

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
Toby Trister Gati

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Toby Trister Gati conducted by Caitlin Bertin-Mahieux on October 4, 2016. This interview is part of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading an edited transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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Session: 1

Interviewee: Toby Trister Gati

Location: Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Caitlin Bertin-Mahieux

Date: October 4, 2016

Q: This is Caitlin Bertin-Mahieux. Today is October 4, 2016 and this is an oral history for the Harriman Institute Oral History Project. I'm here with Toby [Trister] Gati at Akin Gump's offices in Washington, D.C. Toby, thank you so much for your time this morning.

Gati: You're very welcome.

Q: And as I just mentioned, we like to start with a little bit of background about you, and so I was wondering if you could tell me about how you became interested in Russia, in the former Soviet Union, and when that entered your life.

Gati: My acquaintance on an academic level with Russia was accidental. In high school I went to a summer program at the State University of New York [SUNY] in Potsdam. The only courses I was interested in were English literature and Russian language. English literature was scheduled for 8 A.M. Russian was at 11 A.M. So being a high school student, obviously attending class at 8 A.M. was not in my wish list of things to do. So I figured, might as well try something new. I really liked it. The high school I went to, Hunter High School in New York City, also taught Russian, so when I came back in my senior year I could take another language course. My college major actually was Russian literature. Just knowing the greats, [Leo] Tolstoy, [Fyodor] Dostoevsky, all that stuff. Everybody knows those great books.

As to my background—my family comes from that part of the world. Honestly, perhaps I owe Tsarist Russia a “thank you” for the pogroms which drove out the Jews—if the pogroms hadn’t happened and my family and millions of others hadn’t left, the Nazis would have killed the entire family. History works in strange ways.

When I told my grandmother I was studying Russian, I can’t say she was happy. She said, “Why are you going back? I left there. I don’t think you should go back. It’s not a good place to go.” But I was really fascinated by Russian history and culture.

The first time I went to Russia was in college, as part of a language program with Ohio State University. We spent five weeks in Russia, traveling there on the Alexander Pushkin, which was called a cruise line. I think I actually put my life on the line, going on that thing from Montreal to Leningrad, in March. The Atlantic Ocean is not kind to travelers at that time of year. We were all in the lowest level cabins and when the boat tipped—because it had no stabilizers—our windows went under the water. It was a long, long trip. I do remember that.

But we got there and we started to study the language. We were kids, so somebody in authority saying to us you can’t do something was the equivalent of saying, you must do it. So we met Russians despite the fact that our minders didn’t want us to. From Leningrad, we went down to a Sputnik Camp in the Crimea for a few days. Actually, some people there are still my friends. It sounds strange, but Russians are like that. Once you’re a friend, you’re a friend forever—or you’re an enemy forever. It can be either way. I soon went back for another language program in

Leningrad. The dormitory had five or six people in each room. We had hot water twice a week for two hours. The food was terrible. The Russians had to live on different floors, and our floors were guarded by a *dezhurnaya* [attendant]. But our view was of the Winter Palace, so it was pretty cool. Once you've made friends and gotten to understand some things about Russia's history, you get hooked on it.

I didn't have any money to ever consider going back on my own, certainly not as a tourist or student. So I took groups of sixteen and seventeen-year-olds to Russia, working with Putney Student Travel and other organizations. We would go on bike trips through Scandinavia and then into Russia, spending some time in Moscow, and then again go to Sochi or other places. I was with American kids, and one of the biggest challenges was convincing them that they had to obey the laws. Their view is, "I'm an American, they can't touch me." I said, "You're in the Soviet Union, yes they can," and so this was a very interesting cultural experience.

Their upbringing and expectation of how the authorities would treat them was so different from how Russians knew government. I remember one kid sent home a postcard with a stamp that had a picture of Lenin on it. He put an eye patch over Lenin's eye and then he wrote under it, "Moshe Dayan," which he thought was really funny. Actually, everybody did, except for the woman in the post office, who reported him. They really did ask him to leave the country for desecrating an icon—the picture of Lenin on the stamp!

But I just loved Russia, especially the language. In college, I was taught Russian mainly by old ladies whose parents had fled Russia, or who themselves had been part of the tsarist court, so

their Russian was perfect. They were very strict and they were very good. When I got to graduate school at Columbia [University]—and this is absolutely amazing if you think about it—I was taught Russian literature by professors, some of whom could not speak Russian well. We read books and plays in English. Few of the students had the ability to read long books in Russian, and neither did the teachers! I really had to work at learning the language, and now when I go to Russia most of my conversations are in Russian.

I am presently a consultant in a law firm and it is no longer unusual for American lawyers and other business professionals to know Russian, and have Russian friends, even to discuss legal matters with Russians in Russian.

Looking back, I wonder, how could you consider yourself an area specialist and not be fluent in the language? But those were the times we lived in. We used to joke that our professors could tell you all about the history and the literary language of the nineteenth century, but would be unable to order anything in a restaurant, because they didn't know the words needed for everyday life. That's maybe a little harsh, but you get the idea.

Students now can immerse themselves in Russian society in the way we couldn't. I really envy them for the ability to live in homes and have people open up to them. It tells you how far we've come from my Soviet experience. Even now, when relations are not good, we're still not back to the way it was. Anyone who remembers the Soviet period cannot possibly want to return to that period. We should not want to go back to the strained and antagonistic relationship we had. It's not good for either country.

Before getting a master's degree in Russian Literature and an MIA [Master's in International Affairs] from Columbia, I went to Penn State [Pennsylvania State University] and got a degree in Russian literature and language, and an area certificate. They have a very good department in geography, and for Russia certainly geography is destiny. I took all kinds of courses—learning about Siberia, Russia's natural riches, the expansion into Central Asia.

At Columbia University, my good fortune was to become a research assistant to Professor Zbigniew [K.] Brzezinski. Through an acquaintance of his, another professor, I got an interview and started to work at his institute, which at that time was called the Research Institute on Communist Affairs [RICA]. It was located then on 113th Street. This was the fall of 1967, so it was right before the riots at Columbia. It was a period of protest and unrest and some of the protests were directed against Brzezinski as a pillar of the establishment. Actually, at some point during the '68 riots I remember that some of the kids from SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] came to the building of the Institute with a pig on a platter and wanted to present it to Dr. Brzezinski. They were really not very subtle.

I worked as a research assistant for a lot of different professors at the Institute, including [Seweryn] Bialer and John [P.] Haithcox, who was studying Indian Communism. I read Russian obituaries for Professor Bialer's book *Stalin and His Generals*, to find out what people's military career patterns had been. Only when top military leaders died were relatively complete bios published. I became Dr. Brzezinski's research assistant for articles he was writing and for

research on Japan on his book *The Fragile Blossom*, and also on changing global political and economic trends for *Between Two Ages*.

