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**JAMAL AL JIBIRI**

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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Jamal, we're very pleased that you're doing this oral history interview, the first part of which is being done by telephone. I wondered if we could start with you talking a bit about your early background: where you were born, your family background, where you were educated. Just give us a sense of what your childhood and youth were like.*

AL JIBIRI: To a certain extent I had a different kind of upbringing. I grew up in Saudi Arabia. I was born in the West Bank, in a little town called Asira ash-Shamaliya, right outside of Nablus. When I was one and a half years old, around 1961, the family moved to Saudi Arabia where my father was working for Aramco. I grew up in a little town there called Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, which was almost like an American community basically. These are the folks that discovered oil in Saudi, and are now one of the most valuable companies in the world. In those earlier days it was an interesting upbringing there. You were living in America almost, but it was Saudi Arabia. Even though I do not have U.S. citizenship, every morning they would raise the American flag, we would recite the pledge of allegiance; I was a Cub Scout and Boy Scout. I went through all of those things in Saudi Arabia. The school was an American school with the American

curriculum, but we had classes only until ninth grade, and after ninth grade the company would send us off to study high school and college wherever our parents or we chose. I ended up moving around a bit in high school. My education involved a lot of moving around, not because I was brilliant or anything. I went to school in Athens, Greece for a couple of years, then the UK (United Kingdom) for several months, then Lebanon of all places for another six or seven months.

After that I was accepted to the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma. I started studying mechanical engineering. It took several years for me to figure out I was never going to be an engineer, so I switched to finance and banking. It was a pretty circuitous route, but I ended up at the University of Alabama and got a bachelor's degree in banking.

Subsequently I came here to Jordan and a few years later I worked for a bank here. They sent me to the UK and I got an MBA (Master of Business Administration) from the University of Stirling in Scotland on a scholarship from the bank. That's basically my educational history and to a certain extent my upbringing.

*Q: Was your father an engineer with Aramco?*

AL JIBIRI: No, he was an internal auditor, that's why when the IG (Inspector General) would come through I would always relate to them quite easily because my father, being an internal auditor, he would tell me about all the challenges they faced in the company.

*Q: What was your nationality? You said you were born in the West Bank...*

AL JIBIRI: As I always tell the Israelis when I go through, I was born there when it was a part of Jordan, so I've always been a Jordanian citizen.

*Q: I'm sorry; I couldn't remember my history well enough to remember what belonged where and when.*

AL JIBIRI: The Israelis have trouble remembering that too, so I have to remind them every once in a while.

*Q: So your parents were Jordanians as well.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes.

*Q: Did your mother work, just out of curiosity?*

AL JIBIRI: No, we were from a small village in the West Bank, and women's education wasn't a high priority for my mother's generation, so she unfortunately could not read or write. She'd never been to school.

*Q: Very interesting background and strange sort of environment in Saudi Arabia. Have you gone back to Saudi Arabia since?*

AL JIBIRI: I did go back on behalf of DAI (Development Alternatives Incorporated) to attend one of these world competitiveness conferences in Riyadh, but I haven't been back to where I was raised in Dhahran since 1982.

*Q: You went to work in a bank in Jordan, and then did your MBA in Scotland?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, while I was with them. The British Counsel had this program called the Chevening program, and they offer scholarships or half scholarships to students from the countries that they operate in. The British Council, which is part of the Foreign Commonwealth office in the UK, offered me a half scholarship, and the bank that I was working for at the time covered the other half. It was a one-year MBA program in the UK.

*Q: Then you went back to the bank.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. When I first arrived here in Jordan in 1986 after I grew up in Saudi and travelled through high school and college, my parents by then had retired and built a house here. I came and lived here and started working for the Housing Bank. It took several months, but I found a job in the beginning of 1987 in what was called the Housing Bank. I worked for them for 10 years. They sent me off to get my MBA during that period. In 1997, a friend, a colleague of mine from the Housing Bank came to me one day and said, "I just saw a notice in the paper for a job with USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and this is you, you're the guy. There's nobody in the whole country that would fit these qualifications better than you! You've got to fill out an application and send in a CV (curriculum vitae)." I did, but I put them all in an envelope and kept them in my inbox on my desk for a week or two. She came back to me and said, "you know, it's due in a couple of days, have you sent your application?" I said, "no," and she said, "well, we're going out to lunch today, and we're going to pass by the post office and we're going to send it today." The reason I hadn't acted was because I didn't think I would have a chance. There were all kinds of rumors that you had to be this or that in order to be employable by USAID which I didn't meet. In Arab communities, we have this perception that you have to be Christian or you have to be this or that to be employed by them; otherwise, they won't take you.

*Q: Did you know USAID at all, did the housing bank work with them?*

AL JIBIRI: I knew of USAID. When I was with the housing bank, they sent me on a training course to New York City called U.S. Money and Capital Markets. It was a one-month course and was funded by USAID. Because of that I went to the USAID

mission at the time. It was not located where it is now, where you visited last time. It was in a small building that was publicly accessible, different than it is now. I did see the people there, but for me at the time, it was “these are the people paying for my training course so I have to go talk to them.”

*Q: So, AID didn't have any housing guarantee programs with the housing bank?*

AL JIBIRI: No, no, no. Apparently, I discovered later, that through the Ministry of Planning they offered these training courses, and somehow the bank that I worked for was semi-official, so we somehow ended up on the list and I ended up being the person chosen to go.

*Q: So, you were having lunch with your friend and you went by the post office...*

AL JIBIRI: Went by the post office, bought a stamp, sent it in, and two days later — I'm actually surprised at the efficiency of Jordanian post — but two days later, I got a call from a lady at USAID who said, “well, we just saw your CV and we'd like you to come in for an interview.” Interestingly enough, the person interviewing me at the time was a man named Alonzo Fulgham, who was heading up the economic growth office in USAID Amman. He was actually my boss; he was the guy who hired me. The mission director was Lew Lucke. I was interviewed, it felt good because Alonzo's reaction—and this is not to toot my own horn or anything—but Alonzo said, “you're by far the best candidate for this job, we want you, and we're going to hire you as a Grade 12.” That's how I ended up being hired by USAID in February of 1997.

*Q: You were hired as a Grade 12.*

AL JIBIRI: Grade 12 in the Economic Growth office, yes.

*Q: And you were going to be managing a project, or...?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, it was a transitional time, a really interesting time. When I arrived in the mission, I was taking over for somebody who had managed a program in which people buy capital equipment through loan funds.

*Q: The Commodity Import Program?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, CIP, the Commodity Import Program. There had been this large CIP that had been operating in Jordan that had closed down, but the FSN (Foreign Service National) guy that ran the program had left. He was the only technical person in the office outside of the office director. I was hired to replace him. I remember when I was hired at the time, Lew Lucke telling me that the budget for the economic growth office was going to be \$12 million over the next three years. There was a local IQC (Indefinite Quantity

Contract) in place, and a whole bunch of scopes of work had been prepared, but nobody had done anything with them. I was pushing these through and started activities with an organization that USAID had been working with called the Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation. This IQC was in place with a firm called IBTCI (International Business and Technical Consultants Inc.) that was based out of Washington. Alonzo had told me the first week, “I don’t want you to do anything, I just want you to read files and look at all of our programs, and once you’ve got it all figured out, then we’ll start working.”

So, I read through all the files of the programs they had for that whole week, and I was discovering all these documents that were outstanding. I was asking, “ok, there’s a scope of work and there are these forms, but what should I do with them?” I went to the contracting office and talked with all kinds of people; then we started moving this stuff, getting the consultants in, reinvigorating this existing program. There was another program that was about to close down, although it still had about \$200,000 in the pipeline for a grant to a local NGO (non-governmental organization). That’s really when I learned most of what I needed to know in terms of how USAID operates. It was just me and then a project management specialist and a project management assistant and a secretary and Alonzo. That was the whole staff in that office.

*Q: That was lean staffing!*

AL JIBIRI: It was! The positive part of that is that I had to learn very quickly, and I was able to learn very quickly because Alonzo was one of these “throw you in the pool and you either sink or swim,” bosses and I had to learn to swim very quickly in the USAID world. I found that to be very useful later on.

*Q: At that point, you said the economic growth program was about \$12 million a year?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, projected to be. This is what I remember it to be. My final interview with USAID was with Lew Lucke and he said we had about \$12 million in the next three years to develop programs. I still wasn’t familiar with what we were planning to do with it. Subsequent to that, Alonzo and the rest of us started working to create a program around microfinance and policy reform.

*Q: Was the CIP ending?*

AL JIBIRI: It had ended, and the interesting thing was that I kept getting calls up to about a year after that from the local private sector asking if this thing was still in place, and I would always have to say, “I’m sorry, it’s finished, we’re not doing that anymore.” It struck me subsequent to that -- and this is a lesson learned -- I thought it was a useful too that we could have used at a later stage, but we didn’t take advantage of that historical program.

*Q: Right. Do you recall, just out of curiosity, just how large that CIP program was per year?*

AL JIBIRI: As I understand it, if I got the history correct, it was something around \$80 billion, and the thing is...and we're going back in history, but...Jordan was on the wrong side in the 1990 Gulf War, so things got really bad. They basically sided with Iraq, and relations with the U.S. became tenuous after that. George H.W. Bush was president at the time, and relations with the U.S. became a bit difficult, and then shortly after they started to improve. I think that the CIP was the first step in that improvement. It also then became part of the subsequent 1993 Arab peace process, Wadi 'Araba, with Jordan signing the peace treaty and all that.

It stayed quite small. There was the CIP, but not much else outside of it. It was actually later in the year in 1997 when, if I remember correctly, as part of the peace process, \$100 million that had been set aside for something else suddenly was programmed for USAID in Jordan. I believe it was to help Jordan see some "dividends of peace," so the budget all of a sudden, towards late 1997, increased by \$100 million. We needed to figure out as a mission what to do with it very quickly.

*Q: That would have been late 1997.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes.

*Q: So, you'd been on board for several months.*

AL JIBIRI: Six, seven, eight months, yes. I kept telling them that I was the reason all this money came (*laughter*). Here I am, I'm hired, and all of a sudden there's a whole bunch of money! That was my joke.

