

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Oral Histories Of U.S. Diplomacy In Afghanistan, 2001-2021

**AMBASSADOR JEANINE JACKSON & COLONEL MARK JACKSON**

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Jeanine and Mark Jackson both served as senior US Diplomats for more than 30 years before retiring in 2014. Jeanine was the US Ambassador to Burkina Faso and to Malawi, leading health, development and security programs. She managed the world's largest Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq while Mark was Chief of Staff overseeing 26 Provincial Response Teams. Jeanine led the Embassy Kabul reopening in 2001 and then served as Management Counselor while Mark was the refugee coordinator. They also served in Kenya after the bombing of the Embassy, Hong Kong during the handover to China, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Switzerland. Jeanine was a key player in creating, adapting, rebuilding and reopening Embassies, including 13 new Embassies in the former Soviet Union in the early 1990's. Both are retired U.S. Army Colonels.

**Jeanine Jackson – U.S. Embassy Reopening Team November 2001 – February 2002**

On September 11, 2001, my husband Mark and I were in front of a TV in the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi and watched with horror the collapse of the twin towers in New York City. Having themselves been victims of an Al Qaeda bombing in 1998, the Embassy's Kenyan staff were re-traumatized. We had planned to go to the U.S. about that time and so added Ground Zero and the Pentagon to our schedule to take in the unfathomable damage and human suffering. Then at the State Department we volunteered to go to Afghanistan once the U.S. Government decided to reestablish diplomatic relations and reopen the Embassy in Kabul.

Shortly thereafter, I was ordered to travel from my job as Supervisory General Services Officer in Nairobi to Islamabad, Pakistan and then, to Kabul, Afghanistan to help reopen the U.S. Embassy that had been closed since 1989. This was after some negotiation between the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and Embassy Nairobi which only agreed to the temporary loss of one Jackson in the management section. Mark, who was Management Counselor at the largest Embassy in Sub-Saharan Africa, was always my best advisor and I knew I would call on him a lot. This description of the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul compliments the colorful description by Ann Wright in ADST's oral histories.

On December 14, 2001, a C-130 landed on a darkened Bagram airfield. The Embassy Kabul reopening team, Political Officer Ann Wright, Public Affairs Officer John Kincannon, and I were met by a four-man Diplomatic Security (DS) team and driven in

armored Chevy Suburbans, through a war-torn landscape, to Kabul. Greeting the team at the Embassy were Ambassador James Dobbins, Special Representative to the Afghan Opposition; Kathleen Austin-Ferguson, Near East and South Asia Deputy Executive Director; and security specialists. Dozens of Afghan Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) who had maintained and protected the Embassy for 13 years were also on hand.

After settling into the four-room bunker which had been built to shelter the FSNs from attacks, the group explored the Embassy's 28-acre grounds and the largely intact chancery. The chancery was sealed in January 1989 when all American staff were evacuated. The Embassy had been ordered closed by Secretary of State James Baker due to escalating security concerns and instability following the departure of Soviet forces and the inability of the Afghan government to guarantee the safety of diplomats amid increasing internal conflict.



***Me with FSNs after awarding them for their bravery and hard work. Working in the bunker Kathleen Austin-Ferguson, Ann Wright, and John Kincannon***

The entire facility was “frozen in time” and surprisingly undamaged. It looked as if the staff had just stopped what they were doing and left (in fact, they were given very little warning): half-smoked cigar in an ashtray, chocolate pudding in the Ambassador’s fridge, bottles of liquor and X-rated video cassettes, Wang computers, calendars open to the date the Embassy was evacuated, perfectly stored Ambassador’s china and silver, a cafeteria

and its appliances covered in cobwebs, receipts with staff names and what they had ordered for lunch, a very orderly supply room, birds' nests in the draperies, an exam table and stethoscope in the clinic. Fourteen old Volkswagen Passats were stored in the basement and the FSNs quickly put them back in running order (thanks to Mark sending parts from Nairobi). Photos of all previous ambassadors hung haphazardly on a wall. Reportedly, the Taliban had sent children through a small opening to damage the Embassy, but they had only broken pictures and strewn some books and papers around the large library. The communications vault had protected what was thought to be valuable in 1989: stereo equipment, IBM Selectric typewriters, the ambassadorial silver, and unclassified communications equipment. The outbuildings and dozens of vehicles had largely been destroyed but the Afghan gardeners had kept hundreds of rose bushes blooming.



