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

ANNIE PFORZHEIMER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is May 29, 2019, and this is an interview with Annie Pforzheimer?

PFORZHEIMER: Pforzheimer.

Q: Would you spell that?

PFORZHEIMER: P-F-O-R-Z-H-E-I-M-E-R.

Q: What's the Pforz? It's- something from what would be your hometown or-?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh. The Pforz part of Pforzheimer?

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: Nobody knows. The theories are maybe a little bit Latin of door, or "Port".

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: But it's a mystery. And there's a city called Pforzheim.

Q: Okay, well, that's probably- Pforzheimer would probably mean you're from Pforzheim, yes.

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, yes.

Q: Okay. Well, to begin with, let's start off when and where were you born?

PFORZHEIMER: September 8, 1964, in New York City.

Q: In what city?

PFORZHEIMER: New York.

Q: New York.

PFORZHEIMER: New York, New York.

Q: Yes. Alright. Let's first get a little about your parents. What's the background of your father and his family?

PFORZHEIMER: My family has been in New York for a number of generations, and they came to the United States in the mid-1840s on my father's side, and somewhat later that century on my mother's. And they're part of the kind of German-Jewish establishment, with ties to Wall Street. So, my dad was raised in Purchase, New York, and spent a few years in Washington when his father was working as a civilian at the Pentagon during World War II. And otherwise, he's a New Yorker. And my mother was raised in Manhattan as well.

Q: Alright. Where did your mother's family come from?

PFORZHEIMER: They also come from Germany originally and less clear on exactly when they arrived. Her father's family settled in Ohio and her father went to Princeton and stayed in the East Coast after he graduated.

Q: And how your father, where did he go to- did he go to college?

PFORZHEIMER: My father went to Harvard. We have a fairly significant family tie to Harvard, and he went there.

Q: What was his major, do you know?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, he was an English major.

Q: And your mother went to- did she go to-?

PFORZHEIMER: She went to Wellesley, and she studied economics.

Q: So, you're very much from the Eastern establishment.

PFORZHEIMER: I am very Eastern establishment.

Q: I went to a boys' school in Connecticut, Kent, and then I went to Williams, so we talk the same language.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, very Eastern establishment.

Q: Well, let's talk about growing up in New York.

PFORZHEIMER: I didn't grow up in New York City; I grew up in Scarsdale, which is sort of a bedroom community about 20 miles north from New York City.

Q: What was it like there for a kid?

PFORZHEIMER: Dull. Safe. Conformist. Very pretty. Very leafy.

Q: Let's talk about early schooling first; what was that like?

PFORZHEIMER: Not remarkable. It was a very- it's a very wealthy suburb. Somebody asked once did I go to- was it a private school? And the answer is no; it's a private town—and a public school. So, it's a very nice place to grow up, first-rate education. They really put a lot into it. Early school years were nothing that remarkable, but in high school we had a couple of really significant and gifted teachers who, I think, were really helpful to me, putting me in a direction.

Q: Who were they? I want to give their names and also what they were teaching.

PFORZHEIMER: Sure. We had a man named Eric Rothschild, who taught advanced placement American history, and he just died actually, a couple of years ago, but he was one of the greatest teachers I or a lot of other people had ever had. And then, another teacher, a team teaching was a man named Warner Feig, who had been a World War II refugee and his counterpart was a woman named Judith Oxner, and they would teach European history and a couple of other classes, but they did it in a way that demanded the students really argue for what they believed in. They would challenge you to not just take a safe point of view.

Q: Well, let me move back to the family. Is your family Jewish?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Was it- how important was religion for you?

PFORZHEIMER: I think it was moderately important. There were some aspects of it that seemed to not have great meaning for modern life, but there are other aspects, and this is Reform Judaism, which tries to adapt itself to modern ways, there are ways in which I admire the principles and the values of Judaism. My own rabbi had been active in the civil rights movement and it felt meaningful in that sense, the social justice side of it.

Q: Well in school, when were you in high school?

PFORZHEIMER: I was in high school from '78 to '82.

Q: At home were you much of a reader?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Yes.

Q: Can you think of any books that left an impression on you?

PFORZHEIMER: I was pretty omnivorous, and I read a lot of junk as well as good stuff. I remember trying to read "All the King's Men" when I was too young for it. I read just, I don't know, a lot of everything; "The Color Purple" and other books that were popular then. If I came across a lot of titles, I might be able to say which one is important, but actually for me, I remember a lot of what I read, and it sinks in. And I sometimes don't even know why I think about something a certain way until I read a certain book again.

Q: Well, how important, sort of the Jewish experiences in Europe during the Hitler time, I mean, in your family; was this talked about a lot?

PFORZHEIMER: It wasn't talked about a lot in my family because in part it wasn't of primary impact to my family. There were no family members affected. But it was talked about a lot in my synagogue, a lot, and kind of became, I would say, the recurring theme about assimilation, that we shouldn't become assimilated in the United States with Christian culture, that we shouldn't trust it because that's what happened in Germany.

Q: Well, I mean, it's a horrific experience. Were there people in your class who were the children of escapees?

PFORZHEIMER: No, actually, not.

Q: Well, in high school, what were you, was sort of your major?

PFORZHEIMER: Academically I was most interested in the history and political science areas and English, and then what I did with my time was theater. I did tech, backstage, scenery, painting, construction.

Q: You did what?

PFORZHEIMER: The technical side, like the scenery and the backstage and all that.

Q: Did you put on any productions, were you involved in any productions in high school?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, yes, lots. Plays, nothing you may have heard of. But I was backstage, I was helping to run the show and do the painting. I did a lot of art in those days, so it was also just the design.

Q: Well then, I take it you'd say you were a bright kid?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I was a bright kid.

Q: Did that cause problems or not?

PFORZHEIMER: No. It was a pretty academically focused high school and being bright and being on the route to a good college was a very happy thing. It was a well-accepted thing. You know, I wasn't gorgeous, and I wasn't particularly sophisticated, so I probably wasn't as popular as I might have been, but I definitely didn't feel out of step.

Q: Well, you say you were on the college track. I mean, I take it that an awful lot of the Scarsdale High kids were on the college track.

PFORZHEIMER: It's 95 percent or something, go to college. So, it's accepted as what you do.

Q: Did you know where you wanted to go?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I knew I didn't want to go to Harvard -- and that's where I ended up going.

Q: Why didn't you want to go to Harvard?

PFORZHEIMER: Because I didn't want to follow the rest of my family, which is something of a lifelong theme for me, but that was the best school that I got into and it was, I thought, a way for me to be around a lot of opportunities to figure out what I wanted to study and what I wanted to do.

Q: Well, you were in- what years were you at Harvard?

PFORZHEIMER: '82 to '86.

Q: By the time, this is going back to high school, Vietnam, did this play much of a role or was it pretty well over or-?

PFORZHEIMER: It felt pretty well over. I think the conflicts that caught my attention growing up were the beginnings of the Central America conflict, Cold War and what happened in Chile, Argentina, with U.S. intervention. You know, the shameful role of the United States, as I saw it. And one of my earliest influences was Jimmy Carter and his emphasis on human rights, and that seemed to be the way that it should work, that you should use this considerable power of the United States for something good.

Q: Civil- sort of integration and all that, that was pretty well over by, I mean, it wasn't a particular subject-?

PFORZHEIMER: No, it wasn't. When I was in high school I did a two-week student exchange to North Carolina, to Charlotte, and that was very eye opening in that it was a place that had been subject to busing, and there was a lot of anger, 1981, so they were still kind of a little more flagrant in their racism. But, at the same time, they pointed out to us that we were very preachy without knowing very much of what we were talking about. At one point someone said to me, well how many black kids are in your school, and a little ironically, my crew from Scarsdale started to name them, because we knew each one of them because there were about seven. So, it was not the same as having some kind of race balance or relationship, it was a white school with six or seven African-American kids in it.

Q: Well then, let's go to Harvard. When you went there, how did it strike you when you first- I mean, you've obviously been around, you knew what it was and all that, but how did- what were your sort of initial reactions when you were part of the institute?

PFORZHEIMER: I think I remember mostly feeling overwhelmed. I have a personal tendency to shut down a bit with sort of things that are loud and crowded, and that was a lot of the school and college activities. It's a big place and you have to have, I think, a fair amount of self-confidence to shine. So, I did find enjoyment in my classes, and I had friends and I did theater, but I never really felt like I was kind of ahead of the wave. It was always feeling like I was catching up.

Q: One of the things we examine here is the changing role of women over the years in doing this. But what about at Harvard and women there at that time and how did you find it?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, when you're inside an experience, right, it's sort of a truism to not know what you're not seeing. I think, looking back, we were well accepted, our presence was well accepted. We were not, by any stretch of the imagination, the first group of women in the Ivy Leagues. That had happened 10 years before. So, there was never the sense that I had to justify my place there. I think it was not that difficult. You could shine academically; gender was not an issue. There may have been cases here and there where leadership roles in organizations were taken by men and their kind of swagger was a little bit more valued, but it didn't feel, and it still doesn't feel like I had a hugely different experience there.

Q: You didn't feel that the men, boys or whatever you want to call them, tended to grab the microphone? In other words, you know, try to dominate.

PFORZHEIMER: You know, I think that's fair. I'm sure that they did. But it didn't make me feel any more stifled than when the women grabbed the microphone. It was more, for me, that Harvard didn't handle relative introverts all that well. I mean, I took a women's studies course, a seminar that was all women; I had opportunities to shine. I think I did more or less everything that I wanted to do there.

Q: Well, I'm interested. I've always been suspicious of the women's seminar and all; usually I somehow think of it, and I'm probably wrong, of bitter divorced women professors teaching it. But no, I mean, I stand ready to stand corrected. How did you find this?

PFORZHEIMER: Neither bitter nor exuding divorce. And by the way, in high school, the same teacher, Judith Oxner, team taught a women's studies class there, which was excellent, and had given me a foundation of looking at the gender issue.

I have to tell a little story, not about myself, but one day one of the women in the class came in and she was wearing a cheerleading outfit, and Ms. Oxner said to her, what on earth are you doing? You're going and cheering for boys; what's up with that? You know, why are you wearing this, you know, your so-called school spirit, blah, blah, blah, and was giving this girl a hard time. And finally she repeated, why are you wearing it? And the girl replied because I want to. And the teacher said "oh ok, fine." I mean, that's it. It was the kind of feminism where if what you wanted to do was wear a cheerleading outfit, perfectly okay, just do it out of your own volition.

So, the women's studies seminar in college was a history seminar. And it was not so much about how to behave or what to think now, but it was a different way of reading history and re-inserting women's perspectives. And I think putting it together now, I would say that as a political officer, my history studies background was always useful because I was studying history at a point in time where the study of history itself was changing. You know, where they were looking at slave narratives and women's studies and those different ways of seeing the great man trek, I learned how I could better integrate the powerless or outsider perspective into reporting.

Q: In your studies, did foreign affairs play a role?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, it did. My senior thesis was written about the United Nations and the very first case of sanctions at the United Nations, which was against Spain, and the fact that they were imposed in 1946 but then they were revoked in 1950 because of the Cold War realignment. So, I didn't study international relations exclusively, but it came into it.

Q: How did the, maybe even in high school and all, how did the Soviet Union play in your thinking?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, I saw it as a place with a leadership structure that was inimical to human rights and I didn't have sympathy for it. But I also thought that our leaders were using it in order to justify excesses and that that was equally wrong in its way, that there was this kind of sloppy thinking that your enemy is so bad that you can do anything to oppose it. And it really, I was influenced in part by the film "Missing," that was about the Chilean coup and the American role covering it up.

Q: Oh, yes.

PFORZHEIMER: What that movie and current events showed was that in our anger at the Soviet Union we were going forward and making friends with anybody and justifying anything, so I didn't feel like the Soviet Union was good, but I also didn't think that we should be doing all that we were doing.

Q: I know, I saw the movie "Missing" too, but I had a different reaction. But I was in the system and as a consular officer, and to see a consular officer basically selling his constituents, American citizens down the river, just seemed, I mean, it just wasn't- there wasn't a bone in my body, my consular body that would have done that. And I mean-

PFORZHEIMER: Well, it was fictionalized heavily, right?

Q: It was always fake, but it was very emotional.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: And it represented things that are very black and white in a situation. But anyway.

PFORZHEIMER: No, I agree. And I mean, I saw it at an impressionable point, and I was not in the system. But you know, everybody has something like that, right, that they see that sticks with you.

Q: That black and white business hasn't gone away.

PFORZHEIMER: No.

Q: Well then, were any courses at Harvard particularly interesting to you?

PFORZHEIMER: It was a blur. It was, you know, there were big survey courses, a science course that I took taught by a Nobel prizewinner was brilliant, but I just, I didn't feel as much ownership of my education as I should have. So, plenty of things were interesting in their time. A Shakespeare course, which I loved, and wow, what else? It's totally embarrassing. I mean, I took Latin American history, which was useful. Maybe I'll remember it at some other point, but right now it's really notable to me that nothing catches fire.

Q: Well, it's interesting. I sort of have the same feeling. My college education was a good education and all, but I can't say I was- came out charging.

But now, what were you thinking about as you were getting close to graduation?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I did some useful elimination of what I didn't want to do, particularly theater. I went to Williamstown, in your old stomping grounds, for a summer, and I served as an apprentice in the very good summer theater there.

Q: Adams Memorial Theater.

PFORZHEIMER: No, it's the Williamstown Theater Festival.

Q: Oh, yes.

PFORZHEIMER: And I learned from that summer that I had no business being in theater. And actually, I probably, on some levels, this was part of the Foreign Service, I also had no business being in and I stayed away from them, but high pressure, you know, screaming supervisors, get it done, that kind of behavior, it turned me completely off. I do like working on things that have deadlines, I don't want to sort of just meander, but I am definitely not attracted to what some people love in State Department, which is this sort of high adrenalin, you know, those types of jobs.

Q: Yes, yes. Speaking of theater, I could say that I was- did props for the thing, including working on a play, or a musical my classmate, named Stephen Sondheim did. I mean, I was just a flea over in the corner, but anyway.

PFORZHEIMER: Wow. Well, his-

Q: My big claim to fame is my class.

PFORZHEIMER: That's really amazing. And of course, his stuff was so popular with my theater crowd. Wow, that's cool.

And I also eliminated during college the idea of being a lawyer by shadowing an alumna who was a lawyer, for a week. They had a good program at Radcliffe for female students where you could be matched up to somebody over spring break and just see what they do, and it took me a week and I realized I didn't want to be a lawyer. So, those were useful eliminations.

Q: Why didn't you want to be a lawyer?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, it just seemed tedious. It just was so much work with documents and nothing about it thrilled me or interested me.

Q: Most of the time, law seems to be often the fallback position of everything. In Italian they call it a parcheggio, a parking spot.

PFORZHEIMER: Ah, yes. Well, half my classmates, it seemed, became lawyers because of the security, and you know, I had freedom, I had financial comfort so that I didn't need

to rush into something. So, during college I learned about the Foreign Service, I'd never known anybody in it, but I knew what diplomats were. And I went to the career center and was poking around and found a booklet and the booklet had a description of the job and it had a little practice test. I took the test on the train going home for the summer and did really well and thought oh, right, this is apparently what I've been studying and what I might be good at. And so, I took the exam my senior year and I did not pass.

Q: Is this the written exam?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, I took the written exam. I did pass that, but then I didn't pass the oral. And so, I graduated, and I decided to have an adventure and I went off to Australia, rather than starting to work.

Q: I want to go back to the oral exam. Do you recall the first oral exam and what went right, what went wrong on it?

PFORZHEIMER: What went wrong was that they asked me a question about economics. I had never taken an economics course and it was a question that I couldn't fake. I mean, it was like the person spoke Latvian. I didn't know any of the terms that they used. I would have gladly done something with any question you gave me, but it was just full of words I didn't understand. So, I couldn't even fake the faking. And that just stopped it right there. And what I did after that, and this is when I was back from Australia and living in Washington, I took an economics course, I took two actually; I took one over the summer and then I took another one at the U.S. Department of Agriculture graduate school. And then, when I took the exam again, I was better able to fake it.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about Australia. What tempted you to go there and how did you find it?

