot of people wanted London. One of the calculations I made is that early in a Foreign Service career, you can go to a place like London or Paris. As you move up in rank, it gets more difficult because there are not very many positions and there is a lot of competition. When you are starting out, you have no experience and you are all seen as equal, interchangeable. I recall that we had 14 junior officers in London. Thus, there were a lot of positions available. I thought, "If I do not get London now, I will probably never get it." Who does not want to be in England? I did. I remember at the time, the Soviet Union had just collapsed, and all of these new embassies were opening in early 1992. The "stans." Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc. My colleagues were eager to go to them and I said, "Go for it." I did not want to do that right after Zaire.

I do not remember all the other posts that were on the list, but I do remember that four of our classmates had to go to Haiti. The HR people identified all the best French speakers in the class. Fortunately, my French was not good enough, so I was not chosen for Haiti. Had I been assigned there, though, I would have received proper French training at FSI, and I would have done just fine in Haiti. I am not a complainer. I would go anywhere they sent me and do my best to thrive. One colleague of mine started crying when she was assigned to Haiti. She complained "I do not want to go to Haiti." That annoyed the hell out of me. We are supposed to be worldwide available; we agree to that when we join. I do not mind hardship posts. In fact, they are some of the best posts in the Foreign Service and some of the most interesting work. Meanwhile, I got assigned to London. The great thing about London is not the work, but the fact that you are in London when the workday ends.

LONDON

Q: Fair enough. You were going out as a consular officer?

WARD: Yes. The first tour as an FSO is almost always consular, as you know, because we have so many consular positions that need filling. Some FSOs love doing consular work of course and find it very fulfilling. I am not one of those, but I did not detest it. I just knew it was something that I was required to do, and I hoped to do my best and learn

something from the experience. I thought, after this I can get on to Econ work, which is what I really wanted to do.

Q: So, in London, you did your consular tour. What were your principal duties in the consular section when you were there?

WARD: I was in the non-immigrant visa section to start with. I was granting visas to temporary visitors to the United States. People assume that because you are in London, you deal only with British visa applicants. No, most British did not need a visa. We instituted the Visa Waiver Pilot Program at the time, allowing British citizens to travel without a visa to the United States in most cases (for business or tourism). The applicants I was interviewing were mainly Indians, Pakistanis, Nigerians, Ghanians, all these others who were living in the United Kingdom and who needed a visa to go to the United States.

Q: So, third-country nationals?

WARD: Third-country nationals, yes. After a while, I was chosen to adjudicate a subset of non-immigrant visas: treaty-trader investor visas. Applicants were people who were investing in the United States in some sort of business and hiring Americans. In order to incentivize such investment, we offered visas allowing such persons to live in the United States until their investment ended or they sold their business, or they left the country. The treaty-trader visa is similar to an immigrant visa, but it is a non-immigrant visa because it is valid until their business closes. Applicants would send me relevant documents about their proposed investment, and I would scrutinize them and ask questions. Then, if I determined their investment met the criteria, I would issue them the visa.

Q: Of course, the interesting thing is your economic background probably helped you in making the adjudication.

WARD: Perhaps. Then, I issued immigrant visas for six months. I also issued passports for American citizens and visited Americans in prison. While in London, I received a very well-rounded introduction to all types of consular work. Someone posted in Santo Domingo, by contrast, might have spent two years issuing only non-immigrant visas, and never gain exposure to all the other types of consular work that I experienced.

Q: When it came to the immigrant visas, were they essentially British citizens immigrating, or were they third-country nationals?

WARD: There was a mixture. Some immigrant visa applicants are people of any nationality who have married Americans. Or it could be anyone living in the United Kingdom who had an American citizen relative file an immigrant visa petition for them. I found immigrant visa work to be very pro forma, and somewhat boring. For the immigrant visa, the applicant simply either met the criteria or they did not. There was little room for judgment or thought. With the non-immigrant visa, you are trying to determine, "Is this person going to come back? Is this person telling the truth?" You are

asking a lot of questions. With the immigrant visas, it is simply, "Here's my marriage certificate, here's my birth certificate..." - a pile of documents basically.

Q: With the non-immigrant visas, did you end up dealing with a lot of fraud?

WARD: In London, we had an anti-fraud person full time actually, which was unusual. Most embassies do not have such a position, but London was a huge embassy. I got to work with that person for a while. We would examine all of the ways that people can commit fraud, like photo substitution or fake stamps in their passports, or page substitution. Some countries issued very poor quality passports in those days, that had essentially no security features. India, for example, would staple extra pages in if necessary; it is easy to manipulate that. Our anti-fraud person had samples of real and fake documents, and real exit and entry stamps from countries around the world. She would look at them all under the magnifying glass and UV light. What happened when I was in London, which made it a lot more difficult to commit fraud with our American visas, is that we started issuing machine-readable visas in 1992. Then other countries started doing the same. Passports became more sophisticated and incorporated security features. Visas became more tamper-proof with photos on them, holograms, different inks, and so on. Imagine our visas up until 1992. They were simply printed with two colors of ink with no photograph. Then we started with the machine-readable visa, so it contained your picture. It contained data. The machine could read it; it was very hard to tamper with. That was an important advance.

Q: I worked as a consular officer in Jamaica where fraud was rampant, and we had many means of preventing fraud. Yeah, you'd spent quite a lot of time on that.

WARD: The United States was and is the land of milk and honey. People want desperately to go to the United States, and if they cannot obtain a visa legally, many will not hesitate to obtain one by other means. We even incorporated means to prevent fraud within our own organization. The consular officer would approve a visa, but then an FSN (foreign service national) would print the visa. Thus, it would require two people to commit fraud. That was one anti-fraud measure which we took upon ourselves because there had been instances around the world where, unfortunately, consular officers or FSNs had been caught issuing visas to people not qualified, in exchange for money or sexual favors.

Q: How did your wife like London?

WARD: She loved London. We both loved being in London. When one is not working, there are a million things to do: there are theaters, there are restaurants, there's driving all over the country and seeing so much history, castles, the cliffs of Dover, Canterbury, York, Devon, Cornwall, Shakespeare, museums, etc. We did all that and much more. We went to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. We went to Spain. As Samuel Johnson said, “when a man is tired of London, a man is tired of life.” Our two years flew by.

Q: Okay. Also, while you're there, did you have any other opportunities to do other kinds of reporting?

WARD: They needed us to issue visas all the time, but they encouraged junior officers to write cables "from the window" as they called it because we worked at a visa window. One of my colleagues talked to every Iranian visa applicant. We would funnel the Iranian applicants to her. Then she reported on what she learned from them about conditions in Iran. That was perhaps useful because we had no embassy in Iran then (or still today). We tried to do things like that, but there were not really many opportunities and frankly, I do not know who was reading any reporting out of London anyway. My colleague in the Econ section in London, when he got instructions from Washington to deliver a demarche, he would get on the phone—this is still before the age of the Internet—and he would call up his contact in the foreign ministry. He would say "Hi Patty, I have a demarche for you; I am going to fax it over now," and she would reply, "Okay." He would put it in the fax machine, send it over; he would not even go over personally to the foreign ministry. She would call back later and say, "we agree." We agree with the British on almost everything. So, if it is a contentious issue or something serious or headline-grabbing, it would jump above the embassy, i.e. the Secretary of State would call his counterpart directly. I do not know how our Pol and Econ officers in London obtained much satisfaction doing their jobs because no one is reading their reporting, or no one is acting on it. That is my suspicion, anyway.

Q: Were there any issues relative to terrorism while you were there? Because you know, sometimes you have an applicant who's kind of shady, or any or anything else?

WARD: Regulations required us to provide extra scrutiny to certain nationalities, and to inquire with Washington whether we could issue them visas. Of course, that means their names and other data that we obtained were being checked by various intelligence agencies. I always thought it was a bit comical. Bin Laden was not going to walk into the embassy and ask for a visa, but we had his name on our list of people not to issue to. We did have some interesting visitors. One time, I was a control officer for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I did not do anything. I just asked, "Do you need anything?" She said "No." Also, I was in London when Secretary of State Eagleburger visited. I was at a venue where he attended a meeting with Prime Minister John Major regarding Bosnia. Secretary Eagleburger walked into the building and I said to him “good morning.” He was looking down and walking with a cane; he never looked up. He just said “hello” and walked right past me. Prime Minister Major walked up to me and started giving me instructions. Then he said “wait, you do not work for me, do you?” On another occasion, I offered to be the control officer for the visit of former President Richard Nixon. He was going to visit London in 1994. I could not wait to meet Nixon. But he fell ill and died. So, he never visited. Not a lot of interesting things happened during my tour. I just did my consular work.

During my tour in London (1992-94) I do recall paying attention to the disaster that unfolded in Somalia, which made our new president (Clinton) look somewhat out of his depth in foreign affairs. He had campaigned almost entirely on the economy. Also, events

in the Balkans were constantly in the news. Our administration was intent for a couple of years to leave that problem to the Europeans. That, of course, did not pan out. Then the genocide in Rwanda occurred from April-July 1994, in which we seemed to be observers, bystanders, unwilling to get involved following our painful experience in Somalia. It seemed we did not get much right in foreign affairs for a few years there.

Q: Okay. So once again, after the first year in London, you're already beginning to look at potential next posts. What are you and your wife thinking?

WARD: As I noted earlier, when one is a junior officer, HR directs your assignment, though you express your preferences. I did not have fluency in a foreign language, and if that is the case after your first tour, you are required to get language training (and go to a post with that language). I had some French, and I had studied German, but I wanted to learn Spanish. Thus, I looked at the jobs available in Latin America. I saw a job in Montevideo, Uruguay, in the Econ section. I wanted that job. Fortunately for me, my career development officer (CDO) said, "Why didn't you also bid on Panama?" I replied, "Panama's not on the list," and she said, "Yes, it is." In those days, we were still receiving telegrams with job listings. Our HR person was on vacation, so we had not received the updated list of openings. Panama had been added but I had not seen the latest update, but when my CDO told me, I said, "Okay." I added Panama and then I was assigned there. I was very happy because I was going to learn Spanish and work in an economic section.

Q: Very good. Were you tenured as an Econ officer?

WARD: That comes later. They determined our cones after tenure, near the end of our second tours. My first tour as an FSO was in London. Whenever somebody asks about my first tour, I say it was Kinshasa, even though that was not my first *FSO* tour. Nonetheless, it is still the first embassy I worked in.

Q: So, today is March 5, 2019, and we are resuming our interview with Robert Ward. Robert, you are still in your first assignment in London and you still had a few more things left that you wanted to mention.

WARD: Right. Well, I was just thinking, I was doing my consular tour in London, which involves immigration issues. Now, immigration is a major focus in 2019 in the United States. I wanted to underscore that it is very difficult issuing non-immigrant visas because the issuing officer is trying to determine whether the visa applicant is going to come back to their country after the visit to the United States. We did not worry about the British, because they were going to come home. (We used to say "UK, ok.") We worried about the third country nationals.: the Pakistanis, the Nigerians, Indians, Chinese, all these others. I remember one time we got a telegram from Washington that cited statistics that showed that two-thirds of the Chinese students who went to the United States (from whatever country) never returned to China.

Therefore, I said to the boss, I guess our colleagues in China and around the world (including us) should be turning down two out of three Chinese student visa applicants

that we are currently approving, because these individuals as a group have shown that they are unwilling to return to China, which they are required to do at the end of their studies. Of course, she responded oh, we could not possibly turn down two of the three Chinese students we are issuing visas to; that would cause a big ruckus, it would be a big problem in our bilateral relationship with China if we started turning down all these Chinese students. But that gets to the dilemma. When you are issuing student visas, you have no idea whether someone four years from now or longer is going to return to their country, but especially applicants from third world countries, where you have to consider what opportunities do they have in their own country? Why would they return? Look at the attraction of the United States with the political stability, the freedom, the strong economy, the job opportunities, the earning potential. Do they really want to rush back to Botswana or one of these countries? Why would they?

Q: All very good questions. But as you mentioned, it is very hard to foresee because student visas are issued for one year at a time.

WARD: Right.

Q: And so, a student has to renew them. And they're 18 or 19 when they start, which even for American students, you go through a lot of changes in that period.

WARD: Exactly.

Q: So, it's very hard to say even from any realistic point of view what a 19-year-old is going to be thinking at the end of their studies. You know, let's say the person gets a master's degree. They do very, very well at university and the university says you should really stay for another year or two to do your master's because you're doing such good work.

WARD: And here's a scholarship.

Q: Exactly. Or here's a fellowship; you can be a teaching assistant, and we need teaching assistants in X category, so why don't you stay and do a master's degree? And they do a master's degree, and then a company recruits them.

WARD: Right.

Q: And it's very hard to foresee.

WARD: It is impossible to foresee for a given individual. However, it is somewhat predictable for a group as a whole. We can see that from the statistics. At the same time, we are accused by many countries of committing *brain drain*; we are taking the best of their students and they do not return to their countries, although we are not forcing them to stay. They decide to stay.

Q: You're absolutely right. These are difficult visas to be able to foresee, very different from the typical short-term visitor.

WARD: Right, right.

Other than that, I just had one more thought from my time in Kinshasa. When you are posted to a country that is poorly governed, that is backwards, a lot of poverty exists along with all sorts of problems, human rights abuses and so on, some of the locals will ask you "why doesn't the United States intervene? Why don't you do something?" They think it is our responsibility to go in and fix these screwed up countries, overthrow their regimes, set everything right. On the other side of that coin, is when we do intervene in a country, they say to you, "you screwed everything up; look at all the problems because you intervened." You get the feeling that you cannot do anything right, no matter what you do. I am talking, of course, about just the third world, not anywhere in the Western world. A lot of these countries have unrealistic expectations of us because we are a superpower.

Q: Oh, boy. That's a long conversation.

PANAMA

WARD: Yes. Okay, so now we are going ahead. I left London and my next tour was Panama. I should add that my wife became pregnant in London just before we left, and she gave birth when I was at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) studying Spanish.

Q: Boy or girl?

WARD: Boy. One thing that was interesting is before I went to Panama, I had a little bit of time when I finished Spanish language training and it was not time for me to depart for post, so I sat on the Panama desk for three weeks. That was very instructive because I read every single telegram that country had sent in the previous year or two and talked to the Panama desk officer every day. At the time, the desk was preparing our new ambassador-designate for his confirmation hearings in the Senate. I read a large three-ring binder full of briefing papers, questions and answers that were prepared for him, for his testimony. I read everything that he read.

Q: There can't be a better time to read in than when you are reading what they are preparing for the incoming ambassador.

WARD: Exactly. I flew to Panama and I was in the Econ section and then the ambassador arrived a few weeks later. His name was Bill Hughes. He was a political appointee. When I was in Kinshasa we had a career diplomat, Bill Harrop, who went on to be ambassador to Israel. He was a very solid ambassador; he knew what he was doing. In London, we had another career ambassador, Raymond Seitz, which was the first time we had had a career ambassador in London ever.

Q: That is unique, yes.

WARD: I do not think we have had one since; he may be the only one. He had spent about 10 years cumulatively in London before he became ambassador. He had studied there, he had been a junior officer there, then he had come back later as a political officer.

Q: That is pretty rare.

WARD: Panama was my first experience with a political appointee, as we call them. He had been a congressman for 20 years, from New Jersey. That was the experience that he brought to the table. The embassy was medium-sized, and when I was there (’95 to ’97), we were getting ready to turn ten American military bases and control of the canal over to the Panamanians. That was our focus. We still had SOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command) in Panama at the time. This was before they moved their headquarters to Miami. General Barry McCaffrey was in charge of SOUTHCOM. He was a high-powered general who was appointed by the president, just as the ambassador is appointed by the president; so we had two competing centers of power down there, which created a bit of a competition.

Q: Did you recall, for SOUTHCOM, were there any significant troops still left?

WARD: A lot of the ambassador’s focus when I was there was talking to the regional bureau, WHA (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs) and the Department of Defense (DOD) about negotiating with the Panamanians to allow us to keep using two bases of the ten. We had the jungle training school at Fort Sherman, which is on the Atlantic side, and Howard Air Force Base on the Pacific side. DOD saw a need to retain those two bases, because Howard Air Force Base is hard to duplicate. There is nothing like it in the region anywhere. It is a good location from which to project force in the region or just to base planes to monitor drug trafficking and so forth. Meanwhile, the jungle training school at Fort Sherman was also unique; we did not have any other facility like it in the hemisphere.

I recall a Canadian diplomat asked me “do you think you will be allowed to stay at these two bases?” I replied, “I do not know but I do not think so.” All the other diplomats in town thought we would get our way because we are the Americans. We had a lot of money; we had a lot of influence. We are a superpower! But the political chief in our embassy, interestingly, did not think we should stay, contrary to our policy goal. He made his views known to Washington via a dissent channel message, which is rare in the Foreign Service. He said we should give all the bases back to the Panamanians and we should leave. We should stop trying to run the country; let them manage their affairs. The ambassador got very angry at him and tried to damage his career, so the political chief filed a grievance, because dissent channel messages are protected and one cannot be punished for expressing a contrary opinion. He won his grievance and was promoted.

It turns out we did not stay at any military base. The Panamanians wanted us to pay a huge sum of money, as did the Filipinos in regard to Clark and Subic bases; if you pay an

exorbitant amount, we will allow you to stay. However, most Panamanians wanted us to leave. They viewed the bases and American troops in their country as an infringement on their sovereignty. Of course, we had used military force in Panama only a few years earlier, in 1989, to oust Noriega, and that was still fresh in their minds.

As we started vacating the bases, the Panamanians did not know what to do with them. We were maintaining the bases and spending large sums of money in the local economy, and employing Panamanians. In the economic section, we were analyzing all this and trying to show the Panamanians how much we were adding to their economy with these bases. Panama is a small country with about two million people, and we were injecting several hundred million dollars buying supplies and oil and all sorts of things from the economy. It was a huge injection into the economy, with a large multiplier effect.

Q: Very solid argument.

WARD: Regardless, nationalistic arguments won the day. They wanted us to leave and it is probably just as well that we did.

Q: How did our military fill its needs once we departed Panama?

WARD: We do a lot from Miami, I imagine. Miami is a further distance than Panama to many countries in the region, but I do not know what else we have down in the South or Central America area. I do not know that any air base could replace Howard, really.

Q: If I were guessing, I would assume it all just went back to the continental U.S. And they just re-planned, based on the extra amount of miles they would need to fly if they were going into- if they're flying anywhere into Latin America.

WARD: Right. Perhaps they cut back on some missions. One of our focuses in the region was on drug trafficking, so we brought in a narcotics affairs section director, the first one in Panama at our embassy, when I was posted there in 1995. The plan was to focus on all facets of the drug trade, but especially on money laundering. An INL (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) deputy assistant secretary visited us and he tried to enlist me and others in this effort. He said, "look at all the planes coming in and out of Paitilla airport and get their tail numbers." I replied, "this is not my job." He wanted everybody in the embassy to work for him. A lot of people are like this; they have tunnel vision. Whatever their job is, that is what they think everyone should be doing. Of course, we did not do it.

Q: Yes. Because, ultimately, it's the ambassador who sets that kind of priority.

WARD: Right, sure.

We also had the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS, interested in setting up a big office in Panama; they wanted to hire 100 people. They were combating the screwworm. This is a tiny fly that bites cattle and lays eggs in a cut on their skin. Then

the eggs get into the cattle's bloodstream, and the meat becomes infected and you cannot consume it; you cannot sell it. The U.S. cattle industry did not want the screwworm in U.S. cattle, but the screwworm was marching its way up the continent, from the south towards the United States. APHIS wanted to construct a plant in Panama. Scientists had figured out that if you take millions or billions of these little flies and you irradiate them, which sterilizes them, and then you release them into the air, the population would reduce over time, because screwworms mate only once. This would cause their numbers to dwindle. They would die out.

It was an ambitious plan, but our ambassador said wait a minute; we cannot have 100 employees from APHIS down here for this. The embassy does not even have 100 employees. We are going to more than double our size just for this? This will be like the Department of Agriculture (USDA) down here instead of the U.S. embassy. This incident was a reminder that our embassies are composed not only of State Department personnel; many agencies work from our embassies. They are all trying to get their foot in the door or, if already present, to increase their size and footprint at the expense of others. It is a competition for space, personnel, and resources. It is happening all the time at all of our embassies. That was a real eye opener to me, when one agency wanted to come down and bring 100 people. The ambassador did not agree to it (and neither did State) and ultimately, USDA made other plans.

This is just a side note, but the ambassador and the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) did not get along at all. The DCM had been the chargé d'affaires for a year prior to the ambassador's arrival, and that was because the president had nominated Robert Pastor, who formerly had worked on the Panama canal treaties during the Carter administration, and certain republican senators did not like him for that reason. They felt the Carter administration had betrayed our interests, to give back the canal and so, they did not want Pastor to be ambassador. They blocked his nomination. They never allowed a vote to be scheduled; they just sat on it. Finally, the administration gave up, withdrew his name, and nominated Bill Hughes. You can imagine, if you are the chargé for a year and you are a career FSO, and then a political appointee who does not know much about the country, who does not speak Spanish very well, who does not know anything about the State Department, parachutes in. There is going to be friction. There was, immediately, and the ambassador said okay, this guy has got to go, and he got rid of the DCM and got a new one. That was an example, as you see sometimes in the Foreign Service, of the difficulty that can occur when a political ambassador arrives who is not very familiar with the Service, the work, the region, etc. Some political ambassadors are fine, but others, especially large campaign contributors, often do not have the depth of knowledge or the experience or the language and so forth, and FSOs have to deal with it.

Q: Yes.

WARD: My boss, the Econ chief, spent a lot of time in Panama focusing on the 100 richest and most powerful families, because we estimated that together they owned just about everything. Everywhere we went, we ran into them because we were moving in these high circles and it is a small country.

Q: Right.

WARD: He started asking, what does this family own? Oh, they own the banana plantations. Or this guy owns something in the Colón Free Zone. Or this guy owns gas stations, or the newspaper. He slowly compiled this list, and at the end of his three-year tour, he sent a cable in about the 100 families and what they all owned. I thought it was a brilliant piece of reporting because one thing about Panama, which kind of boggles the mind when you think of the United States, is that if you are a politician, you do not have to disclose anything you owned. The idea of a conflict of interest did not exist in Panama, apparently. There were several occasions where this became clear.

One of them was, an American company came down seeking to establish a television station. They applied for, and were issued a license from the minister of telecommunication. A few days later, the license was revoked, and we were wondering, what is going on here? I went with the ambassador to meet the minister of telecommunications, and he told us, oh, I made a mistake when I signed that contract. I did not read it. I said to him "you did not read it?" I gave a look of utter disbelief. The ambassador later admonished me "you do not talk to a minister like that." I replied to the ambassador that I could not help it because he was lying to our faces and I wanted to let him know that I knew. The minister would not even look us in the face. What we soon learned was that the president of the country owned a competing television channel, but apparently the minister had not known this, so when the minister approved the license for the American competitor, he got blowback from the president. Consequently, he revoked the American license. But you would not understand why the license was revoked unless you found out that the president owned a competing television channel.

Q: Right.

WARD: When we looked at some of the things that politicians did but were at a loss to understand their motives, it helped to know what business interests they had. When I commented to our commercial attaché that many government officials seemed to be in office to advance their business interests, he replied "why else would they join the government?" I thought there was a lot of corruption going on in Panama, and so did he. There were many occasions in which the government solicited bids for projects, but we often wondered on what basis the winner was selected. American companies did not seem to win any contracts. One reason might have been that American companies were bound by the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. It is against U.S. law for Americans to bribe anyone for a contract, but the French, the Chinese, and others, they do not have the same laws. There was not a level playing field.

The U.S. company Bechtel sent representatives to Panama. They were going to submit a bid to operate the ports at either end of the canal. I spent time with them, and I gave them my standard speech about what was going on in Panama and what the lay of the land was and so forth, and I gave them some advice. I recommended that they take on a local partner. This is the advice really to anyone wanting to do business in Panama. I said if

you get the vice president of the country or the foreign minister or someone equivalent, that would be ideal. They will pave the way for all the licenses, all the approvals, the parliamentary legislation, it will all get taken care of, and you will never get into any trouble with the authorities. Bechtel said no, we do not want a partner. They submitted their bid, and it was rejected. Of course it was rejected. What do government officials get out of the bid? They wanted their share. Then the Chinese submitted a bid and they won the right to operate the ports on either end of the canal. Do you think the Chinese had any qualms about paying someone off or taking a local partner? I do not. That scared some U.S. congressmen, who thought the Chinese were taking over the canal.

Q: Oh, okay. Was there already talk about widening the canal?

WARD: Yes, the Panamanians were already thinking of it. I sent a cable about that incident. Sometimes you are a bit cheeky with the title when you send these cables because you are trying to get people's attention, in order to get them to read the cable. Some congressman said the Chinese were taking over the canal when in actuality they only won a bid to operate the ports. I sent a cable, the title of which was "The Yellow Peril is a Red Herring." When the Army Corps of Engineers built the canal, it was with locks; it is a step and lock canal. Originally, the French were trying to build a sea level canal, which is unbelievable, in hindsight.

Q; Now, take a second to explain the difference between a sea level canal and a step and lock canal.

WARD: Sure. The first big sea level canal was built in the Suez, and it was by a guy named Ferdinand de Lesseps, a French engineer. That was relatively easy because the area is flat. They excavated the dirt, the sand, and got the canal. The same guy headed up the effort to build a sea level canal in Panama as a private, commercial venture. At the time, the U.S. Congress was thinking of approving the building of a canal in Nicaragua, which would have made even more sense because there is a giant lake there, Lake Nicaragua, and that necessitates less digging.

Q: Sure.

WARD: The U.S. Senate fell just one vote short of agreeing to a canal in Nicaragua. Later, after President Teddy Roosevelt helped secure Panama's independence, the Congress voted to build a canal in Panama. They were worried about earthquakes in Nicaragua, allegedly. Somebody who had commercial interests in Panama probably told them it was dangerous in Nicaragua. Panama is only 48 miles or so across the isthmus, so that seems ideal. However, there is considerable elevation across the isthmus, so all that dirt had to be excavated. You can calculate how much dirt has to be removed, and let's call it X for now. However, what they discovered, as we learned when we were little kids at the beach, is that if you start digging a hole in the sand, the sides collapse in on you. You think you need to remove X amount of dirt, but when the sides start caving in on you, you wind up excavating twice or three times as much dirt. The French got exhausted and ran out of money working on the canal, and it became a giant scandal. All the

investors lost their money. Then the U.S. intervened. We created the country of Panama, essentially, by stirring up the locals to break away and declare their independence from Colombia. First, we tried to buy the province of Panama from Colombia, for around $10 million, which was a large sum of money in those days, but Colombia said no. Undeterred, we sent warships down and Colombia was in no mood to fight, having just endured a long internal conflict. Panama achieved its independence and we secured the right to operate a canal.

Now, it's a step and lock canal because there is no way to build a sea level canal. There is just too much dirt to move. The idea is the vessel sails up to a lock, which is basically a giant box, the box opens at one end and the ship comes in and then the box closes and it fills up with water and the ship rises to the top of the box, and then the box opens on the other side and the ship continues on at the higher elevation. It is like a series of steps, to raise the ship up and over land.

Q: Ah, yes.

WARD: It was quite an engineering feat. The canal was being fed by the Chagres River, which is fortunate because otherwise you would not have sufficient water. There were serious environmental concerns at the time, such as what happens when you have different species of marine life going from the Atlantic to the Pacific through the canal?

Q: Wow, that's- Because this is the early 1900s and they were already thinking that way.

WARD: Yes. However, they realized this would not be a problem because there was water entering, fresh water, from this river and it was pouring out either end, into the Pacific and Caribbean, so water was not entering the canal from either ocean. Fish were not swimming through the canal from one end to the other. It is more like water was entering in the middle of the canal and coming out both ends.

Q: I see.

WARD: They built the locks to be 100 feet wide and 1,000 feet long, and the reason they decided on that size is that it would accommodate the largest ship at the time.

Q: Sure.

WARD: This is early 1905 or so, but what happens later is bigger ships are built, too big for the canal. Naturally, the shipbuilders knew when they built them that large that they would not be able to traverse the canal because they knew the dimensions of the locks in the canal. Let's say a ship goes from China to Los Angeles back and forth and that is all it does. They never planned it would go through the canal, so they could build it larger than the canal's locks. Fast forward to when we were turning the canal over to the Panamanians. They figured well, we want those big ships to come through, so let's make the locks longer and wider and then they will have the option to go through. That is what they did, which again was quite a challenge from an engineering standpoint. They had to

finance it, too, which was quite expensive. However, I gather it paid off for them; it was a good decision.

Q: So, it is complete now?

WARD: Yes.

I got to be sort of an expert on that country because it is so small and I traveled everywhere: the Colon Free Zone, banana plantations, the oil pipeline, infrastructure projects, little islands. I was always eager to get out of the embassy because that is what we should ideally be doing.

Q: Did you ever get feedback from Washington saying this was really helpful to us, thank you, or anything like that?

WARD: I was always seeking feedback because I wondered early on, is anybody reading these reports we are writing? Why are we bothering if no one is interested? When posted abroad, most officers at some point go back to the United States for vacation, and I lived in Virginia very close to Washington. Whenever I was in the area, I would go into the Department and ask people, are you reading my cables? What do you think? Is it what you want? Do you want something different? That is very important to verify because otherwise you may be sending in reports that no one is interested in, that no one is reading. We had that feeling a little bit in Panama just because it is a small country; it is low on the radar screen of most Department officials. The assistant secretary of the regional bureau most likely prioritized Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile (and maybe Cuba) as highest in importance, relatively. Panama was low down the list, although we did get some attention due to the canal and the military bases. Regardless, the principle holds for the entire world: the Secretary and Department principals have only so much time, and they allocate it to the countries or the issues that are the highest priority.

I want to touch on two experiences I had in Panama which are unforgettable. One is, I had the fortune to travel with three scientists to Barro Colorado island. It is located in the middle of the Panama Canal and was created when the Chagres River was dammed to flood the area and feed the canal with water. The island is uninhabited, and was largely untouched by man, so a great place for scientists to study flora and fauna. I went there with a biologist, a geologist, and a botanist. As we hiked along, I asked a thousand questions. It was like being in college, but much better, because I had three expert scientists to answer any question I had. What a tremendous way to learn, in the presence of these brilliant people while enjoying the unspoiled rainforest.

On another occasion, I went with an Iranian-American named Manny whom I had befriended to an island he bought just off the pacific coast of Panama, called Coibita. It was about 100 acres in size, and he flew us there in his Cessna. He had built a very small landing strip on top of the island, barely long enough to take off or land (a bit harrowing). He built a house on the island, and had rigged it with solar panels and a radio. He also had drilled a well and had potable water (which is crucial). He put a few animals on his

island and planted a bunch of different fruit trees. He had a small motorboat to cruise around, and we went snorkeling in the crystal blue water, seeing hundreds of fish and turtles. The guy was like Robinson Crusoe.

Q: Now, because of the issue of money laundering, was it becoming a kind of entrepot for drug traffickers? Was there more and more attention in that realm?

WARD: We invaded Panama and arrested Noriega in 1989, only six years prior to my arrival in Panama. He was a notorious drug trafficker. He had been doing it for a long time, at first utilizing one of the tricks that drug traffickers loved to do, which was they worked with the U.S. government by turning in their competition. We thought great, he is committed to fighting drug trafficking. That was not the case. It is embarrassing that responsible officials in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) did not realize earlier, or turned a blind eye, to Noriega's drug trafficking. Drug trafficking through Panama had pretty much stopped by 1995, but money laundering continued on a large scale. Panama had a large banking sector, and remember, they use the U.S. dollar as their currency. My Econ colleagues and I would talk to Panamanian authorities about the need to combat money laundering, but they would get defensive. They would respond "there is more money laundering going on in Miami than here." We would be at a loss of what to say next, other than pointing out that we were not responsible for what happened in Miami. The Panamanians could be sneaky. We began negotiations with them on a stolen car treaty because cars were being stolen in Miami and elsewhere in the United States, put on containers and sent around the region for resale. We were working to conclude this treaty with all the countries in the region to put a stop to this transnational criminal network. Then we found out the negotiator for Panama on this treaty was actually driving a stolen car from the United States, which I thought was hysterical.

I recall another amusing story. One time, we had some visiting congressmen and we were sitting at the ambassador's residence having lunch with them, and the political counselor was relating how polluted the Bay of Panama was because they dump raw sewage into it every day. Like most governments, the Panamanians did not want to spend money on sewage treatment plants. They wanted to spend it on roads and schools, things they could take credit for and that provide good photo ops, not underground sewage systems that are invisible to the voters. The ambassador could not hear this conversation because he was at another table. Then, the ambassador stood up and said, "We are having fish for lunch; it is caught right here in the Bay of Panama." Immediately, the political chief got a panicked look on his face. He said no, no, no. The fish is caught further out, like 40 or 50 miles out; it is not caught close to the coast. The congressman did not have much appetite after that.

We did have a lot of visitors in Panama. When VIPs came, I would always arrange, with help from my contacts in SOUTHCOM, to get a helicopter and we would fly up and down the canal. Visitors always loved to do that. Who wants to sit in offices all day for briefings when you can fly in a Blackhawk over the canal? I imagine that was the highlight of their trip, and what they related to others upon their return to the United

States. I accompanied them and narrated, because I knew every inch of the canal and what we were looking at below.

The ambassador chose me to be the control officer for four high-level visitors in a row, because he thought I was an excellent control officer. One was the assistant secretary of WHA, Jeff Davidow. At the end of his trip, we went to the Union Club and had drinks and smoked cigars with Panamanian officials. We were surrounded by the rich and powerful, Panama's elite. Music was playing and this young carnival queen, maybe 18, came up to him in a skimpy outfit and a headdress, and dragged him onto the dance floor. He went along as a good sport. Suddenly, I saw a flash - someone had taken his photo. I said to him, "that is going to be on the front page of *La Prensa* tomorrow." He responded, "no way." Next morning, as I was accompanying him to the airport, we stopped and got the paper and sure enough, there he was on the front page with this young beauty queen. I started laughing. He bought two copies of the paper. He explained that he was going to keep one, and give the other to Secretary Albright to show her what he was doing in Panama.

Then I was control officer for a congressman, who told me I was the best control officer he ever had. I was a bit surprised until he related that he had been on only one other overseas trip, and that his control officer had tear-gassed him. "How," I asked? He said he was in Nairobi and there had been a demonstration a few hours earlier, and he was walking on the street with the control officer and the guy picked up a tear gas canister from the ground and shook it. Why he did this is hard to fathom. The can leaked out some remaining gas and the congressman's eyes started watering. Thus, in comparison, I was a better control officer than my colleague in Kenya.

