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

AMBASSADOR P. MICHAEL MCKINLEY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW

Chapter I: Life Before State; First Tour Bolivia 1983–1985: Hyperinflation, Consular Challenges, Threats, and the Office of the Inspector General [OIG]

Q: Good afternoon. It is November first, 2021, and we are beginning our oral history interviews with Ambassador Peter Michael McKinley. Is it okay if I call you Mike?

MCKINLEY: Absolutely.

Q: Starting at the beginning, where and when were you born?

MCKINLEY: I was born in 1954 in Caracas, Venezuela.

Q: I'll be very interested to see how that happened. We will start off with your family background, your father's side and your mother's side and where they came from.

MCKINLEY: My father was born in Boston but grew up in New York City. His parents were a combination of a family who had been in New England in Massachusetts for three hundred years, going back to the Mayflower and that married into an Irish immigrant one. My grandmother and grandfather on that side ended up in New York City. My grandfather was a stockbroker. I was named after my father Peter McKinley, but was always called Michael, my middle name, from the start.

My mother was from Puerto Rico and born to a family which included long-time islanders and more recent immigrants from Spain. Her father was a manager in the local electricity company. She left Puerto Rico after doing undergraduate university there in the late '40s to go to New York and start teaching and began studying for a master's in literature.

My mother and father met in New York City, married, and my father, I think at that point, was working for Standard Oil of New Jersey. And they ended up in Venezuela.

Q: And what did your father do? Was he an engineer or on the financial side?

MCKINLEY: No, it was marketing and business. Throughout his life, he worked his way up and became head of divisions in different countries for different companies. So that's why we moved around a lot. My brother and I were both born in Caracas.

Q: So there's two of you? You have one sibling?

MCKINLEY: Three. We have a sister who was born in Cincinnati. My father left Standard Oil and went to work for Proctor and Gamble.

Q: And how long did you live in Venezuela?

MCKINLEY: We only stayed in Venezuela for another year and a half after I was born.

Q: And then you went to Cincinnati?

MCKINLEY: Cincinnati for a couple of years and then Mexico City where we stayed for five to six years. My father worked for different American firms including Revlon and a now defunct Texas company known as Anderson Clayton, which dealt in commodities largely. And at the age of ten we went to Spain for a few months but ended up in Texas from the ages of ten to twelve in the mid-'60s, from 1964 to 1966. And this Texas company transferred us to Brazil. So, we lived in Brazil in Sao Paulo from 1966 to 1968, and then my father was transferred again with the same company back to Mexico, which is where I did high school. I graduated skipping twelfth grade and going to university in 1971 to England instead of the United States. We were put in a British school in Mexico. And so I was sort of naturally geared towards studying in the UK [United Kingdom]. I was accepted at Southampton University in southern England.

Q: How did you like all the moving around?

MCKINLEY: I think there was a point somewhere around the age of thirteen or fourteen, when having lived in four countries already, it was too much. At that point the fact that we were settling in Mexico seemed like a very good thing.

Q: And were you in Mexico City?

MCKINLEY: Mexico City in 1968, returning. There were of course American schools. My parents chose to put us in the British school where we had attended as younger children, which was smaller, and they just thought it was a better bet for education.

Q: In Brazil, did you pick up Portuguese during those two years?

MCKINLEY: I did. I picked it up so well that at one point my Spanish and particularly my conjugation and writing in Spanish suffered, but I regrouped and so Spanish is what I speak, if I can say this, fluently. Portuguese, I do well, but my Spanish is stronger.

Q: It's pretty cool to get it as a child, right?

MCKINLEY: It absolutely is. And the only French I ever really got other than thirteen days at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] was doing the British equivalent of AP [Advanced Placement] language training in high school for two years. I studied French and whatever I have, I can credit largely to that period too.

Q: You were in Texas in the mid-'60s, so we weren't yet in the protest period of the Vietnam War or full-blown race relations protests. How'd you find Texas at that time?

MCKINLEY: Well, it was Houston and I'm not going to sugarcoat it. We were northerners in a very southern state. That's not the way Texans saw it, but it's certainly the way they treated people from outside at that point. And so as a fourth, fifth, and sixth grader, I did not particularly enjoy it. I remember an English teacher who would begin every class with "the south shall rise again." Looking back, that was the environment. I don't remember any blacks or Hispanics in the school.

Q: Did you keep roots in New England or in New York? Did you go back and visit certain family all the time?

MCKINLEY: My parents made sure that we stayed in touch. My grandparents on my mother's side were dead. And so we had a close relationship with my father's parents, and we spent about five or six summers going to camp in the Poconos in Pennsylvania and the person who took care of us was my grandmother particularly. And so that gave us a stronger connection to the east coast.

Q: But other than that, you sort of grew up as a third country kid?

MCKINLEY: I felt, looking back, almost a hundred percent third culture. Yes.

Q: Did you have a particular interest in Mexico City, in academics or in pastimes?

MCKINLEY: Going to high school and then going off to college, my primary interest was history and literature. But I was also very interested in politics. You asked earlier about my exposure to what was happening in the 1960s in the United States. I was fourteen in 1968 and was very aware of the assassination of Martin Luther King, of Robert Kennedy, of the riots, and the Vietnam War. I remember already at that stage collecting *Time* magazines, some of which I would buy off of street kiosks in Mexico City. It was just my own interest and whatever pocket money I had.

I was very conscious of things that were changing. And even though we were going to camp in the Poconos it was at an age, into our teenage years, in the 1969–70 period, you were aware of what's happening. But it was also a period in which my parents were very laissez faire. And I remember that summer in 1970, my parents let my brother who was fourteen and I at sixteen travel around the United States on our own. And there were cheap tickets available. I remember it was like two hundred dollars plus.

Q: For a train trip?

MCKINLEY: No, we flew on airplanes. I'm trying to remember exactly where we ended up, but I think Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, the Grand Canyon, on our own. And I certainly formed impressions of the United States and of the country I would come to represent officially. We spent some Christmases in Europe where I had an uncle who lived in London, and we would go and stay in his house and spend the weeks between London and Paris. My mother read voraciously and exposed us to then-contemporary French, Italian, German literature in addition to English and

American authors of the day. My father was learning Arabic, and we also visited Morocco. It was a constant change of backdrops and influences, if you will, and experiences in different parts of the world and all of it reinforced my interest in joining the State Department.

Q: Really? When do you think you knew that you wanted to join the State Department?

MCKINLEY: When I was fifteen or sixteen years old. And I remember going by numerous times to the embassy in Mexico City, which is the one that's still there and thinking I wanted to work in that building. I was interested in politics. I was interested in the United States in the world. I was interested in languages, other cultures. I won't pretend I could articulate it more clearly than that. I certainly knew I wanted to work there. The irony being I don't ever remember going into an American embassy until I joined the State Department.

Q: Well, I think a lot of people that have had some overseas experiences in their lives and perhaps also a non-cosmopolitan experience in the United States tend to think about the Foreign Service as a way to have a certain kind of lifestyle, as well as to engage in public service. Did you play any sports or participate in drama or anything like that in Mexico City?

MCKINLEY: No. My father, who was an all-star athlete, had to have been disappointed in his children who didn't take up any team sport with any sense of commitment. My father was a star player, soccer, tennis. He was on the ice hockey team at Tufts, and he simply didn't pass that on, although I did play poorly on baseball, American football, and basketball teams, as well as tennis and golf. Nothing stuck.

Q: At the British school in Mexico City, did you have friends from around the world or were they mostly British and American?

MCKINLEY: I'd say mostly British and American.

Q: Did some Mexicans attend that school?

MCKINLEY: Not many. Not at that time.

Q: How did you decide where to apply for college?

MCKINLEY: I had a tutor, my tutor for history, who was very interested in pushing me towards England and so he pointed me in the direction of a couple of schools and I also applied to a couple places in the U.S. The less appealing part of it was the American approach to the four years of college, which treated the first year as almost a refresher course.

I already knew that the English university system was three years. And if you knew what you wanted, you went straight into your degree course. So that was very appealing. And

so I applied. I didn't get the A levels, the grades I needed for the universities I applied to, but one accepted me for Spanish literature in which I did get the AP-equivalent grade I needed. And I went off at seventeen and did Spanish literature for a year and then switched to history, politics, and economics. That meant starting my degree course again. I did spend four years as an undergraduate after all at Southampton University.

Q: And studying Spanish was just to pay your dues. You didn't really enjoy it?

MCKINLEY: The choice was either find a job for a year, study again, to get the right grade for entry into the history courses or take the offer on hand. I was interested in taking my chance with Spanish and hoped once I was there, I could change. And that was what I decided to do with the strong support of my parents. I did like it and learned a tremendous amount but did not want to study for a full literature degree.

Q: I don't know too much about the British system, but my sense is that you get reading lists. Maybe there's some lectures people attend, but it is your choice. You meet with a tutor once a week. And it's a lot of self-study. Is that a misconception?

MCKINLEY: Not a misconception, in terms of when I was attending. We have a daughter—my spouse Fatima and I have three children, but our youngest daughter went to undergraduate in England—and it's still three years, but in the 2000s or 2010s, much more akin to the American university system in that there's continuous assessments, exams every term, much more direct contact with teachers. You still do go straight into your degree course, but even there, they allow for a more gradual sort of introduction across three years into the concentration you're going to choose as a student.

When I went, it was exactly as you described. After my first-year exams and I'm talking about once I was in my full three-year degree course, I didn't take another exam for two years. Lectures, if they were big enough, you could occasionally skip because nobody was counting. But the meetings with the tutors would be three, four or five students and those were serious. And you really did have to turn up for them if you were going to graduate, with a tremendous amount of emphasis on writing your own papers and research. And when I was there, there was no continuous assessment. You either passed your finals or you didn't graduate.

Q: And what kind of history did you concentrate on?

MCKINLEY: I'm trying to remember what I did. I studied Soviet history and politics. Given what happened with my career later I start wondering about coincidence, but I did a year on African politics and history, mostly concentrated on west Africa. I did Latin American history and politics, some European. So, it was a mix, but clearly the inclination was already there for Latin America because that's where I grew up.

Q: And you had the languages to be able to read.

MCKINLEY: Yes, that's right. But already in high school I had had a very heavy quotient of eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth century European history. The focus on Latin America and Africa sort of rounded out my learning, I think.

Q: Were there any professors that you got close to or were inspired by?

MCKINLEY: There's people who have made a big difference in my life. This tutor I mentioned that I had in high school for history when I was trying to do the Advanced Placement equivalent in one year instead of two years. He was the person who pushed me to apply to England for university, he was a very significant influence on me. He was very intellectual, very questioning, and I'm not sure he was a teacher at all. He was the spouse of the literature teacher in the school, at least that's the way I remember it.

And then in undergraduate, the person who was teaching me Latin American studies, Frank Colson, was critical when I received my degree result in my final year, which was better than I thought I would get. And it was the summertime, and I was just beginning to think of applying to graduate school for a masters in Latin American studies. I was applying to NYU [New York University] and Columbia, but then I got my results and my professor turned to me and said, "What are you going to do with your life? Do you want to go to Oxford?" And he picked up the phone. I went up for an interview, seems like the next week, at the Latin American Center in Oxford, and they accepted me. And that's where I spent the next seven years connected to Oxford.

Q: It was just in the summer that you got your results and then in the fall you went?

MCKINLEY: Yes, it literally happened in weeks. I never thought I would have a chance to go there, and it was literally, or it seemed, like one day to the next and by the fall I was at Oxford.

Q: Tell us about Oxford.

MCKINLEY: I went there as a postgrad. I'm going to get the numbers wrong, but say at the time I went, which was the mid-'70s, there were ten thousand plus students, about a third of them were postgraduates. The undergraduate intake was still very much, in my opinion, class-based although it was changing. And a very significant percentage of the students who went to undergraduate were products of the private school system in Britain, not the public school system which the majority of children attended. I came from what the British considered a red brick university. Southampton wasn't one of the elite schools at the time. So did many of the British postgrads.

I didn't really have much contact with that undergraduate world because I arrived as a postgraduate. I was attached to St. Anthony's College, which is the center for international studies in Oxford. It was a newer college, I think, from the early 1900s. I didn't particularly think the college system was a great way to divide students, but I soon realized the benefit. They had thirty plus of them or forty. And that's how they housed students, gave them support. And obviously it works. I was very happy to be attached to

St. Anthony's, but because I applied late there was no room at the inn for me. And so I didn't end up in their dorms. I landed in another postgraduate college called Linacre, which was brand new, founded in 1962–63, and eventually it developed a reputation for friendly housing of students from different colleges, different disciplines, and different parts of the world.

And you had scientists, you had literature majors, philosophy doctoral students, mathematicians. And we all studied in different colleges. It was a very different atmosphere. You got to know, more holistically, what the university was about because you weren't living with the people you were in a classroom with. And I look back and I think that was a tremendous plus from my experience in Oxford.

But I went into the Latin American Center in Oxford, and it was the 1970s. I'm an American and the longer I stayed there, there was a period when people would say he's a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] agent, he's planted here. It was that kind of environment. We had people who were fleeing the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, the Argentine military junta, Brazil's military dictatorships. Most of these people have turned out to be basically just classic centrists, but at the time given what they were fleeing, the college took on a very definite more leftward tinge. And certainly, America was not viewed in the best of light and was seen as partners with these military governments in Latin America.

But I loved it. I met interesting people and the beauty of Oxford for me, again, was no coursework. The exams were sort of pro forma except for the finals, which were not. And I attended literature courses in other colleges. I went to listen to philosophers. I had a close friend who was doing geophysics and I would listen to him for hours. And it was an extraordinarily stimulating environment. And I loved that informality of exchange. I was in Oxford for three years continuously during which I got my masters' degree before I went off to begin my doctoral research.

And once again, my then-tutor turned to me and said, "Why don't you do a doctorate?" And that's what I did. I wanted to work on Brazil. And he said, "No, why don't you consider Venezuela?" And I did, and from about 1978 onwards, I wasn't living in Oxford full time. I was researching in Spain and Venezuela. And then I went home to Greenwich, Connecticut where my parents had their house, but they were living in Brazil.

But in terms of people who impacted me of the professors I had, the one who most influenced me was my tutor in Oxford, Malcolm Deas. And today at eighty, he's still writing. He's still active. He's still greatly respected in the Latin American historiography community and a giant figure in Colombia where I would end up as ambassador. I remain close to him, and I just saw him four or five weeks ago in Oxford.

Q: What was your dissertation on?

MCKINLEY: I did it on late colonial Venezuela, right before the independence wars, before Simon Bolivar, the liberator of half of South America. And it was basically a

revisionist approach in which I suggested that the end of the colonial period was a golden age in terms of prosperity, and the modernization of many colonial societies. I used Venezuela as an example, noting that it was precisely because of this ongoing transformation that there was this opening that allowed new ideas to come in, including regarding the political order.

My central thesis was that when things break down and there's a vacuum of power, which is what happened when Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808 and occupied it for years, Latin American colonies began to shift and wanted to control their own affairs. Eventually the dissertation became a book. I will be eternally grateful to my supervisor for having supported me through the years of research and writing. And he also helped me get a book contract. My study remains a standard for that period of history in Venezuela.

Q: That's pretty impressive. And what was the name of the book?

MCKINLEY: *Pre-Revolutionary Caracas: Politics, Economy, and Society.* And just an anecdote. Decades later, I resigned from the department over Ukraine in 2019. Two months later, I got an email from an American historian at a university in the United States. Thanks to him I was in touch with new-generation American historians writing on Venezuela who knew of my book. And it was a beautiful reconnection to what I'd done earlier in my life. And I'm very, very grateful to these people for having reached out, especially at the time they did reach out.

Q: Did you work for money during these ten to eleven years of being in university? Were you working at all on the side?

MCKINLEY: Short answer is not really. My parents were very supportive and generous during my period in university. My father lost his employment once and was out of a job for almost a year. And he never asked me to go to work. And he found the way to continue paying the university fees. It was an extraordinary luxury. We grew up comfortably, but when you lose employment, you don't have any income coming in. College costs become a real issue. And my parents were just extraordinary, really very supportive.

There were a couple of summers I worked. I worked as a furniture mover in Arlington because I had a friend who lived in the Washington area, whom I knew from Mexico City days, that sort of thing. But no, I didn't do any sustained employment. I was not a teaching assistant. And when I did my research, that's what I did full time. And then the writing took longer than I anticipated, I thought I'd get it done in a year. It took me well over a year and a half to produce a final manuscript.

And I'd go back to Oxford periodically to talk to my tutor about where I was in writing. Those were days when I wrote everything long hand. And I developed a monkish dedication to very clear handwriting because I knew my tutor would have to read this stuff and that typing services would have to transcribe it. And it was almost two years in my parents' home, while they were in Brazil.

Q: I see. And you had still not met any diplomats or gone inside any diplomatic facilities?

MCKINLEY: Not that I remember. I must have had to renew passports or something, but no, I don't remember. I knew no one in the diplomatic service until I was twenty-eight years old and joined the Foreign Service.

Q: There is one story I have heard that Nick Burns and Bill Burns were at Oxford at the same time, and they bumped into each other taking the Foreign Service exam in London.

MCKINLEY: I never ran into them or met anybody with the same career interests I had. I don't remember attending a single lecture of a visiting American official, nothing.

Q: So you finished your dissertation and what happened next?

MCKINLEY: I was finishing my dissertation when I applied to the Foreign Service. I must have taken the exam at the beginning of 1982, but I'm not quite sure. And I was in the process of being accepted and hired and going through security background checks parallel to finishing the doctorate, getting my degree, across 1982. I was extraordinarily fortunate that I got my degree done by May or June. And I was in the last Foreign Service class of fiscal year 1982, arriving on September twenty-eighth.

Q: And when they offer you a position, it depends on what time period it is, but sometimes they call you and say, We'd like to offer you a position as a political officer, as a management officer. Did you get that kind of phone call?

MCKINLEY: I don't remember a phone call on that specifically. I guess I'd made the selection for political, and I was very happy.

Q: Was it a big A-100 orientation class?

MCKINLEY: It was thirty-five of us if I remember correctly. And I'm not the person who's written about this, another colleague from that time, Ron McMullen, who's now a professor in Iowa and a former ambassador, and who was the class chronicler across a couple of decades, he's written about our class. And when people speak about change in the Foreign Service, our class was perhaps the first which represented the full flowering, if you will, of what was intended after 1980 with the Foreign Service Act.

And there were thirty-five of us in the class, and it was about 50 percent male, 50 percent female. It had almost proportional to the population of the United States representation of black Americans, of Hispanic Americans, of Asian Americans. It was astonishing in retrospect because subsequent classes weren't quite like that. I arrived at this class, and I just thought, This is great, of course this is modern America.

It never even crossed my mind that somebody had purposely put together this class. Or that we still had a long way to go at State on diversity. I'll never know what the rationale

was, but as Ron has written, it really was striking that we were a class that looked like America. There were certainly efforts being made. And I do date them from the Foreign Service Act to make the State Department much more representative, but it takes time. And it doesn't always play out. But our class seemed to be the harbinger of a new era.

Q: And it sounds like you all might have remained in close contact as you all spread around the globe.

MCKINLEY: Ron was an exceptionally diligent person at making sure we stayed in touch with people. And for years on end, we'd all eventually, I mean, for a couple of decades, we'd know what most of the rest of the class was up to. Nick Burns, whom you mentioned, and who went on to become under secretary for political affairs, was in my class and we are still in touch. And there was a small constellation of other individuals who I have stayed in touch with. Although by the time I left in 2019, I don't think there were more than two of us left, maybe three in the building.

Q: I was talking to one former ambassador who said, "You know, I was forty-two years in the Foreign Service. It takes a lot of talent to be able to do that because you have to get promoted, but you have to get promoted really slowly."

MCKINLEY: That's a nice ironic way of putting it. My challenge was I got promoted very quickly.

Q: So did they have the tradition of giving you some chance to opine on your first assignment, and then on the last day of the orientation class, giving you your flags of where you were going to go?

MCKINLEY: Yes, in general terms. They gave us the lists. I wanted to do something completely different. The A-100 coordination people were both great persons and went on to ambassadorships, Katherine Peterson and Skip Gnehm. But they did [kindly] lead me and others astray by suggesting bidding on what you wanted. And so I bid on Mumbai, Bombay as it was called. That's what appealed to me. I wanted to learn about another region of the world. And then when the day came for telling us where we were going, it was made clear that anybody that already had a language at the appropriate level would be going to that region. And I had bid on La Paz Bolivia because it wasn't just consular work. It was a general services/consular rotation, and I thought, Well, if I'm going to do it, it's best to have a mix of experiences. And that's where I ended up.

Q: Were you disappointed?

MCKINLEY: Yes, but mostly because I had wanted to explore another part of the world.

Q: So you arrived in Bolivia in 1983?

MCKINLEY: I did. I joined in September 1982. In March 1983 I arrived in Bolivia.

Q: And was it a big embassy at that time?

MCKINLEY: I don't know. We had assistance programs, we had DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] but the consular section, for example, was small, it was the consul general and two of us at the time.

And the political section was maybe three, four people, economic section three, four people. AID [United States Agency for International Development] was larger. There was a military office. If I had to guess, maybe we were a hundred Americans.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MCKINLEY: It was Ed Corr. Corr had been ambassador briefly in Peru, pulled for Bolivia and went on to El Salvador.

Q: Right. And did they discover your background in history and Latin America? Sometimes embassy leadership is not very interested in the background of their consular folks.

MCKINLEY: It's very simple. My experience in Bolivia was probably the most difficult experience I had in the Foreign Service. My first meeting with the DCM [deputy chief of mission], I started in general services, and I went in to meet him and he sternly said, "This is what you're going to do." And I said, "Yes, of course." And he said that his first marriage partly broke up because the general services section didn't provide appropriate support for his family. Those were my marching orders in my first meeting with the deputy chief of mission.

Q: Oh my.

MCKINLEY: And I worked in general services for an administrative officer with a certain reputation for liberally interpreting the rules. And I certainly began to see things I didn't think were appropriate. I switched to consular at one point because it was part of my rotation. It was a period of hyperinflation. I think it reached 30,000 percent towards the end of my two years there. And people were desperate to get their children out.

I'm not referring to people with no means looking to emigrate. These were persons who had a position, jobs, homes in Bolivia. It was simply a situation where the economy was collapsing and the opportunities that had been there weren't going to be there for their children. And it was a very difficult time in the consulate as rejection rates soared.

And it was also a time that I discovered and decided to report to the inspector general in Washington [the OIG] what I thought I saw in terms of irregularities involving the front office and senior administration management. And it became a very interesting last few months in Bolivia. My life was threatened by the ambassador's security detail chief. On another occasion I was pulled into the room by an American officer and told I would end up beaten up on the ground one night on the streets if I continued to push for an

investigation, which I did nonetheless, providing detailed information on irregularities that were reported to me on several levels.

And I formed an opinion of what the State Department was. I saw how the investigation was conducted, in which the inspector who came to La Paz spent much more time with the Front Office than with me, and so it certainly seemed to me to be a system where what was decided by the OIG depended on who you knew, what power you exercised. I think that changed somewhat over time. I like to believe that because of what happened there and in a couple of other posts, that by the mid-1980s there was a move to create an independent inspector general. In other words, one not drawn from the Foreign Service.

As I was leaving La Paz, I received my second EER [employee evaluation report] and the review was written to have me denied tenure. And so, I decided that I was not doing any more overseas work at that point. I did worry about whether I had a future. I was accepted, however, for a job where they were interested in my background, in the Bureau of Intelligence Research [INR] from where I was tenured a year later, I think.

After I arrived in DC, I decided to drop by the inspector general, Ambassador Bill Harrop. He was a well-known Senior Foreign Service officer, very respected. And I explained to him what I dealt with, and he said to me, "Are you sure you weren't just motivated by personal dislike?" And that was that. Given what I heard in later years about further allegations about the people I reported to that office, it seems remarkable that Harrop would have been so dismissive.

Did I make mistakes in my first tour? Yes, I did. And it really was difficult in admin because of what I saw, and then in consular because you're dealing with a public that is saying anything to get a visa to leave a collapsing economy, and there was real fraud. A senior foreign ministry official sought to promote a fraudulent adoption case which I was able to stop but moments like these were difficult to handle. The consul general, Royce Fichte, certainly protected me from efforts by the Front Office to use these cases as a reason to remove me from post.

I also learned the importance of resource and personnel management. As general services officer, I went out of my way to try to help on everything from plumbing issues to housing issues, to travel issues and understanding the importance of the work administrative people in the department do. And I certainly never lost that appreciation throughout the rest of my career, and especially when I was in a front office.

So there were positive lessons and I certainly enjoyed Bolivia.

And I met Fatima, my future spouse, at the wedding of her sister to a State Department colleague, and it was love at first sight. Her energy and positive outlook on life had a profound influence on me and how I approached my job. As will become clear, she was my indispensable partner throughout our Foreign Service career.

But I did have these challenging experiences, which cast a different light on how I saw accountability in the department.

Q: How did you do with the altitude in La Paz? Not everyone can handle it.

MCKINLEY: It was fine. Like everybody else, you feel it and then you adjust. I found it a fascinating, beautiful country and traveled fairly widely in it. I was very sorry that I was there at a time when the country was in severe economic and political turmoil.

Q: What was causing the turmoil? Was it part of the big region-wide debt meltdown?

MCKINLEY: No, it was largely economic mismanagement. It was the tail end of the period of influence of drug traffickers. I arrived just after the beginning of a series of democratic governments that had come in, that were very fragile. The military had been in charge previously. There were a lot of tensions. The impact on ordinary people was terrible, with an almost barter economy kicking in at certain levels. Cash had little value.

Q: Did you get a sense that there was there was sort of an apartheid type system, that though the indigenous were the majority—

MCKINLEY: The comparison is not apt. When you're looking at Latin America as a whole, there's racial issues and racism that come into play, but they are somewhat different from what we experience in the United States in that there's a very significant percentage of the population that is of mixed racial heritage. Additionally, there are language differences in places like Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Guatemala. Indigenous communities are not just living in rural as opposed to urban areas, but with different cultural traditions. This is particularly the case in Bolivia where indigenous persons are a majority of the population. Notwithstanding, the political tensions in Bolivia are simplified a little too much through the prism of race alone. The challenge there, and in the afore-mentioned countries, is ensuring that the multicultural and multi-racial nature of these societies has full democratic representation.

In terms of the major revolutions of Latin America that altered political and social landscapes in the region, there's 1917 in Mexico, which led to land reform, the disestablishment of the Catholic Church, expropriations of American companies, of the oil industry. All at the time were radical reforms.

The second important revolution in Latin America was 1952 in Bolivia, where, what was really a society seen as feudal in many ways, underwent a significant transformation with major land reform, perhaps the biggest in Latin America, nationalization of the mining industry and an effort to build an egalitarian society to include granting full political rights to all Bolivians. And so, this idea that it was only when Evo Morales was elected president in the 2000s that there was significant change in Bolivia is simply not true.

The third revolution of course, is the Cuban revolution of 1959.

Q: Anything else about your time in Bolivia that you'd like to discuss? Final thoughts on Bolivia?

MCKINLEY: No, I think not. I certainly learned then also to always be grateful for the support of people and friends. The consul general at the time was extremely supportive of me. I made friendships that lasted throughout my career. And their support through a difficult time was critical. But another lesson I took from there as the situation became more difficult for me, was that people in most bureaucracies do not want trouble or to be associated with it. They may strongly agree with you and what you are doing privately; but they will wait to see what happens. But it's something we can return to when we talk about Brussels and Ukraine.

I would just like to underscore again just how much I did learn. I was acting GSO in a middle-sized embassy for almost a year, which was invaluable in terms of understanding the dynamics of how complex embassy operations are, and the importance local employees have for successful operations, and the constant pressures of managing limited resources, which can be particularly acute in the field.

And in consular affairs, in addition to the importance of visa work, working with Americans overseas—it never goes away, but in consular, it's the direct access to working with our fellow citizens to help them. And working with Americans who landed in prison with health issues. I worked on what was a very tragic incident, which was the crash of an Eastern airlines flight into the mountains in Bolivia on January 1, 1985, and the rescue issues related to that. Dealing with relatives, dealing with insurance aspects of recovery from the aircraft, the media coverage. It was again an instrumental lesson in the importance of human emotions and interactions in all the work we do.

Q: Bolivia at that time, did it have a big USAID presence and that of other agencies?

MCKINLEY: Heavily focused on counter narcotics, fighting coca cultivation, trying to develop alternative income activities for the farmers in rural areas where coca leaf was grown. And it was a real uphill battle. It was a country that at that time was plagued with significant penetration of the drug trafficking groups of the security forces and simply the efforts to build up independent units that could tackle the drug traffickers was a big objective. And at the visa window, I dealt a lot with the impact of drug money on the country. I spent a fair amount of time trying to track illicit money that came to my attention through visa applicants, by working closely with the DEA.

Q: It was your first post, but I wanted to ask you. One of the Foreign Service officers I'm interviewing mentioned that in Bolivia, in particular, it appeared that the U.S. footprint in the government ministries and all the operations seemed to be particularly large and overwhelming, with U.S. experts in every ministry. I don't know if you had that sense?

MCKINLEY: Not when I was there. We were certainly a factor in the country. But I don't believe we were dominant or influential quite the way we saw in some other countries, particularly Central American nations.

Chapter II: The Bureau of Intelligence and Research [INR] 1985–1987: Central American Regional Wars, and the Iran Contra Affair

Q: Good morning. It is November eighth, 2021. Mike, last time we discussed your time in Bolivia, and I wanted to check and see if you had anything else that you wanted to talk about.

I just wanted to highlight a stand-out experience I had in A-100 before leaving for Bolivia. And that was the opportunity to work for future Ambassador Luigi Einaudi. In fact, going back, as you suggested, and looking at my EERs it emerges that one of the first evaluations I ever received was from Luigi Einaudi.

I had a break in A-100 training and worked with him at the time on what was preparation for President Reagan's visit to Latin America and, I think, Central America. Little did I know I would return to Central America at a later date, and also return to working with Luigi Einaudi's office. As a highly intellectual and principled person who remained a giant for Latin American affairs for decades and central to negotiating peace between Ecuador and Peru in the '90s, he made a profound impression on me from the very beginning of my career.

Q: And was he in WHA/PPC [the regional political policy coordination office] at that time?

MCKINLEY: Yes. He was director of policy planning for Latin America at that time, in the ARA Bureau, or Americas bureau which eventually became WHA, Bureau for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Q: The next assignment at that stage is usually assigned [after you give a list] as opposed to being one that you find for yourself. So did you tell your personnel folks, you wanted to go back to Washington?

MCKINLEY: No. I bid. I was fortunate. INR thought I was a fit and I went back to be an analyst for just El Salvador. And that was a period when our regional conflicts were at their height in Afghanistan, Angola, and in Central America. Salvador was in a full-fledged civil war and had among the most significant assistance portfolios and engagements by the United States in the world at the time. And INR had a full-time analyst assigned to Salvador and I was brought in.

Q: And who were the bosses there?

MCKINLEY: The two people who had an absolutely outsize impact on me were civil servants David Smith and Jim Buchanan. Jim Buchanan I still see on a regular basis today.

Jim became acting assistant secretary in INR, I think towards the tail end of the Obama years. But that was later. When I joined in 1985, it was a moment for me, especially after Bolivia, in which for a start, I was working on foreign policy. And second, notwithstanding the tremendous pressures of the Reagan era to conform intelligence to goals, INR stood out for its integrity. And that's not just me saying so. There are articles, studies that have come out over the years of the pressures that were placed to come up with certain reports, whether it was on Central America, whether it was on the Soviet Union, on Mexico, or, later, regarding nuclear weapons in Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of that country.

The integrity of INR, which withstood the test of time throughout my thirty-seven years in the State Department—it was like an oasis. I also learned to type and use a computer! Because I had to, and they were very patient with and supportive of me. Eventually I ended up also covering Nicaragua and Cuba for a time.

Q: When you moved to Washington, you were still in quite a hot spot then because you were to become the Salvador analyst in INR. Is that correct?

MCKINLEY: That's correct. I moved in March of 1985 to INR and Salvador and Central America at the time were part of the regional conflicts of the latter stages of the Cold War as I mentioned earlier. At one point Salvador was one of the major assistance recipients in the world if you combine both military and developmental assistance. We were several years into our engagement there in reaction to the 1979 Sandinista takeover in Managua.

Q: This is the second half of the Reagan administration. Do you want to give a little overview of what had been going on in Salvador, what had caused it to become one of the biggest conflict areas and aid recipients that we had?

MCKINLEY: As we look at Central America generally, and frankly, we really have to look at this through the prism of Cold War regional conflicts and ideological clashes to save "the free world," our engagement in Central America really was defined in terms of a fight against communism. After the Cuban revolution in 1959, there had been significant efforts by the United States for fifteen plus years to develop alliances, to buttress governments [democratic or not] against the possibility of communist takeovers, and to prevent left-wing governments taking power or undermining them as we did when Salvador Allende was elected in Chile.

There was also a focus on development and reducing inequalities in the region with assistance programs through the Alliance for Progress, but the fact is everything was with one goal in mind: blocking the expansion of Soviet influence in the hemisphere.

There are people who know Central America far, far better than I do—but if I can shorthand, it was a particularly exploitative environment with military dictatorships and gross inequalities and social abuses. There had to be a more holistic and integrated response focused on defeating leftwing insurgencies but also proactively trying to build democracies and carry out basic reforms to reduce inequalities. The situation was made

starkly clear in Nicaragua when the left-wing Sandinistas or communist Sandinistas supported by Cuba took over in 1979 from the long-standing Somoza family dictatorship in that country.

As the Sandinistas under Daniel Ortega consolidated power, supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, Nicaragua became a new front for the United States in terms of trying to arrest the spread of left-wing influence in Latin America. And given instability in Honduras and Salvador there was very much a sense as we entered the 1980s, that Salvador in particular was next and that there were dominoes that were going to fall that would lead to wider communist influence for Cuba, and the Soviet Union in Latin America.

I think in retrospect, some of this can be seen to have been overblown, but that was very much the mindset that was at play. I shared it. And in Salvador, and it's been written about extensively, here was a country which had a long history of the most unequal land distribution and wealth disparities, and harsh repressive governments. As Salvador began to evolve towards more democratic and open government in the context of a left-wing insurgency supported by Nicaragua, and widespread right-wing violence, the United States became more involved.

What I think can only be characterized as a civil war built up in Salvador. Not everybody views it that way. There's the sense that what was at work in Salvador was very much this battle between left and right. Absolutely that was taking place, but when you take a look at the scale of the violence and the number of deaths in the tens of thousands, and the organization of paramilitaries, the efforts by civil society actors and democratic political figures to create space, the intervention of the United States trying to secure, if you will, a safe passage to a stable democratic government in the midst of horrific abuses by both the security forces and by the leftwing insurgency—it was an internationalized civil war. It truly was unique in the context of the Central American wars.

And in addition, the insurgency was composed of five different groups. And I think people tend to forget that the front, the FMLN [Farabundo Marti Liberation Front] insurgency, included movements that had very different views, from groups that were left of center to hardline communists, and it reflected the divisions that we saw all through Salvadorian society. If I remember correctly there were about five million people at that point in a country the size of Connecticut and it was an absolutely brutal war.

The United States, viewing this as a key front in the fight against communism, poured assistance and military advisors in to help transform Salvador for the better, Salvadoran military forces were meant to become more professional, but the U.S. also assisted them in the fight against the insurgency. At the same time, we struggled to contain human rights excesses of the military, corruption within the elites, paramilitaries inside the country who approached things in a very different way, which included targeting perceived enemies and opponents indiscriminately, extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances, intimidation of civil society actors.

It was a very messy environment indeed, and very conflictive inside the beltway [official Washington] with many people, not just commentators and journalists, but inside Congress questioning what we were doing there and whether we were just making a bad situation worse. So that was the environment I came into.

Q: And as part of that violence against civil society there, I think it was more notable in Salvador at that period than maybe some other countries—that people really had no qualms about going after American citizens, right?

MCKINLEY: That's correct. In those days, INR required you to follow issues on a daily basis and write up pieces for the secretary's reading. Back then there was a premium on brevity of analysis on what a particular development might mean. I remember working on the murder of six U.S. Marines, security guards, who worked at the embassy, who were having dinner in a restaurant in the Zona Rosa in San Salvador, a popular eating area. And it was very much an environment in which the United States was seen by the insurgency as part of the enemy.

Q: You were in INR from 1985 to 1987, right?

MCKINLEY: Covering Salvador. And if I can summarize, because it turned into something very different for me, I ended up across those two years covering Cuba for eight or nine months, I covered Nicaragua at times and I was drawn in different directions.

What I found just liberating in INR was the commitment to calling it as we saw it. And I mean the bureau, I don't mean speaking about me individually, it was very much a bureau ethos. When I ended up working for Secretary of State Pompeo as a senior adviser in 2018–2019, even then INR was still defending the faith, if you will, of having as objective reporting on developments on the ground as possible. And over the years I remember INR was questioning whether Saddam Husain had chemical or nuclear weapons. But it just gives you an idea that through the ages, it is a bureau that has stood for the best the State Department has to offer.

And so early on I began to write, questioning some of what was going on, on the ground in Salvador. We couldn't go into or question policy. My focus, however, became an issue of as objectively as possible judging the extent to which the security forces and right-wing politicians were involved in human rights abuses; and, implicitly, challenging embassy reporting which underplayed both the abuses and the number of indiscriminate killings. That is not to suggest that there were not individual brave Foreign Service officers investigating massacres, and bringing abuses to light, but it was clear to me that was not what front offices in regional embassies, or the Latin America bureau led by Assistant Secretary Elliott Abrams, wanted highlighted.

I remember having the opportunity with full support of the office to dig deeper into the reports that came out of the embassy charting the weekly killings in Salvador and trying to distinguish which murders were caused by crime or social issues, and which were

caused by the civil conflict inside the country. And I reached the point where I was concluding that it was a much worse situation than met the eye which was an issue for us in terms of defending assistance flowing to Salvador in engagements with Congress.

As I was drawn into Nicaragua, what struck me was the extent to which, unlike the FMLN in Salvador, the contras were not homegrown. By way of explanation, Washington was supporting a number of Nicaraguan opposition figures who launched an insurgency, the "contras," against the Sandinista government. They were presented as a popular revolt against communist abuses, by disadvantaged farmers led by political actors fighting for their homeland and democracy.

It was not that simple. And across the months that I intermittently worked on Nicaragua I came to the very firm conclusion that they had no chance of ever winning or garnering wider popular support. And this was in the 1986 timeframe, and that part of the problem was that the contras were directed from Washington. They had little support, their leadership was not only fragmented, but disconnected in many ways on the ground. And we weren't helping things by supporting the contras in the manner we did.

And eventually I was able to do a comparison of the insurgencies in Salvador and Nicaragua. And openly challenged the assumption that the contras were winning, and that a policy made in Washington could succeed. With the full support of INR. It is an analysis which stood the test of time.

Something wasn't quite right in how we were approaching Nicaragua. I think most people by now will agree that the shift in Nicaragua after 1989 to democracy was a direct result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and changes that were sweeping Central America—not the result of our contra policy. I also had an opportunity to work on Nicaragua again inside the Latin American Bureau, again with Luigi Einaudi, on a report that was done called "Revolution Beyond our Borders," which was an effort to pull together factually and objectively U.S. policy over a five-to-six-year period in Central America and to explain to a broader public what the United States was seeking to achieve throughout the region.

That was my first engagement with public diplomacy. Flowing from that, I had a very unusual experience in the middle of 1986 in that, in those days, the lines weren't as firmly drawn as they should have been. As an INR analyst working in intelligence, I was allowed to work with the Latin America Bureau [ARA, now WHA]. I went out traveling around the country and to Central America making speeches, justifying our policies in the region.

And yes, there were the experiences of being called a baby killer and other insults as I sought to put the policies in perspective. I did try to differentiate my approach from other public presentations by recognizing that many awful things were happening on the ground. Nonetheless, I firmly believed we were trying to improve things, and I also sought to put our approach to the region in the broader context of the conflict between the U.S. and a Soviet Union bent on projecting its influence and power.

In other words, our engagement wasn't just a holding operation. The idea was a democratic transformation of the region.

I went out to places like Sacramento. I went to Juneau in Alaska and Anchorage. I went to Burlington and Tallahassee, making presentations, speaking to local media and audiences.

And then, the public diplomacy wing of the bureau headed by Robert Kagan [later a famous author who wrote on American foreign policy but who at that point was a conservative Cold War warrior] invited me to be an American partner, which meant I could go overseas and sell policy. And I went to Panama, Guatemala, and Mexico.

In Mexico, I landed when the contra resupply operation came to light because of an airplane crash in El Salvador involving Americans who were carrying weapons. And I'll never forget that day because I walked in for what I thought would be a couple of media questions just based on how I'd done my presentations to date in Guatemala and Panama. And there were television cameras rolling, and a room packed with reporters. And the questions were all about, What do you know about the airplane that went down in the country, about the contra resupply operation?

It was my introduction to the Iran-Contra affair. And I handled it in a way that didn't get me dismissed from the State Department. I was in my fourth year in the State Department when I faced this, which I think people can agree is unusually early to be responding to a major controversy in public. And I remember getting called into the ambassador's office in Mexico City, by the ambassador or chargé, I don't remember. And he politely asked, "And who are you again? And why are you here?"

Q: As an INR analyst, were you aware of what we were doing with the contras at that time?

MCKINLEY: The short answer is yes to a degree and so much is now public about what was done. I was aware of something, because I worked on the region, but not the extent. And when that airplane went down and as I said, I was in Mexico City the day after that was exposed, I felt conflicted because of course I began to learn of the wider dimensions of the affair.

I returned to the department as the Iran-Contra scandal began. And over the succeeding months, there were the congressional demands for all documentation on what was known, when it was known, who was involved, who was engaged. I presented relevant information to both the ARA/WHA and INR front offices. I remember one assistant secretary asked me, And we knew all this?, or words to that effect.

And it was one of those moments. This was a little bit like my experience in my first tour, in Bolivia. This time as I watched the Walsh special counsel investigation build up, I watched the testimony of senior USG officials. I saw people saying they didn't know

when I thought they did or suspected they did. I couldn't, you know, go to a court of law, but there was no doubt in my mind, people knew what was going on at the most senior levels. I spent many weeks debating, should I go to the media with this? But I did not. The information was already out there, and the media was failing to connect the dots, as I felt they would fail to do on other controversial issues I worked on at a later date like Abu Ghraib and Ukraine.

Over my career, I felt I was very fortunate in that I was able to present what I knew, and to continue working issues. Most of the time, I could speak openly to superiors, presenting the facts on controversial issues, speaking out, even pushing back, which I did at different times. Iran-Contra was one of those early moments where I learned the importance of dealing with complexity and nuance in foreign policy in political matters. It's never all black or white. Many of the people involved thought they were doing the right thing. They weren't criminals. They weren't pocketing money. It was an effort to achieve certain policy objectives. And it was gone about in the wrong way.

And what really struck me, and what struck me ever since about Congress and the media is they want legal answers just like during the Ukraine impeachment hearings or the inquiries into what happened on January 6, 2021. They want legal cases. Iran-Contra was never a legal case. It was a policy decision, and it was a wrong policy decision or decisions, plural, but it was not really a question of criminality or legal wrongdoing.

And that's where Walsh went down a rabbit hole. That's where congressional committees went down a rabbit hole. And frankly, I found their efforts to go after people on a very personalized basis wrong. I thought that Elliott Abrams was given a particularly rough time unnecessarily. I had less sympathy for Ollie North whom I never met, but I did at one point work for Elliott Abrams. I looked at lower ranking officials who were drawn into the hearings, their reputations destroyed. And all I could think of was, and where's the secretary, where's the president, where's the vice president?

And again, it was an eye opener seeing how it's easy to throw the lower ranks to the wolves to cover the traces. And even if it's not that intentional, it's easy to see what happens to lesser officials without policy protection.

But I certainly felt, at the end of that time, as I worked on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Salvador, enough already. I had to get out of the ARA-WHA world—even though that's what I knew—and do something else.

Q: The '80s were really hard for the bureau in a lot of ways. There were a lot of assistant secretaries, one after another. I never thought about it specifically in terms of the State Department, but I remember President Reagan being called the teflon president, a term that meant nothing stuck to him personally. George Shultz was the secretary of state?

MCKINLEY: Yes. I have always believed that the seventh floor knew. And again, I'm not suggesting this is a blame game. I am suggesting there was less protection for the career people, who did what they were asked to do, than there should have been.

Q: Okay. So having mentioned Ollie North, a very flamboyant character, was there any interaction between what he did and what you were doing, that is of interest?

MCKINLEY: I don't really think so. I had no contact with the NSC [National Security Council] at all working where I was working.

Q: You mentioned that you covered Cuba for a while. What was happening in Cuba? What were you covering?

MCKINLEY: The period when Cuba looked like it was opening a little bit, and then it didn't. This was opening on economic reforms and so on, and Castro reversed course and reverted to the hard line. But the work on Cuba was to serve me extremely well in my next assignment, where I dealt extensively with Cuban government officials.

Q: And on Nicaragua, what was happening inside Nicaragua while we were trying to resupply the contras?

MCKINLEY: There was the effort to support civil society, the church, I think universities, individual politicians who had stayed inside the country, the private sector, not unlike what we're dealing with today, the day after the Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega is—I don't even want to use the term reelected—putting himself back in power with a fake election yesterday, on November seventh, 2021.

Q: You are referring to it as fake because he arrested the individuals who would've tried to run against him, and then he had an election?

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And what I saw in covering Nicaragua and when I went there in 1986, [and again in 2019 to speak to Ortega] was simply the closing of the political space for anybody who had a dissident voice. But we need to remember the point I made about the contras because they weren't homegrown. A lot of the opposition to the Ortega brothers was coming from civil society and inside Nicaragua. And so we tried to keep doors and communications open with them.

Q: During your time in INR, were the Contras still fighting?

MCKINLEY: Yes, I believe they fought until 1989. And by then I had stopped working on it. I'm not going to be good on exact timelines, but there was the Contadora peace process, and we had transitions both in Salvador and Nicaragua with Costa Rica playing a significant role, as well as any number of other countries. Political violence as an option in Central America at that point ceased to be on the table, but I didn't follow the end of the Central American wars professionally. I would note that none of the key contra leaders became key political figures in Nicaragua after the transition, which said a lot about our policy failures.

Q: It's a bit of an echo with what happened in Iraq for example later, where we were working with outsiders, people who had left the country like Chalabi and they didn't have actual resonance inside the countries. And therefore, it wasn't a good choice.

MCKINLEY: Yes. The one thing I'll say is that in Nicaragua we were working with both sides. We were working with the civil society and the political opposition that was still in place inside the country, as well as supporting the contras.

Overall, I did feel as Salvador and Guatemala transitioned to democracies and the Sandinistas fell, there was a new dawn beginning for Central America in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War was a more optimistic period in more than Europe!

Chapter III: AF/S 1987–1989: The Angola/Namibia Peace Accords and Cuban Troop Withdrawal from Africa 1987–1989

Q: Okay. So maybe it's time then to move on to your next job. You went through the usual bidding process at this point?

MCKINLEY: I did. And as I mentioned, I was not interested in staying in WHA because of the Iran-Contra scandal and frankly was tired of the way the U.S. seemed to deal with and consider Latin America. I considered it borderline racist. I was offered a posting in Managua that was above my grade at a time when Nicaragua was still important. But I had decided that I have to do something else. And so the Namibia desk came open and it seemed like a completely inconsequential desk offering in Southern African affairs in the African Affairs [AF] Bureau, because in that timeframe, Namibia wasn't a country. It was a territory of South Africa.

Q: This is 1987?

MCKINLEY: Nineteen eighty-seven. But I spoke with the then-Angola desk officer, Gerry Gallucci who told me he was moving on and strongly recommended that I take the job. There was a chance, he noted, that, because nothing much was happening in the negotiations for Namibian independence and there was no American embassy in Luanda, that the Angola and Namibia desks may be meshed together. I had Portuguese because I had spent time growing up in Brazil and so I bet on the chance of that happening. Sure enough, I went into the Namibia desk, and I became Angola/Namibia desk officer.

Q: Just to pause here, you mentioned that the conflicts were viewed in the Cold War prism related to Southern Africa and our U.S. policy at that time with our assistant secretary on constructive engagement, I think.

MCKINLEY: Yes. Chet Crocker.

Q: So, this was very much of a piece, right?

MCKINLEY: It was. I was interested in continuing to work on U.S. policy on regional conflicts, the Cold War. I believed in our policies. I did believe communism had to be defeated. I did believe regional conflicts were an important part of the theater. Although clearly what was happening in Europe and what was happening in the Soviet Union itself were the central aspects of the Cold War even in its final moments.

So Southern Africa appealed. I was fortunate, the negotiations that had been off and on for several years took off again, to secure independence for Namibia from South Africa and the withdrawal of Cuban troops, which at the time numbered in the tens of thousands, from Angola, where there was a civil war underway between the Soviet backed MPLA [People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola] government and a movement UNITA

[National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] being backed by the U.S. and South Africa.

The MPLA and UNITA had also been insurgent movements that had fought the Portuguese. Angola had gained independence in 1975. UNITA had Jonas Savimbi as its leader, a person who for many years was one of the more well-known, notorious, intellectual, and charismatic political figures in the sub-Saharan landscape and presented himself as the democratic alternative to the Soviet backed government. [Which he wasn't, but he had managed to convince many in our government and Washington that he was.]

And I was fortunate enough to join the desk at the moment when the negotiations took off again under the leadership of a person who I admire tremendously Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker, who was the intellectual author of a constructive engagement—a term that has never fully gone out of vogue because constructive engagement probably can be used to define many of the policies we're pursuing today.

His deputies and the ambassadors in the field I dealt with were extraordinary and I have never stopped seeing them as examples of the highest professionalism in the Foreign Service: Chas Freeman who went on to become ambassador to China and Saudi Arabia; Jeff Davidow, one of the most admired Foreign Service officers of his generation for his devotion to staff and future multiple ambassadorships including to Mexico and WHA assistant secretary; the legendary Bill Swing, ambassador to South Africa and future director general of the International Organization of Migration [IOM]; there were so many.

Q: At this time also there was a lot of congressional interest in putting more pressure on South Africa to end apartheid. In fact Congress enacted sanctions to try to force a change. Did you find this had a complication for U.S. policy, as we tried to also forward these other objectives? We were trying to work with South Africa even as we were trying to encourage democracy within it.

MCKINLEY: That's correct.

Q: So do you want to start with Namibia or with Angola?

MCKINLEY: With both, because I think I joined the Southern Africa office in April of 1987 and the process of negotiations with the Angolan government directly began almost immediately. The first session was either in May or June of that year. The Cubans I think had already agreed before I arrived to at least discuss the possibility of troop withdrawal from Angola in the context of Namibia. I believe that was a connection that Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker had tried to establish. South Africans were obviously engaged because as we were attempting to push a broader shift in South Africa on apartheid, resolving Namibia's future was viewed as certainly a critical piece.

And if I remember correctly, part of the argument the South Africans presented was of themselves as a bulwark against the spread of communism and Soviet expansionism in

Africa. Their occupation in Namibia, certainly was being seen partly in that light. I believe we had our first meetings with everybody at the table, South Africa, the Angolan government, Cubans, by January of 1988 in London. So those first six-seven months there was just this extraordinary acceleration of diplomatic activity to reach what was considered a central objective of U.S. foreign policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Q: Were you considered part of the negotiating team or support for somebody who was leading it?

MCKINLEY: That was the beauty of what happened across the timeframe I was involved. There were five of us, maybe six. It was Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker, his special assistant, Robert Cabelly, a deputy office director who went on to become an ambassador in Eastern Europe, Larry Napper, our military advisor on regional affairs, Colonel Charles Snyder, and me. I did everything from arrange hotels and conference rooms in Luanda to carrying cash in the thousands of dollars to pay for airport fees as we flew in specially commissioned airplanes into airports around Africa for negotiations; to taking voluminous notes in meetings that went on hours with the Angolan president, the Cubans at senior party level, the South Africans at the foreign minister level.

And then as the efforts on negotiation expanded and Chet Crocker tried to build up circles of support, we spent a lot of time in Kinshasa and the Democratic Republic of Congo trying to enlist the support of President Mobutu, and also with President Sassou-Nguesso in Brazzaville. We went to Cote D'Ivoire to see the person who was at that point considered the doyenne of African presidents, Houphouet-Boigny, to enlist support in West Africa for the process. We went to Morocco and met with King Hassan to attempt to enlist his support and ended up speaking a lot with the Egyptians and with Boutros Boutros-Ghali who ended up as secretary general of the United Nations. And usually what we would do is fly commercially if it was just Angola. There were times we would fly for two days, stopping in Paris, get down to Luanda, go from the airplane straight to negotiations and within hours or a day being on an airplane back to Washington.

And other times where we would do shuttle diplomacy going to several different countries, where we would get support from the U.S. military to make those puddle jumps work, except they were across half-a-continent. And so I don't think I slept! I don't know how many times I traveled, but I gave up vacations that were already paid for with Fatima. I would have to give them up at the very last moment, lose the money, such was the unpredictability of the work.

And it was an extraordinary almost two years of just nonstop diplomacy, which resulted in Namibian independence and the Cubans withdrawing their troops from not just Angola, but from Ethiopia, a total of fifty thousand and an enormous success. The UN joined the process, and Soviets also became an important part of the negotiation equation but were less participatory than the others.

The talks involved going to Cuba for meetings with the Cubans. I think at that point, one of the few American diplomats to actually meet him. I certainly had my one-on-one

conversation on veterinary issues when he hosted a cocktail for all of us who were participating in the negotiations to include South Africans, Angolans.

At the time, the Cuban delegation that was involved in the negotiations, many of them saw this moment as a potential for a thaw in U.S.-Cuban relations. Cuba responded with true withdrawal from Africa and stood down assistance to the insurgencies in Central America, which was becoming easier and easier as those insurgencies failed. And as things began to change in the Soviet Union, the Castro government was hoping that perhaps there would be a change in how the United States dealt with Cuba.