PFORZHEIMER: What tempted me was "The Thorn Birds" probably more than anything else, or books, you know, "A Town Like Alice," a couple of really great books about Australia, the concept of it being so far away and the ability to do something that was very far away from a little bit of an overwhelming sense of my family, which had kind of crowded in on me. And it was English speaking, so easier to navigate. It was relatively safe if I was going to go by myself, which I did. I tried to get a fellowship to go there; that didn't work out, so I just paid for it and spent six months there.

Q: What did you do?

PFORZHEIMER: Some of the time I worked in a political office of somebody who was a Harvard alum. I worked for free. He was the shadow speaker of the house in the New South Wales parliament. So, I lived in Sydney and I had a place to go and I had people to talk to and I wrote things and tried to be useful. It was just interesting. And then, the rest of the time I traveled.

Q: How did you find Australia at that time was dealing with diverse ethnic populations and all that?

PFORZHEIMER: They were terrible at dealing with diverse ethnic populations. This is 1986 to '87. They were racist unapologetically, and preachy about the rest. You know, there was no foreign food. Anything that was foreign was either Chinese or Lebanese. And yes, they were a long way from where they are now.

Q: Did you go to the embassy or consulate?

PFORZHEIMER: No. I took the Foreign Service exam a second time at the consulate in Sydney, but I didn't really speak to anybody.

Q: How'd you do in that?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I passed it again and that set me up to be able to take the oral exam for a second time. But I didn't pass in the political cone; I passed only, I think, in the management cone. So, when the time came, I took it a third time so that I could qualify as a political officer.

Q: Well then, you came back after what, eight months or so in Australia; then what did you do?

PFORZHEIMER: I spent a summer living in Philadelphia, subletting a friend's apartment, taking that economics course and just trying to find a job in Washington, in those days, by sending typewritten letters. I took a class on how to write a resumé and I was just job hunting from Philadelphia and enjoying myself. Did not want to go back to New York and stay at my parents' house, etcetera. And then, I moved to Washington that September.

Q: Had you found a job?

PFORZHEIMER: I did. I found a job, my first job, which was with the Inter-American Foundation. And I told them I spoke French, which was not completely 100 percent true, and that I would learn Haitian Creole; that didn't really work out either. But otherwise, other than that I was a very good employee.

Q: Well, you've mentioned a number of courses or brushes you've had with Latin America; did you ever travel there before?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, I had been to Mexico when I was 15 with my Girl Scout troop, bizarrely, but other than that, I think no. And my family went to Puerto Rico once, not Latin America. So, I had started learning Spanish in high school and when I went to Mexico that one time, I was really charmed by how welcoming people were of me using

my language, so it left a really positive impression. But no, other than that I had never been to anywhere in South America.

Q: Well then, what were you doing at this international organization?

PFORZHEIMER: The Inter-American Foundation.

Q: Inter-American.

PFORZHEIMER: It's a small U.S. Government agency. It is congressionally mandated, and it was founded in the '70s as a bit of a reaction to AID (United States Agency for International Development). It has a "bottom up" development ethos, so essentially, we would get project descriptions, requests for money from, like, fishing cooperatives. And the area I worked on was Haiti and the Eastern Caribbean. They would write a letter saying we want to buy a shack so we can put in a refrigerator and then we can sell our fish for more money in the market, and this is the amount that we are going to get from our local government and this is the amount that we're going to put in through our labor to build the shack, and we would like your help with bringing the electrical line to the road. And the idea was "they know how"; that is, poor people know what they need. And you didn't give to governments, you gave directly to these grassroots organizations. And I was an administrative person doing the paperwork, the travel vouchers, keeping the records and supporting two field representatives who would travel. And there was no structure overseas. It was all Washington-based, so they would travel, meet these groups and make decisions about funding.

Q: How long did you do that?

PFORZHEIMER: For a year and a quarter.

Q: And in the meantime, you'd taken the exam?

PFORZHEIMER: Exactly. I took it another time.

Q: How was the oral exam? Could you understand economic Latvian?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I was better at faking the economic arguments, economic responses, and by the time I took it a third time, I was like a little tour guide to the rest of the group because I knew exactly what was going to happen next and I got relatively proficient at taking it.

Q: You'd taken it three times. But how about the second and third time? Why-?

PFORZHEIMER: So, the second time I passed the oral exam and began the process for the security clearance, but even though I had passed it, I took it that third time so that I

would pass in the political cone. So, I kind of put myself through the third time in order to get a higher score and have a choice about what I did.

Q: Did it work?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I passed with a higher score the third time, took the oral again, and the security clearance, of course, had already started, so sort of by the time I took it the third time, my clearance came through relatively quickly after that.

Q: Do you recall, the third time, any of the questions asked you?

PFORZHEIMER: Wow. Not a one.

Q: No, I was wondering whether they put you into situations.

PFORZHEIMER: They did and none of it is recallable because you know, there's a sort of semi-traumatic feeling about doing it because so much is at stake. I remember one of the times, I think it might have been the third time where you do the group exercise and you all have to defend your projects, and I had, in my case, a project I thought was a dud, so I said look, this is a dud, I'm giving back my money, we can talk about something else, but here's why I'm not defending it. You know, once you defend it the first round and then you negotiate; I immediately sort of said you know what, I'm not going to defend mine. And there was a very aggressive guy who was kind of all over physically and with his voice and trying to dominate, and I just decided I was not going to allow that. So, I sort of pushed back and kept myself in the conversation in an assertive way. Ironically, I met that guy again because he was engaged to my college roommate, and that marriage did not work out. So, his aggression was real. He didn't make it into the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, well actually, that's what they're looking for.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: I mean, somebody who won't listen to other people.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Well, okay, let's move on then. You came into the Foreign Service when?

PFORZHEIMER: In February of 1989.

Q: And what was your A-100 course like?

PFORZHEIMER: It was great. It was really a wonderful group. We're still close. It was a good time in terms of feeling optimism about the country.

Q: The Soviet Union had fallen or was falling apart.

PFORZHEIMER: Was falling apart; it had not yet had the Berlin Wall fall, which happened our first year. And it was a really positive experience. We didn't like our instructors overall. Just saying. And in any event, the group bonded well and we even- you had an event where you would talk to the next class when they were starting, and we showed up to that event all wearing buttons that said Question Authority. So, we had a little tagline that we were called the "class from hell", the 46th A-100, it was great.

It was illuminating, of course, on the gender issue. There were 18 women and 30 men and a couple weeks in we had to stand up and go to the groups of your cone, and like you're in four corners of the room, and when we did that, I was the only woman in the political section and there were no women econ officers. So, all of the women except for me were either admin or consular, and this was- they did do some compensation, I think, for that later on.

Q: Yes. It shows that- Did you feel the prejudice against consular and admin work?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I shared it, unfortunately, for part- I mean, I have to admit it, you know. I was a classic political officer.

Q: No, no. This is picked up-. I go back to my A-100 course, this is 1955, and it had just started after there had been a hiatus, and at one point they said now, how many of you want to become ambassadors? We all raised our hand. And I don't know why, but in the back of my mind I'm thinking you know, I think I'd rather be consul general in Bermuda, but that was not to happen. But anyway.

PFORZHEIMER: Boy, who wouldn't?

Q: So, where did you want to go, or did you have any choice?

PPFORZHEIMER: I thought I wanted to go to the Philippines because that seemed really cool and interesting and I thought I wanted to work in Asia. And so, of course, therefore they came to me and said we'd like you to go to Colombia.

Q: To where?

PFORZHEIMER: Colombia. And not only was I going to go to Colombia, but they wanted me to go to Barranquilla, which was at that point a two-person post. It has since closed. And it was a danger post because this is February of 1989, where you had a tremendous amount of violence. I mean, kidnappings and bombings. And I was 24. And I really, to this day, have no idea why they made that decision to ask me to volunteer.

Q: That sounds incredible to me, but-.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. It was, you know, I mean, it was tough. But I was a little flattered to be asked. I didn't really know if there was a way to turn things down and I thought okay, I speak Spanish, apparently not as well as I thought I did because I had to take a couple bolster weeks with FSI (Foreign Service Institute), but it's an adventure, it's even on the beach-ish. So, I said yes. And that was kind of a decisive moment and I have no idea what my career would have looked like if I'd gone to Manila.

Q: Well, you were in Barranquilla from when to when?

PFORZHEIMER: From October of 1989 to April of 1991.

Q: Okay. Well, let's talk about that.

PFORZHEIMER: Let's.

Q: In the first place, what was the city like?

PFORZHEIMER: Barranquilla has about a million people. It's sea level, it's hot. It's not on the ocean; it's at the mouth of an estuary for the Magdalena River. It's about a 30-minute drive to the beach, which is a kind of a black volcanic sand, not pretty but very nice part of the, sort of the Caribbean, basically, the Atlantic Caribbean. It's a bit rough. And Barranquilla's pretty unsophisticated; there was the Chinese restaurant, there was the Italian restaurant. But it had its groups; it had a group that at that point still had a lot of the social power, which ran the country club called "El Country Club", seriously. And then, there was the emerging, you know, Middle Eastern, Lebanese Christian immigrant community, which was not allowed to join the country club, and so they had their own. There were plenty of poor mestizos, you know, mixed Spanish-indigenous heritage people and it had a significant Afro-Caribbean culture. Music was great, the food was good, and the beer was really excellent. It's a very happy place in its way and not downtrodden; not wealthy, but not downtrodden. I mean, people enjoy the carnival, they enjoy soccer. I know it very well, in fact, because my husband is from there, so I met him when I was at the consulate.

Q: What was happening? The drug war was on, wasn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: What was the situation when you got there?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, you normalize some things so quickly. I mean, I had armed bodyguards. I had an armored car that took me to and from work. At that point I was 25. It was lonely because I didn't have any colleagues at work at this two-officer Consulate; I just had my boss, who I did not get along with, as it turned out. And there were some car bombs and truck bombs that happened in Bogotá while I was there. Nothing was

happening specifically in Barranquilla. There was a presidential election in March of 1990, and a presidential candidate was shot and killed at a rally in August of '89 and then two more presidential candidates were killed during the campaign, January and February of 1990, one of them in the airport in Bogotá on a flight to Barranquilla and the other one was in the air on an airplane. So, it was a really violent time.

Q: Well, what did you do? I mean, in the first place, let's talk about security-wise and then we'll talk about workwise.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, security-wise, I had this magnificent apartment on the seventh floor of a big high-rise. My boss was on the 26th floor. And probably there were drug dealers in that high-rise, but I had a special key that was- I mean, I was the only apartment on that floor, so the special key for the elevator. When I got off the elevator, there was a giant gate with three locks. Then there were locks on the door. And when you got in, there was an alarm, which I thought was hilarious because really it wasn't linked up to anything and if a terrorist got that far, you know, an alarm was not going to stop him. So, I never set it. And I, you know, I was lonely a lot. I made friends eventually, but it was hard because I was the vice consul and that was a position where people were seeking to use me for their gain.

Q: Were you- could you go in the street and all?

PFORZHEIMER: I could. I mean, I had to use my judgment about the risks I was running. There were obviously going to be security officers who would have liked me to just go to work, come home, lock all those doors and then stay inside, and I wasn't going to do that. So, over time I developed my own rules and habits. By and large, my rule of thumb was that if I was going to go somewhere that was predictable, such as to and from work or to an event where I had been invited formally, with a written invitation or people knew about it, I would use the embassy vehicle and the driver and the bodyguard who were carrying Uzis. And that made sense to me because there really was a danger. The woman I replaced, there had been a kidnapping threat against her. I also made it my business to keep a much lower profile than she had had. She had been in the society pages quite a bit, and so, I developed a habit when I went out to events that- somebody told me that they can't use a picture in the newspaper if you have a glass near you, so I would always have my drink somewhere near my face, that I would ruin the picture and not show up. So, that worked pretty well. Because I just didn't want to be known personally.

So, with that in mind, when I was going somewhere that wasn't predictable, where I just decided I was going to go to the pool with one of my friends, I walked or took taxis. And I went on dates and I did not take my bodyguards along.

Q: How was dating? I mean, with these guys; did you have them vetted beforehand?

PFORZHEIMER: No, I did not, and I probably should have, but I was definitely a little more rebellious than I should admit. I was relatively careful, more just as a New Yorker than anything else. And it was certainly easy to date. I mean, plenty of people wanted to go out with a woman who was important and/or did not live with her parents. That made me a catch. So, I dated a lot of people, but I was more serious about my boyfriend who then I eventually married.

Q: First of all, talk about your boss. Your eyes lit up.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, a happy day for me was in my second tour picking up "State" magazine and learning that he had retired, so I was happy that not that many other people had to work with him. I just found him hard to work with and somewhat intolerant. I mean, on the dating thing, he thought my lifestyle was not respectable and he was a Christian Scientist, a deeply conservative person. But what was tough was that the only person I had to ask work questions of- you know, sometimes when you're a vice consul and you don't remember the rule for something you just lean over to your colleague and say pssst, what do you do with the crewman visa , whatever, you know, is that a three month or a six month? But I didn't have that, I only had him. I didn't take to consular work brilliantly, but I also seemed to be pretty, to him pretty incompetent. And he had thought my predecessor was terrific. And of course, he met her when she'd already been there for an amount of time, and so he got her on her experienced half of the tour, and he got me at my beginner half. And I think for a number of reasons just found me unimpressive. You know, we tried. There were moments we got along. We had to support a visit by President Bush in February of 1990, and that was sort of a bonding experience. But otherwise, yes, we didn't-.

Q: As a Christian Scientist, did he serve liquor?

PFORZHEIMER: No. He did not. He did not drink; he did not serve liquor. He was, I mean, he had his friends, but I think he also was one of these folks who took people a little seriously when they were probably less sincere. You know, he was always talking about his many friends; I'm thinking no, you don't have friends, you have people who use you. Somebody said to me, and it was very helpful, there's a cadre of people in this town who are always friends with the Consul, and I thought ah, I should understand this because they'll always be friends with the Vice Consul, too, and I need to keep that in mind. And so, I really defaulted pretty hard to not wanting to be part of all the socializing where I felt like it wasn't so much about me as a person.

Q: Well, was there, sort of like an oxymoron, but a druggie section or society?

PFORZHEIMER: What section? Drugs?

Q: People, I mean, the drug lords and all.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, that's a good question. I mean, in Barranquilla, what you had more were the white-collar versions of it, the money launderers, the people hiding through corporations, people who had farms that had airstrips, and so it was a different cadre. And then, the Medellin cartel, the Cali cartel, people were not killing each other; they were just making the money. And so, my boss, actually I will totally give him his due, as a consular officer- he was a career consular officer, and he looked at what was doable in our sort of fight against drug trafficking. And what he came up with was a set of ways to use existing visa laws to either deny visas to people who were not involved with the "dirty parts" of drug trafficking, but who were plenty involved otherwise in making money off drugs, or he would use the visa process to get information that we could feed to the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration). And so, we were in a position to use the documents that we were given for visa purposes to give information that was part of the overall information gathering for them.

Q: I take it Miami was the place where most of the people, non-immigrant applicants went, isn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Colombians were applying, especially from the coast, were applying to go to Miami; a few to New York. The Colombian populations in the U.S. are in Miami, New York and then California.

Q: Yes. Well, I've heard stories that talked about the Colombia community in New York being particularly vicious; you know, shooting and all that.

PFORZHEIMER: Oh. Well, it's very possible. There are Colombians that I know in New York and in Patterson, New Jersey; they're definitely not vicious. And it, yes, it all obviously depends. And the coast of Colombia is a really different culture from the rest of the country; the foods different, the music's different and the approach to life is fairly different as well. It's not like some of the other places that are more known for the violence. So, the violence levels there are much lower.