I was control officer for the Deputy U.S. Trade Representative, Peter Allgeier, who visited Panama to try to conclude a bilateral investment treaty with the Panamanians which we in the Econ section had been working on for a long time. We were always hammering the Panamanians to do something about the massive intellectual property rights violations going on, especially in the Colon Free Zone. They reluctantly agreed, and passed relevant legislation that we essentially drafted and handed to them. My experience is that many countries will sign anything we ask them to sign, pass any legislation we request, but then they rarely devote resources to enforcement. First, they drag things out by saying they need implementing regulations. Then, when they finally have them, they tell you they do not have the budget. Then, they ask you for training and equipment and funding. It never ends. Essentially, they lack the political will.

I also was the control officer for the visit of the Governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Rossello. It is somewhat amazing that I was the control officer for all four of these high-level visits, even though I was only a second tour officer and there were plenty of others, higher ranking, who could have been chosen for this duty.

Q: Now, a very related issue to money laundering are all these offshore accounts that are registered in Panama and obviously some years later (2016) they became public in the so-called Panama Papers.

WARD: Right.

Q: Were you involved in any way in that?

WARD: I was not; that was my boss' portfolio. He was dealing with the international financial institutions and the banks, and so he was always meeting with bankers, World Bank and IMF contacts, and ministry of finance officials. FSO's talk to a lot of individuals. Some people in the INL bureau think that you are an investigator or a cop, but you are not. You are a diplomat. You are talking to people. They are not going to tell you yes, I have these secret accounts. Yes, we facilitate money laundering at this bank. You are not going to be able to ferret out these secrets. Now, maybe a sister agency could find out about illicit activities. Nonetheless, we in the Econ section were highly suspicious that money laundering was occurring because there was a lot of construction going on in Panama, which seemed to outstrip the demand. That is one of the ways that money launderers launder their money; they spend a lot of cash constructing a building and then they sell it; now they have money that is clean.

Q: Right.

WARD: Panama uses the U.S. dollar, has a large banking sector, has no conflict of interest laws for public officials, and is lax on enforcement of any laws. It seems set up for money laundering.

Q: Yes. As an aside, I was in Costa Rica twice, and in the mid-2000s, the capital was just booming with new high-rise luxury buildings. We wondered, how could the local economy generate that kind of money for these kinds of, 10, 15 story luxury apartment buildings. It just didn't add up.

WARD: That is what we thought in Panama. This is a theme that comes up over and over: sometimes you get the feeling that Washington does not want you to look into these issues very closely. The regional bureaus especially, which is where most of the power resides in the State Department, place a high value on maintaining strong relations with country X. They do not want to rock the boat. You are not there to be a cop, to be a moral authority, to make things right.

Early during my tour, a big story broke about the president of Panama having received money from a drug trafficker during his presidential campaign. The ambassador immediately went to the president's defense, which surprised me and some of my colleagues. Normally, we would be very suspicious of, or denounce, a candidate receiving campaign funds from a drug trafficker. However, in this case the ambassador said, "I was a congressman for 20 years and you cannot always know the source of money contributed to your campaign." I thought, really? We are defending the president of Panama, who may be in the pay of a drug trafficker? I presume that the ambassador wanted to strengthen his new relationship with the president. He wanted predictability and stability, not turmoil.

Q: Interesting.

WARD: There is also a story that happened when I was down there, and I was partially to blame for this. After American companies had lost several bids for telecom and other privatizations and big projects, and the processes looked shady, the ambassador wrote a letter which I, of course, had drafted, to the minister of commerce expressing concern about the apparent lack of transparency -- which is a code word for "corruption" -- in some of these bid processes. He also shared the letter with affected American businesses to demonstrate, we are on your side and helping you. Then, the letter was leaked to the press and it became the front-page story. The ambassador was livid at the leak. The foreign minister immediately denounced the letter and characterized it as an interference in Panama's internal affairs. He took a public dig at the ambassador, complaining that this is not the way diplomacy is conducted. This was a slight because the ambassador, as noted, was a political appointee (thus not a professional diplomat.) It caused a big brouhaha, but the content of the letter, which the foreign minister did not dispute, was absolutely true. The foreign minister met with the ambassador and stressed that this should have been discussed privately. This story made the front page of the paper, so the government had to respond negatively and defend itself. It caused a big stink for about a couple of weeks and then something else took over the news.

Q: Yes, that's when it's not a good time to be a public affairs officer.

WARD: Oh, and when I was near the end of my tour in Panama, I was tenured. This is kind of a sore point. My classmates and I entered unconed, which I thought was silly to begin with, this experiment. They told us they were going to assign us to our cones at the same time we got tenured. They asked us to express conal preferences. There were four cones at the time, and we thought well, our chances are good that we will get the cone we want because people want different cones.

Q: Fair enough.

WARD: However, many junior officers put political as their top choice, but we cannot all be political officers. A survey showed that political was most popular, econ was number two, consular was number three, and administrative, which they called it at the time, was number four. I put econ first, political second, consular third, and administrative fourth. I got tenure before half of my A-100 classmates. A year later, the other half got tenure. I reasoned, I am doing better than half of my colleagues because I got tenured in the first opportunity.

Q: Right.

WARD: Therefore, I am likely to get the cone of my choice, right? No. I got my last choice. I asked how can you tenure me earlier than my colleagues, many of whom went on to get their first choice a year later, and give me my last choice? I also noted, I am in an Econ section now, and I also worked in the Econ section in Kinshasa, and I was

previously working toward a master's degree in economics. Why are you not assigning me to the Econ cone, which I am clearly qualified to do? Who among my peers has more Econ experience with the State Department and better merits the Econ cone? I had won an award for my Econ reporting in Panama, by the way. Remember, very few of my colleagues had had the opportunity to serve in an Econ position by the time of their second tour, because first tour is consular and there were not many Econ positions available at the junior officer level for second tour officers. Despite these facts, there was no explanation forthcoming from Washington. It really disturbed me. It made no sense. I was infuriated.

I finished that second tour and also something happened that was a personal matter at the time. My second child was born when we were in Panama.

Q: I was just about to ask you if your wife was working, but I guess you were there for two years and if she was pregnant with the second child it's probably-

WARD: Pregnant, and she also had a baby to raise. They were a year and eight months apart. Thus, she was not working in Panama. Just being a mom, basically, and enjoying it. I also got her a nanny, because they were so cheap.

Q: Sure.

WARD: We were concerned that our first son was developing slowly, or we thought he was. New parents are often nervous or unnecessarily concerned. We read articles about child development which stated at X months babies should be crawling, or sitting up, or other milestones. We noticed he was behind on the schedule. We took him to pediatricians, who were all trained in the United States, but they assured us everything was fine, there was nothing wrong, kids grow at different rates, do not worry. At one-year-old we were still concerned, he was still behind. We had some tests done and this time they said oh, yes, there is something wrong: your son has Fragile X. We had never heard of this. What is Fragile X? It is a genetic condition that causes cognitive and developmental delays, speech delays, behavioral problems, all sorts of issues. That was pretty devastating to hear. My boss asked whether I wanted to curtail my tour. I said no, because my son is a one-year-old, and he is no different in most ways than any one-year-old; there is no reason to rush back to the United States. Meanwhile, my second son was born in 1996, while we were in Panama. His gender came as a surprise to us, because we had been told we were having a girl. We tested him and he also had Fragile X. At that point, we had a newborn and an 18-month old, both with Fragile X. When my tour finished, we went back to Washington. Typically, the third tour is in Washington. I was wondering what the future held for me in the Foreign Service because my sons had class 5 medical clearances, which meant they were not cleared to go overseas.

Q: Right.

WASHINGTON/DRL

WARD: We returned to Washington in summer of ’97, and I started working in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL). I had bid on that job because I was interested in working on human rights and democracy issues. I reasoned, this is a major focus of ours in a lot of our Embassies. At least in the third world, some of the most important work of the Foreign Service is promoting democracy, helping these countries hold free and fair elections, pressing them to improve their human rights practices, training judges, helping develop political parties and government institutions, supporting free press and religious freedom, etc. We try to be a leader in the world in this field. We fund programs to advance these issues. I was covering Latin America.

Q: Oh, okay.

WARD: They divide up the bureau geographically. They also have some people working on certain subject matters. I was working on South America my first year, and then Central America and Mexico my second year. I ended up covering all of Latin America.

During my time in DRL, a few important incidents occurred in the region I covered. One of them was that General Pinochet, the former Chilean dictator, was visiting London and was detained by the British authorities at the request of a Spanish judge who requested his extradition to Spain to stand trial for crimes against humanity: torture, murder, etc. during his reign in Chile. This was a huge development because I do not know of another former leader that was ever detained by one country pursuant to the request of another based on alleged human rights violations that had occurred decades earlier. A lot of people criticized the British government over their decision to detain Pinochet. Why did they not just let him slip out on the next plane and avoid the headache? Though the United States was not technically a party in the matter, the detention became a big issue for us in the State Department. Some argued we should just stay out of it completely; it is not our business. That was true, to some degree, but we had a Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who was known to care a lot about human rights, which are after all, considered universal. Therefore, we in DRL were advocating on the side of the Spanish judge.

At the same time, naturally, the regional bureau, WHA, argued that we ought to urge the UK to let Pinochet return to Chile. They saw no upside to his detention, and lots of downside. They did not want this episode to harm our relations with Chile. On the other hand, DRL, especially our assistant secretary, wanted Pinochet to be extradited to Spain and to face trial. This would have set an incredible precedent; the world would send a message to dictators everywhere that they have nowhere to hide when they leave office, that they do not enjoy impunity for their crimes. The United States should support that basic principle, we argued.

A lot of legal maneuvering ensued, because Pinochet was a former head of state, and his lawyers claimed head of state immunity; however, he was not a *current* head of state. He was traveling on a diplomatic passport, but he was not a diplomat and he was not on a diplomatic mission. Therefore, he did not enjoy diplomatic immunity. On and on, back and forth, round and round we go. Assistant Secretary of DRL Harold Koh had a brilliant

legal mind, and had been the dean at Yale Law School. He could (and did) out-lawyer anyone in our bureau of Legal Affairs (which he also later headed). No one could defeat Koh in a legal argument.

The ball was in the British government's court. Eventually, they released Pinochet on health grounds and he was allowed to go back to Chile where some sort of legal process against him would supposedly take place, but we all knew that was a fiction. He was never held accountable, and then he eventually died.

However, the Pinochet saga did have one positive result. Madeline Albright was the most sensitive of any secretary of state that I can recall to the issue of human rights. Other secretaries of state had looked at human rights as kind of a nuisance. Henry Kissinger was secretary of state when Pinochet took over in Chile. I saw one cable that had come either from Argentina or Chile during the dirty war, and he wrote on it in pencil "tell the ambassador to stop sending lectures about human rights." He had no interest in human rights. He was all about realpolitik. Can you imagine the chilling effect it would have on you if you were a political officer charged with sending these types of reports (or even the ambassador)?

Q: Of course.

WARD: Tex Harris, who became an ambassador eventually and the head of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association), was sending some of these cables as a young officer in Argentina, and he was not cowed and intimidated by Kissinger; he kept sending them. He was determined. That is rare in an officer. Usually officers do whatever the ambassador or Washington wants. They are afraid their career will suffer otherwise; they will not get good performance reviews or good onward assignments. They are a pretty cowardly, non-confrontational, career-minded bunch as a whole. If one annoys the ambassador too much, the ambassador can always send that person back to Washington (or refuse to approve the cables he writes to Washington). Not likely, but always a possibility. As one of my colleagues (who rose to the rank of Senior Foreign Service) said, "find the mainstream and swim in it." So, kudos to Tex for his courage.

To return to the theme, what happened as a result of the Pinochet drama was that somebody came up with this idea of declassifying our State Department documents relating to the Pinochet era. I do not remember who suggested it, but as soon as I heard it, I was pushing it hard. Secretary Albright said yes, that is a great idea. The regional bureau (WHA) was not crazy about it, but they had to go along with it because the Secretary wanted it. I was working on this project with our colleagues in the Freedom of Information Act office (FOIA). They directed the search; relevant bureaus identified the documents and then the FOIA office redacted them, or withheld some, as is necessary, because some things they decided were not releasable, even though it had been 25 years or more. Nonetheless, in the end more than 10,000 documents were released. This did not completely appease the human rights NGOs, who thought we were still withholding smoking-gun documents or that we had made redactions in order to hide crucial information. It did not appease Betty Horman, the widow of American citizen Charles

Horman, who was murdered by the Pinochet regime. I met with her at the State Department, by the way. (The movie "Missing" starring Sissy Spacek and Gene Hackman was based on the case.) However, it was a major advancement in the human rights field, because we had not done this sort of major declassification before, that I can recall. It might have got some people a little nervous around the world, wondering whether we were going to release documents on their country next.

Q: WikiLeaks.

WARD: WikiLeaks came later. WikiLeaks is different because WikiLeaks, of course, is a case of posting documents without any government review, and releasing classified, often current information. It is not the U.S. government doing WikiLeaks. It is a private individual. It is illegal to hold classified documents at home (attention Hillary Clinton), to disseminate them to anyone without a security clearance, to publish them. However, the comparison is relevant in that our interlocutors who speak to us in confidence have become worried that their confidential conversations might become public.

Q: Right.

WARD: When we declassify official documents, we wait long enough that our interlocutors are no longer in power or have died, or we redact their names if need be. Or, if a document is still deemed worthy of classification after 25 years, we do not declassify it. Declassifying and releasing the Pinochet files demonstrated a certain transparency, or desire to get to the truth. Few governments are willing to do that.

There was another event that happened when I was in DRL, which could have been a very important precedent. It would have made international news, but it never made the light of day. There was a Peruvian former colonel who came to the United States as a civilian with a Peruvian delegation, to attend a conference. Human rights groups told my colleague, who was covering for me because I was on vacation, that this Peruvian former colonel was a torturer. They had strong evidence that he had tortured people; he was a human rights violator. They wanted us to arrest him. This was somewhat akin to the Pinochet case, in that here is a person in a foreign country who did not break that country's laws, but broke laws in his own country without ever having been held accountable. Are we going to do something about it, or will we allow this impunity to continue? They rightly pointed out that the United States signed and ratified the Torture Convention, under which we are legally <u>required</u> to take action. We are obliged to detain anyone who was credibly alleged to have committed torture and put him on trial or send him to a country that will put him on trial. We had never done that before in our history, so this would have been a landmark case. But my backup who was covering for me was slow to do anything. I do not know why he did not; he was apparently waiting for me to return to work. As soon as I heard about this, I went to the assistant secretary of DRL immediately and I said we have got to arrest this guy. He agreed.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary?

WARD: It was Harold Koh. He immediately saw the implications of detaining this Peruvian. It would be the first time ever and we would set an example for future U.S. administrations and for the world. We would demonstrate that we are serious about defending human rights and we do not let torturers go if we have them in our grasp. We notified other Department officials what we wanted to do. The WHA bureau, of course, said wait a minute, this could damage our relations with Peru if we arrest a Peruvian who is here in an official government delegation. They suggested he enjoyed diplomatic immunity, but we argued no, he is here attending a conference, but he is not a diplomat and has no diplomatic immunity. All the while the clock was ticking. Koh realized we had to raise this issue with the Secretary then because we could not get the WHA bureau to agree on how to proceed. Secretary Albright was traveling and could not be reached, which was unfortunate because she was a supporter of human rights and I think she would have agreed with us. I do not know where the deputy secretary was, but he could not be reached either. We had to go to the Undersecretary of Political Affairs, who was Tom Pickering. He was acting Secretary in the absence of the other two. Tom Pickering got on a conference call with the assistant secretary of WHA and assistant secretary of DRL. Pickering heard the arguments of both sides, and then said he wanted to hear from the assistant secretary of Legal Affairs. So, we brought him into the conversation, and he, as a lawyer, said something obtuse like "it would not be illegal to detain him." Pickering was annoyed at that kind of hedging. He debated a bit and then decided to let the guy go back to Peru.

Koh was outraged and told Pickering he had made a horrible decision, that he was undermining our human rights policies that Secretary Albright supported, etc. Pickering said that he took note of the objection, but was unmoved. The Peruvian got on a plane the next day and took off. Had we arrested him, it would have been international news, but no one ever heard about this case because the guy was never arrested. The human rights NGOs were predictably very upset with the State Department, claiming that we did not really care about human rights, we just paid lip service to it, etc.

Q: But it never became more widely known?

WARD: No. The incident again demonstrates that human rights is one of many issues in a bilateral relationship and in our foreign policy formulation; it is not our sole focus. Human rights is one issue, which is balanced against other issues. We all understand that reality, but when push comes to shove, often human rights considerations go out the window. We often got accused, when I was working in DRL, of a double standard. The United States is tough on North Korea or Iran, but you give a pass to another country that is important to you. You do not criticize Israel for human rights violations, but you do criticize Venezuela, for example. I would respond, I think we do not have a double standard. However, we cannot push around China like we can push around Honduras. China is a gigantic country with nuclear weapons, and they are a permanent member of the UN Security Council and so on. We do not have the same leverage over China that we do over Nicaragua or some of these smaller countries. We are trying to promote human rights everywhere, but we cannot do it the same way everywhere. We do not have a

cookie cutter approach. We have to be realistic about what we can accomplish in each country.

Q: Madeleine Albright was known for the expression "you can't have cookie cutter diplomacy."

WARD: Right.

Q: Where, you know, the very same size and shape of what you do is done for every single country.

WARD: This is why when you are in the field and you receive a worldwide demarche from Washington that instructs you to do something, you immediately tailor it to your circumstances. You say wait a minute, this is not going to fly here; let's amend this slightly. You figure out how to deliver that demarche given the context of your country, the facts on the ground.

Q: Yes, precisely.

WARD: One other notable incident occurred. In early 1999, Kate Doyle, a human rights activist with an NGO called National Security Archives, asked to meet me. She brought with her a black book which was full of photographs and identification cards of Guatemalans who had disappeared during the military regime in the 80's. The book had been stolen by an insider in the military and handed to Kate; she called it the "diario militar" (military diaries) or the "death squad diary." It was very obviously authentic, and everyone catalogued in the book had in fact disappeared (and had been executed). I brought her in to see DRL Assistant Secretary Harold Koh, and he was shocked. She wanted the State Department to authenticate the book, assuming the Guatemalan government would deny its authenticity. I took her over to an office we had called the Office of Authentications, and they gave her a piece of paper. She published a story in *Harper's Magazine* and in other stories and said that the U.S. government had verified the book.

Our embassy in Guatemala got upset, because of course the government of Guatemala was outraged, and our embassy as usual, wanted to maintain close relations, not cause friction.

That was my experience in DRL. I enjoyed my time there. I thought it was very important work that they do. Fast forward a few years and I saw what we did in Abu Ghraib and I thought oh my god, I am glad I am no longer working on human rights because I would not be able to keep a straight face, lecturing other countries not to torture when there are photos of American soldiers torturing Iraqis. There is a fantastic video on Amazon now called "Minority Report," detailing CIA torture of over 100 detainees after the September 11 attacks.

Q: And you were in DRL from '97 to '99?

WARD: I was there from 1997 to 2000. I extended for a third year, because I was not sure after two years what to do, and the assistant secretary asked me to stay. He was such a tremendous individual, whom I admired and respected enormously, so I was glad to do it.

The experience got me to think a lot about how human rights fits into our overall foreign policy formulation and execution. We can see that the answer depends on the administration, frankly. A year after I left DRL, on September 11, 2001 when those planes hit the World Trade Center, human rights became a low priority. The top priority overnight became counter terrorism; I could see immediately that human rights would be marginalized, sidelined, ignored.

While in DRL, I read and edited hundreds of human rights reports and dealt with the human rights NGO officials who are doing great work around the world. I went on a number of trips. I went to Haiti to do election monitoring in the year 2000. At that time, one of the deputy assistant secretaries in DRL, Leslie Gerson, was married to a Haitian and she opined that we were wasting around $20 million to help Haitians hold their election. She reasoned that we should take that $20 million and build some roads; then we would have something to show for the money. It turns out that she was absolutely correct, because I went down with this team, we ran around to all these polling stations and made sure they had ballots and election monitors who were watching people vote, and that it was all being done properly, and then received reports the next day that ballot boxes had been burned and some were missing. Election results were not credible and could not be verified. Our assistance was wasted.

On a subsequent occasion, I remember talking to an ambassador, telling her we needed to create a level playing field, which was a commonly used phrase in the State Department, and she responded “I have never seen a level playing field.” As in, all parties get the same access or television coverage, the rules are the same for everyone, no one has an advantage. She believed there was no such thing anywhere in the world. Similarly, a long time ago we used to ask, “was this election free?” Then we started asking “was it free *and fair*?” Then we started asking was it "relatively free and fair?” We kept adding caveats because there is no such thing as a perfect election. Look at our own election in 2000 where there was chaos and recounting of ballots and hanging chads and all sorts of lunacy, and the Supreme Court had to intervene to determine the outcome. We lecture other countries about human rights and democracy, but there is ample evidence that we have plenty of work to do in our own country.

Q: Now, staying the third year, you are thinking- and you’re still in the management cone-
-at that time called the administrative-

WARD: My job in DRL was multifunctional.

Q: Which is perfectly good, and every officer was advised to do some kind of multifunctional work, at least at that time.

WARD: Right.

Q: At least at that time. But what are you thinking about for the next tour and are you going to try to grieve or fight the, I guess your coning, the cone that you were placed in?

WARD: First of all, I asked the Department "can I go somewhere overseas?" The Department really let me down here because they essentially responded, "you figure it out." I thought, how am I going to figure it out? I am one person. Doesn't the Department have resources? They would say, you should check with each post because they can tell you what the conditions are, facilities for your kids and so forth. My kids were ages four and six in 2000. Whether posts had preschools and kindergartens and other services for special needs kids in these places is pretty hard to find out as an individual. We have an Employee Consultation Service and also an education office in the State Department. However, I found that they do not know anything, and they do not help. Finally, after my incessant badgering of them, someone replied to me well, you might be able to go to London. I responded that I had already done a tour in London. I was not interested in going back there; it did not make sense professionally. Besides, it was very competitive and highly unlikely or impossible to get assigned there again.

My counselor advised me to switch to the Civil Service because I might never go overseas again. I responded that I did not want to be in the Civil Service; I wanted to stay in the Foreign Service. The Department covers the cost of educating your child overseas when you are posted abroad. If your child needs supplemental educational services, like reading assistance or other special one-on-one tutoring, they have money for that. It appears that the Department was afraid that if they sent me abroad, I would complain that services available were not adequate for my children. I would be unhappy and then curtail and come back to Washington, and it would cost the Department a lot of money, and my position would be unfilled overseas. There were a number of State employees in my same situation; I got to know them, and we became like a little club who had kids with learning or other disabilities and we talked to AFSA, and asked for help. Sadly, we got nowhere.

Fast forward 20 years later, I recently saw an FSO wrote an article for the Foreign Service Journal (in 2018) saying she was receiving no help for her special needs kid and was having difficulty finding a placement overseas. I wrote a reply that was published, noting that the same thing has been going on for 20 years. It is shameful that there has been no progress on this issue, no attempt to help these employees to find services for their special needs kids and identify places they could serve overseas.

Q: But the only thing I would say is, although you do get funds, that's true, there undoubtedly are some countries that can offer some assistance for kids with learning disabilities while others cannot.

WARD: Right. Well, I figured it would be a small list. One imagines that Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand are possible.

These are first world countries, and they are going to have people trained and resources to deal with special needs kids. Anyway, they did not tell me anywhere that my class 5 medically uncleared children could go. Accordingly, I bid on Washington jobs again. I decided to take a desk job because I always wanted to do one. I thought desk jobs were the meat and potatoes of the State Department.

Q: Right.

WARD: The person who is in the regional bureau working on a desk is responsible for the entire bilateral relationship.

Q: Correct.

WASHINGTON/ETHIOPIA DESK

WARD: I wanted to work on a country that had a lot going on. I did not want some country that was boring, that had nothing happening, and I wanted to be the only desk officer because some desks, for instance the Japan desk, had four or five people on the desk. All the desk jobs are not available every year, naturally, so I looked at what was available at the time and I went with the Ethiopia desk. Again, part of my philosophy was that I wanted to learn about the world and see the world. A lot of FSOs focus on one region, and I understand that, but I did not want to limit myself. I wanted to get a taste of every region.

Q: In my 30-year career and everyone I've ever spoken to, if you want an interesting job, you take a country that has some visibility and generally visibility means problems.

WARD: Right, exactly. If you take the Singapore desk, you go home at 5:00 pm every day; nothing ever happens. No one pays attention to anything you write or do. At the time, in 2000, Ethiopia had recently fought a border war with Eritrea. There was a UN mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), whose purpose was to form a buffer between the two and prevent renewed hostilities. We were attempting to delineate and demarcate the border between them, because it had never been done. They had perennial problems with feeding themselves; they had suffered droughts, leading to starvation. Ethiopia had a high level of poverty and underdevelopment. Consequently, we had a big USAID (United States Agency for International Development) presence. We sought to increase military-to-military ties, and sales of our excess military equipment. Addis Ababa was the headquarters of the OAU, Organization for African Unity, so they had an important regional role. They had a population of about 70 million, which is quite large. They had a huge AIDS problem. We had a PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) program there. We had a large embassy with a lot going on and I would be the only desk officer. It was an FS-02 job, by the way, and I was an FS-03, so it was a job above my grade. Great, this will help me get promoted, I reasoned.

Q: Exactly.

WARD: The ambassador, Tibor Nagy, was a pro. Today (2019) he is the Assistant Secretary of African Affairs. He is a very interesting guy. He fled Hungary with his father when he was about four years old when the Soviets marched in.

Q: Right, 1956.

WARD: Yes, 1956. I asked him, what about your mother? He said she did not want to leave. That is pretty amazing. Usually, a mother will stay with her four-year-old.

Q: Wow. That is fascinating.

WARD: Like Madeleine Albright, he became a refugee to this country and later became an American citizen, entered the diplomatic corps, and rose to ambassador. He was very solid, very competent. He did not want to serve in Washington. He was an admin cone officer and he had spent 20 years in Africa, steadily moving up.

I had been on the desk about a year when September 11, 2001 occurred and that changed our entire foreign policy, including our relationship with Ethiopia. We wanted them to share intelligence, and by that we meant they were to give us what they had, and we gave them nothing. They had to pass new legislation aimed at curbing flows of terrorist money through Ethiopian banks, etc.

Q: Right.

WARD: Coming out of DRL, I had been interested in human rights and democracy in Ethiopia initially, but after September 11, we did not care about that in Ethiopia or anywhere else.

As a desk officer, you get a holistic view of what is going on in the entire country and you feel like you know it better than anybody in the United States government. You probably do because you are working on one country all day long while your boss, the office deputy director, is responsible for five officers who cover five countries, and the office director is responsible for even more staff and countries. As you keep moving up, individuals have less knowledge of any country because they are responsible for large regions.

Q: Right, right.

WARD: I had to write a memo one day to the Secretary, and was given an hour to do it. Something had happened, and they wanted to tell him right away. This was when Colin Powell was Secretary of State, and he famously instructed when he began his tenure with us that he did not want memos to be longer than one page. That was fine with me. Once you write "from, to, subject, date," you have already taken up a third of the page, so you have got two-thirds of a page to write. You must be succinct and get right to the point. I cranked out the memo and got it cleared by relevant offices in one hour, and my boss was amazed. I knew the subject well so it was not that tough.

I remember, just for historical purposes, the first day that Powell came to the State Department as secretary of state. Everybody came out to greet him. He came in the C Street entrance. He drove himself to work in his PT Cruiser. It was unheard of for a secretary of state to travel without a security detail or to drive his own car. He parked in front and got out and threw the keys to somebody. He walked inside and gave an impromptu speech, and he said, "you all are going to work hard for me, and if you don't work hard, you're going to do push ups." Everybody started laughing.

They treated him like a rock star when he came to the Department, with good reason, too. He took immediate steps to improve our working conditions and professional development. He mandated that everybody take leadership training and he expanded other training opportunities, and ensured we all got new computers when we had been using these antiquated Wang computers. He also requested that Congress give us funding to increase the number of Foreign Service officers. Also, he did something which Madeleine Albright was unable to accomplish. Powell was so well-known and respected that he went up to the Hill with the State Department's proposed budget in hand and told congressmen, we need this money. Secretary Albright never went up to the Hill to defend our budget or explain it or to lobby for it; she sent someone else to go. We usually got about 90 percent of what we requested, as I understand, during the Albright years. When Secretary Powell went up there, I believe we got 100 percent of what the Administration requested. It is a testament to him that we got it. He cajoled and persuaded and twisted arms, whatever he needed to do. They respected him, and they gave him the money that he wanted and that we needed.

Q: Powell was unique in that he did focus on the Foreign Service as well as the State Department.

WARD: We are always talking about the importance of networking in the Foreign Service. Powell had a huge network. He knew all these congressmen personally. They were friends, Biden and all these other senators and congressmen. That was a big change, and everybody loved Colin Powell, as I recall, in the beginning. I think the shine wore off when we did not find the weapons of mass destruction that the CIA had sworn was a "slam-dunk" case in Iraq. Powell was instrumental in making the U.S. presentation in front of the United Nations, and so in retrospect that was a stain on his performance and reputation. It still amazes me that no one in the CIA or FBI was fired after the single greatest intelligence failure (Sep 11) in our history.

So, I spent two years on that desk.

Q: That brought you up to a total of five years in Washington?

WARD: Yes. I should mention, again on a personal note, my marriage started falling apart. My wife, it was very hard for her to deal with two special needs kids.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry.

WARD: Fragile X is a disease carried on the X chromosome, which is why it is called Fragile X. If you have a girl, she has an X chromosome and a Y chromosome, right? Thus, if the X chromosome is damaged, it is not that bad for girls. In fact, my wife had Fragile X; that is how my kids obtained it. I did not know she had it. She did not know she had it. She was a college graduate with a chemistry degree, and seemed perfectly normal. Imagine your eyes. If one of them is damaged, you can still see pretty normally, because the good eye compensates for the bad one. That is what it is like for a Fragile X female. Their X chromosome is damaged, but Y is ok. However, males have two X chromosomes, so if they are both damaged, there is no way to compensate. Therefore, boys with Fragile X are much worse off than girls with Fragile X, and we had two boys who both had Fragile X.

Anyway, after five years in Washington, I was in the same boat as before. I could not go overseas unless I went by myself, but I needed to help with these kids, so I started looking for another job in Washington.

Q: Let me just ask you, now that they're old enough to begin learning and actually going to school and getting socialized, what sort of environment did they need?

WARD: When you are little you go to kindergarten and what is the routine? They are teaching you the alphabet and you are drawing pictures with crayons and whatever. Their differences are not that pronounced from "normal" kids at that stage. Later, when it comes to reading and paying attention, sitting still and following instructions, special needs kids start exhibiting problems, and mine did. When they are very young, it is manageable. You send them off to preschool or to kindergarten, and the teacher knows about them and how to deal with them. We were living in Fairfax, Virginia, which is a very wealthy county, with a lot of fine schools and plenty of resources, and good teachers. It became an issue later on, though.

Q: I'm sorry. One last thing before you leave Ethiopia; did you have an orientation visit and were there any particular impressions that gave you from actually being on the ground there?

WARD: Yes. I did visit and I also insisted on visiting Eritrea since I was the backup for Eritrea. Most FSOs do not take backup duties very seriously. If someone is a backup for you, then when you are out of the office they say to someone oh, can it wait until he returns? They really do no work at all as a backup. On the contrary, I took it very seriously. I knew everything about Eritrea that the desk officer knew.

On my orientation visit, I got to see a little bit of Ethiopia, I got to meet everybody, of course, in the embassy and got out a little bit. I had already done a tour in Africa, so I was not shocked by the things I saw; it was a very typical African country in many ways. We had a big embassy in Addis Ababa for the reasons I was describing. When I visited Eritrea, however, the embassy consisted of nine people; that included the ambassador, the DCM, the RSO (Regional Security Officer), and the Marine guard. We had a country

team meeting; we all fit around a small table. The DCM often, when something had to be done, did it personally rather than delegate it. The consular section, the political section, these were one-person operations. It was the smallest embassy I had ever seen.

Q: We were not nearly as interested in Eritrea from a strategic point of view as we were Ethiopia.

WARD: Correct. Eritrea is a much smaller country, with a small population, very poor and not any of the things going on like there were in Ethiopia. So, a lot less attention to it.

Susan Rice, by the way, was the assistant secretary of African Affairs when I was in that bureau and there were some mixed feelings about her. She was so young. She was 34 when she became assistant secretary. In comparison, Hank Cohen, a predecessor in that job, had been working on Africa for 25 years when he became the assistant secretary. To some, she did not seem to have the gravitas, the experience or qualifications to be the assistant secretary. There was concern that she might not be taken seriously overseas by some of the leaders that she went to meet. Anyway, that is an aside. Susan Rice has been in the news a few times in the last few years, and the coverage has not been favorable.

Back to our topic. It is very important to do an orientation tour. You get to see things with your own eyes and meet colleagues personally. You walk around the streets and you get a feel for the place. I have always learned a lot every time I have traveled anywhere.

Q: And were there any other sort of major points of- major issues or friction or anything else while you were on the desk?

WARD: There was some contention. The ambassador wanted to restart military-to-military ties, which had been suspended in 1998 when Ethiopia and Eritrea began fighting each other. He argued that Ethiopia was an ally of ours in the region. They wanted some C-130s and we had promised four for them. The planes were stuck because there had been a hold on them, due to their war with Eritrea. We were trying to get them moving again.

Q: C-130s are transport planes, which makes sense for a country whose roads aren't terribly good that they would want some ability to move things via air.

WARD: Sure, sure. That's one example. I was trying to get that unstuck. Let me circle back to something Harold Koh told me, by the way. He was very surprised, having come from the outside to work for the State Department, at the bureaucracy within the Department. It is a lot easier dealing with foreign counterparts than with our own government bureaucracy. He related that he was surprised at how much struggling and fighting occurs not even with the interagency, but just within the Department of State. It can be exhausting. You are trying to get a common position on any subject, but you cannot get people to agree.

The political-military (PM) bureau was holding up the C-130s. It was above my head although I was doing whatever I could. I agreed with the ambassador, we should be doing this, this is non-lethal assistance. We were trying to establish and strengthen our relationship with that country.

Q: Okay.

WARD: One argument we made was that if we do not deliver the C-130s, another country (such as Russia) will move in and sell them transport planes and military equipment. When our military guys build a strong relationship with their Ethiopian counterparts, then it is helpful to the entire bilateral relationship. Again, as a desk officer, you are trying to do what you can to foster the relationship, strengthen it, with aid programs, all the different things we were doing. We were trying to help them demarcate their border and reduce tensions with Eritrea and eradicate poverty and so on. It was a multifaceted relationship, and military ties was one part of it.

On one occasion the Ethiopian ambassador invited me and others to dinner, and he asked everybody at the table, "what is the biggest problem that Ethiopia has?" No one said anything. I said "poverty." If you have money, you can build roads and schools, help farmers, fight AIDS, etc. How do you overcome poverty? Well, it is not easy. You need poverty alleviation programs. You need good economic policies. You need to attract investors with good labor and investment policies and allow them to repatriate their profits and so forth. You need to uphold the rule of law, and respect human rights. You need to do a whole series of things. That was my answer. He seemed to like it; he thought it was a good answer.