*An embassy frozen in time, 1989-2001*

Kathleen organized a beautiful flag raising ceremony with participation from the American and FSN staff and the U.S. military. Afghan staff's children were invited and waved little American flags, providing a colorful, poignant presence as the next generations of Afghans who would live in freedom and hope. Representing the new Afghan government at the ceremony were incoming Defense Minister Mohammad Fahim

and Interior Minister Younous Qanooni. Dozens of international journalists recorded the historic occasion during which Ambassador James Dobbins declared: “It demonstrates that we are determined to play a continuing diplomatic, political and economic role here in assisting Afghanistan to make the transition from war to peace. We are here, and we are here to stay. I declare this mission open for business.” The flag, which last flew over the Embassy in 1989, waved in the beautiful sunshine with snowcapped mountains in the background. (Kathleen had found the flag in the Security Officer’s desk.) The approximately 60 Afghan FSNs were recognized for their bravery during the 13 brutal years of rule by the Soviets and Taliban. Ambassador Dobbins and Kathleen then returned to Washington and the small staff went to work as a “liaison office.” I was the senior officer at this diplomatic mission and told Kathleen as she departed, “we need an Ambassador and computers now!” On December 22 the Interim Afghan Government took office led by President Kharzai. General Tommy Franks, Commander U.S. Central Command and I represented the U.S. at a ceremony full of pomp, speeches and hope.



*Embassy Kabul reopening ceremony, December 2001*

The small staff hosted Congressional Delegation (CODEL) Frank Wolf for a day; CODEL Joe Biden for several days (then-Senator Biden took up residence in the old ambassador’s office and used the communal toilet in the bunker); and a 20-person CODEL John McCain who met with Afghan government officials in a large tent at Bagram Air Base. The U.S. provided transportation to Bagram for me, Ann and Foreign

Minister Abdullah Abdullah, UN and Afghan officials in an old Soviet helicopter. John, Ann and I continued to engage with President Karzai and members of his interim government, but we had little to offer because the USG had not yet geared up to support the new government and the Afghan people. We were told we would get some “walking around money” to use as needed but that never really happened. And I led frequent country team meetings that included our military colleagues.



***VIP Visitors: Senator Biden waiting for the shower; Special Representative Khalilzad with President Kharzai; Senators McCain and Lieberman at Bagram, awaiting meetings with Afghans***

A creative “welcome packet” for temporary visitors and VIPS included this: “Bunker shower: please schedule your (short) shower at any time except between 6:30 and 8:00 AM at which time 30 people are waiting to use the toilet. Chancery shower in the basement is usable and shared with 88 Marines.”

One cold December day an Afghan man with a long white beard arrived at the gate and asked for me by name. This of course frightened security but I knew who it might be...the brother of an Afghan friend and carpet dealer who we knew in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. I would spend hours at Sardar Mohammed’s “Kabul House” rug shop listening to his stories of the hardships he and his family endured during the many years of conflict and his new hope for his children’s future. He served freshly picked pears and cardamom tea and I in turn bought some gorgeous Afghan rugs.

We set up offices using the furniture and supplies on hand, but the State Department was very slow at getting computers in place. Other priorities included: keeping the bunker’s one shared toilet (the only functioning toilet at the compound) and shower working, hiring additional Afghan staff, planning for installation of containerized housing units (CHU) made from shipping containers, developing and interviewing important contacts,

sending reporting cables through the lone Consular FSN's Hotmail account (which was soon oversubscribed due to personal emails being sent to the dozens of maintenance and security staff who had arrived).