*Q: Did that then require a rethinking of the whole mission strategy, including the economic growth strategy?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. By then, we had a new economic growth director, a gentleman and someone who I really feel indebted to for the rest of my days, Jon Lindborg. He replaced Alonzo Fulgham. I think John had already arrived when this happened, and we began a whole rethink of the economic growth engagement. We started to expand on...and I want to be sure my timeline is correct...we awarded a project called AMIR, Access to Micro-financing Implementation and Policy Reform. We developed the RFP (Request for Proposal) when Alonzo was here. It was awarded to Chemonics, and when the big money started coming in, it was doing a good job, so one of the things we did was to expand that project to be able to work on some of the big priorities that were coming up at the time. Most if not all of the initial \$100 million went to a cash transfer, and that was our first cash transfer transaction in the country.

*Q: Was that a policy-based cash transfer?*

AL JIBIRI: We were looking at the Egypt cash transfers as they had a lot of experience there. Most was policy based, and the funds were to be used to pay off Jordanian foreign debt, and the conditionalities (CPs or conditions precedent) related to our policy priorities and the work the mission was doing in different areas. At this time, we also had health and family planning programs and a lot of water activities. The major difference between our program and the Egypt one, if I remember correctly, was that we didn't want to allocate tranches to each condition precedent. We did it in a way that if the country met the CPs there would be one payment for them meeting all the CPs at the time.

*Q: So, it was a single tranche...?*

AL JIBIRI: It was a single tranche transfer, yes.

*Q: And what people did was look throughout the portfolio to see the kinds of policy changes that would be needed to implement the rest of the portfolio, and those things were identified?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. In subsequent years the cash transfer continued, and still continues today. What we discovered at the time (I've been out of the mission for almost 10 years now) was that the best use for the cash transfer and the conditionalities was to get things moving throughout our programs and to relieve constraints or other reasons actions were being held up for whatever reason in the Jordanian government. It wasn't necessarily at the high policy level, but we actually were looking at, "ok, we've got this program going and for whatever reason the Ministry of Water is not doing what it needs to do on this specific issue, so that became a condition precedent.

*Q: That's actually a really creative way to do it. I think in Egypt they often tied the conditionality to the macroeconomic policy framework, the Bank (World Bank) and the Fund (International Monetary Fund) had defined. You all used a different approach to help facilitate the rest of the program.*

AL JIBIRI: Right, and it was an incredibly useful tool from my perspective. And if you talk to the current mission director in Amman, Jim Barnhart, he was there as the successor to Jon Lindborg heading up the economic growth office at the time, he would say the same. He learned that lesson; we all learned that lesson very well. We had to choose our conditions precedent very carefully and in a way that helped the rest of the program move along. We all thought that was an incredibly useful tool.



*Q: Do you recall, following up on that point, how that was done? Were there meetings with key staff from the different technical offices to help identify those kinds of constraints that you wanted to deal with?*

AL JIBIRI: I was a COR (Contracting Officer Representative) at the time, so we would have knowledge of some of the obstacles Government inaction was creating to the progress of our work. We were aware of these things, but we would reach out to project staff and get the real in-depth details of what exactly the issues were and what we needed to define as conditions precedent.

*Q: Do you recall what the discussion was with the Jordanian government officials? Were the draft conditions discussed with them and then finalized, or were they presented to them at the end?*

AL JIBIRI: They were discussed as we were drafting, before the final was ever submitted. We were always discussing with them. It was usually the program office, but I used to go with our program people. We would have meetings, and all of this was with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC). They were the ones who were responsible for the whole cash transfer program from the government of Jordan side. The interesting thing, the other part of it was as we dealt with the other parts of the government—for instance, I dealt quite frequently with the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and we would find situations where the Ministry of Industry and Trade would come to us and say, “We’re trying to get this through and it’s being held up at the Prime Ministry or so-and-so ministry’s holding this up and we’re not getting any traction on it.” It would actually be the ministry itself that would come to us with this issue, and we’d say, “well, we can include it as a condition precedent,” and they’d say, “Please, you would do us a great service if you did!” So, we heard directly from some government counterparts in addition to what we got from our projects and what we learned on the ground while implementing activities.

*Q: So, reformers from within the government were also making their suggestions. That’s the way it should work!*

AL JIBIRI: Right! It worked really well. We submitted the drafts to the government, we would meet with MOPIC, they would call in the various ministries as the discussion went along, and we would talk things through. We would come to an agreement on a final list of conditions precedents, CPs, and that’s what would be sent. By then we knew what could be met and what couldn’t be met within the timeframe we were thinking.

*Q: Do you know the extent to which the embassy or others in Washington got involved in identifying those conditions?*

AL JIBIRI: They were involved in fact. I was actually involved in one where the Department of Commerce, the embassy and the embassy's economic counselor office identified some issues that were ultimately resolved through a CP. This was a great example of how the different parts of the U.S. government could work together. What happened was the Ministry of Industry and Trade in Jordan had come agreed with this organization called Bureau Veritas to do what they called pre-shipment inspections, meaning goods that were coming into Jordan had to be inspected through Bureau Veritas offices around the world to make sure that they met Jordanian quality standards. This was becoming a huge obstacle for American exports to Jordan because the Jordanian Institute of Standards and Metrology (part of the Ministry of Industry and Trade) which was controlling all of this was using European standards, EU (European Union) standards, and there were certain American products that were not meeting these EU/Jordanian standards. It became a huge issue internally, including with the Department of Commerce and the U.S. Ambassador. Every time we talked to the government of Jordan, the response was that the deal with the Bureau Veritas involved a contract between the Government and Bureau Veritas, that if the contract were terminated early, they would be owed \$20 million. For the longest time, I was going to meetings with colleagues from the Department of Commerce and economic counselor's office, and the ambassador around this issue. Then we came up with an idea that because the Bureau Veritas contract was running out in a year and a half from that time, we included a CP that basically said we won't ask you to end the contract now but we want a letter from you to Bureau Veritas which tells them that when this contract ends it's not going to be renewed. That's what happened. The government of Jordan really resisted, but at the end they produced the letter which they sent to Bureau Veritas stating we will not renew this contract, and that made a lot of people happy.

*Q: And did they not renew it? (laughter)*

AL JIBIRI: They did not renew it! That was to me an example of how the different parts of the U.S. government worked together to resolve an issue that had become a cause of major concern for the U.S. government.

*Q: That's a very good example. Usually we hear examples of the opposite kind, where the foreign policy priorities suggest that the conditions be lessened rather than used to promote change.*

AL JIBIRI: In my experience, there were several issues where the U.S. government had put its foot down; the U.S. was very concerned about certain issues outside of whatever the political relationships was. That was one of them. The other was an incident, or a report in the mid-2000s, about how foreign laborers were being mistreated in Jordanian garment factories. It showed up in the New York Times as a story. USTR (U.S. Trade Representative's office) got involved in great depth. We had many meetings with the Department of Labor. This didn't involve the use of CPs or conditions precedent, but we

had to develop programs to help Jordan address this issue that was a huge concern of the USG.

*Q: Did you then develop a bilateral program on that?*

AL JIBIRI: We did. It was an interesting situation when I was personally involved in the meetings. Anne Aarnes was the mission director at the time, and she was taking me with her to meetings with the ambassador and others. We were getting visits from senior USTR people. The reason was because this reflected badly on the free trade agreement between Jordan and the U.S. The unique thing about the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was it was the first FTA that had provisions regarding labor and environment. The primary provisions were that neither country would in any way reduce its standards, either related to labor or environmental protection, because of the treaty. When the story came out in the New York Times, questions were raised about whether Jordan was complying with the labor standards that were included in the FTA. Given what was reported, it clearly wasn't. That became a big problem. We were able to quickly bring in somebody who worked in the inspection department at the Ministry of Labor, and he was actually going out and doing inspections in some of these garment factories. Through that, we developed a program with the International Labor Organization (ILO) that's ongoing to this day, called Better Works. They work with garment factories on maintaining very specific standards for foreign laborers in the garment industry.

*Q: Wow, that's an interesting success story.*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, yeah. I'll probably talk a lot more about examples, but for me the almost 12 years I spent with USAID was *the* most productive time of my life in terms of my being there and being sort of right in the middle of an economic reform process that was just incredible, and these are just some examples.

*Q: Let me go back with two other questions related to the cash transfer. One, I believe when cash transfers were used for debt relief, they didn't generate local currency. Is that correct?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, ours did, we generated local currency.

*Q: Ok, so you programmed local currency as well, then?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, I don't remember if the very first one had local currency associated with it, but in subsequent years we had local currency programming as part of it. Again, if I remember correctly, I don't know if the local currency was exactly equivalent to the U.S. dollar amount in the cash transfer, but it was a pretty large amount.

*Q: And how was it programmed within the mission, the local currency?*

AL JIBIRI: It was another tool in our toolbox. If we developed the CPs based on things that were holding back our programs, the other part of it was when we worked with counterpart ministries a lot of times they were underfunded, and we were able to affect that through the local currency program.

*Q: So, the local currency funds became budget support to increase the budget of those ministries?*

AL JIBIRI: If there was a specific program. I'll give you an example. When Jon Lindborg was here, we built this large industrial park in the south of Jordan, in Aqaba, and at one point we faced the problem—this was a \$20 million program—that we needed to get electricity to the business park the industrial park. The problem was Jordanians had been using Romanian equipment for so long, and they said that it was the only kind of stuff they could use. Based on our competitive procurement processes and source origin requirements, we obviously couldn't buy Romanian stuff. They said this is what they'd been using on their electricity grid in the entire country. So, we managed to have them allocate local currency from their own budget to get the electricity out to the industrial park. To me that was the most memorable, at my level, use where it solved a problem for us.

*Q: So, it sounds like the cash transfer program was really key to implementing the rest of the program and that it was very strategic.*

AL JIBIRI: From what I noticed, they actually took it seriously. The worst thing that can happen is you walk into a ministry and “awh, here's a condition and ‘wink, wink’ we'll make this happen,” and then it's not a real condition or anything. In my experience, when we agreed on these conditions and they went to the Ministry of Planning, the ministry immediately sent them out to every ministry that had to do with these conditions. They would give them deadlines by which they had to have met the condition precedent.

*Q: I have a bit of experience with project assistance and cash transfers, and this sounds like one of the best examples I've ever heard of.*

AL JIBIRI: To be completely honest, as happens when there's a lot of money that you need to disperse over a long period of time, people start to come up with ideas that may not be great, to be diplomatic about this since this is going to the diplomatic institute! Because of political circumstances you need to work with them. Also, it wasn't always 100 percent effective or efficient.