Q: Well, how about the, well, this war, which I guess is not completely over yet. I mean, it's still simmering there. What was happening when you were there war-wise?

PFORZHEIMER: At that point, the Colombia government was facing sort of two very empowered drug cartels and they were facing four leftist guerrilla organizations and one incipient right wing guerrilla organization. So, at this point (2019) what they've gotten to is that they're facing kind of one-and-a-half left wing guerrilla organizations and that's pretty good. But there was a huge array of different groups that were committing violent acts and the Colombian government was overmatched.

Q: Yes. How did these violent acts affect you?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, they were what was behind my security routine, but on a personal level I just lived with a certain amount of fear. The idea of being kidnapped

frightened me and the idea of getting in a car that blew up, which was one of the tools people used, that frightened me as well. It was why I didn't bring a car, because that way I was always in a car that had already been started by somebody else. But those were the scariest things I could imagine. Other than that, I kind of developed my own approach to living in a violent place, which I've done frequently, that was part New Yorker from the 1970's and 80's and part Washington, DC in 1987, which was a violent place as well. You know, it's a mixture of practical precautions and fatalism.

Q: Did you feel your job was mainly visa, non-immigrant issuing, or was it reporting on the scene?

PFORZHEIMER: It was very much mainly non-immigrant visa issuing, but I did a little reporting. And our consular district was not of great interest to the wider world, but we tried, and I came up with an idea of traveling to Cucuta, which was in our district and nobody had been to. I generated the idea and I got permission to go and I got a taste of being a reporting officer, you know, talked to the local notables and saw the border with Venezuela and that sort of thing, and that was really interesting.

Q: Well then, were you ever approached by any of the drug people for bribes or anything like that?

PFORZHEIMER: No. If I was, I was oblivious to it. No. I had one or two incidents that were tricky with the Jewish community there, with one person who had been very kind to me when I first arrived and when we went through the process of his visa renewal, and I did the usual checking, I came up with a few unsavory associations and I, unfortunately, had to be part of the process to- I think in the end he ended up getting a visa again, but it was something where he was made aware that we were suspicious of him. And so, I lost the friendships that I was making.

Q: Well then, how did the hand of Bogotá reach down from our embassy there?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, kindly, in a way. The boss and I, the worst thing that he did or tried to do was write me a very, I think a very negative EER for my first one-

Q: EER means efficiency report.

PFORZHEIMER: And I had one of my mentors there at the embassy was this woman you may have heard of named Maura Harty, and Maura took a look at that and said I don't think this is a good EER; you should change this, this and this. And then, the DCM, who reviewed it, he told me that he didn't really agree with how my boss had done things, and although he couldn't change what my boss had said he made sure to compensate on his part as reviewer, to lessen the impact. So, for me the embassy was really helpful because otherwise I was so isolated. I didn't have peers and I didn't really have anyone except my boss to give me a grounding in the State Department. So, I did a one-month rotation in Bogotá, which was really helpful.

Q: Well, did you find yourself, I mean, being out there by yourself with a not very kindly boss, but did that sort of strengthen your resolve or make you a more confident person by the time you got through with all of this?

PFORZHEIMER: I think it had that effect to some degree, but I needed the help that I got. I mean, it was good to show me how to ask for it. And fortunately for me, he left after little less than a year, and then I had, for a couple of months I had an interim, which was actually a friend of mine from the embassy, a second tour officer, believe it or not, who went up there because the person who was supposed to replace my boss resigned rather than go to Colombia, so they were left with nobody. So, then there were two of us inmates running the asylum; that was fun. And then, after that I had another boss for my last couple of months who was a woman who didn't have any background in consular work and who thought I was a genius. So, I got a good sense of how quickly perspectives can change and I got a long great with- I mean, I got along pretty well with every boss I've had since the first one, but that was a tough way to begin.

Q: Well then, you left there when?

PFORZHEIMER: In April of 1991.

Q: And then what?

PFORZHEIMER: Then immediately to South Africa after home leave and I was there for two years as the human rights and political violence reporting officer.

Q: Okay. You were in South Africa for- well, let's take when you arrived; what was the situation? You arrived in 19-?

PFORZHEIMER: I arrived in June of '91 and so, Nelson Mandela had been released in February of 1990, and the very beginnings of negotiations were underway between the African National Congress and the government. It was a tremendous time and I had two of the finest ambassadors in the Foreign Service, William Swing followed by Princeton Lyman. And that's who I got to see in action, which was amazing.

Q: Well, you were- what was this position title?

PFORZHEIMER: Human rights- I was an 03, 04 at the time, reporting officer within the political section.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived, particularly the political situation?

PFORZHEIMER: Wow. That's funny; I'm trying to break it down. I think my personal situation was that the job had been vacant for about six months and I had to produce a lengthy human rights report by September, and it was June or July when I arrived, and

nobody had even started it. So, I went into high gear and got a lot of different people to do their components and put it together on time. I remember walking into an office that had six months' worth of newspapers piled up. I read six newspapers a day from the whole political spectrum. And it was a period of great dynamism because they were getting rid of apartheid laws, sort of one by one. I mean, it was one of the most fun human rights reports to write because everything was improving. And in different sections you could say the law had been this, but that law was rescinded on this date. The other thing I was engaged in right away was the work to release political prisoners which the African National Congress had demanded as a precondition to starting talks. And we had a lawyer on detail who was helping negotiate who would be released, depending on what they were imprisoned for.

And this is another story I always remember. Very soon after I arrived, I went with this lawyer to talk to, a civil servant in the Ministry of Justice named Piet Kleynhans, who was dressed all in gray as-

Q: Piet is P-E-T-

PFORZHEIMER: P-I-E-T, I think.

Q: P-I-E-T.

PFORZHEIMER: And dressed all in gray as Afrikaner civil servants were, including gray vinyl shoes. And he was going over the list with my colleague and objecting to a few names, but essentially ticking them off to be released. And it struck me, especially with my history background, it struck me that this was the likely same man who had put them in, and that he was emotionless about taking them out again. And I was just struck by the existence of that kind of person who doesn't really care what they're doing. They're part of this big machine and if the machine tells them to put that person in jail one day and take them out the next day, they're not that personally involved.

Q: No.

In your work did you run across hardliners, you know, apartheid for now, apartheid forever?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, they certainly knew better than to say some of those things. Yes, I would run into hardliners - I had the position mostly of speaking to human rights community members, and I was also the refugee officer, so I was talking mostly to people with whom these were not beliefs. But I had a few cases- For example, to get the human rights report information I had to go and speak to government officials. And what I found, being white, is that they would test the waters, because there certainly were racist Americans at the embassy who thought apartheid was fine. And so, they would test me and sort of say one thing in support of racial separation and see if I reacted and say something else derogatory. And sometimes, just to be a good reporting officer, I was

interested in, you know, I could fill in a bio on somebody based on what they admitted to me, and so sometimes I would let them say a few things and then my formula was that I would say "well, we'll have to agree to disagree on that." And then you would watch them kind of walk their way back, like they'd gone out too far on thinner and thinner ice.

Q: Yes.

Was Nelson Mandela as much a figure as he certainly became, but at the time in South Africa?

PFORZHEIMER: Absolutely. Absolutely. I went to an event in a stadium that was one of the- It was Soweto Day, I guess, a commemoration of one of the uprisings, one of the first he was able to attend in person, and he walked around the track and waved to everybody and it's like an amazing energy of people, you know, he was one of the rare people in this world who are kind of all that they're built up to be. I think he was seen as the person who could resolve arguments within the ANC leadership. He let people have their own opinions, but then he would sort of step in and guide. And he was very capable of getting angry. While I was there the negotiations broke down because there had been a massacre in a black township by government-sponsored thugs and he'd had enough.

Q: How about the embassy? Was there conflict within the embassy of how we should deal with the situation there?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, not really. It was a remarkable time, and knowing what I know about the U.S. Government and politics, a remarkably unified period. Everything was pretty much aligned, the Congress, the rest of the State Department, the administration. And our job was so vital. The Defense attaché told me on my first week, he said our job is to tell the whites it won't be so bad and the blacks it won't be so good. And William Swing was extraordinary. He used the power of the embassy and his residence as a convening function, a unique one, nobody but us could have brought people together of the range of political views, and he would invite them to his home.

Q: Well, you know, I'm just thinking about this; in difficult situations, having a young girl, I use the term, but-

PFORZHEIMER: Twenty-six.

Q: -could go out- is often more immune and it seems less threatening than putting some guy out there doing the same thing. Did you feel that?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, I have, and there have been plenty of times where my gender has been as helpful as it's been otherwise. I could get under the radar for certain types of people. Sometimes harder to get taken seriously, but that actually wasn't a huge issue when I could add the weight of the U.S. Government to my request for a meeting. It tended to work its way to the right conclusion. But yes, I could talk to- There were a lot

of people on the left who'd been enormously upset with the U.S. position for years, antagonistic towards us, suspicious of us, and so, my job wasn't to tell them they were wrong, but I was there to say I'm here now, I want to know, and get the big picture, get the full picture. And I met people, I met human rights defenders like this one woman named Sally Sealey. I'd read about her in the newspaper and I just sort of picked up a phone, got her number, picked up a phone and called her and said I read about you, your work is inspiring; may I meet you? And we became friends. And she was working to protect, actually gang members who were black and who were being picked up by the police and just murdered.

Q: You say your ambassadors were first rate.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: You want to talk about that a little bit, about your impressions?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, Ambassador Swing, there was that- his leaning forward to use the United States in the best possible way as a convener. He entertained constantly, brought people to the residence in order to let them talk to each other. He had enormous credibility as an ambassador previously, like a million times, and went on to Nigeria afterwards. His personal manner was, of course, courteous and always in authority, but never- he would always allow others to say what they needed to say. He had a great team; he treated them, I think, with respect. What I didn't know was probably a lot about the country team and its dynamics. Marshall McCauley was the DCM and he was a really lovely guy from Tennessee, and he used to tease me a lot about being from New York.

And then, Ambassador Princeton Lyman is a whole other story in terms of his manner. He was obviously less of an extrovert than Ambassador Swing, but just deep in his analysis, also very courteous. And he probably had a slightly higher level of Washington knowledge and policy chops.

Q: Well, it's the time when a lot of American interests were focused on that area.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I mean, I did a cable a day, pretty much. You know, cables were more needed for news updates than they are now, and I got a lot of requests for information about what was happening. So, besides the human rights issues I covered, the political violence spiked while I was there and there were mysteries about who was behind it. And then, I also covered the issue of refugees at that time from Mozambique, who were in South Africa.

Q: Well, the refugees, where were they refugeeing from?

PFORZHEIMER: The civil war there, and I'll get all the acronyms wrong, so basically, they were fleeing from everybody. And they fled across the border, which was a game park, the Kruger Park in the northeast corner of South Africa, and so people had to walk

across a game park, which actually had predators in it, and find their way to these refugee camps that were being managed by Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee of the Red Cross. But South Africa at that point was a pariah within the UN system, and they didn't acknowledge people as legal refugees, but de facto they allowed them to stay.

Q: Well now, did you go into Soweto and all?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, I did.

Q: I mean, was this dangerous or not?

PFORZHEIMER: Sometimes, but it was very well managed. Soweto during the day was, you know, ok to visit. We would bring CODELs, congressional delegations there, sort of poverty tourism. We had a U.S. Information Agency library in the middle in Soweto, which was a very inspiring place where kids could come and do their homework.

So, we had a consulate in Johannesburg and they mostly took people around Soweto. And I was in Pretoria, there were townships there and I went there, I had friends from the embassy, the phone operations, Martha and Julia, and I would visit them and their families. Unfortunately, about six months after I left there was an incident of a woman, a white woman, not with the embassy but with an NGO, who drove some friends home to a township and was attacked and killed. Had that happened before I arrived my whole experience would have been different.

Q: Yes.

Well, did you go to Cape Town often?

PFORZHEIMER: No, I went once or twice. I wasn't a big fan.

Q: What was Pretoria like?

PFORZHEIMER: Very dull. I've had a series of postings in boring capitals. Pretoria had no nightlife. Pretoria in 1991 and '92 was still under blue laws, so like, no movies or shopping on Sundays. And white Pretoria was as conservative as you'd imagine and black Pretoria wasn't allowed downtown, basically, after hours. And so, I would go to Johannesburg for fun.

Q: Yes, somehow the white Afrikaners are not a very interesting or appealing group.

PFORZHEIMER: There are individuals, of course, but as a culture it was a culture that was conformist and unexciting - they were very churchgoing in their day, I mean, I think it was falling off even then, but the Dutch Reformed Church was an all-day event where you would go to church in the morning, go home for lunch and go back to church.

Q: Sounds like fun.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Yes. Did you get to go around Africa at all?

PFORZHEIMER: I visited Mombasa and I went up to Zimbabwe, went canoeing on the Zambezi. Did a couple of trips like that.

Q: Yes, of course, Africa at that time was in pretty much turmoil, wasn't it? I mean, I believe you had Mozambique and Angola; were wars going on then?

PFORZHEIMER: They were. I mean, I went to Mozambique once, actually, because one of my A-100 classmates was serving there. So, you could go to Maputo and you could travel 15 minutes in any direction and that was it. But Maputo was fine.

Q: Yes. Well, after that where did you go?

PFORZHEIMER: I went to the Operations Center; came back to Washington.

Q: Oh. Well, often people sort of third tour who go to the Operations Center are usually picked out as doing fairly well in the Foreign Service. Did you feel that?

PFORZHEIMER: I think, you know, South Africa was good, it was a really great second tour for me and it was a place with a big embassy with people who knew Washington well, so I was lucky that there were people who could point me and recommend me for that.

Q: Were you married at this time?

PFORZHEIMER: No.

Q: How did you find your job?

PFORZHEIMER: The Ops Center?

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: It was fun. It was dynamic. I got used to the shift work pretty easily. I met a lot of good friends because you're working with just a whole cohort of officers your same age, people I've known since then. And you know, I didn't love the phone operator part of it, but I could do it.

Q: Any exciting things happen on your watch?

PFORZHEIMER: Of course. The phrase is "there's never nothing going on." The Rwanda genocide happened while I was there.

Q: Ooh.

PFORZHEIMER: We had the phone line open with the Embassy there for three days. And just watching it unfold, I think I had a vague sense of the non-action taking place bureaucratically. You know, that there were meetings about whether to intervene or help the UN, but that nothing was being ordered to happen. I didn't have a big context for what might have happened, but it did seem like we were just watching it and wishing for it to be over quickly. But that, you know, I also know afterwards that there were meetings and the big decision was made not to intervene and give the UN more tools.

Q: Well, then after you finished that tour you probably had another Washington assignment, didn't you?

PFORZHEIMER: I had two more.

Q: Two more.

PFORZHEIMER: I was in Washington a while. My tour after that was in the International Organizations bureau, Office of Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Operations.

Q: Well, okay, let's talk about that.

PFORZHEIMER: Okay.

Q: What was going on peacekeeping-wise?

PFORZHEIMER: So, this was 1994 to '96. There was a whole area of activity with Bosnia; I was not involved with that. But honestly, it was not an inspiring activity area. We were doing whatever the minimum was in Bosnia. There were sanctions still against Iraq that were the Oil for Food enforcement. There was, in Africa, I mean, Somalia, there were any number of other conflicts that were taking place or being resolved; the fallout from Rwanda, the Burundi, and what I worked on, which was former Soviet Union, Tajikistan and Georgia, and Haiti.

Q: Okay. Well how, what was actually happening in Georgia? I mean, was this more or less watching a fait accompli? I mean, did the Soviet or the Russian forces move in? I mean, was there much fighting or was it-?