I got a master's, an MIA [Master's Degree in International Affairs] degree at the School of International Affairs. Russia was a priority so there was scholarship money. Unfortunately, this funding dried up because after the collapse of the USSR the US government decided that Russia didn't matter. "Been there, done that," was our attitude, and policymakers turned their attention to other parts of the world, and for an entire generation we paid very little attention to Russia and to the countries of the former Soviet Union. We need to reinvigorate programs on Russia and the countries of Eurasia at universities throughout the country, not just at Columbia. There is no substitute for knowing the culture, language and history.

When I went to work for Professor Brzezinski, he had just met a governor from Georgia named Jimmy [James Earl] Carter through the Trilateral Commission. It was a busy time for him, and I learned how to provide the information I was asked for in a concise manner. I learned to always be well prepared, to make your point quickly, and to be brief. All that obviously held me in good stead as I developed my career, because busy people do not have time to hear you ramble on.

I remember going to Dr. Brzezinski to discuss an article he'd written. He said, "So you've done all the research?" I said, "Yes, I have, Dr. Brzezinski, but I have to tell you, I think there is something missing from your article." His eyebrow goes up like, oh yes? I said, "Yes, I made a chart and you discussed all these four factors for all the four periods you outlined and you've left out two points." And then I showed him what I had found. Now when I think about it, I am

amazed at how blunt I was. Brzezinski just looked at me and said, “So fill it in.” I did, and he gave me a footnote in the article to thank me for my work. I learned that you can say what you think, but you better be prepared to back it up.

Working for Dr. Brzezinski really prepared me for my job in the White House. The first time our team went in to brief President [William J.] Clinton on Russia—I had been an advisor during the campaign—everybody was very, very nervous. They looked at me and they said, “You don’t seem nervous at all.” I thought: “Why would I be nervous? I’ve briefed Zbigniew Brzezinski. I’m sure he’s a lot tougher to brief than Bill Clinton—and Brzezinski certainly knows a lot more about Russia.” So working with Dr. Brzezinski was a very important experience for me.

The other person who was very influential in my life then was Professor Marshall [D.] Shulman. If Brzezinski was a yin, Shulman was a yang. You could sit and talk to him for a long time, while with Brzezinski it was much more formal, at least at first. Marshall Shulman and I became very good friends—we even wrote an article on Soviet nonproliferation policy together. He then went down to Washington to work for Secretary of State Cyrus [R.] Vance as his advisor on Soviet affairs. But in the game of politics, Brzezinski had it over him. I think Brzezinski knew what he wanted and was better at working the system. I had the deepest respect for everyone at the Russian Institute—which was not yet the Harriman Institute. (It later became the Harriman Institute with a gift of ten million dollars from the Harrimans, which at that time was an extremely large gift).

The Russians used to talk about these institutes of Russian studies and how they were undermining the Soviet system. That's kind of funny, because the Russia Institute had basically half a floor on the twelfth floor of the School of International Affairs—the other half was the Institute on East Central Europe, where István Deák was the head.

I met my husband, Charles Gati, at the Brzezinski Institute, where he was a visiting fellow. So we consider Brzezinski the godfather of our meeting. Once we were a couple, I said that I would continue to help Charles as his research assistant—but I could never take a course with him [laughs]. And I never did.

Russian studies at Columbia was supported by the US government, which focused on the USSR for national security reasons. The money flowed as long as Russia was perceived as a threat. I think this is part of America's problem, though. When something isn't a burning threat we kind of forget about it. This has proved to be a big, big mistake and we need to train the next generation of experts now.

I am also indebted to Columbia for helping me get my first job. One semester, a course was offered on international events, to be taught by Ambassador Charles [W.] Yost. He had worked in Washington and at the US Mission to the UN [USUN], and often spoke about the organizations he worked for. One of them was the United Nations Association of the USA [UNA-USA]. I got an internship there and then they hired me. They paid me ten thousand dollars, which I thought was a fortune—until I realized that the next year they hired a guy, who had also graduated from Columbia, and they paid him twelve thousand dollars. They did that

because, they said, he had a family. It was the first—but not the last—time I’d face that kind of unequal treatment in my business life. But frankly, I was just very glad to have a job.

I worked at UNA-USA for twenty years, on many, many different projects involving the Soviet Union, on European security, on New International Economic Order—which was a big theme in the 1970s—and North/South relations, on nonproliferation, on environmental issues, and on all kinds of arms control subjects. Panels of prominent people were assembled—mostly consisting of whichever party was out of power. We’d have the Republicans join panels to discuss all kinds of issues when there was a Democrat in the White House. Then when the Republicans got in, the Democrats would become part of UNA’s study program. So I met a whole group of people that, of course, I never would have met otherwise. Those ranged from Governor William [W.] Scranton, who was very concerned about the state of US-Russian negotiations. He was a Republican governor from a Republican Party that no longer exists (otherwise known as “Moderate Republicans,” such as John [C.] Whitehead and Elliot [L.] Richardson). Others who were very active included Cyrus Vance, Orville [L.] Freeman and Mike [W. Michael] Blumenthal—these people became very important officials in Democratic administrations. They all—Democrats and Republicans—worked very intensively to try to keep the lines of communication open with the Soviets.

A new book has just come out that discusses UNA-USA and the accomplishments of this program. It is called *The UN Association-USA: A Little Known History of Advocacy and Action* by James Wurst. He has a chapter on the program I ran called, “The Parallel Studies Program with the Soviet Union.” We used to joke it was a parallel program, because parallel lines never

meet, but actually sometimes we did arrive at agreement. We had very interesting discussions on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was just coming into force then. We now think of it as part of the landscape, but at that time it wasn't. The Russians were even considering using peaceful nuclear explosions [PNEs] to change the direction of some rivers in Siberia. Some of their scientists thought it was a crazy idea and asked if the Americans could write a brief paper opposing the idea. They knew their political leaders wouldn't listen to them, but they hoped they would listen to us. It's hard to know how much impact we had, but the Soviets never did explode nuclear weapons to change the direction of their rivers. We had a lot of other discussions on topics that nobody else was talking to the Soviets about, such as the Soviet role in the Third World. Not just political and military relations, but economic ties as well.

I worked at UNA-USA for almost twenty years, rising to the number two position in the Association. Another graduate from Columbia, Edward [C.] Luck, was the president. We worked very closely together and actually wrote articles together. Another professor from Columbia who was very instrumental in our program was Richard [Newton] Gardner, a renowned expert on international law and the U.N. [United Nations] and on peacekeeping. One of the last things I did at UNA was to co-author an article with Professor Gardner on why, after the collapse of the USSR, the seat in the Security Council should be given to the Russian Federation. It's hard to believe, but some people were not so sure this was a good idea. Some thought it should be a rotating seat; others, that it should not go to any of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. I can see by your expression that this sounds strange to you, but when a country falls apart, there's a lot of things you just can't take for granted.