*Q: No, but it certainly seems that it started out well...and you're right that it's hard to maintain that sort of rigor over a long period of time with significant amounts of funding.*

*Just one other question concerning the decision to go the cash transfer route. You'd mentioned earlier the old commodity import program. When the \$100 million of new came available, was there discussion within the mission about the pros and cons of cash transfers and CIPs?*

AL JIBIRI: We were talking about options. The program officer at the time was Jonathan Addleton, the mission director was Lew Lucke, and Jon Lindborg was the economic growth director. I remember being in meetings where these things were discussed. The possibility of a CIP was brought up, but we needed to disperse quickly, and prevailing wisdom at the time was that we try to do it as cleanly and quickly as possible.

*Q: Certainly, it's less management-intensive as well. Ok, I was just curious. I assumed that was the reasoning. It sounds like it was very well thought-out, and you were certainly fortunate to have some real superstars in the mission to help think through that issue.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yeah. They really were the dream team. It was a great group of people.

*Q: Let me step back. So, at the end of 1997, you began to see a significant increase in the size of the Jordan program. Within the economic growth team, as you began to rethink what your strategy and approaches would be, I assume that as the budget increased that your economic growth strategy broadened as well?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. There was a program called the AMIR Program, the Access to Microfinance and Implementation of Policy Reform that I told you about, that was being implemented by Chemonics. We were able to expand that significantly a couple of years into it so that we were able to work on things like Jordan's WTO (World Trade Organization) accession, which was a model for WTO accession, that we did entirely through this program.

*Q: Initially AMIR was focused on microfinance institutions, but then you broadened the mandate of the project?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, it was microfinance AND policy reform.

*Q: Oh, ok, so it was policy reform not necessarily related to microfinance?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, yes. If I remember correctly, from the mid-90s there were a few activities that were being led by the World Bank, and there were some macro policy recommendations that had come from the World Bank that were included in this program that we helped the government institute. One of those things was the recommendation that Jordan should join the World Trade Organization, so it was mentioned in the original AMIR program design. As initially conceived, we really didn't have much money to do

anything with it beyond produce a couple of reports or something. Subsequent to that, when King Abdullah became king in 1999 and we saw the government of Jordan become serious about WTO accession, we had a program in place that was able to deal with it.

*Q: It sounds again like you all were very creative in expanding an existing program as opposed to having to design something new and go out for a new procurement.*

AL JIBIRI: I know that to this day a lot of people in the implementing partner community nine years later are talking about how a program managed to go from \$12 million to \$53 million, and how USAID Jordan managed to pull that off! (*laughter*) But, because of that, we were able to do all that we did. To this day people are really holding up, in Jordan and in other places in the world, the AMIR program as a model USAID project and tool.

*Q: So, there is an important lesson learned here, but it's one that takes a lot of courage to implement.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yeah. Between Jon Lindborg and the contracting officer at the time, Jeff Bell, we managed to pull it off.

*Q: Again, I would just say that it's an important lesson, that if you want to be effective sometimes you have to be very creative and be a risk taker.*

AL JIBIRI: It gave us gravitas, weight at a time when we needed weight, and we were the major development partner in the country. At a later stage I might like to talk a little more about that, how I think that dissipated more recently. At the time we, as USAID, were able to be a leader in Jordan's economic development context, and be a very, very close partner with the government. We managed to achieve quite a bit, I think.

*Q: Yes, let's definitely come back to that later with more concluding thoughts. So, now we're talking about USAID playing a very prominent role from 1997 into the mid-2000s?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. From my perspective, as an FSN, as a Jordanian, as a person who was there sitting at the table with my American colleagues, with the Government of Jordan, with the Jordanian private sector, I noticed that we had a lot of weight associated with us, of gravitas if you want. As we were meeting with the different sorts of counterparts that we were dealing with, beneficiaries and others, we were taken seriously. I was absolutely thrilled to have been a part of that.

Subsequently, in my opinion, things started to become much more political, much more about politics and less about economics. In my opinion, at least, the authority of USAID started to dissipate as things became more political. The timing—and I want to be completely honest about this—the exact timing was when the Iraq war started in 2003. Subsequent to that, Jordan started becoming much more politically important, so there

were a lot of instances where we, as USAID, might have been more forceful about certain things that we clearly saw as needing to be done, but we started becoming less forceful.

*Q: That's interesting. Maybe we'll come back to this a little bit later, but let me ask a question about USAID when, in the very late 1990s-2000s period, it was playing such a prominent role. The relationship with other donors, particularly the World Bank, which I assume would have been the other major donor? Were there other major bilateral donors? And how did you coordinate with others?*

AL JIBIRI: Historically, the World Bank has been present as a lender. IFC (International Finance Corporation) was less prominent. During those early days, the late 1990s, DFID (Department for International Development of the UK) was present, but they closed down. The EU was always there and they were quite prominent but they had a very strange way of doing their programming, so we knew what they were doing and we were meeting with them quite frequently, but they were operating in a different context and a completely different way they we were, so there wasn't that much to talk about. This is probably not good, but I felt a great amount of pride in being the USAID person in meetings with these different donors, where they would just sit around taking notes, wanting to know what we were doing because we were just so much more prominent than anyone else. In terms of the World Bank, an interesting project I actually ran from start to finish was a grant to the World Bank of \$20 million starting in 1998, initially structured to help Jordan work with some of the conditions precedent (CPs, the World Bank doesn't like to call them that, now they call them disbursement-linked indicators). They were actually certain activities they'd agreed with the Government of Jordan.

*Q: Were these structural adjustment loans?*

AL JIBIRI: I think so. It's a while back and I'm trying to remember. I think it might have been something like that.

*Q: Because the Bank usually did the macroeconomic structural reforms.*

AL JIBIRI: I'm remembering some of the activities they had wanted to work on at the time. Part of it was privatization, part of it was something to set up a registry for movable properties, there were several other things. These were all associated with conditionalities related to the macroeconomic policy of Jordan.

*Q: So, what was our grant to the Bank to do?*

AL JIBIRI: Initially it was to bring in consultants, as well as certain parts of activities. We set up a trust fund which was a grant from us. I remember everybody at USAID told me the World Bank is terrible to work with, they're really slow, they're a very difficult partner. We worked with them quite closely, so within a couple of years of the start of this

trust fund, we agreed to focus on privatization. When Jordan had suddenly gotten serious about privatization, we just focused on that. The remainder of that grant was to work on Jordan's privatization activities through the World Bank. They were administering this, and it had wonderful results. There were some massive successes. They privatized the monopoly telecom and opened the telecom industry. They privatized the cement company, the phosphate company, the potash companies. We managed to bring in a private sector partner to run the Port of Aqaba, so there were some massive, massive activities. Think the overall economic benefit to Jordan from these privatizations, or the money that came into the treasury as a result of these privatizations, was something close to \$2 billion. That was all from a \$20 million grant to the World Bank.

*Q: Which provided the technical assistance to help implement the privatizations.*

AL JIBIRI: Right. And the most useful thing...you kind of fall into these things. We had a very specific plan initially. We discovered through implementation that certain things were working so we just dropped the parts that weren't working and made sure all the resources were being allocated towards what was working. We discovered by coincidence that this was the perfect mechanism specifically for privatization because the World Bank is not constrained by USAID daily rate maximums, so they could actually hire the high-end lawyers and financial experts that you need to bring into a large privatization transaction. We could not have done that on our own at USAID, so it really worked very well.

*Q: Just thinking of the timing, did it involve considerable negotiations with Washington or others to do the grant into the trust fund with the World Bank, because this must have been one of the early ones with the Bank?*

AL JIBIRI: I actually did all the paperwork myself. We started it shortly after we started getting the big money in, so this was around 1997. The grant started in either 1998 or 1999. No, it was not difficult to get it processed. I know the context that you're talking about because I understand right now it's practically impossible to give grants to the World Bank through USAID.

*Q: Was this a decision that you all within the mission were able to make on your own, or did it have to involve Washington as well?*

AL JIBIRI: We worked closely with the financial management office and the contracting office and mission management. As the FSN putting all the paperwork together and involved in all the discussions, I seriously don't remember anything related to Washington or anything that stands out in my mind that Washington may have delayed or had issues with any of this at any time.



*Q: You all were very good at being very innovative to do lots of great things. There are lots of lessons learned here, maybe about leaving missions alone to do good things!*

AL JIBIRI: Seriously, if you've got the right people and you trust them, maybe that's one of the best lessons because it may not work in every instance, but that group of people we had at that time in Jordan, and what we were able to do, was I think remarkable.

*Q: I'm glad we're recording this. I should add that I believe that Lew Lucke's oral history has been done and Jonathan Addleton and some of the others as well, but you've prompted me to be sure we reach out to some of the other names that you've mentioned.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, gosh yes. Jon Lindborg is retired in Hawaii now; Jonathan is now professor, and they're all on my Facebook. Jonathan (Addleton) was Ambassador in Mongolia and he's now retired, and I think he's teaching part-time and lives in Macon, Georgia.

*Q: So, we'll definitely reach out to Jonathan as well, because I think that period was a very interesting period in Jordan and there are a lot of lessons learned for AID moving quickly and effectively in a high priority foreign policy context.*

*Let me shift gears a tiny bit right now to ask about FSN issues. Obviously, you played a very prominent role in all of this. The mission was relatively lean, so FSNs played a very prominent role. If you could talk a little bit about that because again, this is not always the case within all AID missions.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yes. I'll give you a few things that struck me from the moment I joined USAID as an FSN. One, I recognized immediately how little anyone expected from FSNs, meaning that I got the sense that everyone was trying to treat us FSNs with kid gloves, and always telling us we were so great and whatever. We weren't being held to a high standard. I felt that to be patronizing, because we're colleagues working towards the same objectives, so you should expect from me the maximum that I can produce. So, treating me as if I am not able to produce anything, or alternatively giving me too many kudos for minor things would make me feel like "my gosh, how little do they expect of me?" Fortunately, and my own personal experience, was that I was able to contribute what I thought was quite significantly to the mission's objectives while I was there. It did strike me that certain words sort of stood out in my mind when I was hired. For instance, they were always saying "your American boss." That sort of stood out for me, my thought was "ok, that was part of the contract, part of everything." I know it's U.S. government money, U.S. taxpayer money, and it's the U.S. diplomatic presence, and there's a framework and rules that have to apply. To me, always saying "your American boss" was like telling me that I would never be the boss, and that kind of thing stuck out throughout my work with USAID. It was actually a major reason I left towards the end.