PFORZHEIMER: It had just happened. The separatists with Russian help had made this move and had essentially cordoned off Abkhazia and started to create this artificial border. I don't think that they had tried to declare themselves a state yet. They were as separated, autonomous, so they were going through a phase of in a way testing the international community and Russia was asserting itself in its backyard. This was very symbolically important, that- Was it- the foreign minister, Shevardnadze was Georgian and seen as a traitor in a way, and so they were reasserting that Georgia was not going to be able to be as independent and Western aligned as they had started to be. And Russia had military battalions there guarding the Enguri Dam, I think, and it was a source of energy to- even to Tbilisi. So, they sort of had- the Russians had their hands around Georgia's throat and the Georgians were hoping that the presence of international peacekeepers would mean more than in the end it had done.

Q: Was our effort pretty much what you were involved in, getting some American boots on the ground?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I mean, that was it and we were supporting, I think, the robust application of international principles that the government of Georgia should have been able to have access to all of its territory, there shouldn't be two states within a state, and our peacekeepers were there to watch the Russians. That was the UN's- the Russians were there to kind of keep the peace and the UN was there to watch the Russians keep the peace. And so, we probably knew it was doomed but we were putting up a good front at the time.

Q: And what else were you involved in?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, that was not the main part of my engagement. What I mainly worked on was Haiti. And in- So, in July of 1994, just before I arrived, they had passed a resolution authorizing any means necessary to reinstate President Aristide, who'd been kicked out by the sort of resurgent Duvalier group. And "any means necessary" or it was something like all necessary force or whatever; the phrasing was enough to essentially write a sort of operational order and get, in the end in the fall about 20,000 American troops to land in Haiti at the end of '94 and reinstate Aristide under a UN mandate. That was the first phase of it. And the second phase was that the UN was going to take over for the U.S. and my job was to kind of work on that transition, from the U.S.-led intervention to a UN peacekeeping force.

Q: How did it work out?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, it was one of the most interesting jobs I've ever had. For starters, I showed up in August and somebody said to me are you working on the report? I said what report? And they said well, in the July 31 resolution it said that every two weeks we would be submitting a report as the state that had intervened on the conditions necessary to transition to a UN-led operation. So, it was going to be a Chapter VI, in other words, a permissive environment for a UN operation but was a Chapter VII

intervention; they had to shoot their way in. I mean, not a lot of shooting, but they had to use military force. So, we had to show what the conditions were that were now going to be appropriate for a Chapter VI, which actually meant that someone had to develop the metrics of what that meant. And so, as ever with the desk officer, heads swivel and they say what are you doing about that? And I said right away, I'm on it. And so, I worked on developing the metrics of what did it mean to be in a permissive environment, and once I developed those metrics then I could start measuring what the environment was and whether we had advanced towards our goal. And I had to write those every two weeks.

Q: Must have been hard to begin with, wasn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: The first one was a doozy.

Q: Was there anyone you could turn to?

PFORZHEIMER: I surreptitiously was sort of turning to everyone and asking people's advice and opinions. And I think I may have already had a feel for some of the military people that I was working with at the Pentagon and what they thought. But in the end, I sort of just stole creatively from everyone I could and got approval and clearance for what these metrics were and then after that, of course, it was much easier.

Q: Sure, you just kept updating it.

PFORZHEIMER: Kept updating it, number of deaths per week or number of whatever, and you could, I mean, the power of metrics is great because it becomes something that you can grab hold of. But this was submitted to the UN, so it became an official UN document.

And then, concurrent to that was working on ways to draw down our presence, which was becoming politically unpopular and everybody had in mind that they should be all gone by February, even though the logistics of it were not really in place, including the most important thing that I worked on for about a month solid, which was helicopters. We needed to get heavy lift helicopters in place so that the UN would have a rapid response capability. This was, of course, something the U.S. had plenty of. The UN was refusing to accept the mandate and take over as a peacekeeping operation unless they had this rapid response capability, and to have that they needed a helicopter or two that could bring troops somewhere in the island because, as you know, Haiti is very mountainous. And I had to work, for some reason, on getting helicopters that could be contracted and I think the U.S. was going to pay the contract because we were that desperate, to re-hat everybody, withdraw American troops, and move it over to the UN. I had to start working with some guy in the A bureau, in the Administrative bureau, who was in charge of contracting, who I swear had been there since the Vietnam War and Air America. I mean, this is 1995, so it's plausible. I don't remember his name, but he was a legend. And this guy and I, you know, this liberal young woman, whatever, were putting our heads together and he was able to lay hands on a couple of Soviet helicopters that were

available. And to get them- we missed the February deadline, which was bad, but anyway to get them to Haiti they had to fly themselves because you take helicopters apart and put them in a place, I mean, the cost is prohibitive and the helicopters don't do well afterwards, etcetera. So, they had to fly themselves from Siberia to Haiti. And if you could imagine, where that goes is across the United States of America. So, this was at the point in 1995 where Jesse Helms is talking about being invaded by United Nations white helicopters, and we cleared a flight path with the authorities that went actually across all of middle American, buzzed Disneyworld and flew over the Bahamas, and landed in Haiti and it did not become headlines anywhere, which was a big accomplishment. And with that, we could fulfill our bureaucratic requirement to make it into a UN mission and then my job was to manage the-

Q: Did you get any media action on the flight of these helicopters?

PFORZHEIMER: Nobody ever knew.

Q: They're quiet helicopters.

PFORZHEIMER: Quiet helicopters.

Q: Sneaking in, you know.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, sneaking across the United States, just like people were afraid of. And Soviet ones to boot, or ex-Soviet.

Q: I was going to say.

PFORZHEIMER: Everybody's sense of the absurd was triggered by that one, but it just happened. And then-Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott and other people were watching anxiously to make sure that this could occur. It was very instructive, how minutiae and details can somehow become a senior official's, you know, first thing they ask about in the morning and the last thing they ask about at night kind of thing.

Q: Oh, god. Well, does that pretty well end your- is that the last thing you did or were you involved in other things in this Washington tour?

PFORZHEIMER: In the- Let me think. I mean, I think I worked on sort of overall areas of peacekeeping policy. This was a period of time where peacekeeping was becoming quite important and the early '90s had seen successful operations in El Salvador, Cambodia. There was the unsuccessful work in the Balkans, but there was this idea that peacekeeping was an important policy instrument. And my office worked on one of the presidential decisions- PDD 25, which was setting out the policy of when we would use a peacekeeping mission as- to further U.S. policy and when we would not. And there had to be an exit strategy and there had to be a lot of other criteria in place before agreeing to intervene.

Q: Well, was there, within the Department of Defense, sort of a peacekeeping element?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Yes, absolutely. A woman named Sarah Sewall, who was back in the State Department later as undersecretary for global affairs. There was a lot of- I mean, it was qualified enthusiasm, but it was DoD's belief that peacekeeping was a way to burden share and to get what we wanted in parts of the world that we didn't care that much about.

Q: How about the, sort of the professional peacekeepers like the Samoans and others; did you get involved with them?

PFORZHEIMER: No. The troop contributing countries started to shift a bit. There were all these traditional Middle East peacekeeping missions, which were largely peaceful, and you did have Fijians and other South Pacific islanders. But that started to change and now it's really mainly South Asians, Pakistan, Bangladesh and people who, unfortunately, are being used by their governments and put into dangerous places for the money.

Q: Well then, did you do any- what did you do after that?

PFORZHEIMER: So, after that, I faced a career decision about- I was offered a job in Kyrgyzstan because I had gotten to know people in the former Soviet Union desks, and then I was offered a desk job in the Western Hemisphere bureau because I'd gotten to know people through my work on Haiti. So, I had a fork in the road moment and it came down to mainly a person decision, because at that point I was married and thinking about having a baby, and Kyrgyzstan in 1996 was a place where if you had any medical complications, they would put you on a seven-hour flight to Moscow and maybe after that to London, and it was not a really safe environment. And so, I thought and my husband it might be better off staying in Washington. So, I took a desk position in WHA in ARA, American Republic Affairs at the time.

Q: Your husband; what was his background?

PFORZHEIMER: He is a working-class Colombian who I met during my tour in Barranquilla. And then when I left, we stayed in touch and I- it's complicated, but we got back together, and he came to live in the United States in 1995.

Q: Did you have a baby?

PFORZHEIMER: I did. I was lucky enough to have one in 1998, who is-

Q: Boy? Girl?

PFORZHEIMER: Boy who is now turning 21 in two months.

Q: Good heavens.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Going to school?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. He's a junior in college.

Q: Great.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Lucky me.

Q: Okay. You want to talk about WHA?

PFORZHEIMER: Sure.

Q: That period, what were you up to?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, so that was Caribbean Affairs, and I was the desk officer for the Eastern Caribbean. And my predecessor, this was what passed for a briefing. I showed up and he said to me "bananas and drugs, that is what you're going to spend your time on." I said thank you, you know, where do you keep the pencils, and he left. And that is indeed what I spent my time on. At some point during that tour, I actually tried to break the assignment and go to Cuba, but I was denied a clearance based, actually, on my husband, because at that point he had only been in the United States for about six months. He was a Colombian citizen and diplomatic security decided that he would be a security vulnerability in Havana, so that was it. It was too bad, I found the Caribbean job a bit boring and I was excited about going to Havana as the human rights officer and they wanted me to, but I didn't get to go.

So, the Eastern Caribbean job was fun in its way. There was a very important summit with President Clinton and Secretary Albright with the CARICOM, the 15 member states of the Caribbean Community during my time there. And I separately got to travel with Secretary Albright to another meeting in Trinidad and Tobago when I was four months pregnant, which was fun. And I had written the briefing book for that meeting, which was also with the Caribbean Community, and I used that as a lesson to younger officers because Secretary Albright hadn't read the briefing book until she got on the plane from Tobago to Trinidad, which is a 15-minute flight, and so, she flipped open her book and just started reading the points. Well, when you write talking points you should say either in the voice of the principal, I want X, Y, Z, or you're speaking to the principal where you say you want to ask for X, Y, Z. You certainly should not switch halfway through, especially if the principal is going to be reading them word for word. So, at some point, she said you want, I mean I want, etcetera.

So, we had a lot of activity. I got into meetings in the White House. There was a sort of flurry of interest by the National Security Council in having a better relationship with the Caribbean and I did a lot with a relatively small job; I was really active.

Q: Trinidad and Tobago; were they a problem? At one point, I think, they had a leader there who was difficult or something.

PFORZHEIMER: They were not a huge problem, but you're right, and I think they were always a bit of the anti-American ringleader. But at that point they and the rest of the Caribbean were really charmed by President Clinton. They really liked the rhetoric that they were hearing. We were talking about them constituting our third border and trying to improve our financial contributions to them.

Q: So, how about bananas?

PFORZHEIMER: Ah. The bananas issue was an issue with the European Union, and it was a trade dispute over protections in the EU for the bananas that came from former colonies versus our attempt to open up the EU market. I'm not really sure where we had much of a stake in this, but we were doing it in part because of Ecuador, which was the production hub for Chiquita and Dole, very powerful US companies.

Q: Somalia, the Italians had big bananas. You got rather lousy bananas; they're kind of small.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: You know, when you're used to the American-

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: I'm talking about American, not America the country, but-

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: They're big, huge. And then you get these little colonial ones and they're kind of puny.

PFORZHEIMER: I mean, the European consumer had no basis of comparison, so they thought this was a banana and it's $5 and it's this big. And it was a form of European subsidy to these countries or former colonies. And I mean, I sympathize with the free trade side, but the Caribbean was caught in the middle of this because it was actually going- it was actually also applying to them. So, you had- I was sort of sympathetically on the side of the Caribbean against the U.S. position, which was on the side of Ecuador.

Q: Well, Ecuador, wait a minute now, Ecuador, what was Ecuador's position?

PFORZHEIMER: Ecuador was trying to open the European market and that meant that the cheaper, bigger Ecuadorian bananas would come in and the monopoly of the little Caribbean and the little Somali and the little Canary Island bananas, those would be, you know, they would lose their advantage. And so, the entire banana industry had been resting on their ability to export to Europe. So, it was a big- WTO, World Trade Organization and the U.S. Trade Rep, you know, we get deeply involved in that one.

Q: Can you eat a banana today or-?

PFORZHEIMER: The trauma has passed, but it was a lot of, you know, sitting in these rooms hearing very unsympathetic people- I mean, it was terrible. They would say well look; the Caribbean can just do something else; they don't have to do bananas. They could do tourism, and make beds and stir drinks for people. And then a hurricane would hit, and tourism would be devastated, and someone would say well, they can just do banking. And then I would go and talk to the anti-narcotics people and they say no, no, they can't do banking because their structures are too weak and they're laundering money, so they can do bananas.

Q: Yes. So, one would never think that bananas would be a major source of-. Also, well we've had chicken wars, where frozen chickens became quite a bone of contention in, I know in the Netherlands.

PFORZHEIMER: Exactly. Exactly. I think the joy in this career was learning about things, unexpected topics and going deep and getting all these insights when you do.

Q: Yes. Rice from Arkansas and in Japan and all and the Japanese stomach is not used to Arkansas rice. I mean, there'd be these-

PFORZHEIMER: Absolutely.

Q: Oh, god.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the great triumph was getting avocados from Colombia later in my career.

So, that was a great tour in its way. I got really nice travel out of it. And being a desk officer, of course, is fantastic across the board learning experience. You never know, when you picked up the phone -- it was pre-dependence on email, so it was always the phone -- you never knew what the topic would be.

Q: Yes. So, you were getting across some of the things, going from peacekeeping to bananas. And drugs, was anything- were we making progress in Colombia in those days?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I didn't work much on Colombia in those days, so that would have been pre- Plan Colombia. It was a difficult time for them. But with the Caribbean,

the issue was the maritime drug trade and there were a number of instruments we were trying to use, including something called the ship rider, which was if you put a Caribbean law enforcement person onboard a U.S. ship, then they could arrest people under their jurisdiction, and so it was a big push to kind of make a stronger legal network among Caribbean nations with each other and with us, so that there would be fewer ways for people to hide in kind of modern pirate form.

Q: The world of the Foreign Service.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Were there pirates? In those days, I mean, there really aren't pirates.

PFORZHEIMER: The lesson I learned, another lesson I learned, so the island of- the nation of Grenada is a confederation of islands, and so there's Grenada and a place called Carriacou and one or two other little ones, that's the formal nation. And Carriacou is a tiny place and we- the Grenadian coast guard, with our support, was going to put a station there, and we were going to do something like make a basketball court or something. It's a place with sort of nothing and we were going to build a little something, maybe rehab a school. And the residents were protesting mightily; they didn't want this. We would say well, who doesn't want free stuff? And the answer is smugglers, you know. If they were making a living smuggling, then the advance of having a rehabbed school and a new coast guard station is not an advance at all. And I learned something that I think became very apparent when I served in Afghanistan, that sometimes people have no government services because they want it that way.

Q: Yes. You've had a lesson on governmental dynamics and all. We'll close off. We'll just put at the end here, where did you go next?

PFORZHEIMER: Then I took a very swift maternity leave of two months and I started in Turkish language training.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

PFORZHEIMER: Okay.

Q: Great.

[Note: This section is a repeat of pages 26-34 in timeframe but with different details.]

Q: Today is August 29, 2019, with Annie Pforzheimer. And we're going to pick up your time going to the Operations Center. What was the date you went to the Operations Center?

PFORZHEIMER: I left South Africa, my second tour, in April of 1993, and I started in the Operations Center in July of 1993. And what was momentous for that period was that the Operations Center had just been the center of the scandal regarding the listening in on conversations.

Q: This was a standard practice.

PFORZHEIMER: It was standard practice until that year when the process changed, because during the 1992 elections some members of the Bush Administration, the political appointees like Elizabeth Tamposi had engaged in some attempted shenanigans looking for Bill Clinton's passport records and trying to show that he'd done something disloyal when he was a student.

Q: Well, I think the accusation that then-candidate William Clinton was at Oxford and had tried to renounce his American citizenship to avoid the draft. This was a made-up charge, but Betty Tamposi, who was the head of Consular Affairs and a political appointee, tried to go see the records and it became a scandal.