And the tragedy of that is, after 1989, we didn't shift and the more liberal leaning persons who were involved in the negotiations with us, ended up all being removed. One was the number three in the communist party hierarchy, Carlos Aldana. They were speaking about real change, not just in the relations with us, but I remember in conversations I had with them about potential changes gradually inside Cuba. The purge included famous military figures who opposed Castro, like General Ochoa, who was executed, others were removed from their positions, including at least one person who worked with us.

So it was certainly one of those moments where you wonder whether we missed the boat and whether if we had followed through with the warming trend, whether that would've weakened Fidel Castro in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, the collapse of economic support for Cuba at that point, and with these more liberal individuals seemingly in the ascendant. I use the term advisedly, I'm saying liberal compared to what was there, I'm not suggesting that the situation in Cuba was getting better. It was a communist dictatorship but there seemed to be this possibility of a thaw.

The negotiations were an extraordinary experience. We were a small negotiating group. Secretary Shultz gave Crocker enormous leeway. There were people in the Latin America Bureau who didn't want us talking to Cubans. The persons in EUR wondered what we were doing, talking to the Soviets on these African conflict issues. And the Pentagon certainly grew more interested, eventually adding a person to the team, Jim Woods.

But the freedom and Crocker's mastery of working different actors—I mean, we had fraught relations with South Africa, fraught relations to the Soviet Union, no relations to speak of with the Cubans, no relations to speak up with the Angolan government and the Namibian insurgency SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organisation] which eventually took over when Namibia became independent, and which joined the proceedings late in the game.

At the end of the day, I look at Crocker and that process as the model of how we should work on any conflict negotiations. You're not talking to people who are friends. You're talking to the enemy. You're talking to people who are diametrically opposed to you. If you're interested in moving things forward, you have to engage your opponents.

Q: In order to help meet our interests by making sure we understand theirs?

MCKINLEY: Yes, and what Crocker did with great flexibility was taking into account the different points of view. I mean, the diametrically different points of view of Angola and South Africans and Cubans, it was astonishing. It makes the Dayton Accords look like child's play. What Crocker achieved without U.S. military leverage and without the full support of the world watching was truly an extraordinary feat of diplomacy.

Q: One of the reasons that he was able to succeed was that the Cubans were hoping to have a better relationship with the United States, you mentioned. What were the other aspects that made everybody constructive on this, getting everybody to yes?

MCKINLEY: The Soviets by that time were under pressure in Afghanistan. We had decided to support the mujahideen. They weren't winning in Central America. And so the Soviets, I think, were at least beginning to look at how do you preserve your gains, communist governments in places like Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, by giving up something that the United States or the west seemed particularly focused on.

Q: And the Soviet Union had financial problems at this point, too, right?

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And the Soviets were shifting. Inside Angola, the Cubans were a central part of the fighting. The Angolan military truly depended on them, and the Soviets were helping pay for/supporting these wars. And the Cubans had begun to make their own calculations about whether the presence of troops in Angola and Ethiopia were really in the best interests of Cuba. And they were at least prepared to sit down at the negotiating table and doing so also offered direct communications with the U.S. government, although we were strictly instructed never to discuss anything bilateral in the U.S.-Cuban relationship.

To give you an idea of how surreal and I'm using that word twice now, but surreal it was, we were not supposed to discuss anything bilaterally with Havana, but we had the person ranked, as I remember it, number three in the Cuban hierarchy, we had the head of Cuban military intelligence. We had—if it wasn't the secretary general of the party, he was another person who was very senior and became foreign minister in the hardline governments of the 1990s. We had the head of the Cuban armed forces at the table of the armed forces. It was an extraordinary deployment for the negotiations.

You would think the negotiations were important, but did not require that level of commitment, but there they were. And to me, it does suggest, and I'd have to go back and read, but I'm sure many others have written about this, but Cubans appeared to be making calculations going forward about how the relationship with the U.S. might change.

In my own dealings with them—if I can suggest I was the only Spanish and Portuguese speaker on the delegation. I would interpret on occasion. I wasn't a formal interpreter. But I did interpretation for hours in a couple of serious sessions when our extraordinary interpreter Alex Schiavo's voice would give out. We would have these all-day horrible

sessions in which nothing was accomplished, and where there's standoffs, we'd go into a room for ten minutes, walk out, there'd be hours of silence.

And I had Spanish and so with Charlie Snyder, the Africa Bureau military expert, we would go in after dinner into informal meetings with Cubans or Angolans. We had a close, open relationship with the head of the Angola armed forces General Ndalu and with Jose Arbesu who later became head of the Cuban interest section in Washington. And we would have evening conversations.

We were the lowest-ranking people, Charlie and I, so we couldn't negotiate. We were ground-truthing, Well, what happened? What's up? How can we move this? And, so across the entire process of this negotiation, the level of informality and communication at different levels that took place, we also had conversations with the UN and others in hotel bars dissecting the day's events for approaches that could work the next day.

The relationships paid off: Charlie and I, the night before the signing of the agreement in New York at the UN in December 1988, negotiated a last-minute word change with the Cubans.

In terms of the Angolans, you know, I'm not going to say they were completely under the control of Cuba and the Soviet Union. I don't believe that. It's like those who say we controlled the governments in Salvador. Well, if we did, we wouldn't have seen so many extrajudicial killings because we didn't support those.

No, you don't control these situations, you're influencing them. The Angolans were making their own calculations. The situation for the Angolan government was complicated and let me explain through a personal vignette. I think I was the first U.S. official in fifteen years to go to central Angola. I was left behind on one of the trips in Luanda. And so I flew with an Angolan and a Cuban [Arbesu and Ndalu if I remember correctly] and we went to Huambo in central Angola and did the corkscrew landing because of the worry about stingers that we had supplied to UNITA being fired at airplanes coming into Huambo. And I remember being on that airplane and thinking how ironic it would be if I ended up dead as a result of those weapons.

I've worked on a lot of wars. Huambo was one of the most depressing things I've ever seen. It was a city with destroyed buildings, obviously hardly anybody in the street, except it was supposed to be a place with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. I went to the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] which is when I was converted to seeing them as the organization I most admire in the world, but they were doing prosthetics for all the people who had lost limbs with landmines. It was horrific. We had lunch in the governor's house in which there was watery soup with a little bit of rice and a small piece of chicken in the governor's meeting house. Even the highest authorities were living in difficult circumstances.

And it drove home to me the extent to which the war was just destroying Angola. And I think, it seemed like the calculations of the governing MPLA was that if there was a way to get out of this war and still stay in power, they should be exploring it.

They were under pressure from the Soviets and the Cubans, but they were also under pressure from a civil war in which the U.S. and South Africa were supporting UNITA. By the way, their neighbor, President Mobutu, who was dictator for life in Congo and one of the most rapacious world leaders of his times, was supporting UNITA too.

The MPLA government was making calculations about how to run a war in which South Africans would enter periodically to support UNITA which was very effective as an insurgency and had popular support and received significant military assistance from the United States and South Africa. The MPLA had to calculate their options all the time.

SWAPO, by contrast, was largely marginal but hoping that they'd get independence at some point. And the UN system, which was brought in. Their key representative was a larger-than-life personality named Martti Ahtisaari who ended up as president of Finland.

It was really quite a constellation of people. Everybody had their reasons for wanting to bring this to a conclusion. And as I say, historical developments were pushing towards creating a more enabling environment for that transition to take place. So truly, truly one of the most fascinating periods in my career. And also colorful with negotiations set in everything from game parks in Namibia to warzones on the Angola/Namibia border and Havana, London, Kinshasa, Cairo, and more.

There were some truly dark moments: we met regularly with UNITA leader Savimbi whom I mentioned many in the USG saw as a democrat. Early on in the job, I saw him as a megalomaniac dictator in-the-making. I was in many meetings with him in different locations. Away from the cameras, he was intimidating, and his aides lived in almost physical fear of him. One who did not was Tito Chingunji, who headed the U.S. office and became number two in UNITA. And a challenger.

I felt very close to him. I will never forget saying goodbye at the "C" Street entrance of the building as he returned to Africa in 1988 for a family visit at the end of the year. I never saw him again, and he reportedly died under horrific circumstances at Savimbi's hands. We did not hold Savimbi accountable to my recollection, although I remember raising Tito's disappearance for a while. It was personally a difficult moment when news came through of Tito's death.

But overall, I think also an example, a textbook example, for the State Department, diplomats, historians to look at how you run a negotiation and Chet Crocker truly deserves to be much better known than he is. He was and is exceptional.

Q: So, did he have to leave office in 1989 because of the change in administration?

MCKINLEY: Yes, he did. If I remember correctly, at the time he was the only assistant secretary to serve eight years. He came in in 1981 and he left in January of 1989.

Q: He left when George H.W. Bush became president?

MCKINLEY: Yes. Eight years as assistant secretary for a turbulent region where he was being criticized for constructive engagement, for not doing enough on apartheid in South Africa, which was always just not true. He absolutely was trying to push things forward on a number of fronts. And I don't know if he still has the record for longest serving assistant secretary. He was a political appointee.

Q: I think he came from academia.

MCKINLEY: He was an academic and he ended up in Georgetown again where he still teaches conflict theory and international negotiations.

Q: And, then Hank Cohen came in as assistant secretary, I think, next.

MCKINLEY: He did.

Q: And were the negotiations over at that point?

MCKINLEY: They were, but there were bumpy moments on the way to implementation. SWAPO tried to invade Namibia and take over after the agreement had been signed and they were defeated in two weeks. If I remember correctly, it created a lot of tension. Hank Cohen had to move to try and ensure a soft landing for the policy. It continued to require significant hand holding, but Namibia became independent, I think one year later, with elections. SWAPO ran and it did work out, and the Cuban troops did leave Angola and Ethiopia, which was a great thing.

Q: From my own experience, it feels like an amazing thing when a policy initiative you worked on from beginning to end actually works out.

MCKINLEY: Yes, I was very, very fortunate in that Chet Crocker had been working on these issues from 1981 and I was very fortunate to be there for the end game.

Q: And it sounds as if they chose you because you had a skill set—you had the languages, and you were ready to be an important partner. It's not something a desk officer gets to do very often.

MCKINLEY: I think the Portuguese were an attraction as they thought through how they reorganized AFS [Office of Southern African Affairs] and when they joined the Angola and Namibia portfolios. And the fact perhaps that I was coming out of INR having worked on conflict issues already. I don't know what else they thought of me. And the people I worked for were something, and extraordinarily supportive—Larry Napper, the deputy office director. He went on to be ambassador in a couple of Eastern European

countries. Gib Lanpher, office director, went on to be ambassador in Zimbabwe. John Ordway, who succeeded Larry, went on to ambassadorships in Central Asia.

Q: I think we'll end it there for today.

Chapter IV: The Seventh Floor 1989–1990: The End of the Cold War, German Reunification, the Panama Invasion, and the Liberian Civil War

Q: It's November fifteenth, 2021 and we're continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. I believe that we are now in the year 1989. You had the wonderful tour of negotiating peace agreements in Southern Africa. And then what happened?

MCKINLEY: I did the usual bidding process and had made the decision that I wanted to stay in Washington as long as I could. I bid on the special assistant slot in the under secretary for political affairs office [P] on the seventh floor.

Q: Who was the under secretary at that time?

MCKINLEY: Robert Kimmitt, who was one of the constellation of individuals brought in by Secretary Baker. I seem to remember at one point people calling them Baker's boys, although it included at least one woman, Margaret Tutwiler, a spokesperson for public affairs and quite an influential person in the building.

Q: So, 1989 was the beginning of the George H.W. Bush administration?

MCKINLEY: Yes. That's right. By the time I got to the seventh floor, which I think was April of 1989, what you had in place or shortly in place were people who would go on to become quite well known. Robert Zoellick who I think was counselor for Baker at that time. He went on to be any number of things, including USTR [United States Trade Representative] and president of the World Bank. Nick Burns, a future P and classmate in A-100, worked with Zoellick. There was Dennis Ross who went on to become the architect of the Middle East peace process throughout the nineties. Dennis Ross was head of policy planning, and his number two was Bill Burns who was a rising career Foreign Service person who went on to much greater things. As I think we all know, he is currently head of the CIA. My connection to him started then, and he was important in my career.

Robert Kimmitt, whom I worked for, went on to become deputy secretary of the Treasury and ambassador to Germany. Many of the assistants went on to ambassadorships and assistant secretaryships. So it was an interesting time to be up there. The deputy secretary was Larry Eagleburger.

Q: Larry Eagleburger was there for most of Baker's time. And then he ended up, when Baker had to go back to the White House, as acting secretary and for a short while as secretary.

MCKINLEY: Yes, but I didn't deal much where I sat. The under secretary's office hasn't changed that much over the last almost thirty years, except when it was pushed out of its iconic wood panel setting to make way for a second political deputy secretary of state

under President Obama—a terrible signal to the Foreign Service at the time. I spent time working with P in 2018–2019, and it is still structured along the basis of an executive assistant and special assistants covering regions.

Q: There's been reorganizations over the years, but generally the under secretary for political affairs is usually in charge of the geographic bureaus.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And the functional bureaus, in some ways. Bureaus dealing with humanitarian response sometimes would in effect respond to the under secretary for political affairs, as opposed to just the under secretary of global affairs, depending on the extent to which functional bureaus became enmeshed in regional policy crises of the moment.

Q: And often the special assistants will have geographic responsibility.

MCKINLEY: That's correct.

Q: So you had which area?

MCKINLEY: In my case, I was hired to cover Africa, but I very quickly also ended up with backup responsibilities for ARA/WHA and the European Bureau [EUR].

In terms of how that job worked out, I would obviously strongly recommend those jobs almost more than any other mid-level jobs available in the State Department. They're tremendous opportunities, depending on the personality of who you're working for, whether it's in the deputy's office, the under secretaries' offices of different responsibilities, but you end with a number of things: first real exposure to what happens in the building. To the issues of the day. You're very aware of what happens at what's called the deputies level, which is the level of consultation among deputy equivalents at the Pentagon, NSC, heads of offices in the White House, senior department, and other agency people. And whether or not you participate in these, you're also very aware of what is happening more broadly.

In 1989, it was the year the Berlin Wall came down. I was only intermittently working on Europe, but it certainly became the dominant issue in our constellation. And exhilarating. It was the issue.

But during the year I was up there, there were several events that happened on the African continent, which were significant. And if I remember correctly, early in 1990 President De Klerk freed Nelson Mandela from prison where he'd been for almost three decades if I remember right.

And we also had the collapse of the long running government of Samuel Doe in Liberia. And the beginning of a particularly brutal and sanguine civil war in Liberia when Charles Taylor invaded Liberia on December twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of 1989. And I remember at the time the invasion being dismissed because he had come across with

twenty or thirty people but which quickly devolved into a very significant assault on Monrovia, Liberia.

In 1990, there was high-level concern at the White House about what to do. And I was quite drawn into that set of meetings and had the opportunity to watch and engage with senior people at the time including deputy national security advisor, Bob Gates I think, who went on to become secretary of defense and head of the CIA. And what was driven home being on the seventh floor was the extent to which State is one actor among many in deciding things when serious policy issues are in discussion or debate, or there's a crisis underway. The discussions were heavily centered on protecting personnel, installations, and American citizens, and eventually marines deployed to assist.

On Africa, perhaps, State had more sway since there is so little institutional knowledge elsewhere in government. There were many frustrations as the administration looked at the alternatives for our presence in Liberia.

So much of State's influence depends on the extent to which a secretary of state carries weight inside the administration. It's an issue of personalities, who's at the table, and what kind of alliances form between different cabinet secretaries, different agency heads. I was able to see that on a host of issues.

I also worked on Central America, again, on Salvador. The FMLN tried a last assault to take the capital San Salvador, towards the end of 1989, if I remember correctly. It was also when six Jesuit priests were murdered by the military, finally shaking the ambivalence we had regarding the real impunity our allies had on human rights abuses.

I would just like to comment on one event I had almost forgotten, the invasion of Panama in December 1989 to overthrow the military dictator, Manuel Noriega. I was back-up, not the principal assistant on Latin America, and was glad I was. I thought the invasion a low point of American bullying and overreach. The radios blaring at Noriega as he hid out in the Vatican emissary's residence was and is truly a puerile moment where senior American officials seemed to think they were engaged in a clever, not to say "macho" exercise.

It was pathetic. I was drawn in on the day because I was substituting and remember looking at city maps with a deputy assistant secretary in WHA trying to identify why the government's media and radio transmissions had not been taken out. It was amateur hour, fortunately against an "enemy" that had no substance or ability or interest in fighting back.

My favorite moment working in P, and I wish I'd kept my notes, was my backing-up of EUR as the debate on German unification was underway following the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Hard as it may be for people to believe it now, there was a serious group of people inside the building on the seventh floor who were not in favor of Helmut Kohl moving ahead

speedily with German unification. And even then, I found it extraordinarily naïve to think that the United States could stop it. And also insensitive to political realities that were rapidly unfolding on the ground. And I remember writing a note for Bob Kimmitt as he went into one of the senior meetings, where there were other views—in fact it was edited back because it was too forthright—saying essentially, we can't stop German unification and our strategy should be to work with Chancellor Kohl's calendar, allies, and make it happen with a soft landing.

It was an interesting moment because of the very serious discussions about the implications of unification, whether it would cause tensions with what was still the Soviet Union and implications for Poland and on and on. I think there was still the hangover of what a united Germany looked like in the aftermath of World War I. Who knows what the motivations were, but I do believe there was this sense, there was subliminal questioning, whether a united Germany was still something to fear. And obviously it became very obvious across the '90s that united Germany was an extraordinary plus and an achievement for everything the United States had sought to do during that time.

I did find the work on Liberia less cheerful. I thought then, and I think now, that the attitude of senior policy makers through the years with a few exceptions towards Sub-Saharan Africa has been to look at it as a problem people wish would go away, get solved by the career people, but it's never put in terms of a strategic response. And I think we've paid for that over the years and the neglect, if we can call it that, has led, certainly since the 2000s, to a decline in U.S. influence in Sub-Saharan Africa and much greater influence of other actors in the international stage.

I know I keep saying it, but I worked with a wonderful group of people again. Wendy Chamberlain, who went on to senior front office jobs at USAID and in State, ambassador to Pakistan and number two at UNHCR, the UN High Commission for Refugees. I worked with Eric Edelman, who I think went on to be an under secretary for defense as well as ambassador to Turkey. Ken Brill, our boss in the office, who was our ambassador to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], to Cyprus, and one of the department's leaders on multilateral diplomacy, and still speaks out on important issues of our country. Alex Wolf who ended up, I think again, the number two at the UN, ambassador to Cyprus and Chile. It really was a golden moment for learning and collegiality.

And as I look back on it, there was the declining influence of Foreign Service officers after that. It began under Baker. The reason special assistants had so much fun was Baker kept the assistant secretaries somewhat at arm's length because he had such a stellar constellation of deputies on the seventh floor. I remember at one particularly heated moment being told to order the assistant secretary for African affairs to do something differently. I responded that if the under secretary wanted to deliver that kind of message he should do so directly, or make me assistant secretary, but as a 02 officer I was not going to be giving orders to the AF Front Office. I was to experience that "Principals" mindset again when I worked for Secretary Pompeo as a senior adviser in 2018–2019. I learnt then, if, as a boss you have tough news to deliver to a subordinate, do it yourself.

And you know, I'm sure it wasn't deliberate, but I think the approach had ramifications down the line. Looking back, I can date the beginning of decline in the influence of career assistant secretaries from that date. Obviously, there's exceptions throughout the decades, but I'm talking about a systemic approach to how decision making was made. There was a brief resurrection for the Foreign Service under Colin Powell and to a lesser extent Condi Rice, but the decline began again after they left.

Q: I have some follow up questions for that really well-put exposition. So first of all, starting with Baker, many have said that he definitely did not see the Foreign Service and the career folks in the geographic bureaus as being part of the decision making. They considered policy to be reserved for upstairs. But also, if we are looking at clout in the interagency, Baker had it. He had a very strong relationship with the president. Did you see it that way? And how was the under secretary? Did he have a fair amount of influence to get things done?

MCKINLEY: I'm going to go with conventional wisdom. The influence wielded by both Schultz, the first secretary of state, so to speak that I worked for, and Secretary Baker, was just enormous. I did not see Secretary Baker in action. If I was in meetings twice where he was, that was a lot. But I repeat you were very definitely exposed to how decision making was happening on major issues of the day. And as I saw the seventh-floor principals they had selected; they really were an extraordinary group of rising leaders. And we forget how young many of them were. What I saw was definitely State as a powerhouse on issues which State cared about.

That's a very different phenomenon from issues which State did not care so much about. But that was almost a question of choice as opposed to not being able to throw the weight around. And the assistant secretary at the time for African affairs was Hank Cohen, and he did carve out space and independence for himself because he stayed for the whole four years. In part because of the lack of direct interest in the day-to-day issues, he developed a very significant authority over responding to Sub-Saharan African issues.

Q: When I worked in the Economic Bureau, in 1991, Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Bob Zoellick had a very detail-oriented management approach. We would all give weekly updates to him on what was happening on every issue that we worked on in the whole bureau, in a "weekly" memo that went on for pages and pages. And on Monday morning we would get the commentary back; he made handwritten notes—comments and questions—in the margin on almost every single issue. I take it that the under secretary for political affairs did not do the same.

MCKINLEY: Bob Kimmitt in terms of working style was very detail oriented also. Former military, he was very organized, demanding. Kimmitt was very much action, results oriented. And he would certainly look at the bigger picture and he's extraordinarily bright and pragmatic. What needed to be done? And he was also focused on what the secretary of state wanted. So, the pressures on us were to deliver. And we felt

the pressure. I think all of us who worked up there not only worked very hard, but we worked under a very high level of stress.

The payoff was Bob Kimmitt's loyalty to his people. He was extremely loyal to his staff, and he stayed that way for twenty to twenty-five years, following their career development, being helpful all the way through, even after he left government, when he came back into government. He also gave us remarkable freedom. He depended on us to have our own relationships with the assistant secretaries, to develop recommendations, and work with the bureaus.

He wasn't giving us instructions per se a lot of the time. We were coming to him with concepts, ideas, approaches, firefighting, and I really found it stimulating. And Ken Brill was just magical as an executive, as our leader. And he never lost his cool. We worked almost every Saturday too.

Kimmitt, you know, the debate has been there who had more influence given the issues they were working on. I think Bob Zoellick and Dennis Ross on some of the big picture questions did have more, but in terms of running the building and making things work, it was, in my personal opinion, Kimmitt.

Q: Right. So I had the pleasure of interviewing Bill Swing who was ambassador to South Africa the year you were in P. It sounds like it was a very hectic time. Did the under secretary go visit South Africa and visit Mandela?

MCKINLEY: No, not that I remember. Mandela came to visit. And it was one of those moments in my career. I'm with Mandela and one other officer in the receiving area of the P office, three of us in the room. And he looked so unhappy. My colleague got his picture taken with him. I think I still have that picture. I did not get mine taken with Mandela because I just, you felt there was a person with the weight of the world on his shoulders, but I could not use him as a prop. I'm never going to forget meeting him.

And years later, I was able to shake De Klerk's hand. And I, still like many who lived through that era, consider the transition in South Africa one of the top five, top ten moments of the twentieth century. Both men were heroes. This revisionist commentary that went on after De Klerk's obituary, the fact of the matter is in real life and real politics, you need somebody prepared to take the chance, whether they're perfect human beings or not. And he did. And of course, we know the result.

I also worked in that period with what would later become the bureau I most cherished in my Foreign Service career, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration [PRM], which I joined eleven years later. My first exposure to PRM was working on the Ethiopia famine or rather the threat of a second big famine. This was in 1989 into 1990. And getting to know PRM at the time, the legendary Margaret McKelvey who ran African refugee assistance, getting to know relief agencies and very much learning. And PRM's work then made a very deep impact on me, which will become evident when we talk about London, my next assignment.

Q: When you go into a one-year job, you very often have to bid on your next job even before you have started the job you're in. How did London come up?

MCKINLEY: I was asked to stay a second year, but the bid list came out, London was there. Embassy London and Embassy Paris had positions that were called the Africa watcher positions. The African Affairs Bureau had a significant say in who would get the job. But in London, unlike the position in Paris, the European bureau had equal say because half the job was covering the Labor party in Britain, which at that stage had been out of power since 1979.

And I think there were forty-four bidders, and I almost did not get the job. You bid in September. And you hope you're assigned by December-January. Three or four times in my career, I wasn't assigned until March or April, and this was one of those times. In retrospect, I was working for the under secretary for political affairs, but it was a hell of a competition, I did not have the leverage people think you have in those positions because so did others, and it was a talented pool.

I got London. And I almost regretted it instantly because my spouse Fatima was pregnant with our first child due to be born in September. And I began to get pressure from the embassy to be there immediately. I stayed for the birth and then went off. Fatima did all the packing of the house with a newborn child. Something I've never forgotten but even at the time I knew this isn't quite right. I strongly resented what I saw as the lack of sensitivity. Fatima, meanwhile, had used the years in Washington to perfect her English, work as a travel agent, and as we left, chose to become an American citizen. The ceremony was a moving moment for both of us and a real symbol of her commitment to the United States and our career together at State.

Q: So is there anything else that you could share with us on ways in which the State Department and the under secretary were able to influence events in other countries?

MCKINLEY: I'm trying to think. I don't think there's ever been a group of people like that again on the seventh floor. I felt the building was strong and I felt the United States was dominant at that moment.

Chapter V: Embassy London 1990–1994: New Labor and Europe; the Overthrow of Ethiopia's dictatorship; the Somali famine; Sudan's civil war; on geographic borders and political ambassadorships

Q: So you got to London in September of 1990?

MCKINLEY: That's right. And so that's when I discovered the extent to which I had two jobs, two bosses. One was the Africa Bureau and the other was EUR and they might as well have been on parallel tracks. The Africa work was of little interest to the embassy. I was fortunate that I worked for the one career U.S. ambassador to the Court of St. James in two hundred years, Ray Seitz.

And again, I just have to say, I think the Foreign Service is full of just so many special people in all walks and levels. I think most people would agree Ray Seitz was the prototype of certainly the old school Foreign Service officer: erudite, charming, attractive, persuasive but also extraordinarily polite, considerate, and intellectual. I thought he was just wonderful to work with. His representational events and dinners were on a level I have never seen equaled in terms of access and breadth. He was very focused on policy and working with the British, but everybody who worked with him, I thought, came away with very strong affection and respect for him. And he was respectful of all staff at the embassy.

But anyways, I arrived, and I was expected to go to the Labor Party conference in October that year. I knew no one. I had had the introduction to three or four people in their party office, and I was supposed to develop this set of relationships to carry me over the three years, which by the way I extended to four. I had no idea how to do it. And I remember going to the conference and fortunately discovering other Labour Party watchers from other embassies. Except, in other embassies, the officers covered all major parties—Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and the Labour party. The Conservatives were in power with Margaret Thatcher, and then John Major.

And so I learned to go to all the side meetings at party conferences, getting to know the press persons, the executive assistants for important politicians, the assistants to senior trade union leaders [important for Labour], the bureaucrats running the party organization. Labor headquarters were in a place called Walworth Road in south London. And get to know the left-wing think tanks. One of the people I met there was in his mid-twenties and his name was David Miliband. He went on to become Foreign Secretary for the UK and candidate for Labor party leadership. And for reasons that he and his brother have yet to explain, he let his brother Ed Miliband win the Labor party leadership and Ed led the party into defeat in the 2010s. And there's always the question whether David would've led them to victory and avoided Brexit. He's now head of the International Rescue Committee in New York.

Working members of parliament [MPs] were different. They'd initially brush me off. And what I learned very early on was that in Europe, unlike working in some other parts of the world, they didn't give a damn if you were from the American embassy, unless you were

an ambassador. Even deputy chiefs of mission had to choose their moments. In the UK, ministers and under secretaries were already in constant touch with their counterparts in DC.

So the question was defining what's your added value. And what I discovered is the added value is how much you know. Others may have the contacts, but you were the person who was becoming steeped on issues, whether it was on conservative politics, whether it was on British policies, on economic issues, whether it was on defense questions. And building up that understanding of your portfolio was your added value.

And because London, I'm not sure if it's the most visited embassy in the world. I'm not just talking about congressional delegations, but official Americans as well, it certainly seemed like it. So why do visitors want to deal with you other than, as a scheduler? It's having that knowledge base.

But working on Africa in London was a remarkable experience because the Africa Bureau thought that those watchers in Paris and London actually mattered to what they were trying to do.

But first the story on the Labour party. The embassy was unusual in having an officer covering the main opposition party almost full time and having the position formalized as such in the political section. I was told that the reason was that when Labour came back to power after about thirteen years in 1963, the embassy knew nobody in the Labour party leadership. And the operating principle going forward was Embassy London was always going to have eyes and ears on the opposition.

And my fortune was to work for an ambassador who not only fully understood that, Ray Seitz, but who anticipated Labour's return and saw this new generation, people like Tony Blair, Gordon Brown as special, we engaged with all of them personally. I remember at one point Tony Blair and Gordon Brown backing out of an international visitor program I had arranged. I spoke to at least one of them directly, and desperately enlisted my boss' support on getting that visit back on track and they did go. They later were to engage some of President Clinton's campaign managers and employed some of those strategies going forward in what they presented to the British people after their loss in the 1992 general election.

What I learned from Ambassador Seitz, however, was a lesson learned for any mission: never ignore the political actors who are out of power in a democracy, because you never know when there will be a sudden change.

I reached the point where I had met, dealt with, or was on a first name basis with over a dozen of the cabinet members of Tony Blair's first cabinet in 1997, at least that was my count, when Labour finally won elections after almost twenty years out of power. They included Tony Blair and Gordon Brown who went on to succeed him as prime minister and many others who became household names, Lord George Robertson who became

head of NATO, Peter Mandelson, who became an EU [European Union] commissioner and was central to the Northern Ireland peace talks.

And, additionally, I had a fabulous time and reached the point of intimacy with Labour. I was told that I was the only observer from a diplomatic mission invited to door knock in a general election with Labour leader Neil Kinnock in 1992, when he lost. But it was my introduction to grassroots politics. It was absolutely an extraordinary experience and one I'm very grateful to people like my bosses Steve Pifer, who went on to be a DAS [deputy assistant secretary] in EUR and ambassador to Ukraine, and Bruce Burton, who was an expert on arms control and Europe in general. More generally, the embassy team was outstanding, and the locally engaged staff were among the best I ever worked with.

Q: On Labour, you were there for four years as they were coming up, but they weren't actually ready to win for another three years. In retrospect, what did you see they were doing well that helped them come back into power?

MCKINLEY: Well, first there was a generational change. It wasn't a big generational change. It was a five-to-ten-year difference between Neil Kinnock and John Smith and between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, but it was there. And the new Labour and that's what it was called, they embraced business and a middle road. There wasn't this hostility to the private sector, which tended to come through in the past. It was social democracy that was the message, not class politics. So yes, support for the working class, but also for the middle class and a focus on modernizing services, and with an understanding of how government and economies worked. Neil Kinnock had women working in different positions. So did Tony Blair, a different approach on gender really was developing. And they projected themselves as being part of modern Europe. They were pro-European, pro-integration with the European Union. No more "Little England."

And it's cliche now, but by the mid-'90s London was into cool Britannia. If you look at cultural history, it was like England being reborn, just becoming really modern in so many ways. And certainly that was also a period for those who follow popular music. It was a revolution everywhere. In music. In art. In literature. In fashion. It was the city [finance]. I can't remember when the Big Bang happened in the reform of British finance, but things were changing there too. By the late 1990s, London was becoming a financial center of the world which by some measures was surpassing New York.

And I think Labour was able to ride that period, while still having one third of the party that was left wing and we've seen them resurrect themselves in the 2010s with Jeremy Corbin. And that's a lot of the problem with Britain's class politics, reverting to the past to some: Labour's transformation under Blair in the 2000s was not completed, and the Tories in the '90s were about to turn in an equivalent of what's happening in the Republican party, turn very right wing. And what was once considered Thatcherite became something else. The Tories almost became a reactionary party which eventually cost it, of course, the 1997 and subsequent elections and the ability to appeal to the broader English public until David Cameron, another young person turned up in the late 2000s and brought the Tories back to power.

Q: So I have one follow up question on that. You mentioned European integration. So Maastricht was signed. The European Union was created around that time. And for the British, there were some big decisions on whether they would—I don't know if the Euro had been created yet—but they were kind of setting limits on what they would and wouldn't participate in. Do you remember any of the debates on that? I remember the British strongly believing that, if they were going to join the European Union, they did not want to give up the pound.

MCKINLEY: That was 1992, the Maastricht Treaty and for the British it was an opt-out on the Euro. Until then the European Union was little more than a change of name because the Common Market of the EC [European Commission] just evolved into the European Union as it got bigger. But as treaties like Maastricht were agreed, there were giant steps forward in trying to develop commonality under what became the three pillars of European Union cooperation on foreign policy, justice security, judicial cooperation on economic standards and so on. In the timeframe I was there, the debate was over Maastricht and once again, the British trying to preserve their sense of independence.

And I think that was a generalized desire among the British. It wasn't a politically controversial stand going forward, keeping a degree of separation. And, you know, the irony is by the Brexit vote in 2016, the British had become, certainly by the time I was in Brussels in the 2000s, had become absolutely exemplary bureaucrats in the European Commission structure. The go-to persons, people willing to work on compromises. English was the lingua franca. I'm not talking about the politics, but the whole cultural approach of Britain to the day to day of working with the European Union, it was positive. But it's fair to say the British still saw themselves on a bigger world stage. And in the 1990s, they didn't see themselves as quite subsumed to Europe yet; that would come later.

Q: Right. So to the extent that they discussed whether to vote for Maastricht, it was basically trying to preserve their certain opt outs so that they could—

MCKINLEY: Yes. And, and the euro was the key one.

Q: But there was also discussion of mobility of people?

MCKINLEY: No, that was much later. There was the Schengen agreement. It looks like the first stage in 1995 for that. The open borders, what the British and the United States came to criticize as the lax European open borders.

Q: And what were the key issues in the Africa portfolio?

MCKINLEY: On Africa issues, I worked on many areas, but if I can try to summarize it, I would say it was Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. Let me try to actually focus on those. Let me just start with Ethiopia. Ethiopia was in the late 1970s through the 1980s, in the hands of an extreme and brutal left wing military government under the leadership of Haile Mengistu. And the government he operated was called the DERG. Essentially,

because of how he ruled, but also because of the ethnic and regional fragmentation of Ethiopia, there were a number of insurgencies and opposition to Mengistu.

Certainly by the mid to late 1980s the insurgencies against his rule had become more important and more powerful. One of them was the Tigrayan Liberation Front [TPLF], which is currently in the news again and marching on Addis as we speak. And the irony is the Eritreans from then-northern and coastal Ethiopia representing about 6 percent of the country were even more extreme left than the government in power but nonetheless supported fighting against the Amharic based government in Addis as they [the Eritrean Liberation Front] sought independence. And there was another organization called the Oromo Liberation Front, the OLF. The Oromos represent 40 percent of Ethiopia's population, but they were much the weakest of the various groups fighting the Mengistu government.

We have the OLF, the ELF, and the EPRDF, which was a broader umbrella organization that included the TPLF, some Oromos, and Amharas against Mengistu if I remember right. They were marching on Addis in 1991 and the issue became whether there'd be an overthrow and terrible violence and disintegration of the country, or whether Mengistu would voluntarily step down.

The rebels and particularly the TPLF had strong representation in London. And I was in regular touch with them and working with the British Foreign Office which was also following developments in Ethiopia closely.

And so what developed was that by May of 1991, the objective was pulling together a meeting where the parties could try to negotiate Mengistu stepping down, a peaceful transfer of power in Addis. The question was where to host. I went to the British foreign office and the assistant secretary equivalent and I discussed, Why don't we think about London? And I went back to Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen, and we ended up in London.

We ended up with the attendance of Mengistu's, I think, prime minister Tesfaye Dinka, EPRDF officials, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] under Meles Zenawi, the Eritrean Liberation Front [ELF], led by Isais Afwerki, the OLF [Oromo Liberation Front]. What I remember anyways. The negotiation was essentially for Mengistu to step down, which he did and fled to Zimbabwe. The "corridor" conversations with Afwerki and Meles Zenawi were critical in reaching that point, and Cohen handled the fluid environment expertly.

And in one of the more extraordinary moments of recent American diplomatic history in conflict resolution, which of course no one focuses on because it's Sub-Saharan Africa, it was very clear even then to Hank Cohen that the Eritreans weren't going to stop fighting unless they secured independence. And at that conference—remember we had Meles Zenawi who became president of Ethiopia for the next fifteen or twenty years and Isaias Afwerki, who's still in charge of Eritrea.

I think Hank has written about it extensively in his book, but Hank had a decision to make in a twenty-four-to-forty-eight-hour period on Eritrean independence. He goes back to Washington and says, What do we do about finessing this Eritrean desire for some form of self-determination?

Q: And this is still with Baker as secretary?

MCKINLEY: This is still with Baker. It's the London conference. The breakup of Yugoslavia is beginning, and apparently the order came back to do nothing, citing the danger of precedent for Yugoslavia. What did Hank do? There's a press conference to announce the results of the talks. Four or five of us recommended against saying anything. Hank went out, was asked the question, and expressed support for Eritrean self-determination.

Q: Did he have any backing to do that?

MCKINLEY: There was backlash. But it was Hank's courage, clarity, and recognition of political realities that was absolutely central to helping this civil war drawdown. He's blamed by some in Ethiopia as the person who contributed to the breakup of greater Ethiopia, but I think he helped avoid what would've been a much more extended civil war with a lot more suffering and so deserves credit for what he did.

I was invited to go along with Hank to Addis after the EPRDF took over. Going into the city, there were "woyanes," young men with guns, not formally part of a military yet, but keeping guard on the streets. And the city slowly began to absorb what had happened. I came away enormously impressed by Meles Zenawi, who was still a Marxist at that point. He ended up transforming and reforming Ethiopia, not into a democracy, but certainly putting the country on a very different footing during the time he was president until he died in the 2010s.

What was a lot less fun working, and I really want to get my timeframe on this right, was after Siad Barre fell in Somalia.

Q: Okay. So we'll leave off here. When we come back, we'll talk about Somalia and Sudan.

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Q: It is November twenty-third, 2021, and we are continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley on his London tour where he did both Labour and acting as the Africa Bureau's man in London. Mike, we talked a lot about Ethiopia last time. And if you don't have anything you want to add to Ethiopia, it would be interesting to know what you were involved in with Somalia. I think this was the time of the civil war and the helicopter downing and all that.

MCKINLEY: Somalia. I think it was one of the most difficult moments in my career for reasons I will explain. It really shouldn't have been something that occupied a lot of my time, but there was enough of the Somali diaspora in London and the leadership of different regions of Somalia tended to come through London at different points.

There was also a deep level of expertise in the British Foreign Office on Somalia. And after the fall of Siad Barre in 1991 and the evacuation of the U.S. embassy and as the country descended into civil war and then into famine, London became a listening post to try to provide insights on Somalia.

And I won't bore with what I learned about Somalia without ever being there. And I have never gone there subsequently. But at one point I was familiar, it seemed to me, with every square mile from Somaliland in the north down to Hargeisa and the border with Kenya. And because the country did fragment on such a scale and fragmented in a way that was unusual, unlike other African nations, it's often commented that it's one ethnicity in Somalia, it's one religion. And yet the regionalism and the differences within thirty kilometers of communities was pronounced. It really was a clan-based society.

The work that really came into focus was on the developing famine from late 1991 through 1992. After the fall of Barre there were British NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] on the ground on a scale which was frankly beyond others, and Americans were largely not present. The NGOs had information, they had people inside, and on the ground.

And this is one of those situations where your own emotions or personal engagement come into play. And as I mentioned earlier, I'd already worked back in the department on Ethiopia in the late 1980s peripherally. And it just seemed to me as I began to speak to Somali representatives from the different regions as the famine developed, but more critically to Save the Children, UK Care, and Oxfam, Irish Aid, and others, the urgency of responding and doing something before it was too late was driven home.

In a period of months, I must have written over forty cables on Somalia, not being based there, not having responsibility for it, but frankly, moving for I think the only time in my career, into an almost advocacy role.

Q: Our embassy there was closed and nobody else was reporting.

MCKINLEY: It wasn't quite that. I was a listening post like others, and the only reason I had anything to say was because of the information I was being provided, that was very granular on the ground from British NGOs and Somali political representatives.

Here's what struck me: there's moments in our history where we just react too slowly to humanitarian crises as they build. And we'd already seen it I think when the Iraqi Kurds went into the mountains, after we liberated Kuwait and struck Iraq, and it wasn't until the images of freezing children, dying children came out that there was a concerted response. In Somalia, the images were also just horrific.

And we finally did react, but I was struck by the reluctance of the United States to engage more directly in preventing mass famine. I remember advocating to create a safe area around Mogadishu and arrange for protecting and using the port to allow food to get in, and for safe havens where the international community could provide security for anybody that could get there. Obviously, people who are too weak, dying, and walking wouldn't make it, but there would be many others that you could save. Eventually a decision was made to go in in December 1992, but not before three hundred thousand people had died of starvation. And it was really a searing event. And then later being part of discussions, meetings to coordinate assistance, seeing Admiral Howe, who headed the UN mission in Somalia, respond poorly to the challenge of establishing protected areas and mobilizing assistance.

And I look back on Somalia, and still do not understand. The urgency was truly responding to the worst possible kind of humanitarian crisis, and I did not believe the warlords would be that much of a challenge.

And we just didn't intervene, until it was too late. Then we did, we became wrapped up in the politics and conflicts, which resulted in the terrible deaths of American service members, I think in 1993, immortalized in *Black Hawk Down*. We dealt with warlords, seemed to trust some of them, then went to war with them. In Somalia, it was Farrah Aidid who was responsible for the deaths of the nineteen American servicemen.

The other issue I worked on was Sudan. And again, because it was London, the former colonial power, the Southern Sudanese insurgency and political movements [predominantly Black African] including the main one [the SPLA], tended to come through the city and touch base. But, critically, so too did representatives of the government of emerging dictator Omar-al-Bashir, and of the northern Sudanese opposition [predominantly ethnic Arab] to include persons who became well known in the future or already were well known in Sudan, actors like Mubarak Al Mahdi of the well-known al-Mahdi family in Sudan which goes back to the nineteenth century, and whose key figure was Sadiq al-Mahdi, president before his overthrow by Bashir.

And I met, and this was an early exposure to Islamic extremism for me, Hassan al-Turabi. Hassan al-Turabi, was a leading Sudanese Islamic intellectual and was quite respected throughout North Africa, well educated, beautiful English and French in addition to Arabic and very erudite in presenting a fundamentalist vision of Islam in an enlightened way. He made a deep impression on me, and I saw him as profoundly dangerous precisely because he was so good at what he did.

Through the London perch, I was able to report back on meetings with these individuals—leaders of the SPLA movement that eventually took power when South Sudan became independent. And London was a place where people came in from the Africa Bureau also to meet with key Sudanese actors. I'm not going to try to remember everybody I met, but I met different factional leaders and senior SPLA leaders. I met individuals in the diaspora, and as a reporting officer, I had conversations to report back.

And of course, the British were extraordinarily expert on Sudan. One of the beauties for those who work in Embassy London is the almost symbiotic relationship State Department officers have with the Foreign Office. It was just an open relationship when I was there. Maybe it's still the case, I had my own ID to go into the Foreign Office as though I were a British official.

Q: So in all of this, there's civil war, internecine fighting, clans, and some ethnic divides. Did you form a foreign policy opinion on how the international community could better support peace in these countries riven by these divisive cleavages?

MCKINLEY: That's a great question because the short answer is yes. And if I can go back to my work on the seventh floor and as Yugoslavia began to break up. So this is my personal view. I think it's been borne out by events since the end of the Cold War.

You don't keep countries and peoples together that don't want to be together. This is a fundamental fallacy of American foreign policy and the foreign policy of a fair number of other countries. Borders have never been sacrosanct. They have been redrawn for millennia, throughout history.

And so many of the borders that were drawn in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries corresponded to colonial empires. And that goes for Europe as well, with the breakup of the Austria-Hungarian empire, a collapse of the Ottoman empire, changes in Russia's scale of influence after 1917, and so on.

And when I was working on these issues, on Ethiopia, for example I mentioned that I thought Hank Cohen's act of recognizing Eritrea's right to self-determination, that it was a recognition of reality. On Sudan, it was so evident. In the United States, the civil war was simplified in a terrible fashion, in terms of Arab versus Black and Christian versus Muslim, which it was to a large extent, but there were other factors.

There was still this assumption that somehow you could preserve the unity of Sudan as a sovereign state. I never thought that. I believed then that South Sudan needed to break away at some point or another. And it was on racial and religious grounds but also a reflection of geography and that barring significant change in federal structure and behavior of Khartoum, that was eventually going to happen. It took a lot longer than I anticipated, but even at the time that I was in London, I already thought this can't hold.

And on Somalia, I noted to you that it's the one time, I think I really moved more into advocacy, more than anything else in reaction to the famine, but in terms of my view of the politics of the place, I did believe there was also a breakaway region, that we should recognize, that we should still recognize, and I'm not alone here. And that was Northern Somalia. What became Somaliland. As the rest of the country was plunging into disorder, and this has been true throughout the last twenty-five years, Somaliland, more or less kept a governing structure in place, did not succumb to the worst excesses, did not suffer in the same way from the famine. They've certainly been looking for recognition since.

And I certainly viewed situations like these as requiring the U.S. to recognize reality and try to find the soft landing. Because our objectives should be stability in a region and frankly limit the human suffering and deaths that war and civil strife bring. I'm not arguing for this solution for every conflict on earth. But I'm saying there's certain situations where it becomes self-evident like it did in the Balkans. And we need to be more agile in recognizing when those moments surface, because they will come again, in every region of the world.

Q: So on Sudan, you were the key contact as people came in on information you got from the British. Was there anything else of note about your work?

MCKINLEY: I wish I could remember more. I once had former and legendary Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda in my office, whom I had met in his presidential palace during the Angola negotiations, and who was now at a loss. Cumulatively, all of the work was leading to something and I was cementing impressions and helping fact check, whatever I was reporting on, working on, reporting back.

Q: Was Ambassador Seitz there the whole time you were there?

MCKINLEY: No, he was not. A political came in and perhaps unlike some of your other people doing their oral histories, I will never be polite about most political appointees. If it is so easy to do our jobs well, I'd love to run a corporation for three years, or another institution, while they're running foreign missions. Admiral Crowe came in, who did know what he was doing, but as a political. There was also Henry Catto, who had had diplomatic experience over the decades, but was from the business world. Both were nice people. And that's not the issue. They were not Ray Seitz.

If politicals can so easily do what we do, why have a professional career ladder requiring fifteen-to-twenty years or more to become a chief of mission? Moreover, political appointments are the crassest representation of the American spoils system—we essentially "sell" a third or more of our ambassadorships to contributors, bundlers, influencers, supporters. In any other country we would call it corruption. You can have some ambassadors appointed to sensitive locations who are close to the president, but over thirty percent? Other democracies we compare ourselves to do not do that.

Also, in my experience a very significant percentage of senior political appointees do not know what they're doing and are abusive. And we pay the price. I was going to learn through experience of course as I went on to work for four political ambassadors as a DCM at a later stage in my career.

Q: Okay. So you were there for four years. The family did well in London?

MCKINLEY: They did. And two of our three children were born there. Even though London was prohibitively expensive, it was the days of, I remember, of two dollars to the pound, we still loved it. Fatima, as was to be her approach to every posting, built her own

independent life in London. She first started working on art studies there and had been accepted for a full degree at the prestigious Chelsea College of Art and Design but had to leave that behind when the transfer to Mozambique came through. It was becoming clear being the spouse of a Foreign Service officer had its very real constraints.

Chapter VI: DCM, Mozambique 1994–1997: The Peace Process, Refugees, Tackling Corruption and Development

Q: Great. And then you made a big move, right?

MCKINLEY: That's right. I was a political officer in London and bidding, and I never planned ahead, but I'd certainly worked enough on Sub-Saharan Africa by that stage over three tours and wanted very much to serve on the continent. I bid on a couple of DCM jobs at the 01 level. I was very fortunate and was selected by Ambassador Dennis Jett, who went on to be ambassador in Peru as well, who was in Liberia during the fall of Samuel Doe. He was ambassador in Mozambique. We didn't know each other. I waited for months, and the deputies committee finally allowed for the exception since I was not at the appropriate rank for the job. And I was able to go to Mozambique and work for a remarkable Foreign Service officer.

Mozambique was at that point ranked as one of the five poorest nations on earth and was coming out of an absolutely debilitating fifteen-to-seventeen-year civil war following independence from Portugal in 1975. And the UN was there in force, and a peace process and transition to elections was underway. At the time, it was one of the most extensive multilateral commitments in the world.

Q: How big was the embassy?

MCKINLEY: I remember it being somewhere in the range of forty-five to fifty Americans, a couple of hundred local employees. AID was significant. I don't remember if they were fifteen or sixteen individuals, but very large compared to the rest of the mission. We were a big mission by local standards, obviously. The Chinese had a big embassy there. I remember the Russians did too but, I think we were next in line in terms of size.

Q: This is a Portuguese speaking country. You didn't need to study language first?

MCKINLEY: I didn't need language because I had Portuguese from a couple of years of my childhood in Brazil. It was a case of resurrecting it and separating it from Spanish.

Q: Right. And you arrived in—?

MCKINLEY: I think during the usual transfer season, in August or September of 1994. And I was there for three years.

Q: So being a DCM is different, right? The work is different. They give you two or three weeks of training on things that they've kept you out of up until then, management controls and things like that.

MCKINLEY: Oh my gosh, yes. I skipped talking about the training in West Virginia. And it was if I remember correctly, also when the World Cup was on and so two of us at the training were caught sneaking out to watch a critical match, and then chastised politely in front of the class for letting down the side. And we deserved it!

Q: So you arrived during the usual transfer season and your family went with you?

MCKINLEY: I arrived in Maputo as a 02 officer. I think we had a Senior Foreign Service officer as head of AID. I think the heads of sections were my grade. I don't know if a couple of the other agency heads outranked me, but as DCM I went in very conscious of the fact that others knew my grade, and that it was extremely important to be careful and respectful of how I performed as DCM.

I was also aware of how much I didn't know. And then I became really aware of how much I didn't know. And on administrative and personnel work, I was very grateful for my first tour as GSO [general services officer] in Bolivia twelve years earlier. You never stop learning and you have to have considerable respect for just how much goes into keeping an embassy running and just how difficult the myriad of personnel issues is.

During the tour, I was blessed with a largely friendly community, and people drawing together. There were the challenges of young families, health needs [our own daughter at six weeks was overdosed for a month on mefloquine by mistake, and State's oversight MED Bureau was less cooperative on cases requiring treatment outside of Mozambique than they are now], spouses who could not find employment, a high crime environment [my spouse was among those mugged], and managing a large local workforce. Our local guard force rebelled against the American contractors, and I found myself on one occasion going out with just the security officer to speak to dozens of them wielding sticks and calming them down; and on another occasion persuading them to open a garage where they were not allowing embassy employees to leave. The contractor had not been able to deal with the situations alone.

And so, there was that part of the process. We were also in a country recovering from war. The State Department provided two-thousand-pound consumables for employees' allowance to bring in food stuffs, toilet paper, toothpaste, et cetera that may not be available locally. And in fact, what most of the foreigners in the international community did was to caravan from Maputo to the South African border, to a town called Nelspruit in the Transvaal, which was especially helpful for younger families.

My spouse and I decided as we were getting ready to go to Maputo, we were going to live off what was available locally. We did not take a consumable shipment.

Well, we did live off the local market and the embassy commissary was small. And there were no supermarkets in town. We made a decision which was a little silly in hindsight, but initially we had no interest in going to a white segregated town in South Africa to buy things. So we didn't. We would go weeks where we wouldn't have butter or milk or meat. We bought fish. Fatima would go down to the fisherman's market at four pm. Maputo is

on the coast. We bought the local green cassava leaf that is used for matapa stews and cooked the beaten manioc paste with peanut sauce.

Q: You must have had really flexible kids. I was stocking up using the consumables allowance when I went to Moscow with little ones. I was stocking up with formula and juice and all kinds of stuff. They didn't like change.

MCKINLEY: Well, they were toddlers, the third just born, not yet making decisions!

We eventually accepted that things were changing in South Africa and there was nothing wrong with going there. We spent a very interesting time, probably over a year, in which we did live off the local economy. And there was an American who had a farm about twenty to thirty kilometers out of Maputo and he was married to a Chilean. He became the tomato king of Maputo and he produced, I don't know what percentage of the tomatoes that were consumed in the city. We got to know him quite well. Later supplies improved in Maputo, and we started driving to Nelspruit.

Q: A friend of mine worked in Mozambique in 1988. In one of her letters, my friend said she was out on the veranda at the ambassador's residence inventorying the silver, and monkeys jumped down. It was a very graphic vision of the tropics. Is it a tropical city?

MCKINLEY: It's semi-tropical and Maputo actually is one of the more beautiful cities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Portuguese had built it as a planned city. And we loved it. We loved Mozambique with a passion. But it was extraordinarily run down and there were still remnants of fighting when we arrived. There were certain areas that you didn't go to beyond the city limits. I remember along the coast, there was a Greek expatriate who ran the Costa do Sol restaurant. It was the furthest out most expats would go, and at some points even doing that was discouraged. And you'd drive by the palm trees on the beach, but not much development, a few big houses beginning to go up as people recognized that peace might last.

There was a South African expatriate who started in Maputo pushing a food truck. And he was in his early to mid-twenties when we met him and he'd set up a pizza place in the harbor area, which was an extraordinarily rough part of town at that time. But where the South African truckers and others congregated. I think we were the only embassy family to go down there. We'd go with our three kids and hang out with Albert. In hindsight, it was remarkable that the security office did not have issues, and in any case, I did not have a security detail. Eventually Albert became so prosperous, he moved Mundo's, as the restaurant was called, up to the main avenue in the well-to-do part of town. It became the most frequented restaurant in Maputo.