The Russians would often have very, very famous people as head of their delegation at these meetings. Some of the most well-known academics who then went into politics, like Yevgeny [M.] Primakov, who served as foreign minister and prime minister, and Alexander [N.] Yakovlev, who became one of the closest advisors to [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev. At the beginning, as a very young person, I was always seated at the end of the table. But sitting across from me, also very junior, at the end of the table on the Soviet side, were a couple of people who went on to become very important after the collapse of the USSR: Andrei [V.] Kozyrev, who became Foreign Minister, Vladimir [P.] Lukin, who became the ambassador to the US, and Andrei Kolosovsky, who became Deputy Foreign Minister. These were all key figures in the [Boris N.] Yeltsin administration, and before that in something called the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic], which nobody paid much attention to, but was the constituent republic representing Russia in the Former Soviet Union. (Yeltsin was actually the president of the RSFSR before the Soviet Union broke up).

Ed Luck and I spent a lot of time during the Gorbachev Administration trying to explain to the Republican Administration in Washington that things were really changing, and changing fast. We believed the Soviets were serious about getting out of Eastern Europe and that the changes Gorbachev wanted were for real. We pressed the White House to pay attention to Yeltsin and the team around him. I can't say that we were very successful, because the Administration continued to support President Gorbachev. Yes, went their thinking, we hated Communism and the Soviet Union, but we can't think of anything else that might take its place. President George [H.W.] Bush said to the Ukrainians in his famous "Chicken Kiev" speech: "Stay in the Soviet Union." I think, in general, the United States really doesn't like change as much as we think we do, or we

say we do. Part of that is because when things change, they don't always change in the way you want. We see that in many places around the world today.

When I was working at UNA, I was asked by Mike [Michael] Mandelbaum, a good friend of Bill Clinton's, who was then the governor of Arkansas, to see if a meeting could be arranged between Yeltsin and Clinton during Yeltsin's planned visit to the US in June 1992. Clinton had an interest in looking presidential and talking about foreign policy with world leaders to make him a more attractive presidential candidate. He really didn't have a distinct Russia policy yet. The only message was, whatever agreement President Bush agreed upon on arms control, Clinton would adhere to. It was an argument for continuity. The White House didn't want this meeting to take place; they really didn't. They told Clinton's staff that the Russians didn't want it either. But I know all the people around Yeltsin and know they would agree to meet Governor Clinton if I explained why this was important.

A few weeks before that meeting, I came down to brief Governor Clinton—I have a letter on my wall where he thanks me for the briefing. At that meeting I was introduced to his team—Tony [W. Anthony] Lake, and Dick [Richard C. A.] Holbrooke, Nancy [E.] Soderberg—all of whom got important jobs in the Clinton Administration. Clinton was a real policy wonk; he really wanted to know everything. There wasn't anyone else in that room who knew as much about Russia as I did, so I basically answered his questions for the whole time. When the meeting with Yeltsin was finally scheduled, I asked the Governor if I could come down to Washington and just watch him prepare for the meeting. He and his staff agreed, so I wound up at campaign headquarters in Washington early one morning in June.

Well, it turns out, during campaigns people don't prepare for anything [laughs]. Clinton got off a plane from Las Vegas at 5 A.M., and the meeting was 8 A.M. He had no time to prepare for anything! As he was leaving for the meeting with Yeltsin, he turns to me and says, "Come with me." In the car he turns to me and says, "So tell me, why does Boris Yeltsin want to meet with me?" I am not sure how to respond, so I say, "Governor, it's not that he wants to meet with you. You want to meet with him." It was an eye-opening introduction to politics. I got out of the car and I knew many of the Russians there, of course. Governor Clinton introduced me as his advisor on Russia. I thought, Oh my God, is this how countries make policy? [laughs]

So we moved to Washington. I shouldn't say "we" moved; I moved to Washington in January. My husband stayed home in New York with our two kids (then ages 10 and 16) until the school year was over.

Q: In New York City?

Gati: Yes, in New York City. I think about that, often—how hard it must have been for him and the kids to pack up and move. I have always been grateful for their willingness to uproot their lives for me.

You're probably thinking that some of the communications during the campaign and the transition could have been done long distance—that you get on your Blackberry or iPhone and respond to, for example, a congratulatory letter from [Eduard A.] Shevardnadze. Well, I didn't

even have a fax machine at home. We had to go and quickly buy one—and then learn how to use it. All our information came in hard copy. We did have something called FBIS [the Foreign Broadcasting Intelligence Service], which gave us printed copies of speeches. I remember we had a whole closet full of these books at home. Anything you needed, you had to find by hand. During the campaign, here I am in New York trying to respond to hundreds of questions. It was all extremely complicated and time consuming. It's a totally different information world we live in today.

We didn't think much about security of information—just how do we get the information we need? I think I had a computer on my desk by then, but I'm pretty sure my kids used it to play games more than I did to send messages.

I came down to Washington to start work on January 20, 1993 at the National Security Council. It was a very hard transition. The government is a very complicated institution. You not only need to have a policy idea; you have to convince people to accept these ideas. Professors will sometimes say to students, write a paper on policy—as if your saying something makes it happen. It doesn't. Just saying something is a small part of policymaking. You have to get allies. You have to make sure people don't sabotage you. You have to make sure you have a patron. You have to make sure you've gotten all the right people involved. Then, of course, unexpected events happen all the time.

The situation we faced was the following: the Soviet Union had collapsed, and the country was truly in ruins. There was not enough food or heating in some of the republics. Armenia was

starving and cold. I hired somebody from our embassy in Yerevan and she said to me on the phone, “I’m talking to you in a dark room.” In Russia itself, the stores were empty. There was no money. We had to quickly put together an aid package for Russia. It was very complicated—not because people were against it, but because it had to be funded and implemented quickly.

[Newton L.] Gingrich was for it, as was Former President [Richard M.] Nixon. A lot of people wanted to help this new entity, the Russian Federation. But how? We wanted, for example, to ship them grain, but it turns out you have to ship grain in American ships and it cost many times more to do that. So the Russians say to us, “Why should I pay you, when I can get grain cheaper from somewhere else?” And I would have to insist that they had to work within our laws, even if it made no sense to them. There were a lot of other examples where it was just very, very difficult to get things done.

Plus, remember that our laws still had all these prohibitions on dealings with the Soviet Union—a country which no longer existed. Since Russia was the heir to the Soviet Union, those prohibitions continued. They were still the law of the land, but, at the same time, they made no sense in the new situation. It’s not like you can Google “Soviet Union,” and get rid of all those outdated laws simply by pressing the delete button. There were some people at the Treasury who said they wanted to condition all our assistance on performance, and some of our allies felt the same way. Well, that’s like saying to someone who’s just had heart surgery, go run the marathon. Not going to happen, guys. At times, it was the political people versus the economic people and everybody was very sure of their views: [Nelson Strobridge] Strobe Talbott [III] versus [Lawrence H.] Larry Summers. But the president was great. He really did want to help Russia become more stable and prosperous. He particularly cared about nuclear weapons storage and

security, and invested a lot of time in developing programs to make sure the weapons were secured.