PFORZHEIMER: Well so, a secondary scandal was that the way that the first one was found out was through people in the Ops Center who, as you say, routinely listened in on interesting conversations, were listening in on one of the conversations regarding this request to go see the records and it was so juicy that they kind of told everybody else about it. And when it came time for the investigation into the first scandal, the passport issue, the second one was the Operations Center listening in, which was not really common knowledge to the senior officials who put their calls through the Ops Center at the time and- This is third-hand, but supposedly they asked the head of the Ops Center at the time whether he knew that people listened in and he expressed shock and surprise, which was misleading. But some of the more junior people were questioned, pretty intensively, and they were even told at one point that they might have an FBI investigation, that they might need lawyers, etcetera. So, this was the crew that had been serving between 1992 and '93 that was training those of us who started in the summer of 1993 and they were burned by that experience. So, that was one thing I remember is that I was being trained up by people who were fairly bitter about how they'd been treated and it was also the first time that the Ops Center started to ask permission to stay on the line when they put people together. Sometimes there was a genuine reason for the Ops Center to need to be on the line to take notes and-

Q: Well, often it had been the case, particularly of special assistants to people in high positions to stay on, take notes and to make notes of any promises that were made and all that, which could then be followed through. I mean, it was a basic administrative practice, but it got out of hand.

PFORZHEIMER: It did and so they codified a few practices about asking permission, making sure people knew when the Ops Center was on and when it was off. The only difference to that, by law at the time and maybe it's still the case, is when it was not a

U.S. citizen and you could kind of take different measures when you connected a senior official to a senior official of another country. But between two U.S. citizens it was made clear we were not on the line unless we were expressly permitted.

So, the Ops Center from ’93 to ’94. It’s always fascinating to work there. Our year was a year with the Bosnian conflict. I’m not remembering the year precisely. Maybe Srebrenica happened during that time. The Palestinian accords in October, I think, of ’93, and that was one of my favorite moments of what the Ops Center is about because we were connecting calls in the morning of the day that everybody was gathering at the White House for the signing, this sort of famous photograph of President Clinton and the two leaders and-

Q: Arafat and Rabin.

PFORZHEIMER: Arafat and Rabin, and Arafat was refusing to leave his hotel room. And so, the CNN feed was the gathering of all these high ranking people and the anchors were talking about how Arafat was expected and we were putting calls back and forth between people saying he’s not leaving, he wants this change, what are we going to do about it. I don’t actually know whether he got what he wanted, but I know he did show up eventually. But I thought that was the classic Ops Center moment where you know something that the rest of the world doesn’t. There were lots of those.

Q: Do you recall any other sort of incidents that you got involved in that things were happening?

PFORZHEIMER: Personally? I mean, in a way with the Ops Center you’re just very interchangeable, so I don’t recall making that much of a personal contribution. But we had one of the Moscow coups in the winter of ’93, and I remember waking up the political counselor to ask him a kind of inane question and he chewed me out. I mean, we thought that what we were doing was so important -- but this guy had been working night and day and I interrupted his sleep to ask him something that, I mean, I didn’t have the internet really, so I couldn’t have looked it up, but it wasn’t worth bothering him. So, I learned quite a bit from that experience, especially because later in my life when I was the political counselor getting woken up from the Ops Center, I made sure to be polite but also to teach them the same lesson I had learned.

And the most memorable was the Rwanda genocide. So, we made the policy decisions that we made and we were, for two or three days, just on a very sort of micro level, the wellbeing of our embassy, we had a phone line open with the embassy so just in case something happened they would always have somewhere to go. And listening to them from time to time pop up on the phone line about the arrangements they were making; they made a big caravan out of the country and they did take some, I think Belgium diplomats with them and others, maybe Canadians. But the night before, I mean, one of the triggers of the genocide was an attack on the, I think, the prime minister, a woman who climbed over her wall to the embassy compound next to her. And so, we were

hearing all of these details. So, when I think about the genocide, it had all these huge implications, but it also felt like a lot of- a series of small incidents that we were watching.

Q: Well then, for one thing, I might point out that assignments to the Ops Center was often sort of a reward or a training ground for young Foreign Service officers who have shown potential to get them acquainted with how you deal with emergencies and all. Did you feel that you were part of a crew like that?

PFORZHEIMER: I did, and I think at the same time this was one of those points in my own career where I made a decision to not go on a faster track. It was not my style. There were very exciting elements of being in the Ops Center and there were things that felt sort of abusive about the way that the deputy executive secretaries yelled at people and kept them all in line, and I think that if you're the kind of person that finds that thrilling this was a moment to figure it out and to go into then line, right. The Ops Center, you could sort of go either way. I knew plenty of people in the Ops Center who went on to have good or mediocre careers. Everybody went to the line, went into something sort of more super powered, and if we had- if I had taken the small amount of cache that I had from the Ops Center and gone into a staff assistant job, I think I would have been in that faster track.

Q: Staff assistant, the line and staff assistant are usually two keys to moving ahead rather rapidly.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. And I didn't want it. I didn't- I wasn't interested. I don't know what my potential would have been, but it didn't attract me. I felt like it was filled with people yelling at each other and going crazy over commas, and I wanted to do something deeper and to be the sort of queen of a much smaller kingdom, rather than the pawn in the bigger one.

Q: Yes. Well then, what did you do?

PFORZHEIMER: What really interested me for reasons of what I studied and then what I was seeing was peacekeeping. The office for peacekeeping affairs, this is '93 to '94, post Cold War, this was a boom on interest and ability to do things through the UN that hadn't existed when we were having proxy wars, so Cambodia and El Salvador and a couple of- the southern Africa conflicts, Angola, Mozambique, these were all actually coming to some kind of an end and peacekeeping was this positive story for the first time in a long time. Because the frozen conflicts, the Middle East, Cyprus, these were all peacekeeping, but they didn't show any real beginning or end, or middle or end, whereas El Salvador was a conflict that we had seen for years and was actually coming to some kind of a brokered peace. I thought that seemed amazing and I lobbied for a job in that office and I mean I lobbied everybody. And when I finally spoke to the office director, I said well, I'm Annie Pforzheimer and I would like a job with your office, and he said very drily, yes I know. And I got that job. It was very heavily bid. I was really pleased. And that one

sort of got me in a different track, one where I stepped off of what might have been a faster conveyor belt.

Q: Alright. Well, let's talk about how stood peacekeeping when you entered it.

PFORZHEIMER: So, I started in July of 1994 and I was working on Latin America and former Soviet Union accounts. And Latin America was Haiti. So, I started actually, sorry, August, I remember that, because July 31 of '94 we had helped push through a resolution in the Security Council that said that a Chapter VII, in other words, a non-permissive peacekeeping operation was authorized to use any means necessary in order to restore President Aristide, who had been forced into exile a few years before. And the phrase "any means necessary" actually was essentially an order that put about 20,000 U.S. troops into action and they ended up going into Haiti in February of '95and they restored Aristide by force.

Q: Could you explain a little about Aristide and Haiti?

PFORZHEIMER: President Aristide, when I worked before the State Department for the Inter-American Foundation, Aristide was famous in the '80s as a radical priest who had challenged the Duvalier, the Baby Doc and Papa Doc regimes, and then he became a politician after the fall of Baby Doc in '86. When he was elected, he was, you know, everyone had great hopes, and then he did anger a number of the former Duvalier folks and they, I don't remember exactly how, but they threatened his life and he ended up leaving Haiti I think in '91, '92, and so he was living in Washington, DC, in exile. And so, we still believed in him. Later in his career he became someone we believed in a lot less, but at that point he was legitimately elected, he was still within his term, and the mandate of the international community was to restore him to power.

Q: Well then, what were you doing?

PFORZHEIMER: Writing reports. There were a couple of elements. Peacekeeping got me from the start as an incredible blend of operational and policy work. I had to be on top of what the U.S. military was doing in terms of deployment. There was the whole element of international law and how we were there and under what auspices, and then there was the UN liaison element of it. I started and within a couple of days someone said to me well, what about the report? I said what report? They said well, in the mandate at the end of July, it said that the United States was authorized to lead a coalition to restore Aristide and then to transition to a UN-led mission, I normal, permissive Chapter VI of the charter mission led by a UN general and not a U.S. general. And that in order for us to get from one type of operation to the other, we would prepare reports for the secretary general every two weeks, explaining the conditions under which it would move from a non-permissive or a hostile environment to a permissive one. So, you need the metrics that say what is a hostile environment and what's a non-hostile environment, and then you need to measure where you are for where you want to get. And I had to do all of that because nobody had a plan. And the first one was due in a week or something, so it

was a great challenge and I came up with- there were smart people all around me, I asked a lot of questions, and I came up with a couple of metrics that related to the status of the local security forces and whether the airport was open and what kind of movement and permissive environment we had for our troops, and then gave metrics against it. And I had to do that every two weeks until we transitioned the following year.

Q: Did you find- How did you find working with the American military, because you had to and I mean, you're a State Department girl and it's not the- talk about hostile environments in those days.

PFORZHEIMER: So, '94 for the U.S. military is not the U.S. military of post-Iraq, etcetera. They were still in that sort of lower tempo period. The Haiti operation was a big deal. People were happy about it and they wanted to get it right. And so, I think- I can't remember specific incidences, but I think of being treated a little more like a mascot than someone against whom they had to fight, we were seen as being on the same side. Because after Vietnam, with the exception of Grenada and Panama and then Desert Storm, like, the military just hadn't been up to a lot of activity like this. So, it was big. I made a friend then I still run into, we're talking 24 years later, that we worked together so that he would understand what- I was the ambassador in a way of what the UN was looking for. I was explaining UN issues to the U.S. military and vice versa, so we needed each other, and I remember a cordial relationship.

Q: Well, how long did you continue this and were any particular issues coming up?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, yes. I don't know how deep you want me to go into any details.

Q: Let's go into some details.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, my favorite story was the helicopters. When we were ready to transition from U.S.-led to UN-led, the criteria for all of these different elements of the environment were being met, but there was one last part. The UN needed a Quick Response Force, a QRF, that could help if any of their people got into trouble because they were going to go in under very different rules of engagement. They were not going to be as heavily armed as we had been, and they just didn't have as many resources. So, they could find 5,000 or 6,000 soldiers, supposedly it was a permissive environment so they only would have self-defense weaponry, but if something bad happened they didn't have a good way of getting out of trouble. So, the UN was essentially refusing to leave- was refusing, sorry, to take over unless we could give them two heavy lift helicopters that could bring soldiers to a mountainous point, you know, very mountainous country so we needed the heavy lift helicopters. And this is the beginning of 1996 and our political calculus was that people sort of politically in the United States didn't mind that we went to Haiti, but they didn't want us to stay very long. And the election in the United States was coming up and the Congress was hostile, so there was pressure to get us out of there. And Strobe Talbott got involved. People were very interested in this last piece being fixed.

And it turned into my problem, which was weird and shocking because I don't do helicopters, I didn't do helicopters. And I found this guy in the A bureau, the Administrative bureau, AOPR, I think, the contracting office, I think he'd been there since Vietnam, and I went to him with this problem and said as far as I can tell, if we sort of yank some money from the pol-mil bureau we have the money to do this ourselves and just put these helicopters at the U.S.'s disposal. But they can't be U.S. army; we were not allowed to put the U.S. military under the UN command and control, so we had to contract. So, in 1990 now '06, the only people contracting out heavy lift helicopters were the Russians, the former Soviets because they had plenty of them. I mean, to this day the Ukrainians do a lot of the UN's helicopter work. And so, this guy was able to find, I mean, he was a shady character, who knows what part of Air America he was involved in.

Q: Air America was a CIA-run operation in Vietnam.

PFORZHEIMER: Okay. Well, this guy, Rudy something, he was out there and knew where everything was. So, we found two helicopters and I was given a lot of information about helicopters, some of which stuck in my head until now, which is basically that it's much more dangerous to take a helicopter apart, put it in a transport plane and then put it back together again than it is to fly it. So, we had to fly it and they had to fly themselves to Haiti. So, if you're thinking now Siberia, which is where they were, to Haiti, the best route is over the United States of America. So, now we have the Jesse Helms, you know, UN white helicopters period of time where we were accused of creating a world government that the UN would be part of or lead, and we had to take Soviet helicopters over the United States to Haiti. So, the pol-mil bureau quietly got authorizations from Canada and from our own and the helicopters over, I think Memorial Day weekend, flew themselves across the United States and landed in Haiti with nobody being the wiser.

So, that was just one of those moments where I saw that the policy work in State was always punctuated by these operational requirements that came out of nowhere and suddenly took over your whole week, day or month.

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: The other thing I did when I was there besides Haiti, well, with Haiti I had a couple experiences of being part of this planning. The transition was a big deal for us, and so internal to the U.S. Government, I was part of a planning group led by James Dobbins, Ambassador Dobbins, who was the Haiti coordinator, and the folks in my bureau in IO gave me a huge amount of latitude, so I often, even as an 03 officer represented the bureau in interagency meetings. And they also allowed me to go to a planning meeting in Haiti so I could sit in the Haitian palace, which has unfortunately since been since pancaked by an earthquake, and see the old Duvalier collection of luxury cars that was underneath the palace. And hear Kofi Annan, who was the head of peacekeeping at the time and later became the UN secretary general, have the

conversation, there was going to be a Canadian who took over from us, so this was just a lot of logistics and discussions about how it would all work.

The other part of the job I had was the former Soviet Union. I did some work with Tajikistan, which had a small UN mission at the time, nothing memorable. And then with Georgia, I did the paperwork to get the first ever U.S. military officers into a peacekeeping mission in the former Soviet Union. And then, I was able in May of '95 to visit Georgia and Abkhazia, which was a then very recent breakaway part of Georgia and since then has kind of hardened into-

Q: This is part of the Soviet Union that broke up, Georgia became separate and then there was one part which, I guess it had- it was sort of an R&R (rest and relaxation) place for the Soviet army.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: And they weren't about to give that up.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. And we visited there. I went with a group with one person from our U.S. mission in New York and one military officer from the Pentagon's office on peacekeeping, and the three of us visited and at one point we went over the border with Abkhazia with a U.S. military observer. And we weren't sure if we would get over, so we brought a pack of cigarettes and a toothbrush, and we ended up spending the night in one of those old hotels that had been, you know, where the worker of the month got their vacation on the Black Sea.

I really enjoyed that tour a lot and later in my career I went back to be the director of that office. So, leaving it, I had sort of feet in both camps in terms of my Latin America experience or Central Asia, and for personal reasons I decided not to take a job that would have been in Kyrgyzstan because at that point I was thinking of having a child so I didn't want to be in a place with about zero medical facilities.

Q: Were you married at this point?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I got married in '95. So, I went to the then-ARA bureau (Bureau of Inter-American Affairs) and I was the desk officer for the Eastern Caribbean, which is not an exciting part of the world, but it was very active when I was there. We had a presidential visit to the region and two secretarial visits in the two years that I was in the job.

Q: What would cause those visits there?

PFORZHEIMER: I mean, it was, you know, there was a focus on the drug war. There was the sense that the Caribbean was- it was called the Third Border Initiative. I got to work with Richard Clark, who became sort of famous later as the person who'd warned

in the summer of 2001 about Al-Qaeda. He was at the National Security Council working on transnational crime. So, we looked at the Caribbean as a kind of underdeveloped area which was a center for crime, not only drug trafficking. But it was something that hadn't been worked on, so there was quite a lot to do. And in '96, U.S. policy had sharpened regarding deportations. There were more deportations of folks who had been resident in the United States a long time but had committed crimes, and so the criminal, the crime rates in the Caribbean were going up and we were partly blamed for that, with people who would have essentially learned their gang trade while in the United States. So, that was a source of anger.

Q: I understand today, I've talked to people who served in El Salvador and said that people have been deported from the United States to El Salvador, from New York City and Los Angeles, came back and created gangs which hadn't really existed.