Captain Farrell Sullivan arrived with his nearly 200-man Lima Company of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade to assume security of the Embassy in coordination with the Regional Security Officer (RSO). More State offices and other agencies established a presence: the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Office of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) all sent experienced staff to further expand the Embassy's capacity. The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad Pakistan led by Management Officer Ellen Engels began providing significant support including cash and logistics. John Stever, a contracting officer in the State Department Bureau of Administration, who had supported the embassy openings in the Newly Independent States (NIS) in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, sent three European camping trailers, and initiated contracts for containerized housing units that would cover much of the compound, food services, transportation, and other support. He also contracted several Soviet Antonov cargo planes that brought trucks, cars, supplies, and equipment but it was quite a challenge to unload and transport everything to Kabul. Computers arrived on the first plane, but we had to wait for the second plane for the associated keyboards.



***Vehicles and supplies arrive via Antonov; the one working toilet and shower; old Embassy equipment used to dig sewers, reinstate electricity and water, remove debris***

We celebrated the New Year 2002 in lovely Afghan weather with journalists, local staff and others. Speaking of journalists, in 2001 American journalist Daniel Pearl, working for The Wall Street Journal, was kidnapped in Karachi, Pakistan while investigating the “war on terror”. He was specifically reporting on the links between Islamist militant groups in Pakistan and the 9/11 attacks. I remember when John Kincannon first told me

about the kidnapping, and we continued to monitor the situation. Sadly, Pearl was later beheaded, and a video of the murder was sent to the U.S. Consulate in Karachi. There were other journalist kidnappings but, thankfully, those had better outcomes. During this period, press freedom in Afghanistan had improved overall but the situation remained volatile.

We gave tours to a few journalists who were interested in life at the Embassy. In late January, Jim Heintz of the Associated Press published “Troglodytes and Trailer Trash” colorfully describing the physical state of the facilities including a quote from me: “I prefer not to be assigned to a First World embassy. This (Kabul) makes you feel like being in the real foreign service.” In Britain, “The Weekly Telegraph” of January 2 referred to the British Embassy’s “dry” holiday party and noted that, “staff at the American Embassy discovered to their great delight that the Taliban had failed to find their hidden stores of wine, beer, and champagne. U.S. Embassy staff laid on a champagne Christmas reception for all their citizens (and journalists) and were the most popular guests at the Newsweek party when they arrived with several bottles of 1987 California red.”



*Celebrating arrival of 2002*

At the so-called Embassy Annex at the Ariana Hotel a few blocks away, many intelligence officers, paramilitary and heavily armed security contractors were housed. They had arrived well before us and the lead officer, who I knew from my time at U.S. Embassy Lagos, provided regular intelligence updates to the reopening team (while sitting on beds in the bunker). The hotel was also the home of the “Tali Bar” where parties, happy hours, comradery and information sharing took place among Americans and allies. The walls were lined with relics of war and handwritten notes by officers who had served in Afghanistan. I saw parts of that bar at the CIA museum several years ago.

On January 2, Ambassador Ryan Crocker arrived as Charge’ d’Affaires. Then Secretary of State Colin Powell became the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit Afghanistan in 25 years. He told our staff, “We are back in business. We are here to stay. We are committed to the future of this country.” He officially opened the Embassy on January 17 and recognized several local employees with a special “Afghanistan Service Recognition Award”. I received reports from family that they saw me on TV standing next to the Secretary.



***Secretary of State Colin Powell with me at the original and damaged Marine Post 1 inside the Chancery***

So that was how it began, the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. My diaries are full of so many more operational details. This effort was only possible, thanks to the unwavering support of Kathleen Austin-Ferguson and her team plus hundreds of others throughout the Department and U.S. government.

Now, a few fun facts: In late December a self-appointed social organizer (known in Embassies as the Community Liaison Officers) started a weekly rug bazaar on the grounds, inviting local dealers to amuse us and help us spend the extra cash we were earning from being at a difficult and dangerous post. Two military staff members were professional dancers so we laid out a dance floor in the yard and danced rock n' roll, country and waltzes on the unstable plywood. The old cobwebbed-covered cafeteria in the basement was transformed into a well-equipped gym. And weekly happy hours featured a combination of military rations and Bolani (Afghan flatbread), plus rancid beer and Galliano found in the old U.S. Information Service auditorium and bar. During one outdoor happy hour, a plumbing contractor from Kinston, North Carolina declared, "This is just like North Carolina, sitting outside our trailers under the stars, drinking beer, and everybody's got a gun."