So, at the end of my tour as Ethiopia desk officer, in late summer 2002, I applied for one of those Pearson Fellowships, to work on the Hill. I wanted to learn more about another branch of the federal government.

Q: It did not cause you to run up against the five-year rule or did you have to-

WARD: The six-eight rule.

Q: Okay.

WARD: The six-eight rule, it figured prominently. Usually, the Department does not want you to stay more than four years in Washington. Since most tours in Washington are two years, that would be two tours. To stay beyond six years, you need to get a waiver approved. No one could stay beyond eight years, supposedly. I was finishing up five years, and this was a one-year assignment to the Hill.

Q: Right.

WASHINGTON/CAPITOL HILL

WARD: They told me, you have to go overseas next year. I was thinking sure, if you have a job for me where I can take my kids, I will go overseas. Meanwhile, Pearson Fellowships are different from other assignments because they do not assign you to a congressman. Rather, they assign you to the Hill and then you are responsible for identifying a congressman who wants to hire you, which is not easy. Congressional offices are busy and staff are wondering, "who are you, what do you want?" They might like you but have no office space, no desk for you to sit at. I decided I wanted to work for a senator on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) or a representative on the House International Relations Committee (HIRC). First, I talked to my own congressman, Frank Wolf, who was on the HIRC, and who had been a congressman in Virginia for about 30 years. When I was in high school, he was a congressman, so I thought wow, this guy just will never leave, I guess. I went and interviewed with him. He was a big supporter of human rights, and I had worked in DRL, so it seemed a good fit. But I was not crazy about him.

I started looking at the senate side and I went to various offices. One of them was Senator Bill Frist from Tennessee. I was interested in him because he was working on Africa and I was just coming from the Ethiopia desk, and he took trips every year to Sudan where he would perform surgery. He was a heart/lung transplant surgeon. He was one of the few people on the Hill who actually had a skill. I talked to his office and they said yes, we would love to have you. I also was offered a position with Senator Chuck Hagel's office, but had already accepted the offer from Frist's office.

I went to work for Frist in 2002 and I had been up on the Hill a few months when our elections took place and the Republicans took back the Senate from the Democrats. That meant the Republicans were going to have the majority leader. Senator Trent Lott had been the majority leader previously and he was expected to become the majority leader again, but then he said something controversial about another senator, Strom Thurmond, who had been around 50+ years. Lott said things would have been better if Strom had been elected back in 1948 when he ran for president. Strom was about 98 years old at this point, and Lott was just trying to say something nice about him. But people were annoyed, and said that Strom Thurmond was a racist. It became a big brouhaha and Trent Lott had to withdraw from the competition to be majority leader. There was no real contender for the job, and out of nowhere, Bill Frist became the consensus to be the new majority leader. It was totally unexpected to him and everyone else. Suddenly, I was working for the Senate majority leader.

Everything changed overnight because Frist had previously had a normal sized office and senate staff and now as Senate majority leader, he had a gigantic staff and new offices. All of his duties and priorities changed. He was still on the SFRC, but he did not have time to go to those meetings anymore or to pay much attention to foreign policy issues at all. He was trying to manage the whole Senate, setting the agenda and lining up the votes for a dozen different bills, negotiating legislation with the other side of the Hill, and consulting with the White House on priorities. Incidentally, Steve Biegun joined Frist's staff at that time (Biegun became Deputy Secretary of State in early 2020).

Therefore, I would go to all of the SFRC hearings and meetings, and tell people I am the representative for Frist. I would take notes and I would report to him as succinctly as I could because the man's time was very valuable. The first thing you learn on the Hill is that the staffers do 90 percent of the work. It is very odd because you meet with a staffer who tells you "Senator Leahy feels very strongly about this issue," and you have no idea whether Senator Leahy even knows about the issue, but you cannot contradict him; there is no way. You just nod, and then you do the same thing. You respond, "well Senator First feels…" So, the staffers have enormous power. They are the ones actually writing legislation and the senators are voting on bills that they often have not even read. They do not have time, and the bills are too long. It is impossible. In most cases, they are voting the way their leadership tells them. It is really an eyeopener to see how our Congress works.

One of my observations, although this should not have been surprising, perhaps, is that when you watch C-span, you see a senator giving a speech and the camera is zoomed in on the senator, so you cannot see the rest of the room. If you go to the actual room where he is giving the speech, you see that he is practically alone. There is a senator waiting to go after him, and one who is just leaving. Senators are not giving the speech to a roomful of their colleagues. We are told in school that the senate is a deliberative body. We assume that when a senator gives a speech, his audience is the other senators, and he is trying to persuade them to his point. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* comes to mind. In reality, nobody is swayed by any speech in the senate ever. They have made up their minds how they are voting; the leadership told them how to vote or they have decided after hearing from their constituents. No one changes anyone's mind with their speech. It is all kabuki theater. Senators give speeches just to go on the record for their constituents or for a later campaign.

One of my highlights of my Foreign Service career happened when I was on the Hill, in 2003. I got a call one day from an American citizen constituent of Frist who told me about his nephew in Iraq, who was a baby born with spina bifida, which is a condition in which part of your spinal cord is poking through your back.

Q: It's a very serious condition.

WARD: Almost certainly fatal if you do not get operated on. I said "well, what do you want us to do about it?" He responded, "I found a surgeon who can do the operation for free in Tennessee." Frist was from Tennessee and that is why this constituent was calling us, and I said ok, how do we help? He said, "I need to get the baby here from Iraq." I thought that would be tough. It would require a visa and a flight and other logistical hurdles, and this is just a few months after we invaded, so still a war zone, and very complicated to do anything. Nevertheless, I called up our embassy in Baghdad and I talked to some people.

I knew, if the baby did not get the operation, he would die; there is nobody who can do the operation in Iraq. I knew we had flights out of Iraq every day because we had personnel shuttling in and out, but no major airport open and no commercial flights. We

had daily USAID flights utilizing small charter planes. I thought maybe the baby and his mother could get on an AID flight from Baghdad to Amman. I started making some calls and I had to talk to Homeland Security, because the embassy would not give the mother and baby a visa. They needed humanitarian parole, which is rarely granted, by the way, and only the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does that. So, I pressed for it. I said, "Senator Frist wants it." Of course, in reality Senator Frist did not know anything about it.

There were many hoops to jump through, all these logistical hurdles, red tape. I just kept calling people and they made it happen. USAID provided the plane, DHS granted the baby and mother humanitarian parole, somebody paid for the flight from Amman to Tennessee, the uncle probably. Someone asked, what if the baby dies on the flight, because that was a possibility. I said, the baby's going to die if he does not get the operation. Thus, they flew the baby to Amman with the mother and then they flew to Tennessee and the baby got the operation and survived. It made the news in Tennessee, crediting the senator. He was surprised. He said, "what is this all about?" I said, "you did this, senator, you are the one who made it happen." He was very pleased. It had a happy ending. Looking back, I thought that if I had not gotten involved, that kid would have died; nobody else was going to do anything.

Q: Right. Wild.

WARD: Sometimes you feel like a lot of the work you are doing is having no impact, that no one is reading your reports, no one cares, it does not matter whether you do it or not. However, in that case, I knew that I had done something truly worthwhile, something that mattered.

Q: Absolutely.

WARD: Oh, also on the Hill, when I was up there, I was doing almost no work that mattered to the State Department. I was going around to meetings and listening and talking to people and it was all very educational, but I was not doing any traditional State Department work. Nothing important. So, there was no way I could get promoted.

Q: That is correct. Very few people get any extra value out of the Pearson Fellowship for promotion.

WARD: You would think that is correct. However, let me back up a little bit. When I was on the Ethiopia desk my first year, I did a really good job. You will recall, I was telling you it was a 02 job and I was a 03. I was comparing myself to my predecessor, who was an 02. The ambassador wrote something very nice for me, for my employee evaluation report (EER). He had worked with my predecessor too. Referring to me, the ambassador said, "He is the best desk officer I have worked with in 22 years." I put that in my EER, naturally. Yet, though I was recommended for promotion, I was not promoted. He told me not to worry, assuring me I would be promoted the next year. I spent another year on the desk, and I was ostensibly better at my job than the first year because I knew more than

the first year, right? I did an equally good job and was even more experienced, and more effective. I even took on the Madagascar desk in addition to the Ethiopia desk, at a time of crisis, because the Madagascar desk officer could not handle it. I got all sorts of kudos. Did I get promoted the second year? No.

Q: Because it's a different cohort.

WARD: Exactly. Then, I went up on the Hill, and I thought, there is no way I will be promoted; I am not doing anything up here. Surprisingly, I was promoted following my year on the Hill.

Q: That's very interesting.

WASHINGTON/PRM

WARD: It just made me reflect, as I have many times in the Foreign Service, that there is a lot of randomness and subjectivity to the promotion process. There is not a lot of logic, nor transparency.

I ended my time on the Hill, and then, I was still in the same situation as before: I cannot go overseas with these kids. I felt the need to stay around to help out with them, so I decided I wanted to work for PRM (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration), the refugee bureau. They had an opening for someone covering Palestinian refugees, and I thought I would like to do this because I do not know much about the Middle East. Again, I was intent on educating myself about what was going on in the world; I did not care about sticking to one region or one subject. This is a big focus of our foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict. When I bid on that job, I had to get a waiver because that would have been my sixth year in Washington. I thought I would just get these waivers endlessly because I keep arguing that I could not go overseas with my kids.

Q: And the other thing is, the job, if you're working on the Palestinians at that particular moment in history, the Oslo Accord had been signed and we still had a lot to say to the Palestinians and we still- a lot of activities and so on with them; things had not gone sour yet.

WARD: Right. Well, there are a lot of those up and down periods in our relationship with the Palestinians. What did they used to say about Arafat? He never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. There were a lot of fits and starts in our negotiations. I was focusing on the humanitarian side, helping refugees. We in the PRM bureau tried to stay out of the politics, even though you are aware of developments and paying close attention to them, and they inform your work and provide context.

Q: So, you did get the waiver?

WARD: I did. HR's preferred solution, as they recommended again, was for me to switch to the Civil Service. I said no, I do not want to switch to the Civil Service. There were

jobs in the Department then, as there are today, that are reserved for FSOs. They are not for Civil Service. The Ethiopia desk, for instance, is advertised for an FSO to fill. I said look, you have a job that you want a Foreign Service officer to do; I am a Foreign Service officer and I want to do it. What is the problem? Why do I have to go overseas? Why is it important for me to go to, say, Madrid and to force some FSO from Madrid to come to Washington? What is the difference if he is in Madrid and I am here?

Q: Right. And there are even, periodically, hard to fill jobs in the Department, so.

WARD: Also, I tried to make the case, and I believe this, it is not like you are resting and relaxing in Washington. FSOs would much rather be overseas. I would much rather be overseas.

Q: Oh, sure.

WARD: I am doing other FSOs a favor by staying here and doing these jobs that none of them wants to do, but which have to be filled by an FSO.

Q: And actually, you're saving the Department money because they're not paying for the whole move and the extra care and so on.

WARD: Yes. Logically, if the Department sent me overseas and someone from overseas to Washington, we would in essence be switching jobs. That would mean there would be one FSO doing the job here and one over there. What is the difference between who is doing which job? It reminds me of my former ambassador, Tibor Nagy. He spent 21 out of 22 years overseas; he did not want to serve in Washington. He came to Washington for one year because they told him he had to come back, and then he went overseas again immediately. That was his preference, which is fine. My preference was not really a preference but rather a requirement due to my special needs kids. It was not as though the Department were inventing work for me in Washington. There were jobs that needed filling that were designated for Foreign Service only.

Q: And there was no problem for you as a management, officially management cone officer taking this.

WARD: Many Washington jobs are interfunctional. Desk officer jobs are interfunctional. The PRM bureau, those jobs are interfunctional. About this time, I cannot recall when it was exactly, but I went through the conal rectification process.

Q: Right.

WARD: They had sent out a message asking whether anyone wanted to change their cone. I said yes, I do. They had certain requirements such as your having done work in the cone you want to transfer to. I met them all. I asked at that point to be changed to political cone because I thought well, I have worked on the Hill, which is political. I have done human rights work and that is basically political work, and I am working on

refugees now and that also is under the political section of an embassy. They granted my request and made me a political officer. Thus, though I was a management cone officer for something like 13 years, I never did a day of work in that cone. I think I broke a few Foreign Service records; that is one of them.

In 2003, I was a political officer working on Palestinian refugees. That was, again, a very informative job, very educational. I learned all about the Middle East. I traveled to the region a few times and visited Palestinians, where they live. I did not get to Gaza; that was off-limits for security reasons. However, I did go to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and of course, the West Bank, everywhere the Palestinians are except Gaza. I got to know the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), extremely well. UNRWA has an interesting history; it was established before UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) was created. UNHCR was created in 1951 to deal with the European refugees from the Second World War. Believe it or not, UNHCR was given a three-year mandate originally because UN officials reasoned that by that time, they would get all these people back to where they came from. Three years ought to be enough. UNHCR recently celebrated its 65th anniversary. UNHCR is now an honorary member of AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). Every decade, we have more refugees in the world than we did in the previous decade.

Meanwhile, UNRWA was created in 1948, specifically to take care of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war. Like UNHCR, UNRWA is still in existence. One decision that might have been shortsighted was to define Palestinian refugees in a way that the children and grandchildren of Palestinian refugees are refugees too. Consequently, every year, the number of Palestinian refugees grows, and UNRWA, like UNHCR, has become a permanent organization.

Q: Now, can you take a moment and describe the situation of Palestinian refugees in the different places you visited?

WARD: Sure. There are some differences, but what I find interesting is that if you come to the United States as a refugee, or it does not matter how you get here, any way you get here, and you give birth here, your baby is an American citizen at birth.

Q: Right.

WARD: If you are born in this country, you are an American citizen. However, if you are a Palestinian refugee in Jordan, Lebanon, or Syria and you have a child, that child is a refugee, not a citizen of those countries. It is a status that never ends. Those host countries do not want to give Palestinians citizenship because if they did so these new citizens could vote, claim benefits, and have all the rights of other citizens. Also, the refugee status is all tied up in the political settlement. If host countries regularize the refugees, make them citizens and give them full rights, then there would no longer be a compelling argument for their return. They all claim they have the *right to return*. That is one of the absolute bedrocks of the Palestinian position. Of course, it is a fantasy that

they all could return. Today, there are more than five million Palestinian refugees. If they all tried to go back to the areas from which their parents and grandparents fled, in what is today Israel, there would be nowhere for them to live. Their houses are long gone; someone else is living there or they were destroyed and something else was built there. Israel is a small country that cannot absorb five million Palestinians.

Meanwhile, as in so many other instances of refugees around the world, Palestinian refugees are trapped in a cycle of poverty and are living in horrible conditions because the host governments will not allow them to integrate fully. Host governments do not want them to stay permanently, even though they have been there for many decades. Even today in Lebanon, they are living in horrible refugee camps that do not have adequate water and sewage; camps have poor electrical wiring, and refugees have been electrocuted. They have their own schools, but the schools are substandard, and they do not go beyond tenth grade. Without a decent education, refugees have very little opportunity to advance to a professional job. There are many jobs from which they are excluded, by law. Their lives are miserable, unless they can find some way out, like by marrying a European or somehow acquiring a visa to get out of the country. Not many are able to escape. Life is not fun as a Palestinian refugee, and it has become a lot less fun in the last few years, because Syrians are now the refugee du jour; Syrians are all over the region, they are getting all the attention and focus and funding. The Palestinians are even further marginalized than they were before. Of course, many Palestinian refugees in Syria fled along with Syrians due to that country's civil war in this decade. We are jumping ahead a bit, though.

At the time I worked in PRM, 2003-2005, I was visiting Palestinian refugee camps, learning about conditions on the ground, and understanding the situation. I found my work to be worthwhile, providing assistance to people who desperately needed it. We had a gigantic assistance program; it was over $200 million a year that we were providing for Palestinian refugees. The United States was the largest donor in the world to Palestinian refugees. People do not know that, or they forget that, or they assume that because we are Israel's biggest ally, we do not care about the Palestinians. I was highlighting our assistance efforts to an audience of Palestinian school kids on one occasion and they got angry at me and said, "but you are providing guns and helicopters to the Israelis who are shooting us." I did not have an answer to that. Then they added, "you are shaming us by telling us you are giving us assistance; you are humiliating us by telling us that we are beggars." Again, I was at a loss of what to say. After such encounters, at least one comes away appreciating the Palestinian perspective. Our president and congress are so pro-Israel. The largest political action committee in the United States is AIPAC (American Israeli Political Action Committee). There is no equivalent PAC for Palestinians. Palestinians have no champion, no voice on the Hill. You forget sometimes about the other side of the equation; what about the Palestinians? I am not the world's biggest supporter of them, but there is an imbalance in the way we approach the region. There is another side to the equation. These people are living miserably, and we should not forget that.

I enjoyed the PRM bureau a lot. It is a relatively small, functional bureau instead of the regional bureau I had been working in before (while on the Ethiopia desk). DRL was also a functional bureau. Functional bureaus are somewhat narrowly focused on their own issues. At that time, 2003-2005, humanitarian assistance enjoyed widespread bipartisan support on the Hill. Both parties supported our refugee assistance and it was not contentious at all. We had our own appropriation from the Hill in PRM, which is ideal, as it means while other bureaus are struggling and trying to figure out what they can fund, we had our own money which could not be raided by another bureau.

Q: Did the Iraq war affect what you were doing?

WARD: It did not affect my work but of course, it affected our bureau, because whenever there is a war, it is a refugee generator. Iraqis started fleeing Iraq. They became a very large refugee population. They fled, for instance, to Syria, Jordan, and Turkey. Refugees frequently wind up in the countries that border them, because they take their possessions and start walking. One effect of the Iraq war and its consequent refugee outflow is that when you have a given pot of money for humanitarian assistance, you are dividing it up among those who need it, and there is never enough. Thus, if you suddenly have a new population of refugees, which was unexpected when you made your last budget request, then that population is going to get some funding and another population of refugees may not get as much as was planned. I think, however, the Administration pressed Congress for separate funding for Iraq, so that we did not see any major cuts to other refugee populations at the time. Funding is always an issue, however. It is really a problem with the Palestinians because, as I mentioned before, they keep growing in numbers every year.

We have agreements with some of the UN agencies with whom we have a decades-long relationship. For instance, we fund 25% of UNHCR's budget. Thus, as their budget goes up, we have to pay more. We do that regardless of what other donor countries do. Some donors do not pay their share in a timely fashion, or they do not meet their stated commitments. We always do.

Q: Yes.

WARD: It was pretty calm in Iraq for a while in mid to late 2003, as I recall, before the insurgency really started building up. At first, we were wondering what was going to happen in Iraq, and then once we made the decision to disband the armed forces, and to outlaw the Ba'ath party, a lot of young Iraqi men who had nothing better to do and had military training were running around with guns and forming gangs and an insurgency. What a surprise. A lot of the trained Civil Service who were members of the Ba'ath party were suddenly out of work, and so, who was running the government? Those were two totally disastrous decisions made by Jerry Bremmer. Iraq started falling apart, and Iraqi refugees started fleeing throughout the region.

I was focusing on the Palestinians and I got to know a lot about them and their lives. Traveling around the West Bank, I became sensitive to the Palestinian position. Can you

imagine a foreign army occupying our country? That is how Palestinians feel in the West Bank. The Israelis have been occupying the West Bank since 1968. Trying to pass through checkpoints to get to a hospital, sometimes kids or adults would die in transit. This causes resentment and rage to build up on the Palestinian side. I feel for them.

Q: Yes, yes.

WARD: Gaza is the world's largest prison. On one side they have the sea, but no seaport. They are not allowed an airport. On the other side is Israel. Gaza has a tiny strip of land connecting to the Sinai. People are basically trapped in Gaza. There are over one million people living in Gaza. It is one of the most densely populated places on earth.

Q: Yes.

WARD: At any rate, I liked that work and I wanted to be one of our refugee coordinators overseas. That looked like a great job.

Q: How do the refugee coordinators work? How does that little group of people work?

WARD: We do not have very many refugee coordinators. They are posted in places where there are a lot of refugees, naturally, and they are often covering all the refugee populations in a region. In a lot of embassies, we have political officers who pay some attention to refugee issues. But a refugee coordinator, that is his full-time job. The PRM bureau does two things. One of them is to provide refugees with lifesaving assistance. The other thing PRM does is that we bring some refugees to the United States to start a new life; that is called the resettlement program. For Palestinians, we are not resettling any of them. They do not want to be resettled, or at least their leaders do not want that. If Palestinians started resettling to countries in Europe and to the United States, it would undermine their claim that they need to return to their place of origin. The *right of return* would no longer be a bargaining chip. On the other hand, we resettled huge numbers of Iraqis and Syrians, which I will talk about later because I worked as refugee coordinator several times.

Q: So, today is March 18. We are resuming our interview with Robert Ward as he gets ready for his next assignment. Robert, you were leaving the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration when we last spoke.

WASHINGTON/INTER AMERICAN DEFENSE COLLEGE

WARD: Yes, that was in the summer of 2005. Once again, I sought a waiver to stay in Washington. I was still in the same situation, with little kids who had developmental disabilities, and I could not go overseas with them; the Department issued them Class 5 medical clearances and never identified any place they could go. Thus, in 2005 I bid on a detail assignment. An FSO friend of mine told me he had done an assignment at the Inter-American Defense College (IADC). He recommended it to me.

It is located on Fort Lesley McNair, here in Washington. This is an assignment where they send one Foreign Service officer every year and the rest of the class is composed of Latin American military officers from all over the region (and some from the United States). The composition changes yearly. For instance, we had no Venezuelans in my class. I think we were in a spat with Venezuela at that time. A previous class did have Venezuelans. Some countries do not send anyone, for budgetary or whatever reasons. Each class has about 45 students, and they are mainly captains in the navy or colonels or lieutenant colonels in the army or air force. I bid on that job and I got it. It is a one-year assignment.

There were only a few other civilians in the class; one guy was the civilian chief of police from Haiti, and another guy was a Guatemalan government (not foreign ministry) official. We also had a Chilean woman who was in the diplomatic service. The four of us were civilians; we wore suits every day while the others came in their military uniforms.

The course consisted of a year of graduate level study in security issues in the region. I determined pretty quickly that the only purpose of putting an FSO in there was to make friends with all these people and then later on, when you presumably moved up in the State Department and they moved up in their military services, we would have these connections that we could draw on. In the past, a number of military officers who attended the IADC went on to become generals or admirals; a few became defense ministers of their countries.

Q: Interesting.

WARD: The attendees will remember their time in Washington fondly. They spent a year getting to know Americans and America better. They made friends and a network, and we can go to them later and discuss any number of issues that might face us. This is what we do in diplomacy, right? We form personal relationships that we later call upon. The most distinguished graduate from the IADC was Michelle Bachelet, who went on to become president of Chile. Now, it has been more than 10 years since I was in that program, and I have seen many of my fellow classmates go on to become generals or admirals, which I expected would happen. Most of them have since retired. At any rate, I do not think we were there principally to study or to learn; we were there to form relationships. It was an enjoyable year, and educational.

We had speakers almost every day; someone would come in and talk about a topic, and we would debate it and discuss it and get in little groups and write papers or do exercises. We were assigned a lot of reading. We also took a lot of trips around the United States. We went to West Point, we went to the Naval Academy, we went to the Air Force Academy. We toured sites in Washington, DC. We took a trip to New York City and visited the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State building and so on. We took a trip to San Antonio and visited a military base (and the Alamo). Finally, we took an overseas trip, which they do every year; they go to three countries. Ours were Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. I had never been to any of those countries, so that was a bonus. The military

mentality, the camaraderie of this group was a new experience for me. Some of my classmates became really good friends of mine.

I remember, on the first day, they asked everybody in the class, "what is the biggest threat facing the region?" Everybody wrote down an answer and then they revealed them. Mine was: the biggest threat is if terrorists get ahold of a nuclear weapon. No one else in the whole class had anything like that as an answer. Their answers were "poverty, drugs, crime, gangs." This was really surprising for me. The threat of nuclear annihilation did not even occur to anyone in that room because they did not think that some country or terrorist group was going to target them with nuclear weapons.

Q: And the other interesting thing is, you're not mentioning something that our military typically mentions in its sort of top three most basic concerns is climate change and the effect of climate change on the ability of the military to carry out its missions.

WARD: There has been so much focus on climate change in the last maybe five to ten years, but I recall in 2005 that was not the case. The topic was not in the headlines the way it is today; politicians were not debating it. One incident that happened when I was in that class, which is a periodic occurrence and not necessarily tied to climate change, is that Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. It was devastating and made headlines for quite a while. The head of the IADC, an American general named Keith Huber, said he wanted someone to investigate our response to Hurricane Katrina and write a monograph about it, because everyone had to write a long research paper about something. So, I volunteered. I thought it was a great subject to tackle.

Q: Right, of course.

WARD: I did a lot of research and wrote about our response to Hurricane Katrina and how we mismanaged it at the local level, the state level, and the federal level. My paper demonstrated the separation of powers in our country. Some powers belong to the federal government, some to the state, some to the county, and some to the city. That was a relevant topic for the class because when you are dealing with these Latin American militaries, we are not talking about fighting wars with them or against them; we are discussing how can our militaries cooperate to confront narcotics trafficking or natural disasters or other problems of joint concern? How can we work together?

Q: Interesting.

WARD: The entire year was spent learning and speaking in Spanish. We did have interpreters, and some speakers spoke in English, but I had opportunities to improve my Spanish daily.

Q: That is- So, you listened to lectures in Spanish-

WARD: Yes.

Q: -and had conversations with the other students in Spanish?

WARD: They all wanted to speak Spanish. Some of them were pretty good English speakers, but even they preferred their own tongue. Some of them did not have much English at all. Of course, they were supposed to learn English while spending a year in Washington. We had some Brazilians in the class, so they were speaking Portuguese. We had a Haitian in our class who spoke French, of course, but he also spoke perfect English.

Q: I guess the question I'd like to ask is, you had already mentioned how everybody reacted differently to the question of what's the biggest threat; what were your impressions of them as students? You know, were they surprised by things that they saw in the U.S.? What were the things that were difficult for them and easy for them?

WARD: Some of them had not spent much time in the United States prior to this course, so those guys were really getting an education. Much of the education occurs not in the classroom, but outside in the real world, meeting and interacting with Americans. One of them observed to me that what was different about the United States compared to other countries in the region was that we are so organized. He observed that the streetlights work; they never go out. The electricity never goes out; you can drink water from the tap.

I think they all got a lot out of their time in the United States; they all enjoyed it tremendously. They were all the anointed ones, as I called them, in that the posting at the IADC was very prestigious so you had to know someone or be a star to get the assignment. Some of them were not reading much or not taking the academics very seriously; they were coasting. They were punching a ticket to a higher rank.

Q: Was the issue of the U.S. in Iraq and/or Afghanistan big and how did they react to that?
WARD: I tried to get the course instructors to hold a few lectures on Iraq and Afghanistan. I said, these are the biggest foreign policy concerns of the United States right now, and of course to our military as well. They agreed but said that the class curriculum was supposed to focus on our region, Latin America. That made sense to a degree because these are all Latin Americans whose governments are not overly concerned about Iraq or Afghanistan, and their own militaries were for the most part not involved in those regions. Nevertheless, for their own knowledge about what the United States military was doing and why, what we hoped to achieve and how the effort was a coalition one to some degree, one would think that we would have spent some time on Iraq and Afghanistan. However, we did not.

Q: It's interesting only because a few Latin American countries did contribute troops, at least initially, and you might have thought that somebody from one of those countries would have had at least some curiosity; here they are with the opportunity to get a little bit better understanding of what's going on with the war and in the surge and so on, but okay.

WARD: Right. I argued that we should broaden the syllabus a little bit there to include relevant speakers and reading material, but they were reluctant. Nevertheless, we had plenty of private conversations every day about what was going on in the world. I spent a lot of time with these guys, eating meals and traveling around and working on group projects. I had a lot of opportunities to talk with them about many issues other than what was on the syllabus.

Q: And were you thinking, after, you know, taking this particular course with all of the Spanish, that it might offer an opportunity for you in WHA?

WARD: That is what the Department probably assumed from those it sent to the IADC. At that point I had already served in Panama, but yes, I was thinking I would go back to the region, and I did so again later.

WASHINGTON/VIETNAM DESK

Q: So, now, the other thing, of course, is you arrive there and since it's only a one-year detail, you have to bid very shortly after you arrive.

WARD: Yes. I still felt like I was in the same situation; nothing had changed. However, there was a slight change. My boys were getting a little bit older at this point. Yet in my mind, I was still considering bidding only on Washington assignments. This may seem a little odd, coming out of the Inter-American Defense College, but I thought, I would like to work on the Vietnam desk. The reason I chose that job is that I wanted to be posted to Asia at some point, since I had never been there. I put Latin America on the back burner. If you work on a desk in a regional bureau, you have a good shot at getting an onward assignment in that region. I was thinking I could get an assignment to Thailand or Malaysia, when my boys got a little older. Thus, I bid on and was assigned to the Vietnam desk.

Q: That does raise a quick question. Based on everything you had learned about their developmental needs, was there a point at which doctors or psychologists said well, they'll eventually age out of this, they'll eventually get to a point in their education history where they won't be in a position where they have to be limited to just the United States for their care or their special needs? Or were you basically being told they're going to need the particular U.S. environment throughout their high school years?

WARD: Actually, it was the reverse. The problem was getting worse as they got older. There is no cure for Fragile X. The intellectual and developmental distance between them and "normal" kids was increasing. When a child is five years old and trying to learn the alphabet, it is not a big deal if he has not mastered it yet. Later, though, when you get to the point where kids are reading and writing reports and such and your kid is chewing on a pencil and throwing it at some other kid, there is going to be a problem. Their behaviors got worse over time, especially my older son, who had a lot of attention deficit, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, aggression, etc. His needs became more pronounced,

and more intervention was necessary. At that point, it was impossible to find anything overseas for him, not that the Department ever made any attempt when he was younger.

Back to the Vietnam desk: I am not the typical Foreign Service officer because I wanted to taste a little bit of everything; I wanted to see a little bit of every region in the world, not just one region. I understand concentrating on only one region. It makes a lot of sense; you acquire a lot of knowledge and a lot of expertise in a region, and we need that. Nonetheless, it is also good to have people who have been around the world, have broad exposure, and who are generalists. FSOs are all generalists anyway. Our knowledge is usually broad but not incredibly deep. Anyway, that was my preference; I wanted to see the world. That is why I joined the Foreign Service.

I worked on the Vietnam desk thinking they would send me to the country for a familiarization visit, as we talked about before. I intended to visit some other countries in the region when I went to Vietnam and hoped to do a tour in southeast Asia at some point. That was my thinking at the time. I also wanted a country that had a lot going on, as was the case with Ethiopia when I was desk officer.

The biggest thing that was happening when I was on the Vietnam desk in 2006 is that the president was preparing to go to Hanoi for the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit. The APEC summit every year is held in a different capital and that year was going to be in Vietnam. You know how much work a visit of a secretary of state is for a post; well, the secretary of state was going with the president. Accordingly, I spent nearly six months preparing for this trip, writing papers and getting them cleared in the building itself and then through the interagency. I learned a lot about Vietnam, and I got to know the people in our embassy in Hanoi and consulate in Ho Chi Minh.

I remember telling my boss, “the president has to meet with the head of the communist party when he goes to Vietnam.” He disagreed, arguing that the president should meet with government officials only. I thought, this makes no sense. The head of the communist party in Vietnam is the most powerful guy in the country. It reminds me of my time in DRL, when my assistant secretary went to Haiti. He met with Aristide. It did not matter that Aristide was not president; he was the power behind the throne. Regarding Vietnam, I would not relent so finally my boss raised the idea with the National Security Council and they agreed with me, the president should meet the head of the communist party, and so we arranged it. So, minor success for me on that front.

Around this time, in late 2006, I received a letter from the director general of the Foreign Service telling me I had to go overseas or I would be fired. I was astonished, because I had never heard of anyone receiving a letter like that before, and I had just started a two-year assignment with the knowledge and acquiescence of Human Resources. I was in touch with other FSOs who had children with developmental disabilities, and we were all in the same boat. The director demanded that I switch to the Civil Service or make plans to leave the Foreign Service if I was not willing to go overseas. That was the wording of the letter. I had told them I was willing to go overseas, anywhere; tell me someplace I can go where I can take my kids with me. At this point, I went to the American Foreign

Service Association (AFSA) for help, but they did not offer much. I was certain that despite the director general's threat, he would not actually fire me; the Department does not do things like that. They do not have the willpower to do that. If they did it, I could have filed a lawsuit claiming discrimination, and every time the State Department has ever been sued by an employee, they immediately cave, and give some sort of compensation; they go overboard in the other direction. I could have engaged in a legal battle, but then I thought it would hurt my career, and be exhausting and stressful. Would it be worth it?

While I contemplated my options, I looked at what positions were available around the world. At this point my sons were age 12 and 10 and did not need quite as much parenting as when they were younger. They were both in school every day. I had been divorced for about four years. My ex and I took turns taking care of our boys. I talked to her and said, look, for my career, I should not be in Washington for 20 years. I have got to go overseas. This is what I signed up to do, and I still want to do it, and she said okay, you can go if you want to. She thought she could manage the boys.

I looked at the NOW openings, which are jobs that are immediately available, and I saw one in Havana, and I thought wow, I would love to go to Havana. I had been thinking about Asia, but there were no NOW jobs available in Asia. I thought this was an opportunity that might not present itself again. It was also a PRM job. First of all, I loved working with PRM, with refugees, and secondly, this was in Havana, and I had just recently come from a year at the Inter-American Defense College speaking Spanish. It made sense. Also, Cuba is close to the United States and in the same time zone as Washington; I can fly back within a few hours at any time if there is a problem. So, I bid on it and I got the job.

Q: Fantastic. Now that you got what you wanted, when you arrive did it turn out to be what you wanted?

WARD: A few things I forgot to mention. One is that I ended up being on the Vietnam desk for only six months, whereas I had signed up for, and planned to be there, for two years. Basically, the whole time I spent preparing for the president and the secretary to go to Vietnam and they did go and it was a success, but I felt that I was cheated out of my orientation visit because when they realized I was going to leave the office, they reasoned there was no need to send me to Vietnam. That made sense, but I had so looked forward to the trip to the region; it was a major reason I took the job to begin with. Also, I remarried at the end of 2005. My wife was working for the State Department and she was in the Civil Service.

Q: Now, her status in the Civil Service, how did your assignment to Havana affect that?