PFORZHEIMER: I think that's true and to some degree the environment back in El Salvador, where I later served, was very hospitable for that, unfortunately, with the aftermath of their war. And a whole generation of people who were not raising their own kids. So, the Caribbean was interested in doing more with us, we were interested in doing more with them. I worked on trade issues as well, on bananas and protectionism of the European Union towards Caribbean bananas.

Q: Could you go into that a bit? I mean, we've gone into chicken wars; we've had sort of banana wars too.

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, it was a huge issue in certain circles. The European Union had protected the banana trade from the Caribbean from its former colonies for a long time, and we were under pressure from Chiquita and Dole which had big, big plantations, mostly in Ecuador, to allow access to the European market. And Chiquita and Dole made sure to give money to really everybody in the political landscape in order to keep this issue alive. And I think it was unfortunate really, overall. I wasn't a big believer in the idea that the Caribbean should be forced out of their, you know, more expensive production of bananas. The Europeans didn't really mind paying more and Chiquita and Dole were doing just fine, but I was a good soldier and so I did what I was told with respect to that issue.

Q: My experience in Europe was that the bananas we had in America, which is Chiquita and Dole maybe, were a better product. Bananas in Europe are kind of puny.

PFORZHEIMER: They are Caribbean and African. They're a different breed. And it's true, they are punier and more expensive.

Q: Did Cuba enter your calculus?

PFORZHEIMER: No. The "brothers to the rescue" planes that were shot down were around that same time, so there was, you know, side by side in the Caribbean office there

was a whole separate Cuba office. There was this attempt at détente and closer relations in the mid ’90s and that just got completely erased by that one incident.

Q: These Cuban exiles were flying planes and distributing propaganda by pamphlets over there and the Cubans shot them down.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: And that stopped- It was the Clinton Administration, wasn’t it?

PFORZHEIMER: It was.

Q: Had been making overtures to Cuba, saying let’s break this, come on, it’s been too long, let’s do something about it, and that ended that.

PFORZHEIMER: It did. Yes. And the Helms-Burton.

Q: Burton, I think.

PFORZHEIMER: Helms-Burton came out around them, which penalized countries that did business with Cuba or you had to prepare a fancy waiver. So, the Cuba issue went from being a slight glimmer of activity to dead the whole time that I worked on that area of the world.

We did a lot, as far as trying to improve relations with mostly the English-speaking Caribbean, that’s what I worked on. I worked on a summit that happened in ’97. I went traveling with Madeleine Albright to another summit. There was a summit in ’97 in Barbados and then I went traveling with Madeleine Albright, it must have been February of ’98 because I was four months pregnant at the time, and we went to Haiti for a day and then we went on to Trinidad and Tobago. And I always tell this story of- as instructive to people who have worked for me over these. So, when you write talking points for the State Department there are two styles; you’re either writing talking points where you put yourself in the first person and you write the memo, you say I want us to be friends. Or you write in the third person or second person, I guess, tell the person you want to be friends. Those are two different styles, they’re both valid. Try not to mix them up while you are writing a single document. Especially try not to mix them up when you’re writing a single document for Madeleine Albright when she went to Trinidad and didn’t read her briefing book ahead of time. So, she thought she was going to read it -- we had a rest day in Tobago, it’s a very pleasant place where she went to a spa, I think -- and the flight from Tobago to Trinidad is about 20 minutes long. You go up, you go down again. That was when she was going to read her briefing book for a meeting that she was chairing with 15 Caribbean nations. So, she started- I was note taking as the desk officer, note taking and I had my own document with me that I was going to just use as my guide for taking notes. Well, she started speaking and I realized that she was reading it word for word, so I just put a little checkmark next to the point I’d prepared as what she had read.

And then, about midway through, I went from I, I, I to you, and that's the word that she started with, and then she corrected herself and moved on.

Q: Well, you didn't mention Jamaica. How was- It was Manley at one time, wasn't it? But we had not been on the greatest terms with the leader there, Manley, but how stood things in your period with the Caribbean desk?

PFORZHEIMER: I was not the desk officer for Jamaica; that was a separate desk and I didn't end up doing a lot with it. I wasn't the backup for the desk. I was friendly with the officer- there were two different officers the two years I was there. It was just a rough relationship. There wasn't a lot that was productive happening. They had a terrible crime problem. It was political violence, or it was criminal violence; it was indistinguishable. And I think they just spent a lot of time trying to keep things from falling apart further and they had, the Jamaicans had an ambassador in Washington who was brutal. I think his last name was Bernal, and he went on to remain a very important force in Caribbean politics and he was sort of just a thorn in our side. The U.S. had a free trade agreement, the Caribbean Basin Initiative, since Reagan and the Jamaicans spent a lot of time fighting with us over the textile provisions. And so, that was still in force and they were fighting over the textile requirements that from, I guess the U.S. side we were keeping fairly tight and they wanted to allow more products to be imported free of tariff.

Q: Were any particular parts of this island group giving you a pain?

PFORZHEIMER: St. Vincent, talk about these sort of operational punctuations, St. Vincent had arrested an American couple who were the kind- there's a type that goes to the Caribbean and just gets in trouble, and these people had been hanging around and making friends with the locals and a local fisherman had ended up dead on their yacht or soon after being with them on their yacht. And the locals decided these guys were responsible and they were facing the death penalty. And it was a huge deal and we had a really great vice consul, I remember, who covered the trial, and at one point she wrote a very evocative cable about how the judge was totally prejudiced against the couple and had taken pieces of lint and woven them together to make a rope. There was no evidence that they had committed this crime, but the circumstantial side of it was more than anyone could handle. And we had a terrible relationship with the prime minister. The prime ministers, I mean, I had seven countries that I was responsible for; there were seven national days and seven governments and almost all of these prime ministers had- their names were two first names, like Keith Mitchell, you know, and Eddie James and that sort of thing. Only the Birds in Antigua, a long-standing political family. So, it actually was my parlor trick to be able to remember the prime ministers of each of these countries and where they were north to south on the windward and leeward.

But I got some really nice trips out of it. It's a pretty part of the world. And it was a great place when, in my second year when I was pregnant and I was really sleepy my first trimester, it was not a very busy job, so I had a couple of- I had some days where I would

put my feet up and take a nap in the morning, none the wiser, because it was not a face paced office environment.

Q: I interviewed one Foreign Service officer who served in that area, and she talked about the problem she had at social occasions, the leaders often had several mistresses in tow and trying to- you were never quite sure who was going to show up and all that. Did you have any-?

PFORZHEIMER: I didn't because I was in DC. I don't know if this person was in the field.

Q: I know the person was there.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. It was easy, actually. I had a very dysfunctional embassy. We had a political appointee woman who was- named Jeanette Hyde, and Jeanette was a well-connected North Carolinian who I always remember- It was a period of great budget cuts and the Soviet, the former Soviet republics were pulling all the money, the new embassies were being opened, and you know, this is when they closed a lot of consulates in Latin America, so they told her that she was going to lose her two American officers and eight local staff that constituted her entire public diplomacy section. So, she picked up the phone twice and called Jesse Helms and Al Gore and complained, and she kept one American and four locals.

Q: These are two senators, very important senators.

PFORZHEIMER: Well no, at the time Al Gore was vice president.

Q: Al Gore was vice president.

PFORZHEIMER: So, she called a conservative, ultra conservative Republican and the vice president under Clinton and that was the- you know, she had connections. She was an enormous pain to work with and nobody enjoyed being at that embassy. And then she was replaced by a guy that I had to take through confirmation named William Crotty. Mr. Crotty had been a used car dealer in Daytona, Florida, given a lot of money to both parties, and he wanted to be ambassador. And he was singularly unqualified. So, I could tell you more stories about him, but I won't.

Q: Can you tell one?

PFORZHEIMER: One story is that we went to- I took him all over town. He was not in good health and in fact, I will say, unfortunately, he died while he was in office. But he- We went to see the DEA. He kind of didn't have the attention span to sit through the briefing. So, when he was in his hearing, which was just a half dozen very friendly who had sort of all received money from him, I believe, they asked him for his

counter-narcotics approach, and instead of using anything the DEA mentioned, he said that he had seven children and he was happy to say that they were all drug free.

Q: So, that took care of that?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. So, it was a good tour. It was good for me. And from there I bid on the human rights officer position in Turkey, which was just one of my many career switchbacks. I really wanted to try a different part of the world. I was still sad that I hadn't gotten to Central Asia. And it was via language training. I was going to have my son in, it turned out at the end of July of 1998, so I would go from that into language training. And that was the first case where I had to work the whole family issue. The Foreign Service Institute starts its training at the end of August for languages, it was a 10-month language, and I was not going to be able to do that. So, they let me take a three-week Turkish familiarization course in June, no, early July, so I ended my job with the Caribbean Affairs, I went into the language course, and then I went on maternity leave and I had eight weeks of maternity leave and that's it. But I started language then four weeks late, so I had this sort of preview maternity leave and then I started language training late with a two-month-old and a very good nanny.

Q: I've probably covered this before, but it's been quite a hiatus, you married; was your husband in the Foreign Service or how stood this?

PFORZHEIMER: No. My husband was, is, was not, has never been in the Foreign Service. He is Colombian. He is somebody I met on my first tour. And so, at that point he was just employed here in Washington and he said sure, let's go anywhere in the world, and I figured I would pick somewhere that wasn't in Latin America because just in case he liked it we could stay there and if he didn't like it we could go back to Latin America, which is actually what happened. He was just here with me and willing to go overseas in an era where that was not as typical.

Q: Yes. Alright, first place, how did you find what you got out of Turkish? How is learning the language?

PFORZHEIMER: I liked it. It was not that easy. At that point I was 35, so your brain starts to reject new languages a little bit. But I liked it; it was a puzzle and I liked putting it together. I had some difficulties with vocabulary and as usual with the second language I learned here, which was Dari, my comprehension was pretty good. My ability to speak was a little bit behind that and reading was behind that. So, when I finished, I finished with a two plus/two plus, which I ended up being able to raise to a three/three once I was in-country. But I liked it a lot as an experience, the coming to class, the teachers are very dedicated. They were all a little odd with some fairly strongly held political beliefs. One of my colleagues brought in a book about Kurds and he was somewhat ostracized for the rest of the year. But if you stayed on their good side, they were nice, and they put heart and soul into it.

Q: I know I went through Serbian training and I- I say Serbian; I've learned my lesson. But when I learned it, it was technically Serbo-Croatian.

PFORZHEIMER: Absolutely.

Q: But anything Croatian, it was not proper as far as the teachers were concerned.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I had a colleague who was maybe a four/four in Arabic and was learning Turkish, so of course he would put Arabic kind of- there are many, many words borrowed from Arabic in Turkish, and he'd gravitate towards those, but they wanted to use a different version of those words.

Q: Oh, yes.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: So, you served in Turkey from when to when?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, before I get to that I will actually just for the benefit of this process point out that being a nursing mother in 1998 in the Foreign Service Institute meant that I didn't have anywhere to go to pump, so the breast milk pumping debate, which is pretty hot and heavy or has been over the years, at that point what it meant was that I would be sitting on the floor in the women's bathroom, which was down the hall from my class. So, just for the people who come after, so they know, sometimes I tell people that and they are surprised.

Q: I have three children and I obviously had a wife, but what was the process? I mean, was this- breast pumps weren't available or?

PFORZHEIMER: No, I had the pump. It's, you know, it's usually your own property, that's not the problem. The issue is the amount of time that it takes and the amount of break time that you get. So, you had the morning sessions with a half-hour break, then another session, then lunch, then the afternoon. So, lunch was long enough for me to go somewhere else; sometimes I could just find an empty classroom. And after a while, I think they designated a classroom. And I didn't do this, I wasn't pumping the whole time that I was in language, but those half-an-hour break was too short to go somewhere else, set everything up, do it and then come back again. So, the only place with privacy and an electrical outlet was the bathroom that was down the hall. Now, I'm not full of any kind of annoyance or anything about this; it's just a fact. I think that the FSI bathroom is cleaner than I keep my own apartment, frankly. It was, you know, there's a very high standard of cleanliness in the U.S. Government, so I wasn't worried about it or anything else and certainly nothing bad happened. But it does kind of sit a little funny, to say that.

Q: Was there any other solution?

PFORZHEIMER: I couldn't think of one. I needed privacy, a door that locked and an electrical outlet. So, that was it. The handicapped stall is next to- there's an electrical outlet and a shelf. They must have thought of this. So, that's what I did. But it was fine. And having a baby and doing the language training had its challenges but nothing out of the ordinary.

Q: Well then, you were in Turkey where and what were you doing and from when to when?

PFORZHEIMER: I was in Ankara at the embassy in the political section. I was in an 03 position as the human rights officer, even though, actually, I had been promoted the year that I was in language to FS-02. And so, I was over-graded for the position. And the human rights officer actually was the exact same job, in a way, that I had done in my other political section tour in South Africa. So, it was something I was familiar with, but everything else was a total challenge, you know, new part of the world, trying to use my Turkish, which I did from time to time. I was not really able to make genuine conversation; a lot of the time I had to use an interpreter. And it had the NATO aspect, it had the EU accession aspect. The years were between 1999 and 2002. So, I was there over 9/11. As it happened, on 9/11 I was in southeastern Turkey. I was near the border with Syria in an area near Siirt, and I was there because we were looking at the issue of Kurds.

Q: Well, let's- Could you describe the situation in Turkey, first in general and then human rights-wise?

PFORZHEIMER: Turkey was, you know, we didn't know it then, but it was nearing the end of a long period of politics as usual. This is before Erdoğan was elected in 2003. So, the two leaders that were there while I was there were both in their late 70s and represented the secularist mainstream of that time. And the Islamist parties were growing in power and influence, but they had not yet taken center stage. Erdoğan at that point was in jail. So, we actually laughed because in 1999, in November of '99 there was a summit for the OSCE, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the president, Demirel, so the Turkish president, who's a slightly more ceremonial figure than the prime minister, was the same guy who'd been president or prime minister in Turkey in 1974 when the previous OSCE summit had taken place. So, the papers showed a picture of this guy and Brezhnev and Ford in '74, and then the same guy in Turkey. You know, obviously the Soviet Union and the U.S. had moved on since then, but it was the same Turkish guy.

The other big event when I was there, before 9/11, was the earthquake in August of 1999. I got there in July and the earthquake happened a month in. We didn't really feel it in Ankara, but it was enormous in Istanbul. I mean, 18,000 people just died. It was at 3:00 in the morning, people were home. They were in substandard concrete apartment buildings that flattened. Just thousands of people dead and others- And actually, many buildings survived just fine that had decent building codes, so it was a criminal

responsibility that nobody ever paid for. And our embassy mobilized folks, not me, to go to Istanbul and help with the delivery of relief. So, that was in August and there were tent cities and people living in these terrible conditions.

So, in November of '99, I did participate in the support for the summit and President Clinton came to that. And it was a big visit. He and Hillary and Chelsea went to Ephesus. You know, they did some tourism. They did some real good by showing people that there were many parts of Turkey that were just fine and beautiful and you could visit them because the earthquake had gotten so much attention. And then there was this famous visit that Clinton did to the refugee areas of people living in these tent cities. So, the Turkish leadership was kind of old and very introverted, didn't come out much, didn't talk to people, whatever, and Bill Clinton walked into the refugee camp and just walked through all the people and he was talking to them and hugging people. And he picked up this baby who was dressed beautifully in this little white sweater, and the baby reached down and grabbed his nose, and a thousand people took that picture and it was on every Turkish paper, you know, this sort of vital, loving figure of a politician. And I think it was actually part of the downfall of the Turkish elite.

Q: Well, the Turks had already gone through their distancing of the military, hadn't they? Or, I mean, the military had- was not part of the political equation or not?

PFORZHEIMER: No, it wasn't that recent. It hadn't been that long. In '97 there was another, it was a full-fledged coup, as I recall, but there was actually a- This was when the Islamists have gotten into power. That would be, I think, if I'm getting that wrong, I apologize, but I think that in-

Q: You can change it later on.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. In '97 the military had flexed its political muscle and gotten Tansu Çiller out of office and so the secularists were back in, but as it turned out not much longer.