*Q: Very important observation.*

AL JIBIRI: The other part of it was they made us attend all these Equal Opportunity (EEO) trainings and all kinds of stuff. Again, this was very early on in my career. As we attended these things that were great for us to listen to and to hear about how the U.S. government and U.S. people view equal opportunities and how they view all kinds of great things. But, then as FSNs, there was always the added caveat “but you know this doesn’t apply to you.”

*Q: Equal for some!*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, I mean this applies to U.S. citizens within the embassy, but it doesn’t apply to you, so you don’t really expect anything...but you have to do the training. So why the hell do I have to do the training if it doesn’t apply to me? Those little things, they stood out.

*Q: Do you think it would be possible within AID for the system to change to allow an FSN to be an office director, to have that responsibility, the fiduciary responsibility?*

AL JIBIRI: I hope that one day it will. I understand the political context and all of that. It is U.S. government money, it’s part of U.S. foreign policy and all that other stuff, and you have to have U.S. oversight. It’s just how much of it can you delegate to a local person without sort of giving up the farm. It’s a tricky question. I think there are dedicated FSNs, ones who have really shown their value over a period of time, who need to be rewarded in a way. That reward needs to go beyond an exceptional Grade 13 or whatever. That’s my take on it.

*Q: Obviously international corporations have learned how to do this, and you’d think the U.S. government could learn how to do it as well.*

AL JIBIRI: For me, there’s a massive difference between when I left USAID and I joined DAI. At USAID there was always that sort of...in fact I will say this publicly, or at least for the record. One of the last meetings we had, there was a gentleman who came from Washington, Jim Bever. This isn’t the most pleasant thing, but over the years the one thing that started to irritate me more and more was how U.S. officials would come in to the embassy and whenever they would meet with the FSNs they would always have this one line about “we would be nothing without you guys; if it wasn’t for you nothing would operate; it’s you guys who run everything so we really need you guys and appreciate you” and all this. For me, when I left in 2008, it was at a time when the Government of Jordan had removed subsidies on things like fuel, and life had gotten a lot more expensive. At the salary that I was getting from USAID, the U.S. government, it looked like I would not be able to heat my house and educate my children the way I wanted to. Then having Jim Beaver come in and tell us this, sort of the hundredth official

that came through and told us this, I told them “Sir, please do not repeat this.” If there was a real appreciation for the FSNs it would be reflected in how we are compensated and how we’re seen, but to tell us that everything would fall apart without us, but not take that into consideration when you’re looking at compensating us or looking at rewarding us, then it’s meaningless. What you’re saying right now has absolutely no meaning for me right now, no worth. I wanted to make the comparison, but I didn’t say it, with the plantation owner saying “well, if it wasn’t for you guys, we’d never pick the cotton.” It just didn’t feel right.

*Q: Wow. What was his reaction?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, he came over, took my name, said “I’ll get back to you on this, this is a big concern,” whatever. I think they got an email from him a week later saying “I’m really concerned about this.” I noticed all the Americans who were sitting there, mission director and others, they all looked at each other and nodding, “right on” and all this stuff, but I’m old enough and been in the industry long enough to know that it isn’t going to change anything, and nothing did change, and I subsequently left. When you’ve reached that degree of frustration it’s probably a good idea to leave, and I did.

*Q: Let me just follow up on that whole idea of compensation. Was there within the USAID and embassy community, was there an FSN committee, do you know anything about the annual salary surveys they did?*

AL JIBIRI: That time was difficult, because we’d gone several years...we’d done the surveys, some of us FSNs were privy to the results of some of these surveys, but the word was there’s a big war in Iraq and Afghanistan right now and we don’t have the money to raise your salaries. Ok, we’re in this together. Then, they go for several years and we start finding out the U.S. staff are getting a two percent increase. That’s not huge but at least they’re getting some increase. I remember telling the mission director this, that we FSNs are an afterthought. After you’ve covered the salary increases for the American staff, after you’ve covered their rents and their fuel expenses and all of these other things, what’s left is the FSN’s, and at that point you say “sorry, we don’t have any money to give you a raise; we have this big war in Iraq and Afghanistan going on.” This had gone on for several years, two or three at least, of absolutely no raises. By 2008 I’d had enough of it.

*Q: I can understand that, and then to have people tell you that you’re the most important element...*

AL JIBIRI: By god, it was so irritating. We’d heard the stories. For instance, some of the funny stuff. “FSN” almost became almost a derogatory term. I’d heard field people calling USAID/Washington people the “Washington FSNs.” It was funny to me. I assumed that to make it less derogatory, they changed the acronym from FSNs to LES,

Locally Engaged Staff, but that acronym is L-E-S, LESS! No matter what they come up with, somehow, it's making you feel less!

*Q: That may not have been a brilliant maneuver!*

AL JIBIRI: I think somebody should have thought about that one a little bit more. So, regarding FSNs, I remember a colleague of mine who'd been with the mission much longer than me, told a funny story. He said being at USAID as us FSNs, it's like sitting on a bench at the train station and watching these trains and these people get on and off the trains. That was his perspective. I thought it was a little funny.

*Q: As we're talking about some of these management things, let me ask about training. You had mentioned having to sit through EEO training, and you had mentioned when you first came in that you were given a lot to do at the outset and that you did a lot of learning by doing. I'm curious, did you have an opportunity while at AID to do any formal training?*

AL JIBIRI: I attended a whole bunch of trade courses, and I always attended the economic growth conferences they had in Washington. The one that stands out most was arranged by Jon Lindborg. In 2000 I attended this course at HIID (Harvard Institute for International Development), which isn't sort of the best name in the world, on privatization. It was a privatization program for three weeks.

*Q: It was before HIID folded for their work in Russia!*

AL JIBIRI: It was actually the very last year they existed! Then they called it the Kennedy School. It is ironic that I did the privatization thing there, but it was a very useful course. It was three weeks in Cambridge, funded by USAID. It was extremely useful, a really, really good course, among others. I went for training on trade, on finance, on lots of stuff.

*Q: Did you do the program design and program management courses as well?*

AL JIBIRI: I remember the training courses needed to get various project management certifications.

*Q: Ok, so you did have to do that management stuff?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, and they also sent me to one of these emerging leaders' courses once. Those were the kinds of things I remember.

*Q: Good. So, they did provide some training opportunities?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes!

*Q: I think we'll maybe do another 10 or 15 minutes today and then we'll follow up tomorrow. Are you hanging in there?*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, I just noticed we were close to two hours now.

*Q: I'm trying to think what would be best. Or maybe we should close off for now and reconvene in the morning and come back to talking about some of the economic growth programs.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, that would be useful. This, for me, is a great opportunity because I believe the U.S. government did great things for a time here, and I'm really happy that there's a historical record of this. The great things the U.S. government did need to be recorded in history. I really appreciate being a part of it. The programs are what needs to be highlighted, the great things we did here are really what needs to be highlighted.

*Q: Ok, well let's reconvene tomorrow morning at the same time, and let's talk through some of those programs, and then we can morph into your post USAID life and some of the lessons learned. One question I will ask you and you can think a little bit about is, if after nine years on the other side of the table, would you have done anything differently from your AID side of the table earlier. Give that one some thought!*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, I think I can give you some things, I'll definitely think about it!

*Q: Ok, very good, let's stop for now and we'll reconvene tomorrow.*

AL JIBIRI: Excellent. Thank you.

*Q: Thanks very much, Jamal.*

*This is Carol Peasley, and this is the second interview with Jamal al Jibiri. It is January 12, 2018 and we are doing this by telephone. Jamal, thank you again for giving us a chance to talk with you about your career with USAID and after. As I recall when we last spoke a week or so ago, you were talking a lot about the economic growth portfolio at USAID in Jordan. I was wondering if you could talk about that a bit more, putting it into context of U.S.-Jordanian relationships and what else was going on in the economic policy front, and put it all into a larger context of what it all meant.*

AL JIBIRI: Just to remind you, I started with USAID in February of 1997, and I think the one event that had the greatest impact on our economic portfolio was the ascension of King Abdullah II to the throne in 1999 after his majesty King Hussein passed away. If I was to look back on those days, and I say this a lot to my Jordanian friends and others as

well, I thought that King Hussein's greatest accomplishment was the survival of Jordan as a sovereign country for as long as he did. He took over in the 1950s, and for the longest time he was operating in a neighborhood where the most powerful forces didn't think Jordan deserved to be a country. So, the fact that Jordan survived as a country was I thought his biggest accomplishment. He was always much more of a political animal than, say, someone who was overly concerned about the economy. I think that with the arrival of King Abdullah in 1999, he started off with an immediate focus on improving the standard of living for Jordanians. It was the core of almost everything that happened. His Majesty's concern recognized that after a long period, the survival of Jordan seemed assured; now we need to develop economically and become self-sufficient.

Up until then, there were a lot of holdovers from what you can only describe as a command economy structure that evolved out of the Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s and the consequent socialist nature of most Arab economies at the time. In the 1980s, the transformation that was happening in the U.K. with Margaret Thatcher and the greater private sector focus of Ronald Reagan began to have an influence. By the 1990s, there was no question about the importance of economic growth and the importance of private sector growth and that kind of thing. That was overwhelmingly the discussion everywhere. It appeared that King Abdullah had definitely absorbed that and understood that Jordan as it was structured historically was not going to be sustainable going forward. He basically started pushing many of the economic reform efforts, and this was right at the beginning of the U.S. government's decision to massively increase its aid levels to Jordan. It had just started towards the end of 1997, so by the end of 1999 we had started to get used to the larger AID levels and we actually had the resources to come to the table to support the economic reforms that His Majesty King Abdullah was adamant about pushing.

So that was the great coincidence; it was great that it happened, and I think it brought USAID to the forefront of economic development in Jordan. It was an ideal moment. That moment has passed. The funding levels have stayed high; they're still quite large and they've grown over the years, but the desire for economic reform has slowed as a result of pushback by the more traditional forces in the country. The economic reform effort has thus slowed down. For those several years, the five or six years we had sufficient resources to be able to respond to the actual desire by Jordan as a result of His Majesty's decision to institute economic reforms in the country, was great. The greatest issue we faced was to determine the best kinds of projects to be able to respond to that demand.