WARD: Of course, she had to leave her job, but she went on leave without pay (LWOP) which allowed her to come back to the job at a future point (or to another civil service job). LWOP is kind of tricky because they do not want it to be open ended; they want a fixed date for it to end. That makes sense. The Department does not want people on the

employment rolls for years on end wondering when is this person coming back? The idea was after the assignment to Cuba, which was for two years, we could have returned to the Department, thus allowing her to resume her career, and restarting my clock for another six years before being forced overseas again. Or we could have gone somewhere else overseas. In the latter case, she would have had to give up her civil service career, which is eventually what she opted to do, but we were not sure at the time. We thought, let's keep our options open.

Q: Now, was she also able in principle to take the Foreign Service exam?

WARD: Yes, any American citizen age 21-60 can take it. And she did.

Q: Ah, okay.

HAVANA

WARD: She had obtained a master's degree from George Washington University in international relations and had been a French major for her undergrad degree. She had worked in the Department in the Civil Service and she took the Foreign Service test, but she did not pass it. Then she took it a second time but failed it again, which left her very frustrated. I understand that. I had struggled with the test too, as I related earlier. A lot of people who were very smart and capable did not pass that test. She worked at two American embassies, and had been the Armenia desk officer at State, in addition to working with the Diplomatic Security bureau. She was perfectly capable of being an FSO, yet was not found to be qualified due to the test. That makes you wonder whether the test is an accurate way to measure someone's ability to be an FSO.

One of the biggest issues in the Foreign Service when I joined and still today is spousal employment. Spouses are highly educated and qualified to do many things, but they often cannot find any work overseas, or the work they do find is relatively menial. My wife got a job at the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba. (It was not an embassy when we were there.) Her job was to prepare welcome kits for new employees who were arriving. When I asked her, "what did you do today?", she said "I counted spoons that I put in the welcome kits." She was a little frustrated, to say the least. So were other spouses.

I was in a rush to get down to Cuba because it had just been a few months since the world had heard that Fidel Castro had stomach cancer or diverticulitis. We did not know what his real condition was; it was shrouded in mystery. The Cubans treated it as a national security issue. We knew he had been operated on and it did not go very well, and everyone was expecting him to die at any moment. I wanted to be there when he passed the scene because I imagined it would be an important historical event, ushering in new leadership and possibly a move toward a democratic government and normal relations with the United States. I arrived in January 2007 and two-and-a-half years later when I left, Fidel was still alive.

Q: It's funny that you mention that because I remember the media coverage of the whole issue and that eventually somebody- a journalist or someone in the media who had some access to Fidel Castro, somebody relatively sympathetic and that the regime trusted, went and interviewed him, this is like two years after the surgery he had, Fidel Castro himself said he's kind of surprised he's still alive. I guess it was not expected he was going to survive as long as he did.

WARD: Yes. He hung on until he was 86 or so. He lived for much longer than anyone expected. The journalist you are thinking of might have been Matt Lauer. He came down to Havana with "The Today Show." It was a big deal because, how often does an important American journalist come to Havana with all the cameras and crew and spend a week roaming around the city and talking to people and interviewing everyone? That visit, early in the Obama administration, seemed to presage a new chapter in our relations. However, the Trump administration has turned the clock backward.

Meanwhile, when I arrived in Cuba, my job was to manage the refugee resettlement program. We were not providing assistance to refugees; we were resettling them. Actually, there are no refugees in Cuba. The definition of a refugee, according to the Refugee Convention, is someone who has fled their country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Cubans cannot flee because they live on an island, and airports are tightly controlled. We discourage them from fleeing because when they do, they get in rickety, unseaworthy rafts and try to cross the Florida Straits. Some drown en route. Thus, in 1994 we signed a Migration Accord with the government of Cuba to resettle a certain number of Cubans every year. We call these people "refugees" but really, they do not meet the UN definition, as I explained. We might as well have been issuing them immigrant visas. There is little difference when it comes to Cubans.

When a person flies to the United States, if he has a package of documents that says he is a refugee, while another person on the same plane has an immigrant visa, it does not make any difference to Americans who greet them. In either case, we would say "welcome." The only difference it makes is that Cubans would prefer to come as refugees because refugees receive benefits through federal and state programs that are not available to those entering with immigrant visas. There is a whole army of people who are working on the refugee resettlement program in our country to welcome refugees, to give them assistance, to help them sign up for language training, to offer them housing, to get their kids in school; etc. The United States government contracts and pays a lot of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to provide these services. Consequently, these NGOS have a vested interest in the continuation and expansion of the refugee resettlement program. This is one of the criticisms of the program which has arisen recently, and it is valid.

During the disastrous Mariel boatlift in 1980 (April-October), Castro opened the floodgates and let Cubans go to America. He used that opening to his advantage, sending us his criminals, mental patients, drug addicts, enemies, and other undesirables. Though the Carter administration initially welcomed the Cuban "refugees," it soon put a halt to

the seemingly endless flow of Cubans. About 125,000 Cubans emigrated to the United States during that short time period, along with 25,000 Haitians. Florida was being overwhelmed with new arrivals.

From 1980-94, Cubans continued to flee the regime and make the dangerous journey by raft to Florida. The Accords we signed in 1994 sought to make migration safe, orderly, and legal, and to stop the rafters. We agreed to grant 20,000 Cubans documents each year to go live in the United States. Some of the 20,000 go as refugees, the rest as immigrants. There is a difference, technically, but it is a fine one in the case of Cuba, because just about everyone in that country can claim persecution. In theory, someone receiving an immigrant visa may be doing fine and not have any problems, but even "refugees" from Cuba have state-provided healthcare, jobs, and housing, which differentiates them from refugees in other regions of the world. Initially, when the refugee resettlement program started in Cuba, we were processing people who had actually been in prison, who had been beaten or tortured, who were political prisoners and opponents of the regime. That made a lot of sense and fit in with our traditional view of what a refugee is. However, we quickly ran out of those categories of people. The bar for becoming a "refugee" got lower and lower in the case of Cuba as the program continued operating.

When you compare Cuban "refugees" to other refugees around the world, it is a joke. The only reasonable conclusion is that the program to resettle Cuban "refugees" was created by the United States Congress for domestic political reasons.

When I arrived, we had been resettling about 2,500 Cubans a year via the refugee program, and I asked my boss, what do you want me to do while I am there? He replied that he wanted me to double the number coming to the United States. So, I did.

Q: Okay.

WARD: Since the Migration Accords committed us to issuing documents to 20,000 Cubans annually, if I processed 5,000 Cubans as refugees, the consular section would issue immigrant visas to another 15,000. That is the way it worked.

I was working in an annex down the street from our main building. The United States Interests Section (aka USINT) is the former United States embassy that simply changed its name. The whole thing was a fiction and one of many absurdities in Cuba. USINT is now (2019) an embassy again. The annex was falling apart and it had all sorts of problems with water, electricity, etc. My biggest challenge was identifying, attracting, and hiring interviewers. We had some Cubans working for us, but we did not allow any Cubans to do interviews because we did not want them to interview their own; we wanted third country nationals or Americans to do the interviews of Cubans.

We had 53 Americans at USINT, including nine marines. There was a small number of spouses of Americans who worked at USINT but many were not bilingual, or they were not interested in working. Two spouses of my colleagues worked for me; one was Chilean and the other Colombian. After a few months, we identified a few spouses of

Colombian diplomats who wanted to work for us. That was good, because we had no problem hiring them. We had the biggest diplomatic mission in Havana, though we were not officially an embassy. Our chief of mission was an ambassador in all but name.

One of the things that happened before I arrived is that somebody had the brilliant idea of putting up an electronic billboard on top of USINT. It was like a ticker that you see in New York, with headlines streaming across it. They snuck in this equipment piece by piece through the diplomatic pouch because the Cuban government would not have allowed it to come in any other way, and then they installed this equipment and started blasting the regime with anti-government messages. This is one of the dumbest ideas I have ever heard, and it is hard to imagine anyone with two brain cells approving this in Washington. What would you think if an embassy in Washington put up a billboard and started streaming messages against the American government? People would be outraged; they would ask "what the hell is going on here?" The Cubans predictably responded by erecting more than a dozen flag poles in front of USINT, flying giant black flags blocking the view of the building and the billboard. Then, they cut off water and power USINT for a while.

The incident demonstrated how different it is working in Cuba than in other countries, because normally we are trying to foster good relations with the host government to advance our mutual interests. With Cuba, our relations had vacillated between hard line and potential thaws. In the George W. Bush administration, we adopted an antagonistic attitude, as the billboard demonstrates. My conclusion was that our Administration had no interest in cooperating or dialogue on any issue with the Cuban government. Even if that analysis is correct, the billboard unnecessarily antagonized the host country and eventually we took it down. However, doubtless the person who thought of it received an award or got promoted. Then the person who ordered it taken down probably got an award and got promoted. That is the way these things work.

I have never been in a country before or since Cuba where I could not talk to government officials. We did all of our work in Cuba by diplomatic note. We would write a diplomatic note and send it over to the foreign ministry and then await a reply, which often never came. I called a counterpart at the foreign ministry when I had been in Havana about a month and I asked, "can I come over and meet with you?" He replied "no, we do not do any meetings. Send me a diplomatic note." That was very frustrating and made no sense to me, especially considering there were a few issues, like migration, on which we needed to cooperate. We have complex relations with a lot of countries where they are our competitor in one area, but ally in another; we work on issues and engage in dialogue to resolve problems. With Cuba, we literally could not talk to government officials.

One of my colleagues lamented that our chief of mission at the time was "whipsawing" us around, because his inclination was to look for openings, try to find ways to communicate and cooperate with the government of Cuba, but then, he would get his hands slapped from Washington telling him to take a tough line with the Cubans. It left us shaking our heads, wondering what we were trying to accomplish. Our policies toward

Cuba were driven by domestic political calculations. They were ill-formulated, ill-considered, and poorly executed.

The political section, the DCM, and the chief of mission placed great importance in their discussions with Cuban dissidents. Since we were not able to speak with government officials, who else was there for them to talk to? This is what they lived for. The dissidents were allegedly going to take over the government and run it in a pro-Western, democratic fashion when they got the chance. This was a classic case of wishful thinking, a fantasy shared by our leadership at USINT and by officials in Washington. Cuban dissidents were almost universally incompetent, uncharismatic, and boring. The supposed leader of the opposition, Oswaldo Payá, had no personality, no charisma at all, as I concluded after meeting him the first time. If you put him and Fidel Castro up on the same stage, the Cuban people would universally vote for Castro over him. Payá seemed like a mild-mannered accountant. Our political section spent all their time meeting with dissidents and writing cables and sending them back to Washington as though these people would soon be in power. I thought, these people are never going to take over, and of course, they have not to date. Probably, the best and the brightest of the dissidents fled long ago to Miami.

I was managing the program to send refugees. One day I thought, I have a captive audience in here every day, about 50 or 100 Cubans coming in for interviews or other processing every day. Why not do a survey, ask them questions? Cuba is almost an information-free society. We cannot trust anything the government says; there are no reliable statistics. For the first survey I created, I came up with a list of 20 people, and I included five of the most important dissidents on the list. I also included names like Raúl Capablanca (a famous Cuban chess champion), a ballerina, a movie star, a boxer, a baseball player, and some high-ranking Cuban government officials. I asked respondents to identify each person on the list.

Cubans who participated in the refugee program were a fairly representative sample of all Cubans because they were all ages, races, religions, both genders, from all parts of the country, rich or poor. If anything, our applicants were more likely than average Cubans to not like the government and to want to escape the country. Thus, one would think that our applicants would be very familiar with the top dissidents in the country, and at least recognize their names. When I conducted this survey, however, we discovered that only a small percentage of respondents recognized the names of the dissidents among the 20 names on the list. That was a major finding, as far as I was concerned. It was a giant reality check for Washington. The United States government thought or the State Department thought that these dissidents were popular and would take power at the right moment as popular demonstrations swelled and the people demanded a change in government. My survey showed most Cubans did not even know who the dissidents were. When I sent that to Washington, they thought it was a great reporting cable. They assumed the political section had done this analysis. They said, this is some of the best analysis we have had out of USINT in a long time. I had to burst their bubble by saying no one in the political section did it; I did it. They were shocked. I followed up with several other surveys on perceived racism, family income, access to

newspapers/television/internet, etc. and sent back results and they just loved that reporting. No one else was gathering this type of information.

It reminded me of when I joined the Foreign Service, an old timer came in and talked to us in A-100 about Iran before the shah fell and Khomeini took over (1979), and he said the United States government, State Department in particular, missed a lot of clues at that time because we were talking to the wrong people in Iran. We were talking to a clique of people who were pro-Western, pro-American, telling us what we wanted to hear. We were not talking with the man on the street. We were out of touch with reality.

That was the same problem with our political section in Cuba. Our political officers were not trying to get the pulse of the country and to learn how the common man thinks and feels. We were just talking to the same dissidents over and over. They would tell us anything we wanted to hear, and then ask for money, radios, visas, etc. It seems so obvious, so predictable. One assumes that the vast Cuban intelligence network knew everything the dissidents were doing, and did not stop them because there was no need to. The dissidents were deemed harmless. I suspect that many of them were in the pay of, and reporting back to, the Cuban intelligence services.

Q: I wanted to ask you about the qualification for the refugee program, you have to demonstrate that the government is after you for some reason or can't protect you and you're being persecuted and so on. Were any of the reasons for persecution things like they were African Cuban, or they were gay Cubans or- in other words, anything other than political reasons?

WARD: In some cases, yes. For example, persecution for being homosexual, that is one of the bases for persecution in the UN definition of a refugee. They call it "membership in a particular social group." Our lawyers long ago decided that homosexuals fit into that category because in many countries homosexuals are targeted because of their sexual orientation alone. In Iran, for instance, you could be killed if you are found to be a homosexual or engaging in homosexual acts. Cuba is not as bad as Iran on that score, but Latin America in general is a very macho culture, so very few homosexuals will admit that they are gay, and if it becomes known, they can be discriminated against and targeted. It is possible we had a number of people who came through our program who were gay, but they claimed some other basis of persecution because they did not want to let others know of their sexual orientation. Even though we conducted private interviews, no one trusted that the information would be kept private.

Cubans were hesitant to reveal anything sensitive or controversial to you because they feared the walls had ears. They believed that we or a Cuban working for us would pass information to the Cuban government, or that the Cuban government had bugged our offices. They were afraid something they said could be used against them. Most Cubans were timid about coming to see us at all, because under this regime they were constantly monitored. On every street corner there was a Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR); there was some guy who had been chosen based on his loyalty to the regime, and he served as the Neighborhood Watch. He looked at everybody coming and

going, stopped and questioned people, and he wrote up and submitted weekly reports on everything imaginable: this neighbor got a new wheelbarrow, how did he pay for that? This other neighbor did not go to work this week. This other neighbor had a foreigner visit him yesterday. Etc. It was a society of informants. We did not have many applicants for the refugee resettlement program who claimed that homosexuality was the basis for their persecution; they almost always claimed something else.

Some countries and cultures are more tolerant than others, in which case we would say well, so what if you are gay; are you actually being persecuted because of that? If not, you do not have a refugee claim.

Q: Right, absolutely.

WARD: There are a lot of dark skinned people in Cuba, Afro-Cubans. However, the government claims there is no racism in the country. If you travel around Latin America, you definitely observe racist attitudes; the lighter skinned you are, the more likely you are going to do well in a Latin American society and have more advantages and opportunities. I am sure that is the case in Cuba too. Most Cubans, though, are suffering under the dismal economy gradually destroyed by the communist authorities. There is an equality of poverty. It is like we used to say about China: everyone's got an iron rice bowl. Most Cubans eat mainly rice and beans for meals. They would add a little fish, egg, or meat if they could find it and afford it.

Q: And then, just one other question about the qualifications for refugee status. Did women apply because of repeated harassment or sexual attack or rape and so on?

WARD: No. Rape would not be a claim anyway; it is a common crime, like murder. For instance, you could be raped in the United States. That is, unless a woman claimed that she was raped while in detention by the authorities, as some sort of punishment for her political views, nationality, or ethnicity. That has happened in places like Srebrenica; certain actors rape all the women of a given group as a punishment. However, there is very little violence in Cuba, and sexual violence is rare. Murders are rare. No one except law enforcement and military officials own a gun. Havana was the safest place I have ever lived. Much safer than Chicago or Detroit.

Today (2019) we have an ongoing debate about Central Americans and others coming to the United States illegally. Many of them are claiming that there is high crime, or drug violence, or poverty, or gangs in their countries. Okay, but those problems are not a basis for refugee status; we have crime, drugs, gangs, and poverty in the United States too. If you claim refugee status, you have to demonstrate that you have been targeted because of your political beliefs, nationality, ethnicity, religion, or membership in a particular social group.

Some Cubans would come to us at USINT and claim they had been persecuted because of their religion, specifically as a Jehovah's Witness. These are tricky cases because it is very easy for someone to claim that they are a Jehovah's Witness. Do they actually know

anything about the religion, or are they just saying this so they can get approved to go to the United States? This is a dilemma we often face. We create categories of people who are treated preferentially, like widows, and the result is that people will instantly try to maneuver to get into that category. A woman will claim to be a widow; later, you discover her husband is alive and well. My successor in Cuba assessed that there was massive fraud being perpetrated in our refugee program. She wanted to shut it down. I tried to root out fraud, but there was little appetite for that in Washington. The goal was to issue to 20,000 Cubans a year per the Migration Accords, including as many refugee visas as we could process, so making that happen was the priority.

Q: Now, wait. Just so- I just want to be sure I understand. Can someone get an immigrant visa who doesn't actually have an anchor relative in the United States?

WARD: In Cuba, yes. We would issue immigrant visas to anyone who had a family member in the United States, and would supplement that with a lottery. For instance, if we issued documents to 5,000 refugees, plus immigrant visas to 5,000 Cubans with family in the United States who had petitioned for them, we would grant another 10,000 immigrant visas from a lottery. They put their name in the hat and they might win.

We had an enormous number of applicants for the refugee program. We were sending 5,000 refugees a year, while we had about 100,000 people waiting for an interview. I asked the chief of mission one day to let me take a trip around the country to explain our immigration programs and make applications to the refugee program available. He approved my request. I had to get permission from the government of Cuba, since American diplomats were not allowed beyond a 25-mile radius from our building. I sent them a diplomatic note. They never answered it, which was a way of denying the request. Some of our colleagues would visit Guantanamo once in a while, but I never had that opportunity.

At that time, we still had the "wet foot/dry foot" policy. If you were a Cuban and made it to the United States, through any means, and set foot on land, you had "dry feet" and were allowed to stay. However, if you were Cuban interdicted in the water, even 100 yards from shore, then you had "wet feet" and were sent back to Cuba. The U.S. Coast Guard would return Cubans they picked up at sea (to Matanzas), and with Cuban permission, I would go meet them, talk to them, explain the refugee program, and advise them not to risk their lives at sea. Of course, many of them figured out that they would be waiting for many years for a visa or for the refugee interview, or some had been turned down after applying. The demand to migrate was simply far higher than the available supply of visas. The Migration Accords was meant to deter Cubans from risking their lives in rafts, and for the most part it did. Nevertheless, some still attempted it every year. The wet foot/dry foot policy was discriminatory, of course, because Haitians and others who arrived on U.S. soil illegally would be sent back, but Cubans who made it to land were allowed to stay. This demonstrates again the power of the Cuba lobby politically. The Bush/Gore election came down to who won Florida, so our candidates for president in several of our elections gave inordinate attention to the Cuba lobby in Florida.

I loved being in Cuba. I liked Cubans a lot. We had good weather most of the year, nice beaches, good friends, a nice house with a swimming pool. Life was good. I could not wait for us to improve our relations with that country. I am still waiting. I wrote a dissent message when I was about to leave Cuba (2009 Havana 0062); I thought our policies were absurd. There are many issues we could have cooperated on. I thought we actually kept Castro in power for decades with our policies and our embargo.

Q: And you wrote that in the dissent message?

WARD: Yes.

Q: Okay.

WARD: It was a long message. I thought about it long and hard. I spent weeks working on it, noting many areas we could cooperate with Cuba as we do with every other country. What is sad is that secretaries of state and other high-ranking American officials, when they leave office, admit that our Cuba policy has been ridiculous, but they never say that when they are in office, because that would require courage.

Q: What happened to your dissent cable to the extent that you know?

WARD: I had never sent one before and I was expecting a response within 30 days, which is required. However, I was right at the end of my tour when I sent it, and then I was on vacation, plus my mother was in very poor health, so that took all my attention. I went to my next post, Lima, and I wondered, did they ever send a response to my dissent message? Finally, I contacted the Office of Policy Planning, S/P, which is required to respond, but they claimed they never received the cable. I was dumbfounded. I gave them the cable number and the date it was transmitted. It went via dissent channel so it went straight to their office. They claimed it must have been misplaced or overlooked, which is impossible to believe, since so few dissent channel cables are sent each year.

The director of S/P then wrote to me, saying he had read the cable and that it was excellent. He said he was going to nominate me for an award for constructive dissent. Meanwhile, the official response came finally and it focused on just one of the 22 or so recommendations in my cable: that we should end the unproductive embargo on Cuba. The embargo had not achieved its goal in well over 50 years, and yet we continued to maintain it, providing the Cuban regime ammunition to criticize us and to blame their stalled economy on us rather than on their own failed policies. The Cubans labeled the embargo a “bloqueo,” which translates into “blockade.” Of course, it is not a naval blockade, and Cuba can trade with every country in the world except the United States, (and we also exempt food and medicine), but that is the term that they use, in their government-controlled media, and in billboards everywhere. In a normal country, billboards advertise commercial products. Cuba is a communist country. Their billboards all carry political messages, saying things like say “down with the bloqueo; the bloqueo cost 50 lives a month in medicines and hospital supplies that are denied to us; we will never surrender,” etc.

S/P responded to my dissent message by noting that the Department of State cannot end the embargo because it is a law; only Congress can end the embargo. That is true, obviously, but there was no response to the assessment that the embargo was not working and that the administration should ask Congress to repeal the embargo. I had many other suggestions, such as sharing information on natural disaster planning, cooperating to protect marine life, lifting our mutual restrictions preventing movement of diplomats, etc., which were all very logical, but S/P had no arguments to rebut them, so they did not even try. In 2015, we did upgrade our relations with Cuba, reopened our embassy, and sought to enter into a new chapter with Cuba, exactly as I had recommended in 2009. In 2009, S/P acted as though what I was suggesting then was impossible, but the same administration (Obama) did many of the things I suggested six years later. Now, in 2019, the Trump administration is taking a hard line and reversing any openings that were made in the previous administration.

Q: And you never got the dissent award?

WARD: No. I do not think I was ever nominated for it, because had I been, I would most surely have won. There are not very many FSOs who submit dissent messages in any given year, maybe one or two. I remember reading an article in *The Washington Post* where a journalist was reporting on dissent messages at the State Department. He was surprised at how seldom that channel is used. I responded to him; I said that few are submitted because FSOs assume it harms their careers when they do it. Even though the Department gives assurances that this will not happen, it does happen because other officers know that you sent a dissent message; the chief of mission sees it, the communicators see it, people in Washington read it and talk about it. Then they label you as a troublemaker or not a team player. All of your assignments and promotions are obtained by knowing people and by your reputation, and if you rock the boat, you get a reputation and are punished. It is very obvious that this is the case. The other reason FSOs do not send dissent messages is that nothing happens when you do send one. I challenge anyone to find a single example of a policy change that occurred because someone sent a dissent message.

Q: Right. Now, while you were in Cuba, was your wife able to take on other responsibilities?

WARD: She eventually was able to work with our public affairs section, and she was much happier. She was a little unhappy when she first arrived in Cuba because she could not secure a job right away and her Spanish was really weak, almost non-existent. After about six months of language lessons, her Spanish was serviceable, and she had made a lot of friends and was working. At that point, she was happy and very much enjoyed living in Cuba. In fact, she wanted me to extend. In a small diplomatic mission, with restrictions on movement and hostility of the local government, one does a lot of activities with colleagues and other western diplomats, as I noted about my time in Kinshasa. We did that in Havana. We spent a lot of time with our colleagues and friends at their houses, or at the Marine House, or at restaurants.

Q: So, the dissent channel cable, you sent it and it just eventually-?

WARD: It was like a tree falling in a forest with no one around; it made no sound when it struck the earth. I thought that would be the case when I sent it, but I have always felt that we (or at any rate I) should not go along with poorly formulated and executed foreign policy. To a degree, going along with a policy connotes an agreement with the policy. We should speak up if the Emperor has no clothes. Otherwise, you are an enabler. You are part of the problem.

As I was getting ready to leave Cuba, I was considering what to do next. I could have returned to Washington, but my wife did not want to. I saw a job advertised with PRM in Geneva, and I had been on TDY to Geneva in 1998 and 1999; in fact, that was where I met my second wife. She was there in 1998 as an intern, having just finished her master's degree. She loved Geneva and I thought well, it is a great place, and it is another PRM job, which I am experienced at doing. Thus, I contacted the office to express interest. This incident sheds light on how we do assignments in the State Department, versus the way they claim assignments are done. It is not the transparent system that they assert it is. These were my colleagues; I had worked in PRM twice by this point, and I knew the many people in that small bureau. PRM, like other bureaus, is divided into offices, and I had not worked directly with colleagues who worked on multilateral affairs, but they all knew who I was. Moreover, I had just won an individual superior honor award for my work with PRM in Havana, and was highly recommended by my boss in PRM in Washington.

I contacted the officer director for PRM/MCE, which is the multilateral affairs office, and she responded curtly that she already had chosen somebody for that job in Geneva. I responded, what do you mean you have already chosen somebody for the assignment? Bids were not even due yet. By regulation, an office in Washington or an embassy cannot offer a position to anyone until bids are all due, have been submitted, and all bidders have been considered (ideally, interviewed). When I pointed this out, the office director backpedaled and said oh, what I mean is, we have a "leading candidate," but I note your interest in the position and we will scrutinize your bid very carefully. Obviously, it was pre-wired; they were giving it to somebody else. I asked, does this other bidder have as much experience as I do with refugees, with PRM? The answer was no, the person had zero experience. I was incensed by this shabby treatment. I worked for this bureau twice and this office director treated me like this?

I complained to the assistant secretary of PRM, which I never do, but I was livid. He was baffled, but he did not want to get into a fight with one of his office directors. Accordingly, he said look, this is water under the bridge; they are going to give the Geneva job to this other person; we should not fight over this. Just tell me some other job you want, and I will help you get it. I said well, there is a job in Peru, the deputy of the counter-narcotics section. I was an FS-02 at that time, and this was an FS-01 job, so it was a job above my grade, and it was managing a large counter narcotics assistance program. It would be doing something different, which I do not mind; that is what we do

in the Foreign Service. It is a Spanish speaking country, so my wife can continue working on her Spanish and get a job there in Lima. He recommended me, and I got the job.

Q: Now, this is-

WARD: This is 2009, in the summer. I arrived in Cuba in January of 2007, but I extended by six months so that I would be on the summer cycle, as we call it. Otherwise, if I had left in January, there would have been very few jobs available in the winter cycle, as we call it.

LIMA

Q: Right. And you go there directly, or do you come back to Washington for training or anything like that?

WARD: I did not receive any training for my new counter-narcotics assignment, but I did do what we call "consultations." Consultations consist of up to five days of meeting with United States government officials who have some subject knowledge pertinent to the work you will be doing. These are often people you will correspond with from the field. At least, you put a name and a face together and learn what their main concerns are. My job essentially entailed program management, and one need not be an expert in the subject to be a good program manager.

Q: Sorry, a quick question. Were there Peruvians in your group at the Inter-American Defense College who were helpful when you arrived at post?

WARD: There were three military officers from Peru in my class at the Inter-American Defense College, and naturally, I caught up with all of them as soon as I arrived in Lima. Two were good friends of mine. However, they were not helpful in any professional way because they were not working on counter-narcotics for the Peruvian government.

Q: Okay.

WARD: This may be peculiar to me, but as usual I was trying to obtain a job that I thought would be interesting, worth doing, educational, and that would expand my professional knowledge and management abilities. I probably should have bid solely on political jobs, because I was in the political cone at this point but had never served in a political officer job, which is needed in order to get promoted in that cone. The counter-narcotics job was considered multifunctional, not political cone. I was helping to manage a $40+ million annual assistance program, supervising two Foreign Service officers as well as a huge staff of Foreign Service Nationals or locally employed staff (LES) as we started calling them around that time. We had to decide what to request for a budget, how to allocate our funding, set program objectives, and monitor outcomes. We had to work closely with the Peruvian police, military, ports and customs officers, as well as the ministries of interior and foreign affairs.

I thought this would be good for my career, as the position was FS-01. Ideally, to go from FS-02 to FS-01, a candidate should show that he can manage people and resources. I was doing exactly that in Peru, which I also did in Cuba. Presumably, if you do an FS-01 job and you receive good performance reviews, you have already demonstrated that you can do work at the FS-01 level, and they should promote you, right? At least, that is what I assumed.

Q: A quick question about the general circumstances in Lima at the time. Peru had had the Shining Path, but by then it was more or less extinct, but it also had a fair amount of drug traffickers who were quite brutal, and all kinds of other organized crime that gets attracted to all the money from drugs and drug transit. To what extent were you in personal danger once everybody found out that you were working in the anti-narcotics branch?

WARD: I do not think I ever was targeted, and I never felt in danger. First of all, we had DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) officers posted at our embassy, and they were the ones who might be targeted and who actually carried guns. They were the ones who were working with the Peruvian government to capture narcotics traffickers and extradite them to the United States. We State Department employees were not doing that. The counter-narcotics section falls under the INL bureau, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, of State. Our mission was to help the government eradicate coca; interdict drugs at the seaports and airports; train humans and dogs and detect drugs; provide equipment and training, etc. We worked to limit or prevent precursor chemicals from coming into the country so narcotics traffickers could not manufacture illicit drugs. We trained officials to try to prevent and detect money laundering.

DEA, on the other hand, was in the intelligence business, and their goal was to capture and bring to justice drug traffickers. Nonetheless, the DEA officers were not very worried about being targeted either because they claimed that if any drug lord attacked or killed a DEA agent, the DEA would retaliate immediately with lethal force. That is well known. You do not kill DEA agents. It has rarely happened in the past.

Q: Okay.

WARD: The war on drugs will never end because we are not devoting a full effort to it, and that was very obvious to me even before I went to Peru. When I visited Washington after I had been in Lima for a few months, I met with the assistant secretary of INL, David Johnson, whom I knew personally from a previous job. I had worked for him in the Operations Center. I noted that our goal was to eradicate 25,000 hectares of coca in Peru in 2009. At the same time, we calculated that cocaleros would plant 50,000 hectares. Thus, even if we accomplished our goal, we would succeed in eradicating half of the coca cultivated that year in Peru. Coca, of course, is used to manufacture cocaine. The drug traffickers obviously knew what we were planning. We had been doing this year in and year out. They probably calculated that they needed 25,000 hectares under cultivation to make a very good profit, so they planted 50,000 hectares, knowing we would eradicate half of it.

I asked the assistant secretary, somewhat rhetorically, what are we doing in Peru? Why do we not get serious and try to eradicate all of the coca, rather than half of it? How can we claim success when we eliminate only half of the coca crop? He just gave me a blank look. He was not expecting this kind of question. He responded along the lines of we did not have enough budget to do more; this is our interagency strategy and the Peruvian government has agreed to it, etc. I stated the obvious, that what we were doing was not effective. We set the bar too low. The goal should be to wipe out the drug, not wipe out half of it. Apparently, we had eradicated all the coca cultivated in Bolivia one year a few years before I got to Peru. I thought, why don't we try to do that every year? Shouldn't that be the goal? Our counter-drug strategy was not well conceived. It was not cohesive. Some "experts" will tell you what you need to do is go after the money. If you can stop the money flow, and arrest money launderers, you can end drug trafficking. Other experts counsel that we should try to interdict precursor chemicals, thus preventing the manufacture of illegal narcotics. Others focus on coca eradication. DEA believes that if we arrest drug lords, that will end the problem. DEA's strategy does not seem to have much deterrence. They arrest one drug lord and two more pop up to take his place.

At the same time, one always wonders about the local government's commitment, whichever country you are in. Years after my time in Peru, I was stationed in Afghanistan; we had what they called "governor-led eradication," which meant you had to get the approval of the governor of each province before you could eradicate in his region. We could not secure that permission in some areas, such as in Kandahar or Helmand, due to ongoing fighting/insecurity. Naturally, most of the poppy cultivation was in areas of Afghanistan where there was fighting going on, because the drug lords knew no one would come in and try to eradicate.

There are different ways to eradicate coca. In Peru, one of our contracted advisers invented a tool that he called a "cocodrilo," which is Spanish for "crocodile." The tool is somewhat like a hoe but has sets of teeth that close around the stem of the plant, allowing the user to lean back and yank the plant out of the ground, roots and all. The plant quickly shrivels up and dies. It cannot be replanted. That is better than cutting coca with a machete, which only prunes it, allowing it to grow back, as has been done in various locations. Meanwhile, in Colombia, we were spraying glyphosate or Round Up, as we call it in nurseries or hardware stores. Aerial eradication utilizing glyphosate is controversial because peasants claim you sprayed them, or you sprayed their corn or other legitimate food crops, causing them health problems and loss of income. I thought our method in Peru of eradicating coca by hand was better because we did not have people complaining about environmental effects and we were eliminating the crop completely.

Q: Did we ever, in terms of the eradication effort, promise or create a program that would give more money to the farmers to destroy coca than they would have gotten from growing it?

WARD: This is the old USAID approach—crop substitution. USAID tried to get peasants to plant potatoes or other crops rather than coca. But think about it. Farmers were planting those crops but decided to switch to coca because it made them a lot more money. Why would they go back to potatoes? Our counter narcotics experts believed that if we eradicated in the same geographical area three years in a row, farmers would give up planting coca; they would see the futility of receiving no return for their effort. Of course, the drug lords responded by moving from one area to another, and it became a never-ending game of whack-a-mole. However, once we stopped eradicating in a particular area, the temptation to replant coca would be strong, because profits are so much higher than for food crops, and these people are poor.

After the coca leaves were harvested, they were put in large rectangular maceration pits, about a foot deep, and maybe 15 feet long, five feet wide. They filled the pit full of coca leaves and then they dumped all these nasty chemicals on them and they would employ kids to step on the leaves and mash the concoction together. Of course, this would have deleterious consequences to their health and their feet, but children do not understand this. The traffickers were turning the leaves and chemicals into a paste, which was later refined into cocaine. Peasants would carry the paste in small quantities in backpacks, which are called "mochilas" in Spanish, so the persons carrying them were called "mochileros." One person would carry as much as would fit in a backpack, and how do you combat this? We are not talking big trucks or laboratories; this is one guy at a time with a backpack and there are thousands of them running around. We could not grab all these people and arrest them. If you get one of them, so what? They have 20 more ready to take his place. It is like catching a mule going through the airport with half a kilo of drug. You got one guy. Meanwhile, 500 kilos just entered in a container on the ship that you did not detect.