I was grateful for the month with Ambassador Crocker during which I learned what it is like to work for a knowledgeable, committed, and truly inspirational leader. He looked out for his people and respected the lowest level staff up to his senior most civilian and military colleagues. When confronted with the daily unique challenges representing the U.S. President in a nearly destroyed country, he was thoughtful, listened to opinions, and made well-informed decisions. Because Ambassador Crocker was respected by his Washington colleagues, he was able to move forward without consulting Washington on every matter. I was an observer to his deep and personal discussions with President Karzai as the Afghan President tried to lead a country that had been at war for so many years. An avid runner, Ambassador Crocker told the Marines guarding the Embassy that he wanted a running path around the interior perimeter of the large compound. The Marines willingly complied by checking every square inch of that path for mines and other hazards. Ambassador Crocker led the Embassy until April 3, 2002 when Ambassador Robert Finn became the official Ambassador to Afghanistan. (Crocker had a

second tour as Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012.) Ambassador Crocker was later described as “America’s Lawrence of Arabia” by President George W. Bush due to his truly amazing career of six Ambassadorships in war zones. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom (it may be good to include the year he received the Medal).



***Capt Sullivan and Lima Company receiving State Dept award from Ambassador Crocker; Ambassador Crocker with local and U.S. staff (and note to me from the Ambassador)***

In July of 2002, Mark and I attended a ceremony at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina when Ambassador Crocker awarded Captain Sullivan and Lima Company with the State Department’s Superior Honor Award for their work in protecting the U.S. Embassy and its people during his time as Chief of Mission. He said “It was a concept brilliantly conceived and executed, I’ve seen a lot of service, but I have never seen anything work as well, no one could have done it better.” (He was referring to the Marine Expeditionary Brigade’s mission to rapidly respond to crises and contingencies anywhere in the world.)

I had sent daily, unedited reports to Mark via the one unreliable Hotmail account. He edited and then had them published in the Embassy Nairobi newsletter. But he also sent the reports to his mother Peggy in Swansboro, North Carolina (located a few miles from Marine Camp LeJeune) and she sent them to the Jacksonville Daily Times. My unedited, stream of consciousness diaries were published, much to my surprise. Something Washington would frown upon today.

In February I said farewell to my unique job in Kabul and to old and new friends there. I then returned to Nairobi to a job that I suddenly found much less exciting. Mark and I were refused an extension in Nairobi by the Ambassador so within a few days we bid on

Kabul jobs and were immediately assigned – I to the Management Counselor position and Mark as the first Refugee Coordinator at the Embassy. We then began the planning for where to put the waterski boat, Land Cruiser, turtles, cats, and “stuff”.

### **Jeanine Jackson – U.S. Embassy Management Counselor August 2002–August 2003**

I clutched my Embassy opening checklists and materials as I returned to Kabul on a UN flight. Mark arrived a little later with our cats and I arranged to sneak them past the bomb sniffing dogs at the gate. The State Department’s Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) had worked hard to make the chancery usable and staff had taken up residence in the same offices as that of 1989.

Where to start? The Embassy had grown to about 50 State Department and 750 other American civilian staff (including hundreds of contractors and other agencies). The 60 Afghan employees had been augmented, and I eventually grew the team to 130. Thankfully, some great temporary management staff had put several procedures in place, hired more local staff, contracted for U.S. and local logistics, maintenance and other support, and purchased equipment and furnishings. The several hundred shipping container housing units I had ordered were nearly all installed, but the price for staff’s minimal and essential comfort – housing – was the disappearance of the beautiful rose gardens that had greeted us when we reoccupied the Embassy in 2001.