You reminded me that spoke a bit about the different projects that were in place at the time. I don't think we need to go over that again, but we had the AMIR projects: AMIR I and AMIR II. We did all kinds of capital markets reform, WTO (World Trade Organization) accession, and free trade agreements with the U.S. We were able to accomplish all kinds of really great things at that time to help Jordan free up its economy

from the kind of regulatory constraints that had existed for so long before that. We had projects where we worked directly with the Jordanian private sector trying to help them deal with the effects of joining the WTO and the free trade agreement with the U.S. and helping them increase their exports. I think we had an excellent combination of activities within the economic growth sector that was very responsive to the country's needs and was actually very successful.

*Q: You started talking about King Abdullah and his initial interest. You focused on economic growth and improving the living standards for Jordanians. I'm wondering whether it was explicitly stated, or implicit, that behind this was more inclusive economic growth. I ask it in part because I found it very interesting that the initial program that you had that was doing so much policy work was AMIR, which was Access to Micro-financing and Policy Reform. Did the fact that the mission had been working in microfinance for some years and thus shown a commitment to poverty reduction enhance your ability to then work on broader economic reform? Did that link to a more inclusive economic growth make a difference?*

AL JIBIRI: Actually, going back to the various dates I started off our discussion with just now, the AMIR program was awarded in 1998, either towards the end of 1997 or the beginning of 1998. It was actually quite a small program in which the policy reform components were very small. The World Bank and other organizations were trying to institute policy reform, but they weren't getting very far with those reforms. So, we did include a light element of "reform" in the initial AMIR project. The primary focus, you are correct, was actually microfinance. In fact, this project actually helped create the microfinance industry in Jordan where one really didn't exist before. We all understood the importance of alleviating poverty and working with the local communities and empowering people at the micro level through microfinance and that kind of thing. We almost, in effect, created microfinance industry, and we had some incredible success stories. We were able to, by the end of the project, have four financially sustainable MFIs (microfinance institutions), two of which we actually created through grants. The other two had previously existed but had not been effective in the microfinance industry. We did a lot to increase communications efforts around microfinance and introduced the concept throughout both the private sector and the public sector in the country. I remember in those early days when everybody questioned charging such high interest rates to poor people; there were accusations of usurious rates. We were able to initiate a discussion and were able to work with the regulators and the private sector to establish these MFI's, and within what I thought was a relatively short period of time, work to achieve financial sustainability. That was a major part of the engagement initially, but then in 1999, as I said earlier, the arrival of King Abdullah changed the dynamic and discussion toward the need for high level reforms and real policy improvements in the country.

*Q: I understand that. Do you think the fact that you had been working in the microfinance area earlier, did that make it easier for the U.S. to be engaged in the high-level policy dialogue?*

AL JIBIRI: I think they were two different issues, and stakeholders were completely different. If by that you mean our success in the microfinance industry, did that allow us to get into higher level areas, I really can't say. We were responding to a need at a time on the policy reform side of things that really had nothing to do with microfinance.

*Q: Ok. I don't recall whether we discussed this before or not. If we did, just remind me. As you got more involved with the higher-level policy issues, such as WTO, I assume there was much more coordination then with the embassy. Is that correct?*

AL JIBIRI: We were very fortunate to have a very good economic counselor at the embassy, a series of very good economic counselors. Our Department of Commerce colleagues were very helpful as well as we were coordinating very closely with USTR (U.S. Trade Representative) throughout the negotiating process. So various agencies of the U.S. government were working closely with each other. It was us at USAID with the money able to respond to the needs that put us at the center of everything, but we were doing it very much in close coordination with all of those agencies.

*Q: Were there any special issues that you had to face as a Foreign Service National when you got involved in those kinds of issues, interagency coordination, or was it accepted?*

AL JIBIRI: For me the interesting thing was, and I thought it was absolutely natural, that I started getting drawn into discussions at a high level within the embassy itself, meetings led by the ambassador talking about strategy and approaches and that kind of thing. I was invited to many of these meetings. I felt very fortunate to be able to be included in all of that. For me, I understood that it was very important to be able to understand that the U.S. foreign government policy interests did not diverge from the core interests of the government of Jordan. In my mind, I'm not working with the "enemy" basically, we're allies and through the work we're doing I'm able to help my country. The ability to approach everything from that perspective and gain the trust of both my American colleagues and our Jordanian beneficiaries and counterparts...because I was Jordanian, I was able to talk to them effectively. Again, I was very fortunate to be at meetings at the ministerial level, accompanying either the ambassador or the mission director or the economic growth director. I was always invited to those.

*Q: That's very good, and I'm sure you were an important bridge and provided a lot of insights on how best to approach the issues.*

AL JIBIRI: I realized very quickly that being a Jordanian when you walk into meetings...and I thought that was one of the things of value that I could present really



quickly...I could read what was going on in the room on the other side, from somebody sort of winking at somebody else, somebody smiling at the right or wrong time, I could pass that on to my American colleagues and say “This guy isn’t serious” or “I think we have a real partner” and that kind of thing.

*Q: That’s a very valuable skill to be able to provide.*

AL JIBIRI: A lot of times in the beginning I would sit there very quietly, my hobby was just to watch these people as my colleagues would speak. I’m just looking around the table at the reactions, and a lot of times you can read that. Sometimes you overheard something, but sometimes it’s just a look.

*Q: Right! And I’m sure there were probably times you had to explain the American side to the Jordanians as well.*

AL JIBIRI: Of course! I actually went through a time, when Anne was here, that I had to do that quite a bit. At that time, I’d been in the mission for seven or eight years, and I was having to explain what some of my American colleagues really meant to people who had become offended by something somebody said. I found myself in those kinds of positions a lot more than I would have liked.

*Q: That actually raises an interesting question. Obviously when AID is working in a country, a lot depends on the cultural sensitivity of individuals. You probably have seen a lot of variability in the ability of Americans to work effectively in a culturally sensitive way. Do you think that AID can do more to try to train people, either before they go overseas, or are there things that could uniquely be done within a country? I’ve never heard of FSNs doing a training program for the American staff at post, but would something like that be effective?*

AL JIBIRI: I think a lot of these skill sets come naturally to people. Some people are tone deaf, some people are more attuned to it, something in their DNA or something that they grew up with. The primary issue I found and where I saw the greatest variance among the different Americans that came here was the ability to understand that they are providing assistance as partners -- and that the host countries are not beggars. People are very sensitive to that. Again, towards the end of my career I was running into situations where the Jordanians would feel very insulted by certain things that were said, making them feel like they were beggars when the Americans would talk in terms of “giving you all this stuff.” You get Jordanians saying “who the hell do they think they are, we don’t need their assistance, we don’t need this and that.” I’m not sure if certain people are naturally inclined to that. I think it’s more important that senior levels of the mission identify that quickly and try to address it in some way, either through training or whatever.

*Q: An interesting point, as some of it is innate, some people have it and some don't so it's simply not a matter of training. But certainly there can be a greater sensitization to the impact of such attitudes. Just on that, certainly if one looks at the literature today on AID effectiveness, host country ownership is one of the key principles that gets spoken about the most. Because you've done a substantial amount of policy reform, I wonder if you have any thoughts on how best to achieve that when you are using a program to try to support change in a country, how best to do that in the context of real host country leadership. In fact, I always like the term host country leadership as opposed to ownership, because with ownership you can sell something to someone as opposed to having them really own it and lead it.*

AL JIBIRI: That is a really tricky one, because you as somebody who's providing assistance and expertise to help people improve their economy; at times, this means having to convey a difficult message. It might be clear to you what needs to happen, but it's difficult to pass that on, to get the other side to understand the importance of something happening. A lot of times there's resistance to it. So even on the leadership side of things, it's really a combination of carrot and stick. It's not entirely carrot, there has to be a stick there as well.

The best example I can think of was when we were building a large industrial park in the south of Jordan in Aqaba. It was called the Aqaba International Industrial Estate. We were constructing the whole thing. It was Jon Lindborg heading up the economic growth office at the time. We had decided early on that we would partner with a semi-governmental organization called the Jordan Industrial Estates Corporation (JIEC). They were all appointed by the government, and they claimed to have private sector ownership, or partial private sector ownership, but there really was no private sector in it. We had decided that the best way to go forward with this was to outsource the management of the industrial park to the private sector. Of course, there was resistance, and this organization, the Jordan Industrial Estates Corporation, its de facto chairman was always the minister of industry and trade.

I remember a time when Jon and I had a meeting with the minister, and he was saying "we really appreciate this industrial estate, but we believe the JIEC should run this, should manage it." Jon, very astutely at the time, said "well, we're putting \$20 million into this, and if you insist that you don't want private sector management, and you have \$20 million, you are more than welcome to do it yourself!" The minister sort of backed down on that position and said, "No, no, it's fine, bring in the private sector." In fact, right now, it's unfortunate that Jon is retired in Hawaii and can't see it, but it is the most successful industrial park in the entire country because of the private sector management. At the end of the day a firm called Parks and Frankenhofen submitted the winning proposal to manage this industrial park. Every time you have a U.S. Ambassador...I was just looking on Facebook the other day, the Dutch Ambassador was down there. This is

the big success story that everybody goes and shows in terms of effective industrial park management in the country.

*Q: That's important. Let me just ask one other question related to policy reform. I know at some missions in some countries, they often supported local think tanks to do analytic work that helped to then develop a cadre of reform supporters within a country so that it was not necessarily being so much imposed from the outside but with more internal support. Was that done at all in Jordan, or were you able to develop enough consensus on the reforms through other ways?*

AL JIBIRI: We developed consensus through other ways. In fact, there were several proposals throughout my time with USAID to fund think tanks. Every time, at least it was my feeling and I think the feeling of my colleagues was similar, that we always felt we were being approached by people who wanted to create their own little kingdoms rather than do development. We really never ended up funding anything like that. Fortunately, in that context, there is an organization here which is a think tank, you could call it a think tank, called the Jordan Strategy Forum, that was developed independently by the 20 biggest private sector operators in the country and that continues and is a very effective organization. In fact, I approached them when they first opened, and they said it was a point of honor that they would not accept funds from any donor to carry out their work.