Speaking of which, one of our contracted experts, in charge of our ports program, advocated that we procure more dogs, because dogs were more effective than any other method we had for detecting drugs. It is quite amazing in this day and age, given all the technology we have, that what dogs can do cannot be replicated by other methods. If the dogs detected drugs in a container or a box, they would *alert* by sitting down. One time, they alerted on this giant shipment of canned peaches, and the Peruvian customs inspectors could not figure out why. They opened some cans, but all they found were peaches in liquid. So, they wondered, where is the cocaine? They took some cans to a chemist, who found the cocaine was in the liquid. You have to dump the liquid out of the can and run it through some sort of filter and administer a chemical process to extract the cocaine. This example demonstrates that narco-traffickers are always thinking of new ways to ship drugs and outfox the authorities. You find one way to catch them, they find another way to evade you. The dogs found cocaine in that case, whereas a human would never have found it.

Q: That's remarkable.

WARD: It just goes to show you what you are up against. Given resource and time constraints, authorities can open only one out of every 100 shipping containers, and that

supports the DEA argument this is why we need intelligence. Otherwise, we are just poking around in the dark. We need tips to guide us which container to inspect. The head of the DEA in Lima actually said to me "you should give us all of your budget; we will make a lot more busts if you do." I responded that we cannot give you our budget. It is State Department funding and you work for a different agency; we are given funding specifically for our programs. He was serious, though. He thought we (INL) were wasting our money, while I pointed out that INL and DEA programs complemented each other. We had the same overall objective, fighting drug manufacture and trafficking.

Q: During the time you were there, was anything discussed about reducing demand in the U.S.?

WARD: Indeed, that is the first thing the locals often say to you. Just like in Panama, when they said to me, "you have got money laundering going on in Miami," so too in Peru, our interlocutors (or critics) point the finger at us. If we did not have this insatiable demand for cocaine, no one would be supplying it. That was Al Capone's argument, was it not? He said he was just giving people what they wanted (alcohol).

Regarding the need to reduce drug demand, our response was yes, we are well aware of the problem, and are working on it. Our strategy is to fight the drug problem on all fronts - supply and demand. Also, you have got a bit of a drug demand problem in your own country (Peru). In fact, one begins to see that in any country that is producing illicit drugs. They start developing their own drug addicts, especially since some of those employed by drug lords get paid in drugs instead of in money. They wind up selling it locally and using it themselves, and drug addiction becomes a problem in their own country. The United States is not the only country that has a demand problem.

Reducing drug demand is quite a challenge when you see how nefarious these drug traffickers are, because they target young kids, 12-years-old or so, who do not have the awareness, knowledge, experience or maturity that an adult does to understand how dangerous, addicting, and lethal these drugs are. A drug trafficker will give kids some samples for free and then they get hooked and they crave it, and then they will commit crimes to feed their habit because they have run out of money. It is rare for anyone, say, 21 or older, to start using cocaine. Most people, if they stay off illicit drugs until they are 21, will never touch drugs. That is why drug dealers target young kids. We have all been through this in our own childhoods. When I was 13, kids my age were trying marijuana. None of us thought it was harmful; none of us thought it would lead to trying cocaine or heroin.

One of the things I was trying to do in Peru was to convince my boss that we needed more dogs, because they were so obviously worth their weight in gold. I did some research and learned of a center in Front Royal, Virginia, not far from Washington, where they train dogs for the United States government. Some were trained to detect drugs; others were trained for other purposes. When I visited them, I asked "can you train some drug detection dogs and their Peruvian handlers?" They thought that was a fine plan.

However, when I went back to Lima and briefed my boss, he did not approve the plan, without really making any logical argument against it.

I was a little frustrated in Lima because I could not get my boss to approve many ideas or plans I or our contractors came up with. He was very hesitant to spend money on anything, but we had money for these programs. We had many fewer dogs in Peru than our counterparts had in Bolivia and Colombia, which I pointed out, to no avail. I was always scrutinizing or questioning what we were doing, asking why we could not do something else, take a different approach, beef up our activities in certain aspects. I procured body scanners and had them installed at border crossings and in smaller airports where they were never used before, and we had immediate results. I wondered, why did we not do this a long time ago? However, the bigger picture was that whatever we did was not enough. We were detecting and capturing a small percentage of the drugs transiting Peru; we were not even attempting to eradicate all the coca; so we were having a minimal effect. I told the assistant secretary that.

Q: A question about how you were spending your money. Did you spend on local campaigns to discourage people from using drugs, young people, or to help journalists report on the problem? In other words, the public diplomacy aspect.

WARD: Yes. I supervised a junior FSO, whose job was to work on demand reduction, and go give talks and so forth. We gave a contract to a Peruvian expert who researched the drug problem very thoroughly in Peru, and wrote a book about it, which we had published. He wrote about environmental problems that are caused by dumping dangerous chemicals used to manufacture cocaine right into the water supply, about the health effects on children who are forced to work in maceration pits; the danger to society of having a population of drug-addicted citizens; the threat to government institutions posed by narcotics traffickers; the bribing of police, politicians, journalists, and judges that is the modus operandi of drug lords; the tendency of terrorists to get into the drug business (becoming narco-terrorists in the process), etc. The book was so well researched and written that when I read it, I thought, we have to print 1,000 copies. I wanted to put one in every high school, university, and library in the country. That is another thing I was trying to accomplish, convincing my boss to do. We did distribute that book widely, which could not be dismissed as American propaganda because the author was Peruvian. We talked with journalists and asked them to read and report on this book, and educate the people. We gave copies to government officials.

Regarding the public diplomacy aspect, you have to be careful and diplomatic as we are trained to be. You always want to give credit to the local government. You do not want to say the United States did this or that, because then it seems like you are depicting the locals as incapable, incompetent without your help, corrupt. Thus, you are always praising local authorities and giving credit to generals and police chiefs and the minister of interior, etc. We are only helping, advising. Privately, you do wonder if they will do anything without you there. Peruvian officials would come to us and ask for vehicles and computers and everything you can name. They did not seem to budget for anything. Their government does not make combating drugs a priority. You are left to conclude that they

think it is our problem, so we should pay for it. That is the message they are sending. Our message was that we are partners with you, this is your problem too; we will help you, but you should be taking the lead on this. You should be going after these drug traffickers and coca growers, and devoting attention and resources of your own to the problem. Of course, when Colombia let the problem get out of control, we saw what happened: their democracy was under assault, violence soared, and they nearly became a narco state.

We were doing eradication in Peru manually. We would utilize a fleet of helicopters which we had provided to the Peruvians. We had learned from experience that if you give a host government a helicopter, six months later they will tell you it is not working anymore, because they did not buy any spare parts, and they did not have trained mechanics to maintain it, and so forth. With aircraft or even vehicles, this is what happens immediately; they come to you and say the jeep is ruined; we need a new one. Well, why is it ruined? Did no one ever change the oil? We loaned the Peruvians eight helicopters; we trained their pilots in the United States; we supplied spare parts and dedicated a whole facility to store the aircraft; and we contracted mechanics who maintained them. The helicopters would ferry eradicators to whatever site they were going to work that day. We used helicopters because many locations were inaccessible by road, or too dangerous to travel, allegedly. I questioned that premise and asked the boss why we didn't request the Peruvian military to provide security. I never received a satisfactory response.

One day when my boss was out of country, I got a call from the minister of interior around 6:00 p.m. It was already dark. He related that two of his soldiers in the jungle had been shot; they were badly wounded and needed to get to a hospital immediately. The Peruvian government did not have any helicopters, or perhaps the minister of the interior could not get ahold of any. "Can you help," he asked? There was no one for me to consult about this, and anyway, it was my decision; it was not the ambassador's decision.

I contacted one of our pilots and he said, you are asking us to fly in the dark to a region that is canopy jungle. It would be easy to crash; we could hit a hill or a tree while we are flying because visibility is low. In addition, these Peruvian soldiers were attacked by Sendero, which means the attackers could still be in the area and shoot the helicopter down. I asked, "what do you recommend?" If we did not send a helicopter, these guys were going to die for sure. There was no way they could get out of there; it was nighttime; it would take a long time to try to get there by vehicle and they would have to drag them out of the forest. After considering all the facts (briefly), I approved the mission. The pilots flew to the site and landed safely. They got the two guys out of there and flew them to the hospital. They were operated on, and both of them survived.

The next day the minister of interior called the ambassador to thank him for saving the lives of these two soldiers. The ambassador did not even know what the minister was talking about; the ambassador said you are so welcome. In the country team meeting later that morning, the ambassador said to me good job, wonderful. However, I was thinking, if the helicopter had crashed or been shot down, killing the pilots, the ambassador would have been all over me. He would have said "what were you thinking? Are you out of your

mind?" This is the nature of having to make tough decisions; you have to accept responsibility for whatever happens. Fortunately, nothing bad happened.

My tour in Peru was supposed to be for three years, but my wife became pregnant when we were there, and she wanted to go back to California, where she is from, to give birth. She was not very happy in Peru, unlike in Havana, which she grew to love. She had not been able to find a job at our embassy in Lima. This is a common problem for foreign service spouses, as I mentioned before. If your spouse is highly educated and trained, but cannot find work and is sitting around bored, that is a problem. We did not have the same tight-knit community in Lima that we did in Havana. We could go anywhere in Lima, or in Peru for that matter, so Americans at the embassy tended not to huddle together all the time as we did in Havana. She was a little bit lonely and bored and told me she wanted to give birth in California and then not return to Peru. I sympathized but I noted that I could not get out of my assignment; we had been at post only eight months or so. I told her the only way I could curtail was to bid on some post that was worse, e.g. I could volunteer for Iraq or Afghanistan.

Q: But she could not accompany you to Afghanistan.

WARD: Right. Afghanistan was unaccompanied, but she was at any rate pregnant, and a tour in Afghanistan is only one year. The idea was she would go back home, live with her parents, finish her pregnancy and give birth. Meanwhile, I would go immediately to Afghanistan. We would be apart for a year, but we would be apart anyway if she were in the United States to give birth and recover and I were in Peru.

The benefit of going to Afghanistan was that I would not have to go back to Peru and finish my tour; we could bid on a position in Europe or Asia after Afghanistan. We agreed this was a good plan. Accordingly, I searched and found a "NOW" assignment, meaning it was immediately available, in Afghanistan. I bid on it and I got it.

Thus, I ended up leaving Peru after only nine months. I did not like curtailing. I felt that I was letting the embassy in Lima down when I agreed to be in Peru for three years, but then left early. It put my boss in a tough position because it is very difficult to find a replacement quickly. Our system has enormous lead time in it; one bids on assignments that begin eight months later. The Department can advertise a job as a "NOW" assignment, but very few FSOs are available to fill jobs immediately available, and it is especially difficult to find somebody who has the language, the seniority, and the experience you want. My boss was very unhappy because I was doing great work with him, and he depended on me. Now, he was going to be left alone with my work to shoulder as well as his own. He understood, but he took it out on me professionally.

Q: Oh, in your performance evaluation?

WARD: Not in my evaluation. Rather, your corridor reputation suffers when you displease your boss. Your boss will say things about you behind your back. In fact, I was

told by somebody that he did that, which directly prevented me from getting one job. At any rate, it is just another factor one must take into account when in the Foreign Service.

I wanted to stay in Peru for three years. I am sure I would have gotten promoted if I had, because it was an FS-01 job, and I was doing it as an FS-02. My boss gave me an excellent review, which could not have been otherwise because he was not allowed to make up things about me. However, since I left early, I was not able to demonstrate a superior performance over three years in that job.

The job in Afghanistan entailed overseeing American police officers who were contracted to train Afghan police. This was something that I had never done before, but again, it was a program management job. It was a large program with a sizable budget, and I found in both the case of that job, and the jobs I had in Cuba and Peru, where I was managing large programs, the task is very similar. You identify and hire/train/retain qualified and dedicated personnel; you set program goals; you formulate an appropriate budget to accomplish the goal; you measure performance, make adjustments as needed, etc. You manage. You do not have to be an expert in the subject matter. I was not an expert in drugs, but that did not mean I could not manage the counter narcotics program well. There is always room for improvement.

There is one thing I wanted to circle back with on Cuba. After I left Cuba, when I went back to Washington, I met with the assistant secretary of PRM and I recommended that we shut the refugee resettlement program down in Cuba. Which is the same thing a successor of mine recommended years later.

Q: Shut the refugee resettlement program down?

WARD: Yes. I said we should just give all these Cubans whom we are sending to the United States as refugees, immigrant visas instead, because they are not really refugees and we are doing a disservice to refugees elsewhere. I was thinking globally. Most FSOs think about their post and the job that they are narrowly performing. I was taking into account all the refugees in the world, of whom there are many millions. I pointed out that we were taking away resettlement slots that could have gone to refugees in Africa or elsewhere. Some refugees had been tortured, or were living in a refugee camp for 12 years or longer with neither hope nor dignity, suffering badly. Some refugees were dying because they did not have enough clean water, sufficient food, or access to appropriate health care.

There were refugees around the world who were much worse off than the Cubans. Cubans all had jobs, free healthcare, and a place to live. Cubans were not on their last leg. They were not vulnerable. Iraqis and others had fled war and had been injured, psychologically abused, tortured; they had nothing but the shirt on their back. Accordingly, I argued that we should transfer the 5,000 refugee slots reserved for Cuba to some other part of the world, because we had a limited number for the entire world. The assistant secretary of PRM agreed with me. He nodded in assent. However, he replied

that the Cuba refugee program exists for political reasons, so we would maintain it. Of course, I knew he would say that. He did not have the courage to take on the issue.

In the humanitarian world, one tries to be apolitical. For instance, we have given food aid to North Koreans. It does not matter what we think of the regime; we do not want North Korean citizens or any people around the world to starve to death. That is the way you approach humanitarian work. Cuba seems to be an exception. Political considerations are paramount, unfortunately.

Today, as we resume our discussion, you had just finished discussing your tour in Lima, and you were headed to Kabul.

AFGHANISTAN

WARD: Right. I arrived in Kabul on June 1, 2010. I was living in a hooch, as they called it, which was a 20 ft shipping container. Since I knew that would be the case before going, I brought only clothes, a dozen books, my laptop, tennis racket, and baseball glove. That was wise, because there was no room for anything more. I have noticed in the past that one can get used to anything, and in no time I was used to my hooch and not missing all of my material possessions in storage. Most of us were working all the time (six days a week required) and spent free time either at the pool, the tennis court, at the bar, at the gym, playing volleyball, or socializing. We would walk (via tunnel) to the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) headquarters to go to a pizza place when we were tired of the compound's cafeteria. I actually liked the cafeteria food; they always had many options, and on Fridays steak. On special occasions (like holidays) they had lobster and other such treats.

My job was Police Program Manager, so I was supervising a group of contracted American police officers who were advising Afghans how to train Afghan police. We had operations at police training centers in Kabul, Kandahar, Gardez, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Bamiyan, and Kunduz.

When I had been in country less than a week, we received a call one morning that our police training facility in Kandahar had been attacked by suicide bombers. One of the attackers drove into the perimeter wall with a car full of explosives (vehicle borne improvised explosive device - VBIED), detonating and blasting a hole in the wall. Another two attackers followed on foot through the hole in the wall and started shooting at Afghan police recruits. They also had grenades. Fortunately, the attackers were quickly shot and killed; however, we did lose a contracted American police advisor and a Nepalese security guard.

I was working with the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) bureau, and we had our own air wing, composed of various fixed and rotary wing aircraft. Thus, I called up the airfield in Kabul and asked for transportation to Kandahar immediately. Normally, one needs to book a trip with days or a week's advance notice. They granted it, and I flew to Kandahar the same day of the attack, arriving just before dark. There was a

lot of debris everywhere. There was no sign of the car, so powerful was the bomb. There were only pieces of it. One of the terrorists had also been blown into bits, as the bullet that killed him set off explosives he was wearing in a vest. We were lucky, because if the attack had occurred at lunch, rather than around 10 a.m., recruits would have been eating and essentially defenseless, and many could have been killed.

When I returned to Kabul, I huddled with my police advisors, and we concluded that we needed to beef up security at all of the police regional training centers (RTCs). The plan was to dig a ditch about four feet deep and several feet wide, about 50 yards from the perimeter wall of each site. Between these ditches and the wall, we installed barbed wire. Thus, if any vehicle tried a similar attack, it would get stuck in the ditch and not be able to approach and blast through the perimeter wall. The barbed wire would slow down anyone approaching on foot. We also approved 50 caliber guns for the guard towers, whose bullets are powerful enough to go through engine blocks and stop a car. I am happy to report that following this security upgrade at the RTCs, no facility was attacked during the remainder of my tour in Kabul (which was just one year). That was probably my only success in Kabul.

One memorable event that occurred when I had been there only a short time, is that Ambassador Eikenberry asked me to accompany him to see the minister of interior. Of course, I would be the notetaker. As we were driving to the ministry, we got stuck in a traffic jam. We were not moving. The ministry was about 1/4 mile away at this point. The ambassador became frustrated. He looked at me and said, “shall we get out and walk?” Now, we were both wearing suits, with no body armor, and no weapons. My immediate thought was, my ambassador is the number one target of the terrorists, or number two after the Afghan president. He could be shot to death walking down the street, and me with him. But if he was willing to risk it, there is no way I was going to be a wimp, so I said “sure, let’s walk.” I was thinking that my name would be etched on the granite wall at the C Street entrance in the State Department, where those who died in the service of their country are memorialized. Instantly, our bodyguard in the front seat said, “please do not get out of the car.” I wondered whether the ambassador would abide, but before he responded, the car suddenly started moving as the traffic jam ended. So, we drove.

I thought it was very odd that President Obama chose for his ambassador a three-star general who had served in Afghanistan (Eikenberry). Ambassador Holbrooke, the Special Representative for Afghanistan (SRAP), did not enjoy a close relationship with Obama. Holbrooke likely would have been named secretary of state had Hillary won in 2008, but that was not to be his fate. He used to lament that our foreign policy was being taken over by the military, and that certainly was the case in Afghanistan. Not only did we have a recently retired general as ambassador, but also the United States military presence in country was enormous. That would be fine if its role were limited to fighting a war, but our military intervened in every way imaginable in the civilian government. You could not visit a ministry in the Afghan government without tripping over American military officer advisors. American generals (of whom there seemed to be no shortage) were assigned as personal advisors to each of the key ministers. Where did that leave our

diplomats? Essentially, we were marginalized. Like Holbrooke, I think that was an error by the administration - a big one.

Also, during this time (or a few years earlier) it became clear that something had changed very substantially in our approach to countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. For one thing, in the old days, we would evacuate our embassy if it and our diplomats were constantly under attack and the local government could not or would not protect us (which is its duty). In the case of these two countries at war, we decided we would keep our embassies open, despite the threat to our diplomats. These posts were labeled as "danger" posts, and we paid our diplomats extra money to go there. We bribed them to go, in essence, and told them they would have to stay only one year. In the early 2000's, we gave FSOs the choice of their onward assignment if they volunteered for Baghdad or Kabul; later, we gave them "linked" assignments (meaning they bid on both Kabul and an onward assignment at the same time, a clear advantage). However, when these two missions became our largest in the world, and it was necessary to fill them every year with new bodies, the Department kept reducing the incentives to serve in them (except extra pay and a better chance at promotion, allegedly).

Kabul and Baghdad resulted in the HR bureau doing something I thought it should have done many years earlier: they required that positions at those embassies be filled completely before they filled any other positions worldwide. That prioritization should have been taken a step further, in my view. We should have prioritized all the jobs in the world (and Washington) and the lowest priority would simply be filled last (i.e. not filled at all, since we had more job openings than personnel).

When I had been in Kabul for about a month, a story broke in *Rolling Stone* magazine that General Stanley McChrystal had disparaged both our ambassador and the president. I told my boss that he would be sacked. She had been in Afghanistan a year at that point, and assured me, the newcomer, that McChrystal was far too important to be sacked. She was wrong. When General Petraeus was appointed, I listened to him speak at the embassy when he arrived. He gave his usual counterinsurgency (COIN) pep talk, but I was not buying it. I never thought our military's role was to drink tea with people who hate us, or that we could win hearts and minds by building infrastructure or helping farmers. I saw opinion polls showing most Afghans did not understand what we were doing in their country, or thought we were trying to change their religion or culture. Many of them saw us as invaders, not liberators. They assumed we would leave as soon as we got tired of being there, so they were just waiting us out. The longer we stayed, the more they disliked us. The chances of turning what was a backward, very poor, diverse country with a history of instability, violence and competing tribes, into a peaceful, functioning democracy were slim to none.

I was in a meeting with Ambassador Holbrooke and many of our generals at one point, and he expressed that one of the most important things we were doing in country was training Afghan police. It gave me joy to hear that, as though I were somehow doing something important. After all, he noted, we cannot withdraw our troops until the Afghans have the ability to defend themselves, and much of that duty falls on police

(rather than army). The Afghan police, not the army, took the brunt of the attacks by the Taliban and terrorists.

The Department of Defense (DOD) was slowly taking over the police training program from State, unfortunately. They reminded me of their predecessors in Vietnam, who thought we were winning by displaying charts showing how many enemies we killed each week. In the case of Afghanistan, our military would proudly note how many police we (or they) trained. However, this metric belied the fact that a percentage of those we trained would later desert. Especially if they ever came under fire. Also, as our military wanted to reach some large number of police trained, they kept shortening the training period (much to the disgust and dismay of my American police training advisors). The training was reduced to six weeks, which is hardly enough time to learn anything, especially given the often unsophisticated, illiterate recruits we had. I often asked myself (and others), why do you think anyone joins the police? No one was asking that question. My own conclusion was that they liked getting a paycheck, three meals a day, uniforms, and a warm place to sleep. They were not highly motivated to take on Taliban/terrorists. At any rate, what did counterterrorism have to do with traditional policing? Nothing. They should have been learning how to investigate and solve crimes, and community policing. They did none of that, because our military wanted them to be paramilitaries, not traditional police. They were doing the job that the Afghan army should have been doing, had the army not preferred to hide in their barracks.

The majority of Americans at the embassy spent most of their time on the compound. One could leave the compound for official reasons only. I had a good reason: monitoring police training centers around the country. As I worked for INL, I also had aircraft at my disposal. Thus, I got out quite frequently, visiting all of our training centers multiple times. I would also visit our contracted partners at Camp Gibson, across town from the embassy. Therefore, I never had the same cooped up feeling that so many others did. Many colleagues suffered from stress, away from their families, in a war zone, unable to leave the compound, with few diversions. I was fine.

We had a bar on compound called the “Duck and Cover,” which was the name of an action we were supposed to take if threatened with incoming fire (duck under your desk; take cover). I heard that Ambassador Eikenberry, a Mormon, wanted to close the bar. Had he done so, he would have faced a riot. Staff loved that bar, drinking and socializing there. We also had a liquor store on compound. One of my great FSO friends, Alfred Schandlbauer, with whom I went to university and served with in London, was posted to Afghanistan when I was there. He was sent to Chagcharan, a little outpost. He told me he had no alcohol, so I went and bought about nine bottles of various types of liquor, and I sent them to him in one of our INL planes (visiting his post regularly) in a box marked “medical supplies.” He was thrilled and lived like a king for a while.

My wife’s due date was August 29. I made reservations to arrive in San Francisco on that day, but she convinced me to move back my flight to September 1, reasoning that the baby might be a little late. The challenge we faced was that anyone serving in Afghanistan could be away from post only 35 calendar days in a year. She did not want

me to sit around for a week or more burning up my leave waiting for the baby to be born. When babies arrive is unpredictable, of course. As it turns out, she went into labor and gave birth on her due date. I was ecstatic, naturally, and I flew to San Francisco and saw my daughter when she was two days old. It was wonderful. At the same time, I was sad to have missed out on the birth. This was a consequence of serving in Afghanistan.

On my return, one of my colleagues suggested a game of poker. I said sure, and we played one night, pitching in $20 each. If you went bust, you could buy another $20 worth of chips. It was fun, so we scheduled another game. This time, we decided to start off with $40 each as the buy-in, which soon turned into a $50 buy-in. Within a couple of weeks, we were gambling hundreds of dollars each time we played. Fortunately for me, I was fairly skilled at poker. At one point, I recall having won on nine out of eleven game nights. When I won, it was often $300-$600. When I lost, it was usually $100-$200. I came out way ahead playing poker. Whenever I came out ahead, I would buy pizza and bring booze for the next game.

Every embassy has only one ambassador, of course, but at Kabul, we had four former ambassadors serving, in addition to our chief of mission. We had to call them all "ambassador." It seemed very odd to me why we needed all these former ambassadors to serve in Afghanistan. One of them played poker with us. One day, he told us that we could not play any longer, because someone had complained. This was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard. Who would complain? No one forced anyone to play, or to gamble any amount of money. Nevertheless, there is a federal regulation that prohibits gambling on United States government property. That ambassador stopped playing with us, and I assured him that we would continue playing, because it was an enjoyable diversion, but only for chips, not money. He did not ask any questions.

I came back to the United States again at Christmas. I noticed that commercial airliners always give priority to American soldiers. In Afghanistan, 90% of our servicemen never saw or heard a bullet fired. They were working "behind the wire," as we used to say, meaning they were on a well-fortified base and never left. One of my colleagues in INL was a former Navy SEAL, and another was a former army helicopter. They would comment on how out of shape our soldiers looked (or were). Our marines, on the other hand, were doing the vast majority of the fighting; they were in constant firefights, and we admired and respected them enormously.

Our soldiers in Kabul would ride around only in MRAPs (mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles), and only when wearing full body armor and carrying M-16s. FSOs like me rode around town in unarmored vehicles, driven by Afghans, without any body armor or weapons. I would drive to an airfield, get in a helicopter or fixed wing aircraft, and fly to some location around the country. Flying in a helicopter is inherently dangerous in itself, as it can crash in fog or mountains, and is easily shot down (or pierced by bullets). I flew in a sandstorm once where visibility was about zero. Once we arrived at a given airfield, we had to drive to our location (again, a risky prospect due to improvised explosive devices, IEDs). I was at a police training facility one day when a recruit at a different site turned his weapon on his trainers, killing several. I think it is fair

to say my job was ten times more dangerous than the average American soldier's job in Afghanistan (not counting the marines). The American public is always praising our military, and rightly so. I have no qualms about that. But people do not realize that our diplomats serving in places like Afghanistan and Iraq are also doing so at great risk (greater risk, in some cases, as we have no way to defend ourselves and have less protection).

I flew to Helmand once, which was considered the most dangerous part of Afghanistan (along with Kandahar, which I visited multiple times). We had no training center in Helmand; nevertheless, the U.S. marines there were contemplating starting up their own training program for Afghan police. Helmand was one of the dirtiest and hottest places I had ever been. It was about 120F there, and I recall drinking water but never having to urinate, as I was sweating so much. Dust is everywhere in Afghanistan. A fine layer of it coats everything; there seems no way to keep it out of your living quarters. I was told before I went to Afghanistan that one of the reasons we were paid extra is that our health would be harmed by our service there. Everyone suffers respiratory damage to some degree. I was also told I would experience an earthquake (which I did), and get food sickness (which I did, once). Despite these minor setbacks, I very much enjoyed my time in Afghanistan. There is a lot of beauty in that country, and a lot of variety in climate and scenery, from mountains to deserts.

We had a steady stream of high ranking visitors (war tourists). On one occasion, a congressional delegation (CODEL) of multiple senators arrived, including John McCain, who was a frequent visitor. We were given the opportunity to get a photo/handshake. I got in line. I was thinking, you only have a few seconds to say something. I had actually met McCain earlier when I worked in the Senate. When I got to shake his hand and get the photo, I said "my father went to the Naval Academy with you; he was not in your class, but graduated two years ahead of you." He asked, "what is his name?" I told him "Gene Ward." He said, "I know him." In that instant, I was pushed along because others were behind me waiting their turn. I laughed because my father, a big admirer of McCain, had told me he never met him and did not know him. I also got to meet General Petraeus when he visited our police training center in Kandahar. I got to talk to him briefly, explaining our security upgrades that were underway.

We used contractors to do everything in Afghanistan. This was a change from the way we had operated elsewhere in the past. We threw so much money at that country, that there was bound to be a lot of it misspent. I used to laugh at messages posted on billboards that said, "report waste, fraud, and mismanagement." I thought that would be a full time job. There was a Special Inspector General for Afghan Recovery (SIGAR) operating in Kabul. Every year, his office would report that hundreds of millions of dollars of United States assistance was unaccounted for, was misspent, was lost due to fraud, did not achieve desired goals, was stolen, etc. No one seemed to pay any attention to the reports, as they report the same findings year after year.

Part of the problem was that we sent personnel to Kabul for one year. There was no institutional memory. Everyone who arrived wanted to do something new or different in

order to claim some success. So, the same failed strategies were tried multiple times. This was recounted to me by some of our police advisors, who were contractors and had in many cases been in Afghanistan five or six years. "We tried that three years ago and it did not work," they would say, but often no one would listen to them. On top of that, our police training program relied on many allied countries, who each had responsibility in a different location (Italians in one provincial reconstruction team - PRT, Germans in another, French in another, etc.). That left no one with overarching direction or authority.

Our program was a hybrid, as police training had been fought over by DOD and State from its inception. A compromise was agreed by the two organizations' deputy secretaries: State would run the program but DOD would control the purse strings. That was a foolish decision. It left me, for instance, constantly asking DOD counterparts if we could spend money on X, Y, or Z. You cannot manage a program if you do not control the budget and have no spending authority. The difficulties of the hybrid approach eventually became too obvious to ignore, and a decision was made to turn it all over to DOD. This was happening when I was in Afghanistan, leaving me to wonder what my role was.

Actually, I wondered what any of us were doing there. I thought we should have left that country as soon as we defeated the Taliban. The purpose of being there originally was to overthrow the Taliban, due to its hosting of terrorists, and to find and kill bin Laden. Once our administration turned its attention to Iraq, we lost focus in Afghanistan. That was a mistake. We engaged in a nation-building exercise which has never worked anywhere. As Bing West, former Assistant Secretary of Defense said, our military is not a giant Peace Corps, and we should not use it as such.

Two of my colleagues in INL were working on prison management, construction, reform, etc. One day, we woke up to headlines that 400 inmates had escaped a prison by punching through the thin cement floor and tunneling to a small building across the street from the prison. They dug a huge tunnel, left during the night, and no one noticed? These advisors quipped that they were going to tell the ambassador the good news that the prison was no longer overcrowded.

Another of my colleagues in INL was working on poppy eradication. However, as in other countries, we worked with the permission of the government, and in Afghanistan that meant we had a policy of governor-led eradication. This meant we worked with the governor of each province. Unsurprisingly, the governors of such provinces as Helmand and Kandahar, where most of the fighting was going on, suspended any eradication efforts. Accordingly, traffickers planted poppy there. This made me wonder what my colleagues were doing. Why were they even there?

Other colleagues were working on a program training judges and setting up special tribunals to investigate and prosecute cases of corruption. These were well intended, like everything we did, but had few results. Political interference from the highest levels occurred when anyone with connections was the target of a probe. I could not help but conclude that everything we were doing would be overturned, abandoned the minute we left. The only good thing we did in Afghanistan, as far as I could tell, was build schools

and insist that girls attend. Even that had some mixed results, as very conservative elements in some cases attacked girls throwing acid in their faces or employed other violence to discourage them from attending.

I attended a country team meeting at the embassy one day when some agricultural experts announced that, after assessing the results of ten years of planting different crops in Afghanistan, (including cotton), they had concluded that what the Afghans were growing before we started "assisting" them was best all along. That made our agricultural interventions look very foolish. A colleague of mine when I was in London, Peter van Buren, wrote a book about the tremendous ignorance, incompetence, waste and mismanagement that accompanied our assistance to Iraq, where he had served. He wrote it shortly after retiring. For embarrassing the United States government, he was harassed and threatened with legal action by the administration. I wrote to him and told him I could write the same book that he wrote about Iraq, only substituting examples from Afghanistan. He urged me to do so. However, I was not yet done working for the government, so I thought it might be better to wait.

I attended a meeting one day of the Law and Order Trust for Afghanistan (LOTFA). This was a group of western donors pouring money in to help pay Afghan police salaries, fund equipment purchases, etc. I was encouraging donor countries to maintain, or to increase, their donations, in order to achieve our goals (more police, more training, proper equipment, police stations, etc.) A Canadian diplomat announced that her government would reduce its funding because what we were doing was "not sustainable." I responded, "nothing we are doing here in Afghanistan is sustainable." No Afghan government has ever generated sufficient revenue to employ an army or national police force. How is that ever going to change? Donors were tired of pouring money into a sinkhole; such fatigue always sets in years into an intervention.

Supposedly, Afghanistan is rich in mineral resources. Good luck finding investors to come into a country lacking rule of law, replete with violence and political instability, to extract those minerals and try to make a profit doing so.

I was eating breakfast in the cafeteria on May 2, 2011 when the television announced that a SEAL team had killed bin Laden, and that his body was at a base not far from Kabul. We all cheered wildly. The reason we were in Afghanistan was that bin Laden had directed a massive terrorist attack ten years earlier. We finally tracked him down and killed him, not in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan. One wondered how he could have been living in a large house practically within sight of a Pakistani military base, and the Pakistanis did not know it, or (more likely) knew and did nothing. At any rate, the event was an opportunity to reassess what we were doing in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, President Obama essentially announced during his campaign that we were going to stay in Afghanistan, and even increase our presence. I wish he had said he planned to order a top to bottom review of our goals, objectives, strategy, and timeline. He wound up being the only president in our history to be at war during his entire time in office, and Afghanistan wound up being America's longest military (mis)adventure.

Q. Ok, so as you are finishing up your tour in Kabul, where were you thinking of serving next?

WARD: I wanted to go overseas again, to Europe or Asia, to a nice post, considering I had just spent a year in Afghanistan. I was also thinking of a place that would be good for my newborn daughter and wife, of course. However, my wife decided that she did not want to go overseas. She wanted to stay in California to be near her parents. This was a surprise to me and threw a wrench in my plans, career aspirations, and marriage. I was not keen on serving in Washington (and my wife wasn't either), but wanted to be somewhere in the United States because I hoped that my wife would join me, since she objected to going overseas. I found an opening in the form of a detail assignment at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) at Fort Benning, Georgia. I bid on that and got it.

WHINSEC/FORT BENNING-GEORGIA

Q. What were your duties there?

WARD: My job was to teach classes in American government and democracy to Latin American military officers, in Spanish. The overriding theme was civilian control of the military. I took the classes on some field trips, to Andersonville, Georgia, site of the largest prisoner of war camp in the south during the civil war; and to the "little White House" in Warm Springs, Georgia, where FDR frequently vacationed and where he died. I did not have nearly enough to do in that job, and though I asked for more work, the military officers running the operation did not give me additional duties. And so I simply relaxed in Georgia until I could go overseas again. I told the Department they should terminate that detail assignment, because there were much better uses of our scarce personnel. As usual, no one acted on my recommendation. They replaced me with another FSO who had equally little to do.