A permanent management team was soon in place, and I loved working with all of them. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable, hardworking, and mission-focused in logistics, contracting, housing, facilities, transportation, food, supplies, financial management, personnel, medical and communications. We together established a solid management structure from scratch, influencing personnel and facilities decisions for the next 20 years. We strove successfully to improve and maintain high morale in the difficult living and working environments. My daily goal, as I sipped my coffee while gazing through the barbed wire at the snowcapped Hindu Kush mountains, was to base decisions on the bedrock principles of fairness and consistency – what’s best for the mission. Secondly, I endeavored to empower American and local staff...I had to, there was too much to do.

The Embassy management was a bit like the “wild west”, lurching from one demand to another to provide urgent services on an inconsistent basis. We set about “normalizing” the Embassy based on established, equitable, legal procedures developed and implemented by well-informed, trained staff. This ranged from a housing policy to a smallpox vaccination program, from cashier procedures to cafeteria use. One Management Policy I did not bring up was a pet policy...our cats Panda and Chui liked their shipping container, and I did not want them to end up in the Kabul Zoo!



***“Kabul Kondos” Living in a shipping container for a year surrounded by Hesco barriers***

We had a unique community with a dozen agencies including State, USAID, Defense, Treasury and others under the Ambassador’s leadership, military who were not under Chief of Mission (ambassadorial) authority, hundreds of temporary civilians, military and contractors, local staff who had suffered under the Soviet occupancy and Taliban oppression alongside young, eager Afghans who were educated outside the country. My aim was clarity, common sense and fairness in the use of our limited, shared facilities. The General Services Officer Matt Weiller and his team worked literally day and night to ensure that facilities, logistics, housing and procurement served the Embassy well. And of course, they took the brunt of the usually petty complaints but handled it all well.

I paid particular attention to instituting shared administrative services for all agencies under the State Departments system called ICASS (International Cooperative Administration Support Services). I argued, cajoled and ultimately persuaded one recalcitrant agency to sign up for its fair share of administrative services. (Who might that be?) I had to say no to backdoor requests for services from contractors who did not have the right under their contracts. I urged the Assistant Secretary for Administration to review all contracts considering the unique circumstances and total lack of contract clarity and unique circumstances. Employees and contractors worked as one team, but these issues of entitlements to services sometimes made things difficult.

Having just completed a total review and projection of Embassy Nairobi’s staffing for a new office building there, I knew what was needed in Kabul. I spent long hours in front of an Excel spreadsheet while working with several dozen agencies to project staffing through the NSDD-38 process (by which USG agencies submit requests of chiefs of mission to increase, decrease, or change the composition of their overseas staff) and for determining workspace, housing and other facility requirements. I couldn’t get OBO to

grasp what I was telling them about CIA presence, and they did not plan adequately. Ambassador Finn took my recommendations on sighting, configuration and workspace to OBO and on that basis, a new Embassy compound was planned and eventually built. (But of course, as with many other Embassies, USAID and others eventually outgrew their space and built their own facilities across the street from the Embassy which came to be known as the CAFÉ – compound across from the embassy.) I was so focused on that Excel spreadsheet that I missed a short email from my brother asking me to come home immediately due to my mother's worsening condition. I flew to Washington to meet with OBO and learned there that my mother had passed away, so I went to Wyoming for my mother's funeral instead. Ambassador Finn and OBO were very understanding.

Embassy Kabul prepared its first Mission Performance Plan that included my roadmap for future personnel, equipment and facility needs. I was very much a part of the discussions and planning for provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) which, in Afghanistan, were to be led by DoD (in contrast to Iraq, later, which were led by State). In theory, these teams would be a USG representation working closely with local governments on governance, development and security. With DoD lead, they were "armed" with funds, military civil affairs experience and enthusiasm along with State and USAID expertise. In practice, the PRTs were less effective because of the lack of consistent policy, 6-12 month rotations and, in my opinion, due to less experienced officers with too much money to spend on projects that were inevitably locally corrupt. There are many lessons learned from PRTs, especially the complication of USG teams with members who fall under the Combat Commander working with members who fall under the Chief of Mission...for security, policy and mission.