I remember one debate about providing money to secure the doors on the facilities where nuclear weapons are stored. My friend turns to me, who also knows Russia, and she whispers, “But how about securing the windows, too?” Because when we think about such a problem, we think, “Oh yes, good buildings, just secure the doors.” But it turns out that things were literally falling apart. People who knew something about Russia realized that on issue after issue we could not just treat Russia the same way we treated other countries.

In the fall of 1993, I was confirmed as Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research [INR], which gave me an opportunity to think more about Russia on a longer-term basis, and to analyze what the Russians thought about some of our policies, and how they were reacting to what we were doing. That was a great experience. Our analyses were read throughout the government, even in the White House. The National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, said that he started his day with INR’s morning intelligence brief, and that it was “better than Wheaties.”

Then, four years later, after leaving the government, former Ambassador to the Russian Federation Robert S. Strauss offered me a job. And that’s how I landed at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, an international law firm.

You just never know where your education will take you. The thing about the Harriman Institute is that it prepared you so well. I know people who say, I’m going to do this now and then they

plot where they want to be in twenty years. Guys, the world isn't going to look like it does now in twenty years. Some countries may not exist. Do something you really love. It may not always work out, but at least you'll enjoy doing it. And there will always be a need for people who understand other cultures.

My knowledge of the Russian language did not come from the Harriman Institute because, as I said, some of the professors did not know the language well. It wasn't their fault—the chances to live and study in Russia were very limited. So I spent a lot of time listening to tapes, records, and speaking to Russians. My Russian friends appreciated the effort to speak to them in their own language and I can't imagine anyone considering themselves an expert who didn't try to learn the language.

The Harriman Institute had a great impact on my life. I'm from New York City—actually Brooklyn—so coming to Manhattan was not such a big shock. And as I said, I met my husband at Columbia. Several of my best friends went to SIA. I also still see some of the people I worked with at the United Nations Association. In fact, I just gave all my UNA files to the John [C.] Whitehead School of Diplomacy at Seton Hall University. They have a big UN program, and a lot of internships at United Nations Headquarters.

Q: All right. Well, Toby, you just gave me a lot of information. So let's maybe go back a little bit to those early trips that you made to Russia in high school and in college. But what was it that made you fall in love with the Soviet Union back then? Beyond the language and the literature. With no hot water and the constant monitoring—

Gati: Well, in part, it was like camping. No hot water, at that age, was nothing. You're twenty, or twenty-one, so these kinds of things don't really bother you that much. You are in Leningrad, a beautiful city. There were interesting people all around, many of whom have never met an American. And some of them didn't want to meet Americans. I remember one of them said to me, "I don't want to know any Americans, because when we have to bomb America I don't want to know anyone I have to kill." That was a little chilling. But in general people were very friendly, even at the height of the Cold War.

I often thought to myself, when I met a Russian of my age, "There but for the grace of God go I." In the years before and after the Russian Revolution, there were families that ran west and other that ran east. During World War II, people were evacuated, doing whatever they could to save their lives. You would meet people and think to yourself, "This person could have come from the same village that my grandparents did." You had this feeling that it was important to discover what we had in common and where our attitudes differed.

Of course, what this meant is that you had to think about your own country and why we have responded to crisis as we have. You can't just say, "We're great and they're not." What you find out is that there were normal people there, living normal lives—not everyone was unhappy from the day they were born. One of my friends said to me, "Yes, we were Komsomol members, but who cared? We'd go out and smoke cigarettes and get drunk, and never think about politics." But what did we in America focus on? "They all wore red scarves and red hats, and looked so regimented."

That's something that's always stayed with me. When you meet people or when you talk to them, it's good to look for things in common. Of course, sometimes you think you have agreement and you don't. There were a lot of meetings we'd go to and the Russians would say, "Well, in principle we agree with you." But, when a Russian says, "In principle, I agree with you," it often means they disagree with you! But if you don't know the culture and the language, you may think, "Oh yes, we're close to a deal." I often think of [Donald] Trump and how steep the learning curve will be when he finally meets President [Vladimir] Putin! He will find out that we're not the center of the universe, that other countries have histories and national interests, and that not everything is negotiable.

I met a lot of Russians through UNA—our delegation would go to Russia and they would send delegations here. The Russian group met Governor Carter; they went to NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] in Houston; they even got permission to tour Livermore Labs [Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory]. The people I met became leading political figures, scholars, and even businessmen.

One American once said to me that Russians think of Americans as a bridge to help them get somewhere or get something they want. They would often ask for help, and I was already ready to assist. I remember going over to Russia in the '80s when there was nothing there. I would bring the clothes my children had outgrown for my friends' children; for one good friend I even brought soy milk because there was none and their child was allergic to regular milk. Later on, it would be supplies for computers. Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, who was very active in

our UNA group, reminded me recently that I used to give him boxes of office supplies or baby clothes to check in on the plane, on the assumption that nobody was going to stop a former national security advisor. We had a good laugh about it and about how things have changed.

Some of the people I met then I still consider to be good friends. Because when you make a Russian friend, they are really saying, “I trust you.” In America, we have one word for “friend” and everybody is your friend—even people you met yesterday. Well, in Russia, everybody’s not your friend. They may be an acquaintance or someone you just met, but a friend is very, very different. That, I think, comes from the kind of society they have and the general lack of trust in institutions and people.

Now when I go to Russia, I meet people who remember when I was at UNA and was able to help them with a problem. That’s not to say we don’t have real differences about Russia is headed, because we do. The closing up of the system, the lack of economic reforms, the fact that many of the best and brightest are leaving, the anti-Americanism and paranoia about foreign agents is going to hurt Russian development in the long run. It’s their country and they’re going to have to figure that out, but we should never stop supporting the goal of a freer, more prosperous and open Russia. We just have to figure out how to manage our differences without blowing up the whole world. It’s possible to disagree with Russians about a lot of things and still be considered a friend. It’s very hard, but it’s not impossible.

I still listen to Russian tapes and CDs in the car—for example, Bulat Okudzhava. I still listen to some of the plays and musicals written by friends, particularly those by Alexander Zhurbin,

who's very popular there. If I have a chance, I'll go to Russian plays. I just saw the new staging of "Anna Karenina"—both the ballet and the musical. I also love Russian folk art.

Q: I know you said you have a family connection to Russia as well, or the former Soviet Union. You said your grandmother didn't really understand why you were going back. Did that ever change? I mean, did your family ever feel like maybe this was great that you were going back to these roots or—?

Gati: My grandmother died before I got to work in the White House, and I'd like to think she would have been very proud of that, just like my parents were. When I majored in literature, my mother would often say, "So what are you going to do with it? How will you earn a living?" I told her I'd figure that out, but I really liked what I was studying. And it did work out. That's why I think you should do what you really love, because if you don't, people will sense it.

Remember, at that time, there were real reasons for concern about going back. Professor [Frederick C.] Barghoorn from Yale [University] was in Moscow and a contact handed him documents. He was arrested for having some classified information. So it happened and it can still happen. Understanding some of the deeply ingrained Soviet phobias or ways of communicating can actually help in understanding Russia today. The anti-Americanism has deep roots in Soviet times, as does distrust of foreign influence. You have to understand where people come from and what their formative experiences are. Just remember, we in the North call it the "Civil War" while many Southerners call it the "War Between the States"—and that war ended 150 years ago!