In late 2012, I saw a job opening for the following summer in Vienna as refugee coordinator. I contacted my colleagues in PRM and they offered me the job. They asked if I could go early, arriving in May, because my predecessor needed to leave early for family reasons. I agreed, naturally, and asked if I could also avail myself of German classes at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) for six weeks, to at least give me a refresher on that language. My job was not language-designated, meaning they determined I did not need German to do my job. Nevertheless, PRM humored me and let me attend the classes. The German I had studied decades earlier started coming back to me while at FSI. I arrived in Vienna in May 2013.

VIENNA

Q: What were your duties in your job in Vienna?

WARD: The job was regional refugee coordinator, meaning I had responsibility for a region, not just Austria. I was working on resettlement of refugees, as I had done in Cuba.

In my region, the bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) had contracted Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Vienna and International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) in Beirut and Istanbul to process refugees and prepare their cases for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to interview. Initially, I was overseeing these three operations. Before I even left Washington for Vienna, I suggested that we move the job from Vienna to Istanbul, as the latter site handled a far larger number of refugees than the former. My boss in Washington agreed, but it took three years to affect the move, due to disputes with our consulate in Istanbul. I did not object to being based in Vienna though, as it is arguably the best city in Europe in which to live.

In Vienna, HIAS was processing only Iranian religious minorities, who applied while in Iran and were approved to come to Vienna when all their paperwork was in order. All of these applicants had relatives (or close friends) in the United States who promised to look after them when they arrived. Many went to Glendale, California, bordering Los Angeles. The majority of applicants were Armenian Christians, followed by Mandeans, Chaldeans, Zoroastrians, and Jews. Most were in their fifties or sixties and had children in their 20's in the United States. The program ran very smoothly, with an excellent staff at HIAS, a number of whom had come to Vienna from Iran themselves and so spoke the languages (both Armenian and Farsi) of our applicants, knew the country/culture, understood all the official paperwork (birth certificates, school certificates, military and religious certificates, etc.) This program ran with the cooperation of the Austrian government, naturally, whose embassy in Tehran would grant visas to our applicants when we indicated they were ready to travel to Vienna. We processed about 2000 or so applicants a year through this program.

In Turkey, the refugee population before the Syrian conflict was relatively small (about 30,000), and was composed mainly of Iraqis, followed by Iranians and Afghans, and assorted others. Turkey did not want any of these individuals to integrate and to stay in Turkey; rather, they expected all of them to be resettled to a third country. That meant, they expected most of them to go to the United States. That was a reasonable expectation, I suppose, given that we were processing and accepting a large number of Iraqis in those days. Other countries seemed to believe that the United States should resettle Iraqi refugees, given that we had invaded that country and hence were responsible for the refugee outflow in their view. However, once the war in Syria gained steam, Turkey found itself with 100,000, then 250,000, then 500,000, and then over one million Syrian refugees. The numbers steadily grew to over three million. Given that the United States was accepting 70,000 refugees worldwide for resettlement per year, that translated to about 6,000 a year from Turkey, which represented a proverbial drop in the bucket.

During my tour in Vienna, I would fly frequently to Istanbul to oversee our operations there and to consult with our partners in the resettlement business. ICMC's operation was complex. Staff had to deal with refugees from multiple countries, who spoke multiple languages. They had to have numerous interpreters. Refugees lived all over Turkey, which is a large country with 80 provinces, resulting in a need to bus them long distances to Istanbul for their interviews. They all needed medical exams while in Istanbul, and cultural orientation class (for four days) in the language that they spoke. It was a

logistical challenge. Meanwhile, during my time there, we were expanding operations as fast as we could, because President Obama decided to increase the number of refugees who could be resettled in the United States from 70,000 in fiscal year (FY) 15, to 85,000 in FY 16, to 110,000 in FY 17.

The third resettlement operation I was overseeing was located in Beirut. Like Turkey, Lebanon gradually absorbed a growing number of Syrian refugees until they numbered over one million, which put enormous pressure on that small country, given its population was only around four million. Lebanon also had Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan, and African refugees. Our difficulty in operating in Lebanon was that we were required for security reasons to conduct DHS interviews on our small embassy compound, which limited the number we could process each year.

I also visited a number of other locations where we did not have offices, but would travel periodically to interview refugees for resettlement. These included UAE, Kuwait, Romania, and Malta. We made what I thought was an unwise bargain with the Maltese. They claimed they could not handle the number of refugees arriving by boat from North Africa (almost always destined not for Malta, but for Italy), and asked us to resettle a percentage of them. PRM/Washington agreed, in exchange for the Maltese taking certain steps to improve the lives of those refugees who remained on the island. When I looked into the issue, I found the Maltese to have fairly racist attitudes. They did not want any black Africans to integrate and made it almost impossible for them to do so. They wanted us to resettle those refugees.

I also questioned why we would resettle anyone who was residing in Europe. European countries have asylum systems in place; they have high standards of living, resources, healthcare, rule of law, etc. I recommended we end our resettlement of refugees living in Malta, especially after Italian vessels started interdicting unseaworthy craft such that virtually none were arriving in Malta. My boss in Washington agreed; nonetheless, there was an argument to be made that our resettlement of Somalis and Eritreans from Malta improved their lives drastically. They could never obtain citizenship in Malta, but they could in the United States. They could never bring their families to Malta, but they could bring them to the United States. Complicating matters in Malta was that Libyans started arriving in large numbers, fleeing chaos in their country. Those with money were generally tolerated in Malta, as they contributed to the economy (and were not black). Penniless Libyans, on the other hand, represented a burden to the government of Malta.

I found Malta itself to be beautiful. The old capital (Mdina) is enchanting, as is St. Julian's, the area in which I stayed on my several visits there. I also took a trip once to the island of Comino, which was stunning.

When I had been on the job for one year in Vienna, I was asked by my boss to go to Amman and oversee the operation there to fill a gap before the new refugee coordinator arrived. Like my job in Vienna, the job in Amman was a regional one, covering the resettlement operation in Amman (which was huge), Cairo, and Moscow. I was in Amman for only a month but got a feel for the operation and made some suggestions to

improve it. At the same time, I was doing my job covering Vienna, Istanbul, and Beirut, so I had my hands full. I was in touch with the new refugee coordinator even before she arrived, giving advice about issues she would face, recommendations on trips she should make, etc. She had never worked on refugee issues before. We wound up working together closely, and I somewhat mentored her (given my 6+ years of working on refugee issues at that point) in the beginning. When she said that she had too much on her plate, I offered to take the resettlement operation in Moscow off of her hands, and Washington agreed. At that point, I had four resettlement operations to oversee, versus her two.

When I traveled to Moscow, I found that operation to be a mess. Our resettlement partner there, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), had been presenting skewed statistics to us that belied the large backlog of cases awaiting interview and processing. The deputy of the operation apparently had serious mental issues, was behaving erratically, and was unreliable. The entire operation suffered from low morale. I requested the new director of the resettlement operation there to study the workload carefully, and to present a plan to reduce the backlog to zero. I told him to request however many new staff and whatever resources he needed. He did so, and I advocated for this in Washington/PRM. They approved the plan, and we also removed the unreliable deputy.

In Moscow, I witnessed that our operation was difficult to sustain, given hostility from the government of Russia against international organizations like IOM. At the same time, I noted how most of the refugee applicants we interviewed in Moscow were Ukrainian religious minorities. I visited Kyiv with the head of our Moscow resettlement operation, and we found that the IOM office in Kyiv had empty space and room to expand. Consequently, I recommended to Washington/PRM that we move the resettlement office from Moscow to Kyiv. This would be an improvement for several reasons: 1) we could hire Ukrainians in Kyiv to process the applicants, so we would not need interpreters (unlike in Moscow); 2) the applicants would not have to travel to Moscow for interviews; and 3) the Ukrainian government was not hostile to international organizations (while the Russian government was). PRM agreed with me and in fact did move the office to Kyiv, although it took some time to achieve.

In 2015, refugees started crossing the Aegean from Turkey to Greece in large numbers. They took to the sea because they were blocked from taking the land route. This seemed entirely predictable, as Syrian refugees in Turkey were large in number, generally unwelcome, and having a tough time getting by. It would seem natural they would want to go to Europe, where they expected more freedom, more work opportunities, and better social benefits, but Europeans were surprised when they did. The Turks either turned a blind eye to the exodus, eager to reduce their burgeoning refugee population, or facilitated it. German Chancellor Angela Merkel made statements welcoming refugees, which only encouraged more to make the trek. The result was a mass migration, and the death of common European asylum and migration policies. Previously, an asylum seeker was required to request asylum at the first country he came to, outside of his own country. This means an asylum seeker could not pass through multiple countries to arrive at the one he wanted to live in, and request asylum there. Those who did so in Europe in the past were subject to the Dublin Agreement, which stipulated that they would be sent back

to the "first country of asylum" to apply there. However, with Merkel's welcoming attitude, authorities in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Austria, etc. allowed asylum seekers to pass through their countries to Germany. They were only too happy that the asylum seekers did not want to stay in their countries.

Assistant Secretary of PRM Anne Richard visited Vienna in 2015, for one of the many meetings in that city between the foreign ministers of Russia, France, the United States, other European powers, and Iran. She took time out of her schedule to go with me to one of the main train stations in Vienna, where hundreds of refugees were arriving daily and being transported by Austrian rail to Germany. I arranged interpreters from HIAS to join us so that she could talk to Afghan, Iranian, Syrian, and other refugees. There was quite a mix, from many countries. The media labeled them all "refugees," but many doubtless had not been subjected to persecution and thus had no valid refugee claim; rather, they were economic migrants looking for a job and/or a better life in Europe. Eventually, the Germans put an end to the madness, but not until at least a million had arrived in Germany. Millions more would have come if they had been allowed entry. Germany in 2019 is still dealing with the fallout of Merkel's decision, which seemed empathetic but was unsound, in my opinion. It was an unregulated free for all, when it would have been wiser for Germany to announce a resettlement program, accepting the most vulnerable refugees that UNHCR recommended, screening them for solid refugee claims and vetting them for security purposes before approving them abroad before sending them to Germany. I always laughed when European diplomats claimed that Europe could not absorb any additional refugees, having accepted one million or so. The population of Europe was about 500 million, so one million equated to .2% of their population. At the same time, Lebanon was hosting one million refugees, about 20% of its population.

In March 2016, I was told that DHS Secretary Leon Rodriguez was going to be in Istanbul and had asked to see our resettlement operation at our contractor International Catholic Migration Commission's (ICMC's) office. I reasoned he would probably do a walk-through, maybe 30-45 minutes. His office came back and said he wanted to spend four hours (!) with us. I was amazed. A cabinet secretary spending four hours reviewing resettlement operations? Since becoming Secretary, it was his first time meeting with refugees. A colleague of mine from PRM/Washington flew out and together we extensively briefed the Secretary, then gave him a tour of the office. We arranged that he would meet first with adult refugees, and then with refugee children. Everything went very smoothly with the adults. Children, however, are unpredictable. The day before, I had met with the children who were going to meet with the Secretary. Only one of them, an Iraqi boy about 9 years old, spoke English. I asked him how he learned it, he said "from watching movies."

Although we had interpreters present, naturally the Secretary was drawn to this boy, because the boy immediately asked him "who are you?" When the Secretary introduced himself, the boy said "cool." The Secretary then proceeded to try to trick the boy with an old joke that starts off "you are driving a bus" and then the bus stops multiple times picking up different numbers of passengers. The assumption is that the person telling the tale is going to ask how many kids are on the bus at the end, but instead asks "what color

are the bus driver's eyes?" However, the boy stopped the Secretary mid-way through the joke and said something like "why does the bus keep stopping?" By then, the joke was a bust. Suddenly, the boy looked serious and asked if the Secretary had the power to approve refugees going to the United States. The Secretary said something like "the program falls under my Department." Then the boy said, "can my grandparents go with me to the United States? I don't want to go without them." He started to cry. It was deadly quiet. The Secretary did not know anything about this case, so he made the general statement "families should be kept together."

Immediately, I pulled aside an ICMC staffer and asked about the grandparents. The boy was already approved to go to the United States with his parents, as was everyone we presented that day to the Secretary, but we had not known anything about the grandparents. We did some scrambling and found out the grandparents had been considered but denied in the resettlement process for lack of credibility. The grandfather had lied about a criminal conviction. I sent a message to Washington the same day requesting DHS to review the case and noting the Secretary's personal interest in it. Naturally, the grandparents were tracked down, reinterviewed, and approved. That would never have happened if this young boy had not spoken up. Good for him.

When President Obama decided to increase the number of refugees admitted to the United States, from 70,000 in fiscal year (FY) 15, to 85,000 in FY 16, to 110,000 in FY 17, we steadily ramped up our resettlement operation in Turkey. I worked with ICMC to draw up plans to remodel the building they were leasing, to put two empty floors to use, and to hire more staff. I also asked ICMC to install a rail/chair to transport handicapped down some flights of stairs. Previously, staff had been carrying people in wheelchairs down stairs (!). Despite the improvements and expanded office space, we needed more space. I thought, rather than open another office in Istanbul, why not open one in Ankara, and later one in Adana? I traveled with the head of ICMC in Istanbul to Ankara several times, and we inspected newly constructed buildings for rent. One was perfect. It seemed a little too large, but I noted how the previous office in Istanbul seemed too large at first, but now was too small. I traveled with PRM's office director for resettlement to Ankara and Adana. We made a lot of plans to hire additional staff, increase the budget, train personnel, and sort out the logistics to lease the building and operate out of Ankara, and to take similar action in Adana. We awaited, however, our election in 2016, as the outcome could change our plans. When Trump was elected in November 2016 and started gutting the resettlement program, we never went forward with our expansion plan in Turkey, so it is a good thing we did not take immediate action in the summer of 2016.

When I visited our operation in Beirut on one occasion, UNHCR asked me to accept a case of two Saudi women in Lebanon who had converted to Christianity and were threatened in Saudi Arabia with either imprisonment by authorities or death (by relatives) if they returned. Canada had agreed to accept these two women but had been unable to obtain an exit permit for them from the Lebanese government. The assumption was that the Lebanese government was being pressured by the Saudi government to return the women. I asked UNHCR how our accepting the cases, versus Canada, made any difference. They assumed that the United States would have a better chance to get the exit

permits than Canada. I reasoned that the only way this could happen is if our ambassador to Lebanon personally intervened. I met with him, explained the case, and asked him whether he would be willing to intervene. He said yes. The ambassador spoke to a minister (or two), and secured exit permits for the women. They flew to the United States. I had the Assistant Secretary of PRM send the ambassador a personal thank you, and he responded that he was happy to help, and that all who worked on the case showcased the best of America.

During my tour in Vienna, I used some vacation time to visit Paris, Venice, Prague, Berlin, Budapest, Salzburg, and Cologne. I made the most of my time in Europe. I have to say Vienna was one of the highlights of my time in the Foreign Service. I had a great job; I was doing work that I believed to be important and meaningful; and I lived in a great city while having the opportunity to visit so many countries. It was everything I wanted from the Foreign Service. From Vienna, I thought of retiring, but PRM told me they were opening a new refugee coordinator position in Beirut, so I decided to go there in 2016.

So, today we are concluding our interview with Robert Ward with his final tour, in Lebanon. Let me just ask you to quickly review how you were chosen for the job or how did you get it?

BEIRUT

WARD: The job was refugee coordinator, and as I mentioned before, we do not have these jobs everywhere in the world. They are just in certain posts, usually where there are a lot of refugees. I was the refugee coordinator in Vienna, where there are not a lot of refugees, but that was a regional job, so I would travel to 15 or 20 countries. The Department chose Vienna as the hub for its regional operation because we had a program in Vienna processing Iranian religious minority refugees.

In 2016, I was the first refugee coordinator posted to Beirut. They should have established a position in that location years earlier, because it was needed around 2013 after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011 and the gradual flight of Syrians to Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. I had been visiting Lebanon since 2013, but they needed someone posted there full-time (and concentrating only on assistance, not resettlement). By 2016, there were a million or so Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Lebanon is a small country.

One of the frustrations about Lebanon is that there are not many reliable and available statistics on anything. Lebanon is a place where statistics go to die. We do not know how many Lebanese live in the country because the government will not do a census, and some Lebanese emigrate every year. They do not want to do a census because that would determine how they divide power up and certain groups, namely the Christians, are afraid that they have lost more of their members than Muslims have, and so the Christians would lose some power. Sectarian differences are what sparked a civil war from 1975-90, and so all the parties agree they do not want to re-experience that, so will not do a census.

We do not know how many Palestinian refugees there are in Lebanon. The first ones came in 1948, and they kept coming over the years, especially after major conflicts, but some also fled to Europe when/if they got the chance. They registered when they arrived in Lebanon, but never notified authorities when they left. So, we do not know how many Palestinian refugees are there now in Lebanon.

We do not know how many Syrian refugees are in Lebanon either, because the government originally allowed the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to register them, but then it told UNHCR to stop registering them, which was kind of crazy. We argued against that, because we wanted every Syrian to be registered as a way of protecting them. If a refugee does not have registration papers, then when he is stopped by the police, they hassle him. The government did not want to continue registering Syrians, arguing that they had too many already. However, declining to register Syrians did not stop them from continuing to flee Syria into Lebanon. It did not make sense to stop registering them, and the only explanation for this practice was that the government of Lebanon could tell Lebanese that we have 800,000 registered Syrians or whatever the number was, which did not change despite more Syrians arriving, because new arrivals were not registered. The government of Lebanon did not want to tell its own citizens that we now have one million or a million point two Syrians. They did not want to show the problem was growing. Of course, it was growing.

Meanwhile, we obviously needed someone there full-time because we had a large assistance program in addition to our resettlement program. They chose me because I had been visiting Lebanon for the past three years and was managing the resettlement program there, plus at that point I had accumulated eight years of experience working with refugees, which is very rare for Foreign Service officers. It is common for some of the Civil Service people to do the same job for 20 or 30 years, but FSOs move around all the time and we usually take different jobs. We do not do a functional type job, like refugee work, repeatedly, or at least most of us do not. I was a bit of an exception. I liked doing refugee jobs and I wanted to keep doing them. I was not concerned about promotions or advancing my career. I opted to do what I thought was meaningful work, important work. I told them that I wanted the job in Beirut and I knew most people in the PRM bureau already, and so, they said yes, you would obviously be the best person to do that, and they selected me for that job.

Q: Okay.

WARD: By the way, I do not know how much competition there was at that time for the job, because they needed someone to go right away, and also, it was Beirut, where no children were allowed at post. If you had a family, you were probably not going to bid on Beirut. Spouses had a hard time finding jobs as well, just because there were few jobs available for spouses, and we were not allowed to leave the compound to go work downtown. One colleague of mine left his wife and family behind in the United States while he did his tour in Beirut, but most people were not interested in being separated. Thus, the potential pool of bidders was small. We worked on and lived on a compound,

which a lot of people do not want to do, and some people were afraid that Beirut was dangerous. There were at least 35 bidders on the job I got in Vienna, but with Beirut, there might have been two or three (I do not know for sure).

Q: And the problem is, sometimes people bid on those jobs because they want to earn the many additional forms of income, that they're actually not by personality or preparation ready for the rigors of a job like that.

WARD: Right, some go for a paycheck, and others to check a box in order to get promoted. You have to do a danger post, you have to do an unaccompanied post, whatever the requirements are in the Foreign Service for promotion, and so they bid on these jobs and take them, but reluctantly. They do not want to be there and as a consequence the ambassador does not really want them there, because who wants someone bringing down morale? It is not a good situation at all. If someone is not qualified but is the only bidder, you have the choice of taking him or leaving the job empty. Often, the choice is to fill the position, because someone is better than no one. In theory.

Q: Okay. Take a moment to describe life in the U.S. embassy in Beirut.

WARD: Right. Well, I mentioned we were living on a 17-acre compound, if you can picture it, on a hill, which is a strange configuration. This was not a site that we chose and then built the embassy. Rather, this was a hodgepodge where we rented various buildings that belonged to different landlords. Then, we put a fence around the whole thing and said this is our embassy. It was not purpose-built. The chancery itself was a very old house, which we had to reconfigure to make it into the offices that we wanted. The embassy compound might have served its purpose when we acquired it decades ago. We were on this site in the '80s when it was bombed. The skeleton of a building, little more than steel beams and cement, still sits on the compound. It was hit by a truck bomb in 1984. The building has never been demolished. It is a memorial of sorts, a stark reminder of what happened.

There were a series of bombings in Lebanon in '83, '84, the U.S. Marine barracks, of course, and then the embassy. In 2016, our security people seemed to still be living in 1984. They thought we faced a very serious threat. We cursed our security folks at times, and other times we blessed them because they kept us safe and we were all grateful for that, but at the same time, a lot of us felt that we were being overprotected, and in the process restricted from living a normal life. They did not let us get out of the compound sometimes. What are we doing in every embassy around the world? We are getting out and meeting people, gathering information and reporting it back. If you cannot get out, then it is hard to do your job; it is almost impossible.

Unlike my colleagues, I had a job where I got out all the time because I had good justification. Some Americans get stuck in the embassy and then you wonder why they are even there, as in the case of Afghanistan, as we talked about before. If you are going to be in your office all day, you might as well be sitting in Washington. What is the

difference? In Beirut, Americans could not leave the compound for any reason unless we notified the regional security officer (RSO) in advance and he approved our move, and then we would be assigned a car with a bodyguard/driver. The embassy often did not have enough vehicles or bodyguards for everybody who wanted to make a move, so they would consolidate and make people go together on a trip, but then you would not have as much time as you wanted to conduct your business, or you had to stop and waste time somewhere you did not need to be because someone else was with you. Or sometimes the RSO would say no American could leave the compound (lockdown) because there was a serious security threat.

Much was dependent upon the particular RSO. One RSO in Beirut, who was posted there before I did a tour, but whom I knew because I would visit the post, rejected a large number of moves off the compound that Americans wanted to do. She perceived a high level of threat. Because Americans felt stuck on the compound, morale plummeted. Some officers curtailed their tours. Then, a new RSO arrived who had a much more liberal attitude and who approved almost all requests of Americans to get off compound. Security threats did not change at all during the tenure of these two back-to-back RSOs, but these two individuals assessed the threats differently and hence reacted differently. It is interesting how the personality and the experience of a particular RSO can affect these decisions. They are not just fact-based about the threat; it is also about how the RSO sees their job and performs their job.

Q: Yes. It is remarkable.

WARD: You do not want to get on the wrong side of the RSO or the GSO, the General Services Officer, who fixes everything that breaks and is responsible for your housing. You want to be good friends with both of these people, as anyone learns after a short time in the Foreign Service.

Also, on life on the compound, as I mentioned, no children were allowed. Your social life was restricted, obviously. You could not go out and spend all night downtown, you could not go to a hotel for the night. You had a limited time you were allowed off compound, such as four or six hours, because the embassy wanted the cars and the bodyguards back. There was a curfew every night. You could not stay out until all hours. We had to get back by midnight or whatever it was. Anyone who came to visit you had to pass through onerous security checks. It makes it difficult for people's personal lives.

Also, there was a shortage of housing and office space on the compound. We have had that embassy for perhaps 40 years, and over time our mission has grown, but we cannot increase the embassy staffing because there is no additional space for people to live or to work. We have a little building called the Tango Inn on the compound that functions like a hotel. It has, I recall, 15 rooms. You make reservations in advance (for official visitors, not for personal visitors), but about eight of the rooms were being used year-round by temporary duty personnel (TDYers). Those rooms were not available for other visitors. So, that left seven rooms, and you would go tell the person who was running the Tango Inn, I need a room from June 1-3 for an official visitor, and then you would find out

whether it was available. If there were no rooms available, that official visitor could not visit at that time. Whenever we had a congressional delegation or other VIPs, they would take all the rooms; no one else could visit.

The ambassador got very tired of having official visitors all the time. She noted that all visits were resource intensive, in that we had to send a car and bodyguard to the airport to pick up visitors (no official visitor was allowed to come to the embassy by taxi). We had to shuttle them around on a full schedule, sometimes requiring multiple cars. If they wanted to go the Beqaa Valley or elsewhere outside Beirut, we had to send security officers in advance to check out the proposed visit sites. As the embassy has the responsibility to approve all official visits, it also has the right to deny visits. At most embassies, virtually all official visitors are approved. Once in a while one is denied for some reason or other, or the visit is postponed. Our ambassador in Lebanon started personally looking at every proposed visit and vetoing many of them. As in the example I gave about the decisions of different RSOs on security matters, so too with ambassadors. Some ambassadors love visitors. The reason is that the visitor will take the message we shape to them back to Washington; we are going to arm them with facts that they did not know before, and they will become our ally/advocate. This will help to advance our post's (or the State Department's) agenda. This is good. Other ambassadors perceive visitors as a burden; they just want to look around and get a photo op and then leave, there is no added value to us when they visit. They are wasting our time, in fact, because we have to run around with them. Visitors might even say something foolish to the host government and then we have to clean up their mess. We do not want these visitors.

Our ambassador in Lebanon vacillated a little bit on this issue. On one occasion, I had three different people in PRM who wanted to visit for different reasons at the same time. One of them was going to look at humanitarian relief going to Syria. Another wanted to come and look at some issue related to refugee children in Lebanon. The third one wanted to come and review our resettlement program. The ambassador complained that this was too many and denied all of them. I was afraid she would do that. I went to see her, and I pushed back. I recommended that we prioritize our visitors, and at least allow the person coming to look at humanitarian aid going to Syria, because that was more important than the other two visitors. She relented, but it was always a negotiation and a lot of bargaining with the ambassador to secure approval for visitors. I also told the ambassador that I had a spare room and a visitor could stay with me, rather than take a room in the Tango Inn. It was not required of anyone to offer up their personal quarters, but I would always offer.

Speaking of different decisions by different ambassadors, given the same circumstances, the ambassador at post in 2015 decided to end visits by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to conduct interviews of refugees being resettled to the United States. He felt that the interviews, which were required by the RSO to be conducted on the compound, were too resource intensive on the embassy's part. Since I was managing that program (from Vienna 2013-16) I sent an email to Washington which got me in trouble. I pointed out that the claim by the embassy that it could not accommodate DHS visits was not correct; they had accommodated many visits in the past and nothing had changed as

far as resources, office space, etc. Rather, the only change was the ambassador did not want to facilitate visits any longer. My office director called me up and yelled at me, claiming I could have gotten myself (or him) in hot water for sending that email, if someone decided to forward it. Perhaps so, but I was only telling the truth. I hate to say nothing and go along with decisions that are unsound or based on faulty reasoning or falsehoods. Silence connotes agreement, and I did not agree. At times, I made people uneasy by forcing them to defend a decision that was not logical. When I arrived at post in 2016, with a new ambassador, I quickly convinced her to resume the interviews.

In Beirut, I should have had more help to do my job. I was working with one assistant, a young Lebanese man named Joe, who was fantastic. The portfolio was gigantic. At any other embassy I would have hired additional staff. I had money to hire people, but I was not allowed to hire because there was no spare office space, again. Many sections in the embassy also wanted to hire more people. The RSO wanted to hire more people, the GSO, the political section, the consular section, etc. There was a list of 40 to 50 positions that embassy sections wanted to hire.

Q: Was there any consideration while you were there of tearing down and rebuilding the old destroyed building?

WARD: No. Again, I believe we did not own that building, so we could not tear it down. There were a couple of buildings that we built on the compound. We built the consular section. That belonged to us, although perhaps the land underneath it did not. We added about 15 containers to the compound in 2014, which housed our marine force. The embassy had been without marines for decades before they returned to Beirut in 2014.

The solution to our problem of not having enough housing or office space is to build a new embassy, and we started construction on one in 2017 at a site nearby our existing embassy. However, these projects take at least five to seven years, so it will not be finished until 2024, most likely. It is being built to our specifications on roughly triple the current land area we have now (so 51 acres vs. current 17).

On the current compound, there is not enough water or electricity. The infrastructure is corroding like it is everywhere in Lebanon, and just to get water to everyone and to flush toilets was a struggle. There were such plumbing problems that we could not even flush toilet paper. Imagine. It was not only a matter of lack of office space.

The status quo is always difficult to change. Every time someone resigns or retires, a new person is hired to fill that slot, so no section ever loses a position that they have. I went to the ambassador, noting that we could not create new positions or build new office space, but we could redistribute the existing workforce. I asked her whether two or three employees of USAID could come work for me. That would be no net gain or loss at the embassy. Of course, the USAID director did not like my suggestion at all. I pointed out that USAID had an assistance portfolio that was half of mine in size of dollars, but USAID had 24 employees whereas I had one employee. My job and office were not needed until very recently, when Lebanon began experiencing a huge refugee influx. The

facts on the ground have changed, and we need to reprioritize our workforce accordingly, I argued. It seemed logical enough, but the ambassador did not want to take on the issue. She probably did not want to open a can of worms by allowing a redistribution of the existing workforce, although it would have been the right thing to do, in my opinion. Or she may have assessed that I was handling my job ok, despite the crushing workload, so no need for immediate action.

RSO officers would sometimes remind us that the people who blew up the embassy building on the compound were Hezbollah (we believed), and they were still around, and still had hostile intentions. That is why the RSO put many restrictions on our movements. However, I personally never felt under threat. British diplomats would ride bicycles around town, which left me wondering, why can we not go somewhere unless we have an armed guard following us five feet behind? Is there not a threat to other western diplomats, the French, British, Germans, etc? When I got out of an embassy vehicle and walked around in Beirut, I felt safe. I did not feel like I was about to be attacked. No diplomat ever was attacked when I was there. I think that if terrorists really wanted to get us, they could, but they did not want to, obviously. If Hezbollah had attacked us, we would have unleashed hell on them. They knew that, of course. Lebanon was not a war zone, but it seemed like our security folks treated it that way much of the time.

Now about the job itself. Our humanitarian assistance to Lebanon amounted to a little over $250 million a year. This is from the bureau that I worked for, PRM, (Population, Refugees and Migration). PRM has its own appropriation every year, so this is not money that can be moved around or spent some other way; it is solely for providing life-saving assistance to refugees. I have to remind people of that all the time, including the ambassador, USAID and others. They want to take some of our funds and do something with it, but that is not allowed. I also had my own funds for representation purposes, for travel and for anything I needed to do.

Of that $250 million, we gave about 90 percent of it to international organizations, and we did that because that is a philosophy of the PRM bureau. That is, the member states of the United Nations created these organizations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Health Organization (WHO), etc. We gave them mandates and therefore we should fund them because why else did we create them? What are they there for? There is a big movement right now in the humanitarian assistance world where certain donors want to move away from funding the international organizations and instead give money directly to refugees/beneficiaries. They argue that doing so is more efficient; direct assistance goes right to people. Hand them money and allow them to buy whatever they need. That became a big, big debate when I was in Lebanon.

Q: Just out of curiosity, while you were there, did you think that that would be a good alternative for the situation at that time?

WARD: Well, I explained to other diplomats that we funded these large UN organizations and they were in the best position to decide how to provide assistance. In other words, we did not micromanage them. Some donors do micromanage. They say here is money, but it is only for education programs, or it is only for food or some other category. However, earmarking, as that practice is called, ties the hands of the organization. They wind up with too much money for education, for instance, and not enough for health programs, which is exactly what happened in Lebanon. UN organizations love the United States because we, for the most part, do not earmark. We give them maximum flexibility.

The idea of giving money directly to refugees seems quite logical, and was already happening to a degree, by the international organizations. They gave refugees some cash assistance, but this was only a portion of the total assistance. International organizations also provided tents, blankets, clothes, water containers, outhouses, and many other types of "in-kind" assistance. In my view, the danger of providing refugees only cash is that someone may take that cash away from them. You see this even in the streets. If you give a beggar child money, then an adult comes over and takes it from the child. The child does not benefit in that case. Adults exploit children in this way and abuse them in the process. Or in the case of refugees, if you give them a lot of cash each month, their Lebanese landlord will notice the increase in their income and will likely increase the rent. In such a scenario, we would wind up making a transfer of money to the landlord rather than to the refugee.
By contrast, if you give a beneficiary food, the landlord is not going to come around and take their food away from them. Or clothes, blankets, etc. So, there is a tradeoff. In theory, you could get more of what you want if you had cash, and that is why we use cash to an extent. The World Food Program (WFP) provided refugees not cash, but debit cards, with which they could go into approved stores and buy whatever they wanted. In the old days, a WFP beneficiary might have received a basket of rice, corn, cooking oil, etc., for instance, but not particularly liked those food items. In Lebanon today, the beneficiary can go to the store and buy whatever they want with their debit card. They could not buy alcohol or cigarettes or other non-food items. Had we given them cash to buy food (instead of a debit card), someone could have taken their cash from them, or they could have used the cash to pay down their debt, or to buy alcohol, whatever. We know that through WFP, they were purchasing (and consuming) food. Also, they had to show their identification card in order to use their WFP card. In that manner, we were trying to prevent fraud and to ensure that refugees who needed it most were receiving life-saving assistance.

The international organizations had certain responsibilities. They assessed potential beneficiaries, they monitored their own programs, they produced reports for us. If refugees received only cash, who would be doing the monitoring? Who would follow up and make sure that our objectives were being achieved? Giving them more and more cash would result in a loss of control of the program, the management of it, the data collection, the oversight and the monitoring. It would be much harder to assess what was achieved. WFP, for instance, provided us very detailed reports; they could tell us what refugees bought with their debit card, when and where. If you give refugees cash, and that is all you do, you cannot be sure what they do with that money. Thus, I thought our approach

was the best. We trusted the international organizations, which provided some (but not all) benefits in cash. Meanwhile, we did our own monitoring and reviewed the monitoring that international organizations did. Some other donors did not agree with our approach, so there was, and still is, a debate about cash assistance.

We were the largest donor in Lebanon (and worldwide) to UNHCR; they received more of our assistance than any other international organization, followed by UNICEF. The United States is often the largest donor to most humanitarian agencies. We are (or were prior to the Trump administration) the largest donor to the United Nations organization that helps Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, which people do not realize or forget, when they assert that we do not do anything for Palestinians.

In 2016, the Germans decided they were going to make a huge contribution to WFP in Lebanon. This was based on a conversation the head of the WFP had with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in an elevator, supposedly; talk about an elevator pitch! He said something like "we need this help desperately," and she responded that she would look into it, and then the next thing you knew, Germany contributed a huge amount of money to WFP in Lebanon. Well, that was fine, except they did it for one year only. Meanwhile, some donors assumed Germany was going to do it again the following year, but Germany did not. As a result, WFP was scrambling for funding the next year, 2017. One of the things I did when I was in Lebanon was, I kept raising alarms to the United States government about the precarious funding of WFP. USAID has a branch called Food for Peace (FFP), which donates money to WFP for food emergencies all over the world (i.e. not just for refugees). My bureau, PRM in the State Department, did not provide food aid for refugees because food aid was the provenance of FFP.