As I did during the reopening phase, I did my best to foster a sense of community including events that brought military, civilian and local employees together. A real basic morale-builder was food – 100 Marines and 100 civilians shared the cafeteria. Stringent military force protection measures precluded the use of locally sourced fresh fruit and vegetables (which was plentiful and delicious). Working with DoD and State contracting officers, I renegotiated contracts that met security and nutrition requirements. So, salads were a welcome addition to the menu. One afternoon, the Embassy team gave the cafeteria workers the day off by cooking and serving... Mark donned a chef's hat and I did dishes. An old piano that I rescued from the former U.S. Information Service compound provided some dinnertime entertainment and I led at Christmas caroling (a tradition at all of my 14 Foreign Service postings). On the piano was a Christmas tree gifted to me in 2001 by OBO's Nairobi new office building project director, Bill Prior and his wife

One would think that the very best employees would be selected for service in Kabul but I did spend a lot of time on personnel issues aided by an expert officer, Cathy Roberts. We dealt with one difficult American curtailment and removed several non-performing local staff. I mentored a very talented Office Management Specialist (OMS) to take on higher-level responsibilities administering post's housing program and filling in as the personnel officer. I was also successful in bringing great temporary help from the Department and scored big in recruiting Judy Sutton, the best Nurse Practitioner in the

Foreign Service, to join us for a year from her post in Nairobi. She didn't blink at the site of the medical unit which included vintage equipment and a hole in the wall where the only bomb to hit the vacant Embassy had landed.

I nominated an Afghan employee for the Department's FSN of the year and he won. Having been jailed ten years under the Soviets, maintained the Embassy compound for 13 years and then became one of our most trusted advisors and operations experts, the award was well-deserved. Of course, he later told me that every FSN believed he should share the award money with them, which I assume he did.



***Mark Jackson (Acting DCM), FSN of the Year Ghulam Sakhi Ahmadzai, and Deputy Secretary Armitage***

Another challenge was providing services for an unanticipated requirement – a 200-man protection operation for President Karzai and a 12-man protective detail for the Ambassador. The lead Regional Security Officer, Justine Savage, was great to work with in all respects. Her husband led the separate Karzai protective detail.

Our Information Management Officer, Richard McInturff, was a solid, experienced and focused officer. He and his wife Sandy, the Ambassador's OMS, loved difficult and dangerous postings. Because I was an experienced Army Signal Officer, I used my credibility with him and the Department to get support for an \$8m DoD communications project which brought the Embassy one of the most advanced communications systems of any Embassy in the world at that time.

I loved meeting with management professionals at many of the 20 UN agencies and at NATO allies' Embassies. Many of them were unfamiliar with the "from scratch" aspect of their work and appreciated my advice and friendship. I also had the opportunity to be involved with the non-profit, Women for Women, working with Afghan women to build entrepreneurial skills, open businesses, and attend school. I was fortunate to accompany Mark during a few trips outside Kabul to look at schools, clinics, IDP camps and meet with local officials. The trip to Salang Tunnel, built by the Soviets for north-south transport, was especially memorable and I even drove part of the trip...with hardly any security.



*Traveling through Salang Tunnel to X; me with Afghan men who were curious about this blonde American woman; shy girls wondering what the Americans were bringing to improve their lives*

Another aspect of management was the Vienna Convention and diplomatic immunity. We had created the first “diplomatic list” in January 2001, but refinement was needed. Also needed were negotiations with the Afghan government regarding the legal status of several hundred contractors...something most countries might balk at doing...but I was successful at updating contracts and contractor status. Later on, I was involved in the State Department’s development of the program under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) that would provide a path to U.S. permanent resident status (via Special Immigrant Visas) for Afghans (and Iraqis) status who worked for the USG for at least 12 months. Little did I know how important that program would become to thousands of Afghans in 2021.

I was so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of early U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. I really think that year in Kabul was the best year of my career...of course later Ambassadorships were great too, but nothing could top the excitement, challenges, Embassy team, and Afghan people.

**Mark Jackson - Refugee Officer September 2002–August 2003)**

In the summer of 2002, I arrived with Jeanine in Kabul — and our cats joined us in our new home — a converted shipping container. We found our 40-foot container, surrounded by flowers and bomb barriers, quite comfortable.