Q: Well then, let's talk about the situation with human rights.

PFORZHEIMER: Absolutely. It was enormously negative on a lot of levels. The Turkish state was responsible for torture of detainees, a lot of improper extra-judicial detention, some killings, quite a bit of repression of free speech and assembly, especially with respect to the Islamists and with the Kurdish parties, the Kurdish people. You know, when you look at it through a lens maybe of what's happened since in different countries you might think it was not as grave, but I think we found it to be fairly serious and fixable. People didn't see the problem the same way the Turks did. We thought that it would be okay for them to allow much more pluralism, and I think that's actually plausible. I mean, I don't want to do revisionist history and say the Turks were right to repress the Islamists because look what they've done later; I think that they shouldn't have done it. They shouldn't have done almost all of the things that they did and certainly

not with the Kurds. And it was in the context of Turkey trying to join the European Union and the Europeans were, it ran a gamut. They were either genuinely horrified and wanted the Turks to behave better, or they were just resistant in general to the Turks joining the European Union and this was a convenient way to say why.

Q: I was never an authority on Turkey or Europe, really, but I always felt that putting it to a vote, I mean, I could just see the French, when you put something to a vote, it's like this leaving the European Union for Britain. I mean, I think people who are agin it usually are trying to show their dislike and not really thinking of the consequences. And I didn't think Turkey had a chance of getting in.

PFORZHEIMER: This was, yes, exactly. This was the Copenhagen summit, in 1999 I believe, but what I remember is that in my office- I mean, I was mostly doing internal politics, but everyone got pressed into service for this, and we actually wrote two completely different cables that either they were voted in or they weren't and had them ready to go.

Q: Well, what were you doing, I mean regarding the human rights, particularly? Was anybody really paying attention in the States?

PFORZHEIMER: They were. I worked- Sometimes I was working against a lot of resistance. The Pentagon could hear no wrong about Turkey. Lots of people on the Hill, same thing. However, there were other lobbies, the Greek, Armenian, others, who didn't like Turkey, and there was a human rights caucus. There were people within the State Department who felt strongly about human rights and I might confess to having back channeled them some information from time to time that strengthened their hand because certainly from where I stood it looked like the European bureau wanted nothing to do with calling out Turkey at certain points on human rights.

Q: Yes, I've talked to people who served in Europe when the Turks came into Cyprus. And you could just tell, I mean, here are these damn people off to the one side were muddying the floors of the stately edifice of the European Union, you know. And these little ethnic squabbles were really beyond; gentlemen didn't do this sort of thing.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, our military in this case sort of was the big dog, and I would say this would be a point in my career where my relations with the military weren't particularly great because we were just set up to be adversaries in this case. And so, what I thought was terrible they thought was perfectly okay. I was the odd person out and I had also issues with, sometimes with my own RSO, the regional security officer. One case I argued the Leahy Amendment which prohibited us from providing training to individuals or units that were guilty of gross violations of human rights; that was new and so I was the person who was implementing it. And in one case, an anti-terrorism squad, who we wanted to train or my RSO wanted to train, they had been responsible for the torture of a Kurdish doctor. And he wasn't just a doctor, he was a forensic doctor. He documented his own torture. Usually, there was sort of "no proof." Well, this guy provided for himself.

And so, my deputy chief of mission, the very visionary James Jeffries, had my RSO and I come to his office and we debated to him the merits of either doing the training or the legal requirement to not do the training. And I remember winning that one, which was a surprise.

Q: This is you would not train them.

PFORZHEIMER: We would not train them.

Q: How did you see the situation of the Kurds in Turkey in your era?

PFORZHEIMER: So, they were being actively persecuted, told they couldn't use their own language, couldn't name their children Kurdish names. They couldn't- They at that point had a political party but it was under sort of constant threat and harassment. So, it was difficult for them and dangerous, and we were sympathetic to their problems. So, I made sure to try to include them in events. They had a couple of- You know, we thought of it a little bit like the Sinn Féin sort of Irish, you know, these were the people who were in the legitimate political party who were pursuing- under a democracy pursuing sort of an opposition politics versus terrorists. They were not themselves advocating violence. Ocalan, who was the leader of the terrorist group, I mean, there really was one, he was in jail as of the time that I arrived in Turkey.

Q: Did you have to use the term "mountain Turks" for the Kurds?

PFORZHEIMER: That came out- There was a, maybe it was periodic, but there was a reminder to the newspapers of the ways that it was proper to refer to Kurds and the ways that it was proper to refer to Ocalan. You had to say baby killer. Baby killer Ocalan. Or police killer or something. He had to be modified in that way.

Q: How about the Islamists? How did we see them? After 9/11 this must have changed things, didn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: After 9/11 it changed things. Before that, I mean, I put together, for example, when Clinton was there in November of '99, I put together a group of seven NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) leaders and we were very careful; one was straight up secular human rights, one was the Islamist human rights, one was an environmental leader, a woman leader, to meet with the president. So, we did use- there was an Islamist group called Mazlum Der and I used to meet with them, and they wouldn't shake my hand, but they would meet with me. And we tried to provide them with the same kind of, I don't know, protective umbrella that we were trying to provide to other human rights groups. After 9/11, you know, I left in the middle of 2002; we were still very much on the same page with Turkey as long as I was there, and we still, I think, saw them as having a strong secular state that could handle more freedom of speech for the Islamists and the Kurds.

Q: You mentioned women would shake your hand. I would have thought woman-to-woman, that would not be a problem.

PFORZHEIMER: No. I misspoke, Mazlum Der is the name of the Islamist group and the Islamist group leader wouldn't shake my hand, who was a man.

Q: How were women treated or were you looking at that?

PFORZHEIMER: Women in Turkey actually were in a relatively good position, except for some vestigial problems which unfortunately are still there, which was honor killings, women had a pretty good position. I mean, the leader, founder of modern Turkey had promoted women's equality. So, I think in, you know, de facto women didn't rise to many of the leadership positions in politics, so it was a little bit more of a theory, but they were all over the place in the human rights community, in the legal community, even in the business community.

One other thing I did when I was in Turkey, just before I forget, is that I opened, and then it closed, but I opened something called an American presence post in Izmir. So, for a little while in the era of all these consulates having been closed when they opened the new embassies in post-Soviet countries in the '90s, they had these one-person posts that would show an American presence. It wasn't a full-fledged consulate. And we used to have a consulate in Izmir which we had closed, and my boss, who knew that I was a little restless, gave me the problem set of figuring out if we could open a new APP. And so, I got to perform functions like make contact with local authorities and go collect up our previous Foreign Service Nationals and figure out the parameters of what the presence post would do and find an office and those sorts of things, which normally for an oh-three officer in a political section you don't get to do.

Q: Izmir is Smyrna, isn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: It is.

Q: It has quite a history in-

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: How did you find getting around Turkey?

PFORZHEIMER: Easy. On business it was easy and personally, my husband and I would put our toddler in the car and go places or we would fly to the coast and we have wonderful pictures and memories of him playing on Roman ruins as a two-year-old. We went all over. We saw a lot.

Q: What sort of society did you move in in Ankara?

PFORZHEIMER: It was a little hard to make friends in some part, I think, because we were backwards, you know. I was the officer and my husband was mainly at home and there was a heavy military culture within the embassy, and they didn't know what to do with him. So, I will say that we met some other expats and we had some friends, but it was not the most enjoyable embassy environment for me.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

PFORZHEIMER: The first one was Robert Pearson and the second one was Mark -- wow, I can't remember his last name. No, I'm reversing the order; the first one was Mark Parris, the second one was Pearson.

Q: By this time, I wouldn't expect there'd be any problem, but being a woman officer fairly high up in the business, how was it?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, it wasn't a problem with the Turks, by and large, especially because as a human rights officer the milieu was more the NGO and sometimes the foreign ministry. Within the embassy I encountered a little bit of discrimination. It was more about my spouse, that he was not invited to some of the things that if the genders had been reversed my spouse would have been invited to. The wives were clubby and didn't know how to include men in their group at times. And that matters. I mean, it makes a difference sometimes in terms of your, you know, your ease with senior people can happen through your spouses being close to each other and I never really had that.

Also, one time my colleague and I, female colleague, went to my boss and said to him that we had the perception that we were getting less interesting assignments than our male counterparts, that we were getting a little bit of the chores versus the more glamour assignments. And he said he was sorry and that he would do better, and he did.

Q: So, how did you feel about sort of the Middle East, or did you consider, was Turkey really considered Middle East?

PFORZHEIMER: I really couldn't see it as being terribly Middle Eastern, but it also was certainly not European. I think of Turkey as being one of those very interesting former empires, full of a sense of its own glory, not that interested in learning from other countries. But it's worth knowing because it's had a profound impact on the rest of the world and it's just a fascinating country.

Q: Were the Turks reaching out to the former parts of the Soviet Union like the Stans and all that?

PFORZHEIMER: They were. And I think they did it in a kind of a ham handed, fairly colonial way that, you know, we're the big brothers, we know what's going on. They certainly did that with Afghanistan; it took them years to become welcomed again in Afghanistan after- they just came on too strong. That was my impression. But that was

just an impression I had from being in Turkey. But I remember, there were quite a few Central Asians and Russians in Turkey as well. I mean, it was a burgeoning period for that commerce.

Q: How about with Greece and Cyprus? Anything happening?

PFORZHEIMER: No, it was frozen at that point. We participated in all of the preparations for various and sundry inconclusive talks, but it was, I think at that period, '99 to 2002, it was as frozen a conflict as you could get. We visited Northern Cyprus as tourists. You were sort of not supposed to, but it wasn't forbidden, and it was amazing because it's very unspoiled.

Q: I never got to Cyprus. I was in Greece for four years.

Well then, you left Turkey when?

PFORZHEIMER: In July of 2002.

Q: Whither did you see yourself going? What did you want to do?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I wanted to run a section and my husband maybe had enough of that part of the world and being away from his family and roots, and he hadn't been successful in finding anything to do, which was really tough, and so we went, I bid on Latin America. And this filled one of my bosses in Ankara with great horror when he learned that I was going to be the political counselor in El Salvador, which was my next assignment. He said to me, why would you do that? The only bureaus that matter are EUR (Bureau of European Affairs) and NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs).

Q: Well, I mean, that's the perception. I mean, I always looked upon ARA or Latin American Affairs as being a black hole. People would go there and never appear again.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. And those of us who served in Latin America are well aware of that attitude, as are those of us who have served in functional bureaus, but you know, the hell with it, you only get one life.

Q: Oh, sure, no.

PFORZHEIMER: And I was very, very uninterested- In 2002, the world, much as it does now, seemed like a kind of a dangerous and hairy place and I didn't want to be around as much of the anguish of the post 9/11 period as I thought Europe represented. So, being in Latin America seemed like a breather, especially with a young son.

Q: But El Salvador. You're going off, you're going to El Salvador. That was 2002?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: How was it viewed at that time? I mean, what was happening there?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, it had a very high murder rate, but aside from that, in a way it felt like what I had seen with the peacekeeping job, I was really interested in what it looked like 10 years after. So, the peace accords had been signed in '92, so when I visited they were 10 years in, the capital city had a mayor who was affiliated with the guerrilla group, the former guerrilla group which is now a political party, and they had gone through a significant security force reconfiguration and reform, and it was working. And I think with all of its problems it's still a pretty impressive example of an insurgency ending and the international community giving rise to a new and more democratic country.

Q: You were there from 2002 to?

PFORZHEIMER: 2005.

Q: 2005. It's a good solid three years. And you were what, political counselor?

PFORZHEIMER: I was political counselor.

Q: What happened during your time? I mean, what were the things that occupied you mainly?

PFORZHEIMER: The Iraq war broke out and we were asked to find coalition members and El Salvador said yes, so that was part of my job. We had- they had an election in 2004 for the president and we had a kind of strong Bush, George W. Bush group that was trying to put its finger on the scale during that time. We had the first, I think the first ever political appointee ambassador come in. He was a nice man, who didn't speak Spanish. And they had extended, it doesn't seem like a big deal, but it was, they extended the temporary protected status for over 260,000 Salvadorans who had been in the United States at the time of their 2001 earthquake. And it's amazing because this was 2002 and '03 and '04 and they extended the status. These people are still here today, 14 years later, and that was partly influenced by the fact that they chose to go to Iraq and so we made a political decision to keep the temporary protected status for these Salvadorans that's turned into something that's not reversible.

Q: What did the El Salvadorans send to Iraq and how did they perform?

PFORZHEIMER: They sent a 300-person unit that rotated every six months and they performed extremely well. I have a colleague who I met a few years later who told me that the unit had actually saved his life in one case. And they're tough. They trained with our people. They didn't see a whole lot of combat, but they were an augmenting force. And of course, honestly, the politics of it were more important than anything else. It was

another flag. They were the only or one of two in all of Latin America who sent people to Iraq.

Q: Colombia sent somebody?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, I think Colombia did.

Q: I mean, because you think of Colombia and Korea.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.The Salvadorans jumped into it because 300 people, they had a military of 6,000, so it was a lot.

Q: Yes. Well, what were the politics of El Salvador in your era?

PFORZHEIMER: They had a president- The whole time I was, from the right-wing party, so in the 2004 election the right-wing candidate won. They were coming to terms extremely slowly with the civil war, with the atrocities. They had gone through a period of almost blanket amnesty and then a few cases were starting to come up. And they were having the gang issue, as I'd mentioned before and you've mentioned, the deportations hurt El Salvador because you had the wave of people who had come up during the war in the '80s, early '90s and they had formed gangs as self-protection against Mexicans in California, etcetera, and you still had that influence, people who had been deported, and they you also had parents in the United States and especially under the temporary protected status, they were not able to travel back, so their kids were being raised by their grandparents and there was not enough supervision and family cohesion to keep a lot of people out of trouble. So, there wasn't enough employment, there were all of these negative influences, and of course, the landholders in El Salvador continued to have a chokehold on the economy. And as far as they're concerned, to the upper class in El Salvador and you can talk about Guatemala and Honduras, emigration is a great idea. They essentially groom and encourage people to leave because the more poor people who leave El Salvador to work in the United States, that means the fewer disgruntled poor people in El Salvador and the more free money that their economy gets.

Q: How did you find your political contacts?

PFORZHEIMER: Everybody was just divinely happy to be around the Americans. It was way too easy. Like, that period of time in 2003, the world was pretty hostile to the United States for going into Iraq, and I had people who were just thrilled to come to a U.S. event, to be around us. They were excited when Bush won in 2004. I mean, it was a little bit bizarre.

Q: Well, were there any sort of terrorist groups or anything like that in that era?

PFORZHEIMER: No. No. I remember one time, they were so excited to be working with us on anything that we got a call telling us that there had been a group of Muslims who

were in a casino, they had a few casinos in San Salvador, and they wanted to report them to us. And then it turned out that they were Guatemalan; you know, there's a small Muslim community in Guatemala. They were muslim Guatemalans who had come over the border so they could gamble outside of Guatemala. But no, the Salvadorans were all willingness, but no real need to call them into anything.

It was a good tour for me to learn the nuts and bolts of being a manager, of the State Department's narcotics policies, our international visitors' programs. I managed, in my section, the INL program, the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement program was about a million bucks. No, a lot less than that. And we couldn't do very much, but I learned a lot about the oversight function of a mid-level and senior manager.

Q: What was the drug situation?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, this was a period of- the drug flows from South America towards the United States had gone through the Caribbean for a long time and then they were morphing towards the Pacific. And so, one of the things we worked on with the Salvadorans was the international agreements that we had for overflight and for us to be able to go through their territorial waters to make sure that there was sort of a seamless and, you know, that there were no gaps in the coverage that we had to monitor drug flights and transshipments.

Q: Did the El Salvadoran, how did they live within Central America as far as the political-?