But I'm giving you the anecdotes because Fatima and I were in a way living a parallel life to the mission. And then Fatima joined the hash house harriers runners, which I'm sure you're aware of because it is a social gathering that is in many countries, and it included a few people from the mission and then expatriates from Scandinavian

countries, the UN system, NGOs, Mozambicans who ran or worked with the agencies. We began to socialize extensively with expatriates, foreign diplomats, and Mozambicans.

We did also mix with the embassy community, and had close friends, and were very conscious of our responsibilities towards the community, which had a mix of singles, young families, and a more representative mix of America's diversity than we had seen in London. Fatima took on holding events for families on commemorative days and holidays; she organized the representational events and celebrations like Black History month, and community Easter and Christmas events—the latter which largely were paid for out-of-pocket through the years and assignments.

Q: The hash is like a 5k run that the British usually organize, right?

MCKINLEY: That's right. But this was the way the internationals, NGO types, AID workers, and some embassy people got together. It was a heavily singles environment in those days. And every Saturday that's what she did. And eventually that's what we did. As the kids got older, they also ran with the hash house harriers. I did not!

We got to know a couple of Portuguese Mozambican families, who we grew very close to. And Fatima began to mix with and support the local artist community. She became close to a number of artists in Mozambique. She worked with the French and other cultural centers helping promote local painters. Mozambique already had one of Africa's most famous painters and sculptors, a person named Malangatana. His paintings went for thousands of dollars, but there was this whole other art scene there, and we were also supportive of a Brazilian cultural center which was operating again holding exhibitions and supporting Mozambican music as well.

We would occasionally also go out at midnight with a couple of friends into what were called the "canizos" neighborhoods and go to the all-night open-air discotheques. It was quite safe and peaceful, or so it seemed to us. And it was just a beautiful experience of society coming back to life.

And we fell in love with everything about Mozambique, with the people. We were close to the people who worked with us, for us, in our residence. We went for hours into the countryside to meet their families, for celebrations. It was an experience, I think, unlike any other we had. The school was just getting started, the American school and I had to be on the board as DCM, but it was also an interesting learning experience to see how that developed. On a personal side we still think of it as our best tour.

Q: Right. So I have two questions, very different. One is, what were the ambassador's priorities? What was he trying to achieve there? And then the other question is more along the lines of managing an embassy and what you learned from that.

MCKINLEY: I was very fortunate to work for the person I was working for. Dennis Jett gave me a great deal of latitude but wasn't afraid to call me in at key moments and

correct my course. He was also strategic, articulate, and fearless in calling things the way he saw them, and forceful in driving agendas. I learned a lot from him.

I was also fortunate in that the people I was working with in the embassy by and large were people I was able to get along with. I also learned from them, from my own mistakes, and from what we worked on. Morale was high; and I learned the importance of creating a team achievement environment and flattening hierarchy as far as possible in the management of people.

Let me repeat. Mozambique was one of the five poorest countries in the world when we arrived in 1994. And it was a country that had been ruled by a harsh communist government from 1975 onwards and faced an insurgency from a particularly brutal movement, RENAMO [Mozambican National Resistance], which was viewed by the right as an anticommunist movement, and partly founded and funded from apartheid South Africa.

But the civil war should also be viewed in part as an ethnic and regional conflict inside Mozambique. While Frelimo had support in urban areas throughout the country, and among the Shangaan-Tsonga in the south, RENAMO drew on central Mozambique rural support with some support in the Shona-Ndau communities.

That said, it was RENAMO which in the 1980s was one of the most horrific insurgencies in the world. The stories of villages being burned, massacres, women being raped and tortured. It was truly a terrible situation in which, for the longest period, the FRELIMO [Liberation Front of Mozambique] government, the communist government, had a fair amount of support from neutrals, like the Scandinavians, because of the nature of the civil war. The U.S. kept some distance, but we never supported RENAMO as far as I am aware, so parallels with UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] in Angola are misplaced. I don't believe they were equivalent conflicts. But eventually the fighting wound down, there was a peace process supported by the United States led by the Vatican and a peace agreement was reached in 1992.

And Mozambique in the immediate post-Cold War period I think became the biggest single UN peacekeeping mission at the time, a billion dollars plus, I don't know how many thousand UN peacekeepers in country carrying out demobilization of RENAMO and integration of RENAMO fighters into the national military, for those that wanted it, and into civilian life for the others. Two to three million refugees in neighboring countries coming home, with UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] arranging for the return. A political transition inside the country being pushed and supported by donors and the UN special representative with the hope that there would be a more open democratic system where RENAMO as a party could run for the presidency and representation in the parliament.

Q: This UN effort was going on while you were there?

MCKINLEY: I arrived at the tail end of it. It's one of the most successful peacekeeping post-conflict transition efforts in the history of the United Nations, and I would argue in the history of the post-Cold War period.

The United States had one of its biggest assistance programs at the time. If you count our contributions through the UN system, we're talking about over two hundred million a year, if I remember correctly and we worked well with the World Bank, the IMF [International Monetary Fund], with Scandinavian donors, with UN agencies. It was an international effort that actually produced results, helped along by Mozambicans who had had it with a civil war that killed over two hundred thousand people, and which now hoped to transition to something better.

I was there for the big return of refugees in 1994–95. And I ended up with enormous admiration for UNHCR. Seeing them work on the ground in person, as opposed to, from a distance in the manner I had worked on in previous conflicts. And I almost thought they could do no wrong, obviously learning differently over the years, but it was very impressive, the level of dedication and the smoothness with which a couple of million people returned to the country, the smoothness with which the demobilization of thousands of RENAMO fighters was carried out. They went back to their villages and they didn't pick up weapons.

RENAMO sought to boycott, and politically FRELIMO did try to cook the election, but the elections went ahead in October 1994. And the consensus is that FRELIMO won it fairly. RENAMO did well. I don't remember exactly but it was almost 40% of the vote although their leader Dhlakama did worse in his presidential candidacy.

So, to get back to your question, Dennis Jett's priorities were the smooth transition to democracy and a firm foundation for international community engagement and assistance moving forward. We had an outsized personality, an Italian named Aldo Ajello who was running the UN exercise inside the country as the UNSYG's [United Nations Secretary General] special representative. He did a fabulous job, and he worked very closely with Ambassador Jett.

We reached a critical moment in which RENAMO's president Dhlakama said that he was not going to accept the election results. And this is one of those moments where I certainly view the added value the United States has, of being able to talk to multiple sides and to have the credibility of weight, if not always credibility of right, in a given situation.

RENAMO was seen locally as being favored by the United States, which was not true, and of being supported by South Africans, the white South Africans. But by that stage, of course we were into a different government inside South Africa. In the aftermath of the election, Dhlakama had locked himself up in his house. He was resident in a wealthy area of Maputo, which was about three houses, a block and a half away from where the embassy was and where we lived. The international community represented by local

ambassadors, African leaders including President Mandela, and the UN system sought to persuade him to change course.

The issue was Dhlakama wasn't taking calls from anybody to include the South African government. And he was not taking our calls.

And the situation, I remember, was an evening. I can't remember the exact date, but I'm sure Dennis has written about it or Aldo Ajello. Dennis had already reversed the attempted boycott in an earlier meeting with Dhlakama. At that stage, I had already also developed a close relationship with the leadership of RENAMO. I remember earlier that evening attending a meeting of European ambassadors debating what to do.

I returned to the embassy and suggested to Dennis I try walking over. He agreed and sent me; I knocked on the door, I was recognized, and I went into the living room. And Dhlakama agreed to see Dennis Jett and the rest is history. Jett basically convinced Dhlakama to change. With hard talk. And it worked. Dhlakama changed over the next twenty-four hours, and Jett deserves the credit for saving the Mozambican transition. Dhlakama did eventually take some calls and became more open to accepting his loss. FRELIMO wasn't particularly generous in recognizing the change or Dennis' role.

The government had a rather fraught relationship with Ambassador Jett who was very public in his critical statements about the government's still autocratic and corrupt behavior. There's two ways American diplomats work. I'm not saying one approach is right and one is wrong. I'm into more quiet diplomacy normally but as we've seen with everybody from Dennis in Mozambique to Geoff Pyatt in Ukraine, or as I just saw in Salvador yesterday, there is a purpose in driving policy in a public way. And Dennis used that to great effect in Mozambique. And I think he deserves enormous credit for saving a transition that was going to go off the rails. But there are many times it does not work. Especially in today's diplomacy where we have so much less influence.

I learned a lot about the efficacy of the UN system when everybody's working together, but most importantly, learnt that you can get things done if the local parties to a conflict have decided they want out from the conflict. And so the policies began to fall into place. I was the main author of a report Dennis sent back to Washington which was widely circulated on lessons learned on peacekeeping and political transition, and it still holds up.

And then Dennis left, and I was chargé d'affaires for fourteen months.

Q: Until you left post?

MCKINLEY: Until I left post. And so I dealt with a different situation, which was a FRELIMO government under President Chissano and the focus was on preserving political space, a modicum of democratic activity, supporting programs of AID, the UN system and other donors, institution building, helping the parliament build capabilities, focusing on trying to build out a military to be more professional, less dependent on the

Russians. And I worked on economic issues. And at the time I did throw myself fully into what I thought were important potential investments, to include American firms and one named Enron, a major [at the time] energy company from Texas that went down in scandal in the early 2000s and became synonymous with excess.

Q: Sometimes in assistance projects and big programs, donors like to work on what they like to work on. So there's multiple donors working on education or working on hunger or whatever, which can pose a coordination problem, and sometimes donors specialize. What did AID focus on there?

MCKINLEY: AID focused on everything. So, health, agriculture, institutions, infrastructure development. What I chose to work on was frankly business, economic growth, and to a lesser extent supporting the appropriate expenditure of donor money. And it was my first work on corruption in governments. And so I won't belabor this, but there were two incidents of corruption involving U.S. assistance projects. One involved the national railway system that was trying to be built back up, rehabilitated. Another was with grain shipments which were meant to address food insecurity inside the country. There was also more generalized and extensive corruption in Mozambique which was only getting worse.

As I mentioned, I lived a semi-parallel life in that I spoke to a lot of Mozambicans independently of my work. I learned of very significant corruption in the railway project, which was a flagship for AID. AID questioned my questioning of the project. And it became an issue of whether my boss would support me on pushing this, because the information I had was viewed as hearsay. Over a period of many months, I was able to prove it was not hearsay on both issues, on the corn shipments and the skimming in the railway project. Millions in assistance were pulled back.

Q: And at this point you are chargé or DCM?

MCKINLEY: Yes, it was spilling over into my chargé period, but I think on the railways that was resolved while I was still working for Ambassador Jett. I don't think the corn scandal was. It was a real learning experience on the importance of having facts, how you do accountability. One of the real concerns, and I understood it from the AID mission's point of view, is that while we need to correct things that go wrong, the danger is that if you present everything as going down the drain, you risk the whole of the program. Congressional oversight will question, Why are we spending money there? You're not achieving anything.

Well, we were achieving a great deal in Mozambique. And so to me, it was a question of correcting things that were wrong, not bringing down the show. But learning how to present it that way, without seeming as though what you're doing is risking the entire project, was something I had to learn. We eventually had a meeting of the minds. I was very close to many people in the AID mission. And it worked out in the end, but there were some bumpy moments there, working through that.

On Enron, it was a billion-dollar project but the competition was South African, and it was European, and I won't put too fine a point on it, European donors have done many wondrous things, but for decades, they lagged behind the United States on enforcing anti-corruption in their overseas business ventures. And Enron was up against it from the start, and they weren't helped by being a company with a bulldozer personality. Dennis Jett and I at different stages, pointed out that things don't work this way, you have to work things through. Enron was not always appreciative. And did not win the bid.

Q: Was this a bid for electric generation or distribution?

MCKINLEY: It was the development of a pipeline if I remember correctly. But also, if I can put this again in more geostrategic terms, many American firms never quite figured out Sub-Saharan Africa, they still haven't. And we've missed many opportunities. Part of the problem is the over-cautious, We're not going to go into risky environments and we're up against corrupt governments and environments. Well, sometimes creating the right conditions requires working with a longer-term timeframe.

I'll never forget being visited by a major American manufacturer for the sale of a certain kind of car. There were half a dozen or a dozen being sold in Maputo at that time. And their thought was, Isn't this too small a market? Fast forward ten years, and a major Asian competitor is there, tens of thousands of vehicles are being sold every year.

Africa is a difficult working environment for companies, but it's also an environment where if you get it right it can go well. But that's a difficult call, I guess. And certainly when your competition is as rough as I saw in those days, and you're dealing with governments that are not entirely clean in how they approach things, it makes it very difficult for American companies.

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But if I can close by saying a word about my spouse Fatima. In Maputo, she learned Portuguese on her own and began to learn French, both languages which would be important to what we did in the future as well as in Mozambique. And in addition to working with the art world, she threw herself into what's called charity work, but which is really a passion to help people. On her own, she supported some young women learning how to sew and develop a working skill which could provide better employment, and Fatima invited them to our home to practice there.

Fatima also helped lead the diplomatic spouse association. At the end of one event, the money had been raised but there was no one prepared to do oversight on the school project in a distant area of Maputo that the money was supposed to assist.

Fatima spent probably nine months going into the slums of Maputo on her own, buying bags of cement, buying nails, buying the wooden beams to build three classrooms, three toilets, a library room, and general office, and without any support. Not from me because I was always very conscious of keeping the separation between personal and office. She

was out there on her own, going to "thieves" market, to the point that the security officer [RSO] came to ask me, "What is your spouse doing?" She spent entire days supervising the construction in person. She did a fabulous job, and the school rooms were completed. She won the secretary of state's outstanding volunteerism award for Africa that year.

And, at that point a FRELIMO government local official wanted to take them over for government use, for the use of the party.

Q: Oh no.

MCKINLEY: And that's where, again, the friendships we built up came into play. A very senior private sector Mozambican I knew saved the day for us and went and talked to the government and the project stayed as a school.

The parallel life my spouse led in Maputo and many other places kept me, in terms of post management, very aware of what spouses/partners/accompanying family members go through in these environments. And that was already driven home to me from my GSO days in Bolivia. But sitting in the front office, it became all the more apparent, just how difficult it is for spouses in so many of these environments to find jobs, but also to reinvent themselves in every post. Embassies don't give as much support as we think they do.

In the case of front-office spouses, they are not paid but expected to host rep events, community events, fly the flag. This was and is a very sexist view of roles. In one ambassadorial training in the 2000s, one female ambassador actually told the spouses present it was an honor for them to be able to serve. Fatima and I openly disagreed with this characterization of the role, which should be voluntary if a spouse chooses to fulfill it. In any case, with Fatima, it was getting "two-for-one" as Hillary Clinton said once to describe her own role in the 1990s. She was right.

But we loved it so much that for two of the next three years through 2000, we went back for vacation to Mozambique. Unfortunately, we've never gone back since 2000, but it's a place which will stay with us forever.

Q: All right. Well, we'll end there on this lovely note.

Chapter VII: DCM, Uganda 1997–2000: Museveni, New Generation African Leaders; HIV/AIDS; The Congo War; Clinton/Albright Visits; Bwindi Park Murders; The Lord's Resistance Army

Q: It's November twenty-ninth, 2021 and we're continuing our conversation with Mike McKinley. Ambassador, we left off in the year 1997. So what happened next?

MCKINLEY: The bidding process, and I'm not sure whether people are interested in each stage of these things, but the usual sixty seconds on it: I actually had bid on leaving Africa and moving to New York. I think it was deputy political counselor at the mission to the UN but the opportunity for another DCM position in Africa came up and it was in Uganda. The ambassador I ended up working for was Nancy Powell who was a four or five-time ambassador throughout her career including India, but also known to most people as director general of the Foreign Service and acting assistant secretary for Africa.

And a trailblazer for women in the department. She came from a generation which faced very considerable barriers to advancement. There are others from that period, like Beth Jones, who I ended up working for, who was assistant secretary for Europe when I went on to Brussels. There was Maura Harty, the person who became assistant secretary for consular affairs and became something of a legend; our ambassador in Kenya during the 1998 Nairobi bombings Prudence Bushnell. Nancy came from that constellation.

I stayed close to Nancy Powell for many years. She had a very significant impact on me on a personal level, on my career. She was great to work for and I learned a lot from her on organizations and dealing with people.

The opportunity was to be DCM in Kampala, Uganda, which was a country which was already ten years removed from conflict, with a president, Museveni, who at the time was viewed as a new generation African leader. And for people who look at this transcript, this is the period of post-Rwanda genocide, the post-Somalia period, post-Cold War period, a post-Mobutu period in DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo.

There was very much a sense in Washington that Sub-Saharan Africa was changing. It was modernizing, economic opportunities were growing, and internal conflicts were diminishing in number and intensity, and a new generation of leadership was showing the way forward, including Museveni in Uganda, Kagame in Rwanda, Zenawi in Ethiopia, Afwerki in Eritrea.

And while they were not seen as particularly democratic, they certainly seemed to be focused on rebuilding their countries, institution building and so on. Until they weren't. And I think it became evident during the decade, the extent to which some of them were veering towards more traditional big man leadership models. But I'd rather not even use that term, just old-fashioned political authoritarian states in which you become a leader for life. But in those years in the '90s, there was still very much the expectation that things were changing for the better. And they were in most of these countries with the

exception of Eritrea. I went to Uganda and I was coming out of Mozambique, which was also emerging from conflict and seemed to be moving in the right direction.

It was also the period when the HIV/AIDS pandemic and crisis was taking over much of Sub-Saharan Africa. And Uganda at that time was one of the epicenters of the HIV/AIDS outbreak in the world. And also, the location for one of several international placebo investigations including U.S. researchers in which there were attempts to research ways to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS during pregnancy and birth.

Q: Did you say that there was a change of ambassador after your interview?

MCKINLEY: Yes, I arrived and I was chargé for about four months before Nancy Powell arrived and she left a year before I left. And Martin Brennan, another great boss to me, replaced her as ambassador in Uganda. I had a couple of relatively brief periods as chargé in Kampala during my time there, but she left to go back to be ambassador to Ghana and PDAS [principal deputy assistant secretary] in AF. The assistant secretary was Susan Rice. Very hands-on and very focused on this new generation leadership in East Africa. I had a fair amount of exposure to her. She went on to be our ambassador at the United Nations and had senior positions inside the Obama-Biden administration.

Q: You said that the experience was different than expected. How so?

MCKINLEY: I arrived, and Uganda just seemed to me in many ways, a going concern as a country. Although the country was still emerging from ten years of strife under Idi Amin in the 1970s, well known in the annals of modern African history as one of the worst leaders on the continent to be followed by an even worse leader in the person of Milton Obote—terrible abuses, hundreds of thousands of deaths—Museveni came in in 1987 and began a transformation of a country.

Uganda still had sectarian issues in Northern Uganda with a millenarian movement known as the Lord's Resistance Army [LRA], which at the time was the equivalent of Boko Haram, except Christian. And they committed absolutely horrendous atrocities with a million plus people displaced, perhaps up to two million, in Northern Uganda. Gulu and Kitgum were particularly affected, and they were also affected by the still ongoing Sudanese civil war—the Lord's Resistance Army was taking refuge in Southern Sudan and John Garang and the SPLA had support from Museveni inside Uganda in their struggle against the government in Khartoum.

But in Kampala, what you saw was a country that had high economic growth and development. I won't say it was unique, but he was close to unique among Sub-Saharan African leaders in early on recognizing the scourge of HIV/AIDS and doing something about it. Unlike certain leaders in Southern Africa that were denying the existence of HIV/AIDS, Museveni took it head on. He adopted a very aggressive approach to contraception, to HIV/AIDS education, part of it driven by necessity in the sense that, as I said, Uganda at that point had one of the highest global rates of incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Again, at the time, he seemed to me a person who was visionary and had a sense of what had to be done to help and save his people. He was doing the same thing on the economic front.

It was more ambivalent on the political front. There was a fair amount of political freedom then. There were different political currents in the parliament, but there was always the undercurrent of dominance of his party and that his movement would have primacy of place and dominance. And so even with a relatively free press and media, there was very much a sense of what I guess today would be called neo-authoritarian.

Museveni would move onto much more authoritarian tendencies in the 2000s and particularly over the last ten years, inside Uganda. But at the time there was this hybrid mix, which seemed to be working for the country where there were certainly very many scars from the ethnic tensions of the seventies and the eighties, and he was seeking to heal them. And I thought here was a harbinger of what was happening could happen more widely in Africa going forward.

Q: What were the biggest challenges as DCM of keeping the mission going in the same direction?

MCKINLEY: I was DCM for ten years of my career and ambassador in the field for about ten years as well. And certainly, I think Nancy and I agreed that managing the mission internally was an important challenge. More so in Kampala than I found before and later.

What I took away from working with her was the absolute importance of the DCM and ambassador being on the same wavelength when there's difficulties, whether it's on foreign policy, or dealing with Washington, and in terms of how best to lead the mission. Nancy and I were. The experience underscored the importance of transparency in communications, of addressing morale and performance issues directly, of teamwork, and of looking at complicated moments from different perspectives before arriving at a decision on a course of action.

We did deal also with challenges on policy and one of them was on the assistance side. I thought it was one of the more creative aid portfolios we had on the continent because it was focused on reviving agriculture, but it was heavily focused on HIV/AIDs work too. We had NIH [National Institutes of Health], CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], I think, present in the country. And the placebo work turned out to be revolutionary. And they did find a way to stop HIV/AID transmission from mother to child. This was after I left, but it was fascinating to meet with the investigators and doctors who were pursuing the objective while I was there.

It was absolutely one of those moments where you are so proud of the United States, you think wonderful things about individuals and their dedication, commitment, and fearlessness.

We were also working on environmental conservation. There was also responding to the humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda.

And there were decisions that had to be made across three years on what kind of assistance we provided, because there were concerns obviously about human rights abuses. But also, how did we train and work with Ugandan forces in developing capabilities to take on the Lord's Resistance Army, some of the same questions that faced us in recent years, working in Nigeria in response to Boko Haram, for example. We never quite succeeded in tracking down the LRA leadership in my time.

The Ugandan military was relatively efficient, but that came to be something we were more aware of when they unhelpfully began supporting a rebellion in eastern Congo.

The Lord's Resistance Army, they were a small Millenarian movement supposedly drawing inspiration from Christianity, but truly just from a mystic leader Alice Lakwena, and led by a horrifically brutal person, Joseph Kony. There was a question of whether they had some support or not from the Sudanese, but they were homegrown.

On the ethnic divisions question. Uganda really does not have a dominant majority or even an ethnic group that has a significant plurality inside the country, but the Baganda in central Uganda were dominant politically. But the north had the Acholi people, Karamojong, and others. There was certainly friction between these groups, and it certainly exploded in the seventies and eighties. But what I want to suggest is that when the Lord's Resistance Army was in operation, it was hard to look at it strictly in ethnic terms. It was just one of those awful groups that surfaced and was operational.

We took Secretary Madeleine Albright up to the north to Gulu in December 1997 to highlight humanitarian needs. There was a hospital being run by Italian doctors who'd been there for decades. And it was a question of trying to mobilize support for them. People would come by the thousands every night to stay inside the confines of the hospital to protect themselves from the Lord's Resistance Army, which did everything that people are more familiar with from Boko Haram, but it was horrific in the extreme.

They kidnapped young boys ten to twelve years old, had them kill their relatives to learn to be unfeeling murderers, kidnapping young girls and raping them. They were pregnant by twelve or thirteen. I saw this personally, I met groups of fifteen-to-sixteen-year-old young men who were rescued, and already killers, and met a young girl who was twelve or thirteen and giving birth to a baby. At the time of Secretary Albright's visit, I thought it would be good for her to visit the center, as part of the attempt to show U.S. support for people rescued from the Lord's Resistance Army and offer assistance to the hospital. She did.

Q: What did we do to help?

MCKINLEY: We would give assistance. We tried to assist on the military front, tried to help communities rebuild themselves in the north, and tried to address the group's

presence in Southern Sudan where the Lord's Resistance Army would retreat. But it just never worked. They also would flee into the northeastern corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This was a very mobile group, small, a couple of thousand people.

Another aspect of working in Uganda, frankly, was the Uganda-Rwanda relationship. At one point the governments had been close, born in part because of assistance provided by Museveni when the Tutsi movement led by Kagame responded to the 1994 genocide. But Museveni and Kagame had a falling out over Congo, and DRC by that stage was in its own transitions from Mobutu to Kabila, assisted by Kagame, and incipient civil war was building up in different parts of the country, particularly the Eastern Congo.

Eastern Congo was particularly attractive because it's where there are diamonds, cobalt, uranium, bauxite. The Ugandans and Rwandans helped Kabila overthrow President Mobutu, but then Kabila wasn't able to consolidate power, especially in the east where Uganda and Rwanda backed different rebel groups. Rwandan and Ugandan forces did not leave Eastern Kivu, and Ituri, and Eastern Congo descended into a terrible civil conflict, which is still ongoing in certain ways up to today, with atrocities and violence. Whatever the actual human cost, it's at least in the hundreds of thousands of lives.

And by 1998 it became an objective of the U.S. government to try and persuade Kagame and Museveni to withdraw their forces as they were beginning to clash in the Kivus and threatening a wider war. Some of these rebel movements fighting Kabila were being supported by Museveni. And so I asked and I was authorized by Washington to reach out to the most formidable of the leaders, a person named Jean-Pierre Bemba.

Bemba became a significant figure in the country over the next fifteen years. A son of a very wealthy businessperson, and a very wealthy businessman in his own right from the Mobutu days. And he led the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo. I started a relationship with him and spoke to him inside of the Congo and met with him when he came to Kampala. Our embassy in Kinshasa agreed since they could not deal directly with the insurgencies.

With the clashes that developed between Rwanda and Uganda, there was a greater urgency in Washington in trying to mediate between the two of them, as well as trying to mediate some kind of withdrawal from the Congo, as well as trying to mediate some kind of peace inside the Congo. Mediation was also being pursued by African governments with Zimbabwe and Libya playing roles, and agreements on paper being reached like the Lusaka ceasefire agreement in 1999, which did not hold. A source at one point told me notorious arms trafficker Victor Bout was running weapons out of Entebbe.

It was a complex layer of discussions which involved a very wide group of people to include at one point Ambassador Dick Holbrooke coming from the United Nations where I believed he was our ambassador and fresh from his success with the Dayton Accords on the conflict in the Balkans. He thought he could apply the same blueprint to the Congo conflict, and he could not. It was fascinating dealing with him, truly a larger-than-life

figure. Brilliant in many ways, but he was impatient. And so when it became evident that peace wasn't at hand in the Congo, it was an issue he walked away from pretty quickly.

In the succeeding weeks, or maybe it was months or a year because this was a conflict that wasn't going away, the negotiations that we engaged in to try to bring peace between Kagame and Museveni were very much run by the Africa Bureau. It had many colorful moments. I was part of those negotiations working with Gayle Smith, later USAID administrator under President Obama. And she arrived with people coming out from Washington, including Charlie Snyder from the Africa Bureau who was the military advisor I worked with intensively on the Angola-Namibia negotiations.

I had first met Gayle on the Ethiopia/Eritrea negotiations. We essentially tried to negotiate ceasefires and stand downs with the Rwandans and Ugandans in August 1999 when fighting erupted in Kisangani between them and threatened a broader war, with the proverbial writing on the back of napkins in a safari lodge and passing them on with suggestions to the contending parties. I remember doing that. We were down in southern Uganda, and after one of the sessions, three of us had rented a twin prop to get back to Kampala and the motor wouldn't start, and it was getting dark. And the pilot said we can't take off if it gets dark. And so we pulled up a car and jump-started the airplane engine and decided to take off anyway. We did get to Kampala.

Q: The pilot did fly it, right?

MCKINLEY: He was a "bush" pilot. He knew his business, and we were all fatalistic and we did leave. But it was a period of just intense back and forth negotiations. And the shine went off of both Kagame and Museveni as it became clear they had no intention of dropping their interests in Eastern Congo, and as the situation in Eastern Congo grew considerably worse, with real humanitarian consequences.

Q: Were they intent on staying because they were starting to profit from the mineral riches?

MCKINLEY: Correct in part. And also, simply a fight for spheres of influence. In the case of Rwanda, there was an additional incentive, which was that there was a large Hutu diaspora in eastern Congo, many of the people who had been involved in the genocide and to them, it was a way of increasing security for Rwanda by creating a perimeter, if you will, of Rwandan influence inside the Congo.

We also, in 1998, had the visit of President Clinton. He met with the leaders of East Africa, the Horn of Africa, in Kampala. And I will say that I have never, ever worked on a presidential visit that required as much logistical support as that one did, partly because it included meetings at Entebbe, it included gathering with the African presidents so that they wouldn't have to come into Kampala, which meant constructing a stage area. The advance had to set a schedule up which included a visit to an AID project dozens of miles outside of Kampala, and which involved helicopter transport for the president and his party. The visit included meetings inside Kampala for the traveling party, the first lady,

cabinet secretaries, and a significant representation of the Congressional Black Caucus. And again a significant amount of building out construction. I believe we had over a dozen of those C130 flights to bring in everything from cars to persons capable of building sets for meeting in-country. I saw the usual slights to the host government, but overall, the visit went off successfully.

And we also started building a new chancery in Kampala during that period, and I learned a lot about working with OBO [Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations], the State Department's facilities bureau, which stood me in good stead when I moved on to other countries and particularly Afghanistan. And what I learned was OBO doesn't always listen to people on the ground and largely marches to its own drummer. They often get things right. They largely did in Kampala. And other times, as many other people can tell you, they can get it very, very wrong as I saw in Brasilia and Kabul later in my career.

There was the issue of American Citizen Services as well. On an occasion when the ambassador was out of town there was the spillover from the Congo wars, and an armed group entered Uganda and went into Bwindi gorilla park. Uganda is one of the last two places where you can see mountain gorillas. This was in 1999, tourists were kidnapped. Eight were murdered, almost all of them international, as well as Ugandan park personnel. At least two Americans were killed.

Some tourists were freed by the rebels, including an American tour guide operating out of Kenya, a person named Mark Ross who wrote a book afterwards, but it was a devastating experience for everyone, for the survivors, dealing with the families, dealing with the remains, dealing with the Americans who survived, and dealing with the international fallout, we helped other missions. There were New Zealanders killed, Italians, British. It was a very, very sad moment, an experience I know that I share with Foreign Service officers, who've worked on these kinds of tragedies around the world. We worked well over subsequent months with the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] trying to track down the killers. It took years.

You combine the things I've been pointing out, and the Congo conflict really began to change the way Uganda was looked at by the time I left. But on the whole, I did leave feeling people were being educated, companies were growing and investing, professional capacity in government was expanding and I was very disappointed to see what happened to Uganda in subsequent years.

Q: You had mentioned AID's programs were very innovative. Did the HIV effort overtake other kinds of assistance?

MCKINLEY: It was certainly predominant, but I don't have the breakdown anymore in my head on what we did. I was very fortunate, both in Mozambique and Uganda, being countries that had significant assistance resources which allowed a lot to be done. And in Uganda, the added benefit of working on conservation in the national parks which were coming back to life. There were so many facets.

We also worked with their military helping train their counterinsurgency unit to deal with Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, only to discover that it was sent to fight in the Kivus and became part of the Congo conflict. So the contradictions of dealing with the environment were ever present. And as part of my continuing links to Sudan I can't remember, I think it was Riak Machar who came to town from the SPLA movement, and so did John Garang, and so we continued to engage with Sudan's opposition. Uganda was certainly an important listening post for responding to what happened in Southern Sudan.

Q: Do you feel like Washington listened to you all? Did the ambassador have strong feelings on how to improve the situation and was she listened to?

MCKINLEY: I think on Uganda, we largely had not just support but a certain autonomy. The broad outlines of our engagement with Uganda were already set by the time both Nancy and I got there. It became complicated by these factors that I have mentioned, but it's no mistake that President Clinton came to Uganda for his meeting with Eastern African leaders. It's no mistake that Secretary Albright came, it is no mistake that we had other senior leaders visiting it. Uganda was one of those places that was viewed as a going concern and as an example for much of the rest of Africa.

There's one other aspect of the work I should speak about although I find it hard speaking about—the terrorist bombings of the embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998.

It was August 7, 1998, and Nancy was out of the country. We received an urgent call from the State Department Operations Center that morning and I was told that there were significant fears that we were going to be attacked as well. And so we decided to do a very careful and quiet evacuation of the embassy, because we didn't know what was outside. There was no time to really call a country team meeting. I remember calling together a couple of people, certainly needed the RSO and our military, and we did a very careful low-key evacuation of the building and other facilities.

Q: How many people?

MCKINLEY: The embassy was slightly larger than the one in Maputo. I'd say perhaps fifty plus Americans at that moment. Our local employees numbered several hundred but few of them at the embassy location. And there was the warden notice to activate to alert Americans in-country. It was a quick evacuation and people were told to stay at home.

As the situation in Dar and in Nairobi became clearer, I remember talking to Nancy. We were co-located with the British embassy, so alerting them too was part of the process.

It's still really difficult for me to talk about this, but I'll never forget the feeling I had when I was the last person leaving with the RSO and we left one marine in the embassy, and I'll just never forget it. It was just, you know, what duty is? I also know what a nineteen-year-old kid is. And you also know somebody is staying who could be killed.

The bombings played out with their tragic consequences in Dar and Nairobi. Nancy returned quickly. And we were given the decision on whether to draw down or close down. Over the next three to four months, we dealt with multiple threats. I'm trying to remember whether we closed the embassy two or three dozen times. We sent people home early or we closed, or we didn't work from the premises. We held town halls, country teams, either at the residence or at the DCM's residence. We had a patio at the DCM residence that was big enough to seat everybody. It was a very difficult time of decisions. And we were told by the department, if you close down, you're not going to reopen for a long time. But we're leaving it to you to evaluate. So we did.

We reached one moment when more threat information came in. And we were visited by U.S. law enforcement out of Nairobi who helped investigate. They sent two or three people, and then more, and we worked with the senior investigation levels. I will not go into the details, but it was not a high point. I remember one earnest discussion about not being able to find a location; I remember going to the yellow pages of Kampala and saying here it is. The entire team left Kampala when they received a threat, literally one day to the next, without informing us, as we stayed behind caring for an embassy community with spouses, partners, children, and, as far as I know, most of us unarmed.

Q: The day of the bombings when they thought you might be third; did it turn out to be bad information?

MCKINLEY: How do we know? Information, all these things, nine out of ten times or ninety-nine out of a hundred times the information isn't real, or it's not going to happen. But it was an experience in that, it shows it really is down to that front office, making the right call on the security of the personnel of the mission, and the lesson certainly stood me in good stead in coming years. As I dealt with situations in Afghanistan and in Colombia.

Q: So did Washington make the right decision to leave it to the ambassador?

MCKINLEY: If it occurred today? We would've been shut down. Or we would be a skeletal crew, right from the start. We did go with voluntary departure. I think only one family took it. I believe our embassies in Dar and Nairobi kept most staff in place too. The rules now are draconian. I think the proposals for relaxing rules by the American Academy of Diplomacy and others questioning Fortress America for our embassies, which means we don't dare do anything if it might imply a danger, are correct.

But in 1998 I think we were given too much leeway. We were getting threats. Nancy and I worked on this every day, and she's legendary for caring about people. But if we had to do it again, and this is hindsight, I would say reduce personnel but not close.

Q: I guess then the people did not come from those other embassies for refuge in Uganda?

MCKINLEY: No, I don't think they were all pulled out. It was a very different mindset from today. The targets weren't the families, so there wasn't an immediate shutdown.

Q: Right. I heard our ambassador to Kenya, Prudence Bushnell, talk about this some years ago. And she said the military would've pulled the whole team out and put a new team in, but the State Department didn't think in the same terms, which was a mistake given the shock and trauma of what happened. So I don't think they did take them out. The message was to carry on, carry on.

MCKINLEY: And it's a different mindset and we got through it, but you should never draw the corollary that the call was obvious simply because nothing had gone wrong. It was a judgment call. Many of our visitors, like the law enforcement team, took precautions. We had to address the issues of visiting officials bringing weapons into the country with Ugandan restrictions. Once a senior military visit was called off because of this, and I said to the staff person, "So you are scared to come because weapons are restricted, where we have families and children. Explain that to me."

Our influence over other agencies was always less than meets the eye. I never thought State really controlled other agencies, but not only do you not control them, you had better figure out a way to work with their cultures. If an embassy is going to work holistically and the chief of mission authority is going to be maintained when it matters, respect their boundaries, and don't fight every little battle.

Q: What's your gut feeling about whether al Qaeda was really thinking about attacking the mission?

MCKINLEY: I assume they would've tried to hit more places, there were certainly other U.S. targets in Africa. But I don't know. I've never seen any further official information providing detail, I've never looked at it again.

Q: And you never knew who those threats were coming from?

MCKINLEY: Not with precision. There were bombings in Kampala, restaurants hit, Americans injured. The RSO Ray Bassi and I spent one night walking through blood-soaked hospitals looking for Americans. We were constantly on alert and evaluating. We seemed to get it right, but no one should ever think doing so is a science.

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If I can just say something about family life there. Our children were all going to school, and it was an interesting dynamic. There was an American and a British school. And we put our kids in the British school. And I'll not forget this, being visited and being told by colleagues, you're not setting the right example as DCM for the community, by putting your kids in the British school, you should put them in the American school.

This happened right after arriving and I was polite, but I said our children are not paid by the U.S. government. We will choose what we think is best for our children. That was where you are reminded that for the front office—and you've experienced it—the optics are always there for everything you do.

Fatima continued to do a tremendous amount of charity work working with artists, and over a one-and-a-half-year period, she worked at Makerere University. The main university art program asked for her assistance in expanding its training for students. She designed a curriculum and independently raised some money from a couple of places and taught a basic jewelry course that became part of the curriculum, on her own, unpaid in the university. Fatima also helped artists at the university be exhibited at the World Bank and other diplomatic missions.

Fatima met many Ugandans socially: we were one of only two-or-three diplomats invited to the royal wedding of the Buganda king, for example, through her. She again joined the hash house harriers opening the doors socially for us to the long-time British expatriate community, Ugandan professionals, and the NGO community.

And in the meantime, as president of the International Women's Organization, she organized fundraisers involving hundreds of people. She was one of only two diplomatic spouses selected to work with the first lady of Uganda with the Ugandan Women's Efforts to Save Orphans. Fatima also worked intensively with children with HIV/AIDS, going out to semi-rural areas, taking our three kids to these huts with dying children inside them, it was really just— But she did terrific work as always.

Three of our staff at the residence died of HIV/AIDS and there was such a fear of HIV/AIDS in the embassy community. Many wanted their employees tested regularly, especially households with children. We made the decision—we didn't do it in our home. We just had to go into a different type of mindset. We are here. This is what it is and we have to deal with our staff as humanely as possible. And that's the way we approached it. Anyways, I'll stop there. It was sad. It certainly taught us a lot about life.

Chapter VIII: DCM, Brussels 2000–2001: Emerging Europe; Parting Ways with a Political Ambassador

Q: Good afternoon. It is December sixth, 2021, and we're continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. Mike, you are now in the year 2000, ready to go to your third of four DCM jobs. Is that right?

MCKINLEY: That is correct.

Q: What did you do after Uganda?

MCKINLEY: The bidding cycle was 1999 to 2000 and I was first offered a chief-of-mission position in 1999 by Susan Rice. It was for a West African nation. And we made a decision as a family, with our oldest child ten years old and moving into middle school, that the country that I had been offered would not be the best fit for schooling for our children. So I said no and scrambled to look at the lists. I saw the opportunity for a couple of DCM-ships in Europe. And I'd always wanted to return to Western Europe. As I think I've mentioned in a previous session we had on London, I considered Western Europe the most important economic-security-political relationship the United States had.

And even though the opening was for the DCM-ship in the bilateral mission in Belgium, I saw it as an opportunity to learn by osmosis what was happening at NATO and the European Union. I bid on it. There was another very lengthy bidding cycle, in which I don't believe I was selected until very late in the day. But I was, and we ended up moving to Belgium to work for a political ambassador, Paul Cejas, who was from Florida and I think out of the HMO, health medical organization business. He was a Democratic appointee. And we moved in August of 2000.

This was one of those moments that illustrates what so many spouses go through with professional frustrations and having to reinvent themselves every three years. Leaving, although I requested a little more time, pulling us out just when Fatima needed a couple of extra months to finish graduating the first class she was teaching at the University in Uganda. She didn't have the opportunity to do so and was told she could not remain in embassy housing if she stayed and I departed.

But we moved to Brussels in August, and it turned out to be a short tour.

If I can summarize quickly, the DCM at the bilateral mission in Brussels at that time and I believe still today, is charged with supervising the joint administrative support for all three missions, for NATO and the European Union, and obviously for the ambassadors and DCMS so count that as six representational residences plus that of a senior U.S. representative at NATO command.

There were, I believe, over five hundred Americans assigned to the three missions. In the bilateral embassy joint administrative support section, we were talking about four hundred Americans and local employees. And the skillset, if you want to call it that, that I'd learned in Mozambique and Uganda as DCM, came into play in fairly sharp relief with the added overlay of having to support ambassadors who were a mix of career and political.

So everything from dealing with local employee pay issues, contract issues, work hours. I think the Belgians and the French were beginning to inaugurate thirty-five to thirty-seven hour weeks. There were budget challenges, OBO projects and maintenance of official residences. It doesn't sound very interesting, but for anybody who works in the administrative cone or managed as a DCM, I would suggest it's one of the more challenging jobs in the Foreign Service.

And in addition, there are also nonstop official visits to support. I believe we were probably third for official visits after London and Paris because of NATO and the EU. All the summits that took place, congressional visits, and just hundreds of official Americans coming through meant that there was a very significant challenge to keep the trains running on time. Doing so required maintaining very good relations with Belgian security, the Belgian government, and understanding the dynamics of one of the most international cities around the world in terms of the number of diplomatic missions, and with the presence of thousands of lawyers and lobbyists, perhaps the second largest such presence in the world after Washington.

I think people who work in Western Europe would understand why I would find it so interesting. I think people working in other regions of the world would find aspects of the work less interesting and drudgery, but it was anything but.

But what I did see there on policy was something—it was the heyday of the unipolar moment, with the United States viewed as driving a lot of what was happening in the world. We were predominant in NATO. The European Union was developing more and more of a voice with periodic agreements coming into focus and strengthening unity, developing a more consistent voice on foreign policy issues which was important to us, and the debate was underway over a greater European voice on military security issues.

The irony is that the thrust of Foreign Service reform efforts in the late '90s and into the 2000s was to make us better managers. Traditional diplomacy skills like reporting, building contacts, negotiating with adversaries, responding to crises, were downplayed in favor of personnel and resource oversight, multifunctionality, and transnational issues. I wrote a dissent cable at one point noting diplomacy still mattered; had to be continually upgraded. Developments over the past twenty years would seem to underscore that point. I strongly believed in effective management as well, which the tour in Brussels made crystal clear remained central to how well we were able to function.

Separately, what was for me most interesting working in Brussels as I met with the companies in the American Chamber of Commerce, was the extent to which Western

Europe was emerging with very significant world class multinationals that challenged the United States and as the commission was setting industry regulatory standards that were coming into play. This was something that many Americans did not fully grasp, thinking that the European Union really did not matter compared to NATO and the U.S. bilateral relations in Berlin, Paris, and London. Not quite. France, Paris, and Berlin would be deferring more and more to the commission and common European positions on foreign and security policy.

And if I can just say one thing I did while I was there, was a cable I can refer to called Rethinking Europe. And it received wide readership in the department and our embassies. Essentially, I was arguing in the early 2001 period that the United States had to view Europe as an emerging power, not as a support for what we did on foreign policy and the global economic arena, and even on security matters.

On the personal side one of the most enjoyable and touching sides of my work was going to the World War I and World War II memorial ceremonies. The ambassador didn't go to many. I was at the sixtieth, I believe, anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge, ceremonies in the Arden, Flanders field, 1918 memorial services with people in their nineties.

It was just tremendously moving and a reminder of the importance of the United States in turning the tide in the defining conflicts of the twentieth century. And through the time I was there, the ambassador let me do a fair amount of engagement on those sorts of ceremonies and representational events. A reminder of just how much we sacrificed, and how much we contributed to the transformation of the world after 1945.

Q: The ambassador had to leave because of the 2000 elections, right? He had to leave in January?

MCKINLEY: Yes. And to be fair to that ambassador, he'd been there for three years and had been doing all of these events. And so it was a period of phase out, or he was not in country. There's no implied criticism whatsoever. But yes, I forgot, there was a 2000 presidential election in the U.S. political ambassadors were appointed to the bilateral and to the EU mission.

Q: I think Beth Jones was the assistant secretary for Eurasia.

MCKINLEY: Yes. The ambassadors to NATO, all in a row, four of them, were State Department. I was there for Sandy Vershbow, who was previously assistant secretary for Europe, very well respected at NATO.

But the change came, and a political ambassador came into the bilateral mission, and he represented everything to me that was worst about political ambassadors. He was a massive contributor. But he really knew nothing about foreign policy, nothing about Belgium and his primary qualification for the job was contributing money and a baseball connection to President Bush.

And he arrived in Belgium in late May or early June and it appeared that he was looking at how to set up a private personal office in the front office for a family member. I reported that back to the department, this time to EUR and Diplomatic Security, and I had the support people in the mission, and at State. The head of regional security was just tremendous and professional about the concern.

I don't have to tell you how that went. And I left post early. The irony was I had been approached early that year for another chief of mission position in Africa, but I thought my family was doing so well. Fatima was enrolled in French classes at a local university and had found a charity focused on Latin America and was supporting community events. And I was learning so much in Brussels that we decided to stay. That was two strikes, on chief of mission offers that I was saying no to.

And so, I found myself out of a job in July–August in Brussels. I thought my career was effectively over. It was quite an intense few weeks. I was out of a job June eighteenth, and so it was a scramble with the end of the school year, and hardly any positions open worldwide since they had been filled in the assignment cycle by that point.

It was also a period when my mother, whom I was extremely close to, was dying. I remember flying to Greenwich, Connecticut to say goodbye to my mother in the middle of all of this. I came back before she died, one week before she died, because I had to keep looking for a job and move the family.

Zoom wasn't around in those days, but that's when the kindness of strangers came into play and I was rescued for a second time in my career [the first being after my tour in Bolivia]. I was rescued by the Foreign Service, and I received tremendous support from the WHA Bureau. I was offered a consul general position in Toronto, which had just come open. Separately, Gretchen Welch, who was working in the career development office, sent my name around immediately.

And I was interviewed by PRM for a deputy assistant secretary job, which was coming open. A civil servant named Alan Kreczko was running the bureau and we met in Berlin where he was at a conference. I got the job. We decided to go back to Washington with all that entailed. The moving, unexpected departure from post, all the usual.

And I will be critical. I had no real support from EUR; this was the experience other DCMs in Europe had during that period. It is difficult for EUR. Every change of administration, State sends a bunch of political hacks to Europe who treat the Foreign Service with widely varying degrees of respect for what we do and expect rules to accommodate them. And given their White House connection, are difficult to challenge.

Sometimes you can adapt and sometimes you can't, but certainly in the timeframe I was working and subsequently, people who ran into a chainsaw with the change of the political parties rarely got strong support, ended up going home to sit in an office and hope that in the next bidding cycle they could recover and move on. There were certainly people at State who wanted me to downplay what was happening.

Q: Was there any discipline for the problem that started it all?

MCKINLEY: I don't know what happened in the end. There were later reports I heard on other ethical concerns, but I was gone by then. But he was problematic, I remember running into President Bush several times in his presidency. First time was that year in Brussels. And I remember the second time years later. If there's a president I found to be the most personable it was him. And I certainly feel I got along with him. And so, I told him I was in Brussels before with a certain ambassador, and he sympathized with me. And rumor had it that the ambassador left early, but I don't know.

But it was, given my prior experiences in the Foreign Service, starting with my first tour, it was nothing surprising to me about how State was dealing with this, or rather seeking not to. And I dealt with it in a much more careful way than I had fifteen years earlier. Everything was on paper. I had full support from other people, as I mentioned, including Diplomatic Security, and reportedly from the seventh floor, but there was nothing to be done about it.

They weren't going to remove the political ambassador, but as I mentioned, the Foreign Service came through. In later years, I was told that one of the EUR deputy assistant secretaries tried to block me from getting a second DCM assignment in Europe. He failed.

Q: Ten years later, I went through something similar. It was hard to find someone to talk to explain the issues that were arising related to an ambassador. But I will say that after I left, there was a very activist director general for the Foreign Service who did look into things and I understand that she did ensure accountability in several embassies. But that was a hard one for them in general.

MCKINLEY: I guess, but the issue really comes down to what happens to whistleblowers. And, you know, I hate the term, because people using that word, it connotes a lack of respect for people who have the courage to point out what's going wrong. And in the department, if you're a deputy chief of mission, you're very vulnerable because by doing so, you look like you can't work with people. All of a sudden it looks like you can't work with politicals. You can't work in a front office. And the second part of it is because of the kind of people we are, we avoid conflict. And so, at moments like this, it's not that people don't want to support the person in question, but they pull back and wait to see where the chips fall before deciding whether you are radioactive or not.

Q: I liked the way you phrased that as DCMs being vulnerable, because on the one hand, you can look too tough, as if you can't get along with people. But on the other hand, when bad behavior is exposed people then say, Well, where was the DCM? Why didn't they stop it? Luckily, most do come out the other side with some good friends, if not with good experiences, along the way.

Chapter IX: DAS, PRM Bureau, 2001–2004: 9/11; Refugee Resettlement; Africa Humanitarian Assistance; Darfur Negotiations; The Fall of Monrovia; Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo; Mexico City Policy on Abortion

Q: Well, anyway, let's move on to PRM. So I have worked with PRM at times but I don't know it very well. It's a very small organization. It has big responsibilities and some money. So why don't you give us the picture of what happened after 9/11, which was four days after you started the job. What did your job become?

MCKINLEY: If I can first say that the three years I was there included the response to 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

Over those years, our relationships around the world became more difficult. We began with strong support as we were responding to the attack on the United States. By the time I left in 2004 to return to Brussels, and the European Union mission as DCM, the United States had lost not just a lot of the goodwill, we were in open debate, if not real tensions with allies like France and Germany, question marks over what our overall policy was in the Middle East, and with a very significant change in the international mood.

And also, across those three years, the U.S. began to turn inward on a very significant basis. It seems contradictory because we were involved in these conflicts overseas and we were still viewed as the world's sole superpower. It's only hindsight, which allows people to speak about China and Russia in a different way, but at the time China's emergence was viewed as a positive, not as a negative. And Russia was viewed as pretty much played out on the wider international stage. There were initiatives like the Inter-American Democracy Charter to strengthen ties with Latin America. The U.S. was predominant.

That said, I felt throughout my three years in Washington that there was only one direction for where we were going and that was looking increasingly inward and losing sight of how to engage with a changing world because of 9/11, and even in early 2002 in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Taliban. And I felt that extremely strongly when the president did his speech in January or February of 2002, in which he said you're with us or you were against us.

I certainly didn't see the world that way. And at the time I remember looking at global public opinion. And when you looked beneath the surface sympathy for the United States for having undergone the attack, there was a fair amount of questioning about whether we'd brought it on ourselves.

I saw this environment of trying to paint the world in black and white as not a good thing. And by the time we were headed into Iraq, we were trying to remake the world. There was the language that was being used by Rumsfeld, by Wolfowitz, by Cheney, in which we were running roughshod over other people's opinions, but it was still not evident what the damage of doing so was.

My job coming in was to work on refugee support in the bureau of PRM, Population, Refugees, and Migration Bureau. I didn't really fully focus on what the bureau was responsible for other than refugee assistance, which appealed to me immensely.

And I was to learn that mine was a very limited view of what the bureau did. You mentioned that PRM is a small bureau, but it is a bureau with very significant resources. There are two bureaus in the department, and I think it's still true today that they have money. One is INL [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs] which runs our counter narcotics and justice programs, the other is PRM. And in the time I was there, we were near a billion and were going to be driven over a billion dollars plus depending on the scale of challenges that were developing.

I was charged with working our largest portfolio which was assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Africa was the primary focus and particularly east Africa in Sudan and Somalia. There were conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in West Africa with Sierra Leone and Liberia with hundreds of thousands of people displaced and refugees in neighboring countries. I was supposed to also look at how we responded to the Balkans, and Chechen and other refugees that had fled Russia and were in the south Caucasus states. In Latin America it was basically Colombia, which at the time included the displacement of literally millions of people from decades of conflict inside the country.

But I was also drawn into the response to 9/11.

It was never fully clear to me how this happened, but I was given supervisory responsibility for the refugee admissions program to the United States [in terms of funding, working with resettlement agencies, identifying populations, working with Congress]. The United States was the most generous country on earth in formal refugee admissions and processing admissions into the United States on a scale that no country could match. When I came in, the target for fiscal year 2002 was seventy thousand projected admissions and with a budget of a hundred and thirty million dollars for resettlement in the U.S.

I should mention that the budgets I was supervising funding that we provided to UNHCR and others for work in Africa. I was also supposed to be the lead contact for our funding for the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross.

On refugee admissions, I'm going to provide an anecdote here. September 11 happened. Shortly thereafter, the department was reportedly called by a mayor of a major American city, and he asked why were people from a Muslim country arriving for refugee resettlement in the United States? The order went out to shut down the refugee admissions program from one day to the next, for every refugee in the world, until the process and security were upgraded.

So when people look at Donald Trump and everything he tried to do, the only time we actually closed down refugee admissions in our history was in the immediate aftermath of

9/11. It took us perhaps over a year to restart, but the driving imperative was to provide a security upgrade. Clarifying and vetting who it was that was being allowed into the United States for resettlement, given that so many people came from conflicted parts of the world, including the Middle East, Afghanistan, and East Africa.

At the time there was the proposal to set up the new Department of Homeland Security, bringing together all our law enforcement, security, and border control and immigration processing agencies. It was a bold experiment, both the setting up of DHS, which I still believe was a mistake, to include its name department of homeland security, which sounds authoritarian. But it did involve rethinking how we did security for people entering this country, which was needed.