Jeanine was Management Counselor at the growing Embassy. Ambassador Robert Finn and Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Brad Hanson were very supportive, and we had great colleagues throughout the Embassy including Donor Coordinator Ambassador Bill Taylor. We and many others didn't feel, however, that special presidential envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad's frequent visits were at all helpful to the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

I was assigned as the first U.S. Refugee Coordinator for Afghanistan. Fortunately, I was not alone. I worked with the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and about 20 different non-governmental organizations. As a teenager in Zweibruchen, Germany, I had observed my father, Colonel Burwell Jackson, lead a group of NATO officers, dubbed "little NATO", in that area of southwest Germany, coordinating, socializing and getting things done. Emulating my father, I too coordinated with our NATO ally embassies whose early presence in Afghanistan was a result of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty that was triggered by the September attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Al Qaeda, which had its roots and support among Afghan Taliban, had attacked U.S. soil so to rout out those terrorists, our NATO allies joined us as envisioned by Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. The treaty says "an armed attack against one or more of NATO allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all...and (parties) shall take such action, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area." So, all in all, 50 NATO and partner nations contributed troops and resources to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that was to support the Afghan government and prevent the country from becoming a haven for terrorism.

After the combat action had dissipated, NATO allies and partner nations took on different tasks. The Germans assisted police; Italians the justice system; the U.S. the national guard and security forces. (At a meeting with the German Embassy I was told their progress was limited because the Italians weren't doing their part to improve the justice system.) Other allies were helpful with food, internally displaced persons (IDP), returning refugees, mine clearing, agriculture, education, etc. but all had in one way or another expressed reservations about the UN organizations present in Afghanistan.

I on the other hand loved working with the UN teams; for example, I worked closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on the critical effort to repatriate 1.8 million registered Afghan refugees, primarily from Iran and Pakistan. The UN International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) addressed girls' education and pregnant women's issues, and the World Food Program (WFP) and Foreign Agricultural Organization (FAO) both tackled the issue that loomed over every citizen – food security. The head of UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan worked hard to ensure the 20 UN agencies were coordinated to better assist Afghanistan and he and I frequently met. He had particularly important insights, having grown up in Afghanistan as an American missionary child.

I hired a great Afghan employee who worked hard and had good contacts as we focused on the nearly two million Afghan refugees who were returning from exile in Pakistan and Iran. The job was to keep them alive through the winter. The problem was that after 13

years of war, most housing had been destroyed. Many returned to their villages to find them flattened. And Afghan winters are often brutal. We were fortunate that the winter of 2002 was not one of the worst. In the end most of the returning refugees survived, thanks in large part to the combined efforts of dedicated people from a multitude of international organizations, not to mention the Afghan people and government.



***Destroyed building that provided shelter for IDPs; visiting assistance projects in Baghlan Province passing through an icy tunnel; an IDP family***

So, what did we, the USG and international community, do for returning Afghans? Coordination, coordination, coordination. Examples of issues I helped address within and outside the USG were assessments, clearing roads (of snow, mines and damage), communications to the people about accommodations and food, health clinics, child welfare, safe drinking water, shelter kits (plastic sheeting primarily), use of destroyed buildings (yes, that was better than tents), cash handouts, family reunification, overall logistics, and many other tasks. The Military Information Support Team (MIST) arrived in the Embassy to “help” so I put them to work right away to develop coordinated messaging to Afghans via radio and print. (Jeanine had them design the official Embassy t-shirt...a shipping container with “Kabul Kondos.”)

Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration, Gene Dewey, kept me busy for about ten days of meetings with a wide range of allies and partners, government officials, non-profits and the Afghan people themselves. He was a fellow West Point graduate, one reason we got along famously. We visited an IDP camp in Herat after meeting with the former warlord and current governor, Ismail Khan. One topic of discussion was a proposed Afghan Civilian Conservation Corp, like that initiated by President Roosevelt. I don’t think that ever happened. Always on the agenda were human rights, the welfare of women and girls, strategy on IDPs, health care, and donor coordination with the Afghan ministries. We Americans, especially the military, always

seem to think we are in charge when we should always defer to the host country, even if we might have more capacity.