As Russia looks at its history or begins to reinterpret it, some of the old fears come out. People were shot in the '30s and '40s for being a “foreign agent.” People remember that and therefore any civil society group named a “foreign agent” has to fight against that designation. I’m very concerned that America has lost some of that expertise and historical knowledge, and that we are not training the next generation of experts on Russia and on all the nationalities in Russia and the former Soviet states.

You can better understand why people felt they had lost something when the Soviet Union collapsed when you talk to people who lost their sense of stability and faced economic uncertainties, ranging from the loss of free education to the elimination of free health care—no matter how inferior. The American universities that have Russian studies programs really ought to band together and explain to the Congress why we can’t let that expertise atrophy, that we really have to invest in the next generation of experts. Otherwise we run the risk of not understanding this part of the world.

Russia isn’t going to be our friend and it’s not going to be our economic equal. But we can’t ignore Russia because when it wants us to take it seriously, it can get our attention. We see that in Syria now. Unless we understand the way Russia calculates risk, we will not know how to respond. Unless we understand how they assess the way we calculate risk, we run real risks of sending the wrong signals to each other.

[Barack H.] Obama called Russia a “regional power,” but “their” region is Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and when they want to make an impact they can be every bit as “global” a power as we are.

In the '90s we never were able to articulate a vision of where Russia fits in the global system. We'd spend so many years with Russia as a threat that when there was an opportunity to change the dynamics, the United States didn't know what the goal should be. Should we let Russia into NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] like we did with Poland or Hungary? Could you force Russia to make changes in its economic and political system, like was done with Germany and Japan after World War II? How do you do that to a country that was not defeated in war and that has both a huge inferiority *and* superiority complex?

That's the challenge we're now facing. I'm glad the Harriman Institute is there to help sort this out, because if it weren't, we'd have to create it.

Q: Let's go back to Harriman, and let's go back to Columbia in the late '60s. You talked about being there in '68 and the demonstrations and protests, and working for people who were targets of those. How is that, personally, to be there in such a tumultuous time?

Gati: Well, as I said, my major was literature, so I don't think I really understood what these people were protesting against. I knew the Vietnam War wasn't going well, and that the protesters wanted us to get out, and were siding with the North Vietnamese, who I was pretty sure were our enemy. But it was not part of my life. What I knew was—because I lived on 116th

Street—that the protesters were constantly under my window, and people were occupying offices, including, I recall, the office of the university president. I remember the anger of some professors. They told us, “If you come to class you automatically will pass,” because they were so upset that people were preventing students from going to class. This was still a university, after all.

I was spending a lot of time at Brzezinski’s Institute [The Research Institute on International Change]. We had real problems getting into the building, which was surrounded by students. That building is now the School of social work. Brzezinski had this ironic smile on his face when he confronted the protests, and certainly wasn’t afraid of them.

I wasn’t very political and I certainly was not the protesting type. I was just a normal college kid, very glad to be at Columbia, living in a teeny two-room apartment with my roommate, who was in the School of Social Work.

The more research and writing I did for Dr. Brzezinski, the more I realized that I didn’t want to be a literature major—I was drawn to Russia because Russian literature is politics. What is the importance of *Fathers and Sons*? What does it tell you about nineteenth century Russian society? Why is *Oblomov* by [Ivan] Goncharov so absorbing as a study of Russia’s rural/urban life? I wasn’t interested in the image of the dog in [Anton] Chekhov’s short stories, or some of the other literary themes of pre-revolutionary literature. But I also didn’t want to study political science theory, which was part of getting a PhD.

So the MIA was a perfect degree for me at that point. I was able to take a lot of different courses—not just on Russia, but on Japanese and Chinese political development, and on third world economics. The School didn't have all these other degree programs—you got an MIA or nothing. Well, that's how I remember it.

I was lucky, I guess, to get a job that I loved. Unfortunately, early on, Columbia did not have a very good outreach program to keep graduates involved in alumni affairs. Actually, it had a terrible outreach program. Every time there was an event, the then director of the Harriman Institute would ask me what my name was. I thought the school took its graduates for granted. Fortunately this changed and now Columbia very actively cultivates its alums. But for a while the Davis Center [for Russian and Eurasian Studies] at Harvard University was much more active. They had seminars, and programs for journalists, and Columbia University didn't. Now this is all changed for the better.

Q: Right. [Columbia University] made a concerted effort to change that.

So tell me, when you got the MIA you also got the certificate from Harriman, right? You said Dr. Seweryn Bialer was there and you mentioned a few other people. Well, the Harriman Institute is still on the twelfth floor of the International Affairs Building. Its physical location hasn't changed. But who was there, and what were the courses like?

Gati: Well, I remember that the library was very small, maybe two rooms. No computers; everything was hard copy. The most recent books and periodicals—Russian and English—were

in the middle of the room. Students and visiting fellows from other universities wandered in all day. Jonathan Sanders was the director of the Institute. He was very innovative, and did something which was simply amazing. He got us a direct link by satellite to Russian TV. You could actually see a Russian TV program in real time! That brought home the reality that you really did need to know the language. That was a big, big deal.

Professor Loren [R.] Graham was also at the Institute, teaching courses on Russian science. I even took a course on Russian and Soviet children's literature with Professor George Bereday. And, of course, I took courses from Dr. Shulman and Dr. Brzezinski. I'd already gotten one degree at Columbia, so I wasn't really a "new" student at SIA.

I would hang out on the twelfth floor and every once in a while they'd have pizza or something. Free food is always welcome for graduate students! The university could have done a little more to make the Institute a little less shabby [laughs], but I was a student so I didn't notice that much.

Q: What about your peers and classmates?

Gati: Well, a lot of my peers and classmates went on to become Russian experts, or to specialize in other aspects of international affairs. One of them, I remember, became an expert on East Germany. A few years later, I thought to myself, I wonder what that person is doing now that there is no more GDR [German Democratic Republic]. Others went on to be professors, or join think tanks. Others had to leave the field because it was hard to find jobs in academia.

Q: So you were at the UNIA during the collapse of the Soviet Union, right?

Gati: I was there from '72 to '92, so yes.

Q: You mentioned seeing the changes with General Secretary Gorbachev and trying to prepare for that. What was your reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union, both personally and professionally? Were you as surprised by it as some others were? Did it make you think about what was next?

Gati: I wasn't that surprised by the collapse. By 1988 it was pretty clear, at least to Ed Luck and me, that Mikhail Gorbachev and his chief adviser, Alexander Yakovlev, really wanted to transform the system. They were going to pull the Soviet military out of Eastern Europe. They knew the system wasn't producing economically. They were having a hard time getting control of military spending. There was dissatisfaction in the intelligentsia and also hope that things could be changed for the better. But if you've lived in a system that has undergone revolutions, purges and wars, it's hard to shake the belief that radical change will only make things worse.