And in PRM, we were negotiating with the law enforcement agencies, with INS, working with the NSC, with emerging Homeland Security coordination offices to figure out how refugee resettlement could be restarted and what populations to focus on. And obviously there were going to be much greater restrictions on refugees coming in from the Middle East.

At the same time, there was this absolutely extraordinary pressure from the ten resettlement agencies, which were mostly religious based—Lutheran, Catholic, and Jewish and secular ones like the International Refugees Council, I think IRC. They literally operated hundreds of offices around the country that depended on money from PRM for resettlement. Pressures also built in Congress on why all streams, including from Latin America, were being shut down.

Q: So, Mike, at the same time, there was a lot of concern about State Department visa adjudication as well because these particular bombers/hijackers had gotten U.S. nonimmigrant visas. And so that was going on, I think Maura Harty in Consular Affairs was having to manage that at the same time. Were you all seeing that as a parallel process?

MCKINLEY: Yes. As a parallel process. We were under enormous pressure. I remember accompanying Secretary Powell who was very supportive. I rode with him one-on-one in the car, up to a hearing with senators like Ted Kennedy who were pushing the department to reopen resettlement of refugees. And of course, we had the counter pressure, which was not to reopen until processes were in place to ensure it was safe to do so. And across a year plus, hiring for overseas processing greatly increased. We worked with our security agencies on new vetting processes.

We identified new populations for migration settlement to the United States to include Muslim populations. So, populations like Meskhetian Turks in Russia and Somali Bantus, who were in Northern Kenya and in giant refugee camps like the Dadaab, were identified as populations for resettlement. And identifying non-controversial populations elsewhere. There were tons of meetings with congressional staff, meeting with senators, presentations to seventh floor principals, to the resettlement agencies, on progress. It was

an extraordinary, highly political effort. I also traveled to camps in Kenya to look at processing systems under the new regulations.

And I want to say that our Civil Service staff and Foreign Service staff who worked on this should almost be nominated for sainthood, the patience they had, the brick bats they took, the humanitarian commitment they demonstrated, the drive to find a solution for this. We got frustrated at times with the slow pace, but the collective effort actually put into place the right systems. I truly believe that was one of the shining untold moments of how State Department works.

Q: But is it correct to say that another big change was that before, we relied on UNHCR to do interviews, and then the refugees would come in, and then this changed?

MCKINLEY: Yes. We didn't stop relying on them, but we certainly took over a lot of the interviewing. I'd have to go back and look at this in detail. I just don't have it. I'm sure there's people in PRM who can write the history on it, or maybe already have. But the key point is that the systems were put into place to do it.

Q: So now I'd like to go back to what you were about to say about your work on 9/11.

MCKINLEY: So, I did have other responsibilities. I volunteered to help with media appearances on the crisis and refugee response. So, I was called in to talk to audiences, if I remember correctly, in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, in Portuguese and bad French, and so on. The message being, we weren't ignoring Afghanistan's humanitarian needs. We have come full cycle. I was just published a few days ago in *Foreign Affairs* on humanitarian needs in Afghanistan for 2022.

Moving into 2002. In Africa, I had come out of the Africa Bureau, and I certainly had a very close relationship with the AF front office as well as WHA. Charles Taylor, president of Liberia, was on the verge of falling. Monrovia, the capital, was under siege by different groups of rebels. It was a horrific environment. Our embassy was completely surrounded by thousands of people seeking shelter, refuge, and thought their proximity to the embassy would spare them being massacred or abused by some of these groups which were blocking roads and ransacking towns and raping and killing. It was a horrific period, not unlike when Samuel Doe fell in 1990.

And so we, pushed by Margaret McKelvey who directed African relief for PRM, felt very strongly that we had to do what we could, urgently, for humanitarian relief, support, to identify whatever agencies were working, identify what displaced populations we could reach in Sierra Leone and Guinea, which bordered Liberia.

Eventually the political and the humanitarian efforts meshed. The Africa Bureau asked me to go in. Part of my work would be looking at the humanitarian conditions in Guinea and Sierra Leone, and part of it would be to go to Monrovia, meet with Charles Taylor, I think in November 2002.

Q: They asked you to meet with Charles Taylor?

MCKINLEY: Yes, along with the ambassador. You may remember I'd already had my first experience with Liberia in 1989–90. The ambassador at this time was John Blaney.

Blaney and I went in the evening to the presidential palace. It was the three of us in a large ornate room with frescoes on the ceiling, and Taylor spoke as if he was in a parallel universe, and of himself in the third person. He seemed gone, mentally, and though there was a conversation of sorts at the moment, he seemed to not recognize what was happening around him. Common to dictators and leaders at the end of a crisis perhaps, and I was meant to focus on refugee protection concerns and did, but there was so much more going on.

I did two trips, I believe, to Liberia. I think this one was November 2002, as I said, and I was also visiting refugee centers elsewhere, in Sierra Leone, in Guinea. By the second visit things were much worse.

The embassy was surrounded by a sea of displaced persons, hoping that proximity would protect them. I went again to Monrovia with, I believe a UN mission, to see what was happening. We arrived at the airport, which is about forty kilometers out. By that stage, Blaney had only a few Americans left on compound. He had sent a car out for me with a local driver.

The UN people were told by their security it's too dangerous to go into Monrovia. I had a decision to make, and I did. I got in the embassy car and for the forty kilometers into Monrovia, it's one of those moments where you think through, well, I hope I've made the right decision as we went through checkpoints manned by teenagers with guns, there was not another vehicle on the road. We moved through Monrovia, and there was virtually nobody on the streets. As we neared the embassy, there's this mass of people. And there was no way to get to the embassy gates without driving through the large crowd. You don't know who these people are. You don't know anything, you have no guns, you're not with security. We just inched our way through this crowd, to the gates. We got in.

I remember arriving and I couldn't believe what I saw. It was just a few security and support personnel and Blaney. And we sat and talked. With what I'd seen from the airport, I sat down and wrote an urgent message to Washington, noting that the situation, and in particular the humanitarian situation really was as dire as it seemed. The message was meant to reach the seventh-floor decision makers arguing for an immediate response to major humanitarian organizations; and it happened.

So much of this is down to the bravery of Ambassador Blaney. He kept the embassy operational. He had resisted seventh floor pressure to close, but he saved thousands of lives, I am convinced of it.

And the PRM assistant secretary at the time was absolutely driven and inspirational and moral, Gene Dewey, he believed that you do what you have to do to help refugees and was fully supportive of all of us taking chances.

Q: Tell us about Sudan.

MCKINLEY: I was drawn into both the humanitarian response to, and political negotiations in the developing conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan. I think I made three trips to the region across that timeframe, one that took me to Khartoum and Juba in the south, another to Darfur, and a third to N'djamena, the capital of Chad for negotiations between rebels and the government.

Sudan had long been about the conflict between south and north. To that was now added a pitiless struggle in the vast Darfur region in western Sudan, where more nomadic Arab communities clashed with more agrarian mixed Arab and Black populations over land—both were Muslim and so religion did not play a major part in the civil war that developed. Two, three or more insurgencies were launched; the government in Khartoum led by President Bashir and with the feared intelligence chief Salah Gosh used local Arab militias, the "Janjaweed" who were pictured riding across the desert landscape on horseback. And hundreds of thousands were displaced.

I was again asked by AF to be part of the team, and we were joined by a USAID assistant administrator, Roger Winter, who was already deeply engaged on South Sudan. The visits with Bashir were fruitless; the fly-over in Darfur was a classic literal inferno as we saw flames around small villages that had been destroyed by the Janjaweed or blackened ground as ethnic cleansing proceeded. I remember a meeting with leaders in a city on the ground when we were buzzed by a Sudanese government aircraft at a very low altitude.

As refugees poured into Chad, Roger and I went there to look at the humanitarian impact, I believe towards the end of 2003. We went from the capital in a small prop plane to reach an ICRC camp in a border area. Dust storms prevented us from getting there, and we landed in the city of Abeche. And had to make a decision.

We were accompanied by a security officer from the embassy who correctly sought to dissuade us from travel. Roger and I decided to proceed. We got into separate vehicles, separated, and he went north, I went towards the border with Sudan. Dozens if not more of kilometers through largely empty desert-like savannah and reaching refugee camps and NGO operations. It was foolhardy in the extreme, I slept on the ground only miles from areas where the Janjaweed had attacked, and Roger did the same. We met up again safely after a couple of days and sent an urgent request for millions in funding for ICRC, UNHCR, and other operations, which was granted.

And then it was one of the periodic efforts at negotiations. Roger and I led an inter-agency delegation for almost two weeks of talks in N'djamena, coordinating with the Chadian president, the UN, the African Union, the French, and the EU.

It was a soul-destroying exercise: the rebels were simply not equipped to negotiate documents [I believe our military expert helped write much of them] but as I spent more time with rebels who had little or no education and contrasted it with the sophistication of the Sudanese from Khartoum, I despaired. We did reach agreement, I remember calling it in before a morning staff meeting on the seventh floor to the Deputy Secretary Rich Armitage, and then stood alone in a room wondering what we had done. Because the government was already figuring out how to break the ceasefire, and to divide the rebels, which they eventually did. And the war continued, although eventually an international peace-keeping mission was launched.

Q: And other issues?

MCKINLEY: Separately, at the early stages of the preparations for war in Iraq, I was drawn into meetings for what was expected to be an outflow of refugees to neighboring countries. The confidence level of officials I saw in action was striking but at first there was an element of realism. I remember one meeting I attended at the NSC chaired by Elliott Abrams where there seemed to be a consensus that the Iraqi military and administration should not be dismantled. By the time of the invasion, however, that sense of caution was gone.

And perhaps in response to what he was seeing, the PRM Assistant Secretary Gene Dewey drafted a set of recommendations on how to approach an eventual occupation of Iraq which I helped him with. And the argument boiled down to internationalize it and lower the U.S. profile immediately. It is clear, once the war began, that that was not going to happen. The hubris was astonishing.

Also, during that period, I began to interact more and more with the ICRC on Guantanamo. After the invasion of Afghanistan there was the issue of deciding what to do with the terrorists or others who had been arrested in the operation in the country. And the decision was made to use the migrant operations facilities at Guantanamo for Haitians, Cubans, others trying to get across to Miami, and turn it into a detention center for al Qaeda prisoners or al Qaeda related Afghanistan prisoners.

And I will have to tell you, over the next three years, 2002, 2003, 2004—from the beginning of 2002, it was clear there were concerns about the treatment of prisoners, to include some dying in custody. Overseas, the first news reports of prisoners freezing to death in Bagram came out in 2002. And I was drawn into the negotiations with DHS on the setup of the Guantanamo detention center because of my work with ICRC, I guess, and it was a negotiation involving DOD.

The construction firm Halliburton had the contract to restructure the facilities. I think I can say, especially given their future contracts in Iraq, and the ties to the vice president, there should have been concerns of conflict of interest. PRM was in the unenviable position of trying to help keep costs down but negotiating humane detention conditions, because we were also going to be part of the budget paying for this.

From 2002 onwards, it became very clear that ICRC as well as other human rights organizations and some of the media had serious concerns about what was happening at Guantanamo. Across my interactions with ICRC, I began working with a lawyer in L who is now deceased, Ed Cummings, who was ex-military, and who had experience working on human rights issues in conflict, and was highly principled, discreet, and knowledgeable. Ed and I were informed in parallel of developments because he also met with ICRC separately on their legal issues about international humanitarian law.

We each had our own growing concerns about where things were going. We periodically would separately raise our concerns with our front offices about the information ICRC provided, which does not publicize its reports. They would come and meet with their appointed interlocutors in the USG and move on from there.

I began to put together a picture of what was for me, significant abuse in Guantanamo. And it took me a while to figure out how to convey my concerns to the seventh floor. Because Ed and I were working in silos, I didn't realize how much we had the same concerns. The war with Iraq came in 2003 and the setting up of detention centers there.

Across this time, ICRC continued its visits to Washington, to include meetings with security agencies, and I would ask whether they were raising their concerns there. They said they were.

And I'm trying to remember sequences—but one thing I do remember very well. The photos of the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq came out in May of 2004. A couple of months before, I became aware of an earlier ICRC study that year of conditions in Abu Ghraib, but which was only reluctantly shared with PRM. It was a devastating report. Aspects of it leaked later that year to the media but were not followed up on.

I had already written a report earlier that year on my concerns about what I thought was happening with detained prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the level of detail in the ICRC report was on a different scale. And Ed and I put together our own very critical analysis on paper for the seventh floor. What we wrote predated the Abu Ghraib revelations but was eventually confirmed by those and so much more that came out later, much later, in the Feinstein reports and McCain's investigations.

Gene Dewey and William Taft, the legal advisor, supported us. And what Ed and I said was that this ICRC report and others demonstrated that there were systematic abuses in the handling of prisoners. We spoke about the violation of principles, and the profound negative impact this would have globally if the abuses became more widely known. All of this and so much more was made public from 2005 onwards, but we added things needed to change, that there should be corrective action.

I believe that Secretary Powell and Deputy Secretary Armitage fully understood this. I believe to this day that they were the principled individuals standing in the way of much worse things happening across those years. I spoke to them personally on different issues. On refugee admissions too, I remember briefing Powell, one-on-one in his office on the

attempt to shut down certain categories of immigrants. His commitment was to doing what was right every time. Powell was, again, the person I admired most in my professional life. And inside the building, State career officials could raise concerns on the seventh floor without worrying about John Bolton or someone else coming after you.

Later when I moved on to Brussels to the U.S. European Union mission as DCM in the summer of 2004, Secretary Powell was still around and visited later that year. But I remember in 2005, we were addressing renditions, you know, this kidnapping of individuals, taking them to third countries and again things were happening that were not right. And I remember dealing with senior legal officers, front offices coming to talk to the Europeans. I would watch the Europeans and think that they were quite disbelieving about what they were hearing in terms of our efforts to justify our actions on detainees under Geneva conventions. And I remember one assistant secretary who, when I tried to get him to acknowledge the issue said, that's not our issue. That's for the Pentagon or other agencies. No, it was an issue for all of us.

I was also given population policy to cover in, I believe 2002, something I had never thought about in terms of the P in PRM. And we had a political deputy assistant secretary who was ideological on this. Family planning is a major political football for American assistance policy overseas. And it is sometimes simplified to just being about the so-called Mexico City policy, a decision that was made, I believe in the Reagan years, that the U.S. does not fund services on abortion, which complicates working with any NGO or UN system agencies that do. When Republicans are in charge Mexico City policy restrictions are imposed; when Democrats win, the restrictions are lifted.

And on the surface given how divided this country is on this issue, that seesaw was inevitable. It's how you interpret the restrictions. At that time in 2001, the ideologues were in charge. Restrictions for them had to be absolute, and the argument was money's fungible; if you're supporting an NGO that is using other funds for abortion, you're essentially facilitating abortion indirectly. They could not be funded unless they ceased their abortion services. NGOs would not always agree to this. We also had ideologues who sought to stop contraceptive assistance. These people were extreme. They were close to advocates who were against condoms, IUD devices, and gels.

Early on working with a couple of persons in PRM, I decided we had to limit the efforts of these people to expand the interpretation of funding restrictions on family planning beyond abortion. No one was going to challenge the White House policy, but it was up to bureaucrats to figure out implementation and find workarounds for extreme positions.

A seventh-floor political person at one point thanked me personally but privately for my efforts to keep policy within the agreed boundaries. At one point, however, the political DAS called me into her office and said words to the effect that, "I know what you're doing. And if you continue doing this, there's a little black book over at the White House. You'll never get an ambassadorship."

I continued working. We managed to prevent defunding of contraception support. Obviously, Mexico City policy had to be applied. I may not agree with the decision, but as a mainstream policy we implemented it.

The civil servants I worked with were an inspiration on this issue. Overall, PRM may have been the posting I loved most in my career. The bureau made such an immediate difference to the lives of people. I was extraordinarily fortunate to have Rich Greene, the former CFO [chief financial officer] for the department, as my immediate boss as principal deputy assistant secretary. He was principled, dynamic, realistic, a superb resource strategist, and stalwart in supporting all of us. Among the office directors, Margaret McKelvey, Terry Rusch, and Nancy Iris stood out for me.

And I think the Civil Service stood out right through my career. Whether it's INR, whether it's PRM, whether it's IO [international organizations], OES [environment], their dedication to truth, objectivity telling it as it is, theirs' is an absolutely essential part of us being able to function in the department because Foreign Service personnel, we get pushed around by the politics a lot more. And I can't tell you how many times turning to the civil service for support, knowledge, perspective, was so critical to responding to challenges.

Q: I want to point out that you really hadn't worked in the department all that much at that point. And all of a sudden you were in an important policy position. In a way it was a big jump. You had been doing it overseas but Washington is so different. DASes don't have an easy life.

MCKINLEY: You're certainly looking over your shoulder at a thousand political pieces that can fall along the way.

Chapter X: DCM, U.S. European Union Brussels: U.S. Reset with Europe; Data Privacy and SWIFT; Economic and Doha Issues; Energy

Q: Good afternoon. It is January third, 2022 and we're continuing our conversation with Ambassador Mike McKinley. Mike, I think we're ready to talk about the period that you were DCM in the U.S. Mission to the European Union. Is that right? So you got there in 2004 just as it was turning from the European Commission to the European Union. Is that right?

MCKINLEY: I was in PRM and had decided that I was happy to stay in Washington. But the DCM job at the European Union mission popped up. And frankly working with the European Union had been something I had been interested in doing for years. I strongly believed in what the European Union represented.

Given that I had left the bilateral mission in circumstances in which I had turned the political in for what I perceived of as abuses of the system, there was an effort in EUR and by the former ambassador I had worked with to prevent my bid from going through. I was supported by people elsewhere in the system who saw what I did in 2001 in a positive way. I had a great interview with a political ambassador, Rock Schnabel, who was originally from the Netherlands and had been ambassador under, I think Ronald Reagan, to Finland, and was a private equity manager. I was selected and moved out to the European Union job in I believe August 2004.

And it was a moment that was extremely significant on a number of levels. First, European and U.S. relations were at a very low point, both with the commission and with governments in Europe.

Q: Was this because of the invasion of Iraq?

MCKINLEY: That's correct. Relations with Europe were at a low point because of the invasion of Iraq, but also because of what was seen by the Europeans as the United States violating international conventions across the board, to include exerting undue pressure on allies. Their great and growing concern about the U.S. approach to interrogation, whether it was Guantanamo or renditions, was becoming public by then, as well as the co-participation of certain European allies in the process. And there were differences in approach to respecting the privacy of citizens. There was considerable debate over U.S. pressure trying to change the rules of engagement on tracking financial flows around the world, which had an impact also on the neutrality of the SWIFT banking system, which governs banking transfers to this day. The aftermath of the Iraq invasion was messy.

And frankly, there was a profound dislike of President Bush on a personal level. It was still the period when Chirac in France and Schroeder in Germany were both very outspoken leaders who had staked out some of their reputation on openly opposing the United States on the invasion of Iraq and more. And with a French foreign minister and later prime minister who was extremely anti-American.

But more widely there was just this general attitude of where is the United States going? Is this [U.S.-Europe] an alliance? Is the U.S. a country that Europe can still fully relate to as it violates what Europeans perceived as values. And it was also a period when Europe saw itself as an increasingly important actor on the world stage. I arrived when ten new countries joined the European Union in May of 2004, and I arrived as they were ratifying the new EU constitution.

There was this idea of a pan-European government, of a growing, increasingly economically prosperous European Union that was capable of spreading democracy and values to central-eastern Europe and the Balkans. There was a high degree of political confidence growing inside the European Union and a sense that they could challenge us on a number of fronts.

It was in that context and particularly after the reelection of President Bush in November of 2004 that the decision in Washington was made on a reset with Europe. I think that terminology was used. And so over the time I was there, it was very much a part of rebuilding relations. I can't underscore how frosty the ties were.

I remember going into my first meetings in the commission on different issues—whether it was agricultural subsidies, whether it was cooperation on security questions, whether it was on defense and cooperation, whether it was on environment, whether it was on our approach to Iran—and encountering either, as I said earlier, skepticism, a considered listening, but not necessarily an engagement on a lot of the issues. That's not true of all of the questions, the world's a big place. And there were areas where we did find common ground in reacting.

Q: Was the ambassador going out at the same time?

MCKINLEY: The ambassador I was working for at the time in Brussels broke the mold of disinterested political ambassadors in important ways. First, he grew up in the Netherlands and came to the United States after World War II. I think he was already sixteen or something, but his worldview remained much broader than most political people I've dealt with. And he fully saw what the difficulties were in dealing with the commission.

He certainly saw the failure in Washington to acknowledge the growing importance of the European Union. He saw the importance of working with the commissioners as an adjunct to the efforts in Washington to still focus on bilateral ties in Paris and Berlin and in London because he knew so many of the decisions that were made bilaterally came back to the commission in Brussels anyways, for final debate among the twenty-eight—was it twenty-eight or twenty-seven, I never get this right—members of the European Union.

And Ambassador Schnabel was fully aware of this and looked for ways to communicate. This was a soft-spoken person, one of the most diplomatic individuals I've ever known.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the structure of the U.S.-EU mission?

MCKINLEY: Sure but let me just speak about the context for the work.
Two thousand and four, and I remember it was the year of reset. I believe it was in that first year that I was there, and this is going to be slightly—I'm, I'm picking out figures from my memory. But I believe we had somewhere between ninety and a hundred visits in one year at deputy assistant secretary or above. Eleven to thirteen cabinet secretaries. We had presidential visits. And so, there was this very serious effort at reviving engagement with Europe and the commission benefited from that.

And it also helped open commission doors for those of us on the staff, and there was tons of congressional business. Many of the visits were motivated by the presence of NATO in Brussels, but the knock-on benefit of NATO being there was this growing awareness of having to deal with the commission and having to deal with commissioners. The foreign affairs commissioner at the time, Javier Solana, was one of the most impressive people I've ever met in my life. He knew how to work us and was a committed transatlanticist, committed to NATO and Europe as well.

And I remember having conversations with him without the ambassador, without visitors, in which, there would be frank talk about what's happening with the United States and how do we work through this? Unlike some other commissioners, he was very much committed to trying to make things work, but with a critical eye, also looking at what the United States might have to do differently to get things to move forward.

The mission had the highest number of capable and expert people I've worked with in my career. The competition was fierce for the seventy, I remember the figure, seventy American positions there from the different agencies. I don't know how many, eight to ten agencies but we were tiny given the work we did.

From Commerce, from Treasury from State, the quality of the officers, from Justice, was through the roof. Part of it was the issues were extraordinarily esoteric in many respects, whether they were about financial regulations, technology, customs, cooperation, the security data on individual corporations, working with SWIFT on banking secrecy. Trade issues related to what were still efforts to make the Doha round reach conclusion working with the Europeans. And then in our political section, working with commission opposites, where—if you went in to speak about Russia, about Iran and nuclear negotiations, if you went in to talk about nuclear proliferation—if you talked about African issues. You can bet that the person sitting across from you had been doing it for ten or fifteen years, and you'd better have the depth or at least the ability to engage with them.

And so it was an extraordinary group of people for me in terms of intellectual capacity and work ethic. We didn't work much on weekends, which was a blessing, but we worked very, very long days and we were supported by locally engaged staff. They were just walking encyclopedias on the issues they'd been hired to cover. They would know

commission politics, commission personnel, they would know the different economic sectors and could open just about any door, reach anybody.

I have never worked in a more efficient mission, in a more driven mission, in a more intellectually challenging mission. And we all were aware we were cogs in the machine. No one was looking to stand out and make a name for themselves separately.

Q: (laughs) Well, I am not sure that describes the people that I worked with in trade agencies there. Maybe it's different.

MCKINLEY: Okay, maybe. But, you know, we were fully aware that we were working in a much broader canvas but a canvas which affected central U.S. interests across the board. And, you know, we'd get the congressional visitors, they'd come from committees, which were in charge of issues that needed resolution. And so unlike so many of the times you were supporting congressional visitors, they actually were interested in engaging with their commission counterparts. It was quite something to see the depth of knowledge of some of our representatives and senators.

I think across the three years I was there, I ended up being chargé for quite a while, it was nearly a full year across the three years. Schnabel left. It took some time for his replacement to come in, who was a well-known Washington lawyer named Boyden Gray. He was more typically Washington political in his focus. And so, it fell on staff to carry more of the work than we had under Schnabel. Gray was a very bright man, understood Washington deeply, but he did spend a lot of time away from post.

That early period was one of rebuilding and rethinking how we worked with Europe. And there were moments which were tough.

We were negotiating on passenger name records, which is basically private information of international citizens and Americans. And we were demanding that the Europeans allow us complete access to their passenger name records for transatlantic travel. It was just a nonstarter. Because of the way Europeans approach privacy for their citizens, they do a much better job of protecting it than we do.

Or our efforts for SWIFT to be even more forthcoming in cooperating on tracing terrorism financing, on data, on financial transfers, when to some Europeans it seemed like it would've involved violating banking standards.

Separately, as I mentioned in my comments on my time at PRM, a particularly embarrassing moment for me was our effort to defend our approach to detentions and renditions as permissible under international law and how Geneva conventions didn't apply to the global war on terrorism. We had improved after Abu Ghraib had happened. But we still were looking for ways to explain what we were doing. The assistant secretary I mentioned earlier who said "it's not our issue" later worked on seeking third countries to resettle persons we wanted to release, because it was.

Q: Oh, right, right.

MCKINLEY: And so, there was this earlier period where we were working through difficult issues with the EU, but I thought what was significant was Condi Rice and I'm assuming with the full support of President Bush, worked hard at reestablishing the relationship with key European interlocutors including the commission. I remember having a one-on-one conversation with the secretary of state on how I perceived the issues, and she was just extraordinarily sophisticated, strategic, aware of the contradictions in policy and thinking through what could be put forward in terms of advancing cooperation with the Europeans on a host of fronts.

And so, by the end of three years, I truly left there feeling that it was an enormously successful period, professionally, but also successful in terms of the United States: back at the table, reasserting leadership, taking into account the viewpoints of allies, fewer bullying tactics by that stage. People like Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were gone.

And I'll mention that it was also my first occasion to meet John McCain, whom I worked with over the years on different subjects. I remember an initial conversation with him either late in 2004 or early 2005. And I was just an add-on at a lunch or a meeting at the bilateral. And, he had a very Cold War view of the world, which he never left behind. He was being fairly dogmatic about certain subjects but struck me at the time as he struck many, as somebody whose commitment to the Western Alliance was something critical, pivotal to the relationship, and a man of principle. Which came into play, obviously when Abu Ghraib and other information began to come out.

So just to maybe add a little more color to the different periods. With some very talented people helping, we sought to revamp how the EU was presented to the U.S., reviewing all kinds of EU policies, their growing importance on development assistance around the world, how they were approaching the Middle East, homeland security issues and so on. It was striking how often we had to argue for separate meetings with the EU.

A very critical aspect of our issues was addressing the NATO-EU relationship on defense and security issues, which was always a small thorn in the side for the United States. But the fact is that the French and Germans were looking at a separate European pillar for security. We were trying to suggest to our colleagues in NATO or in Washington that there was a percentage in having capabilities built up inside the European Union.

And I'd argue that today in the wake of Ukraine, this European capability hasn't fully developed, but we've been myopic in opposing it, undermining it, doing passive resistance to it. We're now paying the price as we deal with Russia's threats in Ukraine.

And I also thought it was extraordinarily important to focus on the importance of the economic relationship. We weren't going to achieve what we wanted in WTO [World Trade Organization], unless we worked with the Europeans, we weren't going to resolve differences over Boeing-Airbus. Well, we didn't. Our differences on financial regulation,

on Sarbanes-Oxley, and so on. A more vigorous engagement with the Commission on these questions was needed.

It was interesting to have USTR [United States Trade Representative] Bob Zoellick visit a couple of occasions working with Peter Mandelson, who was a former senior British minister under Tony Blair, and led much of the Northern Ireland peace process, and who was then the trade commissioner, and someone whom I knew as an MP when I worked in London in the early ’90s. Two very impressive worldly men failing to reach agreement.

Q: Let’s pause on trade for a second. So in the USEU [United States Mission to the European Union] mission, did USTR’s office lead the discussions on trade?

MCKINLEY: Yes. In the sense that they were regularly engaged with them, but senior or sectoral USTR would come out from Washington for the detailed talks. What I’ve found with USTR over the years, and I don’t mean this as a criticism, is that because they’re negotiators and they’re so focused on the issues that are on the table at a given time, they sometimes need support in deciphering the broader political environment and challenges.

I think there was a profound change in how we approached trade negotiations by the end of the 2000s. And into the later part of the second Obama administration, in which it was understood we were not going to get everything we wanted. Whereas while I was working at the European Union, we were still in the mentality of “well don’t they [EU] understand, they have to do this?” I thought the USTR people were very impressive, worked hard, but the negotiations were led by Washington.

Now, the ambassador and I communicated back to Washington our concerns, particularly that we were missing the boat on reaching an agreement with the Europeans on agricultural subsidies. And that an alliance was building up between India, Brazil, and South Africa, that was going to kill a compromise. If Europe and the United States didn’t reach an agreement, Doha would be dead.

Peter Mandelson, I thought, was a visionary on this question. And still we were just stuck with, “We’re going to defend our agricultural lobby to hell and back, and we weren’t going to make any concessions.” And we didn’t, and we didn’t reach an agreement, and Doha collapsed for other reasons, which also involved, I think IPR questions, but we blew it. We had a window, and we just didn’t concede and

Q: We weren’t able to give anything to get to agreement?

MCKINLEY: Well, not enough, that’s for sure.

Q: And then on the Airbus issue at that point, the Boeing-Airbus disputes that were basically working in the background of litigation, right. So we were trying to discuss that, but in the background.

MCKINLEY: And neither side was willing to give. And, let me plead my ignorance or subjectivity. I didn't see Airbus' side of the argument ever. I didn't think the state level subsidies in the U.S. were the equivalent of government strategic engagement across three countries in Europe. The only time in my career I ever hung anything in my office related to a private company was a picture of the Boeing Dreamliner that was in development. I was so committed to supporting Boeing in the dispute at that point.

Other moments.

Zoellick was deputy secretary when he was working on Darfur negotiations. So on the basis of my experience with Sudan, I supported his visit to look for common ground with Europeans on working through that stage of talks.

Because I was chargé for so many periods, I had a moment in which I hosted a dinner with just six people. And two of them were the NATO secretary general and Henry Kissinger. I had a fabulous evening.

We ended up with the first ever U.S.-EU economic ministerial. I mean, it was the no-brainer aspect of asking what it is we don't understand even today that our relationship with the European Union is the single biggest trading and investment relationship we have. It's a place where most of our government bonds are bought. It generates millions of employment positions in the U.S., as well as in Europe. And now that we're concerned about China as an emerging third pillar of the world economy, where's our strategy for working with our natural ally in responding to the challenge?

In short, it was a magical period of working on broader strategic policies.

Q: Yes. And I remember that EB was led by Tony Wayne who felt very strongly as you do about the important impact on everyday American lives of these technical economic issues like standards harmonization. The idea was that trade in manufacturing or agriculture for that matter could flow easier if there was some kind of agreement on what the standards were going to be instead of having dueling standards.

MCKINLEY: Absolutely. The standards argument, however, in the period I was there, we weren't successful. What we were trying to suggest to Washington is we're losing this battle and the Europeans are beating us in Africa. They're beating us in parts of the Middle East. They're beating us in parts of Asia, establishing their own standards regimen. We needed to come to an accommodation with them on equivalency. And their success also impacted our global financial regulation cooperation.

We made some advances in fits and starts working on SWIFT, on counter terrorism and global interbank transactions. It led to this blow-up in 2006 in Europe, over the U.S. allegedly abusing data privacy cooperation from Europe, and that spilled over into SWIFT. But that meant we had to look at accommodating Europe to some degree.

Q: So what I remember on that issue was that we knew what we wanted to be able to track financial transfers to terrorist groups. We knew that there were legal obstacles in Europe to doing that. We were trying to delve into understanding the legalities enough to be able to try to get some progress on that issue of trying to follow and then stop those financial flows.

MCKINLEY: And we got there. Just.

Q: It was painful, right?

MCKINLEY: There were bumps in the road. The Europeans forced us to figure out a new approach or we were going to lose everything. They had strong reservations about how SWIFT was used, and their concern worsened again under President Trump.

Q: Could you describe what SWIFT is?

MCKINLEY: It's the system which governs global financial transaction transfers.

Q: Okay. To make the interbank transfers work.

MCKINLEY: Right. And it was run by an American when I was there, but not anymore.

Q: Okay. But so the leaking of it, was it a Wikileaks kind of thing?

MCKINLEY: If I remember correctly, it came out in the *Wall Street Journal* or *Financial Times* that the U.S. was using confidential SWIFT information for counterterrorism.

Q: But do you feel that by the end of your time we had reached an accommodation with the Europeans?

MCKINLEY: It was after I left that, I think we reached the accommodation. And I would suggest the places where we were making most progress tended to be where there were commission civil servants in charge of talks.

Q: Was there also an increase in terrorism in Europe at that time? In Spain or was that later?

MCKINLEY: Yes, there was. There was the attack on the train station in Madrid, I believe in 2004 or 2005. There was the attack on the London subway system. These attacks left hundreds dead across the continent. There were attacks in France at a couple of locations. And so that didn't change things when it came down to the data privacy issues, the Europeans weren't budging because of that, we were the ones that had to end up taking more into account what their concerns were.

On passenger name records, PNR, I think our arguments were that we needed to be able to transparently understand who was traveling, and the Europeans were less certain. We

ended up with an agreement which was perhaps helped along by the Europeans beginning to recognize the level of threat they also faced in building up better data coordination on individuals who might be a threat in the broader European Union region.

Here is one little additional tidbit, which I had completely forgotten, which is relevant to today. We did an analysis of the Russian penetration of the EU energy market, challenging Washington conventional thinking. We did spend our time promoting the Baku-Ceyhan, Adriatic pipelines. Anyways, a reminder of things/issues that linger.

Q: So let's talk about that for a second. This had been going on for a long time, because even during the Reagan administration, we had tried putting sanctions on to deter the Europeans from getting too dependent on Russian or Soviet energy. And then in the decade before your time we had the issues where the Russians started turning off the gas to Ukraine, because the Ukrainians didn't pay. And then the Europeans on the other end of that pipeline were getting affected. What was going on when you were there?

MCKINLEY: I think it was just more of the same but there was a very strategic pressure on the Europeans to commit to contracts for pipelines and gas that wasn't flowing so that alternative routes could be developed.

There was another aspect to this. Since the late 1990s, I believed our approach to Russia needed to be re-thought, that we were putting undue pressure on a then-weak state that was reacting to the psychological as well as political impact of the breakup of the Soviet Union. I didn't think at the time that NATO expansion was a great idea, in the manner it was done. I saw this energy strategy in terms of driving Russia away as well. I was working from the assumption that we could find common ground somewhere. And a part of it meant giving Russia its respect, not as a disappearing power, but as a country that was still important on the global stage. I don't want to oversell it, but that was my mindset. And I thought the energy alternatives we supported at the time did not answer European needs.

And what was wrong with my viewpoint, with hindsight now, as Russia threatens Ukraine, is this. Who knows when Putin first thought he was going to rebuild the Soviet empire? And who knows when he was aggrieved or did he always believe that Russia had to break away from the West? The moment is almost existential.

Q: Okay. And what were the Europeans saying?

MCKINLEY: They listened politely to our points, but the economics of it were very challenging. And so, the issue was who's going to pay for this?

Q: For the alternative routes?

MCKINLEY: For the alternative pipelines. Some of them eventually did come into being, but they're no substitute for what was coming across from Russia. And they still aren't.

Q: Okay. So that was a good overview on the economic issues. On the U.S.-EU economic ministerial, was the most important thing of that, the fact of it?

MCKINLEY: No, I never thought ministerials do much on substance. The importance is people speaking with each other. Very rarely do you get a singular moment when something important is decided, it's part of process, but if you don't have the ministerials, if you're not meeting, if you don't know each other face to face, you—

I'm going to exaggerate here, but when I first arrived in Brussels in 2004 it was like Washington didn't know most of the commissioners and cared less who they were; but they wielded enormous power. That viewpoint changed until Trump came along, he had a kind of engagement that tore things down and I think there's an effort underway now to rebuild ties again with the individual commissioners.

Q: Any other issues that you worked a lot on during those three years?

MCKINLEY: Yes. I mean I have plenty of anecdotes. When President Kabila was killed in the Congo, I was apparently the first person in the U.S. government to be told it was happening. I was called in Brussels from the palace where there was shooting by a contact I had. And I immediately called the Africa Bureau which didn't know what was underway, and I mention this to underscore, you never know when people you meet with over the years are going to turn out to be people who still end up being important to you as contacts. But I think that's something most Foreign Service officers learn in all streams of our service. And so, I'm not saying anything that isn't obvious. It's just that it surfaces sometimes in the most unexpected ways.

I guess there's two people I would like to mention in the commission who I thought were among the most accomplished people I've ever met. One was Robert Cooper who was the chief adviser to the foreign relations head Solana. And still all these years later, I remember him as brilliant in understanding the transformation of the world after the Cold War and the dangers that we were facing with a new emerging architecture and finding the appropriate response. He was a terrific interlocutor for Washington, on the Iran nuclear deal, he was leading on for the commission. He was ahead of his time. Another was Jonathan Faull, who worked on security issues with us, one of the two or three most able diplomats I have ever known. I learned a tremendous amount from both.

The Americans who worked there. The Americans who worked at NATO were very impressive. And the Europeans across the board and the commission and some of the bilateral missions. And like I say, I think we ended up in a better place in U.S.-European relations as we moved into the Obama administration.

Q: Before we stop, should we talk about what was happening as far as getting ready for your next posting?

MCKINLEY: Yes, we can get that over with. So, in 2006—

Q: Which, by the way, is when I met you. I came with one of the USTR folks and was able to attend a dinner that you hosted.

MCKINLEY: Oh, I had forgotten it was then!

And the bidding process was coming along, and I was thinking of returning to Washington, and was not concerned about an ambassadorship. I loved the policy work. And my ambassador sat me down, and said, "When you leave the State Department, the one title that can immediately open doors and possibilities for you is being chief of mission. So, you're making a mistake." I listened. And I bid.

Q: This is a very different process, the ambassador track. They tell you that there's some positions open for the department to fill and then you have to reach out to individual bureaus and ask what they are. Right? There's not even a public list like usual.

MCKINLEY: By the time I was coming into it, they were producing the list more transparently through personnel offices. It's only in the first year of an administration that it's not clear which embassies are going to go political, but by the second, third, fourth years it is clear. You need a career development officer who will give you the list. I was fortunate, right. My counselors were always very supportive.

Q: Okay. So did you look at more than one bureau when you were at this point in 2006?

MCKINLEY: That year I was on five chief of mission lists for three bureaus. We had been happy in Brussels as a family as well, and that colored bidding since one was in Europe. Fatima had continued working with representation events, charities, community events, and art. She had integrated us with Belgians in sports clubs, art schools, and with one of Europe's major musical competitions, the Prix Concours Elisabeth, which was a fabulous exposure to rising classical musicians. We hosted an American musician, and it was a privilege to listen to her play and practice daily for the competition.

I did receive two offers of nominations, and again, although one was in an African country we had always wanted to live in, and I was very grateful to the AF bureau, we decided to take the possibility of returning to Latin America after twenty years away and which our children had little familiarity with. I still had the department's "D" committee process to go through and was not sure how that would go. I had accepted Peru.

Q: Oh. So it was a big risk?

MCKINLEY: Those are anxious moments waiting for the final decisions by the committee. What I learned then was that it was helpful if more than the regional bureau was backing you. I was very nervous, and I was very pleased when the committee, and then the White House approved the Peru nomination. Then the background checks, and they got more intrusive and political every time I went through them for other ambassadorial nominations. I had my congressional hearing with the nominees for Colombia and Venezuela. They were the focus. I had two questions. And I got to Lima.

Chapter XI: Ambassador, Peru, 2007–2010: Pisco Earthquake: FTA Implementation; Cultural Diplomacy; Counter-Narcotics/Counterterrorism

Q: It is January tenth, 2022, and we're continuing our conversation with Ambassador Mike McKinley. The year is 2007, Mike, and you are heading off to Peru as ambassador. It's your first of several ambassadorships. Can you tell me a little bit about what your goals were or what the Department of State and the president had asked you to try to look at and achieve while you were in Peru?

MCKINLEY: If I can just offer a parenthetical, which I haven't mentioned before, but the idea that ambassadors are the personal representatives of the president is not entirely accurate. Ninety percent of ambassadors, maybe a higher percentage, never have any real personal contact or communication with the president across their tours. It's the NSC staff that decides things. And we all work for the State Department, the secretary of state and specifically the assistant secretary of state for that region. And if you're representing the U.S. in smaller countries, office directors for subregions, even the desk officer become your real boss.

Q: And at this point was Tom Shannon the—?

MCKINLEY: Yes, Tom Shannon was the assistant secretary in WHA when I became an ambassador. He was one of the most impressive officers of our generation, a great and singular diplomat, and I owe him my nomination.

Q: And I was the deputy director of the Office of Andean Affairs.

MCKINLEY: Yes, and so I do remember being very focused on the marching orders from the office, less so from Ambassador Shannon!

It is a period in Latin America that's important to place in context. It was the decade plus of a commodity boom, which transformed economic growth and provided for tens of millions of people to enter into the middle class in the region. It was also a period in which the democratic transformation of Latin America of the late eighties and into the nineties was consolidating itself. And there was a greater sense of self confidence in Latin America deciding its own way, its wider relationship with the outside world, and reexamining the relationship with the U.S. That's not true for every country. Obviously, some continued to be more dependent on the United States than others, but there was something of a shift underway.

This was also the timeframe globally of the emergence of the BRICSs. That grouping of Russia, India, South Africa, China, and Brazil, all emerging economies, which saw themselves, and were seen to be developing in a fashion in which they would be major actors on the world's economic stage in the not-too-distant future.

It was also a period of more muscular assertion by the G-77 of developing countries, of North-South tensions between what was called the West or the developed economies of

the world and the rest of the globe. And inside Latin America, there was also an emerging political competition between what were populist left-wing governments, not yet dictatorships or formal dictatorships anyways, and what we considered to be more traditional liberal democracies in the mold of what we had hoped to see after 1989 and which we were accustomed to dealing with.

Venezuela under President Chavez was busy building up an alternative set of alliances, or alignments would be a better term, with like-minded leaders like President Correa in Ecuador, President Evo Morales in Bolivia, President Lula in Brazil, President Kirchner in Argentina. In Nicaragua, the Ortegas were coming back. I think they came back in an election for the first time in 2007. Cuba was still obviously a focus of American policy and welcomed in this group.

Peru was seen as somewhat in the middle. It wasn't a strong democracy and seemed more fragile than the Colombia emerging from Plan Colombia, and not as solid as the democracies in Chile or Uruguay, or Costa Rica, Panama, other countries we can mention. But Peru was coming out of a long period of civil strife. There had been a left-wing insurgency and terrorism carried out by the Shining Path, drug trafficking penetration, populist politics, and a right-wing authoritarian government led by President Fujimori, who had nonetheless stabilized the economy and defeated the Shining Path.

From 2001 onwards, Peru was able to hold elections on schedule, have peaceful transfers of power, and an open and democratic environment, even as the constellation of political actors inside the country never developed strong political parties, structures, or institutional foundations.

Over time, there were a lot of shifting alliances, dozens of political movements, actors competing with personalist movements, and a relatively weak institutional setup in governance seemed to be the result.

I arrived and a left-of-center president, Alan Garcia, was in charge. He was infamous in the 1980s for running one of the most inept, and certainly one of the most corrupt governments in Latin America during that period at a time when the left-wing insurgency, the Shining Path, was taking off, cocaine exports were growing, and the economy was imploding, everything. And people were somewhat alarmed at Garcia returning to power as president twenty years later. But the fact is he turned out to be one of those leaders who showed that he had learned from experience and became one of the most level and coherent leaders of modern-day Peru—his second administration proved to be one of the most successful political periods over the last forty years.

Q: He came in, in his second term in 2006. So a little bit before you.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And so, as I came in, it seemed to me I did not have to reinvent the wheel, things in the bilateral relationship were working. Peru was one of our twenty-five largest missions in the world, three hundred Americans. We had a dozen

agencies, a significant, but not huge foreign assistance program, I can't remember exactly, two hundred to three hundred million dollars.

Q: It was dropping fast though.

MCKINLEY: It was dropping fast. And the focus was on transitioning the relationship, to what the Bush administration was focused on, which was free trade agreements, concluding them, bringing them to ratification for Peru, for Colombia, for South Korea. And Peru was certainly one that was closer to the finishing line than the others.

There were major commercial interests at stake. One being the development of a natural gas project called Camisea, which involved four billion dollars of investment, over two billion from what I seem to remember was Hunt Oil in the U.S., but very dependent on financing from American financial institutions and the Inter-American Development Bank.

And there was a focus on counter-narcotics and continuing to work with Peruvian governments on expanding the security relationship. That meant, in part, trying to help Peru transition out of the strong equipment legacy relationship with the Soviet Union.

I don't want to dress this up. It was a question of managing something that was already working well under my predecessor.

As I arrived, Peru was hit with a major earthquake with the epicenter about two hours outside of Lima in Pisco, with hundreds dead, two hundred thousand displaced, buildings falling down in Lima. And because Peru was a place where Americans tend to go for tourism, there was also an American citizen response requirement that was significant.

And I'll just say this, that the experiences I'd had in my career in Africa and working with PRM and working with our talented staff on the ground, certainly helped tremendously in knowing who to work with in Washington, with WHA but also with OFDA [Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance], AID's disaster response office. Frankly, also in responding to pressures from State and at the NSC on whether we were doing enough to help. And in mobilizing support and rethinking the presence we had on the ground.

And across the next couple of weeks, our response involved taking decisions to deploy consular officers and administrative officers to the earthquake zone, to reroute our counter-narcotics air support, working with the Peruvian government response, ground-truthing with Washington to try to generate more assistance funds.

But I want to emphasize that our work was to essentially support the Peruvian government, which was doing the heavy lifting, and doing it well. We did work with great people in the State department and USAID. I won't say it was seamless. It would be ridiculous to pretend we didn't face obstacles, or that we didn't get some things wrong,

but just the dedication, the hard work and, and strategic focus, and then the coordination with Washington, everybody caring and wanting to see a result. It worked out.

Q: So just to pause there a little bit. With any earthquake or natural disaster, the first thing that happens is that thousands of people start calling the embassy and the desk and—

MCKINLEY: —and the Operations Center.

Q: And whoever they can reach to make sure their family or friends are okay, even if they don't know for a fact they were in the affected area. So one thing I was aware of in the department was that there was a lag for a few hours before we were able to get the mechanism set up for the consular bureau to take calls, but on the desk we filled in until that happened. The next thing that happens is the ambassador needs to decide or work with the government to decide on whether to do a declaration of an emergency. So you can start releasing some money and start asking for assistance. And so that went seamlessly, right?

MCKINLEY: It did. All I'm going to say is that the disaster announcement process is inconsequential. Fifty thousand to a hundred thousand dollars. It makes no difference except in the most micro of fashions. There should be a meaningful amount for immediate response, say five hundred thousand to one million dollars, and a commitment to work on identifying further resources quickly.

Q: So you mentioned the office of foreign disaster assistance, which is part of AID but a very specific organization which does work very well. And the regional office is located in Costa Rica for the Western Hemisphere. I've worked several disasters and often the problem is the weather or the damage to the airport or whatever delays, the fact-finding team to come in to kind of gauge the needs. They are the experts and it's important for them to get there. Was there any delay in OFDA being able to arrive?

MCKINLEY: There was damage I don't remember if to the runway, but to the airport near Pisco, to the road down, so trying to deploy was a challenge, but I don't want to compare this to responding to the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 which was cataclysmic. In Peru, this was a significant earthquake, with significant loss of life, and significant displacement, but it was near a major urban area. It was near human resources that could be deployed, material resources that could be deployed. There was a functional government and services that worked to respond.

Q: Right. That was my final question. I was going to ask if I was correct that the Peruvian government was very skilled at doing a lot. So we were basically bringing in things to support them, not to lead at all.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And I think there was real appreciation for what the United States had to offer, but a high level of pride in what they were able to do themselves and

with good reason. They did not see the international community as leading the response, and at the embassy we certainly were aware of the sensitivities.

Q: And you had a very good brand-new desk officer. She was new on the desk but she did a marvelous job, protecting you from phone calls and distractions.

MCKINLEY: That's right. Certainly, the support from Washington was seamless. It was very, very easy. The ambassador or the mission is presenting, and you're hoping Washington's on the same page.

Q: I remember I warned you early on that there was going to be a consistent desire in Washington to know how much other countries were giving so that they could gauge how U.S. assistance was stacking up, as there were announcements of Cuban doctors et cetera. It would be important to have one person collecting this information to feed the beast. And I believe that suggestion worked out well.

MCKINLEY: Absolutely. And it's really sad that we focus on that, because it shouldn't matter where the assistance comes in from in a humanitarian response situation.

Q: A little like sibling rivalry but it helps a little to get a little more resources. So I would look at it that way.

MCKINLEY: Maybe, maybe. I certainly viewed our focus on Cuban doctors as misplaced, since in many countries, they were the only medical service available in rural areas. They were providing needed services.

Q: So the earthquake complicated your ability to come into the country and get started, and the reconstruction lasted a couple of months.

MCKINLEY: Initial stages, it really is one of the more seamless crisis response efforts I was involved in across my career. I was very impressed.

Q: Turning to trade. Trade agreements were a high priority, at least in the Western Hemisphere Bureau. The trade negotiations in the region had started off the Andean negotiations, but the countries diverged and Peru quickly took the lead. But the politics on Capitol Hill of which agreements could get, could get through was starting to worry the bureau leadership, which didn't want Peru to move ahead without Colombia. So we were working that in Washington. I know you had a good economic team working closely with the U.S. Trade Representative's office, but could you talk a little bit about what that negotiation looked like for you?

MCKINLEY: Well to me, finalizing the free trade agreement was something that absolutely consumed me into 2008, when we were running up against the deadline on whether the agreement would be implemented or not, not just ratified. On the delinking from the Colombia process, I worked closely with your office. I worked with Shannon, and I was allowed to make cases directly to Commerce Secretary Gutierrez, to USTR.

Arguing for the delinking. It wasn't because Peru was more important than Colombia or South Korea. It was a question of getting something done and moving forward, and it was already evident to me at the time that the U.S. Congress, that the Democratic caucus was very much focused on environmental and labor issues, which Peru met to a certain extent, but not fully, and so this provided an excuse to anti-free trade politicians to block agreement to proceed to implementation.

There are always domestic policy components affecting agreements, but Peru was an easy target to slap down. There was no Peru constituency. Well, Peru mattered anyways, as an example of what could be done more broadly. Although we were talking about a twelve-billion-dollar, two-way trade relationship at the time, it wasn't insignificant, but it wasn't of world importance. The other challenge was that it wasn't clear that President Garcia cared if we got the free trade agreement or not. He had to be convinced by his ministers over the whole time I was there, who explained why an FTA was good for Peru.

Garcia, by the way, was perhaps the most [he later committed suicide] impressive intellect I dealt with at the leadership level in Latin America. He had real depth.

Q: So that, that reminds me of something that your predecessor Curt Struble said. I remember him telling us as Garcia came into power that we had to understand that he didn't know the United States very well compared to other Latin American leaders. He had spent a lot of time in France. Ambassador Struble's example was that when Garcia got a request to be interviewed by the New York Times, he really didn't know how important the New York Times was in the United States compared to other media outlets. He just didn't have this kind of context to understand us. Did you have that sense at all?

MCKINLEY: Well, because of the perspective I have on how the U.S. works in Latin America, it was we who didn't understand. We just weren't top of the priorities for Peru. Nobody was, it was Peruvian domestic politics that dominated. And for the external, they had difficult relationships which had to be worked across the board around the globe. And Garcia, looking at the global stage certainly had the European connection, but he also was looking at what was emerging as Pacific Alliance countries—the constellation of countries on the Pacific coast of South America, which had a like-minded view on development: Colombia, Chile, Peru, I think Panama and Mexico.

Q: Was Peru the organizer of the Pacific Alliance?

MCKINLEY: Well, you know, I'd have to go back and research and study and all that. But while I was there, I was absolutely convinced that without Garcia's strategic conception, it wouldn't have advanced.

Q: It became a very formidable group. I also remember hearing that Treasury felt that Peru was important in terms of moving like-minded macroeconomic policies in the region.

MCKINLEY: Yes. Fujimori, across his mandate, carried out absolutely fundamental economic reforms. His successor continued, democratically elected Toledo with a finance minister who became president later for a short period, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski who was First Boston, World Bank, a formidable economic and business intellect. And then Garcia came in. He was very much into continuity and deepening reforms as long as there was also a component of responding to social needs inside the country. And he was exemplary in sustaining the course because the expectation was he would devolve into populism, excessive social spending.

And Peru continued to grow. Peru's growth rate across a twenty-year period was the most sustained high growth rate in Latin America, 4 percent, 5 percent a year, it just kept going. And this in a country with weak institutions, with economic reforms grudgingly implemented and so on, but something seemed to be working and Garcia was part of that.

And so when he pushed the Pacific Alliance concept, he had something to base his approach on. And of course, with Colombia and Chile, he was pushing on an open door. Meanwhile, the left led by President Hugo Chavez was driving the so-called ALBA group, trying to develop this alternative constellation of nations in South America, which had a different view on what economic progress should be built on, which was redistributive policies, some elements of nationalization, distancing economic dependence on the United States helped by emerging commodity boom markets driven by the demand of China and other countries.

And so Garcia, I saw as a very central and underappreciated figure, because this is a person who would talk for hours. That doesn't go down well in Washington. He also didn't speak English which sometimes affects how cabinet-level officials deal with Latin Americans who don't since so many of the persons they deal with in the region do.

Q: Yeah, maybe so. Another factor was Colombia was that the upper levels of the State Department forced the Western Hemisphere Bureau to focus all of its attention on Colombia, to the detriment of Peru, to the detriment of Ecuador and many other countries. Because Secretary Rice instituted a bottom up review of assistance funding country by country. And all the bureaus were going to get less aid money than previously and asked how are you going to prioritize within this smaller amount? And in the Western Hemisphere Bureau, it could only be Colombia. There was only enough money to keep Colombia, maybe Haiti, at the same foreign assistance level. Everybody else was being cut on resources. It was that kind of pressure. That's what I was seeing.