***Assistant Secretary Gene Dewey with Ismail Khan; class on hygiene for women and children; women awaiting their turn at a women's health clinic***

After the winter, I also worked with the UN Mine Action Service to hasten the removal of more than 12 million anti-personnel mines from Afghan soil. My job took me to many parts of the country and the roads, especially in Baghlan province, were not for the timid! One of those roads took me to Bamiyan, where ancient Buddhist cliff carvings – the tallest was 174 feet – had all been wantonly destroyed by the Taliban with help from Pakistan. Despite the destruction, many families remained in mountain-side niches that had long been their homes.

Demining was to be a very long-term effort. The U.S. Humanitarian Demining Assistance to Afghanistan was critical as was the expertise of non-profit and corporate assistance including from HALO and Ronco Consulting. These organizations did surveying, mapping, manual and mechanical clearance of mines, destruction of explosives and educating the local communities. One of the biggest concerns was children being maimed because they unknowingly played in minefields. I donned the demining apron, vest and ballistic helmet to experience the methods and danger of these intense and seemingly unending efforts to demine what the UN estimated to be ten million mines. I brought back a red and white rock that was used to demarcate demined and not-demined areas as a reminder of that job.



***Observing demining; a T-shirt that tells the tragic story of mines; me with my FSN and a colleague from HALO***

My third portfolio was re-forestation. I coordinated with Ashraf Ghani and on the ground with the United Nations and the U.S. Dept of Agriculture to engage villagers to help reverse the rapid deforestation of Afghanistan through sustainable methods. Some of my better photos of Afghans were taken while discussing re-forestation in remote villages. There was also an attempt to move farmers away from growing poppies (turned into opium) to pistachios and other products.



***Faces of Afghans eager to learn how the United States planned to assist with agricultural development and education***

During our time in Kabul, our Security Cooperation Chief, Major General Karl Eikenberry (who later served as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan), asked us to perform our annual Army Reserve duty under his supervision. We each had projects (Jeanine worked with the German Army to hand over vehicles to Afghan forces and with the Defense Logistics Agency to hand over musical instruments to the Afghan military band.) Jeanine was promoted to full Colonel by LTG Dan McNeil, the Commanding General of the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps. As a West Point graduate, I attended the annual founders' day ceremony on the flight line at Bagram Air Base.



*Colonels Mark and Jeanine Jackson on Army duty in Afghanistan*

I wrote a cable that Ambassador Robert Finn signed off on, suggesting to Washington that a new policy on Afghanistan was badly needed. The war in Iraq had taken the focus away from Afghanistan. The U.S. had apparently assumed that the combat would end quickly and that rebuilding Afghanistan would not be as challenging as we learned it would be. We knew that a new policy could also mean staff changes. So, we departed in July just as the Ambassador and DCM were being replaced. We hoped over the ensuing years that the U.S. would focus on a consistent and effective policy. But instead, it seemed like the Afghanistan war was fought, and peace initiatives pursued, twelve months at a time, based on the rotation schedule of U.S. civilian and military personnel tours of duty and on the waxing and waning of public and Congressional attention. We had no strategic patience.

Reflection. While we were tempted to pitch in at the State Dept in 2021 as the U.S. again hastily closed the Embassy, we concluded that there were great people like Tracey Jacobson and Kathleen Austin-Ferguson, along with now Marine Brig Gen Farrell Sullivan working hard on evacuating Americans and Afghans. (We wondered what was

left on desks, in the vault and in the basement.) This is not the place to contemplate on what we did wrong and what we did right, suffice it to say we were devastated by the “loss” of Afghanistan and especially the catastrophic impact on women and girls there. On TV newscasts, we could see on their faces and in their quavered voices the stunned realization that the hard-earned progress that these Afghan women and girls had achieved and basked in in the fields of education, health, government since 2001 were once more slipping away beyond their reach.

*End of Memoir*