During this period, I spent hours talking with Alexander Yakovlev, who was the theoretician behind Gorbachev's new policies. We spoke about the need for change, and the difficulty of getting information from the military and party elite about what was really happening, since many of them didn't want the new political leadership to make the difficult changes that were necessary. I spent a lot of time with people who talked about the bankruptcy of the system—literal bankruptcy. No money in the treasury. The KGB [Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti]

had been funneling money out of the country for its own purposes or to support foreign communist parties. In part, this is why I reject the explanation that the economic problems of the 1990s were caused by Yeltsin's policies. The cause of the Soviet collapse was the policies pursued by the Communist Party and the Soviet leadership.

The corruption at the time was very real and got worse towards the end of the 1990s, but it is nothing compared to the level of corruption today. At that time, the system just stopped working when people stopped believing in it. When there is nothing left to believe in, restoring trust is really, really hard.

Although I wasn't surprised by the collapse, I *was* surprised about how little we could do to ameliorate some of the effects of the collapse. I mean, if we'd really wanted to, we could have put more resources into Russia—some people even proposed a “Marshall Plan” for Russia. We even discussed, perhaps only half seriously, the idea of paying Russian retirees the ten or fifteen dollars it would have cost to give them their monthly pension. If we could have done this, then maybe the idea of a Communist return to power would not have been so palpable. But how could we even propose such an idea when the US doesn't guarantee its own retirees a pension?

What you realize very quickly in government is how much domestic politics are part of foreign policy. Marshall Shulman used to say that successful US-Soviet arms control negotiations include three separate sets of negotiations. The first negotiation is among our own people, as US policymakers determine what our position should be. The second negotiation is a mirror image, but involving the Russian side. The third negotiation is what takes place between the two

countries. By far the third negotiation was the *least* difficult. As Professor Shulman told us, you really had to get your ducks in order internally on both sides before you could even think about negotiating an agreement with the other side. He was right. We had to decide what we wanted to do, what we were willing to negotiate away in order to come to any agreement with the Russians.

Could we have forgiven the Russian debt? I think we should have considered this at that time.

But the Treasury Department was adamant that you shouldn't forgive the debt, even though we'd done it for Hungary and Poland. Should we have insisted on reform of the security structures and the KGB? Probably yes. But we had placed our bet on getting the economy right in the hopes that the necessary political changes would follow. It was, in a way, quite Marxist. We wanted to change the economic "base" enough to force changes in the political "superstructure." A lot of the new industries in Russia came out of the '90s. Telecommunications and the IT [Information Technology] sector developed rather quickly—they didn't have any Soviet legacy pulling them down. People were able to do things that they couldn't do before, to create companies, to travel. But we were very forgiving of Yeltsin's consolidation of power and of corruption—probably too forgiving.

I believed at the time that the takeover of Parliament by Yeltsin in the fall of 1993 was necessary to save the regime. Now, I am not so sure that this was the right policy. Many Russians told me this at the time, warning that the trampling of democratic procedures would come back to haunt us. Many Russians at the time accused us of only wanting to keep "our guy" in power.

This was a real problem, particularly because, as time went on, “our guy” grew more and more erratic. He was clearly not in any shape to run the country, but we had to stick by him. Could we have reassessed our policy? Probably—if we were willing to admit failure. But this is something a US president will rarely do. You should never forget the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy decision making. This is true in Russia as well, although it is often hidden from view. There are governors that want to stay in power; officials are always jockeying for position.

Q: One of the things this project is really interested in, as I mentioned before, is stories about policy impact and things like that. You’ve mentioned a few stories already from your time at UNA, and then at the National Security Council, and the State Department. It seems like you’ve had lots of opportunities to help influence or impact policy. I was wondering if you could maybe think of some examples when things went well, or when they didn’t—the challenges and triumphs of both.

Gati: Well, when you’re in a political science or international affairs graduate program, one of the favorite assignments is for students to write two pages on what you’d do if you were in the NSC [National Security Council]. People write down some really good ideas and assume that all you have to do is write a paper and the whole policy apparatus will welcome your ideas. That’s where most people start, but it can’t be where they end up. To have an impact, to change policy, you have to communicate to people; you have to persuade them and the bureaucracies they work in that they have an interest in supporting you. You’d better be prepared for unexpected events that sidetrack even the best laid plans. It was a real shock to me when I got in government that the first thing we did each morning was read the newspapers and write press guidance. It’s not

what you thought you were going to be doing, but it was the first thing you did, because if you didn't get the optics right, the policy would never be supported.

The exchange students who came to Columbia from Russia got a great education and then went back to high positions in their own country. What they learned here undoubtedly influenced Russian policies. I'm sure some of them were sent as agents, but that was just the nature of the system.

The other thing I remember at Columbia was that if you were a major in Soviet studies, you had no need to take real economics courses. There was no point in understanding free markets if you were studying Russia, because they didn't have real markets. They had transferable rubles and transfer pricing; they had a non-convertible currency and a closed trading bloc, Comecon [The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance]. Everything was set up to avoid market mechanisms. When the Soviet Union collapsed and people started talking about profits and budgets, stock markets and regulatory bodies like the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commissions], anyone who had studied the Soviet Union was out of their depth. Unfortunately, sometimes the financial experts implementing the reforms knew little about Russia and even less about how to monitor the changes they were introducing.

So we helped the Russians set up stock markets, but we never helped them set up an oversight or regulatory body. Our view was, give them more freedom. We gave the Russians more freedom, in the spirit of [Ronald W.] Reagan, but freedom without limits doesn't always work. Freedom can become chaos, or it can become corruption, or it can become a lack of interest in or respect

for rules and laws. The nation had lived for seventy years without any real sense of personal responsibility or the rule of law, and to change a history like that is really hard.

In the twenty-first century, the last thing we should want is for Russia to implode. We were extremely lucky that the Soviet Union collapsed peacefully. It didn't lead to a Yugoslav scenario. It didn't lead to purges. It didn't lead to mass migration—we see now what mass migration can do to destabilize countries. It didn't lead to mass starvation. And, most important, didn't lead to a break up of the country and civil war. We now take this for granted, but peaceful transition was not inevitable. That's why when we say we "won" the Cold War it doesn't give enough credit to the people on the other side who worked to ensure a peaceful transition.

Imagine if in America—you walk out and everything is different. Things we take for granted no longer function as they once did. Take, for example, the ability to buy a house with a thirty-year mortgage. You might say, "Oh, that's not political. That's just a market calculation." Well, of course, it's very political. It assumes (a) your country's going to be there in thirty years; (b) you're not going to have hyperinflation like Weimar Germany that makes your currency worthless; (c) that people are actually going to adhere to any contract they sign or not trash the house before it's paid for; and (d) that the laws are going to be the same in thirty years as they are now.