This created an odd situation in Lebanon because I, not my USAID colleague, was the one who was monitoring food assistance. She reasoned that FFP assistance to WFP in Lebanon was going only to refugees, so she had no interest. Accordingly, I monitored the food aid, even though it was not coming from my bureau's (PRM's) funding. Food aid was critical and lifesaving for refugees in Lebanon. People have to eat; that is the most important assistance you can give them. However, WFP was facing a shortfall in Lebanon because they did not have enough funding, and so, I was lobbying our government to make an additional donation. We had already provided assistance, but I argued that we needed to make an additional contribution because Germany was not providing the same level of assistance that they had provided the previous year. Meanwhile, other donors were not coming forward. There was a gap in funding. I sent several cables on the subject, pleading for more money, and FFP did come through with another donation. I believe it was for $30 million, in 2017, which was critical. That was one very important success I had while I was there. I was very happy about that because otherwise, it would have been a disaster for refugees.

About two years before I arrived in Lebanon and began working on assistance programs, there were not enough donations to WFP to fund their food aid. These are all voluntary donations. There is no mandatory assessment on donors for food aid. Some of our UN dues are assessed and others are voluntary, and WFP's budget is voluntary. Given the

paucity of funding, WFP could not feed everybody who needed food. Thus, they had two equally unpalatable options: either reduce food aid to each beneficiary or reduce the number of beneficiaries. WFP decided to do the former. They cut food assistance in half that they were giving refugees. When they did that, all the things that you would imagine would happen, did happen. It was very predictable. Refugees bought less food; they consumed less food; they sent their children out to work to earn money instead of going to school; they borrowed money, which means they went into debt; their health deteriorated because they were not eating enough; and poverty levels rose. All these negative consequences occurred because they did not have enough food to eat. That was in a one-year period. The next year, funding for WFP resumed at a sufficient level to allow it to provide sufficient food aid to needy refugees.

I told Washington, if we do not keep feeding refugees, what happened two years ago is going to happen again, guaranteed, and it is going to be even worse this time because refugees are already in debt. Can they take on more debt? Will anyone loan to them? They try to work, but many of them are afraid to go out and work because it is illegal, and if they do not have proper papers, they risk arrest and deportation. Even when they work, they are frequently exploited and cheated. It is a nightmare for them. When people flee their country, they take everything they have with them, and a lot of times in the Middle Eastern cultures they take gold because that is easy to transport; you transfer your wealth into gold bracelets around your wrists or necklaces or whatever and you flee. Later, you sell this gold one piece at a time when you need money, but eventually you run out; you have nothing left to sell. The head of UNHCR in Lebanon used to warn that Syrian refugees barely had their heads above water.

I formulated a plan with the public diplomacy chief to take the ambassador out once a month to look at embassy projects in different areas of the country. I took her to a school, and we asked refugee children "what do you want to be when you grow up?" They responded "doctor, lawyer, teacher." One kid said he wanted to be an astronaut. They had their dreams, their hopes, their vision of the future. Yet I was thinking to myself, virtually all Syrian refugee children in Lebanon stop going to school at age 15. The boys started working at that age and the girls stayed at home and helped. Therefore, only a very small percentage realistically had a shot at realizing their dreams. The High Commissioner of UNHCR spoke of the need to prevent what he termed "a lost generation," meaning an entire generation of uneducated Syrians. Unfortunately, it is already happening. Of the children who left Syria and came to Lebanon, some of them were out of school for two or three years because of fighting and conflict. Then they arrived in Lebanon and attended school again, but a ten-year-old did not want to be put in a class with seven-year-olds simply because he was behind in learning. Children who are older than others in their grade are teased and called "stupid" and so forth, which leads to fighting and problems.

Education was one of the top priorities for donors. One can view humanitarian needs by sector, i.e. food, clean water, shelter, healthcare, education, etc. Some donors would earmark a high percentage of their assistance for education. As a result, the education sector was more than 100 percent funded one year when I was in Lebanon. In contrast, healthcare was around 25 percent funded. I sat down with the other donors and said, we

should coordinate what we are doing. Sadly, there was almost no coordination among donors. The British would say, we are not funding anything in health, and I would respond, well, are you expecting us to do it? They did not have an answer to that. Donors were each doing their own thing with little regard to an overarching strategy or coordination with other donors. Aid decisions were made by politicians back home; they wanted to put money into schools so they could have some minister visit and say look at these schools we built in Lebanon, and get a nice photo-op. We ended up with serious disparities in funding the various sectors. There were only four big donors in Lebanon: the United States, the UK, the EU and Germany. Together we comprised about 90 percent of all humanitarian funding. I would get together with my counterparts from those three other missions and we would talk about these issues and I would try to coordinate to the extent it was possible.

Q: So, the other Arab states, especially the oil states, don't make many contributions?

WARD: No, at least not to the international organizations. They did provide some assistance privately. They waved their flag and said this was built by the UAE. It was difficult to get a handle on what they were doing because they were not transparent. They often went through religious organizations and they had their own religious aims attached to the assistance, which of course we never did. But they were not doing much. The attitude of Arab states seemed to be that Westerners should take care of refugees because they created the problem to begin with. I do not know how we created the problems in Syria, but this is typically the attitude. The same is the case for UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. Did the United States create the Palestinian refugee problem? The Gulf states would say yes, because we recognized Israel in 1948, and it would not exist without massive U.S. military, economic, and diplomatic support. We provided Israel with military aid and the technology which they used to attack the Palestinians and Arab states; therefore, the United States should foot the bill for the Palestinian refugees. The Gulf states, which are rich, are not helping Palestinians much. Bin Laden was a rich Saudi, who spent his life and fortune mounting terror attacks. What did he ever do to help Palestinian refugees? Nothing.

Let's turn to UNICEF, our second largest partner in Lebanon after UNHCR. UNICEF's mandate is to take care of all children, not just refugee children. UNICEF would often present us a project for funding that would benefit both Lebanese kids and Syrian kids, and that was important because we always needed the buy-in on some level from the host government for anything we were doing. We would often hear Lebanese politicians or media complain that we were doing so much for the refugees, but nothing for the Lebanese poor. My response could have been "you are the government, you take care of your own citizens." However, you cannot say that to local officials. If you said that privately to a parliamentarian, he would probably respond "I am only one parliamentarian; we have limited resources" and so forth and so on. Politicians want to help their constituents, naturally, so they come to donors asking for help for Lebanese.

When it came to education, which is part of UNICEF's mandate, if we built onto a school or renovated one that was dilapidated, our assistance benefitted both Lebanese and

Syrians because typically the Lebanese children would go in the morning to the school and then the Syrian children would attend in the afternoon. Many schools had two shifts in one day. Likewise, if a school hired additional teachers with our funding, they could teach both Lebanese and Syrians. Thus, in the education sector, we were definitely helping both Syrians and Lebanese.

We also funded UNICEF to do water projects. They would drill wells and provide clean water to an area that did not have it before. When they did that, we would always choose a site that had at least 50 percent refugees, because PRM funding is by law supposed to go to help refugees (minimum 50% of the beneficiaries). If we identified a site that had 5,000 Syrian refugees and 4,000 Lebanese, we could drill a well there. It would help both groups. The ambassador loved those kinds of projects because she could say to the government, we are helping Lebanese communities too, not just refugees.

Aside from our 90 percent funding channeled to international organizations, we had 10 percent left, which we used to fund non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We could have spent a lot more on NGOs; we could have changed that formula if we had wanted to. There was nothing sacred about the 90/10 split, but increasing funding for NGOs would have been difficult from a practical standpoint, because every organization that we funded, we had to monitor. For NGOs, we typically provided $1 million to $3 million in funding per year. Had we funded 50 NGOs at $1 million each, we would have had to monitor 50 NGOs, and each one of them required a grant; we had to have meetings with them; we had to visit them regularly in their offices; we had to visit beneficiaries in the field. It was just physically impossible with our two-person office. Thus, we decided we were going to fund 10 NGOs. That was a reasonable amount for me and my assistant to monitor, along with all of our work with the international organizations.

Q: Do you have the capability of sitting down with several NGOs and saying okay, you three have to work together on this project, because that's the only way I can monitor it?

WARD: NGOs are generally competing against each other for funding. Typically, they submit proposals for funding, and we evaluate them and select ones to fund. They could submit a joint proposal, but usually, they did not. NGO proposals were supposed to fill a gap. In Lebanon, we would receive about 50 proposals from NGOs each year. I would meet with any NGO representatives who wanted to meet with me. They would often come by and ask how to get funding from us. Some of them were upset because we tended to fund the same NGOs year after year. We do this a lot in the U.S. government. We fund an NGO, they do a good job, they meet all the objectives, and next year they want funding to continue the program. We give them one-year funding because Congressional appropriations are just for one year, so by law we cannot promise them multi-year funding. If they did exactly what we asked them to do, the chances are we are going to give them funding again, because they have proven themselves. NGOs that do not perform, do not receive another grant from us. NGOs we have not funded before have no track record, and often complain that we do not give them a chance. There is some truth to that. I tried to mix it up a bit, though. I thought, we need to get some new partners this year and get rid of some of the old ones, give others a chance, and we did that. I also

counseled NGO representatives to go to the other embassies, go over to Germany, go over to the UK, go to the EU, ask them for funding because the United States cannot fund everybody.

One shortfall of ours was that we did not provide very good guidelines to NGOs. Our requests for proposals (RFP) simply noted that we would accept any proposal that met any refugee needs. I argued to Washington that we should advise NGOs what our priorities are, rather than solicit proposals on anything. For instance, we were funding one women's shelter in Beirut, and it was the only one in the country that I know of. I argued that more were needed. There are many women who were battered, abused by their husbands, abandoned, sex trafficking victims, victims of violence; we needed to open at least one more of these shelters, maybe two, in my estimation. I suggested to Washington that we solicit NGOs to submit competing proposals specifically for this purpose. Unfortunately, PRM did not go for it, which I found a bit disheartening. There is always an inertia to overcome, a resistance to changing the way things have been done for so long. I found that to be the case over and over in my time at State.

Another observation I had was that we were not doing enough for the most vulnerable refugees, such as the handicapped. I was always hypersensitive to the needs of the disabled, likely because of my special needs children. Being a refugee is tough; being a handicapped one is tougher. If you lose a limb and you are living in a tent, life is very difficult. We were funding an NGO called Handicap International, which was my favorite because we could see directly what they were doing and how it benefited people; it was very obvious. Someone who lost a limb, for instance, received a prosthetic and physical therapy from Handicap International. However, no NGO was doing anything for vision impaired or hearing impaired. There were refugees who had lost a lot of their hearing, but no one was providing hearing aids. Or refugees who had poor eyesight, but no NGO was providing glasses or even eye exams, much less corrective surgery. Let's do that, I argued. Let's specifically solicit NGO proposals for this need. Unfortunately, again, I could not get PRM in Washington on board. Undeterred, I told Handicap International to include those types of interventions in their next NGO proposal that they submitted to us. That was the workaround I came up with. I also tried to convince my colleagues in Washington that we should double our assistance to refugees with disabilities, because quite clearly, they were the most vulnerable refugees. Again, I got pushback. Rather than prioritize need, many in the humanitarian world (at least in Washington) take the shotgun approach: throw a little money at everything.

Regarding other donors, they had different policies toward NGOs, and so we did not coordinate at all with them. The world is characterized by needs being greater than available resources. Certainly, that is the case in refugee situations. There is not enough healthcare available to them, there is not enough clean water, there is not enough adequate housing. In Lebanon, shelter often consisted of plastic sheeted tents that were very flimsy, over a dirt floor. The government of Lebanon did not allow construction of cinder block houses or even something made out of wood because it feared that those dwellings would be too solid and permanent, and that if refugees had them, they would never leave. As the head of UNHCR in Lebanon used to say, the government is keeping

refugees “on their toes,” prepared to leave at any time, ready to go back to Syria. That was the goal of the government of Lebanon: get refugees to return to Syria.

The government also did not want refugees to gather in big groups, because if they did so, they would pose a threat. Thus, in Lebanon refugees lived in settlements which housed about 50-100. A settlement is just a dirt lot. Half a mile away there would be another settlement of 80 refugees and a quarter mile in the other direction another settlement with 100 refugees. The government’s decision was surely informed by their experience with Palestinian refugees, who were placed in camps that grew large and uncontrollable. The police rarely entered Palestinian camps in Lebanon, because the residents had weapons and might use them. As a result, Palestinian camps were like a prison with no guards, or the guards were on the outside. The Lebanese did not want to re-experience that, so they spread Syrian refugees out over the whole country in little settlements.

Refugees in settlements were not allowed to drill wells, either. That, again, was considered permanent infrastructure. If they had permanent structures, with running water and electricity, they would be reluctant to return home to Syria. As a result of no water infrastructure, we had to truck in water. Do you know how expensive it is to truck water to people and deliver it?

The Lebanese government views Syrian refugees as a threat, to some degree. It would be challenging for any country to allow such a high percentage of refugees among their total population, especially given a small amount of territory. Could you imagine one-quarter of *our* population composed of refugees? We would have 80+ million refugees. It would be unthinkable. We have to give the government of Lebanon a lot of credit for hosting the refugees, then and still today. Most of the assistance was coming from donors, not from the government of Lebanon. The government complained that the refugees had cost them $13 billion, which seemed a fabricated number, but it was repeated so often that it took on a life of its own. We pressed officials on how they calculated that number and they responded that this calculation reflected lost GDP (gross domestic product). Therefore, the government did not spend this amount on refugees. However, GDP did not fall as a consequence of hosting refugees; rather, GDP fell because of the war in Syria, which resulted in a loss of export markets, a decrease in tourism, and a reduction in foreign investment due to perceived instability in the region. Governments look to blame someone, and it is easy to blame refugees. They are a convenient scapegoat; they cannot defend themselves. The government takes cheap shots at them and asserts that refugees are making everything worse.

The fact is, if you look at Lebanon before the refugee crisis, the infrastructure was falling apart. It had been decades since there had been any investment in the power grid, in water infrastructure, in roads, in sewage. The government did not even build schools; they were renting schools, much like we rented our embassy. I would often ask, why should we renovate this school when it belongs to a landlord who can just turn around and sell it? It does not make sense. Lebanon has to build its own schools.

Nonetheless, without question, Syrian refugees exacerbated the existing dilapidated infrastructure. When your population increases by 25% basically overnight, resources become strained. There are not enough health clinics, schools, clean water and so on to accommodate all the newcomers plus the local population. That said, the poor state of infrastructure before the Syrian war started demonstrated a lack of government willingness, planning, foresight, and capability to solve problems.

The government also was worried about the sectarian divide in Lebanon. There are Shias, Sunnis and Christians in Lebanon, and if you add a million (Syrian) Sunnis to the equation, then you get an imbalance, and that becomes worrisome from a political perspective. I acknowledge the government's concern there. We do not want another civil war in Lebanon. Lebanon is facing difficulties on multiple fronts. They have Israel next door threatening at times to intervene. There is a civil war ongoing next door in Syria that they are trying to stay out of (despite Lebanese Hezbollah fighters there). They have Syrian refugees pouring in. They have Saudi Arabia causing trouble; Saudi Arabia actually detained the Lebanese prime minister (almost like a hostage) for a spell when he visited Riyadh in 2017. The French are sometimes meddling. There are so many actors involved in what is a small country. The Lebanese feel like a pawn in the region.

I spoke with our ambassador before she arrived in Lebanon. I was in Washington and so was she, and I arrived at post in June 2016, about two weeks before she did. I asked her "what is your number one goal when you get to Lebanon?" I thought she was going to say something about refugees because she knew I was going to be the refugee coordinator, but no. She responded "my number one goal is going to be to help keep Lebanon stable. We do not want another Syria, Yemen, or Egypt on our hands." She had been working in the Near East Affairs bureau as one of the deputy assistant secretaries, and she had been posted to Yemen. On her watch, she had seen multiple countries in the region collapse into chaos, including those three. She commented, there is no good news story in the region, and we do not want another country to collapse. Lebanon is a functioning democracy. It is quite amazing, actually. They have three different religious sects that could be at each other's throats, but they are making it all work. We do not want that to fall apart. We have got enough failed states in the region.

She was right to be worried. Lebanon's government was a bit dysfunctional when I arrived. I was with the ambassador when she met the prime minister for the first time, who told her "I want to resign, but I cannot because if I do, the country will collapse." He saw himself as a caretaker. There was no president when I arrived in Lebanon. There was no president for about 18 months, which is hard to believe. By law, the president is chosen by the parliament, but the parliament could not agree on a candidate, and because parliament is composed of these three different sects, they had trouble agreeing. The president had to be a Christian, by law. Because the majority of parliament is non-Christian, they wanted the weakest Christian possible, or so it was explained to me by one of our local employees (who was Christian). There was constant negotiation and battling about who should be the next president, and horse trading and so forth. Finally, they agreed on Aoun as the new president, and then a new prime minister came in, Hariri, and things settled down. However, for the longest time there was dysfunction. We

sometimes talk about a do-nothing Congress in our own country, but the Lebanese could not even solve a trash crisis that was going on when I got there. Each sect cares only about their own members, and each group wields about one-third of the power, and so how do you get coalitions to get anything done? It is not easy.

One of the things I understood from some of my Lebanese colleagues is that during the civil war, which lasted from ’75 to ’90, there was no infrastructure being built. As a result, rich Lebanese would hire a contractor to do things, such as install a generator, so they could have electricity. Or pave the road in front of their house, or drill a well so they could have water. Whatever they needed done that normally the government would do, they privately hired contractors to do. This became almost a mentality. For 15 years they did not have anything provided by the government. When the government finally started functioning again, it still did not do much in the way of infrastructure and still does not today, and that is why Lebanon does not have sufficient schools and electricity and water and so forth. The government does not raise enough revenue to do these things that they should be doing, and they do not budget for them. Yet the country’s debt burden and debt service payments are huge. They owe more than their annual GDP, which makes borrowing more money very difficult.

I talked to a Lebanese official one time, and I do not know why, but we were talking about Nigeria for a minute, and I remarked that the Nigerians invented corruption. He responded no, the Nigerians learned it from the Lebanese. There is a lot of corruption going on in Lebanon. I think at the embassy, we did not want to look too deeply into this issue because if we did, we would find out the prime minister or several ministers were corrupt and then what do you do with that information? We have to work with these people. It is a fact that in many countries, the rich and powerful became so through the business deals they made, which were not always legal. Anger at Lebanese politicians, who were perceived to be self-serving, corrupt, and unresponsive, grew during my time there. In late 2019, demonstrations erupted in Beirut, in a way not seen before. Lebanese are united against poor governance, rather than divided along sectarian lines.

I met a young American man who was running an orphanage in Beirut. He would see these kids on the street, nobody caring for them, just sitting around, begging. They would get scooped up and delivered to his orphanage. The Lebanese government, unfortunately, treats all these kids as stateless, because if you do not have papers, if you do not have a birth certificate, then how do we know you are Lebanese? Of course, a four-year-old does not have a birth certificate, and we do not know whether these kids were Lebanese or Syrian, because they looked the same and spoke the same language. The government reasoned that a given orphan could be Syrian, so they would not document him as Lebanese. What happens to these kids when they become 18 and are emancipated? They cannot travel abroad because they cannot obtain a passport. They cannot go to university because one needs an identity card and other documents that they do not have. An identity card is used for everything. So, they are stateless.

I recommended to the ambassador that we press the government to sign the Statelessness Convention, which gives guidance on how to deal with stateless people. Basically, you

give them citizenship if there is no other solution. It is not a large group of people in the case of Lebanon. However, the government was hesitant to do that, fearing that Palestinian refugees would petition to become Lebanese too, and then compete for jobs and services, and in theory, no longer receive support from donor countries (because they would no longer be refugees). Palestinians comprise a large group, 300,000 or so. The ambassador sympathized with my position, but assessed that other issues were a higher priority. The problem is that some issues, like statelessness, remain a low priority year after year, and so are never addressed.

Speaking of our priorities, the focus of the United States in Lebanon, after the election of Donald Trump, was on Hezbollah. It was as though our new administration did not realize that Hezbollah was part of the government. Hezbollah is a political party as well as an armed group, and they have ministers in the government of Lebanon. A percentage of Lebanese citizens support them, obviously. Our new administration had a very simplistic response. Hezbollah is bad; do not deal with Hezbollah. Well, how do you not deal with a minister in the government? How do you not deal with parliamentarians? Are you just going to ignore them? Pretend they do not exist? This is the sort of directive we got. It was rather naive.

I was placed in the political section in Beirut. They wanted me there because I could write reports and telegrams and help some of the junior officers with their writing, and I was a political officer by cone. I liked being in the political section. I was in touch with what our section was doing, and I saw all the directives from Washington. One was a reminder that the government of Lebanon had the sole legitimate authority to bear arms, a monopoly. Hezbollah should not have arms because they are not part of the government; therefore, they should be disarmed. I asked one of my Lebanese colleagues, although I already knew the answer, what would happen if the government of Lebanon tried to disarm Hezbollah? He responded that such an attempt would spark an immediate civil war. Since our number one goal in Lebanon was to promote stability, it would seem rather foolish to press the government to disarm Hezbollah. These clashes with reality occur when you have policies announced that are not based on facts or on a sober assessment of conditions on the ground. Hezbollah, of course, was intervening in Syria militarily, and their fighters all came back war-hardened veterans (the ones who were not killed, that is). What made our administration think the Lebanese army would be willing to take on Hezbollah? Naturally, the government had no intention of doing that.

I told the Ambassador one day, we should send a cable titled “Lebanon has two armies,” because in fact, they do have two armies. They have the government of Lebanon army and they have Hezbollah. Of course, no one in the political section had the balls to write such a truthful cable, and if they had, the ambassador would never have approved and sent it. In that embassy, as in most, the reporting is shaped by what people in Washington want to hear, or the image the ambassador wants to project, rather than what is the truth. That is a generalization, but most foreign service officers are career-minded, looking to advance. They are not interested in making waves, or confrontation, or truth-telling.

The immediate question was "does the government of Lebanon collude with Hezbollah; does the army know what Hezbollah is doing; do they allow Hezbollah to pass through checkpoints?" The army did not want to clash with Hezbollah, so they turned a blind eye. Did that equate to collusion? This was a fixation in Washington, although for us on the ground it was reality. We could not do anything about it. If you want to do something about it, try to cut off funding to Hezbollah that is coming through Iran, but do not tell the Lebanese army to confront and disarm Hezbollah. That was impossible.

One of the first acts of President Trump, on January 27, 2017 was to institute a travel ban for certain nationalities. Our consular officers determined that they could not process applicants of these nationalities for visas. We were processing a lot of Syrians in the consular section in Beirut because our embassy in Damascus had been closed for several years. Everyone was concerned about the effect of the travel ban on *visas*, but I pointed out that the ban also affected *refugees*. I was overseeing our refugee resettlement program out of Beirut. The great majority of those being resettled were Syrian and Iraqi refugees, both subject to the travel ban.

The travel ban took everybody by surprise because the White House did not consult the State Department before issuing the Executive Order. They just announced it and we had not even received an advance copy. Imagine. My colleagues and I were astonished that this was the way foreign policy was being conducted in the new administration. I had been through many changes in administrations, with accompanying growing pains, but this was different. In the first few months, it seemed we were frequently blindsided by the news. We were being asked about our policies by other diplomats, but we were not confident in our responses due to the latest tweet coming out of the White House reversing a previous position. The President seemed determined to sideline the State Department in the formulation and execution of foreign policy, leaving us to wonder what our role was.

I remember early in the administration seeing on the news that the Mexican foreign minister had been in Washington and had met with Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law. Secretary of State Tillerson did not even know the Mexican foreign minister was in town. How is it possible that your chief diplomat does not even know that his counterpart from Mexico, representing one of our most important bilateral relationships, is in town? How is it possible that they did not meet? It was shocking, unbelievable really.

In February 2017, only weeks after Trump took office, the High Commissioner of UNHCR, Filippo Grandi, visited Lebanon. He was in Beirut to meet with Lebanese officials and talk about Syria. I had the opportunity to talk with him one on one for about thirty minutes. He was very upset. He said "the United States government seems to be backtracking on support for refugees. You should maintain the leadership role with refugees which you have always had. You are the number one donor to UNHCR providing assistance to refugees and you are the number one country resettling refugees."

When President Obama saw the crisis unfolding in Europe in 2015-2016 with tens of thousands of refugees crossing the Aegean into Greece and then spreading out through Europe, he and many others in the administration and in our Congress seemed for the first time to be aware that there even was a refugee problem in the world. Refugees started making headlines across Europe, especially after the iconic photo of a three-year old Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish shore after drowning, was all over the internet. As I noted earlier, President Obama steadily increased the number of refugees the United States would resettle. He also requested a special session focusing on refugees for heads of state, which had never happened before, after the United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2017. However, in the election in November, two months later, Donald Trump was elected, and he announced that we were going to reduce the number of refugees resettled. So, we did a 180. We had been planning for a large increase in refugee resettlement, then suddenly were told we would actually decrease our resettlement program drastically.

We had been the world leader in resettling refugees, but suddenly the signal from Washington was that this issue is not so important to us anymore; we are scaling back our program. As we know from countless examples, when the United States surrenders leadership on an issue, frequently no other country fills that vacuum. Worse is that others take their cues from us. Thus, if we reduce support for refugees, other countries follow suit. That is what happened.

This is what concerned the head of UNHCR in February 2017, and still does. I did not have any answers for him. He told me he was going to Washington the next week. I advised him to meet with members of Congress and their staffs and relate his concerns, because the legislature is another branch of government; it is another source of power. However, at that time both houses of Congress were controlled by the same party holding the White House, so it was unlikely that there would be opposition to the president's policy. Though the head of UNHCR complained privately, he did not publicly criticize the United States, because this would have been biting the hand that feeds him. We were still the number one donor to UNHCR and if he attacked us publicly, you can imagine what the response from the White House would have been.

That is the situation we were in then and are still in. I am reminded of a conversation I had around the year 2000. I was at a conference in Kenya, and I met a British diplomat who asked me, "Do you think the United States is a force for good in the world?" I thought at first she was joking, but she was not. I responded yes, of course we are a force for good, and then I cited many examples. That incident is a reminder that foreigners often view us differently than we view ourselves. When they perceive that we are hostile to immigrants, that we are reducing the number of refugees we allow to resettle each year, and that we are cutting funding to the Palestinian refugees as well, then they draw negative conclusions about the United States. They expect us to take a leadership role, to be a force for good, to be a moral authority, and we lose much of that when we retreat from the international stage, when we dismiss or undermine international organizations that were designed to alleviate suffering.

One of the casualties of the Syrian civil war has been the Palestinian refugees. We are all focused on Syrian refugees now, and we have forgotten about Palestinian refugees as a result. They are on the back burner now. Many donors want to help Syrian refugees, build schools for them, X, Y and Z. What about the Palestinian refugees? They are receiving less attention and less funding than in the past. The sad reality is that the number of crises in the world has increased to the point where donors cannot meet all the humanitarian needs. The inclination after a disaster is to help. If a crisis continues, less assistance is offered each successive year as fatigue sets in. However, as the UNHCR representative in Lebanon underscored, "refugees do not go away because you stop looking at them." They are here, they need help, we have got to do something.

I knew the heads of all the international organizations in Lebanon very well. I could meet with them at any moment. Talk about privileged access. When you are the number one donor, they will answer your call. They will meet with you; they will have lunch with you one-on-one. Other donors have to settle for a joint briefing. I tried not to abuse that access because they are very busy people. I would meet with their deputies a lot. Other diplomats would come to us and ask us "what is going on?" What did you hear?" In Lebanon, as in so many countries, the American embassy is the most plugged in, best informed diplomatic mission on many issues.

Q: So, now that we are reducing support for UNHCR and to UNRWA for Palestinian refugees, there are not enough others coming in to fill the gap?

WARD: Sadly, no. We traditionally provide 25 percent of UNHCR's budget, and so if we reduce that, no one else steps forward to fill the gap. A lot of times our contribution of 25 percent of UNHCR's budget winds up comprising 33 percent of all the funding they receive in a year, given what other donors contribute. Their budget is never fully funded.

Q: Right.

WARD: Underfunding of humanitarian agencies is an issue everywhere. In Lebanon, since the Syrian crisis began, an annual Lebanon Crisis Response Plan has been issued. This is a big, thick document produced by all the UN organizations, the government, and NGOs; they all feed into it to calculate and articulate the needs for the upcoming year. Of course, there is a price tag associated with it. We need $1 billion, or whatever it is, for the next year. One need only review previous years to see that each annual request is about 50 percent funded. Thus, there is no reason to assume it will be 100 percent funded this year. It never is. That fact makes you consider, how should we prioritize the funding received? What is most important to fund? There was a debate about whether these organizations should submit a smaller request because they know the overall budget will not be fully funded. To that question, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon responded no, because our job is to assess what the needs are. We are not going to say the needs are less just because we know donors are not going to fund us fully. We are citing the needs. If we submitted a smaller request, we would be saying the needs are smaller, but they are not smaller.

The principal deputy assistant secretary of PRM came to visit Beirut and I asked him, "what are our priorities?" He had no idea. He did not give any direction to me at all. I thought that might be his response. Therefore, I listed for him what I thought the priorities should be. Our number one priority should be food because no one can survive without eating. Number two, clean water. If people do not have clean water, they are going to get sick and then will need healthcare, cannot go to school, cannot work, etc. Number three priority is shelter. People cannot sleep on the ground when it is snowing. Number four, healthcare. We have to offer primary, preventive healthcare along with emergency care. Number five would be education, in my view. Everyone understands the value of education, but it is not a basic human need.

Nonetheless, by earmarking their donations, donors put education first. Donors like education programs because they are sexy; building schools is something politicians love to do, and then take photos of themselves in front. That is fine, but what if food needs are not being met? Is education more important than food? No one asks that question. There is no prioritization by the donors, including the U.S. government. I tried to get my front office in PRM to think about that and to prioritize our assistance appropriately. Unfortunately, they did not.

I would often send my assistant out to do monitoring, because as a Lebanese citizen he could go anywhere; he did not need our security guys with him. He would get in his own car and drive to a site and review the situation, take photographs and ask questions to ensure that whatever assistance we were providing was actually being delivered. Let's say we are funding the World Health Organization (WHO) to give measles vaccines to 1,000 kids; Joe would go see if they got their shots. He would talk to beneficiaries directly.

I would go with him whenever I could. I sent him to Amman to get financial monitoring training, which he did not have before, so then we could scrutinize the books of NGOs we were funding and see how they spent the money, review their receipts and so on. Accordingly, we could better ensure that we were not being defrauded or that money was being wasted. NGOs will open their books to us every time; they will be completely transparent. If they are not, we do not renew their contract. However, we are not going to cut off funding to UNHCR or other international organizations. UN organizations do not feel compelled to share financial information with donors, or certainly not in the field. The first thing they remind you is that they are an independent organization; they are the UN, not another government or an NGO, so any request to audit them should go through Geneva headquarters, which would result in endless stalling and red tape. Also, our contributions are co-mingled with the money of other donors, so it is difficult to determine how "our" contribution was utilized.

This was very frustrating for my ambassador. She would ask "how much of our funding did UNHCR spend on women, or on shelter?" I would respond "I don't know." I noted that UNHCR took our money and Swiss money and German money and French money, and it all went into a pot, and so, one can no longer differentiate our money from other donor money. Since we generally do not earmark, I told the ambassador that UNHCR

was spending our money on everything: on healthcare, on food, on shelter, on education. Anything that they do, we can take credit for because some of our funds went toward that activity. She did not like that answer. She thought we had no control. However, we could still monitor their activities on a macro scale. If no refugees are starving, then we know that they are getting food. Are any refugees homeless? No? Then we know they all have shelter. Etc. We looked at the macro scale and drew conclusions. We also talked constantly to refugees; as long as we got a representative sample, we were getting a good picture of the whole.

I accompanied the ambassador and the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to a trauma center in northern Lebanon that we were funding. It was a rare example of an earmark on our part. At the center, foreign doctors were training Lebanese doctors in reconstructive surgery and trauma surgery. The patients were mainly from Syria. There were very few hospitals left operating in Syria due to the war, and very few doctors. There were virtually no advanced surgical facilities available in Syria. Thus, some casualties would be brought across the border to this facility in Lebanon.

Every case stood out, but to give you an example of one, there was a little girl, about nine. She had been walking down the street in her town in Syria when a stray bullet hit her in the arm, and the medical care she received following that incident was rudimentary. Doctors stopped the bleeding and bandaged her up but they could not do much more. Her bone had been shattered, so they brought her to this trauma center in Lebanon that we were funding, and that ICRC was staffing. Doctors had to break her arm again and reset the bone properly and place metal pins in it. Also, she had nerve damage, so her hand was limp and flopping around; she could not control it. After the first operation, she needed a vascular surgeon to try to repair the nerve damage. Then she needed a year of physical therapy. After all that, she regained 90 percent of the use of her arm and hand. Without this facility, her arm would have been useless.

Another patient at that facility had been sitting on top of his roof doing some repairs when a barrel bomb exploded and blew him off the roof. He broke a vertebra in his back. Again, these surgeons were working a miracle in his case. Most patients at this facility had suffered war injuries of one type or another. One of the benefits of the project was that when the war ends, after the foreign doctors return home, they will leave behind a cadre of trained Lebanese doctors, because the foreigners are teaching them how to do trauma surgery. This is what we always want to do with our funding if we can. We are trying to build capacity for the locals so that they can do these things after we leave, after our funding ends.

The head of ICRC noted that we needed trauma centers in Yemen and in Syria like the one in Lebanon. I thought, that makes eminent sense. I immediately wrote a report back to Washington; I made the recommendation and suggested we fund these two centers. Certainly, one was needed in Syria, which was generating so many war injuries. Yemen needed one too; they had nothing. I do not know whether my recommendation was acted on. I think not. As usual, no one paid heed. It is a theme throughout my time in Foreign

Service. You make what seem to be rational, intelligent recommendations, but they fall on deaf ears.

Q: The one in Syria, would it have been possible because it would have needed, you know, military protection?

WARD: It would have to be located in Damascus; I imagine. Damascus has been relatively untouched by the war.

At any rate, I did ensure to the extent I could that the ambassador got out regularly to different sites so she could see what we were doing with our funding, generate some positive media exposure, and show people (both locals and our citizens back home) what we were doing in Lebanon to help. Unfortunately, a lot of times the American public is not very aware of what we are doing with our foreign aid. They think we are wasting money with foreign assistance. Host governments, meanwhile, often want us to give funding directly to them, but we never do that because we do not know what they will do with our funding, and we cannot hold them accountable. Money is fungible and can be used for anything.

When I was in Lebanon, U.S. assistance to Syrians inside Syria was being delivered through Jordan. The rationale for not passing assistance through Lebanon was that the government of Lebanon was trying to maintain neutrality (although humanitarian assistance is neutral, but never mind that). The government of Lebanon did not want to get embroiled in the civil war next door, even though, of course, Hezbollah from Lebanon was fighting in Syria. Our embassy, along with the other embassies and international organizations, was on board with not providing any cross-border aid to Syria from Lebanon.