*Q: Oh, that's very interesting! Obviously, they became then a force for helping develop ideas and consensus on a pro-economic growth agenda.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yes. They've been around for five-six years now, and in fact they've become a very potent organization. They produce reports about the health of the Jordanian economy, the issues that are happening and that kind of thing. They put out publications, and they're doing very, very well without any donor support.

*Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about the economic growth portfolio and the impact of AID work that we haven't already discussed?*

AL JIBIRI: I don't know if we spoke about this last time, but one of the things that really hurts me as someone who has spent so long with USAID is the loss of stature over recent years. For the longest time we had stature as an organization that was commensurate with the amount of resources that we were bringing to the table, but I've started to notice, and I hear it a lot from Jordanians as well, that the stature of USAID is not what it used to be.

*Q: And is that due to the people who are there?*

AL JIBIRI: I think it's a combination of factors. Jordan, for a time among U.S. government people and USAID foreign service officers, had become a cushy sort of place, so the people who had served in places like Afghanistan and Iraq or other places

were promised Jordan as a compensation for having served in these other places. I think that had a price to it, because a lot of these people were burned out by the time they came here. The other part of it was...and I think we also went through it...and this is something we haven't discussed...was the assassination of Larry Foley here, and the impact that had for a time around the time of the Iraq war. That had an impact on Americans' desire to actually come out here after that. The reputation is that it's a great family post, but at the same time there was that element of danger introduced when Larry Foley was assassinated here.

*Q: Just for those who might be reading this later, Larry Foley was the executive officer in the mission, and he was killed when? That was in 2000...*

AL JIBIRI: It would have been in 2003. The Iraq war was started in March of 2003, so this would have either been the end of 2002 or before March 2003.

*Q: Right, so that obviously had a severe impact on recruitment. Just on this point of the stature of the AID mission, I think people might often equate stature with only the mission director or the most senior person at post, but I suspect that's not the case. The stature of the mission depends upon all levels of the mission.*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, definitely. This might have existed before, and I hadn't been aware of it, but since I departed USAID and through my work with DAI had been exposed to the work of other donors and have been able to be in on other discussions with other donors, and have noticed that when there's a group sitting around the table, the opinions of the USAID officers seem to be disconnected from the reality of other donors who often appear to recognize situations on the ground in a much better way.

*Q: Now you're trying to depress me!*

AL JIBIRI: I think a lot of it is that is historical; it's the ivory tower thing. For instance, DFID has over the last year restarted an operation here that they are actually growing, and it is going to be much bigger going forward, whereas they'd closed down about 10 years ago. I see those folks out and about with the private sector a lot more than the U.S. people. The U.S. people, I noticed, have their preferred list of usual suspects that they prefer to talk to, and at the end of the day they say "we consulted with the private sector," but they don't have as broad a reach as others. The Dutch have started to grow as a presence, and I see their people much more in the weeds with the private sector than I've seen the Americans at USAID.

*Q: I've often heard, and I'm very glad that most of my career was before email ruled the world, that AID people tend to get tied to their desks much more now than they used to be and they just don't get out of the office as much generally. Do you think that's part of it, that there are so many bureaucratic requirements that tie people to their desks, or for*

*other reasons that may be affecting the ability of people to reach out to a broader array of Jordanians?*

AL JIBIRI: There are several factors. First of all, it's almost impossible to get into any U.S. embassy right now because of all the security. I suspect that it could be similar in other places, but what happens is they end up identifying a café right next to the embassy, and they end up having most of their meetings there. It becomes known that all the embassy people are having their meetings in this café, and that's just to work around the security requirements at the embassy and to make it easier for partners. When I was there, I thought at certain times it was actually good to impose the security requirements on somebody. I remember talking to my bosses when we needed to have meetings with certain people, and I would say, "make them walk through that security, show them...I don't want to call it stature...the gravitas of the U.S. government." Some people just needed to see that, in my opinion. But you are right, they really aren't getting out nearly enough.

*Q: That's interesting. Any sort of further observations on the cultural side, and then let me also ask a question...and I suspect this is not an issue in Jordan but I'll ask it anyway...whether there are any special challenges that women working for USAID might face culturally working in Jordan, or are there any other cultural observations you'd like to make?*

AL JIBIRI: Jordan is, in terms of gender, one of the worst countries in the world for labor participation by women. I think only about 12-14% of the labor force is female in this country, which is terrible. Saudi Arabia is even better than Jordan on that. Despite that, there have been, as I remember and go back, some powerful women on USAID staff, both local and American, who worked at this, so I've never really deemed that as some kind of obstacle to getting things done.

*Q: Ok, I was just curious. Somewhat also on the cultural side, culture within the FSN community? Again, this may not be an issue in Jordan, but I know in other countries there have been issues of regional origin within the country, ethnic, or religious backgrounds of FSN staff that have caused tension within AID offices. I'm just curious...and I suspect not...whether that was ever an issue within Jordan?*

AL JIBIRI: I think there is a perception of that from the people on the outside, but it's not really the case within the mission.

*Q: That's good to hear. Let me see...can I shift over to talking about your own professional growth within the AID mission? You started out as a project management specialist, and you ended up being basically the deputy director of the office.*

AL JIBIRI: I hate to be cynical about this, but during my time with USAID, there were at least two attempts, one during Anne's tenure here, to get me a Grade 13, and they were turned down by Washington in both instances, even though others in the mission did get the Grade 13. In fact, I thought that by taking on greater responsibility as the #2 in the office that there would be a stronger argument for a Grade 13, but it really didn't. Others also recognized, and I have to be honest about it without wanting to toot my own horn, my considerable influence within the economic growth office as well.

*Q: Do you know what the criteria are, or were, for getting approval for an FSN 13?*

AL JIBIRI: The one example given was Egypt: they kept saying that the first guy to ever get a 13 was in Egypt and he was running the Aswan Dam or something. So, you really have to be a superman to get a 13! The other part of it was that you can't base the argument on the amount of work you're doing; instead, you have to argue the responsibility you're assuming, and for some reason, the people reviewing the request or application never concluded that I had assumed sufficient responsibility to warrant a 13.

*Q: I know that the different roles between the embassy FSN staff and AID staff often create issues in some posts because USAID relies to a greater extent on its FSN staff and therefore has usually had more highly graded staff than in the embassy. Was that an element in any of this?*

AL JIBIRI: We were always viewed as being the special ones at the embassy. It was always noted that the maximum grade that FSN staff could get in the embassy, outside of USAID, was an 11, and very few people had an 11. A 12 was something completely unattainable for anyone outside USAID. So, I think as a result of that, you had your average USAID grade for positions not at 12 actually higher than their equivalents in the State Department and other agencies.

*Q: I'm also now recalling when we spoke last week that you talked about the slowness of salary adjustments as well.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. Well, that was a specific time. I think they've since adjusted it. They argued that, because of the war we don't have any money so you're not going to get any raises.

*Q: In general, it sounds as if the Jordan mission was traditionally quite "lean and mean;" it didn't have as many American direct hire positions and therefore they provided much more room for leadership positions for the FSN staff.*

AL JIBIRI: There's a lot of things in that, but more recently...and this is after I left USAID...I understood a mission director, Beth Paige, came to Jordan and concluded the mission was totally understaffed, and you started to get a lot more Americans coming in.

I was hearing this from the FSNs, that the levels of responsibility of the FSNs declined significantly from that time.

*Q: That's interesting.*

AL JIBIRI: I don't think there are any FSN deputies there anymore.

*Q: That's sort of moving in the opposite direction from how AID says they want to operate.*

AL JIBIRI: I heard the argument was, at the time, that this specific mission director had been in Bangladesh, which had a smaller funding level but had more staff. Using that model, she concluded that more staff was needed in Jordan.

*Q: In many ways, that's probably a very simple thing for management folks to understand, that if you want to enhance the role of FSNs you don't expand the number of Americans. Anyway...looking at that balance is important. Additional things to talk about with regard to your work in Jordan before we move on to talk about what you did after you left AID?*

AL JIBIRI: For me, they were the best 12 years of my life, it was a great time. I thought I was part of something great, and that's something that I'll always remember, despite talking about some of the bitterness and whatever towards the end. Overall, looking back on my career, I see the 11 ½ years I spent with USAID as being the best years of my career.

*Q: You left in September of 2008?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, my last day at USAID was August 31, 2008 and my first day at DAI was September 1, 2008.

*Q: You gave yourself a break between jobs, I see! The major factors for leaving AID were, I assume, the things we have just spoken about, as well as the attractive possibility that DAI presented. I assume it was a combination of factors that caused you to leave.*

AL JIBIRI: Actually, the one person that I remember very well having that discussion with me was a lady called Diana Putnam, the economic growth director in Amman. One of the things she kept telling me was "look, it's going to be a tradeoff between compensation and stature. You as a senior USAID Jordanian official have quite a bit of stature, but you're compensated below the market value. If you go to the private sector, you're going to have much better compensation, but you will not retain that stature that you have at USAID." She was always telling me, "You've got to plan forward. What do you want for yourself after USAID? You have to make a decision about where you want

to go in your career and then start to plan and prepare for it.” She was actually the first and only American office director who spoke to me about career planning.

The thing was, and this is something I’ve had discussions with a lot of people on, I had this feeling that if you stay...there’s a general sense here in Jordan that if you are an FSN in the mission then that’s a job for life. There are all these incentives that the U.S. government offered to extend your USAID career, or your U.S. government career. Among them is the opportunity to apply for a special immigrant visa. When I was first hired it was 15 years of service, and you had to prove you’d done a whole bunch of special things to qualify for that. And then, if I remember correctly, they changed it to 18 years. I don’t know what it is now, if that’s changed. I remember there were some odd things in it, you had to have saved an American’s life and do some weird things to prove you qualified for U.S. citizenship. Anyway, the possibility of a special immigrant visa is a huge incentive for a lot of people.

For me, I was afraid that spending so long with one organization would cause my skill sets to start to atrophy and that my worth would start to decline in terms of the job market. It was always in the back of my mind, at any point in time, what is my market value? What is somebody willing to pay me for the value they think I can bring to the table? I concluded that the longer I stayed with USAID, the more my market value would decline, so that was another part of the thought process I had in terms of wanting to leave USAID.