MCKINLEY: And that's a very important perspective, which I keep forgetting, but yes, that's what we were facing on the annual budget slashing. And Peru was a government that had corruption issues which did not help. The investigation into the corruption led in the late 2010s to Garcia's house arrest and eventual suicide rather than face the courts.

Q: I think we're going to have to cut here. I'm going to stop recording now.

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Q: Good afternoon. It's January fouteenth, 2022. We're continuing our conversation with Ambassador Mike McKinley on his time as ambassador in Peru. I wanted to continue to talk about trade a little bit. Is there anything you can tell us about the process of how the embassy helped USTR to reach closure on the agreement with Peru and then after that, on the ratification and the implementation.

MCKINLEY: You know, I hesitate to speak because you're so much more knowledgeable on what was happening inside Washington than I.

Q: I think the embassies play a very important role in the end game of the negotiations. The USTR negotiators really rely on the ambassador, often trust them, often do not. So I think you were in an important place.

MCKINLEY: The issue was ambivalence about the free trade agreement under President Alan Garcia and because of the changing environment in Washington with concerns in our Congress. And as you know, there were changes inside USTR and the administration on the strategy of pushing various free trade agreements forward. As you've reminded me, the Central American Trade Agreement had to be handled in a differentiated fashion with different countries and bringing Chile to conclusion required different approaches. And the lessons from this complex environment were at play.

What I was focused on was worries about slippage that would affect how the Peruvian government viewed it. Second, I was worried about efforts to link what happened in Peru to Colombia and Panama. I focused on how we reach the finishing line in Peru, and I thought we should separate Peru from the broader noise on trade agreements elsewhere.

Q: And I would say the problem for Colombia, because they were pretty tough negotiators and very experienced negotiators. So they might have been playing a little bit of hardball on beef exports from the U.S. and things like that, but I would say the big problem for timing and getting congressional approval was the human rights abuses.

MCKINLEY: That is correct.

Q: The politics of going into a trade agreement, which the U.S. Congress always views as a giveaway, were getting more complicated in Colombia. In Peru, there wasn't that baggage.

MCKINLEY: There wasn't. You're absolutely right. The political overhang in Colombia was huge. So the work for Peru really boiled down to what seemed to me relatively straightforward issues. I think I gave speeches that addressed the benefits for Peru. I worked with Commerce because I saw Secretary Gutierrez, who for my money was one of the best commerce secretaries we have had, as truly committed.

He understood business, but he also understood government, and he understood we needed these agreements because America's interests abroad were still heavily economic,

however many political factors took over the headlines of the day. And so arguing for delinking Peru, not looking at what was happening in other countries with other trade agreements, moving towards ratification, resonated with him.

The same was true of the USTR senior working level. USTR hadn't gone into the more cautious mode of subsequent years, especially after President Obama was elected. And they were prepared to work with whatever lingering issues were out there.

Q: Why is that?

MCKINLEY: We had the 2006 midterms, and the Democrats became more powerful, but the outstanding issues could be negotiated. But on Peru, all the heavy lifting on substance had been done. And it really was a question of preventing a surprise issue that could derail U.S. congressional approval or spark a reaction inside Peru that could lead to rejection of the free trade agreement. And the curveball came. Should I go on to that?

Q: Yes, please. You were proved wrong about—?

MCKINLEY: Being a smooth ride.

Q: A smooth ride. And the end game being ratification, right?

MCKINLEY: Ratification was in 2007. Implementation kicked in as an issue in 2008.

Q: And what did implementation mean?

MCKINLEY: Implementation was nuts and bolts, making sure all provisions of the agreement were being met, but environmental and labor issues were just soaring up the charts in terms of concerns for U.S. Congress. There were concerns that Peru was not making the changes to laws or oversight required under the agreement. Colombia was certainly the big target, but it's interesting that even on labor issues South Korea became a concern. In Peru, critics had an easy target, a country of less importance to the U.S.

Q: In other words, they wanted changes before they would allow the treaty to enter into force, basically.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. Absolutely correct. And so there was a double take by the Peruvians, questioning good faith. The changes involved deeper protections on labor than perhaps an emerging market like Peru was capable of delivering. And in an environment where I did think Peru could do more and address the issues more directly, the questions involved some changes to their own laws in addressing deforestation, pollution in the Amazon areas. I remember talking about illegal mining, the impact on clean water flows, but cannot be sure without research how much was being asked for by the U.S.

It really turned into a not insignificant battle because of the November 2008 elections in the United States in which John McCain was defeated by President Obama. And USTR

did like a 180 degrees shift in my view. They now cared about how an incoming administration would view what they did with Peru. And the Peru FTA was not viewed on a scale with, say South Korea. And it wasn't, and implementation could be delayed.

It seemed to me there was a decision in USTR to slow-roll the Peruvian trade agreement implementation and kick it off to the next administration. I knew that doing so would kill the agreement because the Democrats would insist on a set of new provisions, the Peruvians would move on, reflecting a growing self-confidence that would not accept the imposition of one-way demands from the United States.

Q: So you're talking about that this was a period between the election and inauguration.

MCKINLEY: November 2008 and January 20, 2009.

Q: You were trying to get the agreement it to enter into force before—

MCKINLEY: Yes. And the annual APEC summit was, I think, November 19-22. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum.

Q: A big meeting

MCKINLEY: APEC is for my money, the most significant gathering that takes place on world economic issues outside of discussions within the European Union. As I said, it became clear to me where USTR was. So President Bush was turning up in Lima and U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab with him.

Q: Oh. And the summit was in Peru?

MCKINLEY: Oh, I apologize. APEC that year was being hosted by Peru.

Q: So that was actually good timing for you.

MCKINLEY: It was excellent timing and I worked through what I would say if I had the opportunity to address the issue with Susan Schwab. I remember Steve Hadley was there as the national security advisor, trying to remember who else I interacted with at that point. I made my pitch, I don't remember how or when, but I was basically told I needed to understand there is a change of administration coming, one less favorable to trade.

I had an opportunity to try again when I was riding with the president in the car and I remember Hadley was there. I'd already tried Schwab whom I greatly respected, and Hadley who I respected too. But I basically thought, What do I got to lose? And so essentially, I said, to President Bush, the biggest part of your legacy on Latin America is the trade and investment agenda. There may not have been a free trade agreement with the Americas as a whole, but closing out with an easy win in Peru highlighted how much was achieved. It would be a pity to lose the symbolism. I was told that on the airplane back as Bush left Peru, he told his staff to get this done.

So that was six weeks from inauguration. There were additional, small changes from USTR at the last minute. I remember going back and forth, but it was on January 2, 2009, the day after New Year's and a holiday too if I remember correctly, as we went into the weekend. I sat down in the living room of the residence with the Peruvian minister of commerce and with Marcos Mandojana—who I have just enormous respect for—from our economic section. And we went through the documentation, looking at potential word changes and seeing what could work. We worked through it for a few more days and got the changes. The agreement was ready for presidential signature for implementation. I was also working with WHA. The paperwork was sent over to the White House and then it just languished.

Q: At the White House, it was sitting at the?

MCKINLEY: I can't remember what held it up, you know, there were so many things that presidents decide at the last minute—

Q: Right. There's always the delay in getting that presidential signature even when nothing's wrong. It can take time.

MCKINLEY: It came down to the NSC Director for the Americas, Dan Fisk. I checked nearly every day and it's 17, 18, 19 January, and it wasn't moving. He moved it himself and it was signed on January 20 I believe. The FTA implementation, Dan deserves full credit for that. We almost missed it.

Q: Wow. In the morning the day he went out of office.

MCKINLEY: Apparently. And I certainly thought this was one of those moments in which you learned that persistence even inside of bureaucracy can pay off. It was also a moment where I learned more about how our political system works and how the increasing polarization in Congress on trade agreements was impacting something I thought should have been a no-brainer for the United States, that both Democrats and Republican could see the importance of trade agreements for the future economic growth in the U.S. This was not the case. Before it seems as though I'm unloading on Democrats, by 2017, there were plenty of Republicans who didn't favor trade agreements.

So, this was a shifting landscape, and I would eventually pay the price for over-pushing the Peru agreement when it came time to work on the Colombia free trade agreement, when I went to Bogota as ambassador. I was told there were lingering reservations about my approach to Colombia because of Peru. But anyways later on that.

In Peru, an important victory in bilateral relations then became wrapped up in a very unfortunate set of developments in which there were protests that turned tragically violent against provisions of the agreement, not against the whole of the FTA per se, but against Peruvian government policies liberalizing investment in mining and oil exploration. And I can't remember if it was only on environmental issues, but the protests surfaced from

indigenous and other communities in 2009. It was opposition to oil development in the Amazon which included opening energy resources to foreign investment.

Be that as it may, there were protests and they turned violent. I don't want to suggest that protecting the environment for responsible development should not be the objective for governments. I am just making observations on a volatile situation. At one point, the government seemed to be debating changes which might satisfy the protestors, but could affect the implementation of the FTA, or at least that is what I remember.

Protestors began blockading roads, and the government decided to send police to contain protests in a place called Bagua, and where dozens of protestors and police were killed as a result. Many of the police were killed, without their weapons, as prisoners. And it became the biggest crisis of the Alan Garcia government leading to the fall of the prime minister. There was an investigation into Bagua; it was a sad tragic moment.

Q: At this point, Kevin Whitaker was the office director?

MCKINLEY: Yes.

Q: So, development in the indigenous areas, in the recent history of Peru, had been very highly charged.

MCKINLEY: Yes, and I underestimated this as a challenge, I'd always seen this as: if the mining companies, the oil companies dealt transparently with indigenous communities, then with the help of national governments working with NGOs any contentious issues could be resolved, and communities could be assured they would benefit. And what I learned, not just on this, but with protests against other mining projects, copper and gold projects—I underestimated the extent to which indigenous communities were willing to forgo certain kinds of development to protect their land and their way of life.

I remember a mining project in northern Peru being challenged because it was on a mountain that was considered sacred. It was abandoned. Not unlike some of the debate over Keystone. It's a hard lesson for people like me who believe that all development is good. It's important to remember that these perspectives don't always carry the day and that cultural meshed with environmental concerns are extraordinarily real.

Q: So let's take a break from those issues. On the terrorism front, I am interested in the Shining Path and the group that had led the attack years before on the Japanese embassy. What was the state of terrorism and internal security?

MCKINLEY: There were no more than a couple of hundred Shining Path remnants, and they were in an area called the VRAEM valley, which is a remote part of Peru. But drug trafficking was and is still a major issue in Peru.

Q: I think there were valleys in Peru where coca plants had become extraordinarily productive?

MCKINLEY: In both Peru and Colombia, the economies of coca production shifted and became higher grade, more insect-resistant coca leaves were planted, and you could plant hundreds more trees per X measure of land available. The efficiencies of the coca economy just kept growing. But in dealing with the Shining Path remnants, the focus was very much on trying to capture the leadership, because it was viewed that if they were either captured or killed, the group would fall apart because there was not much left to it other than drug trafficking, with a limited ideological component.

By the time I was there, Artemio was leading the Shining Path. And our approach was on three tracks. One was the classic DEA focus on going after traffickers, interdicting drug shipments out of Peruvian ports, dealing with local security, building up other forms of cooperation. The second strand involved a broader focus on counter terrorism. The year before I was there, the American residence was attacked. The third was on promoting alternative development for Peru's coca farmers. And USAID ran that.

Q: American residence means the home of the ambassador.

MCKINLEY: The ambassador's residence in Lima. And because of the security threat, I drove around town with a security detail everywhere I went, including restaurants, movies with my family and so on.

So, the focus was on containing or eliminating the Shining Path. And there were moments when the Peruvians got close to achieving their goal. After I left, and WikiLeaks happened, I ended up on the cover of the leading news magazine as heading the "bunker" from where the counter drug operations in the country were being run from. Well, we were very transparent about our cooperation with the Peruvian government on counter-narcotics. They ran their own strategy and programs. We were also concerned about people inside the Peruvian security establishment, as elsewhere, who might be linked to, or corrupted by drug traffickers.

It was work that was similar to anything that we see in any of the producer countries where we work. Alternative development was a major focus. And I can say this after having worked in Afghanistan, Bolivia, Peru and Colombia, alternative development does not really work absent a host of state-building and security investments. It certainly provided employment for lots of consultants, and for bureaucracies, including ours and everybody was well intentioned, but other factors have to come into play. It's simply not an issue of going into communities and promising them the sky if they shift coca production to wheat production that all is going to be well. You need roads, you need security, you need institutions.

And everybody knows that, but we just keep pushing alternative development. Rural communities. They don't grow other crops because of the challenges. That said, I actually had the experience in Peru of the one time I've seen alternative development work on a sustained basis, and it was in a district called San Martin. It had about three hundred

thousand people. It was a not insignificant coca producer. I don't know whether it was 20-30 percent of the national total. And production was essentially eliminated.

What happened in San Martin was first, you had local political leadership that cared. And they engaged with the assistance programs, largely ours but from other countries as well. And the central government was providing resources as they began to see the alternative crop substitution takeoff on San Martin. Secondary roads were built. It was an interior district and roads were built so that the products could reach the coast.

And there was the buy-in from the communities. San Martin was not particularly violent. It was the San Martin miracle. And for a moment, I was sold too. They were producing organic coffee and cocoa. So many things had to come right.

Q: I interviewed an AID anthropologist, Hugh "Sher" Plunkett [he just passed away sadly but his oral history is posted]. His favorite tour was when he worked on an INL project in Lima. And he worked on making sure that that kind of alternative development project would include roads and education. And he didn't talk much about small programs with individual entrepreneurs. This was before your time. It was from 1998 to 2002.

MCKINLEY: He may have been part of building out San Martin.

Q: He did. He had five regions that needed the aid, and every time somebody in the embassy wanted to take some of his resources for, you know, to give to the police in Lima for example, he would just say no, all of these resources need to go to alternative development programs in these five districts. So he described how he did it and I kept asking questions about what was key to successful alternative development and he said, oh yeah, roads. You had to do homes. You had to do courts to settle disputes. It was very, very interesting to listen to somebody knowing how to do it right.

MCKINLEY: Well, so much depends on individuals, but in the case of where it works so much, depends on local government assistance, you need community buy-in, but I was sold in San Martin. It was one of those moments where you're so happy to have your assumptions challenged. And I never saw success like that again.

Q: Only in Peru and only in that one place?

MCKINLEY: Well, in Colombia, there was partial progress. Afghanistan and Bolivia, very little. But by the time I got to Colombia, and I was looking at the stats we were rolling out about how successful we'd been on crop substitution, I asked why was coca production still such an issue? It just didn't compute. And I began to question whether a lot of the changes we did see in certain areas were just a result of commercial opportunities as opposed to assistance or rather to the success the Colombia government was eventually beginning to have against some of the drug traffickers, against the FARC, against paramilitaries. I was certainly much more skeptical of the claims and so was GAO and others who did reports on alternative development in Colombia.

Q: Were there any other aspects of your time in Peru that you wanted to talk about?

MCKINLEY: Yes. I would like to touch on the whole issue of cultural diplomacy. Peru has such a rich cultural life: the highlands indigenous music, world-class writers like Vargas Llosa and Cesar Vallejo, musical traditions that include adaptations of Peruvian cumbia, "Marinera" dancing, some of the most beautiful folkloric dancing I have ever seen. The dancing horses, the "caballos de paso." Millennial textile traditions. We were absolutely seduced on every level.

The question was how to pursue cultural diplomacy and the engagement with next-generation Peruvians. I think you may have heard me earlier on this in regard to, I hope I mentioned it, maybe not—Fulbright scholarships not being promoted properly in Europe, because it was not seen as necessary. Europeans had a high degree of education, spoke English, and did not need vigorous Fulbright programs when resources are finite. That was the argument. The counter to that line of argument was clear: because the world changes, generations change, and it's not automatic that what we sell is going to be bought on a cultural level or politically by next generations as societies change. I felt that strongly in Brussels; I felt it strongly in Latin America.

In Peru I was able to work much more closely with the Fulbright program, which was very welcome. And I first learned and then became an evangelist for binational centers teaching English, but linked to the United States government, the embassy. Except that because of a decision in Washington we'd long ago stopped funding binational centers in Latin America. One of the least strategic decisions on cultural diplomacy that's been made. But there were in Peru, the figure I have here is that at the time there were eighty thousand students in binational centers out of the four hundred thousand students in all binational centers in Latin America.

The idea surfaced of using the binational centers as a base to work with the Ministry of Education. Peru was evolving towards making English a part of the curriculum and the question of how we could support the Ministry of Education. We did so working with the binational centers on curriculum design to promote the study of English. And we got a couple million dollars of additional funding, which doesn't sound like a lot, but—

Q: It's a lot in that context.

MCKINLEY: In the context of public affairs, that was real money. And I went on to Colombia and elsewhere. It just struck me the extent to which binational centers were such a treasure that wasn't cherished in Washington the way they should have been. As the years went on, the view that with a globalized world we didn't quite need to have the systematic connectivity to these institutions that we'd had in the past, was wrong.

In Lima, I also learned about a cultural fund for ambassadors—

Q: For cultural preservation. The Ambassador's Fund for cultural preservation.

MCKINLEY: Yes. Since I'd gotten my doctorate on colonial Latin American history, I could see there were so many historical projects to support. The fund was an extraordinary opportunity to engage. We competed and won funding for many projects, including for a small out-of-the-way collection of colonial manuscripts in Northern Peru to improve how they were housed with climate controls. Funding for the repainting of frescos and churches from the eighteenth century where they'd faded away. And for indigenous pre-Hispanic sites including places that were being researched by I believe Berkeley University archeologists.

Our biggest pitch was for a set of city and pyramid ruins called Caral north of Lima, which is the oldest human settlement in the Americas. It goes back forty-five hundred years and is every bit as extraordinary as the more famous pyramid remnants, whether in Mexico, or Machu Picchu. The location was in the Peruvian desert run by this extraordinary Peruvian archeologist. Ruth Shady, and our wonderful public affairs section run by Linda Gonzalez, and the expert cultural local employee Vanessa Wagner promoted helping the excavations. Linda was an absolute visionary.

We competed for and won eight hundred thousand dollars for that site. I think we ended up getting well over one million dollars for restoration in Peru, and as anybody who's worked with the cultural fund, that is significant, maybe near a record.

Q: Let's stay on cultural heritage for a second. Were there any disputes over any artifacts that it ended up with?

MCKINLEY: Yes. We worked with the UN red lists on cultural property. On the return of the archeological artifacts. The embassy cooperated with whatever was required, but we weren't driving it. But it was very interesting to learn about the process of returning stolen artifacts, or artifacts that had been sold out of the country and about negotiations to do so.

Central to that during my time was the agreement for the return of the archeological artifacts taken by Hiram Bingham of Yale University fame who discovered Machu Picchu. There were thousands of artifacts in Yale, in a museum. And needless to say, it's a little bit like the Parthenon columns —

Q: The Elgin Marbles.

MCKINLEY: The Elgin Marbles and the British Museum and the perennial debate with succeeding Greek governments over whether they should be returned to their country of origin. That sentiment was building in Peru on the Yale Machu Picchu collection. And I worked with Yale University, and with the government and with academic actors in Peru, with Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd, and we were, all of us, instrumental in helping negotiate the return of hundreds of artifacts to Peru from Yale.

Q: That's wonderful.

MCKINLEY: One of my most cherished memories when the process was actually completed after I left, was to receive a message from a person heavily involved in the process in Peru saying, "You should be here, so much of this was because of your contributions," which is an exaggeration. It was an honor to be part of the process. And it was fascinating dealing with Yale and their lawyers. The university administration wanted to do the right thing. And the museum administrators, from their perspective, had done a terrific job protecting all of these artifacts and thought they should remain. Yale, I think, worked conscientiously to find a solution and it was a happy conclusion.

Q: So before we move off that, the trick was to negotiate convincing safeguards?

MCKINLEY: That was critical. Absolutely critical. I think the Peruvian government had to commit to building a museum in Cuzco and they did, but that was after my time.

Q: And the other things you wanted to mention?

MCKINLEY: First, again, working with wonderful American staff, a strong DCM in the person of Jim Nealon who went on to become ambassador to Honduras, a strong AID mission, and I became particularly close to many of the Peruvian employees in the embassy. It was all very special, and what a team approach to everything we did.

I also cannot underscore enough the importance of the outstanding office management specialists I worked with through the years. Irene Willig in Colombia and Peru; Alma Pratt in Afghanistan and Brasilia; Roberta Ross in Brussels; Patricia Kidd in PRM; Kathy Alexander and James Bryant in USEU—they were absolutely central to the functioning of the front offices in missions I worked in.

But another issue was working on American Citizen Services. On one occasion, there were severe floods in the Machu Picchu area, and four thousand foreign students and tourists, including three hundred Americans, got stranded. And we worked with the Peruvian government mobilizing again as we did with the earthquake and airlifted people out.

My spouse Fatima was integral to making my tour in Lima a success. She achieved entry to different parts of Peruvian society that greatly enriched our experience, among the business community, among artists, and people who had nothing to do with the diplomatic environment.

Fatima was again heavily involved in charity work supporting different initiatives. She was president of the association of diplomatic spouses, the honorary president of the American women's club composed of long-standing residents of Lima, and honorary president of the U.S. employee association.

Fatima worked intensively with HIV orphans, with battered women, with children with special needs. But what she also did for three years running was to work on an event that

mostly Peruvian employees at our embassy had been supporting for a good dozen years before she arrived and which is still operational today. It's called Noche de Arte, Night of the Arts.

Noche de Arte is a three-day art show, which is the biggest art exhibition in Lima, with the proceeds split between the artists and donations for charity. Setting it up was a mammoth operation: it involved negotiating formal exposition space in either banks or historical buildings and the additional necessary financial guarantees, hiring curators to decide which couple of hundred artists would present, to include some of the country's best-known artists. Fatima was hands-on, and very directly engaged with the artists, finding space, hiring, and working with the small group of exceptionally dedicated volunteers. She interviewed in the media to raise awareness of the event each year. Across three days each of the years, Noche de Arte attracted thousands of people and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars.

More broadly, we were very social and out and about on the town as we were in Bogota later. But I certainly wouldn't have done it anywhere near to the same extent without Fatima. Very much a partnership in how we engaged with Peruvian society at all levels.

Q: So you enjoyed that ambassadorship, you enjoyed your time?

MCKINLEY: At the time, I thought it was so terrific an ambassadorship that I didn't need to do another one. And so, I didn't even bid on another.

Q: I hope this isn't prying, but I know you also had some health issues at the time.

MCKINLEY: I did. Actually, three months into my first year there, I think.

I was diagnosed with cancer, and I will forever be grateful to the regional medical officer who was there because the department [at least M, the Under Secretary of Management's Office] appeared to be thinking of pulling me. I did have to go up to treatment and I looked like hell when I returned. But he basically made the argument to the department that I could have my follow-up and consultations in Lima and fly to Miami periodically. I owe him perhaps the rest of my career because M was of two minds.

At post, rumors were flying that I was dying, and I was leaving. After treatment, I had to make clear to my colleagues that I was there to stay.

Q: Sorry to hear that. So what happened that you had decided that once was enough for ambassadorships? You were planning on retiring or what?

MCKINLEY: No, no, no! I loved the department and if I'd been called back for a DAS position or something. I would've jumped at it. But that year DCM Paris and London were on the list. I was shortlisted, and selected for London, and was happy to return to Embassy London. I had spent a dozen years in the UK, and I couldn't think of anything better than being DCM in London, our closest diplomatic relationship in the world.

And that was when Tom Shannon first called about Colombia. And so I broke my children's hearts and in discussion with the family, we all agreed that Colombia was something that I could not turn down. I did have to enlist then-Under Secretary Bill Burns' assistance in explaining why I was going to Colombia and not to London to be the ambassador designate.

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Q: Good morning. It is January seventeenth, 2022, and we are continuing our conversation with Ambassador Mike McKinley. Did you have anything else you wanted to talk about on your ambassadorship in Peru?

MCKINLEY: Not anything that I can remember at this moment, other than to say my spouse and I threw ourselves into the local music, local arts scene, the social scene. We were very fortunate to meet fascinating people including Juan Diego Flores, the world-famous opera singer, whose wedding we attended, and the world music singer Susana Baca who remains a friend.

Q: And you didn't mention food. Peru had become by that time a center of culinary arts, right?

MCKINLEY: So that's a terrible omission because I spent three years extremely supportive in any way I could be, particularly spending money in the restaurants!

Peruvian fusion cuisine is extraordinary and took the world by storm. It began to come into its own in the mid-to-late 1990s. We arrived when people like Nobu, with restaurants in London and elsewhere, and a younger chef named Gaston Arcurio and his spouse Astrid were already well-known. Theirs was called Astrid y Gaston, which ended up on *Best of Restaurants in the World* lists along with Nobu, into the 2000s. But it wasn't just Gaston Acurio and Nobu. There were other chefs of now world-renown including Rafael Osterling, Miguel Schiaffino, and others.

A special experience and our privilege, and just good luck was to be among the first customers to a restaurant which opened about two years into our stay called Central run by Virgilio Martinez. He had opened in the Miraflores section of Lima and a competitor tried to close him down and did, one month after his opening. It took legal battles and the faith of his backers to reopen. And I remember Fatima and I going the first couple of nights after it reopened because we wanted to give him support and being in an empty restaurant. We started promoting Central among friends and Americans.

Central didn't need our support and caught on quickly. When in Bogota, as ambassador, we helped host the first Bogota international food festival with restaurateurs, and Virgilio turned up. Central has ended up in the top four or five restaurants of the world on the San Pellegrino list in recent years. And other Peruvian restaurants started by chefs I did not

know are now in the top ten to fifteen, just to give an idea of the transformation of dining there, and its global influence.

The relationship we built with these chefs across the city was special to us and not just at upper-end places. There was a small cevicheria run by a Chinese chef named Mr. Wong that made it into *Conde Nast*, I think. There were Afro Peruvian restaurants including El Rincon que no Conoces for Afro-Peruvian food, "the place no one knows," run by the now deceased Dona Teresa Izquierdo. Wonderful fusion Japanese and Chinese places.

Q: I'm going to ask one more question on Peru. So in that part of South America, was the press a little more unimpressed with the U.S. ambassador, or did they write about you and what you did all the time?

MCKINLEY: In terms of my relationship with the media, Peru is not a country that's strongly pro-U.S., but it was a generally benign atmosphere. Fatima and I worked with several of the key media outlets, getting to know their editors, giving interviews on a broad array of issues, being accessible to reporters and photographers and emerging social media, and visible on the social scene constantly.

We were very aware that we could end up being portrayed in an unflattering light. In Peru we were very fortunate, and it was overwhelmingly positive. The true media blitz was in Colombia where, I remember one year between Fatima and I, we were in media spots close to a hundred and fifty times. And of course, the social media revolution was fully underway by the time we got to Colombia. Again, we had an excellent press section, with Linda Gonzales again as senior public affairs officer, and a local employee Cesar Castro who was excellent. You had to manage it, but again overwhelmingly positive.

Chapter XII: Ambassador, Colombia 2010–2013: Peace Process; The FTA; Summit of Americas Secret Service Sex Scandal; Assistance Issues; Cultural Diplomacy

Q: You got to Bogota in 2010, and you got there after Santos was elected president?

MCKINLEY: President Santos was inaugurated on August sixth of 2010. He was the former defense minister, scion of a powerful family in Bogota. He was seen as a person who was in political alignment with President Uribe who had been the Colombian president who took over in 2002 at the point where Colombia was seen by some as a near failed state, and who in 2010 was viewed widely as the person who saved the country.

Uribe had worked with the United States in the context of "Plan Colombia", the strategic effort developed by the Clinton administration to respond to what seemed to be a collapsing government in Colombia, where drug trafficking groups were world-known and a threat to the state, where paramilitaries were beginning to number in the tens of thousands, and where left-wing guerilla organizations—the FARC and ELN—were continuing a decades-long war on the government. They and the paramilitaries were also heavily meshed with drug trafficking.

Q: And you were saying it was Uribe who was credited with saving Colombia?

MCKINLEY: Yes. The decision in Washington that Colombia was too important to fail led to the development of Plan Colombia in 1999, before Uribe's election in 2002. Plan Colombia which, I'll probably say this several times, was the single most successful post-Cold War engagement by the United States in addressing conflict and post conflict anywhere in the world. It is our single biggest success story, and it had implications, not just for Colombia, but for our relationship with Latin America more broadly.

As we look at conflict engagement by Washington in other parts of the world after 1989, whether it was in Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle Eastern conflicts, what we did in Afghanistan, our efforts at negotiation of the Southeast Asian conflicts, truly the standard was set in our fifteen plus year engagement with successive Colombian governments on the existential crisis they faced at the end of the 1990s and through a peace process which resulted in the end of a fifty year insurgency in 2016, with a peace agreement.

Uribe was a politician, with charisma, authority, and fearlessness. And a leader of the moment: he persuaded the wealthy in Colombia early in his tenure to pay a wealth tax to cover the costs of trying to rebuild the country and confront the scourges of the insurgencies and the drug traffickers. He rebuilt the military and police, built a sense of purpose. There were also concerns about human rights abuses and corruption, but the balance sheet was strongly positive. And certainly, by the end of his tenure, Uribe believed that he was essential to the country. I am providing this context because it conditioned how Santos began.

Q: Colombia had already changed the constitution to allow him to do two terms instead of one.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. Colombia historically had had one-term presidents and Uribe ran for two. By his second term he had reached an agreement with paramilitary leaders who were responsible for up to half the killings in the war at that stage. They were largely disarmed. There were lenient amnesty terms for many of them, as long as they didn't return to drug trafficking or violence. Some of them did, and they paid the price in terms of extradition to the United States. Extradition was controversial in Colombia, but it worked very much as a weapon to convince traffickers and others that if they were caught, it wasn't simply Colombian justice they would face.

And as we've seen in Mexico, drug traffickers never want to be sent to the United States because they see that as a permanent prison sentence and something they can never break out of.

The government also had landed some significant blows against the leftist insurgencies and Uribe was claiming by 2009 that they were all but defeated. This was not true. The insurgencies had regrouped and were beginning to regain strength in the last year, year-and-a-half, of Uribe's government.

Santos came in with a broader social political agenda although still clearly supportive of everything Uribe had achieved. At the start, he was seen as a kinder, gentler version of Uribe. He wanted to focus on social spending policies that could improve educational standards, health standards, living standards for Colombia's poor. He was very focused on economic growth and development, building government institutions. He had a different approach to dealing with the drug trafficking scourge. It became evident as the years went on and long after I left that Santos had a more liberal approach to dealing with drugs but he was hardly alone as states like California moved ahead with legalization of marijuana.

But I digress, that was just one part of his agenda. The other was, and this is clear in retrospect to many, but it was clear to me relatively early on, that Santos came in determined to be the person who would negotiate a peace agreement with the insurgency in Colombia and bring an end to fifty years of civil war. I use the term civil war. There are persons in our government who saw the insurgencies as essentially terrorists and drug traffickers, well so were the paramilitaries, but that was not the whole story.

The armed groups of left and right did commit terrible atrocities and terrorist actions, but there was also a very strong political component to the conflict inside Colombia. And to address it, you had to acknowledge the political tensions, which is why the government ended up with the negotiation with the FARC, why there was a relatively lenient amnesty agreement with the paramilitaries, who were strongly supported by regional political and economic actors inside the country, as a break on insurgencies.

And conversely the left-wing insurgencies, certainly in the Pacific region of the country and the southern and eastern parts of the country were feeding off of deep, deep social inequities and racial tensions inside the country. Afro-Colombians certainly were treated very poorly by the rest of society.

Q: One thing that struck me in my years working on Plan Colombia was that Colombia had more of a tradition of bringing in its former terrorists like the M-19 into the political arena than other countries I've worked with, like Mexico. I don't know how successfully or how often it had been done, but there was this precedent that was talked about a lot that seemed different from other countries.

MCKINLEY: Yes. I would agree with you. And M-19 was viewed as an amalgam of actors, not just left-wing radicals, which facilitated the integration of some of them back into the political system. But Colombia is a very complex society. You can argue every society's complex but even with that sort of broad generalization there are places that are more so. Colombia, going back over a hundred years, has had a higher level of social violence than many other Latin American countries, even if by some measures, it has a higher standard of living, higher level of urbanization, and stronger institutions. It has also been a stable country in terms of democratic elections, where institutions, like the courts and the Congress, have been relatively strong and where, until recently, traditional parties were very organized as well.

I arrived to a country where Plan Colombia's success was evident to everyone. It was celebrated and the U.S. relationship with Colombia was extremely strong.

The embassy in Colombia at that point was one of the five biggest in the world if I remember correctly. It had thirty-five hundred employees, eight hundred of them Americans, a significant number of those military. And our security agencies. And it was developing into our third, most important commercial relationship in Latin America and the Caribbean.

There was success in the cooperation against drug trafficking organizations. We were already into probably the third generation after Pablo Escobar, who was followed by the Cali cartel in the nineties. The new groupings were weaker when I arrived. Our policy in helping curtail coca production was successful, partly because Colombia was the lone country in the world where we were allowed to do aerial spraying with glyphosate.

Our relationship, understandably, was heavily focused on counter narcotics, and security cooperation, partly because of the importance of building on Uribe's success, and partly because U.S. administrations continued to emphasize the hard side, not just in Colombia, but in many other parts of the world. We were still at over five hundred million dollars a year in bilateral assistance, although on a downward trend.

And it was a moment in which, like with Peru, I came into what was a going concern where the parameters of engagement were clear. And I think I was expected to just keep doing the same, except that's not where Assistant Secretary Arturo Valenzuela, who

sought to broaden the relationship, was. That's not where Santos was. And that's not where I was. The relationship needed to deepen in other ways as well.

The phrase I had used sparingly in Peru, I began to use more openly in terms of explaining objectives to the country team and Washington and the Colombians. And that was to "desnarcotizar" the relationship.

Desnarcotizar: "denarcotize," strip the drug trafficking component out of its role as defining the relationship with Colombia. Colombia was forty plus million people at the time, and had an emerging trade and investment relationship with the United States and the region. It had some of the most sophisticated people on the continent. Strong institutions. Why weren't we speaking about development, trade, the environment more front-and-center? Why weren't we working more on a people-to-people relationship? We could continue to do everything we needed to do on drug trafficking and terrorism without making every speech start with "Colombia and the United States are united in fighting drug traffickers and terrorists."

Also, it became evident to me that Santos had this peace agenda. But it wasn't clear to me how it was going to be articulated in terms of dealing with the FARC and the ELN; that was to emerge in the second year I was there.

Q: I had worked on Plan Colombia II from the Washington angle, and in that effort I tried to direct money into our work for what we called state presence. Up until I left the Andean desk in early 2008, it was hard going. I also remember your predecessor Bill Brownfield realizing as he prepared for his confirmation hearings that the overwhelming ratio of money for military versus economic activities had stayed the same. It had not evolved as had been envisioned when he was DAS earlier, selling Plan Colombia to Congress. Had there been any shift of our resources toward economic and development assistance by the time you arrived?

MCKINLEY: It was hard for me to tell. I certainly consider Bill Brownfield one of my closest colleagues going back to when I worked with him in 1985 in Central America, on Central America when I was in INR. And as you know, he was one of the great WHA leaders as well as personalities.

If he was concerned about the balance, it was an issue. I think he did a terrific job in building on the work of people like Anne Patterson before him, in fleshing out Plan Colombia and all of its aspects. And Uribe was not an easy person to work with. He wasn't embracing the U.S. necessarily. He was embracing a strategic partnership. So, Brownfield had to consolidate gains, maintain a relationship, work on security, but also sought to highlight other aspects of our engagement. He spent a lot of time also working on securing the release of three Americans who were in the hands of the FARC. That's a separate story and I'm hoping he writes his book one day on that.

But, when I came in, things were beginning to change. And it was very clear that Santos and Uribe had tensions within months, if not weeks, of Santos taking over. And my

analytical view of this was that we needed to more proactively broaden our relationship beyond the security components to work with Santos and take advantage of the success of our engagement and deepen our work on more than security with what was our closest ally in Latin America.

And I use the term ally very rarely. But Colombia and the United States had developed this strategic relationship, which was allowing us to project in all kinds of ways. At one point Colombia was training police in I believe sixteen other countries, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean, but some as far as away as Afghanistan.

Q: We brought them to Costa Rica in 2016 to help the local police, very successfully.

MCKINLEY: There you go. Something remarkable was happening in Colombia, in the relationship, and we had great partners. For me, President Santos is one of the great presidents of the last thirty years in Latin America. And we needed to work alongside him, if necessary, change some of what we did. Santos, for example, was launching an agrarian reform, which would impact two million people. We should work more closely with that initiative, I thought.

Santos' goals, they were about what you raised earlier, investing in state presence, investing in assisting communities, in building out government services and land titling for dispossessed farmers all through the country, persons dispossessed by paramilitaries, dispossessed by big farm owners, dispossessed by the FARC. And I certainly saw the focus of his ministers on education as something important to include looking at initiatives like computers for every child. Laptops for students were an idea or concept. My first experience with the concept was in Peru.

Q: I think it was John Negroponte's brother Nicholas, who was at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], who developed One Laptop Per Child.

MCKINLEY: You are right. His brother. The Colombian government was interested in building out, and this would have required Washington adding a few millions of dollars to this initiative out of the hundreds of millions going into the country. I failed. I was told to work with the private sector, with public private partnerships, which rarely work to scale. Pointing to PPPs as an alternative looks more like a cover for successive U.S. governments not to do things because the truth of the matter is PPPs have had a lackluster record across the last twenty years.

More generally, this is where I thought our relationship with Latin America writ large should be going. We could continue to do security work, counternarcotics work, fight terrorism, and be worried about Cuba. But we also needed to have an alternative vision.

In Latin America, governments seemed more prepared to pursue orthodox economic policies, but mesh it with a wider focus on raising standards for the majority of their populations. And by then the Obama administration had seen the wisdom of free trade

agreements and was looking to move towards implementation on Colombia, on Panama, on South Korea.

Part of the broadening of the relationship would be helping galvanize approval in the U.S. Congress for the Colombia-U.S. free trade agreement [FTA], which had languished since 2006.

Q: So what were the key deliverables you needed, to help the administration get the FTA through Congress?

MCKINLEY: Well, the remaining concerns were heavily focused on labor reforms and environmental protections inside a country with a terrible record on protection of workers' rights and of activists in the public space. And the problem continued during the timeframe I was there. There was a need for a clearer set of legal protections for the environment, although the outline for this had been largely negotiated by the time I arrived there. There was not that much more to add. But the U.S. Congress or elements in the U.S. Congress kept adding on, particularly on labor issues. So the question was on how to move forward on labor protection.

I remember dealing with administration officials, cabinet secretaries, whomever visited Colombia to make the case for moving forward on the FTA. And I was going back up to Washington. I was working with USTR and others and ended up meeting with seven congressional and staff delegations in one four-month period in early 2011.

I remember one meeting with Vice President Biden in which I went into his office in DC with a Colombian delegation. There were some of his advisers as well. Biden seemed skeptical of the trade agreement. I said this is going to be good for American workers, our export markets, integration with Latin America and Biden corrected me and said he did not need to be told what was good for American workers. I persisted. It was clear there were benefits for both sides. And, in retrospect, more commercial benefits for American workers and exporters than Colombian counterparts.

Working with the economic section, we ended up writing a cable on what was President Obama's national export initiative. It's amazing when you go back and look at what happened, just how many titles have been given to the same policies which end up petering out over the decades. We didn't just argue for Colombia. We argued for free trade agreements more generally and on their importance for the United States.

I also realized we had to work with Congress and had to work with the U.S. interagency on the free trade agreements and work with Colombians on the environmental and labor concerns that we had. In January of 2011, John McCain visited Colombia and by then he was openly critical of the administration, but strongly supportive of the relationship with Colombia. It was then that I began to develop a kind of relationship with him. I'd already met him when I was DCM in Brussels at USEU. But this was different. We had a private conversation, and I said that the most important objective for President Santos in the

relationship with us was the free trade agreement. I noted the difficulties inside the beltway. He went out and added the free trade agreement to his public comments.

I should note parenthetically that during my time in Colombia it became evident to me that the bipartisan approach to foreign policy was breaking down, as Democrats and Republicans ran each other's positions down in conversations with me and others. It was to worsen across the 2010s when codels [congressional delegations] became composed of largely or only one party.

At that stage somewhere in those first couple of months of 2011 Santos asked what needed to be done. I asked USTR who gave me a list of what seemed to me an expanded list of demands for Colombia to meet. And I was realistic and pragmatic enough at that stage to recognize that to argue against what USTR wanted would not work, particularly after my experience working with them on implementation of the FTA with Peru.

The kicker was that I was told not to share the points with the Colombian government at that stage. I made clear that would be difficult, and so it proved when Santos pressed me on what was required. I shared. I ended up working for months with a superb newly tenured Foreign Service officer. Elizabeth Hoffman, who was extremely knowledgeable on the issues, and she and I met with Santos and walked through the concerns. It was a critical moment, and time-saver, as he ordered his ministries to prepare for the more formal discussions to come. Which were then much more productive.

Q: I think this is very important. In Washington, sometimes they may act as if you just ask a foreign government for something and you get it. When we're out in the field, helping the interlocular to be prepared is very useful. Because they can't just jump, they can't just immediately solve the problem of teachers and labor organizers getting killed all over Colombia. They have to have thought it through and come up with approaches and mechanisms for solving grave problems like that. So I think it's an important role that we diplomats play in preparing the foreign governments for working with our negotiators.

MCKINLEY: There you go. And to be clear, I didn't hand over any paper.

And I couched my discussion with Santos in terms of things you need to think about and things you need to have answers for. I knew we'd eventually get a negotiation, but how was the Colombia government going to be able to begin preparing and answering if they didn't have an idea of what the issues were? There were genuine human rights concerns to address; civil society activists were being killed. There were questions about the extent to which the government did enough to look into these cases, to provide protection. They were genuine concerns, but they weren't arguments for not moving ahead to consolidate the progress that had been made.

I can't remember if it was April or May 2011 but at that stage it also became a question of working with congressional committees. Assistant Secretary Valenzuela gave me free reign and support and I traveled to Washington for meetings. But we had many meetings with committee chairs, people in leadership positions, like Speaker Boehner, Steny

Hoyer, Dave Camp, Gregory Meeks. I dealt with literally dozens of senators and representatives, making the case for the Colombia free trade agreement across most of the year.

As USTR negotiated in Washington and Bogota, we supplemented the efforts by working with the Colombians to meet the requirements. Colombian negotiators over several generations, going back to the beginning of the talks in the early two thousands, were absolutely the highest quality individuals and did an exceptional job moving things forward. So by April 2012 the Summit of the Americas, that was where Santos and President Obama announced the formal implementation of the Colombia free trade agreement after it had been ratified by the U.S. Congress.

I had interesting experiences with certain congressional people. One was Sandy Levin, and his brother was Carl Levin who was a senator and head of the Armed Services committee. Sandy was leading the charge against the free trade agreement. And at one point, he was part of a delegation to Bogota and wanted to stay on. His staff said he did not have the money to cover additional days, and so I offered him our home. He barely emerged from his room as he continued to work against the FTA.

But I learned long ago to deal with congressional members as they are. They've got the power and you accommodate, otherwise in our system of government, things don't move forward. And they can surprise you: Boehner turned up with signed copies of the ratified agreement, and I still have one.

At that point I considered it time to retire. (laughs) No, but it was quite an experience. And you know, it takes a million people to get things done. There was a terrific economic and commercial staff at the embassy. Once it was clear that the U.S. government was committed to working on the free trade agreement, USTR moved forward, and it took superb Colombian government negotiators to figure out what they could do, what changes they had to make. And it took a congressional vote to get the agreement ratified.

Q: Well, I think this is a good time to end our time for today.

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Q: Good afternoon, it's January twenty-first, 2022 and we're continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. So, Mike we are in the middle, or maybe it's still the beginning of your time as ambassador to Colombia. So the floor is yours.

MCKINLEY: I believe we covered pretty much the free trade agreement issues. Perhaps I will start with the second issue, the emerging peace process across the three years I was there.

I think I mentioned last time that President Santos' focus on peace became evident to me, because he stated it, but also because of conversations I had with one of his senior advisors, the remarkably impressive Sergio Jaramillo.

Jaramillo was working on what at that stage was the continuing implementation of a plan of recuperation of areas that had been ravaged by drug trafficking organizations, by the guerrillas, by the paramilitaries. And the goal was building out a program of support for isolated communities, in conflict areas, and it was a very ambitious program, which I believe had been started by the prior government with the support of the United States. Jaramillo's vision was to go further than alternative development. This was a question of rebuilding societies and services and infrastructure from the ravages of war in places where the state was trying to reestablish a presence.

I can't put a date on it, but it was clear early in 2011 that what Santos was looking at was launching a peace process that could actually bring a result.

There had been efforts going back to the 1980s in Colombia at different points to negotiate, arrive at deals with left-wing insurgencies. And they had never really succeeded. There was a particularly infamous example in which, in the '90s, the Colombian president in effect declared a no-fire zone in southern Colombia, which allowed the FARC to expand tremendously in a huge geographical space, the "Despeje," to certainly present itself as legitimized by what the government did without making any real concessions itself either on violence or on engagement in political talks with the government. And obviously under President Uribe that approach changed because he took war to the insurgency, as well as to the paramilitaries and the drug trafficking organizations.

But by the time President Santos was into his tenure, it was clear that the FARC insurgency wasn't going away. And from 2008 on, it was beginning to regroup and become more active again and more powerful. And by the time when I arrived, we were still talking about a group with ten to fifteen thousand fighters and president Uribe's claims that he had ended the FARC insurgency simply held no water.

Santos immediately came under fire from Uribe as being soft on the insurgency. The fact of the matter is that more so than at any other time in the history of the battle against the FARC, the Colombian government was successful in taking out the leadership—senior leadership—of the FARC. Before I arrived in 2008, one of the FARC Secretariat, a person named Raul Reyes was killed. The FARC leader, Manuel Marulanda, also had died, but of natural causes in 2008.

And he was succeeded by Alfonso Cano. It was during his tenure after 2008, that the FARC began to be more active around the country. But from the time I arrived, there was greater and greater success in locating and eliminating the FARC leadership. People like Mono Jojoy. Alfonso Cano was killed in November of 2011. And there were other senior FARC members killed across that period subsequent to Cano's death.

In other words, the FARC's sense of impunity in terms of the security of its leadership was badly shaken. There was also a generational change beginning, and I think the older FARC leaders, including names that would become very familiar across negotiations,

seemed tired, some of them already living in Venezuela under the umbrella of then President of Venezuela Hugo Chavez, and ready to look at talks more seriously.

And a very critical element in my view was a change in the Cuban government's approach to this. The extent to which they provided material support for the FARC, I think, is something that still has to be deciphered. They certainly provided a lot of political support, but they began to push for a different approach, with Santos doing his own outreach to the Cuban government. They were important in applying the pressure to the FARC to enter into serious negotiations with the government.

In the middle of 2011, late 2011 into 2012, Santos launched an engagement with the Cubans, to a lesser extent the Venezuelans, and with the FARC in which terms of reference for negotiations with the FARC were developed. And I say impressive, astonishing, they never leaked, until the government was ready to announce it. But across 2012, the FARC was beginning to make concessions, saying it would end kidnapping. The much smaller dissident group, the ELN, was muttering about joining the peace process; they didn't in the end. It was only in August or September of 2012, that Santos publicly announced that exploratory conversations had been carried out with the FARC and by that time had lined up international support for what he was doing.

And I repeat it was just truly exceptional management of that sensitive first period. Whereas if he had been doing it in public, and if the Cubans or the FARC had gone public in those early months, I don't believe Santos would have made it to a process because the backlash would've been tremendous.

But in terms of the U.S. role in all of this, there was little support in Washington at first. When I first went back to the department saying something was developing, the skepticism was combined with what I find to be a standard reaction from the United States across the decades. If we don't like something, we belittle it, instead of taking a step back and asking what we may have missed. And in wars, this is especially the case. We like black and white. You don't speak to insurgents, they're terrorists.

Well, in conflict, you negotiate with your enemies. You don't negotiate because you like people. You don't negotiate because they're recognized governments. You don't shut off dialogue or communication. These are things we've had to learn again and again. We first say we won't deal with insurgents or an enemy. And eventually of course we do because there's no other avenue towards peace.

I'm not defending this on relativist grounds. These were terrible groups, terrible people. But at the end of the day in responding to conflicts, unless you want to see thousands more die, unless you want to continue to see millions of people displaced, unless you want to continue to see societies ripped apart, you have to look at negotiations. This is particularly the case if an insurgency is not defeated, because this usually means it has a political base inside the country.

We never accepted that in Salvador where the FMLN was absolutely a political movement, as well as an insurgency and a terrorist group. By 2011, we had matured to the point where the United States wasn't going to try to stop the Colombians from negotiating with the FARC. We weren't going to give a helping hand either, initially. And we were going to raise a lot of our concerns about the process.

So for example, preliminary thoughts about goodwill gestures—issues that would come up and be discussed, but there was never really going to be that kind of concessions from the United States, but in the end, they weren't really necessary. What we had to do is just get out of the way. And of course, Santos was also dealing with the Cubans and that didn't go down well with some in Washington. But he had the leeway earned by Colombia being such a strong and effective partner with us anyways.

As ambassador on the ground, I decided to be 1000 percent supportive of the efforts from the start. I became an informal sounding board at different points with Sergio Jaramillo, to a lesser extent with the president. As he built out the team that would eventually be the negotiating partners. I had conversations with the team to include the-then chief of police General Naranjo who became the vice president, and a supporter of the negotiations.

Something exceptional was happening across 2011–2012. So many actors were engaged, discreetly. President Santos' brother who was a former journalist, Frank Pearl former peace czar in a previous iteration inside the government. But everything was handled as I said with the utmost discretion. And Humberto de la Calle, the former vice president, was chosen as negotiator. I had conversations with most of these people across 2011 and into 2012. And by that stage, of course, when the peace process became public in later 2012, the United States had decided to support the process and played a very constructive role.

What was fascinating to me was working with and following Sergio, and I think Sergio Jaramillo is the true architect of the outline which provided the basis for these negotiations to start. And of substantively guiding much of the negotiating process when it got underway.

Q: And what was the outline?

MCKINLEY: It was very public, once agreed. It was four to five pages, and it was deciding which four or five general topics would be talked about and what issues under those topics, establishing a sequence, but without trying to establish conditionalities or hard timelines. It was a state-of-the-art launch to formal negotiations which lasted for almost three years. The hope had been, of course they would go much more quickly, but they didn't.

And once the change in Washington happened, sometime in early 2012 to shift towards being supportive, the U.S. was also helpful in bringing in analyses of how other peace processes had worked. And we became quite helpful politically as it, this, drew closer to being reality. And of course, inside Colombia, once it was formalized, it was a moment of tension inside the country, which continued because of very strongly differing points of

view on whether negotiating with the FARC, and eventually offering amnesty, was the correct thing to do.

It is ironic. Uribe offered the paramilitaries—responsible for most of the atrocities across the previous twenty to thirty years—generous terms to demobilize and was hailed as a realist. So, what was the issue with looking for terms which would allow for the FARC to cease to be a political insurgency inside the country? I was under no illusion, before I left in August of 2013, that elements of the FARC would break away and would continue with drug trafficking and might even ideologically be opposed to this agreement.

What I did believe and continue to believe to this day is that the political rationale for an insurgent movement against the government, which had lasted fifty years, was removed by this peace agreement. And it's a fundamentally different equation for the country to respond to breakaways which are basically drug trafficking enterprises, as opposed to confronting a political insurgency with a political identity and with informal control of parts of the country. That aspect of conflict in Colombia ceased to be a determining factor of violence inside the country.

Q: So Uribe. Did he get angry at Santos earlier, or was it when the—

MCKINLEY: He moved into opposition within months of Santos becoming president.

Q: So it preceded his actual peace talks by a lot?

MCKINLEY: Yes. And it got locked in by the decision to go ahead with a peace process.

Q: At the end of the day, was it a very Colombian negotiating model or was it based on something else?

MCKINLEY: Sergio Jaramillo is one of the most intelligent and strategic people I've ever met. Frankly he was a visionary in terms of what had to be done and he was supported by a president who was also a visionary. Between them they had many ideas of how to work this. And as they dug deeper and Sergio proceeded with exploratory talks and got to know the opposition or the enemy, so to speak, he shifted and adapted and thought through what had to be done to put together a framework for negotiations.

We became important to the process after I left. Under Ambassador Kevin Whitaker and with the appointment of a special representative to the Colombian peace process Bernie Aaronson, a former assistant secretary for Latin American affairs. We very much became engaged in supporting the end game, supporting Santos and the government but that was after my time. I think you're speaking with Kevin as well, and he can provide the details.

Santos put together a small brain trust of outsiders, which included Jonathan Powell out of England and William Ury at Harvard. And these people also provided another element of touching base. It was a sophisticated effort.

And then as Santos and team began to work with broader Colombian political and civil society, they started building a support base among the people who were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt on negotiations and seeing how far they could take it. And they were successful within the military as well. The military was cautious, but I don't remember them ever doing anything to stop the president from pursuing the peace talks. It's a real tribute to Santos' leadership.

Q: And then when the talks were publicly acknowledged at that point, were the Colombians laying off on the high value target operations?

MCKINLEY: As far as I am aware. there weren't any more efforts to take out senior FARC. The FARC was still fighting. There was no ceasefire. So the war continued. But you needed negotiators at the table and some of those negotiators had to travel out of Colombia, out of conflict areas through Venezuela to get to Cuba. And so, those arrangements were negotiated.

Q: And then Hugo Chavez got sick and died during that period.