Every one of life's basic choices was up for grabs in Russia, and had to be debated and legislated. The fact that they did that peacefully is amazing. I don't think we give enough credit to the Russian people for having done that. Unfortunately, the current leadership doesn't give

enough credit to the Russian people either, and assumes they need a strong hand to tell them what to do. The hardest thing to accept in any system is personal responsibility for choices made.

When you study a foreign system, you learn a lot about your own system. You learn a lot about your own country, and the values that are important. Ideas like the sense of responsibility, the importance of the rule of law and civic participation, the importance of protecting dissent.

Other societies have to decide what path they take, but I think we do have a lot to offer Russia if we are true to our values, our institutions, our system of checks and balances. The more we know about Russia, the better we will understand the value—and the limits—of our experience.

Q: Those are some great lessons, and I'm wondering if some of them were learned during the Clinton administration. You said you were already instrumental in the meeting between Yeltsin and then-Governor Clinton. How did your role evolve as an advisor on things during the administration? What were you working on, and what was the goal in crafting a response to the new state of Russia?

Gati: The aim during the transition was to explain what we thought we could do, and to make sure there was support in Congress. That meant going up to the Hill all the time to talk to people, because the money comes from Congress. There were different priorities; some wanted to sell grain, but others wanted more focus on security cooperation.

Q: Special interests?

Gati: You really had to have a multi-faceted approach in order to make sure there was broad support for assistance to Russia. During that time, it was decided to create a special position in the State Department on Russia. Strobe Talbott, who was a good friend of the new president, was chosen for the position. Since he didn't get confirmed for a while, I had to run the policy groups. My background did not include detailed knowledge about the functioning of the US Government. Maybe it would be a good idea for those contemplating a government career to have to study how the Executive Branch functions, and even more important, how a bill becomes a law!

Q: [Laughs] That is pretty funny.

Gati: The other thing that I remember is that no matter how hard or long you work, you're never done. There's never enough time to read all the things that are produced by the State Department or by the intelligence community. This means sometimes making seat-of-the-pants decisions. If you don't have a good education, you're toast. You just don't have time to fill in gaps in your background and get your job done. A new donors conference is coming up or a G-7 or a NATO meeting. Should the G-7 become a G-8? There are a lot of things that you have to deal with and you just don't have time to research every issue.

I had a very, very good staff. Some people later assumed very important positions in government. Rose [E.] Gottemoeller, who was just appointed as Deputy Secretary General at the

NATO, Nick [R. Nicholas] Burns, who succeeded me, then became Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the State Department.

The other thing I learned was that I was never going to see my family on a regular basis. There was always a crisis just as a birthday or school event was coming up. The weekend I did decide to go to New York for my daughter's birthday, there was an attempted coup in Moscow. Now, just remember, we didn't have Blackberries or cellphones, we didn't have any secure communication, so there is no way to keep in touch. Nothing, zero. But how could you not go to your daughter's tenth birthday party? I kept wondering if men feel the same way about the choices they had to make.

I didn't often think about how differently men and women were treated, but sometimes it's impossible to ignore. I remember one time when a new advisory panel was being formed and the list of ten candidates included only white males. I asked for a more inclusive list, and the response was, "There are no qualified females." I was shocked and blurted out, "You know, we've been choosing unqualified males for these panels for years and no one ever made a fuss." After a day or two, I got a list with some women on it. The person who brought it to me said that he had three daughters, and wanted them to have an equal chance to advance. Many high level jobs are now filled by women, but in many cases, these are single women or women without children. This comment may get me in trouble with some of my women colleagues, but it's true. On the Russian side, of course, many believe that women will never perform under pressure as well as men. In general in Russia, the fields that women predominate in are paid the least. And as

soon as a woman is appointed to something, the first thought is still that the job is probably not that important.

I was sent to Russia, right after the election (in December 1992), to talk to the foreign minister and others. After dinner the custom was to break up—the women go in one room to gossip and the guys light up the cigars and talk politics. Well, I knew where I was supposed to be, since I was in Moscow at the request of the President-elect, but once again, I was the only woman in the group. You had to constantly rethink your role as a woman. On the one hand, no one likes “pushy women;” on the other hand, I had a job to do.

But Russians have a hard time with that. You can see it in this election where—I mean, there are other factors here—but the idea that Hillary [R.] Clinton would be Putin’s equal is really, really hard for Russians to accept. Of course, it shouldn’t be like that, but that’s how Russian society is. On my NSC team, I had three women and one man. I had thought that if I hired another woman, that Russians would think that their country was no longer important, because only women were involved.

Q: Oh, wow. You were dealing with Russia, which is male-focused. In the ’90s was the US government more male-focused than it is now?

Gati: On many occasions, I was the only woman in the room. Is that what you mean?

Q: Yes. So how did you handle that? How did you make people take you seriously?

Gati: One way was to make sure you were prepared better than anyone else in the room. Another was to bring other women along with me to meetings. In the State Department, many of my senior staff were women, but that didn't stop some people from complaining that women didn't get enough of a chance to be promoted. You realize that some people use this as an excuse—they will say that the reason for their failure is because they're a woman. Now, that's true in a lot of cases, but not always. I dealt with a lot of people in positions of authority—most of them were male—and sometimes you just have to put your foot down and tell them that this is how we're doing it. If you don't like it, please get out of my office. You do have to be tough. Since I was always pretty sure I knew what I was talking about on the subject matter (thank you, Dr. Brzezinski!), it was often just a question of asserting my authority.

Hey, if you think that the men in power are going to go out of their way to treat you as an equal, and give up some of their power, then you're in the wrong field [laughs]. But you can make a difference in the long run. Progress does not move in one direction only—it's going to be up and down. But women have a lot more opportunities than ever before. Just don't forget, if you get married and have kids, when they get sick, somebody's got to get up with them at 3 A.M. You can decide with your husband whether it's you or him, but one of you is going to be very tired the next morning. Nothing is cost free. You won't make it to a birthday party; you won't make it to a school event.

Sometimes I would leave the office at State at three in the afternoon in order to go to my son's baseball game at his school and then go back to work. He was only fifteen and he didn't really

care whether I might have to take a call from President Yeltsin's staff. He wanted to know that his mother cared enough to come to his baseball game. That was important to him, so it was important to me. In the end, which matters more? At every point in your career, there are tradeoffs. There's no such thing as a free lunch. I love what I do, I love my husband, I love my kids, I love travel—I still do travel a lot—but if I said there were no tradeoffs I'd be lying.

Q: Interesting. Most of your time in government was at the State Department, at the Bureau of Intelligence and Research [INR], right?

Gati: Right.

Q: You were tasked with supplying information to the Secretary of State on major policy questions. What were some of your initiatives or big projects during that time?

Gati: Once I got to INR, I realized that I would no longer be sitting at the table when policy decisions were made. INR's role was to provide analyses before important meetings and then assess the situation after decisions were taken. So what I would do is go to Russia after a visit of the Secretary of State—maybe a month or six weeks later—and report on what had happened since the meeting and what were the major challenges moving ahead. I was able to provide a point of view that nobody else could, in part because I knew the people in the Foreign Ministry, and could talk to other high level people. So I created a role for myself. The staff at INR was really, really professional, made up of both Foreign Service officers and Civil Service personnel.