*Q: That makes clear sense. So, you made the decision it was time to go and you began to look for alternatives?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, I remember very clearly the way I went about it was very unusual. Once I made the decision that I’d been with USAID long enough, I just started making it public to many of the people I knew in government and the private sector that I was looking for a job. I reached out, I asked, I did several interviews with primarily Jordanian enterprises. This was like a six-month process from the time I made it public that I was looking for a job until I actually found one. It was a total coincidence that I had, during this time, been introduced to Tony Barclay, who was the DAI CEO at the time. He had come to Jordan and asked for a meeting with the economic growth office, and he met my boss Steve Garnier and myself, and then a month later I got a call from his secretary that he’d come back. I understood eventually that his ultimate purpose in meeting with us at the mission was that he felt DAI, as a subcontractor on a certain project, wasn’t being dealt with fairly by Bearing Point. We really couldn’t do much for him, but during those two meetings, outside of that specific issue, we developed a very good rapport. We were talking about politics, the economy, lots of things outside of what USAID is doing.

On his third trip, even though I didn’t know he was in town, a friend of mine told him that Jamal’s looking for a job. That’s when he asked for a meeting with me, and then



asked me if I was willing to consider DAI. I said I hadn't thought about it, but it could be interesting, and then that kind of kicked off a very long interview process with practically the entire DAI senior management. About a month later, they concluded they would offer me a job. To his credit, the very first thing he told me was, when we both agreed it was something I was willing to consider, he said "You need to talk to the RLA (Regional Legal Advisor) and put it out there and take all the legal steps that are required under U.S. government law to recuse yourself from anything that has to do with DAI until the decision is made."

*Q: It's good that he was taking precautions to make sure you weren't getting yourself into any trouble.*

AL JIBIRI: Right. The funny thing was that was when I did talk to the legal advisor and said that I wanted to go through all the right steps, I was told that because I was an FSN a lot of the restrictions didn't apply to me! I thought that was interesting!

*Q: That is interesting!*

AL JIBIRI: I ended up signing a paper, making sure there was nothing obvious, but none of the longer-term restrictions that apply to U.S. citizens applied to me. That's how I understood it from the legal advisor.

*Q: That's an interesting point. So, they were eager to have you, and you took the job. Was the job in Bethesda?*

AL JIBIRI: I was hired as a managing director in DAI to set up a Jordan operation.

*Q: Ok. Was it a Jordan specific office?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, we set up a limited liability company here, and then we set up another company registration for doing business outside Jordan and that kind of thing.

*Q: What were your responsibilities? Can you talk about how you went about doing this?*

AL JIBIRI: My initial responsibility was...no big surprise...was to grow the portfolio in Jordan. What I took great pride in was, up until the moment they hired me, DAI had never signed a contract in Jordan outside of the water sector. After they hired me, because of my brilliance, DAI managed to win three large projects in the economic growth sector.

*Q: With USAID or with other donors?*

AL JIBIRI: The most significant was USAID.

*Q: What was that in?*

AL JIBIRI: The first one was a fiscal reform project. The second was a Jordan competitiveness project, and the third one was a workforce development project.

*Q: So obviously you were very busy then, creating an office and getting new business for it.*

AL JIBIRI: To me, it was a really interesting challenge. While I was at USAID, I had run into a lot of ex-USAID people that had started working for implementing partners who had come through the country, and the one thing I noticed about many of them—not all of them, but the majority of them—was that they were talking, when they would come into the mission, as if they were still with USAID. From my perspective, I remember thinking while these people were talking to me, don't you understand that you're now an implementing partner and you're not here to tell us what to do? I was very cognizant that I could not be acting, and I know those kinds of people don't do very well within the implementing partner environment, within the companies they join, I expect, because if they act that way with USAID, I'm sure they act that way with their own colleagues in the companies they work with and it just doesn't go over very well. So, I made a conscious decision from the start that there was always a very clear distinction in my mind that I am no longer with USAID; if I talk to USAID people, I don't talk to them as if we're buddy-buddies and that kind of thing. I'm coming to you as an implementing partner and that had to be clear. And you ultimately are a client and I am a service provider and we have to be able to provide a service that is up to your expectations.

*Q: You knew from the very beginning that you wanted to behave differently?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, I thought if I was to operate that way...and to be clear, I had developed a reputation during my USAID career, like Diana Putnam was talking about, between stature and compensation, and I understood that I couldn't walk into any kind of meeting assuming that I had the same stature that I did when I was with USAID.

*Q: That was very perceptive.*

AL JIBIRI: It's very clear. In fact, one of the first challenges I had to deal with was when I was reaching out to government officials and private sector people here in Jordan after I joined DAI. I would realize in the beginnings of meetings that some of them still thought that I was with USAID. I would have to very quickly point out to them that I'm not with USAID anymore, I'm not here representing USAID, I'm representing DAI, and I want that distinction to be very clear from the very start.

*Q: I assume you were also then dealing with other donors in Jordan as well for DAI and looking for business.*

AL JIBIRI: I don't want to give out too much about internal things, but we did ultimately make a decision winning USAID business was not sufficient to have a local geographic presence. That was also clear because we as an implementing partner are winning contracts in many other locations where we do not have an official geographic presence as a registered enterprise in that specific country. It was made clear that we had to be able to pursue contracts with other entities than USAID. We did pursue them, with organizations such as the African Development Bank. At that time Jordan became the regional office for DAI, so we were going to the Gulf states, to the African Development Bank, the World Bank, IFC (International Finance Corporation), EU (European Union), CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency), some of the other European agencies. While I had my DAI corporate responsibilities, DFID was not present on the ground.

*Q: That must have been interesting to see how the different donors operated.*

AL JIBIRI: It was definitely quite interesting to see. It's a much different world than the USAID world.

*Q: Just out of curiosity, did you also look at clients that wouldn't have been donor funded but that might have been requests from institutions themselves?*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yes. Specifically, in the Gulf, we were looking for work with national governments as well. We did explore opportunities there and put some proposals together in Oman, in the Emirates, in Abu Dhabi, in places like that. In Libya, in the time after Qaddafi, I actually found myself going back and forth to Libya to support a colleague there after the overthrow of Qaddafi and before things went really south in Libya. We realized there was a need in Libya specifically for development work. Before things got really nasty security-wise, we were meeting with quite a few Libyan government officials.

*Q: Looking at your CV, it appears that you also took on some specific project responsibilities as well.*

AL JIBIRI: More recently, after we won the Jordan competitiveness project...this was around the time that DAI decided to close down the corporate office here.

*Q: Oh, I see, so from 2008-2014 you were doing a management function for DAI.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. And until 2013 or 2014 when the office had closed.

*Q: Ok, I see. So then you became an advisor on one of the projects.*

AL JIBIRI: I eventually became DCOP (Deputy Chief of Party) of the project, and while I was DCOP of the project the interesting thing that came up, and it was really remarkable, was the international community's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. It was led and is still being led by the World Bank to a large extent. What the donors decided, primarily the Europeans but also the Americans. In many ways, it was due to a cynical equation in which the Europeans were inundated with Syrian refugees, specifically Germany, and they came to the conclusion that it would be cheaper to give a whole bunch of money to places like Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey to keep the refugees there rather than have them go to Europe. That's when they all decided they would get together and put funding together for Jordan and Turkey to deal with the Syrian refugee crisis.

*Q: And that's what's referred to as the London Compact?*

AL JIBIRI: That's the London Compact. It was unique ... and the assumption was that the way to deal with the refugees was to try to create economic, job opportunities in these local economies. So, it was one of the first times, if not the first time that a humanitarian crisis was being addressed through economic development interventions. That was the idea. The World Bank came in with the EU: there was a combination of funding and conditions and trade preferences that were given to Jordan to grow the economy so it would be able to absorb some of the Syrians into the economy.

*Q: But it was for the development of the Jordanian productive sector to allow it to employ both Jordanians and Syrian refugees?*

AL JIBIRI: Exactly. None of the assistance is exclusively for ... none of the Compact assistance is exclusively for the refugees. Of course, there are humanitarian interventions, UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees) and others that deal exclusively with refugees in the camps and that sort of thing, but in terms of the broader vision for the Compact, the idea was to help grow the economy for the benefit of both Jordanians and Syrians.

*Q: Right, because normally in refugee situations the refugees are not supposed to be living on the local economy, so this was a concession basically realizing how large the population was and the need to try to integrate it in some way into the economy?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes; 1 ½ million refugees were introduced into a country of about 7 ½ million people. That's been discussed a lot -- 20% of the nation was refugees. And that's a massive shock to the economy in so many ways, from the drain on various natural resources like water, and the provision of basic services like electricity and other kinds of things, and Jordan being one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of water sufficiency. A lot of things had to be addressed to be able to absorb these refugees.

*Q: Did the U.S. participate in this program?*

AL JIBIRI: Oh, yes, yes. It is a major contributor to it. The idea of the donor community, primarily led by the U.S. and the World Bank, was to set up a project management unit within the ministry of planning and international cooperation that would have two primary functions: one would be to monitor the donor commitments toward the Compact as well as the government of Jordan's commitment to the Compact; the other one was to align donor efforts around Compact efforts.

*Q: Was there a trust fund created, or did the individual donors do their own programming within an aligned program?*

AL JIBIRI: Both. There was a trust fund created primarily funded by the British, and in fact this trust fund is growing. But there are and continue to be donor bilateral activities funded by various donors.

*Q: Is the U.S. contributing to the trust fund?*

AL JIBIRI: No, not that I know of.

*Q: So, the U.S. is running parallel programs?*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, in fact what I've started to hear more recently is that it's actually become much more difficult under this administration for USAID or the U.S. government to contribute to a trust fund.

*Q: Yeah, that obviously makes it a much more complex operation to manage if it's managing parallel activities.*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, and I'll tell you, we came in to develop what the needs were, what the objectives were, and what kinds of organizational structure we would need, what kinds of people, and we submitted the package to USAID. And USAID actually funded the PMU (Project Management Unit) and continued to fund it while I was there. The staff at the PMU are being funded by USAID, and there's talk of DFID taking over some of that funding.