MCKINLEY: Yes, he died before I left Colombia. I am not objective on Chavez. Whereas I'm willing to be analytical about pink tides and the swing towards left-wing populism in much of Latin America, and I'm certainly one of those who was against the embargo with Cuba—but the truth is I viewed Chavez as the biggest threat to progress as we saw it in Latin America. He was so charismatic, superficially democratic, and he had so much money because of the commodity boom, he was just buying his way through the continent and influencing governments and creating alliances which hurt Latin America's longer-term development and promoted distancing from the United States. Without Chavez's oil money, it is hard to see how leaders like Correa in Ecuador and Morales in Bolivia would have succeeded quite as long as they did.

I don't believe Chavez really cared about the FARC but he gave them a safe haven. On a personal level, I found it troubling that Latin America sustained full diplomatic ties, even the United States—with a country in the hemisphere providing safe haven to FARC leaders, and allowing the FARC to run drug trafficking, carry out terrorist actions, to wage war against a neighboring democracy, well that seemed unacceptable. I don't think we'll know the full story of the FARC-Chavez relationship for a while.

What Chavez did do, whether he was influenced by the Cubans or not, was to support the peace process at a critical juncture. And to that extent that was an important, additional element in the mix in helping convince the FARC that they didn't have backers if they were going to continue a long-term war, the shift should be acknowledged.

Just a personal anecdote on Venezuela. When I was named to be ambassador in Colombia in 2010, I remember being referenced somewhere as the "Venezuelan" ambassador sent to Colombia, because I was born in Venezuela. Anyways, I didn't have much sympathy for Chavez. Little did we all know that Maduro would be worse. When I joined Pompeo, again I was labeled the "Venezuelan adviser".

Q: Okay. Moving on to counter-narcotics.

MCKINLEY: I arrived at the peak of the success of our counter-narcotics cooperation with Colombia. The area under coca leaf production continued to go down. Aerial spraying was working, but it was controversial—glyphosate and whether it caused cancer in communities where it was sprayed. The medical scientific evidence did not seem to be there for the broad allegations of glyphosate causing cancer, or killing other crops, but it was always under review, and eventually aerial spraying stopped. But while I was there, it was used, and it was effective.

The alternative was pulling out the coca trees by hand. I went out once as every ambassador has done, and did the pulling, which was grueling work and in remote areas and in fields where the FARC and drug traffickers would put landmines and every year dozens of young people working to clear, manually would die or were maimed.

I could sense that President Santos, as I think I mentioned before, had a different attitude towards drugs, not unlike George Schultz, our former secretary of state. And as the United States moved towards legalization of marijuana use in places like California, Santos was very aware of the changing norms.

I remember writing to Carlos Pascual our ambassador in Mexico and a couple of others and asking how we could keep pressing Latin American governments on this with the changes in our own country. We were told by Washington that the U.S. continued committed to existing policy. Federal law had not changed.

But it was a good period for counternarcotics work. The drug trafficking organizations in Colombia were more dispersed, smaller. And the DEA continued to have significant successes against them.

One unanticipated effect of the drug war in Colombia was how many people ended up on no-fly lists for the United States. Many should not have been there, and their names were added because an enemy of theirs or somebody who didn't like them smeared them. I may have the numbers wrong on this, but there were hundreds if not more people who eventually were removed from the so-called Clinton list because they were erroneously put there.

I worked on a couple of significant cases, including someone who was one of our best allies on counter-narcotics, who was put on the list in 2002, 2003. Bill Brownfield, my predecessor, and I waged a multi-year effort to help clear this person's name. He worked with us throughout those years, 100 percent and at great risk. But once you're on the list it just becomes Kafkaesque.

I also worked on removing from the list one of the famous football teams of Latin America, America de Cali from the town of Cali in Colombia. America de Cali won the continent-wide Libertadores cup in the late 1980s and was Colombian champion but was

owned by drug traffickers and ended up on the list. By the time I arrived, drug traffickers were long gone and the team was still on the list and the owners couldn't raise money to buy players. Anyways, I worked closely with Treasury and Justice and, over a review process that was thorough, America de Cali came off the list.

More importantly, and before the Summit of the Americas in 2012, I argued for reinstating ten-year visas for Colombia, which had been cut back to five years because of all the issues with the insurgency and drug trafficking. We succeeded in time to have it as a deliverable for the summit.

Public diplomacy at work in different ways.

But on drug trafficking, I just want to say that I was super impressed with the Colombians we worked with. Of course, there was corruption. Of course, there were difficulties. The DEA also did terrific work as did our counter-narcotics assistance office [INL] led at one point by the extremely effective Jimmy Story who I worked with again as consul-general in Rio de Janeiro and became our ambassador to Venezuela. The companies we worked with on flying the airplanes for glyphosate spraying were American contractors working in southern-central Colombia putting their lives at risk to do the job and they did it well. The extradition process, which scared the living daylights out of traffickers and insurgents, was working at full steam with the Department of Justice. It was a good moment.

On alternative development. I think I've made my point earlier that I don't think it was particularly effective. I worked with AID to launch a significant review of aspects of our assistance policies inside Colombia. To increase effectiveness, we reduced the number of municipalities we worked in from about a hundred to forty, so we could concentrate on levels of assistance. AID did a great job of helping build capacity in ministries.

Q: How did the Colombians do on having more state presence throughout the country? It's a very mountainous country.

MCKINLEY: Well, the issue is do they have it even today in some parts of the country? The problem's not dissimilar to many states in Mexico. In other words, you can have a mayor, you can have a local council, you can have police, you can have social services. And then you have the visits at night from criminals, drug trafficking groups, the insurgencies, and the paramilitaries. And you're making accommodations because you have to survive. And if you're a social activist working on indigenous rights, gender rights, land rights, you're also putting yourself in significant danger. So, the real issue is the rule of law. Colombia was successful in placing civil authorities in most places, but the extent of power on the ground in some places is another question.

The embassy was very active in highlighting threats to community activists, to Afro-Colombian activists, and land rights activists. I remember a group of lawyers; left-wing lawyers were receiving threats. We had no ideological overlap, but they were a

legitimate part of civil society. We met publicly with them in an effort to provide support. Our entire mission really worked on human rights protection.

I want to underscore we had an exceptionally strong embassy political team across the board. The political section, with Mark Wells, Shelby Smith-Wilson, and others were scrupulous on covering the issues, but never lost sight of the very real human rights concerns we were dealing with.

Q: The Colombians did set up a good process in terms of protection programs and things like that.

MCKINLEY: Which we helped finance. And it was particularly for judges, sometimes political figures, and some journalists. It was an important and effective program, but in the countryside was more difficult to implement.

Q: Well, here's another anecdote. When I was in Montevideo in 2008–2010, there was a very tiny Colombian embassy, just the ambassador and a DCM. The DCM that came was this lovely young lady who had been a mayor in a small town and the government decided she was under too much threat. So they moved her to the diplomatic corps. Just to give you one example.

MCKINLEY: It's a great example. What struck me working with President Santos' government, I felt that the vast majority of people I spoke to wanted to protect people, to stop the killings. Again, I really do look at it as a golden moment, Santos' first term.

Q: Did you want to move to talk about gender violence and African Colombians issues? Or something else?

MCKINLEY: Part of the assistance programs focused a lot on gender and on race equity issues in Colombia, which were serious concerns and acknowledged as such inside the country. There were many NGOs working on these questions. The government across the years, long before I got there, had also established a legal framework for protecting rights for diverse communities inside the country.

Still, there was an extraordinary level of violence, because of the conflict, but because it's also a society with a lot of social violence independent of the conflict. Our assistance agencies, department of justice assistance programs heavily focused on establishing the legislative and legal framework for protections for the rights of women and others.

On a personal level, I was also very concerned about another aspect of this, which was what it was like for ordinary people on the ground on the day-to-day. They weren't going to be helped only by legislation that was worked into the ledger of the country's rule of law framework. I tried to redirect funding to more immediate effect and impact, particularly on gender violence. My original objective was to establish rape counseling centers and treatment centers in different parts of the country.

I remember we appealed for support on projects to the women's office in Washington. The response wasn't at a level that would allow us to do things on the scale I had hoped, and there were competing needs around the world to be fair. I was looking for tangible assistance in real time to real victims, not a thirty-thousand-foot rhetorical restatement of principles. I looked for an option to help women in real-time with USAID, I focused on an area of the country that was particularly violent towards women.

Fatima my spouse had attempted to provide some funding there in her charity work. This area was the Pacific coast region of Choco. Something attracted me to a project assisting rape victims in the capital, Buenaventura, which was a dangerous city which embassy officials did not visit regularly.

It took me over a year of engagement to secure a couple hundred thousand dollars to build a rape counseling center. But we managed to open it before I left in 2013. I went down to Buenaventura for the ceremony, and for me, on so many levels, personal and professional, this was a key moment of bringing commitments to ground-level impact.

But what I was left with, was the sense that there is the tendency in our government to work on difficult social issues within a comfort zone. It is relatively straightforward when you advance rule of law, work with activists, largely middle-class who are educated and urban. It's an entirely different story to attempt to make a difference to the lives of people that are far removed from what you can more directly impact. That's what all the NGO workers who live in conflict areas come up against and deal with on a daily basis. For U.S. government developmental assistance programs, as opposed to humanitarian response projects, it is more of a challenge.

If I can be allowed a quote from an efficiency report, Melanne Verveer, the ambassador at large for Global Women's Issues, called me one of the ambassadors that gets it. I appreciated the commendations, but many officers actually do throughout the department. It is just that it is so difficult to do certain projects. I encountered much of the same in Kabul in trying to confront the abuse of boys in Afghanistan with more on-the-ground programming. One senior assistance person told me I had to understand the challenge of changing behavior and setting up programs; not unlike the debate on mobilizing against infibulation in the Sahel. There may be no easy solutions, but projects on the ground directly working with affected individuals is more than a start: they are the symbols of what can change over time in communities on the ground.

Q: Do you think on gender violence that the issue has been complicated by the TIP law? The reports required by the TIP law have the State Department identify gaps in support for victims, but then stops us from building shelters and treatment centers because the law requires the government to do that kind of work. Do you think some of our laws and programs stop us from supporting positive change?

MCKINLEY: Yes. I think that you said it better than I did, because it does become a policy or a philosophy that the host governments are responsible for this. And of course, I understand that, but if there's one thing I learned from my time in Africa was, you help

people when you can. And maybe it won't last, but you're doing something at the moment and that's the way I viewed what we did in Buenaventura.

If I can move on to the mission's work with the Afro-Colombian community, the embassy already had terrific ties. The annual black heritage event at the residence was one of the best attended events we held outside of the Fourth of July reception. It was successful in highlighting black culture in Colombia, our ties, and support. It was a privilege to be part of that tradition across the three years that I was in Colombia.

But on that front, I will digress for the last few minutes we have here. My spouse Fatima, like elsewhere, became president of the Association of Diplomatic Spouses for a year, in the process opening it to include more than ambassadorial spouses. She worked on raising funding for charity on a significant scale and supporting different NGOs working with different sectors of need. But she also worked on her own. And did so for most of the time we were there.

On our second or third night in Bogota, we went to a small bar in the old town and a group of musicians from the coast, mostly elderly, were playing. They were from a town called San Basilio de Palenque, which is outside of the city of Cartagena, about an hour, hour and a half away.

And it struck us immediately that the music had strong elements of what we had heard living in Africa before. San Basilio was a small, impoverished, rural, almost entirely Afro-Colombian town, which once was the site of the first permanent free and runaway-slave settlement in colonial Colombia. The inhabitants were proud of their heritage.

We met the musicians again. Fatima visited San Basilio on one of our visits to Cartagena and saw the needs on a host of levels, particularly young girls and women who traveled to Cartagena to sell candy or otherwise work for minimal incomes. Fatima wanted to build capacity and worked on setting up a sewing and computer center for women in San Basilio over the next almost two years. She did it without embassy support. I couldn't afford to be involved because the charges of meshing work and personal interests would come flying thick and fast. And so, Fatima would fly from Bogota to Cartagena, drive to San Basilio, work with community leaders, raise money, and deal with local authorities and the media. Fatima talked to Cartagena authorities, was on local media, drawing attention to San Basilio's needs.

As it turns out, there was also an artistic connection to one of Colombia's most famous painters, Mercedes Hoyos, whom we knew. Many of her paintings were of the people of San Basilio. Anyways, to cut a long story short, the center was set up, and the road to the town partially paved.

On the day the center was to be inaugurated, an event which had been scheduled for a while, I was going to join Fatima. But Wendy Sherman, our under secretary, was scheduled to come to Bogota. And a day or two before she arrived, I went back to her

staff and asked if I could allow the DCM Perry Holloway, who was very knowledgeable about Colombia and well respected, to stand in for me for her meetings: my spouse had done this project, and in any case the department was placing such a premium on gender and race issues, I wanted to be there. The answer back was that Sherman had the expectation that I would accompany her to the meeting with the president. I still feel I let Fatima down at a very important moment.

Fatima was working on her own with other individuals. I discovered at one point she was working with a drug addicted woman in the hills of Bogota, and she would go there trying to assist this person and her family who lived in terrible conditions on a half-deserted slum hill-top with other addicts. I went out one time to accompany her and was concerned that she was exposing herself this way, but that's what she did.

Fatima was also contacted at one point by an international journalist telling her about an acid burn victim. She had heard about Fatima and thought she could help. And so, she did for a time to include accompanying the woman to medical appointments. Fatima was just out there constantly. She established a relationship with a boy's home. Some were tough beyond their years, others not. Fatima worked with the directors of the home to organize days out for the students that began with breakfast at our residence; I remember these included visits to the movies and once to a professional football game. She set up art classes for the boys, with some of them becoming quite proficient.

It was just a constant, what she was doing on her own, independent of what she was doing with other more formalized charity work across three years including organizing major fundraisers.

Q: I think we'll stop here and resume with the other issues on Colombia next time.

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Q: Good afternoon, it's January twenty-fourth, 2022, with Ambassador Mike McKinley. Mike, maybe we'll start with the Summit of the Americas in 2012 in Cartagena.

MCKINLEY: The Summit of the Americas is a hemispheric meeting, which takes place or is supposed to take place every three years. And traditionally, it has included every country except Cuba. I think it began in 1994 as a U.S. driven proposal as democracies emerged in Latin America, with the goal of reinforcing everything from democratic tendencies to regional integration, to cooperation on issues like drug trafficking.

It's fair to say by the early 2000s, it became more political as left-wing governments began to take over in the region. There was a summit in Argentina in 2005 in which then President Kirchner and Brazilian President Lula and others went out of their way to stake an independent stance with President Bush in attendance. His visionary effort to promote a Free Trade Area for the Americas had been stymied by regional opposition.

The decade or so after 2000 was a period of the commodity boom and probably the height of Latin American self-confidence. The Summit of the Americas to be held in Colombia in 2012 was just before commodity prices crashed; before Chavez turned more openly dictatorial; before the Kirchners and other left-of-center governments ran out of steam or turned less open as in Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia.

In 2012, at the Cartagena summit there was a sense of challenge for the United States to redefine engagement with Latin America. The theme was supposed to be prosperity for the Americas, and a significant number of the continent's most important business people turned up for the occasion.

Latin American heads of state were also telegraphing this would be the last summit with Cuba not in attendance. Even President Santos made statements suggesting in effect that the Western hemisphere included all the countries of the region, regardless of their political systems. Another issue that was out there was the debate over drug policy with Mexico, Colombia, other partners of the United States, including a couple of Central American states suggesting it was time for change in the war on drugs if I remember right.

I was there to support a presidential visit, but our focus as the embassy in Colombia was also to use the summit to advance bilateral objectives like the ten-year visa, which I referred to earlier, the implementation of the free trade agreement with the U.S., and what we hoped would be a broader agenda focused on looking forward to strengthening Colombia-U.S. ties further.

So, it wasn't as though this summit was set up to be a love fest. The secretary of state was Hillary Clinton. President Obama was coming. The congressional delegation included Senator Marco Rubio, at that stage, not as well known then but very much engaged. Both President Obama and Secretary Clinton clearly signaled they were coming to listen, if you will, this was meant to be a summit for dialogue.

Because it was being hosted in Colombia, the embassy was heavily drawn into summit preparations. Under the leadership of the excellent DCM Perry Holloway, things just moved. And as everybody who's ever worked on presidential visits knows, that entails in the region of somewhere around eight hundred and fifty to a thousand people who have to join the president or prepare and run the visit. And I could write a doctoral dissertation on what the public diplomacy political projection of that means to other countries. It is not positive.

Q: Also if it was in Cartagena or somewhere else besides where the embassy is located, that makes it a lot more complicated and more expensive, right?

MCKINLEY: But the Colombians were great to work with. And arrangements proceeded. In my experience over time, it has been the fact that advance teams from the department are almost universally first rate. The Operations Center has the procedures down, but also has enough flexibility built in because they deal with presidential travel globally and

secretarial travel and have to roll with the punches from host nations. And presidential visits are a little different because you have "volunteer" politicals turning up trying to help you structure the meeting. They do, it usually works out.

It fell into place. The summit dates, April fourteenth and fifteenth were a Saturday and a Sunday. I was in Cartagena on Thursday morning, the twelfth I think to prepare for earlier arrivals of Secretary Clinton and Senator Rubio. And sometime in early afternoon, I can't remember exactly why, but I was at the airport, I received a phone call from Holloway, and it was a heads up on a negative development.

It was a report that some Secret Service agents had been involved in an exchange at one of the summit hotels that we were using. It involved non-payment to sex workers, women who had been taken to their rooms and it was on camera. I was furious and not very contained in my reaction. I remember going to another hotel and meeting with Secret Service leads and asking for those involved to be sent home. The reaction was serious, measured, and a commitment made to look further into the matter. As the hours passed, the numbers of people involved rose and rose and rose to include DOD personnel as well as Secret Service.

By about five or six in the afternoon, I was called from public affairs and a reporter had the story. I called a couple of buildings in Washington, pushed for a preemptive press release, condemning what had happened. And the answer I got back was, "We're handling it." I thought that was not appropriate and remember saying that this was a developing media story, which would eventually become a storm. And I remember getting the reaction of, "Well, these are allegations, and we have to look into it." And I said, "It's on video. These aren't allegations. We have to act." It was not much better with military commands when stories of special forces involvement began to circulate.

I remember that the story began to break on Friday. Looking at the news stories online it was at the Hotel Caribe, twenty-two Americans, seventeen Secret Service agents, five members of the U.S. special forces. Eleven agents were recalled from Colombia on Thursday. Regardless, I was told to leave it to the White House to deal with, which did not seem right.

Secretary Clinton arrived the morning of Friday, April thirteenth. And as the day progressed, the story just ballooned. But at that stage as we headed into the evening, we still didn't have a clear declaration from the United States government, other than that they were placing people on administrative leave as they looked into the incident. And I see a quote here, the president was saying he'd be angry if the reports turned out to be true. He had been briefed by the Secret Service director, Mark Sullivan.

I simply found the whole approach wrong, and I found it wrong for two to three reasons. The first, frequenting sex workers while you're working for the U.S. government should have been understood to be strictly forbidden. This was an open-and-shut case. By the way, all visiting staff were advised in the embassy pre-brief, to not frequent sex-workers.

Second, I didn't understand the reaction of the higher-ups, that we weren't just issuing just the most forthright condemnations, because it was on camera. The incident was an embarrassment for the United States. It distracted from the substance; it was insulting to our hosts; it was demeaning for all concerned. I was just taken aback almost to the point of being stunned into silence by the way we reacted. Moreover, sex-trafficking as part of prostitution was and is a serious concern in Colombia.

It was inconceivable to me that in an administration that placed such an emphasis on gender issues, we should not be more forthright. This was a policy issue, not a preliminary phase of a legal investigation, that we should have been reacting to. I remember pressing the issue at cabinet level, but having it made clear to me that it was up to the White House to decide on how best to respond.

So, we had the embarrassment of seeming to wave the incident off that weekend, and, basically for my money, it was almost a "who cares" about the Summit of the Americas. I was very, very disappointed about what happened.

In the middle of this, on that weekend, after an official reception or dinner in the evening with Santos, I can't quite remember the event, senior visiting American officials including the secretary went to a place called Cafe Havana and generated not entirely favorable media coverage. Nobody had called me to ask me as ambassador whether it was a good idea to go; I would have advised against it.

We got the PD wrong on this, on substance and on visuals, right the way through.

In subsequent weeks, the irony of things, I got a call from Washington commending me for my restrained approach and asking for embassy support in the subsequent investigation. I, however, never saw this as a legal issue: it was administrative, and substantive. I remember going back periodically in the succeeding months, asking where was the updated department worldwide guidance on frequenting sex workers? And I would be told the lawyers are working on it. Extraordinary. The guidance finally came out; but should have been out much sooner. It was not that complicated.

Q: Should we talk about cultural work?

MCKINLEY: As I think I've stated through discussions of previous tours, the cultural issues were always very important to me and important to my spouse, Fatima, just both of us on a personal level. And I think I've talked extensively about what we did in some places. What was different in Colombia was we had an extraordinary opportunity to expand.

Cartagena had an annual classical music festival in January that brought together American artists, artists from the region and for a week in this beautiful setting, you'd have orchestras, chamber pieces by individual soloists playing. Cartagena also had an annual film festival, which with Mar de Plata and Guadalajara is one of the three major

film festivals of Latin America. And invariably we would get American film stars turn up or people with connections to the United States.

And the third festival was a literary festival. It grew out of the United Kingdom's Hay festival which I think takes place in Wales and is probably the most prestigious literary festival in the English language world. But they obviously extend far beyond Wales and there's chapters in the United States and they certainly try over the years to internationalize their brand.

One of the chapters was in Cartagena. And you had authors of just extraordinary renown. In the time I was there the American author, Jonathan Franzen came, considered one of the top novelists of our times in the United States. There were Nobel Prize winners from the European firmament, Booker Prize winners like Julian Barnes, and naturally the festival had Latin American writers like Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes.

The excellent public affairs officer Linda Gonzales suggested that all it would take for us to be connected to this was to sign up as a sponsor with a minimal contribution. We did, and it connected the embassy to how Colombians saw their own culture, engaging in what they considered important, with the added benefit of a clear American component and participation and integration of American with Latin American artistic creativity.

It brought us very positive media coverage. And Colombia was a place where there was very substantial media coverage of the United States, for reasons we're all familiar with—drugs and security. This was another optic, this time on our artistic synergies. It was very well received.

The embassy through Black Heritage month also engaged with musicians of Afro Colombian descent, groups like ChocQuibTown and Toto la Momposina. We met other artists who crossed international boundaries like Carlos Vives and Juanes. We supported the first jazz festival in the city of Mompos, which is still going. There was an American association that held an annual art exhibition for charity fundraising with dozens of painters and sculptors engaged, some of them of continental renown.

Q*: And, it's a fun thing. In Guadalajara, the consulate traditionally was a sponsor for the international book festival, but in 2019 we expanded to working with the film festival too. We hosted Peter Fonda, as they celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Easy Rider. It turned out to be a tremendous thing. The Mexicans were just enamored with him as an independent filmmaker they could identify with. As with music and art, it is important to understand what those exchanges can do.*

MCKINLEY: Yes, you're absolutely reinforcing what I'm saying. Over the decades there has been less and less money for cultural exchange and diplomacy, even though in Mozambique, Uganda, Peru, Brazil we brought occasional classical and jazz trios, blues singers who would do workshops and performances. They did beautiful, moving work.

If it were up to me, however, we would still be pouring money into cultural exchange, supporting modern American cultural expression overseas, whether it's art, whether it's orchestras or hip-hop. I saw a documentary on PBS in the last two years. And it was about cultural diplomacy in the post-World War period in the late '40s, early '50s of major American artists. Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong. Thousands of people turning out for these concerts. We need to return to those days.

I remember Ambassador Tony Wayne in Argentina. The story was that he would get in touch with American bands and try to work them into public diplomacy in some way because Buenos Aires is on the international rock-pop music circuit. Since we don't have the funding, this is the kind of creative way forward if we're going to be relevant to societies in the twenty-first century, and especially to the next generations in other countries.

Q: I agree with you. During that time that we're talking about—you were in Peru and Colombia, Tony Wayne was in Argentina a little earlier, I was in Montevideo, Uruguay. We were in a part of the world that had become fairly anti-American, maybe not so much in Colombia. A public diplomacy approach that focused specifically on counter-narcotics or other national security goals may be correct on a grand scale, but it wasn't working in South America during that time. When we increased the cultural programming and people-to-people outreach, the favorability ratings for the U.S. rose, giving us a better base for convincing countries to support our policy goals.

MCKINLEY: We could spend the rest of the time talking about this.

There was one other area that I felt strongly that we were missing the boat on. And I know President Obama launched One Hundred Thousand Strong to encourage a significant uptake in student exchanges for the United States and the region. And I think it was relatively successful, particularly with Brazil, for a while.

But the bottom line is there was a fundamental failure of understanding at the policy level, administration after administration. In that connectivity to the next generation was opening the door to students, to young people, and in certain regions of the world, you needed to provide the resources for people who could not afford our country. By the late 2010s, there were three hundred and fifty thousand Chinese students in American universities, two hundred thousand Indian students in American universities, fifty thousand plus South Korean students in American universities. But there were much less than a hundred thousand from the entire Latin American region studying in the United States.

And somehow, we didn't understand the concept of scale on exchanges. We were all very proud of our Fulbright programs which sent a few dozen students from a country for postgrad studies. While staring us in the face was this extraordinary need for thousands of talented but disadvantaged students in the region, which a scholarship fund of fifty to a hundred million a year, could address, and increase next generation connectivity and promote our gender and race objectives in these societies. We never got around to it.

I remember getting a visit from the board of one of Washington, DC's premier private universities. They asked me why it was so difficult to attract Latin Americans to the United States. I was not diplomatic. I asked did they really think a sixty thousand dollars a year undergraduate education was either affordable or worth it in today's world?

We may have the best universities in the world. We also have the most elitist educational structure around because of pricing. It's no accident that Australia, Canada, UK, Netherlands, English speaking universities in the Gulf, in Sweden, in Asia are attracting many international students.

Q: And so your next assignment is sort of surprising. How did that come about?

MCKINLEY: I was bidding in 2013, I was ready to come back to Washington and join WHA and I received a call from Under Secretary Bill Burns at the time with a pitch to go as deputy ambassador for a year to Kabul. Those days, in Afghanistan, postings were one-year assignments.

I think I have mentioned having spent a lot of my career on conflicts going back to the 1980s. It seemed to me that to turn down the opportunity to work on what was the defining conflict of our time was wrong, even if I had questions about our policy. The use of the term "global war on terrorism" was fading, but that was still the overarching concept of what drove much of our engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world.

One of the attractive aspects for me was that there was permission for American officials, to include ambassadors and deputy ambassadors, to have their spouses accompany them if they found employment in the mission. Relatively few did, for many reasons, but there were maybe thirty to forty couples that would be there at a time.

On a personal level, and because since 1994 I had been in front offices, ever since I was DCM in Mozambique, my spouse had not been allowed to work in embassies because of nepotism rules. My career track certainly had truncated opportunities for her. Kabul was big enough to obviate any supervisory connection between us, but I think the exemption was driven by the hope senior leadership in Kabul would stay on longer than the one year. Fatima very much wanted to go, and to serve, and pushed me to accept. With her by my side, I was prepared to go.

Afghanistan was extremely attractive on a professional and personal level, and so I said, yes. As we were leaving Colombia in July 2013, delays kicked in on a job for Fatima, and we were told she could join me a couple of months later. At that point I said, I'll withdraw. You can find someone else. Secretary Kerry was visiting, spoke with Fatima and me, and helped push for a faster timetable.

Q: Any final thoughts on Colombia?

MCKINLEY: I just want to quickly close out Colombia. Two of the issues that came up were as I arrived in 2010 Wikileaks, and as I left, Snowden. I just want to say that it's commonplace to recognize the damage that Wikileaks and Snowden's disclosures did to U.S. diplomacy around the world. I can tell you the damage was very real and caused senior contacts to be very careful with us much of the time. My view is we also put people around the world in danger simply for speaking to us. I think we really do need to, at some point in the State Department, study what exactly the damage was. Especially as we move forward into a world where electronic security is more of a challenge. Finding a middle ground on transparency is always a challenge, but I think this is something we have to address going forward.

And just a final comment on the importance of spouses in missions. Fatima was central to our representational outreach and social life in Bogota. By the end, I was the "*esposo de Fatima*" (husband of Fatima) for so many people. I remember being introduced at events that way, which was just fine.

Chapter XIII: Deputy Ambassador, Ambassador, Afghanistan 2013–2016

Q: Good morning. It is February fourth, 2022, and we are continuing our conversation with Ambassador Mike McKinley. And Mike, we left off when you were getting ready to go to Kabul as deputy ambassador in September of 2013, I believe.

MCKINLEY: That's right.

Q: And the ambassador there was?

MCKINLEY: James Cunningham who had been our deputy representative at USUN and also ambassador to Israel and a very experienced professional.

I don't think I've explained the deputy ambassador structure. It was in place, uniquely in the world, only in Baghdad and Afghanistan because of the need to have people at a higher rank than a deputy chief of mission to interact with the outsize U.S. military presence, with host government officials who were used to dealing with ambassadors, and under secretaries and cabinet secretaries who visited on a regular basis. Persons who had been ambassadors were drafted in for the number two, three, four positions in the embassies. There were no DCMs really, only deputy ambassadors—three or four of them to complement the ambassador. There was a first among equals which is what I was when I arrived, but it's fair to say it was a team approach because there was so much work.

I very quickly came to the conclusion that it was not necessary to have this structure. You empower your deputies and you make sure they're senior enough as officers. And if they happen to have been ambassadors before, that's a good thing. But to formalize it and have this array of titles walking around the mission, created a certain element of confusion, and depending on personalities, also created unnecessary turf battles. It was an experiment worth trying, certainly not worth formalizing again in the next crisis.

Q: Who was the team then?

MCKINLEY: We had two additional ambassadors when I arrived. By that stage, there were also senior persons who were not formally ambassadors but treated as such. One I had enormous respect for ran the assistance portfolio, Ken Yamashita out of USAID. And one of the best people I've worked with. He had such authority, knowledge, and ability.

Kabul was then our biggest embassy in the world, and the figures shifted constantly, but we had, when I arrived, according to my efficiency report, twelve hundred direct hire and TDY personnel and five thousand contractors, and almost a thousand locally employed staff.

I came in as the number two, thinking I would be there for one year. And the key issue at that time was the military drawdown that was underway. We had at one point over a hundred thousand American troops there into I think mid-2011 as part of a surge of troops that was ordered after 2009 to respond to the Taliban increasingly challenging the

government and Kabul itself—notwithstanding the generalized impression that they had been largely marginalized in the first years of our engagement inside the country. The situation became serious in 2008 and 2009, leading to the surge. But by the time I got there, President Obama had long made the decision that the drawdown should begin.

We were at about seventy thousand plus troops when I arrived, and the objective was to bring them down to ten thousand by January 2015. And part of this was setting up the legal framework for our troops which would remain, through a bilateral security agreement or BSA, which we have in many other countries. It was a period in which there were going to be elections in which there would be the first democratic transfer of power from one president to another in Afghanistan's history, because Karzai, the president, was finishing off his second term and was proscribed from running a third time.

In the fall and into December/January, President Karzai, who was no friend of the United States, saw an opportunity to change the dynamic, both for the drawdown and for a continued U.S. troop presence, by dragging out the negotiations on the bilateral security agreement, which were largely being led by the Pentagon with support from State.

It was also a period when the U.S. Congress and others were questioning what our objectives going forward were to be in Afghanistan. These periodic cycles of doubt would surface over twenty years, this was one of those.

And Karzai just started going after us very publicly and did everything he could to stop the BSA from being signed to include convening a large gathering, what was known as a Loya Jirga, bringing together elders, and political figures from around the country for essentially a consultation on the big issues of the day with an end goal of deciding/endorsing approaches to policy. Karzai certainly thought that he was in a position to use the Loya Jirga to block the signature of the BSA.

That was what Karzai was lobbying for, and that's what we were lobbying against to include meeting with influential Afghan leaders to influence Karzai. Senators like McCain, Levin, Graham, came in to reinforce the importance of the BSA for the continued American military presence in the country. Other than Karzai, I think it's fair to say that most of the political leadership of the country realized that the departure of American troops was not in the interest of stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, it could have a knock-on impact on everything from assistance levels to the battlefield. Our allies in the international security arena, dozens of countries, were weighing in with Karzai to try to influence him as well.

We did go through the drama of the Loya Jirga, which we partly attended as observers, and in the end Karzai lost. The atmosphere in Washington, however, at the time was of increasing frustration and frankly, in some corridors of "well, the hell with Afghanistan." Karzai's tactics on the BSA did not help things.

I learned from Ambassador Cunningham and had the opportunity to work with the first of three American military commanders in Afghanistan during my time, in this case, General Dunford who went on to become joint chiefs of staff under Trump. The issues included what to present to Washington in terms of strategies for moving forward, staying the course. We never did a arrive at a signature of a BSA under Karzai, but we arrived at a soft landing in which it was understood in Washington that the best approach was to await the outcome of coming general elections in Afghanistan in 2014 and hope that the next president would move smartly on signing it, before pulling the plug on the relationship of Afghanistan to the United States.

There was also very significant debate about what troop levels should be by 2015 with civilian Washington skeptical of what the military was proposing. So was I, and the numbers seemed to shift not in relation to battlefield realities but what the Washington policy environment could be convinced to accept. It was an unappealing process, and which ultimately failed to define a bottom line.

Q: What did Karzai want? Did he want U.S. troops out or did he want them to stay in greater numbers, but without the BSA?

MCKINLEY: He wanted us out.

Q: Because of the drone attacks and things like that?

MCKINLEY: Partly. Karzai for years had been focused on the number of civilians killed. In the early months I was there, there were incidents, which we ended up acknowledging responsibility for, but I do believe that our approach to acknowledging civilian casualties has been problematic, whether it's Iraq, whether it's drone attacks in Somalia, whether it's Afghanistan and other conflicts.

Let me be clear that I am not criticizing the use of drones or other forms of attack. Civilian casualties are tragic, but when you're dealing with enemies on the field, who use civilians to hide within cities, use children as shields, you're facing an almost intractable question of when to use force in the context of an ongoing war when that enemy is trying to kill you and your allies, and committing terrorist attacks against civilians too.

Deciding to use drones is a tough call but often correct. But there's also mistakes. My belief, which hardened over the three years I was in Kabul, was that it was always important to admit mistakes up front. The tendency instead was to launch an investigation, and only months later have a clear picture of what had happened. Being transparent in war is so important to the credibility of what you are trying to do.

Anyways, drone strikes were a problem with Karzai.

Q: That was a big issue. Other interviewees of mine have said he was actually getting quite fixated on it, I think.

MCKINLEY: Yes. There are cases, and I'm not going to remember them exactly, and they made a very deep impression on him. Any of us working in wars have been aware of what death is and what unwanted, unplanned deaths are. They are tragic.

Q: Okay. Just to make sure, the elections were when?

MCKINLEY: So, the first round in April of 2014.

Q: In May and June of 2014, ISIS started making really huge inroads in Iraq and started highlighting the problems of U.S. troops having left. That may be jumping ahead too much, but I remember that having a big impact on what we did in Afghanistan.

MCKINLEY: It was so clear that the speed of the drawdown was driven by Iraq and the need to focus on the Persian Gulf area and to send assets to that region. As 2014 turned into 2015 and the war against ISIS in Iraq became an existential one, what became evident to me was that our military was stretched.

And I think this is a debate which continues to this day, how many wars can we fight at once? And what kind of equipment do we have to have at our disposal? What kind of conflicts do we engage in? And there are no easy answers to that. I certainly thought that if we were going to continue to be supportive of the Afghan military, there was a point of drawdown beyond which we could not go, but that was a debate that went on for the entire time I was there.

I'll start by focusing on internal issues. Very much in the news right now is special immigrant visa [SIV] processing for Afghans that were evacuated after the fall of Kabul in August 2021, or were left behind.

When I arrived in 2013, certainly the most difficult public relations issue that the mission was dealing with was SIVs—lots of congressionals, letters from the advocates and family members in the different states. We had a system in which all you had to do was work for one year for the U.S. government and you could apply for SIVs, that is emigrate to the United States. And many of our employees did in that kind of timeframe.

I think that does raise the question of just how committed Afghans felt in 2013, 2012, 2011 or did they already see how fragile things were? This is something for historians to work on at a later date, but it struck me even at the time that a one-year qualifying period led to enormous turnover. I can't remember if it was 20, 25, 30 percent of the mission every year in terms of our local employees. Constant hiring process, constant SIV processing. And given the number of Afghans working with other government departments, like the Department of Defense, it was a very difficult program to administer, and it also experienced significant fraud. You'd have multiple applicants using the same threat letter and thinking they could get away with that. And that's why people working on SIVs were having to go through these applications carefully because the flip side of not doing so was letting in people who could be threats without proper vetting.

But it was clear that we had to do better. We had to really pick up the pace. And so that first year, we worked as a team on clearing the logjams with our law enforcement agencies, how we did background checks, and how we streamlined paper approvals. I believe that we processed twice as many SIVs as we had in the previous five years. And I'd just like to say our consular staff faced an extraordinarily difficult challenge, and the level of commitment was there in trying to process SIVs, all the way to today.

It was a difficult time, but the turnaround improvement helped lessen criticism from Washington, from Congress, on how the program was administered.

We also went through a scheduled Office of the Inspector General [OIG] inspection. I think I've been through four inspections in the front office as ambassador, as deputy chief of mission. Those reports are public, so people can read them and draw their own conclusions. What I will say is I certainly argued against this top-heavy leadership at the mission: by the time I'd been there a few months, I was also convinced the embassy was far too big. I was convinced we needed to scale back our presence in consulates around the country. I was convinced we weren't providing the appropriate supervision of our assistance programs, and we needed to rethink what we were doing.

And I raised dealing with morale challenges and how we dealt with 85-90 percent turnover every year in direct hires inside the mission. I was also interested in creating a more congenial workplace. Without pointing fingers, I think there's a history of mission culture that led people to work seven days a week because they got two months off. I thought the work environment needed to change; burnout was an issue. Stress was an issue. People's need to see their families—that was respected with the generous leave from post.

What also began to come across to me was these missions when they're combined with our military becomes a microcosm of America. And we have people from every agency, every walk of life. Our hundreds of security contract personnel who risked their lives every single day for the rest of us, our building contractors were there for years, supervising construction projects. Different professional cultures, our soldiers.

And what I came away with was a sense in many ways that across those three years, I saw the best of America. People from all backgrounds pulled together, people worked together, people played together. Of course, there were issues. But I never felt more humbled, more honored, more grateful to be an American serving my country.

Q: Were people able to go around the city?

MCKINLEY: By the time I'd been there about six months, travel outside the compound stopped. I was there for the tail end of people being able to go out with security to restaurants, or to visit other embassies, to meet with contacts in town. The Taliban were certainly more aggressive in attacking provincial areas where foreigners were present. And in the city, terrorist attacks also became more common. There was a restaurant called

the Lebanese taverna where thirteen people I think were killed, including, I believe the IMF director, academics at the American University. And that was the turning point. From that attack, which was in early 2014 to the time I left in December 2016, there was no movement outside of the embassy for most staff.

At a certain point—I can't remember whether it was the end of 2014 or in 2015—we stopped driving to the airport all of two miles away, and it was helicopter transfers for the rest of my time there, for everyone. Two miles away and it wasn't safe. And in one of the best parts of town, a developed commercial and residential area, and no travel because there were attacks along that one stretch of road and the Afghans couldn't secure it. It's astonishing in retrospect and should have been a signal to everybody in Washington, just how badly the situation was deteriorating. We continued throughout the time I was there to have attacks on other facilities we had in town, attacks in which contractors and staff died, and there were near misses when casualties could have been catastrophic. Our local guards and Nepalese Gurkhas certainly paid a heavy price.

And as we moved into 2014, we began preparing for elections. The first round of presidential elections was held on April fifth, 2014, I am not going to pretend to have had any particularly distinguished role in the build-up to the holding of those elections. Ambassador Cunningham took the lead in dealing with most of the key presidential candidates. It seemed at that point, the front runners would be the former finance minister Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, a prominent Tajik leader, but it wasn't guaranteed.

And Karzai, a lot of work was done with him because of the fear that he might sabotage the elections to stay in power, using constitutional means, using the fact that the election process wouldn't work or wouldn't be carried out properly or people couldn't vote. To be fair to him, as we moved into an electoral crisis in the summer of 2014 after the first and second rounds of the elections, Karzai played a helpful role, but Karzai before April fifth tipped his hand in support of Ghani, encouraging Ghani to form a broader coalition to include appointing as his first vice president candidate General Dostum, an Uzbek.

This was not good in my view but reflected the complexity of Afghan politics. Dostum is one of the most reprehensible persons the U.S. government dealt with across the time we were in Afghanistan. He was one of the heroes in the eyes of some in the United States during the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. But he was a major human rights abuser who was said to have massacred hundreds of Taliban prisoners by sealing them in train vans. He was a brutal man. So, it raised eyebrows when he was selected as the vice-presidential candidate, but it was important for Ghani to establish a broader ethnic coalition. And as it was important for Abdullah and his backers to broaden their Tajik base by choosing Hazaras and Pashtuns: in Ghani's case Uzbeks and Hazaras support to supplement his Pashtun base. It was part of the ethnic politics of coalition building. No one carried the baggage Dostum did, however. More about him later.

We had an election, and everything seemed to go well, the UN agencies and USAID providing invaluable support. I think there were seven million plus people voting, turnout of 50 or 60 percent. It was, given that the country was at war, notable that elections were

held nationwide, I think in all of the thirty-four provinces. The results in the first round were 45 percent for Abdullah and 32 percent for Ghani. And then everybody else. And at that point it was clear, the country would move on to a second-round election since no one had cleared 50 percent.

By that time frame, I had been approached to replace Cunningham as ambassador, and had been approved as the nominee. I certainly continued seeing myself as number two and supporting Ambassador Cunningham. And he continued to do very important work with Karzai, with Ghani, with Abdullah as the elections moved to a second round.

Q: What happened?

MCKINLEY: The second round of elections took place on the seventh of July. Remember the first one was on the fifth of April. It took about four weeks to count the votes from the first round of elections, maybe more. So, we moved into the second round of elections and Ghani was declared the winner with 55 percent of the vote. You can imagine what the reaction was in Abdullah's camp where he had almost half of the vote in the first round. He could not for the life of him believe that he couldn't pick up 5 percent of the vote from the numerous tertiary candidates that had been on the ballot.

Q: So he thought it was corruption?

MCKINLEY: Yes. He thought it was fraud. In addition, for the U.S., Iraq was heating up and the idea that we were going to have failure in Afghanistan, and we were being challenged in Iraq, this moment certainly was becoming a crisis for the administration. Secretary Kerry was to become intimately involved in what happened subsequent to the second round on the seventh of July.

It says here in Wikipedia that John Kerry announced on twelfth of July, that all ballots would be audited, but it gives you an idea of the severity of the crisis because within a very short few days, and unlike the lengthy counting process in the first round, we already had preliminary results and a pledge for auditing of the results. And that was the result of Abdullah rejecting them and a sense that we were headed into a potentially violent political conflict.

I shared the concern of extensive fraud. It didn't take me forty-eight hours from the ballots closing to think there was widespread fraud. In the equivalent of precincts, Ghani's vote total would have risen from five, ten, a hundred votes up to a thousand from one round to the next. I remember raising my concerns, and a senior person saying to me, who makes you the expert on electoral fraud?

As it became a juggernaut of allegations of fraud, and evidence—videos of boxes being stuffed, ballots that were never cast being counted, and especially in Pashtun areas where Ghani needed to run up the vote, I did not need to argue the point further. I was told that one of the key electoral administrators, widely admired as a technocrat by the donors, was deliberately assisting Ghani with fraud. Karzai at that point, was asking, "Well, what

do I do? Do I stay?" And so, we had to go for the audit of the elections. I'll stop there for today.

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Q: Good morning. It is February seventh, 2022 and we are continuing with Ambassador McKinley. Mike, we were discussing what happened in Afghanistan with a lot of apparent fraud in the second round of voting in the presidential elections in 2014. You were describing some of the bad signals that you were seeing.

MCKINLEY: There was a decision to move on to a recount, which necessitated extraordinary coordination with UNAMA, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan led by Jan Kubis, a Slovak statesman, who ended up as foreign minister in Slovakia. Nick Haysom from South Africa was his deputy, also effective, and senior and experienced working the UN system and who replaced Kubisch and has gone on to work in Sudan. Both men were giants of the moment.

And what the UN did was to deploy a couple of election experts to run the recount, including Craig Jenness, who had handled difficult transitions and questioned elections elsewhere. The effort included 22,828 ballot boxes that were going to be subject to a manual recount and a challenging airlift largely supported by our U.S. military, bringing them back to a warehouse in Kabul. It was a logistical miracle: they succeeded.

The international military force also had to ensure security from terrorist attacks for the warehouse, for the ballot boxes, for election workers, and in particular for somewhere in the region of about two hundred international election experts, who were brought in to do the manual recount. The process included observation by representatives of the political parties involved in the disputed election and involved significant pressures brought to bear by the Afghan parties on the independent electoral commission of Afghanistan.

And I think it's a tribute to the electoral commission that they did face these pressures but did not break and had the full support from the international community. This was in the full public glare of the media. The UN officials who were involved were heroic in many ways, although initially they allowed the Ghani and Abdullah camps too much leeway to dispute the conditions for the recount.

At the end of the day, it was a transparent and full-fledged audit which, while it identified fraud by both sides, and defined the results conclusively, it did not resolve the political tensions between the two candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah. It did provide the foundation for actually reaching a soft landing with a government of national unity, which was largely negotiated by Secretary of State John Kerry.

Q: Okay. To back up just a second. The recount showed that the original count had been successful enough that Ghani had won. Is that what you said?

MCKINLEY: That's largely what emerged, but there was an agreement not to release the results because there was still enormous tension, and Abdullah was still not accepting the results even after the recount. In 2016, the results were finally released, and they largely reconfirmed the breakdown of votes. Some 850,000 ballots of the seven million that were cast were invalidated, with most of those being cast for Ghani. In other words, much greater fraud on the part of Ghani supporters but plenty by Abdullah's followers as well.

The rejection by Abdullah of the audit as well was so fierce that there had to be an agreement on how to try and arrive at a solution that didn't lead to the disintegration of what was by then almost thirteen years of international engagement in Afghanistan.

I was personally involved in working with our military, the UN auditors and so on, but Ambassador Cunningham carried the load with Ghani and Abdullah and their immediate circle of followers and tried to make clear what the downsides were of not accepting an audit result. But the fact is we reached a point in August, after it was becoming clear there wasn't going to be a change in election results, that we faced another crisis.

Secretary Kerry had negotiated the first agreement on the audit, but he had to return to Kabul and negotiate from August 7, I believe to the eighth or ninth of August an agreement between Abdullah and Ghani on the creation of a national unity government with the backdrop of potential political violence.

It was a very tense environment and very much underestimated by the international community and the media, just how close we were to descending into violence because a significant number of Abdullah supporters made clear they weren't going to accept the results of the recount. We ended up with two to three tracks of engagement working very closely with Kubis and the international community, and Ambassador Cunningham just working nonstop with Abdullah and Ghani followers.

And then there was a third track, which was security focused. And I was drawn into that simply because there was just so much work to do. I ended up in conversations with Afghan security officials. I was called in by the interior minister, Omar Daudzai, an impressive politician. He pointed out, as did others, that we were facing the possibility of the Northern Tajik and perhaps other minorities mobilizing against Ghani and against the transfer of power inside Kabul, and that there was a potential for thousands of armed men descending on Kabul. Daudzai was also communicating this information to our military commanders, but I think it's fair to say this was a collective effort to stand down Abdullah's followers.

But it did fall to me to speak to tribal leaders you never read about in the news in the surroundings of Kabul, to the east and north and who were seen as being capable of marshaling and bringing into Kabul armed men to challenge the results in support of Abdullah. So, I met with at least a couple of them working with the support of a terrific political team. We spent hours listening and trying to suggest what would happen if they moved ahead with violent actions and alternatively the benefits of supporting the transition.

It was a glimpse of the precipice. I remember one week in particular. Daudzai called me in for a meeting early one evening and said the incursion into Kabul was on the verge of happening. And we mobilized and engaged again. Behind the scenes, in short, this was much tenser than just the political standoff.

Kerry's intervention became absolutely the game changer. There's a lot of debate and a lot of armchair criticism of what Kerry negotiated and the terminology employed for the government of national unity that emerged. Since both slates had already run to be president of Afghanistan and they had three vice presidents each—first vice president, second, third—it was not feasible to create a supervisory vice president. And a prime minister title didn't convey because it meant subordination to the vice presidents as well as to Ghani for Abdullah. Kerry was dealing with an impossible task in coming up with something that would be acceptable to both men, fully aware that the election result, the recount, favored Ghani and Abdullah was saying he wouldn't accept it.

Kerry with his staff, with Ambassador Cunningham, with Dan Feldman, set about drawing up this document, which was highly imperfect, trying to divide ministerial positions, and representation in government. The title for Abdullah was chief executive. It was dismissed by some critics as a Western document that didn't take into account Afghan realities. But the agreement did result in a decision—on a public statement by both men stating that they had agreed to work together.

And we ended up with an agreement and that was really quite a signal contribution to peace in Afghanistan at that time, allowing a democratic transition producing a national government where the broad spectrum of key actors in the political arena were represented and it allowed us to continue with a government in place.

And so, I would suggest that was a truly quite remarkable tribute to Secretary Kerry and at the time seemed to provide the foundation for a transfer of power from a president who was very problematic for the United States, President Karzai. The crisis went all the way to September twenty-first, 2014. It was months of this, from June to September. Abdullah and Ghani finally signed a power sharing agreement on September twenty-first, 2014.

Q: Before we leave the power sharing agreement and the lead up to it, you mentioned Dan Feldman. Had he taken over SRAP at that point from Mark Grossman?

MCKINLEY: Oh, yes. He was special representative.

Q: Okay. So he and his staff were supporting the ambassador and Secretary Kerry, and coming up with some of the details on this, I assume.

MCKINLEY: That's correct.

Q: And your political section, who was the political minister counselor? Was it a big section?

MCKINLEY: Tom Yazgerdi who was followed by Elizabeth Rood. Well, it was big but I thought it was small given what we were tasked to deal with, with very strong leadership.

Q: So you went for your confirmation hearings in the fall?

MCKINLEY: I can't remember the timing of the hearings, which had tough moments, visits with McCain and others, and there were the usual hold ups by the Republicans. McCain told me privately he would give me a tough time to score points against the administration but to not take it personally. The partisanship by that stage of the whole process was striking. But I was paired with the person nominated for India and the two of us got through sometime in December. Jim Cunningham left in early December.

It was a period when the Taliban were picking up terrorist attacks inside the capitol. Movement was increasingly restricted. And I'm not going to go into details on this, but across the next two years, there were numerous threats to our people, of attacks on our military personnel. There were deaths. And there was concern in Washington. I dealt with high levels in Washington on security, and they drove home how close we were to being closed down if we could not continuously increase security.

And so, I spent an inordinate amount of time with Diplomatic Security and with OBO [Office of Overseas Building Operations] on security enhancements. When you take a look at what was built out in Baghdad, state-of-the-art. When I arrived in Afghanistan in 2013 and until I left in 2016, people were still living in trailers.

The DCM David Lindwall and I spent our years worrying about security for our people. I worked particularly closely with diplomatic security, during the last two years with Tom Barnard, who was terrific, and who had a large and very experienced team. There were delays, new monies appropriated, decisions on some issues, not others. I think the experience in Afghanistan should become, if it's not already, a study for DS agents and OBO, on responding to needs of a mission in a war front. The threat to expatriates continued, and we responded to attacks on foreign embassies, and a particularly savage assault on the American University of Afghanistan which led to it being closed down for a time. Those days and nights, in which I was personally involved for hours, were searing for everyone.

I believed in taking care of our personnel, I also believed in our personnel doing their jobs. I do believe that certain risks had to be taken. But finding the balance is tough. I don't know what the answer is. Ron Neumann, one of my predecessors and head of the American Academy of Diplomacy, has been leading the charge for years on redefining risk management for American diplomats in war zones. In Afghanistan I became less and less convinced the risk was worth it.

On another issue: we always speak about American casualties. But what about the Gurkhas who worked for us? What about the Afghan soldiers and policemen who provided our protection, who got blown up and killed in the entry and access points to

our facilities? Our local employees? We had numerous attacks on our installations in Kabul, Herat, and there would be many deaths, but they did not register in Washington the same way as American ones. They should have because they did for us locally. Our security universe is everyone who works for us.

As the situation deteriorated, there was a debate over our presence nationally, although it was being downsized as our military drew down. Very early on I was against having a presence outside of Kabul. We were drawing down troops. Our assistance programs weren't doing much and would be doing a lot less without supervision in the field, so we had to rethink our footprint inside the country.

Q: So did you close consulates during your time?

MCKINLEY: I didn't have to in the end, because the attack in September 2013 on our consulate in Herat helped concentrate minds, although there was still the inclination of a number of senior persons to keep those offices open. By the end of my first year, there was consensus that we had to concentrate our presence. I also believed that our embassy was way too big. By the time I left in 2016 we had drawn it down more than 30 percent, and I was interested in driving it down further.

I also thought assistance should be cut. We could not supervise what we were funding. And corruption was rife to include key actors in the presidential palace and [allegedly] family. When I first arrived, there was a five-to-six-billion-dollar pipeline of assistance programs. And once I was fully in charge, I thought we should reconfigure assistance, cut out most of the new programmatic investments, not take on major new projects, finish some infrastructure projects that still had a couple of billion dollars to spend for completion, and then move towards budget support to the extent U.S. congressional and U.S. government restrictions would allow. I worked very closely with the excellent USAID director Bill Hammick and he and his staff were cooperative on redesigning things to address what was a changing environment.

We had SIGAR [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction] to help us along because they were constantly pointing out failures in programs, corruption up to a certain level, and we had to respond. I had my own differences with SIGAR. I didn't object, in fact I was strongly supportive of what they were doing. Frankly I believed in bringing them in as much as possible.