Those people really knew what they were doing, and I had nothing but admiration for the quality of their work.

As the number of crises grew and the need for an international response multiplied, I decided that the State Department didn't know enough about what international organizations were doing. I worked with my staff to create a journal called *Peacekeeping Perspectives*, which provided an analysis of multilateral efforts to manage various conflict regions. We decided to keep it at a classification level that was low enough so most people at State could read it.

Discussions of international organizations are not super-secret, so there was no sense in over-classifying the report. I also worked to provide opportunities for the staff to travel to conflict zones, and get a first-hand read of the situation on the ground. This made our analysis more relevant to the needs of policymakers.

Another area of importance was ensuring that there was State Department oversight of intelligence programs, because when intelligence crises occur, they often have diplomatic repercussions. I became an active member of the National Foreign Intelligence Board [NFIB], which provided the president with assessments of critical policy issues. This was very much like doing serious academic work, because a lot of it involved logical thinking. What are the risks of certain policies? Who are the central actors? My academic training was very, very helpful for that task.

INR was a wonderful place to be. The input into decision making can be as important as making sure the policy is implemented. Sometimes policy would get ahead of the facts. For example,

people might want to pursue a certain policy in Central America, or in the Balkans, or in Asia, and my analysts would try to explain why it might not work out. Sometimes the policymaker didn't want to hear that. I always felt that it was important to explain and defend your conclusions. I would never rewrite an analysis because a policymaker did not agree with it.

I learned a lot about teamwork at INR, and, critically important, that you have to defend the people who work for you. You are a leader, yes, but you are not a loner. It's not like a professor who walks into a class and then walks out. If you don't defend the people who work for you, if you don't support them, they're not going to support you when you need it. The human dimension often gets forgotten when you discuss policy options. If you embarrass people or if you don't support them when they need it, there's no reason they're going to support you when you need it. Policymaking is not an ivory tower. You have to know how to work with people and you have to know how to write—which is a skill that's really been lost. You have to—as my husband would say—take the time to be brief if you are writing a memo to the Secretary of State. No one is going to read a ten-page analysis. I want one page—two at most—and then a one paragraph summary. If you can't do it, then you won't influence policymakers.

When I was in the White House, there were always people asking for a meeting with the President. Just ten minutes, they would say. It reflected an incredible lack of understanding of the constraints on important people's time. The number of lobbying and ethnic groups was huge, and their demands were never ending.

You can learn a lot about government—and about human nature—by watching how successful people handle different tasks. I would encourage students to have internships at various levels of government and at think tanks. Successful people respect other people, and try to get results by persuasion. People who don't play by the rules eventually get tripped up. The way politics is, you can be flying high today and then tomorrow you can be down in the dumps. If you're down or get demoted, you will quickly find out who are your real friends. Some of the people who loved you when you were powerful will have no use for you.

I'm very proud of the fact that I still see people with whom I worked in government. They answer my phone calls, we talk about serious issues, and we try to maintain social contact. I always tried to treat my coworkers with respect, even when I didn't agree with them.

Q: What made you decide to leave INR in '97 and come to Akin Gump?

Gati: Well, I'd been there for four years, and that is a long time for a political appointee to stay in one position.

Q: That was a long time [laughs].

Gati: Madeline Albright had become Secretary of State. She wanted her own team, and so I stayed until June of 1997 while a successor was appointed. Several of the Ambassadors I had worked with thought my skills might be useful at Akin Gump, which had a big international law practice, including in Russia. [Robert S.] Strauss, who had been ambassador to Russia, wanted

someone who knew the country and how to deal with the people. After we talked, he offered me a job. I stayed at the law firm for twenty years as Senior International Advisor, and now as a consultant.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your role there as Senior International Advisor. What does that mean?

Gati: First of all, it means I'm not a lawyer, so don't ask me for legal advice. Secondly, it means that I try to provide context to ongoing decisions with clients and help assess the risk of dealing with various industries or companies, as well as country risk. I am often asked how I think the Russians might react to an American client's proposal, or to changes in US legislation. Sanctions is now a big issue. I have also brought clients to the firm, which is unusual for a non-lawyer.

Now I am also now on the board of a large Russian company. It's a new experience and, again, something I could never have planned, never. Looking back, I realize that my decision to take Russian in high school determined much of my life's path, even if I didn't know it at the time.

Q: And be open to what comes sometimes, right?

Gati: Yes, you need to be open to whatever comes. Those at the Harriman Institute, and at the School of International Affairs, who have those qualities will go really far. The others will advance, too, but there will always be something holding them back if they are not open to change, or willing to consider the needs of others. At Akin Gump, I also tried to work with the

pro bono practice, helping people who have problems with their refugee status or are the victims of abuse and need to get out of their country. If it's a worthy case, I will always try to help them. You should never forget that you could be the one asking for help one day. I think it is unforgivable to think that people only owe you and that you owe them nothing. That attitude is as harmful in one's personal life as it is in international politics.

Q: Yes. Finally, you had mentioned before that the country is losing its expertise on Russia, and that the schools of international affairs throughout the country should band together and ensure the education of the next generation of experts. What are your hopes for Harriman in the future? Where are we with Russia now? It seemed to fade from the public consciousness for a while, then came back and in full force.

Gati: Well, it's back in full force because of the presidential election, but, in point of fact, it never really disappeared. I mean, Russia has always been influential in its neighborhood, it has always tried to project power. Even its internal problems have an impact on us and especially on Europe, which has a greater interest in Russia's economy than we do. It's not like Russia disappeared and then was rediscovered.

The problem is that you can't create expertise overnight. Our country has benefitted from so many immigrant populations, including those who came from Russia, but we need experts with rigorous training and knowledge of Russia and Eurasia. There are many centers of Russian studies throughout the country—not just Columbia, Stanford, Harvard, and Georgetown, but the [University of] Kansas, and the [University of] Michigan, as well as others. They all ought to be

talking to Congress about investing in the next generation of experts. We're not talking about a lot of money, but we are talking about a multi-year commitment. We need the expertise whether Russia is a friend or foe.

Just look at the amount of money the Chinese are putting into education, the number of students they are sending abroad, and the endowments they have set up. Well, we should care about educating our own students in the same way. If we don't, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. I know that it's really hard to convince Congress to give to universities just a tiny portion of what is spent by the military to counter Russia, so that we can understand Russia, but it is just as important. They say if someone gives you a lemon, make lemonade. Maybe with the current crisis in US-Russia relations, we'll focus our attention on the sad state of Russian studies.

I don't want to direct all our efforts at fighting a propaganda war with the Russians. I am grateful for the education I got at the Harriman Institute and I want it to prosper by educating others who will understand the challenges we face in the twenty-first century.

Q: Thank you so much, Toby. Thank you for your time today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]