The ambassador went a step further. She directed that post should not approve official visitors from Washington coming to Beirut to meet with any international organization officials visiting from Syria, and she did not want her own staff meeting with them either. She did not want the appearance of the United States meddling in the Syrian conflict. I thought, this is odd. Our job at embassies everywhere is to report what is going on. We have no personnel in Damascus, as we shuttered our embassy there years earlier. A lot of people who worked in Damascus, such as officials from UN organizations or even some of the few remaining western diplomats there, would come to Beirut to consult with their colleagues and give briefings. I argued that we should talk to them. They were a unique and reliable source of information. For instance, an official from the WHO in Damascus came to Beirut and briefed on health issues in Syria; I went to that briefing and wrote up the notes and sent a report to Washington, and they loved it. Naturally. How else were we going to get this type of information? The only way was if those same individuals went to Amman and our colleagues in Amman reported on it, but these officials sometimes came to Beirut only.

I made these points to the ambassador, but she was still uneasy. She thought we should not be doing this, and I said of course we should be doing it, this is what we do. We

report on things we learn. I have seen that sometimes in the Foreign Service, you get these strange reactions. People sometimes get upset that a message is sent if they do not like the content. They should be appreciative, because accurate, timely information, and facts should always be welcome.

In June 2017, I wrote a magnum opus about the refugee situation. I kept it unclassified, so that it could be disseminated widely. The DCM liked it, but wanted it separated into three cables because it was long. I pushed back. I felt that separating it into three cables would result in many people seeing only one part of the three. I wanted it to be comprehensive, all in one document, and that is how it was ultimately transmitted. The cable described the views and concerns of donors, the host government, and the refugees themselves, so it gave three different perspectives in one report, which I thought was very useful.

The Lebanese see the Syrian refugees, or at least portray them, as a burden and a threat that could upset the delicate sectarian balance in Lebanon. Lebanese officials always complained about the problems the refugees were causing, but they never admitted any benefits to hosting refugees. The fact is refugees bought food from Lebanese vendors. They paid rent to Lebanese landlords. They provided an extremely cheap labor force to Lebanese businesses. Refugees did not receive anything for free from the government of Lebanon. They bought everything (with western donor funding, often). Those factors were all a net plus to the economy and to the Lebanese people. The refugee presence caused donors to pour aid money into the country, for schools and water projects and other interventions that benefitted Lebanese as well as Syrians. The Lebanese also have had a history of allowing Syrians to provide seasonal labor. Syrians would come during the harvest season and would come in the summer to work in construction, and then they would leave. In the past, that was tolerated and welcomed; it was not a problem. The only difference since the war started, is that Syrian laborers started coming with their families instead of alone. Then, they did not leave.

One of the points I made in my cable was that the government of Lebanon wanted to send the refugees home immediately. They talked about establishing “safe zones.” Where do you establish a safe zone in Syria? How do you guarantee safety in a country at war? The head of UNHCR in Lebanon underscored repeatedly that it was impossible to establish a safe zone in Syria, and that no one should be forced to go back. Why would Syrians go home if they were afraid that somebody would try to kill them? How many of them were draft dodgers or deserters who feared they would be jailed if they went home? They were simply not going to return until they felt safe to go home, until they had something to go home to. If you go to some area that used to be your village or town, but now it is flattened and there is no electricity or water or schools or jobs or food, why would you go there? I pointed out, in my analysis, that Syrians are going to be in Lebanon for many years to come. That is a fact that the Lebanese just have to come to grips with. We too as donors, have to come to grips with that. We have to be in it for the long haul because, to this day (2019) they have not begun to return. I do not know when that day will come, but there are many refugee situations around the world which we characterize as “protracted.” Refugees frequently do not return home for 12 to 15 years after fleeing.

Or longer. Afghans started fleeing their country after the Soviet invasion in 1979, and then the fighting after the Soviet withdrawal led to the rise of the Taliban, causing more Afghans to flee and those who had fled earlier to be leery of returning. Some Afghans did not return for 30 years; some never have returned. If you are born outside your country, or move to another country as a young child, and live there many years, it is likely you will get married and have a couple of kids in your new country. In such a case, your children will know nothing about your home country, and you may not know much either. There are Afghans today who have never been in Afghanistan. They were born in Pakistan or Iran, and have never set foot in Afghanistan, so do we expect they will return there?

I was following Turkey very closely from 2013-2017, and Turkey got tired of hosting Syrian refugees. However, Turkey is a different case than Lebanon because it has much more land compared to Lebanon, and it has a population of 80 million, so two million refugees is only one-fortieth of the population instead of one-fourth in the case of Lebanon. Syrians can spread out in Turkey. Nonetheless, in 2015 Turkey essentially opened the spigot and turned a blind eye (or facilitated?) the exodus of refugees across the Aegean. In late 2019, Erdogan went a step further and sent his military into Syria to establish a safe zone, as he claimed, and began pushing Syrian refugees back. I suspect many of them did not return voluntarily. The jury is out on how that will turn out, but undoubtedly the humanitarian community is aghast at what Turkey has done.

Q: Yes. Well, other than hiring additional assistants, sort of blue sky, what would you recommend now as a policy to address the issues that you had seen in Lebanon during that time?

WARD: I suppose I would reiterate the idea that we should reallocate existing manpower in a way that aligns with our priorities. I would recommend that we do that until our new embassy is completed.

Q: And about the refugee situation itself?

WARD: There are not any great solutions. The ambassador used to say, "if it were easy, we would have already done it." Some actions could be beneficial, though. The government could allow UNHCR to resume registering Syrian refugees, so we do not have two classes of people. The government could allow refugees to work, putting an end to illegal work and exploitation of laborers. They could allow refugees to build more semi-permanent structures; it is not easy living in a plastic tent for seven years. Let them build something that is made out of two by fours and plywood or something similar. That would be nice. They could allow us to drill wells instead of trucking in water, which is so expensive. These would be humane things to do. We have to keep pressing for these actions.

Refugee situations are never simple; they are never easy. Every country gets tired of hosting refugees, and they want refugees to go home. No country wants a massive

presence of refugees, with no end in sight. They see them as a burden. They just want them to go away. The obvious solution in all of these situations is that we have to address the root of the problem, of why people fled to begin with. We have to negotiate an end to the war in Syria, for instance, and facilitate a diplomatic solution, with security guarantees and so forth, and start rebuilding that shattered nation, so people can feel safe about going home. People usually want to go home. There is this thought that they have come to our country because our country is nice. No, they would rather be home. An Eritrean farmer scrabbling out an existence on a hot, dry, wind-swept plain in his country longs to stay there, if he can. People flee as a last resort and tend not to return until it is safe for them to do so.

End of Interview

Post-Interview update: *After retiring, I was hired as a re-employed annuitant (REA) by PRM and was first asked to go TDY to Tbilisi, Georgia from October-December 2019 to occupy the Refugee Coordinator position.*

TBILISI

I was happy to be back working for State in Tbilisi. I occupied the RefCoord position left vacant by the unexpected transfer of the incumbent to a neighboring country. This was the first time I worked with PRM on internally displaced persons (IDPs). Our assistance programs were designed to help those who had been displaced by fighting in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, which were invaded by Russian troops and claimed by Russia, though nearly all countries continued to recognize these regions as belonging to Georgia.

During my three months in Tbilisi, I traveled around Georgia, including one drive to Batumi on the Black Sea, in which we stopped at multiple locations where we had programs helping IDPs. A question I have always asked myself is when does a person stop being characterized as an IDP? They are in their own country, with full citizenship and political/civil rights. After their initial displacement, they request assistance from their government (and international organizations), which makes sense. But five, ten, twenty years later they are still claiming the need for assistance due to their special status as IDPs. It is essentially an entitlement, and the group receiving it in Georgia, as in countries everywhere, clamor to keep receiving it. In the case of Georgia, the government is hesitant to cut off such assistance for fear of losing votes.

I found Tbilisi to be a lovely city, with friendly people who are pro-American for the most part. The Kura River running through the city and the old buildings reminded me a bit of Istanbul, though on a much smaller scale. My locally employed assistant was a great fellow, very knowledgeable and friendly. We would go out to eat the delicious Georgian food (khachapuri, khinkali, and kharcho were my favorites). The Georgians

also love their wine, and claim to have invented it. I visited a few wineries and saw the traditional kveris where wine was made.

I also had an opportunity while in Georgia to visit Yerevan, Armenia. There, I met with an NGO we were providing funding for, as well as with UNHCR. I was struck by the government's program to help Syrians with Armenian roots to escape Syria, enter Armenia and receive full citizenship. These individuals usually spoke no Russian, which seemed necessary on the Armenian job market, given that Russia was the biggest trade partner. So, they had to take Russian classes. I spoke with our embassy in Armenia about the possibility of our interviewing Iranian religious minorities in Yerevan for our refugee resettlement program (the same individuals we were transporting to Vienna to interview). It seemed obvious it would be much less expensive, easier to accomplish, and more efficient to do in Yerevan than Vienna. Also, no visa was needed for Iranians to visit Armenia. Of course, our embassy cited several reasons why they couldn't possibly do it, although I pointed out to them no agreement with host authorities of any sort was needed (unlike in Austria) because Iranians do not need permission to visit Armenia. Still, they balked. This issue would be raised again in the future…

After my stint in Georgia, I traveled back to Washington for Christmas. The plan was that I would return in January to Kyiv to continue working for PRM on programs in that country. However, COVID reared its ugly head in late December, and by early January everyone got skittish and nervous. The State Department put non-essential travel on hold, and suddenly, my TDY to Kyiv was postponed for an indefinite period. Most of us thought things would settle down in a month or so. How wrong we were.

I wound up spending all of 2020 in Arlington, Virginia waiting for COVID to retreat or for our authorities at all levels to stop panicking and overreacting to it. But they did not, and then elections occurred and Biden won. I knew that if he won, we would see funding increase for the refugee resettlement and assistance programs, as that is what he had promised, so I was pretty confident work was coming my way again.

Sure enough, in February 2021 my boss asked me if I could go on a long TDY (six months to a year) to Guatemala City to be the first RefCoord there. I said yes. Like so many others, I was waiting for a COVID vaccination before departing, as it was so highly encouraged, although I wasn't keen on getting it. I finally got a vaccination in early April and flew a few days later to Guatemala.

GUATEMALA

I was overseeing our refugee resettlement program in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica. I was also working on our assistance programs in Guatemala. Regarding assistance, PRM leadership came up with an idea of establishing migration resource centers (MRCs), which were envisioned to give information and assistance to migrants, encourage them to migrate through legal channels, inform them about asylum options, and dissuade them from traveling to the U.S. border (utilizing smugglers) and enter illegally. Vice President Harris made her first trip overseas to Guatemala. Secretary of

Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas accompanied her, along with White House aides. I chatted with Mayorkas when he visited the new MRC we established in Guatemala City. I told him the MRCs being established around the country (and planned for other countries) would not slow the flow of migrants to our southern border (which proved to be true). He had no answer.

Although for 40 years we had resettled only very small numbers of refugees from Latin America (fewer than 5000/year), we suddenly decided during the Biden administration that there were tens of thousands of people who had valid refugee claims and deserved resettlement to the United States. UNHCR came to the same conclusion after decades of asserting that there were minuscule numbers of refugees in the region. We decided to process Guatemalans living in Guatemala as refugees, though they had not left their country of origin. Same for Salvadorans and Hondurans. Most of these individuals wanted to escape from surrounding crime, drug activity, gangs, ineffective police and court systems, poverty, lack of opportunity, climate change. I would want to escape those bleak conditions and take advantage of opportunities in the United States too, so I don't blame them. But these conditions did not mean that they had valid refugee claims. They were economic migrants, which is why we had never resettled them before. The Biden administration lowered the bar for the refugee resettlement program, for political reasons. I pointed this out to my leadership, but they were following instructions from above, as usual, and were unwilling to challenge what the official policy was.

In August 2021, the Taliban took Kabul. Anyone who was paying attention could see it coming months ahead. The Biden Administration apparently was caught off guard. The U.S. withdrawal from the country was so poorly planned and executed that it must go down as one of the worst foreign policy blunders in the previous 40 years. The U.S. withdrew from Bagram air force base in the middle of the night without even telling our Afghan partners (!). That base could have been used to evacuate Americans and Afghans who worked for us. Instead, this incompetent move resulted in a rush to the civilian airport in Kabul, and total chaos. U.S. service members were killed in a terrorist attack, which our cognitively declining president forgot about when he asserted in a debate that no servicemen had been killed on his watch. It need never have occurred. Thousands of Afghans who did not work for us and had no affiliation with us forced their way on to planes. One photo showed a C-5 crammed full of Afghans, every one an adult male. These cowards left their wives and children behind as they fled, then later demanded that we evacuate those they left behind. The Afghan army and police which we had trained for 20 years and heavily supplied, dropped their weapons and ran rather than fight the Taliban. It was disgraceful of them, and our withdrawal (leaving billions of dollars in equipment behind) was equally so. No one was held accountable in the Biden administration for this amateurish withdrawal. In fact, no matter how incompetent anyone was in Biden's administration, he never fired anyone.

Meanwhile, my colleagues in PRM shifted to a new focus: helping Afghans. A new office was established at State, called CARE (Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts), to verify Afghans who worked for us, evacuate them, and bring them to the United States to start a new life. The first months after the downfall of the Ghani regime,

we evacuated 70,000 Afghans (again, chaotically, with little to no vetting, and many mistakes including thousands who were not affiliated with us). The administration paroled these individuals into the United States (which results in no legal status). We processed these individuals at eight military bases in the United States. My boss called me and asked me to work at one of the bases. I agreed. The next day, I was told of a change in plans. Would I go to our embassy in Islamabad and work there instead, restarting a moribund refugee resettlement program for Afghans? Sure, I said.

ISLAMABAD

It took some time for me to obtain a visa to Pakistan, but the real holdup to my arrival was our own embassy. Though my bureau, PRM, and other offices in the Department up to and including the Deputy Secretary were in favor of our restarting our program to resettle to the United States Afghan refugees in Pakistan (including many who worked for us in the past), our embassy was afraid that the Pakistani government would not approve, and so our embassy delayed approving my visit. Finally, I was given permission to travel to Islamabad in November. I immediately met with my counterpart from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), our partner in that country facilitating our resettlement efforts. We quickly formulated plans for hiring, budget, etc. and located a building for rent inside the diplomatic enclave, very close to the U.S. embassy. However, when IOM requested approval from the Government of Pakistan to process refugees for resettlement, they did not get any answer. We kept getting the runaround as to which ministries and personnel were required to sign off. The government was stalling a response because it did not want to approve, and an outright denial would have caused a rift in our relationship. I told my boss in late December that there was no reason for me to stay in Islamabad if the government were not prepared to approve our resettlement program. I asked him to send me to Doha instead, as we were just getting ready to start an operation there. He agreed. Before I left Pakistan, I recommended to the State Department that we simply process Afghans for resettlement out of our embassy (i.e. not using IOM as a partner). We had a huge embassy compound with lots of space. Eighteen months later, the embassy finally allowed us to do exactly what I had suggested in late 2021. They wasted all that time that could have been used processing Afghans.

DOHA

I studied up and contributed to our resettlement operation planning in Doha, consulted closely with colleagues from CARE, and then arrived February 1, 2022. I had a month to prepare before the first Afghans would start arriving March 1 for us to process for special immigrant visas (SIVs) and refugee status. Again, IOM was to be our partner, and they needed to hire a huge number of staff to process the refugees, plus provide all sorts of ancillary support, because the Afghans would be living on the U.S. military base (Camp As Sayliyah - CAS) where we processed them. The U.S. army provided security, food, housing, and infrastructure. IOM provided protection services, healthcare, conducted medical exams and vaccinations, offered education for children, psychosocial/mental counseling, recreation, and other assistance.

Immediately, there was a challenge because we had only empty warehouses, with no office space, and my colleagues in PRM in Washington were arguing that DOD should pay for the construction of offices with billions of dollars appropriated by Congress for humanitarian assistance. DOD refused, claiming that our operation was an immigration function rather than a humanitarian one. This was absurd. PRM provides humanitarian assistance and does not have immigration programs. Lawyers got involved. DOD eventually conceded that our work was humanitarian in nature, but still objected to using their funding on policy grounds. The clock was ticking and I reminded my colleagues that DOD doesn't do anything quickly, and that I had given IOM a task to identify a local contractor who could construct the offices in two weeks (plywood and 2x4's) at a low cost (a few hundred thousand dollars of a huge multimillion dollar effort). IOM had succeeded in this task. I had to appeal to the PRM front office to get approval for State to pay; I told them that otherwise the resettlement effort would be delayed, at a huge cost (daily feeding and housing of thousands of Afghans). They approved. The construction was finished on time and we started processing March 1.

We realized right away we didn't have enough doctors and nurses to conduct the medical exams, so IOM had to hire more and train them. CARE had difficulty getting approval from the Taliban to allow flights out of Kabul to Doha for the Afghans who worked for us. The flights came sporadically at times, or not at all for a few weeks. When they did arrive, we often found that CARE had not done a thorough job vetting who was eligible for relocation. There were many cases of SIV candidates improperly vetted (i.e. not eligible) sent to Doha. Once in Doha, we could not send Afghans we had relocated and who were unqualified for SIVs to the United States, back to Kabul as they refused to go. So we had to process them as refugees onward to the United States. In other words, we rewarded fraud. When I raised this issue with CARE and Consular Affairs (multiple times), I got angry replies as though I were a troublemaker and not a team player, rather than an acknowledgement that they needed to improve their processes to identify and weed out unqualified applicants, and to reduce fraud. There were scores of cases of fake employment letters, for instance, which took CARE and Consular Affairs at least a year before they started scrutinizing them more closely. We spent millions evacuating some Afghans who were not qualified for our program, fed and housed them, and then spent more on them by giving them resettlement benefits when they arrived in the United States.

PRM sent many TDYers out to help me, although they were always State Department employees from bureaus other than PRM who did not know anything about our work or Afghans, and only stayed six weeks, not long enough to become very useful. I kept asking PRM not to send me anymore help. Eventually, when we had the program running very smoothly, PRM found two Refugee Coordinators to come out to replace me, doing regular tours at the embassy. I brought them both up to speed before departing in August. Later, PRM sent two more RefCoords, to have four on the ground in Doha, which I thought was ridiculously overstaffed. It was rare to have two RefCoords in one country. To have four on a small military base made no sense whatsoever. I urged my boss to relocate one of them to Islamabad, and another to UAE (but he didn't).

Also while in Doha, at the request of my boss in PRM, I visited our embassy in Abu Dhabi to try to help get the resettlement efforts there moving. There were about 10,000 Afghans in UAE, but they were not all relocated by the U.S. Government, which was part of the problem. Private entities evacuated some Afghans and just assumed that our government would process them on to the United States, although that was not our intention unless it could be documented that the person worked for us. When I arrived in Abu Dhabi (in March, 2022), a high-ranking embassy officer shouted at me asking why we hadn't moved the Afghans in UAE to the United States yet. I informed him that a high level decision was made by CARE to focus on evacuating Afghans from Kabul as quickly as possible (under the rationale that they were under threat from the Taliban) and to process them in Doha. Additionally, the Government of the UAE had no country agreement allowing our partner, IOM, to operate in country, and we needed that. I met with IOM and we began immediately the process of requesting approval for IOM to operate. The program got underway shortly after. It was a slog, but unlike Doha, which had flights arriving every week, no flights arrived in UAE after the initial 10,000 Afghans arrived, so we just slowly chipped away at the population there.

I was brought back to Washington in late 2022 to work on the Afghan resettlement program. I was familiar with UAE, Qatar, and Pakistan efforts, having seen or worked on all three, and was additionally given oversight of our efforts in Kosovo. One issue, which I had raised in early 2022 regarding Doha, was what happened if a consular officer found an Afghan ineligible for an SIV, and USCIS officers found the same person ineligible for refugee status? In other words, what happened if there was no legal immigration path for an Afghan? This was not considered by anyone who came up with the idea of relocating large numbers of Afghans to Doha. So, someone came up with the idea of sending them to Kosovo for "further processing." This was a way of kicking the can down the road, but it made little sense, because we just transferred the problem from Doha to Pristina.

In the cases of Kosovo, Qatar, and UAE, each of those governments assumed we would take all of the Afghans we relocated to their countries. This was implicit or explicit in their agreeing to host the Afghans. They also stipulated timelines for processing (i.e. total time of any Afghan in country) which we violated constantly. We in PRM spent countless hours asking our vetting partners to review the cases of Afghans we had processed who were not approved for security reasons. It took vetting partners nearly two years to finally go through all the cases. Most Afghans we had transferred to Kosovo were eventually approved, and most of those denied for immigration to the United States walked off the compound where they were living in Pristina and headed to (we imagine) Germany. Someone came up with an idea of transferring cases that had a final determination of ineligibility, from Kosovo to Suriname. Suriname had agreed to take a small number of cases. We would up pressuring one Afghan lady stuck in Kosovo, to go to Suriname. We had set aside $3 million for this transfer program. One person was transferred. Another of the endless examples of wasting U.S. taxpayer money.

In Washington, I kept trying to streamline our refugee resettlement processing in Doha, to shorten the time Afghans spent at CAS. When the program originated, someone at a high level asserted that we could process Afghans in 30 days. This person must have had no

idea of the timelines of our processing, and made this number up from thin air. The number of steps required, from vaccination, to medical exam, USCIS interview, security vetting, etc. meant that on average we were closer to 45 days for processing refugees. In fact, no one kept statistics, no one was measuring average time to process a case, and no one seemed to care. I did some number crunching and found we were processing refugees even faster than our colleagues were processing special immigrant visa cases, which should not have been the case. This infuriated my consular colleagues, who denied it, and then got annoyed when it was proven to them. Consular work was controlled by the Consular Affairs bureau, not by PRM, so though I made suggestions on how they could improve their processing, they ignored me. For refugee processing, I suggested combining steps, moving steps up earlier after arrival, etc. One suggestion was to perform vetting of those we intended to transfer to Doha while Afghans were still in Afghanistan. This, we finally started doing, and of course, it not only reduced processing time in Doha, but also weeded out cases that would not be approved for security reasons. Another step to improve efficiency was to start doing medical exams in Kabul, to reduce the time Afghans spent in Doha. We started doing this too. Finally, I offered to PRM to go to Kabul and manage a big portion of the resettlement operation there. I argued that I could go because I was not a full-time government employee. I was retired and could go as a contractor. CARE actually had a few American contractors on the ground in Kabul, I pointed out. PRM did not take me up on my offer, though.

SAN JOSE

Late in 2023, my office asked me to shift to work on Latin America, since the focus on our southern border by the administration was again heating up. I was asked to go to Mexico and work on a new resettlement program. However, the Government of Mexico did not approve our plan, so my visit there was postponed indefinitely. My office decided instead to send me to Costa Rica, where our new Safe Mobility Office (SMO), was getting underway. This SMO agreement was allegedly designed to slow the invasion of our southern border and ensure those who came to the United States did so legally. However, with the agreement hammered out with the Government of Costa Rica, we were restricted to resettling mainly Nicaraguans. But as I pointed out, most of the Nicaraguans in Costa Rica had been there for years and were not planning to migrate to the United States. Those responsible for the SMO idea were not receptive to such points.

In San Jose, I helped secure RSO permission for IOM to occupy a new building. IOM had been operating out of a hotel in San Jose, at great expense. I worked in San Jose to get additional doctors on board, to reduce a backlog of cases pending medical exams. I accelerated the cultural orientation class scheduling to get refugees in our program approved and en route to the United States faster.

At the end of 2023, my office asked me to transfer to Bogota, to manage our new and largest refugee resettlement program in the world. In January, 2024, I arrived in Bogota. We had recently concluded an SMO agreement with Colombia, which stipulated that we could process only Venezuelans, Cubans, and Haitians and only those who were in the country legally at the time we signed the agreement. That meant, of course, that anyone

who came to Colombia after the agreement was signed, was ineligible, as were any other nationalities. The result was that tens of thousands of migrants who were ineligible for the SMO in Colombia continued to travel through the Darien Gap to Costa Rica and on to the United States southern border.

The Darien Gap had been considered impassable when I did a tour in Panama (1995-97), but with the perceived open border of the United States under Biden, migrants moved in massive numbers. This meant business was booming for smugglers, and countless women were raped passing through the Darien. Other migrants were robbed, beaten, killed, had their food and water stolen and starved or died of thirst. It was horrible. Neither Panama nor Colombia did anything to stop it, nor did the Biden administration.

The NSC was pressing us to approve as many refugees for resettlement as possible, to try to show that we were doing something (anything) to stem the flow of migrants (several million in 2023 alone). Of course, our program didn't slow migration at all. We had a goal of moving 3000/month through Bogota. The focus on Colombia and the goal of resettling 3000/month were derived out of thin air. There was no apparent justification, or attempt at one. In Colombia, those we processed were almost entirely Venezuelans. The pressure to meet numbers resulted in moving away from PRM's usual objective, which was to resettle those most in need and most vulnerable. I pointed this out to leadership, but as usual received no explanation or defense of the new policy.

In Colombia, we asked UNHCR to operate a portal where refugees could apply for resettlement. In other countries, we did not allow refugees to apply for resettlement; rather, we asked UNHCR to choose the most vulnerable and most in need of resettlement among those in country. So our program in Colombia resembled an immigration program rather than a refugee resettlement program. The bar was lowered on refugee claims so that 99% of applicants were approved, an unheard of rate compared to other locations in the world, meaning many weak refugee claims were approved (most were very weak). The portal allowing refugees to apply resulted in about 10,000 applications a month, even with very restricted hours and days to apply. UNHCR wanted to close the portal. They argued, and I agreed, that we could not continue allowing 10,000 per month to apply when we were processing 3,000 per month. However, PRM leadership coerced UNHCR to keep the portal open. UNHCR did not want to upset its largest donor. The result, as I foresaw and warned Washington, is that we would have 200,000 angry applicants stuck in the queue when we eventually closed the program. This of course transpired.

Unfortunately, while we were meeting all targets regarding interviews and approvals, our colleagues in the resettlement agencies in the United States were unable to accommodate 3000 arrivals per month from Colombia, or large numbers from many other parts of the world. The resettlement agencies were responsible for providing housing and other services to newly arrived refugees, and we would not send a refugee to the United States through our program until a resettlement agency was prepared to receive him. Thus, we quickly built up a massive backlog of approved cases who were not traveling to the United States. When PRM Assistant Secretary Julieta Noyes visited Bogota in summer 2024, I asked her to allow us to stop interviewing (and approving) refugees until the

backlog of thousands of approved cases traveled to the United States. She replied that she couldn't authorize that, because "Alejandro won't let me." She was referring to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who was not, in fact, her boss, as he was the head of a different agency.

She also told me that her top priority was delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza, and I informed her that I had worked on Palestinian refugees many years earlier. On the spot, she asked me to go to Jerusalem to help our effort, and I agreed, as I no longer wanted to be part of the train wreck about to happen in Bogota.

I also thought that we should slow down refugee processing worldwide leading up to our elections, as there was a good chance the entire program would be reduced or even scrapped if Trump won (as we had seen in 2016). I made this recommendation to Washington. Again, no one in leadership listened or wanted to recognize that reality. Several colleagues, as usual, were upset that I even brought these issues up for discussion. They kept rearranging the chairs on the Titanic.

JERUSALEM

In August 2024, I obtained my visa and headed out to Jerusalem. I went from managing our largest resettlement program in the world (Bogota) to managing our largest assistance program (Jerusalem). The Congress had allocated $1 billion to PRM to assist Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza. Of course, most of the focus was on war-torn Gaza. I was reporting to the political section in the Office of Palestinian Affairs (OPA), a semi-independent office with its own director who could send telegrams and recommendations directly to Washington without clearing them with the ambassador. However, of course, we did have an ambassador, operating from a different building, who was overall our top diplomat in country. OPA had the responsibility of interacting with Palestinian politicians and people. The embassy main building had the responsibility of interacting with the Israeli Government. This made for an unusual dynamic, especially in the time period I was there, when Israel and Hamas in Gaza were at war.

My job was to oversee and ensure PRM's humanitarian relief supplies were reaching the two million Palestinians in Gaza (and in other locations as well, but most of my focus was on Gaza). Before the horrific Hamas attack on Israel October 7, 2023, almost all of PRM's assistance for Palestinians was channeled through UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees), an organization with which I had worked 20 years earlier. After the October 7 attack, UNRWA came under fire for allegedly having within its workforce many Palestinians supporting Hamas or members of Hamas. (These allegations had been made 20 years earlier when I worked on the issue.) This was undoubtedly true. It would be amazing if it were not true, given UNRWA had thousands of local employees in Gaza.

Our administration decided to pause assistance to UNRWA while investigations were ongoing into that agency, and our Congress did the same. Therefore, in PRM we decided that we needed to utilize other partners to deliver humanitarian assistance, such as the

World Food Program (WFP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), etc. and we also planned to fund non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Thus, I met with all of our partners to assess what they were doing and how our assistance was being delivered. It turned out, most of our assistance was stuck, due to a number of restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government such as limited entry points to Gaza, prohibition on movement of convoys, etc. There were hundreds of trucks with supplies waiting outside Gaza for approval to enter. There were thousands of pallets of food and other life-saving assistance that entered Gaza and were dumped in staging areas, awaiting Israeli approval to move to the final destination. Most of Gaza was flattened by the Israeli Defense Forces, and the majority of Palestinians were forced by the IDF into a small geographic area of Gaza. Bombings trapped at least 10,000 Palestinians under rubble, mostly women and children. Almost all of the hospitals were destroyed and a few were operating in name only. There was very little medicine and some key medications were out of stock. There was not a single MRI machine working in Gaza. Most doctors had fled; many medical personnel were killed or injured in bombings. There was insufficient food or clean water. Electricity was non-existent in most of Gaza. The entire population was traumatized and on the brink of starvation. It was a humanitarian catastrophe, entirely man made. Or Israeli made.

Fearing I would never get a cable cleared portraying what was happening (or that it would be watered down considerably), I sent an email to PRM only including to Assistant Secretary Noyes regarding the true situation in Gaza. She immediately forwarded it to the NSC and to the NEA bureau, and it got a lot of attention, including at my post.

When I was in Jerusalem, on September 17-18 Israeli intelligence mounted a spectacular attack, detonating thousands of pagers and radios held by Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon and Syria, killing or injuring hundreds. This was followed by the assassination of Hasan Nasrullah, the head of Hezbollah, in a bombing raid in Beirut September 27. Also, on October 1, Iran fired missiles at Israel apparently in retaliation for the July 31 Israeli assassination of Haniyeh in Teheran (a Mossad campaign, undoubtedly). Ya Ya Sinwar, the head of Hamas, was killed by the IDF October 16. All of this showed a very capable and bold Israeli intelligence and military force. One of the many Hezbollah leaders assassinated had taken part in bombing of the U.S. marine barracks and embassy in the 1980's. I wondered why our own intelligence and military hadn't tracked him down and killed him in four decades. Were we not as determined as the Israelis to avenge the deaths of American soldiers and diplomatic personnel?

My replacement arrived in Jerusalem in late October, and I was glad to leave, because I was not able to do my job. No one in Washington was willing to stand up to the Israeli Government over the issue of humanitarian aid. The feckless Biden administration did very little, and too late. Netanyahu essentially ignored President Biden, who was already a lame duck and clearly losing his cognitive function, though no one in the administration

took any action to remove him (via the 25th Amendment). We were all waiting for the election to achieve that.

DHAKA

I wasn't back in Washington long before I got a call asking me if I could go to Dhaka immediately to be the Refugee Coordinator there. This was unexpected. Our RefCoord in Dhaka had been in a car accident, and was ushered out of the country the next day, leaving a vacancy. The RefCoord was supposed to have a deputy, but that position had been vacant for some time. Bangladesh in late 2024 was home to the largest refugee camp in the world, Cox's Bazar, with about one million inhabitants. It was hard to know the exact number, because more kept coming from neighboring Myanmar (Burma). At least 60,000 had come in the previous six months to add to the one million already there. They were virtually all Rohingya. I obtained a visa in early November and headed to Dhaka.

I was thinking that what I should do is go directly to Cox's Bazar, a one-hour flight from Dhaka. Instead, the Embassy wanted me to spend time in the capital, Dhaka, getting to know the key players and meeting relevant government officials. It was a strange time in Bangladesh, as the people had chased out the previous leader, Sheikh Hasina, in early August, and there was a new leader, Muhammad Yunus, a former Nobel laureate, with a group of new advisors. Every day, the interim government found new evidence of the corruption of Hasina's regime, which apparently made off with billions of dollars and bankrupted the government, ruining its credit rating and making new loans very hard to obtain. Officials were just settling into their new roles and becoming familiar with their responsibilities. We were, as usual, advising on a multitude of issues. Our efforts were somewhat stymied by not having an ambassador at post. We had a charge d'affaires.

I finally was able to visit Cox's Bazar in early December with my trusted assistant. We assessed several of the 26 camps that comprise Cox's, and met all of our implementing partners, as well as many refugees. My USAID colleague was responsible for food assistance (through World Food Program) to the Rohingya refugees, but otherwise PRM was supplying assistance for all other sectors (shelter, water, sanitation, health, education, protection, etc.). I went with our charge d'affaires to meet with the newly appointed Refugee Advisor in the Government, and asked for approval the implementing agencies had been requesting for some time: to build more durable shelters, and to conduct a new census and registration process so that our aid would go to all refugees. We received vague promises that these long standing issues would be addressed. Until we did, our partners were able to deliver assistance only to those refugees who were registered.

The Government of Bangladesh, like in the case I had seen in Lebanon and elsewhere, was afraid that if UNHCR registered more refugees and gave them assistance, it would incentivize even more to flee Myanmar and come to Bangladesh. They also complained that our assistance for refugees left them in a better socioeconomic condition than many poor Bangladeshis (who were not our responsibility, but never mind that point).

I returned home for Christmas to spend a few weeks, and then my office wanted me to return to Dhaka until July. However, by this point it was mid-January, and I suggested we wait a week to see what the new (Trump) administration was going to do. As I expected, on his first day in office, January 20, 2025, Trump put a hold on our refugee resettlement. But he also paused our foreign assistance, which I did not expect. So I didn't go anywhere. Meanwhile, we shortly after received news that the administration was offering to buy out federal workers, which left us in a more confused state as to who was staying and who was leaving, while at the same time we expected new leadership. Plans to lay off a large percentage of federal workers was announced, leading to more uncertainty. While I understood and agreed on the need to cut massive amounts of government spending, to reduce the federal workforce, and to root out waste, fraud, and mismanagement, it seemed the new DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) and administration were going about it in a rather roughshod manner, without much assessment of who and what should be retained.

February, 2025