But I did not like the personalization of the SIGAR attacks on U.S. officials. Everybody was trying to do their best. These were impossible working conditions. The demands were outsize. And also, I think there were programs that worked, up to the point they didn't, and so some of the broad-brush attacks went further than they should have. There was a SIGAR questioning of the educational investment. Well, I think most people in hindsight would agree getting millions of kids and especially girls back to school was worth it, notwithstanding that there were parts of the country where we did not succeed, or where there were ghost teachers and students and money was siphoned off. Did that

invalidate everything that was happening with the entire educational investment program?

I do think there should have been more aggressive investigation of the rumors of corruption of senior Afghan officials which I reported to Washington, to SIGAR, and USAID, and our military commanders. It may have been a challenge, but not doing more only played to Afghan perceptions that we were not watching closely.

Many of SIGAR's reviews were on target. A new program to support women's rights, called PROMOTE, with a commitment that was 240 to 250 million dollars, never took off. SIGAR took on PROMOTE. And what should have been a flagship program was revealed over a period of two to three years to not be particularly effective in achieving its objectives. There is this idea that ambassadors can just direct what happens—the program had so much support in Washington that to question it before it launched would not have been credible. I thought it had issues because the implementation path was unclear. It wasn't that I didn't think that it was not appropriate to provide money. It was how were we going to use it effectively which was in question.

Q: On budget support, I think that earlier, Karzai used to complain that the officials had more allegiance to U.S. government people who paid them than to the government they worked for.

MCKINLEY: There may have been something to that. We still funded most of the costs of the security forces. The only thing I thought would work at the end of the day was budget support, pay for everybody's salaries, and for us to stop hoping every year at donors' conferences that the Afghan government would assume the responsibility at some point, which it could not.

Overall, AID was trying to do the right thing, finish out infrastructure projects. I remember taking a decision on the fabled Kajaki dam in Southern Afghanistan in Helmand province, which Americans started building in the 1950s. It was never completed, and it was a second turbine that was being put in as the Taliban surrounded it from the countryside. We pulled Americans out. We had Turkish, other contractors, who continued work, but the dam was under greater threat. It became difficult to drive material in for finishing the job.

AID asked for support in keeping the project going. I agreed to fly in all of the equipment to complete the installation. And held my breath. And Kajaki was completed. But if it had been attacked and people had died, it would not have looked like the right decision. This was one of those moments on risk management. The dam just seemed like an extraordinarily important symbol of U.S. engagement, and the gamble worked out.

USAID did a lot right. I have tremendous admiration for their commitment and for what they achieved. It just was becoming more difficult to continue and we had to retrench.

And then there were other aspects to the work. One was the government of national unity and from the beginning the government was in danger of failing—at first every two or three months, then there was a crisis more frequently.

Months after endless months trying to just fill cabinet positions that were representative that both sides could agree to. A particular problem with filling senior spots in security, in the military. I think our military made a very significant mistake trying to influence the selection of generals and of senior security positions. And at times exacerbated the tensions between Ghani and Abdullah. Abdullah would threaten to walk out of the government. Ghani would say he wouldn't work with Abdullah anymore.

There were moments throughout my tenure in which I would be spending days each week going between the palaces of the respective individuals. I'll have to say that my experience was one in which I sympathized more with Abdullah and viewed the efforts by Ghani and his palace cohort to basically cut off Abdullah from key decision making as extraordinarily damaging. Even puerile. The early months when Abdullah wouldn't even be given funding for office equipment. But the tensions would go from ridiculous to very serious moments when we were within twenty-four hours/forty-eight hours of the government collapsing over military appointments.

Q: When you went to meet with them did you go with a military counterpart or by this time, was this fully in the ambassador's realm?

MCKINLEY: Depended on the issue my predecessors or I dealt with. Because it was a war, it was also appropriate that the head of our military operations should accompany the ambassador to meetings with the president.

There were moments when we'd break out and there'd be one-on-one meetings with the president, under Cunningham with Karzai and Ghani, and I'm sure it was the same under Crocker, but I was helped by the two Afghan leaders who preferred smaller meetings. And so my discussions with them were mostly without the military, unless there was something significant happening on the security front.

I'm not suggesting it was a bifurcation of responsibilities, but in terms of trying to keep the government going, I increasingly went alone. At the beginning, I brought a note taker. I stopped doing note takers because these meetings became one-on-one with Abdullah and one-on-one with Ghani. He didn't have anybody in there and the discussions would often be at unscheduled hours. And so, a lot of the work I did was negotiating the politics of the moment, or, for example, ensuring Abdullah would be included in meetings when they visited Washington—it was a government of national unity, but Ghani would resist. But the fact of the matter is many of the differences were on political and economic issues, security issues affecting the country. There were many near misses, and the crises at times required Washington interventions by the secretary and president to resolve.

And I had conversations, where, as the time went on, it became evident to me that the key people around the president were very concerned about how he was ruling. Senior

Afghans from Abdullah's camp, but also a number from Ghani's camp, and then Pashtuns who weren't inside the government inner circle, would say very directly to me, Didn't we [the U.S.] see what was happening?

And of course, I did, I saw a government that was not really functional, and I found ways to communicate that very directly to Washington. I was helped by requests from the White House for my personal assessments, and that of the DCM, from time to time for the most senior levels of the building. We had to be careful, however, not to get out too far ahead of policy endorsed by the cabinet.

I was also struck in conversations with numerous codels from Nancy Pelosi to David Camp, Levin to McCain, of the concern that was beginning to be more evident in Congress about how things were going, but still a disinclination to recognize that fact openly and still looking for how to improve on what was working in our engagement.

Beneath the surface, there were differences over drawing down. I remember one visit by McCain when, one night early into my tenure in Kabul, he tore into me about "my president" "my policy", which was affecting our success. I responded that Obama was president of all Americans, and that McCain was as responsible for that policy over the preceding dozen years. It was frosty. We continued to speak.

Later in my time there I spoke separately with vice-president Biden in Washington, who had reservations I strongly shared.

At the end of the day, because Ghani spoke so well, because our programs moved ahead, because he interfered much less with our security issues, which our military was very happy about—Karzai was a nightmare—and because Ghani had at least in the first iteration, some competent people in key ministerial positions that we worked with, we all felt we were moving things forward as Ghani began his presidency.

I did not by 2015. The deterioration was over time. It was cumulative. By 2018/2019, it was evident just how far-gone governance in Kabul was. But I felt it through the time I was there, and felt governance was getting much worse by the time I left.

And I also felt that we were losing the war. And the DCM and I made this very clear in discussions back in Washington, that we weren't making gains, that the Taliban was advancing every single year. There was pressure to tone down our reporting, which we did not. This understandably led to tensions with our commanders on the ground, and sometimes differing reports back to Washington on what was happening on the battlefield. I have also written publicly about my concerns about how we oversold the fighting capability of the Afghan security forces.

My personal view, which I did express, but didn't put on paper was that without the United States, the place would collapse in six months. I said that in 2015 and 2016. The superb DCM David Lindwall, who followed battlefield developments more closely, at

one point looked at the historical record on what had happened in 1975 in Vietnam. This was in 2015–2016, not 2021.

As the USG reported to Congress year after year that the Afghan military were getting better at what they did, the situation deteriorated. We dressed up periodic blows to the Taliban as significant when they were not. I think this was reflective of how we did the Iraq war as well in the early years. Recognizing battlefield realities that reflected poorly on the U.S. was not in our DNA; the celebrated gains in the surges of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan notwithstanding, the question should have been why the surges were necessary after years of effort in both places.

I remember when Kunduz was attacked and largely occupied by the Taliban in September 2015, one of the largest in the country. These things weren't supposed to happen, especially in northern Afghanistan. At the embassy, we spoke to contacts and realized something very serious was happening. The following day, however, and in the presidential gardens with Ghani and our military, the discussion was that the Taliban would be beaten in twenty-four hours. Ghani affirmed, supported by military advisors, that the Taliban didn't have the staying power. I said that was not true. And was politely sidelined. It took two weeks to take Kunduz back with the support of U.S. troops.

I can give so many examples of how we were trying to put a more positive spin on what was happening inside that country, but we had a fraying government that was barely kept together by the intervention of Washington. There was another period when Kerry visited again because Abdullah and Ghani were about to fall apart.

In April 2016, there was another crisis between Abdullah and Ghani. I was meeting with Tajik leaders, to include Foreign Minister Rabbani, and it was another breakdown in the making. And I remember speaking with the secretary who was in the region and had deployed to Kabul. I was direct about how serious the moment was to include threats of a possible breakdown of relations between northern Afghanistan and Kabul to include what I presumed was loose talk about secession. Kerry did one-on-ones with each of them in which it was made clear that if they did not reach agreement on whatever issue was at stake, the U.S. would have to reconsider its support.

Seniors at State, cabinet secretaries, President Obama all got in on the mix across the years. There were National Security Council meetings in which I was included. Just holding the government together became the job, and I believe my successors did the same. By 2020, Ghani the presidential palace started being called "the government of three". It was Ghani plus a couple of young advisors, all Pashtuns. He was often in fantasy land while I was there: on the Friday before Kabul fell, he was reportedly discussing a five-year development plan for the country.

A final vignette that's relevant to what I'm talking about. In June of 2021, Ghani visited Washington as the Taliban advanced. It was meant to be a show of force, of unity, meeting with Biden and congressional backers. The Taliban hadn't taken any provincial

capitals. I was invited to a dinner with former ambassadors, former generals, and political figures. There were pep talks and more from Petraeus and others.

I was thinking this was irresponsible—the situation was dire, and the Afghans in the room were partly responsible for it. In retrospect, it was also clear that pressing them to ask for more from the USG was to ignore rapidly shifting realities on the ground. I tried to say something more pointed, directed to others at the table like Abdullah, Hanif Atmar, and Amrullah Saleh, the Tajik vice president, that time's running out and the answer's not in Washington.

Abdullah pulled me aside afterwards. He told me that even in the middle of this crisis Ghani had tried to kick him off the airplane as they were coming to Washington. This, after a dinner and meetings in Congress and with the administration, where we all acted as though it really was a government of national unity. I did not know how or why we kept playing this game until the end.

By the time I left Afghanistan in 2016, I truly viewed the situation as something was very, very wrong there.

The other issue I worked on peripherally was the peace process. Capable people in the department, Jarrett Blanc at the beginning, Laurel Miller, Rick Olson all were involved in different stages across the three plus years I was there in efforts of outreach to the Taliban. We weren't doing this unilaterally. At the time, we weren't going to meet with them in any formal way without the Afghan government being part of it.

There was an effort working with the Chinese and the Russians at the time, to come up together with some kind of blueprint of what could be topics for discussion. And it ebbed and flowed. And there was a period in 2015–2016 where it was on the way up with Ambassador Rick Olson, who was first our ambassador in Pakistan and then the special representative, was working with the Chinese, the Gulf, and Pakistan. There were any number of Afghans doing their own outreach and feelers to the Taliban. The very well-known Gailani family was central to this. But they were just one of several initiatives, President Ghani in principle, was absolutely on-board, not so much on-board with the way we were approaching it. And the minister of intelligence and former peace negotiator Stanekzai, was also engaged in outreach efforts. Stanekzai was a committed, strategic, and intelligent leader who commanded real respect and understood Afghan political realities better than most. The Norwegians were also active.

I was very impressed by the efforts to start negotiations. I thought it was the right thing to do. I did question whether the Taliban were capable of negotiating anything on our terms. But having worked on many peace agreements or conflict negotiations in my career, you could never stop trying in a conflict which otherwise did not appear to have a resolution. Like many persons stationed in Afghanistan, I did believe the sanctuary in Pakistan was the main reason the Taliban could successfully sustain their insurgency over time which included killing hundreds of Americans.

And so did I really believe that there could be a negotiation eventually? Yes, I did at the time because I thought there was a generational shift underway. I'm not saying my reading was correct, and I did not anticipate the rest of Afghanistan being incapable of developing a common political position against the Taliban after 2019.

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Q: Good morning. It is February tenth, 2022. We're continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. Mike, continuing with Afghanistan. I wonder if you could start off by talking about the Taliban. What was happening? What was the Taliban doing during these years? What were we reporting to Washington? You had mentioned last time attempts to get them to the table and that there was a lot of bombing going on, getting closer into the city. So let's start there.

MCKINLEY: I think in retrospect, and I'm not going to pretend to have had this view in any developed form while I was there, but I think in retrospect we have to acknowledge that our understanding of how the Taliban was organized was relatively limited. We could point to their headquarter operations, their shuras, we could identify key leaders, but we really didn't know as much about their political ties and support in rural Afghanistan, what their approaches to different offensive seasons were, what they thought about outreaches related to peace processes.

The relationship between the more overtly terrorist elements like the Haqqani network and the more traditional elements in the Taliban was unclear but should not have been. The moment when Mullah Omar was declared dead, after almost a year—we missed that, although I was suggesting months earlier that he was gone by looking at how just the leadership projected. Mine was dismissed as idle speculation. Well, it wasn't.

I would suggest that gap extended to our understanding of the battlefield. When people look at what happened in 2021 with the fall of Kabul, and ask why we didn't know, I would suggest we never really knew as much as we needed to know even at the height of our presence. It is interesting how the estimates of Taliban strength were substantially revised over time, and there was endless debate over the best military strategy to pursue: concentration of forces or trying to project in every one of the country's three hundred plus districts. These were not easy decisions but required understanding Taliban gains.

Q: You had just come from Colombia. Was this very different from the FARC insurgency?

MCKINLEY: Absolutely. The FARC wasn't winning. And the FARC did not compare in terms of control of territory. The other aspect, I think, of the Taliban presence that we underestimated and even dismissed was the extent of their popular support. It was a small minority of the population, but even at less than 10 percent that counts as a base of a couple of million people in a country with forty million inhabitants. And the number who were passive or sympathetic was likely to be significantly larger.

Q: Okay. And did we have any responsibility—in how we handled things—for the popular support for the Taliban?

MCKINLEY: Well, we had programs that had been there for a long time, long before I got there, a national solidarity program, which built out thousands of civil society/community outreach efforts throughout the country. We were successful in establishing governments in all thirty-four provinces. In many districts, there was something approaching a government presence—education, minimal health services. But, to repeat, the government was viewed as profoundly corrupt, cynical, and populated with many of the leaders who had led to the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s.

U.S. diplomacy throughout my entire career underestimates the power of ideology, underestimates nationalism, underestimates extremism. We ought to have a much better handle on it now that we have extremists in our own country.

I always thought, from the time I was there, that Afghanistan was also a very conservative society. And so, you're distinguishing between Afghan conservatives who still believe women should be subjugated and the Taliban—there's only shades of difference between them. They may not support violence, but there was a broader popular base for the conservatism that the Taliban espoused.

There's a recent book by Carter Malkasian that came out, that's the standard right now on what happened in Afghanistan. He recounts a conversation with me in 2014 in which I basically was challenging the view of the Taliban as not having an ideology or support base. And at least it proves that I'm not making these comments in hindsight.

We all believed, certainly by the time I was there, all but the most recalcitrant hardliners in the U.S., that the government needed to talk to the Taliban at some point under the right conditions. Getting there proved more difficult than we thought.

Q: And you said in the previous interviews that it was a very big struggle to keep the government functioning at the highest level, but talking to each other. Did the government below that top leadership, did the rest of the government function?

MCKINLEY: Well, it functioned. If we want to put things in historical perspective, in 2002 when we went in after the overthrow of the Taliban, there was not much. No functional ministries, no educated civil servants in place, no functional basic social services for the wider population. The transformation, over the fifteen years by the time I got there, was remarkable. There were tens of thousands of younger Afghans who were running ministries with support and advice from the international assistance world, whether it was consultants funded by AID, by the Norwegians, by the European union, by the Japanese, by the Canadians, the World Bank. I would suggest that it was a significant transformation.

Q: So there had been some good nation building going on over those years?

MCKINLEY: Yes. But I'd suggest after a hundred billion dollars of expenditure, there should have been.

Q: I am asking because so many people are saying it failed.

MCKINLEY: Well, that's just not entirely true. These structures were emerging. And as much as I'm prepared to throw stones and talk about corruption all day long, roads were built, hydroelectric projects proceeded, electrification of the capital was a major success. There was a market economy beginning to develop. And the transformation in the education of girls was huge as was the codification of women's rights and opportunities. The emergence of a younger generation of middle/upper-middle class educated Afghans was important. The functioning of a parliament that included all of the ethnic groups and different points of view was significant. There was a media that in the cities was largely free and functioned. The legal system was being stood up and working to an extent.

So, I don't mean to suggest that nothing was built. But we weren't building on very solid foundations inside Afghanistan, and progress was heavily dependent on the international community, and not as much the Afghan government or the Afghan people.

Q: Were you in contact with our embassy in Pakistan a lot?

MCKINLEY: On the peace process, primarily.

Q: So let's talk about the peace process. We did that last time, so I hope it isn't too repetitive.

MCKINLEY: Sure.

I don't remember when we started the peace feelers exactly. The first effort collapsed in 2012–2013. We were very close to the Taliban rep office being set up in Qatar, which would have allowed for some kind of formalized negotiations going forward and it fell apart and it fell apart for good reasons given Taliban violations of agreements.

The next effort was following the contested election in 2014. It was the end of 2014 into 2015. I believe I have spoken about this at length but would only add that the Russians and especially the Chinese were helpful in the process, hosting meetings in Urumqi, in Xinxiang [those were different times!]. Even the Iranians seemed interested. Finally, I think I spoke about Ghani and Abdullah. Ghani's concerns that the United States might usurp Afghan national sovereignty were accurate: those fears were realized when Trump's negotiations got underway in the 2018–19 period. But at the time there was no intention in Washington of not working with the Afghan government.

I also had mentioned that there were efforts to enlist the Pakistanis to reach more senior levels of the Taliban. I don't believe we were particularly successful. Looking at Prime Minister Khan's comments when Kabul fell, it is clear that the Pakistanis always had questions about U.S. staying power, and whether the government in Kabul could hold.

Q: Okay. I wanted to ask you about one aspect of what happened in 2021 with the U.S. withdrawal and the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. It seems like even though the Taliban was coming in militarily, they seemed to think they could just take over this government that was much different and much more modern than when they had last been there. And I have a lot of cognitive dissonance on what was happening, what the Taliban thought they were going to achieve. From the basis of your perspective, did they really, do they really, want to bring the world back totally to where it was when they were in power the first time? I hope this isn't a stupid question.

MCKINLEY: No, it's a very legitimate question because there was a constant debate. Maybe here's the best place to do this, rather than when I talk about my time with Secretary Pompeo in 2018 and 2019.

Obviously given where I'd been, when I joined Pompeo's office in May of 2018. I was back full time in Washington in December of 2018, I had a first meeting with Pompeo and Ambassador Khalilzad who had been appointed the special envoy or special representative, in I think September 2018 to negotiate with the Taliban. That meeting with Pompeo was about potential talks and the structure for them and how to go forward on what President Trump wanted.

In early 2019, Khalilzad and company had succeeded in reaching a higher level of Taliban leadership, and they were also dealing with the representatives in Doha. And there was this question that grew more and more central for people who were interested in seeing the agreements move to a peace negotiation or a negotiation with other actors in Afghanistan. Have the Taliban changed? Is there a generational shift? Do they begin to accept the importance of functioning economic ministries? Do they accept that women have to have at least some role? And this was encouraged by the savvier of the Taliban interlocutors who inherited a more liberal approach to society and running the economy. But in the air was the fact that the Taliban across the four to five years they were in charge of Afghanistan in the 1990s represented the most extreme interpretation of Islam in government that the modern world has ever seen anywhere.

So, the fact that they were evolving from the most extreme of positions is a relative concept, but the debate was on whether there was some evolution. But in my view, it did not follow that they were open to incorporating non-Pashtuns. It did not follow that they were going to give women even the space that they have, say, in Saudi Arabia. When we speak about women in conservative Islamic societies, take a look at Iran. Women work, have something of a voice, and are in movies. There's a different shade of repression from the very fundamentalist extremist approach of the Taliban.

And so, I didn't think they were going to change that much. In fact, what we're seeing with them in power, while it's too early to know, I give interviews, and I'm harsh on the Taliban. Are they going to get more extreme in the coming months? I don't know the answer to that question, but they're sending out conflicting messages. They're not going

after businesspeople perhaps because the economy is collapsing, and they need it to function.

They talk a good game on reopening schools for girls in March. It's going to be a real litmus check. My view of course, is I don't think it's particularly significant to allow education for girls up to the age of twelve so that when puberty sets in, you can marry them off. Put me in the skeptic camp, it is evolution compared to what? It still is the most extreme form of subjugation of women in the world.

But, so the jury's out for some observers, and they certainly want to run a more modern state structure, but I'm sorry, I'm not giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Q: And of course, democracy is dead.

MCKINLEY: I'm sorry, but the democracy argument is the weakest. We deal with many non-democracies around the world, including in the Gulf, China, and so on. That's not the central concern. Our worries are girls and women. Our worries are political persecution. Our worries are about the inclusiveness of ethnic minorities. Our worries are their ties to al Qaeda. And if they address all those, I guarantee you governments around the world will begin to move towards accommodation. The most significant indication of how far they are from doing that, however, is that not even the Pakistanis, the Russians, and the Chinese and the Iranians have recognized the Taliban government.

Q: I have one more question that's more related to what happened in 2021, but is there anything else about your time in Kabul that you'd like to talk about first?

Some more on the peace process as it developed in 2018–2019.

The peace process and negotiations that developed in 2018 were very much a product of President Trump threatening to pull troops out from one week to the next or one month to the next. And so the armchair criticism of ambassador Khalilzad on those initial months of negotiation are just misplaced. People need to remember who was president and what he was doing. And what Zal was doing was negotiating a decent interval for an orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops and for the Afghan political class and military to get their act together as we withdrew.

And I don't think anybody could predict quite how we did the withdrawal and the arbitrary deadlines we imposed early in 2021, but to suggest that these [Zal's] were secret talks when they had the National Security Director for South Asia Lisa Curtis participating, when they had our senior military representative in Afghanistan, General Miller participating, when Donald Trump was kept abreast by Secretary Pompeo of developments as they proceeded, it doesn't compute. It's not true.

And the agreement that was negotiated was on the basis, partly, of the political pressures here in Washington. People working inside had to recognize that reality. Although I was never part of the negotiations, or drafting of texts, I was drawn into policy discussions. I

remember in one senior meeting saying, let's just get to the finishing line, satisfy President Trump and when the Taliban violate the agreement reached, we keep a couple of thousand troops there, indefinitely. That was my thinking, and I am sure of others.

I was in the camp of it was time to leave, but I could understand the argument against reducing to nothing as the Taliban took over more and more of the country, and that we should be keeping our options open by holding Bagram and Kabul, and Zal, I think, worked in part on that basis. But we were dealing with the president. I remember December 2018, that meeting I was in with Pompeo and Zal, and Zal outlining an approach to negotiations, building on what Rick Olson and Laurel Miller had done, and Zal being told there was no time for that. He had six weeks.

Zal asked me on the way out, "Was that really true?" I said, "What he had been told was absolutely the environment we're dealing in, but if he made progress at each stage, you'll get more time." And that's the way it happened.

I can say that in our military, at the time, people in the White House, others, were opposed to this, Bolton was opposed to it. Lisa Curtis, the national security council person, was opposed to this. I think General Dunford was opposed to this. Certainly, General Miller in the field was opposed to this. I think our embassy questioned the approach, but this was what the president had ordered. I believe so much of this is in the public domain with books by now.

Zal produced an agreement in late August 2019, and I think there were still going to be some, some refinements and conditionalities worked in. But Trump at that point surprised everybody and invited the Taliban to Camp David. And it was a close run for four to five days and Bolton and others worked to walk it back.

By that stage, I wasn't following the process as closely and just looked at it as the Trump show. But an American soldier was killed, and Trump used that as an excuse to end all the negotiations with the Taliban in September.

And of course, I didn't think that was the right approach either because we had reached a much more senior level of the Taliban than we had ever spoken to before. If we were going to be able to find a way out of Afghanistan that didn't involve an arbitrary decision by the president to pull our forces out, we needed an agreement.

And so the question marks over the decision of how to implement the agreement should have come into play when the Taliban did not renounce its relationship with al Qaeda in terms that we could understand as such. It was a moment to suspend the agreement. That's beyond my time in the State Department and so I don't know what the calculations were either at the end of Trump or at the beginning of President Biden's administration.

The only point I will suggest is that by the time Biden came in, he had no choice, but to either follow through with the agreement, because we were already halfway there in withdrawal, or risk the Taliban attacking American forces again.

And I believe to this day that if American troops had started dying again in Afghanistan, we would get the flip side of the argument, why were American troops still there? The pressure was always there. An editorial in the *New York Times* in 2016 questioned why Obama was leaving troops in Afghanistan, and argued that they should be pulled out by the end of 2016 because Americans were dying for what? The specious arguments by Petraeus and others that the Taliban was no longer attacking us directly—the reason was the agreement. They would have hit much harder if we had walked away. You can't win. And so I think Biden made a courageous correct decision.

I'm afraid I'll join the chorus on why did the administration establish an arbitrary deadline and why didn't they get through the fighting season? And why, when the Taliban began to take the countryside, did we not speed up processing of SIVs [Special Immigrant Visas]? I know president Ghani didn't want us to, but President Ghani by that stage was a shell president.

I think Biden made the right decision. I think we did have to have some kind of negotiation to allow for an orderly withdrawal of forces. I do think we missed a couple of beats in terms of timetable; we could have extended. And I do think that the primary weight of blowing it was on the Afghan political leadership with Ghani spending months weakening his opponents and blocking efforts to negotiate in Doha, to put together the right teams, to empower people, to draw on the support of the senior leadership of other political actors. So much has yet to be written about the extent to which President Ghani from 2020 onwards and the people around him slow-rolled any possibility of moving forward on a united front against the Taliban.

I did write an article published in *Foreign Affairs* on August 16, 2021, the day after the fall of Kabul, detailing why our policy was such a failure over twenty years, "We all lost Afghanistan."

Q: Well, should we end on this cheery note?

MCKINLEY: Perhaps on one incident that demonstrated the turmoil on ethnic strife always just below the surface. We engaged in tensions between the Hazara community and the government for example in 2016, but this other situation is more illustrative.

It was September 2016. And there was an issue over a burial site for a former Tajik king, who was executed in 1929, King Kalakani. And there was an effort to re-bury him by Tajiks, with a state burial in Kabul. The afore-mentioned vice president, Dostum, an Uzbek, said the remains couldn't be buried in the chosen location because it was an Uzbek sacred mound.

I was called late afternoon, alerting me to the fact that hundreds of Tajiks, and more, were on the way to the mound, and that Dostum was ordering a mobilization of Uzbek militias to stop them. I received another call from national security advisor Atmar asking for our help. I asked, since Dostum worked for the president, "Why did not Ghani speak to him?"

The short answer was Dostum wasn't listening. Abdullah called soon after noting the explosive nature of what was happening. He was highly credible. And clearly, he was not in a position to talk Dostum down.

I of course thought we would find a way to reach Dostum. It did not work. We spent the next several hours trying to reach him. Stanekzai, the person I mentioned before, ended up with Dostum in person with some elders sitting with Dostum reportedly out of his mind. I worked with terrific persons from the political section, including the political counselor Elizabeth Rood who was fluent in Pashto and Dari, and Tony Bonville, who just died in New York prematurely, and was a wonderful person to work with.

This was before Zoom, and we were speaking on different phones to people, often at the same time, with Dostum, with Tajik leaders so that their supporters did not provoke things on the ground. I said anything, working with Stanekzai, that might work to help get this psychotic off the precipice. Stanekzai played a pivotal role, but our little team helped. In the end there were many people who thought it was a pretty bad thing to start having guns going off between two ethnic groups in Kabul.

When Ghani would complain about Dostum, I'd say, "Why don't you get rid of him?" "Well, I can't." And I never understood that. There was this undercurrent of fear about the old warlords. Ghani and Abdullah and others in Kabul believed that people like Dostum, Sayyaf, Ata in Mazar, Ismail Khan in Herat, the Karzais in Kandahar, that they all could mobilize militias, which would threaten the state, that they were parallel security organizations. I never believed they were there, especially after they failed to materialize to defend Kunduz when it was attacked by the Taliban.

I despised and loathed Dostum. And towards the end of my time there, he decided to go after one of his political opponents, kidnapped him, held him for days, torturing him personally, according to reports leaving him with serious injuries. I came out publicly as I was leaving, calling for an investigation of the vice president's actions.

And I believe I was the first American to go after a senior government person in public and call for him to be brought to justice. In retrospect, I should have gone further. I went back to Washington and said we can't work with this person.

Nothing happened. And I raise this because what this demonstrates is a sublimation of principle to the realities we were addressing. To remind, the country was at war. So, we also had to deal with people who were unpalatable, but who had influence. But I do think there were points where we could have acted differently, with a number of our questionable contacts responsible for abuses. And Dostum was one of them.

Then corruption. I don't know if I've talked about it enough or not. I reported extensively on it. But it was hard work getting things corrected. Evidence trails were not clear. Even the investigators had to choose their battles on what corruption they pursued with any hope of reaching a clear resolution. And there was always the risk of the palace cutting off access we needed, as I was warned at one point.

I've talked about gender issues but there were gender issues inside the mission.

Q: How so?

MCKINLEY: Well, we employed a fair number of Afghan women. And we were definitely trying to provide space, opportunity, visibility, and we did a lot of good, but if you spoke to them one-on-one, certainly my spouse Fatima did, many of them, the minute they left embassy grounds they would cover themselves to go out into the "liberal" Kabul streets. There were men among the educated Afghans who worked with us, who, when they saw the women being too liberal, whatever that meant, whether in conversation and work, would quietly tell their female colleagues you're free here eight to five, but remember where you're from. We tried to address things like this with regular counseling sessions for the broader community, we underscored respect for women with our male Afghan colleagues, but it was a constant undercurrent.

At one of the celebratory lunches that was held for Afghan staff, the embassy leadership was going to help serve the food and Fatima and I walked in, and there was a sea of men. And the far fewer women were all on one side of the wall, waiting for the men to decide proceedings. In the embassy. We broke that up.

There was this constant undercurrent. I was convinced things were getting worse for women in Kabul every year I was there. There was the murder of a woman named Farkhunda, in downtown Kabul, near a mosque she had come out of. She was accused of defiling the Quran and a mob set on her. And it was a horrific event. I remember going to the palace urging an immediate statement. They hesitated but did eventually issue one, but I was struck by their calculations about how far they could go with a conservative Afghan public. It was a real eye-opener: they knew something I did not. Fatima approached an Afghan woman colleague to ask whether something was being done to commemorate Farkhunda on campus—at that point there was not. Fatima later supported the women who organized a vigil at the mission. Fewer people than I anticipated joined. Again, it seemed so fragile, what we were building here.

And you'd meet young Afghan women, whether it was through education in the American university, or the people we hired, and all you wanted was for them to succeed. Fatima at one point hosted an event to introduce engineering female graduates from the American university to international professional working women. I had tremendous admiration for the courage of all the younger Afghans who were working in government or in civil society.

Q: By and large, you had a good team at the embassy?

MCKINLEY: The answer is yes, but we had up to 90 percent turnover every year. There was the conundrum of how to manage our personnel presence in war zones. Many were there to meet department requirements and needs. Many wanted to be there and had volunteered. With turnover, the management challenge of building a team began anew

every year, but people were, by and large, very committed and there was a sense of community amongst most of us. Fatima and I participated actively in embassy gatherings and hosted an annual party at the residence to which all employees were invited. I worked on supporting family members receiving better pay, but that was difficult to achieve.

There was/is this concept of expeditionary diplomacy, except we are not soldiers and the world was/is much bigger than wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we deploy different skill sets beyond supporting war efforts. That other work globally had to continue and be respected. You were not letting the side down by not serving in war zones.

There were tensions in the dynamic, but they were worked out. People were professionals and worked hard. I don't know what percentage of our service ended up in Iraq and Afghanistan over the fifteen to eighteen years, but it was a significant percentage. And there was a group which believed in these wars, what we were trying to do, not just in Afghanistan, but more broadly in the broader Middle East.

I believe that one year of service was enough, as it was for our military colleagues. And every time there was a suggestion of extending a tour to two years, I very much opposed doing so. People had lives, partners, spouses, children. It was great, however, when people stayed for an extra year, it was very helpful to our work.

Overall, I felt that I met and worked with superb individuals across the board, whether it was at AID, with our military, all the other agencies and departments at post. The State Department colleagues, so many were dedicated professionals, and team players. Staying over three years, I met hundreds. And I worked with real stars in diplomatic security.

Q: One more question on this period. You seem to have had frustrating experiences in dealing with Washington but also you seem to keep people's confidence. And in fact, they asked you to stay a third year as ambassador, which would've been a fourth year in country. So that shows a respect for what you did. Did you see it that way?

MCKINLEY: I don't want to convey that I had frustrations with the people running overall policy towards Afghanistan. I had a fantastic working relationship with Washington. The SRAP [special representative] office couldn't have been more supportive, strategic, helping think through issues, providing direction, understanding things that we in the field sometimes did not. I had enormous respect for them. Dan Feldman, Jarrett Blanc, Laurel Miller, Rick Olson. I just can't say enough good things about them. I thought they were excellent.

And then at the cabinet level, their willingness to give me the time to speak my mind. To cabinet secretaries and to the president directly. I of course followed orders and policy. I had the experience of a lifetime working with Washington during that period.

Chapter XIV: Ambassador, Brazil 2017–2018: A New Bilateral Relationship; President Trump Impact; OBO Overbuild; Trade/Investment Re-defined; Bolsonaro Election; Cultural Diplomacy—Valongo Wharf

Q: So good afternoon. It is February fourteenth, 2022, and we are continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. Mike, I believe we are in the year 2017.

MCKINLEY: Yes, January 2017.

Q: You arrived in Brazil and I have forgotten, did you speak Portuguese?

MCKINLEY: I did speak Portuguese. I spent two years of my childhood in Sao Paulo, where my father was working for an American company. And I traveled to Brazil several times because my parents ended up in Rio de Janeiro as well. I lived in Mozambique for three years. But this was my first return to Brazil in a professional context.

Q: So tell us about Brazil at that point. I think there was a temporary president in Brazil at this time?

MCKINLEY: So just to explain the working environment for me personally when I went to Brazil. The November 2016 elections resulted in the election of President Trump, and I was still in Afghanistan in the middle of December. And the way the Tillerson transition, well the whole transition, was going in which the Trump administration didn't want to deal with anybody in the building, raised questions about what would happen to ambassadors who were not in place. I also expected Brazil to go political. I knew I had to be in Brasilia and credentialed if there was a likelihood of staying any length of time. I got down to Brasilia January tenth or eleventh, 2017, and the Brazilian Foreign Ministry was just remarkably understanding. And I ended up being added to a credential ceremony I think on January nineteenth, just before Trump's inauguration.

I had been offered the possibility of being ambassador in Kenya or in Brasilia and had chosen to stick with Brazil, partly because of my childhood connection. I studied Brazil at university and did my undergraduate thesis on Brazil. I very much wanted to go back.

The embassy at that time, I think, was the fourth, fifth or sixth largest we had. You never know, as these counts are fungible, but it certainly was one of our biggest embassies with approximately fourteen hundred employees, twenty-eight agencies and four consulates general.

I arrived with basically two sets of taskings and one unwritten one. The clearest one was, the mission was undergoing a significant transformation. There was something near a billion dollars in OBO projects that had been approved over the years—building a new consulate in Rio de Janeiro and building out two new consulate buildings in Belo Horizonte in central Brazil and Recife in the north and opening up another consulate building in Rio Grande do Sul, revamping the embassy. There was very much a focus on

"inside the mission" issues. And I was also aware there were a number of issues that impacted mission morale because of administrative support concerns.

The second objective was working with Brazil that was undergoing a change in the way it dealt with the United States. I arrived in 2017 and the democratically elected left-of-center president Dilma Rousseff had been impeached in 2016 on what seemed like a technicality regarding the handling of the government budget. Her vice president, Michel Temer, who came from a conservative party, took over.

The U.S. relationship with Brazil—there had been an effort to put it on a more strategic footing, going back to the early 2000s, going back to the 1990s, as Brazil emerged from decades of military dictatorships and cyclical economic booms and busts. By the 2000s, Brazil was an evolving and strengthening democracy, and an economy that strongly benefitted from the commodity boom of that decade. The left-wing president Lula did not ruin the economic foundation of the country as some had feared and took advantage of the economic boom to expand social services and build the country's institutions. Brazil entered a period of political and macroeconomic stability.

With the end of the commodity boom and the election of Lula's successor, Rousseff, the country underwent its worst economic recession in modern history from 2013 onwards into 2014 and 2015, with very significant street protests.

And like elsewhere in the world from 2008 onwards, politics became more polarized, popular dissatisfaction grew, and Brazil's racial and social concerns remained pronounced. Critically, Brazil faced one of the worst public corruption challenges in the world, with government entities, the governing political parties, and local governments and businesses all implicated. The investigation was called "Lava Jato", the car wash investigation, and centered on the giant construction firm, Odebrecht. Odebrecht's reach was such that corruption was uncovered in countries around Latin America and beyond, bringing down governments and indictments of presidents elsewhere too.

I arrived during that period, but I also arrived in a period where the historic efforts by Tom Shannon, first when he was at the NSC as a director for Latin America, then as assistant secretary for Latin America, and then as ambassador in Brazil, to transform the strategic relationship with Brazil had been making great strides in convincing in Washington of the importance of having a better relationship with Brazil, notwithstanding Brazil having left-wing governments. But then the United States got caught up in the Snowden leaks, which were very destructive to the relationship between the United States and Brazil, that was 2013.

Shannon's successor, Liliana Ayalde, did an excellent job of mending bridges and keeping the growing people-to-people and business side of the relationship going. It's not well known, but by 2016, Brazil was providing the sixth or seventh largest stream of legal visitors to the United States, over two million a year. Our trade relationship was strong, and the investment relationship, at a hundred billion dollars plus, was a bigger exposure for American firms than in China.

On trade there was more to be done [Brazil was only our eleventh or twelfth largest trading partner], but there was the challenge of breaking into a highly protectionist economy that saw itself as part of an emerging markets grouping [BRICS] consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa that hoped to challenge western economic powers. Moreover, it was a country which under Lula and Rousseff had seen itself as challenging U.S. influence in the hemisphere.

In this context, Ayalde successfully maintained a high U.S. profile, using the Rio Olympics, the World Cup, and cultural diplomacy and business and regional travel in-country to sustain the relationship and was well-positioned to reach out to Temer's government when it replaced Rousseff's.

That said, I arrived when there was still the knock-on impact of the worst recession in a century and where the corruption crisis continued to rumble on to include an impending trial of former president Lula on what seemed thin corruption charges, and where we were seeking to address long-standing irritants in the relationship. They included ones that had lingered ten, fifteen, twenty years over trade, ethanol, steel tariffs, child abduction cases. We could never reach agreements on issues like space cooperation, which would allow a better security relationship as well as satellite launches with the US.

But the Temer administration seemed more open to working with us on issues like these and prepared to respond to an increasingly dictatorial regime in Venezuela, under President Maduro, which became a priority for the Trump administration, and Temer was willing to work with us on a strong stand against North Korea as we grew more concerned about North Korea's nuclear ballistic missile program. With a conservative government in Washington, certainly there were some commonalities of political vision on what was happening regionally.

But my concern was broader as we dealt with Brazil. It was evident from the moment Trump began his presidency, that the U.S. was going to face enormous challenges globally. That there was a very significant difference in approach to dealing with world affairs. There was a serious underestimation among my Foreign Service colleagues at the beginning about what that meant, and an effort to continue as if nothing had really changed in the work we did. Change it had, however.

As we drew back from or pressured security alliances in Europe and Asia, as we abandoned the free trade agenda, which had essentially supported U.S. global economic policy for forty years, and turned our backs on multilateralism, and challenged climate change, it was so clear it was not 2016 anymore. And so inside the mission, I spent my first three, four, five months, looking at how to protect what was building in Brazil without drawing undue attention to programs like environmental protection, or ongoing efforts to constructively resolve trade disputes.

It was also clear to me that Washington did not want us talking about what President Obama had achieved, or historic bilateral relationships. Our DCM in London had run

afoul of Washington for doing just that. The White House was redefining things, slapping steel tariffs on friends like Australia and Argentina, threatening NATO. And so, for example, on steel tariffs, the work in our embassy was to try to limit steel and aluminum tariffs on Brazil which could impact the wider relationship negatively, and unnecessarily.

Q: So on that particular issue, Commerce came up with a number by which they wanted to reduce the amount of imports that would help them raise the prices for domestic producers to be competitive. So they had this big debate on whether to do it globally, where everybody's exports were cut or just cut particular countries. It was an interesting challenge for different embassies to try to understand what was happening and be able to advocate. So that was one of the early glimpses of the transactional nature of our new trade policy. Also in Mexico, what they were doing with NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement].

MCKINLEY: That's an excellent point. And actually, that says it better and puts the context for what I'm describing.

Q: In Costa Rica, our ambassador was successful in getting the secretary of commerce on the phone. We learned that it was all about reducing the amount of steel imports, and at this point they were envisioning cutting the big exporters only, but they still needed a little more. Tiny Costa Rica and also Israel, together, had just enough steel exports to the U.S. to make up that small gap in the number they needed to cut.

MCKINLEY: I think it's important to have this context. Inside the mission, the people who seemed to understand it more quickly than anyone were our Department of Commerce colleagues. And that was because the word went out from Commerce. They didn't really care anymore in Washington about U.S. companies invested in Brazil or overseas generally.

The administration did not want more American investment overseas. They wanted to force U.S. companies to return. It was an autarkic approach to economic policy in which U.S. companies overseas equals bad. You had these Fortune 100, Fortune 50 companies—who'd been in Brazil for decades—looking at an administration and an embassy, which no longer was free to be fully supportive of the agenda of American investors in Brazil, or to promote inward investment into Brazil.

It was shocking to them; to me. The only interest was in helping U.S. companies sell to Brazil. Commerce now neatly side-stepped getting involved in any contentious issues on the ground, on ethanol production, on the steel and the aluminum tariffs, and frankly doing little to support our defense industry dialogue, which was reviving, working with a Brazilian government that for the first time in twenty years was open to doing so. It was a constant battle.

Q: I also saw the Commerce Department's Foreign Service being directed away from their usual activities when I was consul general in Guadalajara in 2018. At the direction

of Washington, my commerce officer advised me not to visit U.S. companies in my consular district. They were concerned about highlighting U.S. investment in Mexico.

MCKINLEY: I think you definitely need to keep these examples in the transcript. It shows it was an Orwellian world. Here, the Department of Commerce and the State Department, all of a sudden, we're not supporting our businesses overseas. One of our strongest components in projecting American strength, America's image overseas, and for supporting our national economic security. And suddenly, our hands are tied.

Q: It was probably harder for you. You had such a big and active U.S. business community there. Our companies were so integrated in the local economy, they really weren't noticeable. We carried on visiting IBM, HP, Cargill, et cetera. even as we still supported U.S. exports and encouraged Mexicans to invest in the U.S. Later when Washington wanted us to reactivate the supply chain for food and autos despite Mexico's pandemic restrictions, we had the relationships to do so.

MCKINLEY: So, in Brazil, we certainly sustained the relationships with all the American companies, but we couldn't openly promote. And that was a big distinction. I remember being part of business groups in which I would be trying to explain Washington's environment across the almost two years I was working on Brazil, and they really couldn't quite believe it when I first said this isn't going to be business as usual. But by 2018, they certainly were reading it. And to give you an idea of the paradoxes, opportunities were expanding in Brazil. The Temer government liberalized bidding on the deep-water oil and gas reserves of Brazil, something that the United States had always wanted to see. Companies realized there had been a radical transformation. But they didn't really care in Washington.

And so, the work we did—by the way, let me start off by noting I had an extraordinarily high caliber team in the embassy, whether it was defense, whether it was law enforcement, whether it was the economic section, the commercial section, the political section, the heads of our consulates, their engagements, I couldn't have gotten to first or second base on any objectives if I hadn't been working with just an excellent team. Jimmy Story, whom I have mentioned before, Kristin Kane in political, Abby Dressel in public affairs, and so many others. I worked again with Ricardo Zuniga, our consul general in Sao Paulo, whom I had known for almost twenty years, and who is an exceptionally fine officer who was in President Obama's NSC and is now number two in the ARA Bureau for the Western Hemisphere.

There were also many new generation entry-level officers and specialists, and it was a thrill to see that change happening in the composition of our service, although the concerns about their future were palpable because of what was happening in the department under Tillerson. Most State officials shared those concerns, and I occasionally sought to address them.

I took more than a dozen trips around the country the first year supporting business and outreach; we relaunched the defense industry dialogue for U.S. companies, which were

on the verge of abandoning it, to include Brazilian and U.S. defense officials. We reached an Open Skies agreement, which had been on the table for fifteen plus years. I led a business delegation to the U.S. as part of the Invest in USA initiative, the fourth or fifth largest business grouping at the event. And there, I got a sense of how Wilber Ross worked, not good, and the priority placed on inward investment into the U.S.

We managed to make the case for more measured U.S. reactions on ethanol retaliatory sanctions or on steel and aluminum, as well as to be supportive on the energy opening, supportive of our companies, of the defense industry dialogue, open skies, and to advance negotiations on a space agreement, centered on intellectual property protections.

Q: So what was the Brazilian government's view of China at this point? Because they had become a very big customer over the previous ten years, with the commodities boom.

MCKINLEY: The Chinese had become the biggest new investors in Brazil, but the question was how much of it was being realized and how much of it was directed at infrastructure projects which benefitted largely Chinese firms.

But the fact is what I saw in 2017 was a very different China outreach from the one I'd seen in the 2000s when I was in Peru and then in Colombia. Their commercial delegations were sophisticated, involving state operated enterprises and private sector companies, engaging Brazilians suggesting they too would greatly benefit. The perennial focus on locking in contracts on minerals and agricultural products needed for China's economy domestically remained part of the objective of course. The overall approach, however, was in contrast to the previous strategy of simply locking in commodities, mining rights, agricultural purchases to supply China. It suggested, real or not, a two-way street. The Chinese, like other competitors around the world like the Germans, British, French, Spanish, took a more holistic view to supporting their firms and investments than the United States tended to. That does not mean there were not issues of concern, which the Brazilians shared, regarding tech investments, trade transparency, and debt finance.

The twenty billion dollars in Chinese investment was not a paradigm shift, yet, since American firms had much more invested in Brazil. But China had become Brazil's largest trading partner. It was important for us to be aware of the shift, but also to continue seeing Brazil as a country that could potentially be helpful in the WTO and elsewhere, on rules of the game on issues like IPR, on forced technology transfer, name it.

We spent a fair amount of time in dialogue with Brazilian ministries on these questions, on agricultural questions. The Foreign Ministry was open to us again, and we dealt a lot with them on Venezuela, on Middle Eastern concerns, on China.

And I have to say, my personal view was and is that the Brazilians have one of the highest caliber Foreign Services in the world, and very accomplished senior civil servants working in the Finance Ministry, Health Ministry, environment. It was a pleasure dealing with them even with disagreements. And there were. Brazil tended towards

protectionism, and had its own world view. They were in trade negotiations with the European Union, Canada, I believe with Japan—they saw themselves as global players.

We were careful in our outreach. Domestic Brazilian politics were still in turmoil, corruption revelations continued, and touched the former president Lula as well as people around Temer. Lula was imprisoned on what seemed to be less than serious charges and was eventually released after I left. The broader concerns were about millions siphoned off for political campaigns over the years. As every American ambassador knows, the Department of Justice does not always share information, but it appears to be helping the Brazilian Justice Ministry on aspects of the investigation into the Car Wash scandal.

We also worked on child abduction cases. Brazil had one of the highest numbers in contention and that was certainly a very sensitive, difficult issue with a lot of congressional interest in the United States. And as a mission, I think we helped advance the process as well as trying to help resolve some cases.

Q: Can you explain? Child abduction has to do with parents taking their children—

MCKINLEY: Parents marry across nationalities and abduction takes place when one of the parents takes the child or children to a third country and does not return to the United States or allow the other parent access. The issue is complex and wound up in problems that surface in relationships, and visitation rights and custody become a battle across borders. Our concern is global, with Germany, Saudi Arabia, and many other places.

I worked a lot on the public diplomacy side, but not in the media. My early sessions with Brazilian media were all about Donald Trump. I wasn't going to speak critically about the president as a sitting ambassador. I also wasn't going to try to interpret policies that seemed to change quickly.

I visited universities, supported cultural exchanges, met with American companies, and visited their factories. I certainly was very impressed by Brazil on the artistic level, on the cultural level, on the depth and quality of their universities, our cooperation with them on medical research issues, whether it was on HIV/AIDS, or Zika. We had an exceptionally broad relationship which was not fully understood in Washington. The tragedy, I think for all of us who served in Brazil is, conveying how important Brazil is globally, and how there is so much that is positive that we can do together.

I did have challenges inside the mission whether it was household effects not arriving for months, sitting in the import location for our missions; or vouchers that weren't paid for months at a time, with people running up thousands of dollars in bills; problems with Brazilian labor laws which made it almost impossible to dismiss non-performing employees; the slow-moving OBO consulate projects.

I cannot underscore what Ambassadors in front offices have discovered everywhere. If there's issues in internal management of a mission, deal with them, because of the impact on morale, the impact on the efficiency of what you're doing, the impact on family

members. Fortunately, the administrative officer and excellent DCM Bill Popp resolved most of these concerns in that first year at post.

One of the biggest issues we dealt with when I arrived was what to do with the commitment to build new consulates. We'd already built the consulate in Porto Alegre in southern Brazil. We had two more projects worth over fifty million, in addition to the hundreds of millions of dollars in commitments to building a new consulate in Rio de Janeiro and revamping the embassy building. Many of the proposals no longer made sense.

OBO was committed. Consular Affairs in Washington was committed. This highlighted, however, what's wrong with the State Department approach to building out infrastructure. It has difficulty adjusting to change. When the decision was made to build these consulates years earlier, we were anticipating that Embassy Brazil would be growing by 20 percent plus in staffing. Instead, by the time I arrived, we were down and going further down in numbers; and the number of visa applicants was not rising anymore in the way we had anticipated. Then there were cost overruns and the delays in construction—and the sites that were chosen in both Belo Horizonte and Recife were in difficult areas which had not developed as anticipated.

So, I worked on closing the projects in Belo and Recife down, which was initially opposed in OBO, but I certainly had support from the leadership inside the country. Eventually there was a reappraisal, and the shutting down of a couple of the projects.

But as the Trump administration grew into its own, it was a difficult policy environment. The assistant secretary Roberta Jacobson helpfully held monthly calls with chiefs of mission in the field. Her successor was acting Paco Palmieri, who did the same. But it was clear that the department was undergoing profound change. Secretary Tillerson was destroying the Foreign Service, a hundred and fifty seniors out of nine hundred being forced out or leaving in the first year, the fourteen months that he was in charge, he was cutting budgets. I think our specialists were down 8 percent, he reduced promotions.

He tried to stop new EFM [employee family members] hiring at posts. We worked to ameliorate the impact at post but let's face it, it was also anti women in its impact, and anti-family in its impact. And then, on the LGBT issues, Tillerson appears to have sought to tone down embassy gay pride celebrations. We did do something in Brasilia, but everybody was discouraged from raising the flag. We put the colors and lit up our entrance and did gay pride messaging online. I was speaking offline to our special envoy on the issue. It was a difficult moment.

The institution seemed to be crumbling, being undermined. So were Justice, Homeland Security, EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]—senior civil servant authority was being eroded, people were being beaten down, and actually that atmosphere trickles down and affects everything.

On the family and representational front, and after Kabul, Brasilia was something of a respite for Fatima. She was part of the local spousal diplomatic association but focused more on personal things. One issue she did help address was the faulty construction of the new ambassador's residence, where portions of the outer perimeter wall fell, wall-to-floor windows in the living room and living quarters crashed to the ground, drainage sinkholes developed on the property, and where the verandah roofing was little more than floating plastic flaps. I turned the issue into OBO, and the makeover since we left has required well over a million dollars of repairs.

On the positive side, Fatima and I had an excellent personal moment with a major exhibition of Jean Michel Basquiat that the embassy had not actually helped with. As one of the top American artists of the last forty years, it was an honor to be invited to address the opening of the exhibition, an incredibly moving experience for both of us.

The exhibition was like a positive affirmation for us. Fatima and one of our daughters had experienced racism inside our missions and schools throughout our career. Their experience is a scar I carry permanently, and I do not believe the department has done enough to address racism as opposed to diversity. I wrote about my views on racism at State in an article in the AFSA Journal of June 2020 called, "Changing mindsets on race at State." It has a lot of our personal experiences included.

But I also wrote in general terms about what Black, Latino, and Muslim colleagues went through, and about what seemed like narrowing leadership opportunities in the department at that time. I did acknowledge systems had improved but still believed there is underlying racism that had to be addressed more directly.

On a related issue, the cultural affairs section in Rio and in Brasilia came up with a terrific proposal to secure funding from the Ambassador's Cultural Fund program for the restoration of a wharf in Rio, that was no longer oceanside because the city had been built out into the water, but which was where up to a million slaves were brought into Brazil. The goal was competing for a grant of eight hundred thousand dollars, as we had done in Peru for a pre-Hispanic site, and the purpose was to restore it to remind people of the immense injustice of slavery, and of the complexity of Brazil's cultural and racial fabric. I helped make the argument, but it was a collective effort, and we were successful.

I'll stop there, but I think next time I can go into the period when presidential elections kicked in in Brazil. And we emerged with President Bolsonaro.

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Q: Good morning. It is February seventeenth, 2022. We're continuing our conversation with Ambassador McKinley. So Mike, you were talking about your time in Brazil as ambassador as the administration changed and the style and the substance of our foreign policy was changing pretty dramatically.

MCKINLEY: As we approached 2018, we moved into an election period in Brazil, and by 2018, I think it was very obvious what was happening in Washington. And it began to be clear to me that there was some interest there in whether the right-wing candidate for the presidency in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, stood a chance.