*Q: That is an alternative way, if you can't put it in the trust fund by covering some of the operating costs. And I assume this program...when did it start, this Compact, and is it being successful?*

AL JIBIRI: The Compact started off at the London Summit in February of 2016. The PMU was set up, and my first day of work as director was the beginning of July 2016,

and it's still ongoing. In terms of the expectations of the PMU, it's overall done well, while I was there and after I left,

*Q: And it's still obviously still quite new as well, so one wouldn't expect to see major impact yet, but it is working, it is operating effectively.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, one of the ultimate purposes is to serve as an intermediary between the donors and the government on a lot of issues and it's done that. It's proved its value to the government and its proved its value, I believe, to the donor community.

*Q: And there are policy reform elements to it?*

AL JIBIRI: The interesting thing there is that the primary driver in the Compact is what's called the Program for Results activity, I think the first one that the World Bank started. There is a \$300 million loan given to Jordan that had DLIs, or Disbursement Linked Indicators, that if a certain policy is achieved. The primary indicator there is the number of work permits issued to Syrians. [See Center for Global Development report on the Compact: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/jordan-compact-three-years-on>]

*Q: Right, ok.*

AL JIBIRI: But there were definitely other indicators, and each one of these indicators has a specific amount tied to it. I always saw it as very similar to the U.S. government's cash transfer program.

*Q: Right. And do you think that's an effective mechanism?*

AL JIBIRI: Yeah, when you have an incentive for the government to make changes and there's actual funding tied to those changes, then it can be effective.

*Q: And so you were at the PMU for about a year or so?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes. I'm getting up there in age and it was quite stressful having so many stakeholders that didn't always agree on how they wanted things to go and having to serve all of them and trying to keep all of them happy. For me personally, it proved to be too much pressure and I did talk to the mission director and told him I wanted to slow down. I'm still working with DAI part time, and also agreed with the World Bank to work with them part time as well.

*Q: That sounds quite sensible!*

AL JIBIRI: It's actually working out quite well. I guess you could call it sensible, yes.

*Q: One thing I meant to ask you about before we left your USAID career, but I will ask it now, because when I'd seen your CV and saw the word "compact" I immediately started thinking about the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and I know they've been working in Jordan as well, so I'm wondering if you have any observations about the MCC, both how it has worked with USAID and how it operates more generally within Jordan?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, this may not be politically correct, but one of the things I noticed was that, first of all, having served with USAID for such a long time, I knew there were a lot of restrictions on USAID in terms of what it was able to fund. And periodically Congress would impose more and more restrictions on exactly what USAID could do. At some point, somebody comes up with the bright idea that USAID is too straightjacketed to be effective so we need an organization that is less constrained than USAID, so we'll put together the MCC and it won't have to deal with all the constraints that USAID has had to deal with. I used to joke to my friends that I'm just waiting for the very first contract to be issued by a country under MCC funding when somehow somebody overlooks something (such as a Cuban subcontractor), and then see what Congress does there. The many, many years of these constraints being imposed on USAID had to do with certain things that came out of the press that Congress was reacting to. Removing these constraints from a new organization and saying that they are free to develop real partnerships with host countries and to enhance host country ownership, as well as to focus on infrastructure, seemed almost like a warm and fuzzy attempt to do what the Chinese are doing around the world in a much more sinister way. I always thought that the ultimate objectives of the organization were always noble, and there was a very clear path towards getting MCC funding in theory, but their saving grace is that they just didn't have the history that USAID had -- and thus were given more freedom.

*Q: Right, right. You used the word 'stature' frequently. Does MCC have stature?*

AL JIBIRI: Well MCC is really out of the picture because there's currently no activity here now.

*Q: Oh, there's not? I thought there was still a compact.*

AL JIBIRI: What happened was they came in and looked at all the indicators, they created sort of an intermediary threshold program where they funded one activity around local governance and another around customs, and then they came in and decided the most effective way to use the money was to redo the water network in the city of Zarqa, which they did for several years and that was finished and that was the end.

*Q: Oh, really? So MCC just did the one big infrastructure project in Jordan and then left?*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, yes. I heard rumors that there's talk of Jordan wanting another one but I don't know where that's going.

*Q: Well, thank you very much. I guess I should have done more research on that before asking!*

*Let me ask a more general question: you worked for USAID for almost 12 years, and then worked on the implementing agency side, and I'm just wondering, having sat on the other side of the table more recently, are there any things you would have done differently during your USAID career? Or just any observations from sitting on the other side of the table that you'd like to make for USAID?*

AL JIBIRI: The one funny thing I realized immediately after I left USAID was that the implementing partners actually knew a lot more than USAID assumed they knew. In fact, it was not just the implementing partners, it was the local consulting and contracting community; they knew a lot more than USAID within their ivory towers thought that the people on the outside knew. I also thought it funny when I often heard people talking that "USAID wants this, USAID wants that" as if USAID was a homogenous body where everybody had the same thoughts. I kept telling them, first they would have heard something from the technical office or the COR (Contracting Officer's Representative) on a certain day and they would assume that's USAID policy. I'd tell them, "Look guys, maybe the guy or the lady got off on the wrong side of the bed that day. That doesn't mean it's USAID policy." And you'd hear these guys say "Well, this is what USAID wants," and it was clear to me having been there for almost 12 years that no, there are very clear policies at the high level, but at the level you're talking about this is not necessarily a USAID policy. It may just be what one person said on a specific day.

*Q: When you talked about AID not recognizing sometimes the knowledge in the local contracting community, do you think that sometimes leads to solicitations that are too prescriptive and maybe sometimes based on a less than perfect understanding, and does that constrain the ability of the local community to provide solutions? Or any observations on the way the process of solicitations is done, does it bring out the best of what the local community can offer or not?*

AL JIBIRI: I recognized this when I was at USAID; I noticed that most of the procurements I was involved with had, for the want of a better term, the same usual suspects from the Jordanian contract community on them. There were like two or three local contractors that were always on every bid by AID prime contractor implementing partners. I noticed this when at USAID; told others I thought there should be more competition in the local contracting community. I actually talked to the contracting officers at various times about this to see if we could do something to encourage greater competition and newer partners, getting new ideas. You're exactly right, when these traditional players are always involved, you're going to get prescriptive solutions to everything. I really always thought there was a need to open up the field in the local



consulting community, perhaps something like a small business arrangement for local contracting, or that kind of thing. I just saw there was this small group of local contractors that was getting all the work. When I did move to DAI, I realized that one of the big issues is compliance right now, and there is a big danger in going with a new contractor who knows nothing about compliance with USAID regulations. So, one of the benefits on the opposite side of what I was saying, one of the benefits of having these usual local partners is that they do understand USAID regulations and compliance and reporting and that kind of thing so that gives them an advantage.

*Q: That's an interesting tradeoff that one might have to make sometimes, the difference between compliance and innovation and new ideas.*

AL JIBIRI: Yes, and on the DAI level, and I'm sure all the major implementing partners in Washington, more and more of their resources are going toward things like compliance at this stage. It's always been important, but more resources are being allocated for what's compliance now than there used to be.

*Q: And that's being driven by USAID itself?*

AL JIBIRI: Well, yes, you could say that. The one biggest shock was AED (Academy for Educational Development), that sent a very strong message to the entire implementing community. That is an existential kind of thing.

*Q: Right, you make a mistake, ...gotcha. I have actually noticed that, I'm on some boards and I'm surprised at the amount of investment in compliance.*

AL JIBIRI: AED seriously was a game changer for everybody.

*Q: That should actually be written up sometime by somebody, it would be a good research project for someone.*

AL JIBIRI: It probably would. There's a lot of internal discussion about the costs of compliance, the importance of it is understood. You have the internal ethics officers that are much more visible now than they used to be and that kind of thing.

*Q: In talking with a former Foreign Service National in USAID Egypt who had been there for many, many years...*

AL JIBIRI: Ali Kamel?

*Q: Yes, it was Ali, right! It was interesting because one of the observations he made was on host country contracting, which when he started his AID career was really one of the*

*primary ways of working in Egypt. He thought it was very unfortunate that AID had moved away from that.*

AL JIBIRI: We actually had quite a bit of host country contracting in Jordan, but that was primarily in the water sector, revolving primarily around some of the major construction projects we did in Jordan around water – wastewater treatment plants and that kind of thing. That was exclusively done through host country contracts. I can see where it makes sense for construction, but outside of construction I really don't see that there's a huge value to it.

*Q: That's good to hear. I'm trying to think...we're getting close to two hours and I'm trying to figure out how to wrap up. If there are things that I've forgotten to ask you that you would like to put on the record. You've talked a bit about the 12 years you worked for AID were among the most professionally satisfying of your career. I wonder if you'd like any sort of summary comments or lessons learned before we wrap up, or anything else that you would like to bring up.*

AL JIBIRI: I take tremendous pride in my association with USAID, and my association with the U.S. government for so many years. That's something that I will never forget and will continue to stay with me for the rest of my life. As a result of that work I was extremely, extremely fortunate to be a contributor to Jordan's economic development through USAID, which I thought was extremely effective. For the longest period, I was telling people I thought I had the best job in the whole country, and I couldn't imagine wanting anything more than that. But it got to a point, as we discussed before, that for various reasons I thought I had to leave. But those specific years in the U.S. government and my association with it are something that I take tremendous pride in.

*Q: And, you should. You obviously accomplished many important things and led huge progress in Jordan.*

AL JIBIRI: Those are things people can't take away from you! At the end of the day, it's reputation, it's how you're remembered, and fortunately you'll go to the grave and if someone tells your kids that your father was a good man, then that's maybe one of the best things you can accomplish.

*Q: Absolutely, and I probably should add that I don't know if I mentioned it before, but in contacting you, we had recommendations from various folks that you would be someone we should interview, but one of them was one of your first mission directors, Lew Lucke, who cited you in his own oral history as being someone who made tremendous contributions, so you should know that.*

AL JIBIRI: I do appreciate that. Lew has been through Jordan several times, and unfortunately Anne was here not too long ago but I was out of the country and I couldn't

see here, and Jane Ott is somebody that I respect always. They've all had, all of them are people I tremendously respect and had what I thought was a great relationship with.

*Q: You were fortunate to work with some very special people.*

AL JIBIRI: Definitely, very lucky.

*Q: Any further concluding thoughts, Jamal?*

AL JIBIRI: I think we pretty much covered it. It was a great time, an excellent time, and it's something I'll carry with me the rest of my life. That's all I can really say!

*Q: Well, thank you very much, Jamal again. I'm going to turn the recorder off and then I'll talk a little more about the process.*

*End of interview*