I didn't really connect two and two together at that stage. What I did feel early on in 2018, and if I remember correctly, elections in Brazil are in October. What I did feel early on was, despite the polls at the time, that Bolsonaro was a much stronger candidate than many thought.

Q: Why is that?

MCKINLEY: Because I sensed that the populist trend lines that were evident in the United States, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, a number of other countries in Asia, were growing in Latin America, and because there was great dissatisfaction in Brazil and why should Brazil be an exception? The worst recession in a hundred years, corruption inside the government, a succession of weaker presidents, a weaker Congress. So, an outsider politician certainly had a chance, and that was not unheard of in Brazil. In the late 1980s in the first democratic elections, an outsider named Fernando Collor won the presidential elections before being impeached for corruption.

And as we surveyed the landscape, worked with the political team, and I may have said this before, but I don't think I've said it properly. It's so important to depend on your local employees and particularly the ones in your commercial, economic, and political sections. There was certainly not a universal sense that Bolsonaro was moving up the charts and that somebody more conventional like Sao Paulo mayor Joao Doria was a more likely candidate for the center right. Lula, although in jail, had an ally in Fernando Haddad, who also seemed like a strong candidate for the Workers' Party. Staff at the embassy and consulates were maintaining contact with the candidates' offices.

Q: Let me ask you this. Did Bolsonaro emphasize in his campaign anti-corruption or more about more business-oriented policies?

MCKINLEY: It was anti-corruption. It was resurrecting Brazil. It was God and country. He touched on the social issues the way the Republican party does in the United States—guns, abortion, religion but in a Brazilian context. We met with other candidates, but as the campaigns progressed, Bolsonaro came more into focus.

I did meet Bolsonaro and I believe one of his sons was present, I walked away convinced this person could win. After he won the elections in October, I saw him in his home in Rio de Janeiro. And by then aware of Washington's strong interest.

John Bolton visited in late November, and did not touch base with Brasilia, and he wasn't particularly concerned with the government in power. He was much more interested in Bolsonaro. And as we all began to discover, there were Bolsonaro family connections to Steve Bannon and others, and there was an ultra-conservative commentator named Olavo

de Carvalho who lived here in Virginia, who was very influential with the Bolsonaros and had connectivity to the right wing inside the United States.

Bolsonaro was elected with broad support, 55 percent of the vote, but with only 10 percent of Congress being held by the party that put him on the slate. He did not, therefore, have the same power in Brazil as Trump had in the United States. What was clear, however, was that the bilateral relationship was going to deepen further, and the new foreign minister had been director of the Americas in the Foreign Ministry.

I left Brazil, but the DCM who worked with me, and was in charge for an extended period, was superb, Bill Popp, who is now ambassador in Guatemala. And he deserves tremendous credit for cementing and delivering on a lot of the issues I've already outlined in time for a Bolsonaro visit to the White House, I think in March 2019.

I accompanied Secretary Pompeo to Bolsonaro's inauguration. I saw Bolsonaro again at a G-20 meeting in Osaka in 2019. But what I will remember is the conversation in his house after the election in which he and I pulled away from the advisors and had a one-on-one. And he explained how he'd spent two years packing his own suitcase, traveling to all the states of Brazil, and building ground level support for his candidacy. And he would make his own decisions as president. The confidence carried him for a while.

Q: So one thing that gets press here about Bolsonaro is the change in lip service to preservation of the Amazon. Is that factual or is that just—

MCKINLEY: No, it's absolutely the case. And there has been damage to environmental protection because of the liberalization of regulations limiting business activity there and cuts in funding to environmental agencies and differences with key European donors who have suspended assistance. But there is a more widespread belief in Brazil that environmental protection and expanding economic activities can be balanced. Also, Brazilian environmental protection programs at government level are stronger than appreciated. Still, it was not my view when I was there, or afterwards, that balance was being met, and the rainforest cover was diminishing again. At the mission we worked to preserve our environmental assistance program from the broader disengagement from programs by the Trump administration, but we were not able to add new funding.

I could talk about Brazil more because I love the place, but I should probably stop there.

Chapter XV: Senior Adviser to Secretary of State, 2018–2019: Changes in the Department; North Korea; China and Indo-Pacific; Ortega and Nicaragua; Congo Elections; Venezuela and Guaido; Mexico Immigration Policy; Ukraine Scandal

Q. Continuation of interview, February 17, 2022

MCKINLEY: In May of 2018, it was already clear what was happening to foreign policy and that Secretary Tillerson's one year in charge had been incredibly destructive to personnel and process. Michael Pompeo was chosen to replace him. Pompeo was already a controversial figure for the department, because of the Benghazi hearings and attacks on Secretary Clinton. That at least was my memory of him at that point.

And yet here was somebody who had already been the head of the CIA under President Trump, who'd gone to West Point, who seemed to understand government, and he came in. When he was nominated, there was the hope that he could be better than Tillerson. I think one of the things people forget is how ideological Tillerson was. He seemed to despise the State Department. And he certainly believed like Trump that the bureaucracy was not on board with the policies of the government and needed to be tamed.

I remember sitting in my office in Brasilia at midday and being told that the head of the CIA wanted to speak with me. I had a first video conference interview, and then came up to Washington to see him.

The pitch was: join my staff. He said he wanted to rebuild the department with senior career people who were prepared to work with him. And because I never for a moment thought he would choose me, I was very direct about what I thought about Tillerson, what had happened in the building. I also said, I'm an independent, was not political, and would want to be free to speak out on what I disagreed with. And the answer back was absolutely, yes. I asked what would happen if we fell out? Would I be able to leave through the front door? I was already seeing how Trump was dealing with people who fell on the wrong side of the ledger inside the bureaucracy. He said yes.

I did make the case that I couldn't formally leave Brazil before the election. I didn't actually leave Brazil until November of 2018. For six months I would do roughly two weeks in DC and two weeks in Brazil. Pompeo seemed to understand the desire. I don't know whether he agreed with the importance, with the wish to finish the assignment in Brazil properly, but the fact is he agreed to let me do both jobs. In fact, much of my time back in Brasilia was to be spent on issues developing in Washington and elsewhere.

Before accepting, I spoke with my spouse Fatima and I spoke with friends and colleagues, and the universal reaction except for a couple of people was, Why are you going to do this? Reading between the lines, I saw some people decided I was coming out as a Republican. I was not, I was an independent. But there it was.

But speaking with my spouse Fatima and a couple of people whose opinions were important to me, we had certain views of how bad things were. But the counter argument was that if a four-time ambassador is too scared to take a chance to help the building when it's falling apart, then I would be letting the Foreign Service down.

I had other friends who saw Brazil as a great place to finish your career. I certainly saw it that way. But Fatima backed me 100 percent in coming back. Both of us were appalled by what was happening in Washington. And so here was the opportunity to try to help or go down fighting. We both realized that I could arrive in Washington and three months later be out of a job. We both realized that by taking it on, I was moving into a controversial political environment which could tarnish me.

On that second interview visit, Pompeo said that he was giving me the office next to him, where Tillerson had put his chief of staff, Margaret Peterlin, who had elicited a lot of negative reactions inside the department. I did not like the symbolism and did not want to sit there and said so, but that was the secretary's decision.

My earliest trip with him included joining a stop in Brussels in May where Pompeo was having meetings with the European Union and NATO I think, and I believe I may have joined EU meetings. I think it was on June fifth, 2018, that I flew off to Washington for the formal start and spent a couple of days in the building getting to know Lisa Kenna, the executive secretary of the Department. She was the only other senior Foreign Service officer on the seventh floor at that point with a certain level of authority. I asked who Pompeo was selecting to replace Tom Shannon as under secretary for political affairs. Eventually I learned the choice was David Hale, whom I knew from Afghanistan days when he was an effective ambassador in Pakistan.

June ninth in 2018 was my first full trip with Secretary Pompeo and President Trump. And it was to Singapore for the meeting with Kim Jong Un of North Korea. And the beginning of the North Korean-White House love affair as described by the president.

I had worked on conflicts and negotiations for much of my career, but this challenge with North Korea was on an entirely different scale. I poured everything into it, learning as much as I could about what was at stake. We left for first Quebec where the G-7 meeting was taking place. And Donald Trump was insulting our allies, including Justin Trudeau, the host. The secretary went onto Air Force One. I stayed with the rest of the team on the secretary's airplane as we all flew to Singapore.

We were in Singapore on the eleventh and twelfth of June. I was included in the lunch with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. An extraordinarily impressive person. And it was just fascinating to watch the dynamic as—and I was to see this on numerous occasions, watching foreigners trying to figure out how to deal with Trump, with the Trump administration. There was no warmth. There was no embrace. It was all calculation. As I mentioned before, I had experienced this sensation in Brussels after the Iraq war, but this was on another level.

So, the stage was set for the meeting with Kim Jong Un. The day before in the afternoon or early evening, I joined the secretary on a hotel floor with meeting space, and with him was Bolton. Later, there were people I knew, General Kelly, from his time at Southern Command, Steven Miller, Sarah Sanders, and others were present through the evening.

The big concern was that Trump was going to pull out of the meeting the next day. I am mentioning this because this anecdote was later reported by the *Washington Post*. But what struck me across those hours is how afraid Cabinet secretaries—grown men and women—were of the president. I had been invited to join a dinner with the team and the president, and he was a no-show. The dinner went ahead.

I began to get a taste for the court, if you will, of President Trump. I wasn't drawing conclusions one way or another, because these were very bright people, for the most part, and I did not see them as an aberration. This was the new normal of how a populist government in the United States was operating. The next day, I was at the meeting place for the summit, and saw both men greet, but was not part of the meeting.

Back in Washington, the question became how to set up the structure for the talks to come with North Korea. Because of the way Tillerson had run the building, and I believe Acting Assistant Secretary for Asia Susan Thornton was on her way out, and much of the bureau leadership was in transition. The most senior person at the NSC was Matt Pottinger, well-known in China circles, and leading on North Korea, and who would eventually become deputy national security adviser. He was professional and would be important to helping to manage the North Korea account.

And inside the State Department, it was important to define the role, and, preferably, its lead on negotiations. I worked with EAP, with politicals, and with the secretary helping to set up an office that could engage as a negotiating team, be part of the White House effort, and have the secretary in the lead, which I believed was essential.

By then I could quote chapter and verse on negotiations with North Korea, going back to the early 1990s, and I could see how there was in fact a strong element of continuity in what the Trump administration was attempting. Pompeo went to North Korea in July. I did not join him for that trip because I felt I needed to be in Brazil at that point. And I regret not doing so because we never went back to Pyongyang. The meetings were difficult, and the challenges of moving things forward began to become clearer. The excellent government political veteran Steve Biegun was named in August to be special representative for North Korea.

As I saw commentators in the media and experts on the Korean peninsula saying that Trump was getting ready to give away the store, I did not really see it that way, other than the questionable visuals and rhetoric being employed. The conditionalities that were part of this negotiation historically, all of them were still there. I worked initially with Steve on these questions, he was superb, and knew how to adapt to new realities and still preserve the USG objectives. There was also the opportunity of working with a South Korean prime minister who was invested in achieving a breakthrough.

It was a fascinating three months, but by the time September rolled around, any added value I might have on North Korea was gone. This was to be characteristic of my work with Pompeo, engaging for a time on an issue or policy and moving on.

I should backtrack because on that trip to Singapore, the secretary of state broke away. And we went to Beijing where we met with president Xi Jinping, and we went on to meet with the president of South Korea in Seoul. What struck me at that time was that because of the engagement in Singapore, the Chinese were listening.

As Pompeo made clear later, he is very hard line on China, but at the time, what I remember in the meetings with the foreign minister of China Wang Yi, and President Xi was that, although we went into some of the thorny issues in the bilateral relationship, the tone was correct, and the focus that time was on the North Korea talks. I remember those as moments where I thought there may be a chance of working with China on addressing some of our broader concerns. I was interested on a personal level in working on trade issues, only to realize over the months that policy approach was not in the hands of State.

South Korea did have preoccupations with our approach to North Korea. But by and large they were positive meetings, with a new president—Moon Jae-In who wanted a breakthrough with North Korea and with Foreign Minister Kang who seemed more skeptical about where the talks might go. She was an extremely impressive politician, whom I saw at least once again in the following year, and I certainly saw her as an extremely astute person and another one who was trying to figure out how to deal with the new Americans across the table.

When I was back in Washington, I would join the secretary's series of meetings, including a first restricted one in the morning around 7:30 am, and broader meetings with the seventh-floor leadership and under secretaries that took place perhaps once a week. There were very few Foreign Service people present, although Bill Todd was a senior civil service person who was acting undersecretary for management and eventually deputy secretary of management, a new position. Although Pompeo arrived to a building full of vacancies, he moved much more rapidly than Tillerson to fill positions.

Bill, Lisa, and I helped in that transformation, but it was clear Pompeo had staffing the building as a top priority. That included listening to our concerns about the need for formalizing deputy assistant secretary positions that remained empty awaiting assistant secretaries who were taking time to be confirmed. They were largely filled in the following months.

Key for Pompeo were his old business friends and classmates, to include the eventual under secretary for management, Brian Bulatao, and the counselor, Ulrich Brechbuhl. They had served in the military as well. The staff meetings in those early days were mostly politicals. My title was formalized as senior adviser.

What struck me as I settled in, when I attended what would become increasingly infrequent meetings the secretary would hold at the assistant secretary level, was the uncertainty and unease among the actings [mostly Foreign Service] and even some of the politicals. Pompeo exuded not just power but spoke very categorically leaving little space for discussion in that format. So, people picked up on that and later would ask me for advice on how to handle issues and meetings.

Things began to improve notwithstanding. Pompeo began to push through dozens of career officer nominations for ambassadorships which was important. Advice on policy flowed more freely. Promotions were restored to their former levels; family hiring overseas quietly returned to previous levels. There was no commissar on memos as there had been with Director of Policy Planning Brian Hook under Tillerson. Pompeo went to bat for two or three career people who were blocked by the White House. He met with embassy staff everywhere he traveled and was open to questions. Brechbuhl would personally track nominations from the department to the Congress and through the White House, on giant spreadsheets.

Q: What position did Brian Hook have?

MCKINLEY: He was moved to be the special envoy for Iran and worked professionally on that account. The deputy secretary, John Sullivan, was also a holdover from Tillerson. As I mentioned, the person brought in as under secretary for political affairs was a career officer David Hale, who had been ambassador in Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan. Various politicals filled other under-secretary slots. Our ambassador to Chile, Carol Perez, was brought in as director general. So, if you will, the two senior career people in the building were Carol Perez and David Hale. And in the wider mix were Lisa Kenna, Bill Todd, and me. What I began to notice was that there were no nominations of career people for assistant secretary positions or equivalents. Not even for administration, which normally went to a career person.

Pompeo and Bulatao did systematically fight for the budget for State, and despite OMB and the White House, there would be no further real budget cuts under Pompeo of the kind Tillerson carried out, in fact I believe the budget increased. Pompeo reopened hiring, with the help of Brian Bulatao and I guess Bill Todd, and Bulatao pushed for upgrading our IT capabilities to include rethinking salaries.

To repeat, things were improving in important ways. It was possible to discuss and debate policy more openly. I like to think I was helpful in writing suggestions on what could be done and speaking about certain issues, to front offices, to ambassadors who came in from the field, and being encouraging to include dissuading people from quitting and promoting others. But the fact is Pompeo, and his team knew things had to change and carried out the reforms.

Q: You worked on Indo-Pacific issues, on assistance in general or assistance in that region?

MCKINLEY: One of the trips with the secretary was in September 2018 and it was to India and of course it began to emerge as one of the centerpieces of our engagement in South Asia and East Asia as the policy on China crystallized. I worked with the bureaus in making the arguments for sustaining our assistance programs, which Pompeo wanted to cut at one point in 2018. I made strong arguments in support of continuing engagement which turned out to be helpful for the bureau and policy.

The issue was that there was still this furious effort at the White House to cut assistance around the world. Pompeo certainly realized the limits of that argument, and the new under secretary for economic affairs, a Californian and an IT businessman, Keith Krach, fully understood the importance of economic engagement with Southeast Asia and South Asia, not just on strategic concerns, not just through the Quad in which the United States, Australia, Japan, and India met. He and others were focused on regional economic integration questions. The goal was consolidating ties and building new ones in Southeast Asia as China also sought to expand its economic influence in the region.

Q: On that trip, did they try to reengage on the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement?

MCKINLEY: No. The TPP was dead, and it was not going to be resurrected. But it is fair to say the Indo-Pacific strategy was advancing, building on what Obama did.

A couple of other issues surfaced in that early phase, and I think I already spoke about Afghanistan.

I was also asked by the WHA Bureau to go to Nicaragua and see if there could be negotiations with the Ortegas in Managua on a transition and free elections. Ortega told me he had waited out X number of American presidents; we had tried to kill him; he was still in power; and he was not afraid of returning to the bush. I came away absolutely convinced there was nothing to work with there with him.

Q: This is the time when there were demonstrations and local opposition?

MCKINLEY: This meeting followed brutal repression and the killing of hundreds of people in protests in the summer of 2018. Our ambassador Kevin Sullivan and WHA DAS Julie Chung were also involved in the discussions. The only chance of doing something was working with people around him, but that outreach fizzled.

I'll do one other country, before we stop for the day. I was drawn into supporting the Africa Bureau on the elections that were contested in Congo. These elections took place also in January of 2019 and involved the first potential democratic transition in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or at least one not involving a violent overthrow or deposing of a dictator, and the elections had been forced on the then dictatorial president Kabila.

Kabila had a candidate who did not succeed. The other two main candidates were the son of historic opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, his son Félix Tshisekedi, and Martin Fayulu who was supported by a broader array of interests inside the Congo. The elections were seriously contested when Tshisekedi supposedly won by a few percentage points after cutting a deal with the president. There were widespread accusations of fraud.

There was debate inside Washington, and among European allies, particularly Belgium and France, about whether to recognize the results. Our embassy in the field discovered that the picture was blurred although the Catholic Church on the ground deemed the election results fraudulent after posting thousands of observers throughout the country.

The question then became a concern about potential civil strife or worse, a civil war. I am not going to get into further debate about whether this would have happened or not and whether the ballot was clean or not. There were strongly held views on this. But the debate in Washington was whether to recognize the election as announced or not. Kabila appeared to be threatening to stay in power. The AF Bureau believed that there was potential for serious violence. Having worked on Congo before, so did I.

I was enlisted to be supportive of AF and ended up in senior policy discussions, where there was discussion which leaked. I made the AF case for a soft landing, as opposed to having either a civil war erupt or have President Kabila stay in power indefinitely with all that meant. For people who know the history of the Congo, that potentially meant a lot. The French and Belgian governments also were reassessing the situation.

We ended up with Tshisekedi being inaugurated in the first, flawed it is true, the first democratic transition of power in the history of the Congo. It's largely been peace in the country since. I don't want to exaggerate. The decision to support the results as announced continues to be debated and was and is controversial. We still need greater clarity going forward on DRC. Many of the old problems are still there and evident. But widespread violence was avoided, and Congo appears to be on a better path.

Q: So we'll pick up next time with Venezuela, Ukraine, and whatever else.

MCKINLEY: Yes.

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Q: Good afternoon, it is February twenty-second, 2022. We are continuing to talk to Ambassador Peter Michael McKinley. Mike, we were talking about your year and a half in the State Department working with Secretary Pompeo. And I'd like to ask you about our policy toward Venezuela, because that was quite an active time as far as what we were doing on Venezuela.

MCKINLEY: In Venezuela, the newly unified opposition in late 2018 used a clause in Chavez's constitution to seek to deny recognition of President Maduro's reelection held

in May 2018, in a ballot which was widely viewed not only as fraudulent, but as illegitimate under that constitution.

The opposition began to coalesce sometime in the fall around the idea of not recognizing President Maduro's inauguration, which was to formally take place on January tenth, 2019. And it became very clear that this opposition effort to challenge Maduro was different. They unified around a person who was allied with long-time opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez. That was Juan Guaido, the president of the National Assembly.

I think the history books will analyze in much greater depth how Guaidó emerged as the compromise candidate to lead the National Assembly, but he did. And the decision by December was to push for international recognition of the president of the National Assembly to become acting president.

And this was certainly an important moment in the view of a fair number of people inside the administration who worked on Latin America. In the early days of January, I gave my strong view that if we hesitated on recognizing the National Assembly's actions, we might as well kiss goodbye to the ability of any organized opposition inside Venezuela. There were some in DC who were less certain about what to do. In the event, the national assembly took the decision not to recognize Maduro's inauguration and presented the international community, the United States in particular, with a decision to make on whether to recognize Guaidó as acting interim president instead.

A few days later, around January twenty-second, there was a decision by the U.S. administration to recognize President Guaidó as interim president, while still trying to sustain a dialogue with Maduro's government and keeping our embassy on the ground open. We were joined by Canada and Latin American governments in the Lima Group who followed course. Peru led the group, but it included a constellation of conservative and centrist governments, not just the Peruvian government under President Vizcarra, but also President Pinera in Chile, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Colombia under President Duque.

In the succeeding weeks, more than fifty governments worldwide to include much of the European Union recognized Guaidó as the legitimate acting president of Venezuela and called upon Maduro to negotiate and move forward with new elections that could decide the future of Venezuela. This was an unprecedented development. It is hard to find a comparable example elsewhere in the post-1989, or post-1945 world.

At the time there was great confidence in Washington, that it was only a matter of time before Maduro was convinced to step aside, given the array of international opposition, and what seemed like a unified opposition, and hundreds of thousands of people coming out on the streets in Venezuela.

Q: The demonstrations were in support of Guaidó?

MCKINLEY: Yes, and against Maduro.

Q: This was a time of great hunger and—

MCKINLEY: The Venezuela economy was in its period of greatest free fall. There were millions of people leaving the country, the exodus was accelerating. I can't remember at that stage whether we were at two million people who had left out of a population base of thirty-five million. We're at over five million now. Everything seemed to be coming together. And the United States was ratcheting up sanctions across 2019 to pressure Maduro to include sanctioning leaders inside the government, state enterprises, and eventually oil exports.

What happened was, there was an underestimation, and I will put myself in the mix, of just how strong the resolve was within Maduro's camp to hold onto power. There has been a lot of talk about Russia and China and Cuba offering Maduro support. None of that holds if you don't have something to work with, and Maduro was going to prove to be a more ruthless and efficient operator than we gave him credit for.

The first sign of trouble I saw was when there was a Washington decision to organize a cross border humanitarian relief effort even though the Maduro government controlled the border. The expectation was of a people's march across the Colombian-Venezuela border delivering humanitarian relief.

The assumption was that the Venezuelan people would rise and support Guaidó as this was happening, seeing the international community firmly behind a rescue effort for the Venezuela population that was suffering so greatly. I certainly didn't think that was possible at the time. In fact, I thought the initiative was naïve, but stepped out of the discussion. It was clear that the U.S. agencies involved did not anticipate that the Venezuelan government would react as quickly as it did in shutting down delivery and protests in different cities in support of the international humanitarian bridge.

The operation was a failure. And the impetus began to go out of public protests as the government began to crack down more effectively, break up demonstrations, began to harass opposition figures, and harassed our embassy which led to the withdrawal of our personnel from Caracas. This began to look like a much longer march.

As things proceeded, there was a last burst of efforts by the opposition to head off a developing impasse by reaching out to persons in Maduro's entourage including political figures, ministers, and most specifically people in the military and in the security apparatus, with a belief that they were prepared to break with Maduro.

There's been a lot of talk that what happened on April 30 was an attempted coup. I think that's too facile. The opposition entered a series of dialogues with key figures inside the government and the security apparatus who seemed inclined to jettison Maduro.

Importantly, the opposition developed a blueprint for engaging the government, which included liberal conditions both for Maduro to depart and for working with Chavez' socialist party of Venezuela and holding elections which would include government

figures. The transition would have included both opposition and government figures. This was a well-thought-through set of engagements, although there were other thoughts people inside the beltway had, including in Congress, about the right approach. It remains unclear to me the extent of USG involvement.

Q: Sometime in mid-2018, Senator Rubio came down to Costa Rica where I was posted, and he got together the ambassadors from the other countries that were relevant to talk about what to do about Venezuela. He was firm there would be no armed intervention. And I did ask him, are you working on a place for Maduro to go?

MCKINLEY: And what was the answer?

Q: I don't think I got one. (laughs) I didn't know what the chances were. But my sense, after working on Latin America for thirty years, is that it's really hard to get these people to leave if you don't have a good place for them to go. Anyway, that's just a side note. I take it from what you are saying that Senator Rubio was not really a major figure in the policy making in the Trump administration on this?

MCKINLEY: Rubio? I can't tell, but I think this was really being driven from inside the administration for the most part. With cheering from the sidelines, because at that point, the administration, Rubio and Menendez all wanted to see the change inside Venezuela.

In late January, a special representative for Venezuela was appointed. Elliot Abrams who's well known going back to the 1980s when he was assistant secretary for Latin America, and who was later in the Bush administration after 9/11 as a national security council director working on the Iraq invasion as well as other issues. This was my third time working with him. The political appointee Kim Breier was assistant secretary. Both apparently came to see me as a problematic player, which was far from the truth.

I certainly was giving my opinions on what was developing, which was what my job was as adviser to Pompeo. At one point, however, I went into the secretary and said I'm quite willing to step aside. I'm not interested in turf battles. But he gave me orders to continue doing what I was doing.

It's ironic, because all three of us were working in the same direction after the recognition of Guaidó. It's ironic because I can't think of a substantive difference between the three of us other than, there might have been differences of opinion over tactics but not the overall strategy or endgame.

April thirtieth was meant to be a big protest day, which would lead to change inside Caracas, in which the opposition would be joined by key persons in Maduro's regime. And in the event, something happened that changed the dynamic. In the event, Maduro and company were clearly aware and ready to crack down. Across April thirtieth, demonstrations were crushed. Security forces and political actors did not defect to the opposition. There were arrests, even as Guaido and Leopoldo Lopez displayed great

courage. And it became evident to me that this phase of transformation in Venezuela was over.

If I can inject a personal note, it was an extraordinarily sad day or two for me on a personal basis. I've tried over the decades, not to become personally invested in foreign policy issues. There've been exceptions. The emerging Somalia famine as I mentioned before was one of them. The torture of prisoners after 9/11 was another. On this occasion it seemed the opposition were on the cusp of a major victory for the continent and then they weren't.

In succeeding months, we went through a series of ratcheting up sanctions; the opposition was funded with national assets that were overseas; diplomacy continued. And for many months it seemed like there was unity of purpose in the international community to pressure the Maduro government to negotiate, but things slowly shifted. Maduro began to show that he was going to survive. Security forces and elements within them that had wavered now supported him, and his circle of political allies closed ranks. Washington's interest began to lessen. Corruption issues surfaced among the opposition.

There were also political changes beginning in Latin America too as elections took place. Lopez Obrador in Mexico, and Fernandez in Argentina were not as interested in challenging Maduro. And we faced a new dispensation, which was how to jumpstart talks with the government, but with a weaker hand. Conversations began with the Norwegians facilitating, as they have for so many peace negotiations in the world since the 1990s.

And fatigue set in. Europeans became less unified on how to respond to the situation in Venezuela. The Covid pandemic did its part in lessening the saliency of issues like Venezuela. And I think we can say, as we entered 2022, Maduro was in a stronger position, and the opposition weaker but still with the hope that talks in Mexico City can resume and be meaningful.

All very sad. It's extraordinary that we ended up with fifty plus nations recognizing a virtual government in the person of Juan Guaidó and the National Assembly. The right steps on ratcheting up sanctions were taken. There was the bravery and generosity of the Colombian government led by President Duque, welcoming millions of Venezuelans; as did Peru, Ecuador, Chile. But today's situation in Venezuela is a reminder of just how entrenched dictatorships can become even as their economies collapsed.

I'll move on from Venezuela. What would you like to discuss next?

Q: China

MCKINLEY: I worked peripherally on China, but what I saw was an interesting evolution from essentially a Trump administration believing it could reach phase one/phase two trade agreements with China and strengthen IPR, address forced technology transfers, open markets, and safeguard our economy from cyber and telecoms penetration, and then move to open confrontation. At the same time the administration

hoped to use inducements and pressures to attract American companies to re-shore in the United States or near-shore their operations somewhere else. You can argue with elements of strategy, but it was a strategy. At the same time Washington was hoping to have China cooperate with us on the North Korea negotiations.

At some point, as the situations in Hong Kong and Xinxiang worsened, and as trade talks stalled, those who argued for a more layered approach to China lost ground to Peter Navarro the senior economic advisor at the White House, and USTR Lighthizer, both of whom seemed to have support from NSA Bolton and Secretary Pompeo. The exchanges with the Chinese became tougher, including a second one I was in with the Chinese foreign minister. Our approach reflected the seriousness of our concerns, but it became clear that the leverage was less than the administration had thought it had.

Q: And before we go back to China, did the U.S. administration try a hardline with Russia?

MCKINLEY: Pompeo never embraced Russia, not in my presence. And he raised tough issues in a meeting I was in with Foreign Minister Lavrov. I certainly saw him at some variance with the White House in terms of how hard to deal with Russia.

Q: Thank you. Going back to China, I want to posit a hypothesis and see whether you share this view. It seems to me that the Trump administration came in with a more mercantile approach with countries like Mexico, the Europeans, and Japan, and took a hardball approach of mixing unrelated issues like immigration policy with trade stances. So they often had leverage to achieve changes to NAFTA or steel trade policy because of it. But the Chinese retaliated quickly, for example by stopping purchases from U.S. farmers and things like that. It seemed clear that the Chinese were never going to buckle, but the administration didn't see that. What do you think of that theory of the case?

MCKINLEY: You're absolutely correct. I did not speak at length about national economic issues with you before but certainly from the inauguration of President Trump, his approach to trade agreements, his renunciation of accords like the Trans Pacific Partnership, I viewed as historic mistakes that shut down the U.S.'s ability to influence international rules of the game on trade and investment, on IPR, on the future of cybersecurity regulation, on the technology questions we're concerned about. And to use the TPP to strengthen a common approach in East Asia to China's trade practices.

Renegotiating free trade agreements that were in place was one of the key objectives of the administration. And we browbeat South Korea and Mexico and Canada into doing so. It was ugly, but in both of those cases you could argue, there were necessary updates that were justified and were achieved. I sought briefly to suggest a different approach, but realized Pompeo was disinclined to spend time on issues where other secretaries led.

Q: Let's talk about Israel and Netanyahu.

MCKINLEY: Israel. I was on one of the trips to Israel at the table with Netanyahu and Pompeo. It was in the period when the decisions were being made on recognizing Jerusalem as capital, I can't remember if that had already been done. But what struck me watching Netanyahu, was the extent to which he was just a master at playing Americans. And he knew what to say, knew how to flatter, knew how to look like he was in lockstep, as he shepherded people towards the conclusions he sought. I think he was very good at reading our environment those years.

But I would like to try to correct the record on a couple of points. First, the idea that Jared Kushner was running Middle Eastern policy is overstated. He may have been very much the person who worked with the Israeli government on outreach to Arab governments. But Pompeo was dealing with the greater strategic issues of the relationships with Saudi Arabia, with the Emirates, what to do with Yemen, what to do on Syria, the six party negotiations in Northern Syria and responding to Iran. There was a lot going on, and the net result was a partial strengthening of our relationships with the Gulf states.

Q: It really is a striking outcome that Israel is starting to reach peace with much of the Middle East. So you mentioned Saudi Arabia.

MCKINLEY: Yes. Saudi Arabia.

Q: I'm just looking and I see Khashoggi was killed right before, or as you were coming into the department.

MCKINLEY: That is correct. I think many of us still feel very strongly about the Khashoggi murder and question whether the U.S. responded as forcefully as it could have. That said, what I saw was a sustained effort by our government agencies to find out what happened. The need for accountability was raised with the Saudi government at senior levels. Dozens of people were sanctioned by the United States. If we fast forward to what President Biden's administration decided on relations with Saudi Arabia, the approaches are not so dissimilar although the tone certainly is.

Q: Mexico.

I worked on Mexico. My personal belief is that the Trump administration was an inherently nativist administration. And because of larger irregular immigration flows at the borders, this impacted its approach to the relationship with Mexico, which is so much broader, and critical for the United States than this one issue, on so many levels.

The determination to cut the immigration flows was there from the start: the building of the wall, tighter entry controls, all but shutting down the refugee program. I don't know if I talked about that earlier, but I and others did argue against White House efforts to shut down the refugee resettlement program to zero intake. To me, the symbolism of shutting it down completely was beyond comprehension, but that's the pressure we were operating under even though we have been the world's leaders on refugee resettlement from time immemorial. We were fortunate to preserve any ceilings at all.

Q: Right. I heard recently from one of the resettlement NGOs that they had been asked to resettle more refugees in thirty days in 2021 than they had done during the whole year before. Key NGO partners on resettlement had been weakened so much, it took a long time to gear back up.

MCKINLEY: It really had a catastrophic impact on refugee resettlement infrastructure and the organizations that do it on contract for the PRM Bureau. We are still seeing the impact of it in the Afghan evacuation recently and all of the problems in speeding the process of resettling the Afghan evacuees. The administration also seemed to want to shut down foreign students, especially those from China, and then there was the Muslim ban.

The immigration concern meshed with the other big bilateral issue with Mexico, our economic ties. The updated free trade agreement [USMCA] had largely been negotiated by Pena Nieto. And Lopez Obrador had quietly agreed to it. I was in a last session with Pena Nieto, and a first one with Lopez Obrador in Mexico City with the secretary, Mnuchin, Nielsen, Kushner, and others. But it became evident to me that the next agenda was shutting down the surging stream of irregular migrants crossing the border.

And so, across a series of negotiations and conversations with Mexico, the goal was getting the Mexicans to do more, much more. There were decisions being made in Washington, like the Remain in Mexico provisions for asylum seekers, and which have only recently been pulled down. It was a conundrum. Stephen Miller and others also appeared to be using migrants as a polarizing racial and cultural wedge issue inside the United States.

I had my own views on what should be done, which included much more structured, accelerated, and humane asylum processing and deportation proceedings. And I favored amnesty for those migrants who have been in the United States for a long time, and more generous temporary worker programs. I was concerned about efforts to limit even legal avenues for immigrants seeking to come to the United States. But I did not support open borders, saw the surge in migrants as a serious concern, and thought we needed to improve entry controls.

The first series of discussions on migrant issues I was involved in were in December 2018. The goal was getting Mexico to more actively control the flow of Central American migrants across the Guatemala border, and to be more active in patrolling the Mexican side of the Mexico-U.S. border.

I joined the counselor of the department, Brian Brechbuhl, our Chargé in Mexico, John Creamer, and a DHS official in meetings with Foreign Minister Ebrard in Mexico as we sought an agreement in which Mexicans would do more, but where we would also make a contribution towards helping the development of southern Mexico and work together on programs for Central America. The other key component was agreement on the Remain in Mexico policy on asylum seekers that DHS and the White House were negotiating with Mexico largely independently of the State Department as far as I was aware. We

were certainly not there to negotiate the substance of that accord. I was fully aware that I was in the dark on the White House discussions on this policy.

At one point I did call back to Washington in the middle of negotiations in Mexico as we were pressed on amounts we could contribute for development. I asked EXIM for a commitment of two billion dollars for Mexico. It happened, and agreement was reached. But as we went into 2019, migration just soared creating new White House pressures on State and DHS to do something about the border.

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Q: Good morning, it's February twenty-fifth, 2022 and this is our last conversation with Ambassador McKinley. Mike, I think when we left off last time, we were talking about the discussions with Mexico on the large numbers of migrants coming from Central America. At that point, the administration felt a need to have an agreement with Mexico or protocols. So I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about that.

MCKINLEY: We had agreed in December 2018, but never seemed to really make good on contributing funding to some of President Lopez' projects in southern Mexico and to working together on funding for Central America in terms of the development needs. The Mexicans had made some commitments to enhance their security operations on not just the Guatemala-Mexico border, but on the U.S.-Mexico border. By spring of 2019, however, it seemed to Washington hardliners that they were not implementing Remain in Mexico. The Mexicans for their part saw DHS as lax and behind schedule on ramping up asylum processing and centers on the border. And they were right.

As a side note, I met with a couple of senior people from the Inter-American Development Bank who had spent years working on making the case for regularizing and improving transit conditions and controls on the Guatemala-Mexico border because of people-smuggling and drug trafficking issues. They never seemed to gain traction but came up with excellent ideas and I'm not sure they ever received funding for projects.

Implementation of the agreement, codified as the Migrant Protection Protocols in early 2019 I think, did not go smoothly. Or rather it did not produce the desired results. Migration numbers just began to surge in 2019. Inside of the State Department, inside of the Homeland Security, there were discussions with the Mexicans, but nothing seemed to stem hundreds of thousands of people coming across the border.

I remember that Brechbuhl, at his office on the seventh floor, used his long conference table to lay out tracking sheets on migration flows, he was such a methodical person. He would hold meetings with the assistant secretary, Kim Breier and others, do conference calls with senior DHS officials, and we would speak about what could be done to try and slow the flow, short of closing the borders. No one wanted that but there were what I and others thought highly unrealistic expectations of how quickly the migration flow could be shut off, let alone slowed. Our first-rate representative in Mexico, John Creamer, had

done an excellent job of developing relationships with the foreign minister of Mexico and other key officials which helped with understanding the evolving situation.

Q: John was the chargé d'affaires in the absence of an ambassador.

MCKINLEY: That's correct. And he conveyed the pressures Mexico was operating under. At the end of the day, we reached a point in late May 2019 where I guess it didn't matter to the White House what constraints the Mexicans government was dealing with. DHS was slowly enhancing infrastructure and personnel on the border but not fast enough. We reached a crisis point. And I believe it was on the thirtieth of May that President Trump all but threatened Mexico with a border closing. I don't remember if there was a specific timeframe given for reaching an agreement,

Q: But it was very public.

MCKINLEY: And he did some alarming tweets on Mexico on Sunday, June second. We were in Europe, Secretary Pompeo was visiting Switzerland, but we rushed back, and the Mexicans had gotten the message. They sent a senior delegation to Washington led by Foreign Minister Ebrard. John Creamer came up as well. Across that week, on our side we had White House Counsel Cipollone and future acting DHS secretary Chad Wolf engage. And other senior officials.

There was no give, there was a lot of pressure on the Mexicans to all but close their borders to irregular migrants, but the central issue was implementing Remain in Mexico policy for asylum seekers, in other words asylum seekers arriving at U.S. points of entry would have to remain in Mexico to have their claims adjudicated. It was anticipated this would bring down migrant numbers by tens of thousands.

Q: To be clear, you're still talking about this 2019 meeting in Washington.

MCKINLEY: Yes. It was so clear to me that we were not moving as the days progressed. The Mexican ambassador Marta Barcena was very good, and she and the foreign minister were also rightly firm on Mexico's sovereignty and Mexico's right to decide migrant matters inside its borders. But the mood in Washington was hardening.

I had a sense of how serious the White House was from Secretary Pompeo who had asked me to monitor the discussions and negotiations and that's what I did. And as we moved into the week, John Creamer and I grew concerned that a decision really would be taken to close borders, and that the Mexicans did not fully realize this.

John and I had separate meetings in off-site locations, not at the embassy or the Department, going into the Wednesday and Thursday, with the Mexican representatives including Foreign Minister Ebrard. It was a delicate time of explaining each other's realities. I will confess I was strongly sympathetic to Mexico and raised Mexico's concerns back in the department with the secretary. The moment was serious.

Q: Let's back up a little bit. Was there something that the Trump administration wanted the Mexicans to do in specific?

MCKINLEY: They felt Mexico had not fulfilled its commitments to police their borders. We had committed to establishing processing centers for asylum seekers and to tighten border security on the border ourselves but were not doing so well either.

We reached a crisis point on the Friday afternoon of June 7. I received instructions from the White House where the secretary was, to effectively stand down the talks, the borders would likely close that evening. I believe that Cipollone, who had joined the negotiations, received the same minutes later. I am not going to provide further details, but in the remaining three hours we worked professionally and quietly with Ebrard and his team. And we reached agreement around 6:30 that night. Colleen Hoey, the Mexico Office director, whom I had worked with for years and is a terrific colleague and officer, and Creamer were also critical to the break-through.

I left the building and received a call inviting me to join the foreign minister of Mexico, and I assume others, for a congratulatory phone call with Trump. I was glad I wasn't still in the department. We had avoided the border closure, which would have been disastrous for the Mexico-U.S. relationship, but this was a profoundly ugly moment.

I walked away from this, and I just thought I can't work on our policy towards Mexico anymore if this is all it is going to be about, and I certainly increasingly felt there was a strong undercurrent of prejudice which was deeply offensive on a personal level. It was the first time I began to seriously think about a deadline for leaving the department, and I thought I would ease out of State early in the 2020 election year.

That summer was busy. We visited the Emirates again. We went to Afghanistan, and to India, again. The Osaka G-20 meetings. We also took trips to Buenos Aires again, to Ecuador, back to Mexico City, San Salvador, meeting with Bukele, the Salvadoran president as he was coming in. That was also in July. The outreach to Ecuador and El Salvador was positive; Afghanistan was tense, meetings focused on the negotiations with the Taliban. G-20 meetings I attended, with the Chinese foreign minister among others, confirmed a hardening foreign policy line.

And then we went to Sydney, Australia to Sydney for the annual Australian-U.S. defense security high level dialogue which I had first attended a year earlier in Stanford. Watching the interaction of our delegation with the foreign minister and defense minister, both were women. And I thought they received less respect than they should have.

Q: You thought they were not respected because they were women?

MCKINLEY: Yes, that is exactly what I thought, but part of it was a result of disagreements on aspects of policy. Their pushback was impressive, but it was not a fun set of discussions. I remember being at a dinner that night, overlooking the Opera House, and I don't think the secretary was there. So, I was able to speak freely, and it was so

clear there was a major opportunity to expand cooperation with Australia in the Pacific islands and we did not take it on the way we should have. And only now, the Biden administration is seeking to.

There were things on Afghanistan to work on, which I think I covered earlier, and were disconcerting, particularly the invitation to the Taliban, quickly withdrawn, to visit Camp David. Bolton was out by the tenth of September as national security advisor. Pompeo seemed to visibly grow in confidence in his position, as if he had won the political battle for influence with the president. It struck me that this was a turning point for him.

Q: But you didn't know why?

MCKINLEY: Not beyond Bolton's departure, and at this stage what I saw had nothing with Ukraine.

Then came the annual presidential visit to the UN General Assembly in late September.

I went to New York on September twenty-first. The first reporting on the news on Ukraine—the whistleblower reports on the Ukraine calls, the extortion efforts against Zelensky, the president's comments about Ambassador Yovanovich—had come out in *Politico* and the *Washington Post* on the seventeenth and eighteenth of September. I thought then that the developing scandal would overshadow UNGA.

On Sunday, September 22 there was a reception hosted by the Bureau of International Affairs and Assistant Secretary Moley who had already drawn significant attention because of an OIG investigation into his management of the bureau. I had a private conversation with a senior career official, expressing my growing concern. I asked about what was happening on Ukraine, and whether the State Department was involved or whether it was just the White House and asked what was happening with Masha Yovanovich. He told me State was not involved, and I believed him as a Foreign Service officer who I assumed shared the concerns. I should not have.

I look back on that moment and realize something was wrong then. Perhaps there was an assumption I knew what had gone on. I only realized how much the person I spoke to and a couple of other career officials knew already, when I read the depositions before Congress.

UNGA started; on Tuesday, September twenty-fourth, Pelosi announced an impeachment inquiry.

I can't remember if that day was my first conversation with the secretary on the subject, or whether it was the next day. I spoke about this in my deposition. We were in the hotel towards midday. I said, the news reports raised serious concerns. Pompeo said in effect he did not have the details of what was being reported. I asked if it would be possible to support Masha Yovanovich publicly? The conversation was relaxed, but it became clear to me at that moment that the department was part of the story in some way.

Revelations began to cascade. On Rudy Giuliani's role, on Volker's role, who I'd known professionally, on Brechbuhl, I had not been included in Ukraine discussions over the months, so I was learning about what had happened from the media.

Thursday, the twenty-sixth, I grew more concerned. I spoke to the secretary very early in the morning, and said the situation was getting out of control, and we really had to put a statement out on Masha. It was a short conversation.

I saw what was coming out on Masha. Masha wasn't a close friend. I did have a lot of respect for her and had known her for a long time, I knew what the administration was like, and saw that Fox News was getting in on the act. I became concerned for her safety.

Q: Because of the rhetoric out of the White House and conservative media?

MCKINLEY: Yes.

Q: You thought that they would incite somebody crazy, somewhere?

MCKINLEY: Yes, that's right.

By Saturday, September 28, we were back in Washington. That day I went to my spouse Fatima and said, I could no longer continue to work with the secretary. I was going to resign. Given the way the administration worked we could be targeted; it was a very personal exchange about what could happen to us in the future.

I decided to make a more concerted push for a statement on Masha's behalf that day, and started by calling her and asking, would she welcome a statement, and whether anybody had called her. The answers were yes and no. I reached George Kent, the deputy assistant secretary in charge of Ukraine, too, who was being drawn in as well. And I started making calls and sending emails, to include the executive secretary, the director general of the Foreign Service, the acting assistant secretary for Europe, to the under secretary for political affairs. I called Dan Smith, a trusted colleague, who used to be the DG and who was head of FSI. Virtually everyone agreed that we should issue a statement. And then I contacted the press aide to the secretary: she took it to the secretary, and I was politely told to stand down. I began to place communications on email so that there was a record.

I went to the secretary on the morning of September thirtieth and told him I was resigning. I said it was the moment for me to move on. I mentioned Ukraine in passing but suggested we could put out a brief neutral statement saying I was leaving. The conversation was cold but correct. Since he was traveling to Europe, we agreed to speak again on his return.

The news cycle and the week just got worse. In the secretary's absence, the seventh-floor under-secretaries meeting was being hosted by the political appointee deputy secretary,

John Sullivan, the person who supported both Tillerson and Pompeo in what they had done to the building, and then was kept on by President Biden as ambassador in Moscow.

Sullivan did the usual round of the table. The focus was on issues like post-UNGA. Nobody said anything about Ukraine or what was building. I was almost the last person to speak, and I did say there's a lot bigger story out there, and it's having an enormous impact on the building, and we need to do something. No one responded. No one spoke up, including the senior Foreign Service persons there. And Sullivan was cold and dismissive and spoke about his experience during the Iraq war and said that supervisors should tell everyone to keep their head down and work. And everything was going to be just fine. He didn't mention the word Ukraine.

And then on Wednesday, October second, Trump invited China as well as Ukraine to investigate Biden. And the State Department's Inspector General, Steve Linick, took documents to Congress, which appeared to smear Masha Yovanovich among others, and came from Giuliani. I found this highly unusual to say the least from a person who had taken over a year to investigate allegations of mismanagement in IO.

I certainly grew more concerned on that Wednesday and sent a note to Pompeo in Europe asking to speak. I wanted an immediate announcement of my resignation. We spoke by phone on the morning of Thursday, October third. At that point, I said, I was not working for this administration, was not working for a president who invited foreign countries to investigate politicians. I went over the attacks on Masha. I talked about the failure of the OIG to act forcefully on the allegations against IO. The conversation was direct.

That same day Counselor Brechbuhl and Under Secretary Bulatao came to see me separately and asked about my concerns and said the secretary had not spoken to them. It was surreal, and I realized that I was being played.

Q: It seemed as if the administration was trying to keep people from the State Department from talking to Congress.

MCKINLEY: That's correct, or at least my impression.

Q: That would have been tough to achieve. Career State people are well trained not to deny requests or subpoenas from Congress. So maybe Pompeo and his team were concerned, when you were leaving, about what you planned to do on speaking publicly.

MCKINLEY: Separately, George Kent, who as I mentioned was the deputy assistant secretary for Ukraine in EUR, and I spoke. All this is a matter of public record from the depositions. He was preparing for a likely appearance on the Hill and had been told by department lawyers he faced restrictions. He sent me a message on what he was facing.

I decided to raise this additional aspect of what was happening and use email to create a record. On Friday, October 4, I went ahead and sent a message, if I remember correctly, to Hale, to Marik String [the acting legal advisor], and eventually to Sullivan [it is in my

deposition], and basically said that lawyers seeking to intimidate officers was an unacceptable situation, we had to correct course. No one answered. Later, thanks to David Hale's deposition, I discovered he went to the secretary that weekend and said I was becoming a morale problem for the building.

It is hard to convey what the atmosphere was like on the seventh floor. Certain people stopped speaking to me. Every morning I went in expecting to be locked out of my office. By then I'd gone to Carol Perez to ask for assistance expediting my departure.

On the weekend of October 5-6, on Sunday night, Brian Bulatao called me and asked me to write up a paper that he could present to Pompeo, to use in the senior staff meeting the next morning with assistant secretaries and under secretaries. Bulatao said that I could outline my proposed courses of action for the department on the Ukraine scandal.

I thought about it and decided to do it in person. I spoke to Bulatao on the morning on Monday before we went into the meeting with the secretary. I said to Bulatao that Pompeo should support career professionals, clarify policy on Ukraine, and pledge to work with Congress. The staff meeting later that morning was short and intimidating. Senior career people found it disconcerting. One compared it to a politburo meeting.

I met again with the secretary later that day, and the next. As you can imagine, they were difficult discussions. On Thursday, October 10, I told Pompeo that the system had processed my paperwork. I was processed out in less than five days, when it can take weeks, thanks to Carol.

The *Washington Post* separately got word of my departure on Thursday night. It was in the newspaper on Friday and any possibility of a quiet departure was over. I had one last conversation with the secretary, where it was clear he thought Ukraine was being blown out of proportion.

By Saturday morning, I was getting emails from the congressional committee investigating. And I said I would be happy to sit for a deposition. I was not going to be subpoenaed, I had done nothing to hide. I was then told by a friend and Fatima to get a lawyer; I did not know why I should, but eventually was convinced, and by Sunday night it was John Bellinger, a principled, exceptional person who was once the legal advisor for State in President Bush's administration. And he certainly got me through everything.

I was up on the Hill on Wednesday, October 16. Afterwards, it was recommended I release my statement, but I decided not to since it was supposed to be confidential. I should have in retrospect since it came out anyways at a later date. I was skeptical that the committee would be able to reach a result and said so to Representative Adam Schiff and his committee legal counsel Dan Goldman.

Let me just close with what I saw in the building in those last few months, and thereafter from outside, which I wrote about in *The Atlantic* in October 2020 on "The Final Politicization of State". Sometime in early 2019, the atmosphere began to change in the

building. There were several departures. Most of them women, political women from positions of authority. Minority appointments were virtually non-existent. No career people were promoted to positions at the assistant secretary level. I was told that a couple of the political advisers and assistant secretaries there were people who went after my loyalty and reliability, all but accusing me of being Deep State. It happened again as I left the building.

The seventh-floor leadership was also openly questioning the commitment of the State Department. I heard it in meetings that included the principals. And they began working on a professional ethos for the State Department, the big banner that was later hung in 1933 style in the entrance of the State Department. If people could see the first drafts of the statement, I think they would be surprised at what they suggested about their perception of the lack of professional ethics, let alone loyalty, of the Foreign Service.

And I certainly made my opinion known then, to several political and career seniors, that we didn't need a professional ethos, but I was not included in further discussions. But I saw and sensed a growing unease more generally within the Foreign Service at that year's chief of mission conference.

A climate of fear returned to the building by the summer, and policy discussion again became less open even before the Ukraine scandal altered the relationship of the seventh-floor leadership to the building. Successive AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] presidents, Ambassadors Barbara Stephenson and Eric Rubin, did stand out for their courage in speaking out on behalf of the building. And those of us drawn into congressional hearings owe AFSA and many of our colleagues a tremendous personal debt for paying our legal fees.

I already had my own feelings about what was happening more widely in the administration. Institutions were being undermined everywhere. For a long time, I thought I was more useful to the department and my colleagues staying in rather than being out. Until it became clear that I was not. Fatima would say I was being used as cover, and I would debate her, but it certainly felt more and more that way.

I look at the four years as extremely destructive to the department. Tillerson dismantled processes, historical memory, systems, people, and gutted the leadership level. Pompeo restored a lot of that. But by the end he was politicizing the building even more.

My final comments on the work of the congressional committee are that it did not come to an effective conclusion. I have written articles on this in *Just Security*. President Trump just grew stronger.

The after-effects of Ukraine are still with us. Today, State's leadership could do more to address accountability for what happened and build in protections for what may come again. Morale of course recovers. It's a better working atmosphere. People can believe in what they're doing.

But they're not assuming that systems won't change after another election. The proposal for a Schedule F for civil servant appointments being circulated could destroy impartiality in the bureaucracy, as soon as there is a change of party in the White House. Guardrails need to be established to protect the integrity of federal institutions. And we can start by addressing what happened to the department in the Trump administration. It is not enough to turn the page as though that period was simply an unfortunate moment. It can happen again.

There is also the wider context inside the U.S. for what happened at State. The U.S. had already spent much of the previous fifteen years consumed by the "forever wars" as the rest of the world was transformed, and we took our eye off more important challenges, to include a rising China and a still formidable Russia, something I have written about before. State was not and is not immune to the ongoing political and social polarization domestically, or to the profound economic transformation underway. Much of what the previous administration did, and much of the debate in today's Washington was and is part of the global challenge that is still underway to the post-1945/1989 world order.

The Biden administration has clearly thought through the implications and carried out a broad range of initiatives to rebuild alliances, reengage multilaterally, and meet transnational challenges. But there is a long way to go in defining a new foreign policy for our time. The challenge remains to the post-1945 international order defined by the emergence of liberal democracies, open markets, globalization, security alliances, and a codification of universal human rights. In other words, the challenge is to the interests and ideals which had driven much of American foreign policy for almost seven decades.

In short, the department should take that hardest of looks at itself and prepare for a very different future. We also need new blood and new ideas at State. Give the next generation a chance before it's too late.

Q: Well, it was certainly quite a ride Mike. You had some tough times from the beginning and in the middle, you did some extraordinary things in four ambassadorships where in each of them you felt valuable, and you did help steady the department for a little while. So, I know that at the beginning, when I induced you to do this interview, I promised you it did not have to be butterflies and unicorns. Thank you.

End of interview