PFORZHEIMER: Salvador has been, you know, they've part of- there are a thousand and one metaphorically different integration and coordination mechanisms among the Central Americans, none of which really work because they don't want them to. They're all kind of competitive with each other, the same products, the same people, and so efforts to have then integrate further into a single political entity have never really borne much fruit. But they play nicely with others.

Q: Did we have any, I mean, were we exerting influence and saying why don't you all guys get together?

PFORZHEIMER: Sure, we did. It would never- I mean, we just got the runaround and they just, I mean, you can talk about five countries that have the same national day, that speak the exact same language, that have the same ethnicity. You know, there should be no real impediment to them becoming a larger and more powerful state except that four of them can't be president anymore.

Q: Yes. Well, did you see were there Indian problems? I mean, mistreatment of Indians and that sort of thing?

PFORZHEIMER: Well no, because they killed them all a long, long time before. Salvador has almost no indigenous population.

Q: That takes care of that.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, the Spanish took care of that. And almost no trees. They're about 93 percent deforested. They were the indigo- Indigo was the cash crop for a while, before coffee and other things, and the Spanish just leveled it.

Q: Were they making any move to replant and reforest?

PFORZHEIMER: Nothing very concerted. I mean, I think Salvador, I don't mean to blame the victim, but honestly, it was a kleptocratic, oligarchy of not exactly generous politicians. They were only thinking about themselves and their kids and that was it. So, the idea of doing something for the good of the whole country was minor. I mean, they also, to give them credit, they were rebuilding from a devastating earthquake.

Q: What about you mentioned about our leadership program and all. I mean, I imagine, I mean, that's what introduced foreigners to American society. I don't think you could have- I mean, they knew American society.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. It was hard to find a Salvadoran who had sort of no ties or no visits, but they were there. Was this Salvador? No. Oh, I could have told my story in Turkey. I did a leadership program in Turkey as the human rights officer with five human rights leaders. And when they came back, one of them, I was at a dinner, my Danish colleague gave a dinner and invited this guy who'd been to the United States and me, and thought as a favor to me that he would let this guy talk about this visit, which had been, you know, I was trying to show them how U.S. human rights groups worked together. But instead, the man went on for a really long time about the horrific prison conditions in the United States and discrimination and the terrible things that he had seen in my country, and there I was sitting at dinner with this going on. It sort of soured me a tiny bit about these programs being automatically good for relations. You know, you need to be careful what you do.

Q: Yes. Did you see yourself resettling into the ARA or Western Hemisphere orbit?

PFORZHEIMER: Not really. I was extremely bored by it. There were natural progressions of what I would do afterwards that I wanted to avoid. From that job, what I should have done is gotten a deputy office director job in WHA which would have turned me into a DCM candidate. You know, that was the natural progression and I just found the issues to be really dull. I wasn't that engaged with that career concept.

Q: Well, I belong to sort of Far East and European circuit and all that, and at one point I was with the board of examiners, giving the oral exam, and I used to pose the question to

candidates, I'd say Henry Kissinger used to say Latin America is a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica. What does that mean, you know?

PFORZHEIMER: I mean, it has, I think Latin America has tremendous significance, but not really as a foreign policy arena. It has enormous, to me it should have enormous significance to the United States as essentially our natural allies with the rest of the world. I mean, I think we should be as federated as possible with Latin America because economically and politically and demographically it would give us such an edge in our dealings with Europe and with unfriendlies. It would be great. But as a nation, we don't seem to have the ability to allow slightly brown people to tell us anything, so we can't federate if we're going to consistently say that we're the ones who are always in charge.

Q: Did you find there was this attitude- I mean, how about the rest of the staff at the embassy and all? Were you sort of the discontented one?

PFORZHEIMER: I wasn't discontented there. I just didn't want to do it much more. I mean, it was a great family post. Eventually my husband found some work, which was good. He could do soccer. My kid was happy, had friends. So, there were a lot of life issues that were very good there. The weather was perfect. I had a convertible. At the embassy, I think you had some folks who were very lifer, you know, marking time, not that dynamic, honestly. And then you had other people who have gone on to bigger things.

Q: How did you feel about the political ambassador there? Was he-?

PFORZHEIMER: He was an interesting case. He was a sweet person. And I used to describe him at first as this kind of appreciator of us career people, like Lewis and Clark felt about Sacagawea, that he was always happy and appreciative and impressed with how much we knew and our fantastic Spanish, and we were his guide. And he had his quirks, but mostly he was courteous. He was a New York State politician who had run a newspaper and done a lot of things and he had a lot of life experience that, honestly, we didn't have. So, as long as he was sort open to hearing from us how things normally worked and then he put his own spin on it, it was a really positive relationship. But he also could just go off on weird tangents. He decided that his job was to increase Salvador's GDP by three percent. So, he would sort of interject that into any meetings, like well yes, but how is this going to increase Salvador's GDP by three percent? I don't know, I do public diplomacy, that would be the answer. But he was not always all that easy to manage.

Q: Well then after this post, whither?

PFORZHEIMER: I applied for and got into the War College, so I went to the National War College at National Defense University at Fort McNair.

Q: This is 2005 and to'06?

PFORZHEIMER: ’05 to ’06.

Q: You already, you’d had a good bit of military exposure anyway, so how did you find it?

PFORZHEIMER: In the atmosphere of that time it was tough. 2005 to ’06 was right after Iraq was supposedly a big success and was turning into something else, and the civilians were blamed for not showing up. And we who had been against the Iraq war from the start were seen as disloyal. That attitude started to change in mid, you know, the end of 2005, in the middle of our year, but there were a lot of very pointed arguments during classes with people who’d served, you know, military people who’d served in Iraq, and those of us who thought that it should never have started.

Q: Yes. Did you find that- did you have any allies in the military?

PFORZHEIMER: Quiet ones, Coasties (Coast Guard) or officers in the Air Force or people who were really, really, their ego wasn’t tied up with how well their service had done in Fallujah. It was not an easy conversation. It wasn’t the only conversation, but here was my example, where there was a guy who was one of my sort of nemesis figures there, infantry, artillery, I think. Anyway, we went on trips, that was sort of the big project, and we would brief each other on how we were going to conduct the trip. So, there were 10 of us going on a trip to Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, and this atmosphere, I mean, there had been the bombings in Bali, this was 2006, this was a pretty active terrorist threat climate. So, I was talking about Indonesia and I said that in my experience, I’d never been in Southeast Asia but in my experience in Latin America and in Africa where I’d lived, generally speaking adult men did not wear shorts in cities. Adult men might wear shorts on a beach or children wear shorts in the city, but that I was attuned to the fact and my husband, being Latin, that adult men didn’t wear shorts in cities, that was something where people would be fairly aware that you were probably an American. And I offered that as part of our operational security, which was important. And this guy said aggressively, “I’m proud to be an American”, this sort of pointless remark that you got all the time, that somehow my ability to tell people what was normal in a foreign environment was seen as being not proud of my country.

Q: How did you find the trip to Southeast Asia?

PFORZHEIMER: It was odd. Those same guys, you know, some of them were nice, but some of them just really never were all that cordial. I didn’t enjoy it and they had their bonding going on. I mean, I think that was one of those moments where being female and being civilian were just equally off putting to them, and me, maybe my personality, but it was not an easy trip. And I’ve generally gotten along well with a wide variety of people, but I would say that was a low point.

Q: Well then, where did you go after this?

PFORZHEIMER: So, then that brought us to mid-2006, where the Iraq war was raging, and I didn't agree with it and I came as close as I had come to resigning just to say I really didn't agree with this policy. And it was so pervasive. I mean, it's hard to remember now, but, like, everybody had a piece of the Iraq pie. So, I thought I would go and do something that was less political, and I became an office director in the bureau for international narcotics and law enforcement.

Can we take a break, I think?

Q: Yes.

Alright.

PFORZHEIMER: So, in mid-2006 I took a job as the officer director for the INL, the policy coordination office. It was fascinating. It was an office that did a couple of different things, one of those umbrella offices in the department. It has the congressional affairs, a two-person unit, and that's the first time I came in contact with budgeting and found that I thought it was really interesting. It had our public affairs and press, a three-person unit. It had a separate unit that worked on international organizations, so the UN's Commission on Narcotics, Drugs and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime. And then, we did sort of random and miscellaneous things as well. And the absolute low point of that office was one of the most hostile co-workers I've ever had was the secretary, the OMS (Office Management Specialist), and she was a terrible human being who wouldn't speak and had terrified pretty much everybody in the office. And I mention her because I think that's important to note.

Q: No, I mean, it's difficult. I mean, the Foreign Service, you're sort of trained to get along with people. This doesn't always work. But to run across somebody who's, particularly Civil Service who's hostile.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Sort of-

Q: And they can- And they've been there so long that they can establish sort of a fortress for themselves and everybody's afraid of them.

PFORZHEIMER: This is exactly what she did. It was a reign of terror. There were a number of incidents where she had been so angry- Somebody threw a stapler at her, actually, which the other person involved was one of these very gentle souls and the fact that that happened was amazing. But over time I had to come up with coping mechanisms of how to manage her, and I would say what's important too, for that, is it was the first time that I used the employee counseling service (ECS) office over in Columbia Plaza, and I thought that was amazing. It has helped me over the years. I must have gone there three or four different times, and it was very important that I get some kind of outside

help in how to manage it, because certainly nobody before me and maybe after really was able to get a handle on it.

So, with the exception of that person it was a very fun office and I really, I think I came into my own in a way as a manager in understanding all of these diverse Civil Service- I'm not sure I managed any other Foreign Service in that job, but Civil Service and Presidential Management interns and all these contractors and other folks.

Oh, the other thing the office did was to compile and edit the annual reports, it's called an INCSR, the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) It's a report that every- that most embassies in the world compile regarding the status of the narcotics issue and the country's efforts to combat it. And this was part of a process that was known as the certification process, the majors list; these were all legislations designed to give Congress a sense of where the drug problems were and whether our allies were doing enough about it.

Q: Well, what was your job?

PFORZHEIMER: So, I was the office director. And I, gosh, I did sort of all of it. I went to Vienna to participate with the commission, the annual meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which tried to establish worldwide drug policies on the UN's international conventions on drugs. This is where you get Class I and different types of categorization of drugs. At that point, we were incredibly strongly anti-legalization of anything and found ourselves internationally closely allied with the Arab states, Russia and China, and against Western Europe. So, that was unpleasant.

Q: So, what was the issue?

PFORZHEIMER: Legalization, things like whether there could be a different way of talking about needle exchanges and harm reduction. Harm reduction was the phrase for if people are going to be addicts, they should be addicts who aren't sharing needles, that kind of thing. Or they should be addicts who have access to methadone or who have access to drugs, I mean, the way that Western Europe has experimented with it.

Q: Western Europe was basically to be more relaxed on this and you were tougher on it?

PFORZHEIMER: I had to be as tough as possible. The Bush White House sent some people to be part of this commission and they were hard over- I remember one of them getting upset with me as I explained to that person what the European point of view was, and kind of the fact that- It felt like the War College again, like the fact that I was able to explain that alternative point of view made me very suspect. But it was interesting. It was the nuts and bolts of diplomacy. I had to- It was really one of the first times that I ever had to use talking points that someone else had prepared, so kind of like where I was the one preparing the talking points and they weren't used very well, I realized how tough it is to use talking points and I never, ever, after that, I never wrote the kind of long, windy,

three-clause sentence talking points that I used to write. I wrote short ones that could be used.

So, I don't think we moved the needle that far, but we engaged, and I got experience as part of a delegation and sitting behind the placard, that kind of thing. We had some political appointee folks in place, but Anne Patterson was my assistant secretary for my first year, so I'm really just describing 2006 to '07 because then my job changed. And Anne, of course, is legendary. My favorite part of working for Anne, as an office director we would have our senior staff meeting and we would go around the room and I had one colleague in particular who was dealing with a lot of thorny issues regarding Iraq and police training, which INL was in charge of. And so, Anne would have basically two responses; she would either say, you know, you would describe to her something that you were working on that was reaching a point of decision or difficulty and she would say "make it happen", and when she said that you knew that she was on your team, she was going to pick up the phone and call anybody in the world and you were authorized to go forth and kill within the bureaucracy. Or she would say "make it go away". So, make it go away just meant do your best, but she was not going to go forth and kill for you and you needed to know that, and you couldn't invoke her. But if you made it, you know, if you succeeded, terrific. She wasn't telling you to stop trying, but she was telling you that you were on your own. This is clarity that is very important when you are in these positions.

I did that for a year. I had, at one point my deputy assistant secretary tell me that I was to try and find out whether the Soros group was funding this legalization campaign in Europe because he wanted to show that this was- I mean, this is somebody who just profoundly believed that legalization of any drugs, including marijuana, was a terrible thing and we were supposed to fight against it. And this was also the period of a lot people coming out with the brilliant deduction that we should just legalize the opium from Afghanistan because at that point Afghanistan was starting to slide out of our control and some people thought that this was a terribly important idea. And I will say that I can argue pretty vociferously that legalization of opium is a terrible idea, could never be handled adequately and would just, would basically be a bureaucratic nightmare plus the same crime problem you have.

So, at some point there was a poisonous environment brewing about Iraq and our activities there. And I had nothing to do with Iraq, but this guy named Bob Gifford, who was a civil servant, brilliant dude, had been very involved with Iraq and- You know, people forget; when you're at the beginning point of some kind of big emergency, war or whatever, there's a lot of folks yelling that you should just go and do it. Stop telling me that this is legally questionable; boys are dying, you have to go and spend the money, don't, you know. That sort of thing. And we have contracts and we have rules and everything else, but people were yelling about Iraq in a way that I certainly remembered when I was in Afghanistan later in my career, and saying like, just do it. Well, the guy that they were yelling at who did things was subsequently investigated, and all those people yelling at him to go forth and do stuff, they were gone, but he was there with his

signature on things. So, he was being investigated and there was an internal investigation and congressional one and neither of them ever found anything on him. But while it was happening, his role as the head of this separate office within INL, which was called Civilian Police and Rule of Law, that was tough. He was asked to take a different job within INL and then they needed someone to run that office. And Anne asked me if I would do it. So, I left the job with the policy coordination with the congressional and public affairs and all those others and I moved for my second year to the Civilian Police and Rule of Law office, which I really loved.

Q: So, what did that involve?

PFORZHEIMER: So, that office at the time ran the three- four missions that we participated in as peacekeepers, so I went back to my peacekeeping roots in a way, because the U.S. supplies police officers to UN missions, but since we don't have a federal police, we do it through a contracting mechanism. So, I oversaw our police contribution to Haiti, Liberia, Sudan and Kosovo. And then we also had a separate program which was for the West Bank, and that started while I was there. There was $100 million to do a training program that was almost outside of INL's purview, but it wasn't quite the military. It's right at the line. INL can work on policing but may not do paramilitary. And the- right. Well, certain definitions. I got to be very good friends with our lawyer. And the military can do, obviously military but can't do policing. So, we were in an uneasy- it was another one of those military low point relationships, this uneasy hybrid of a military officer running it, but INL supplying the trainers and curriculum and equipment. This was fascinating because Israel really liked this program. The more that the Palestinian authorities were able to conduct their own policing in the West Bank, the less that the Israelis had to do it, so that if the Palestinians could address crime or those sorts of things, the Israelis didn't have to send Israeli forces in.

It was complicated. It involved a lot of briefing Congress and managing a budget. And there were a number of other things I did there as a manager, helping and mentoring some people, and it was just a really great experience.

Q: Did you, I mean, the idea of training police on the West Bank and all and with the Israelis breathing down your neck, I'd think this would be- cause problems.

PFORZHEIMER: No, the Israelis liked the program.

Q: I'm surprised because, I mean, if police are right into the community and if the Israelis are being, put it euphemistically difficult in their relations with the West Bankers, I would think that this could not help but cause conflict.

PFORZHEIMER: No, this was a popular program. It was, first of all, it was at a period of greater openness. This was pre-Netanyahu; it was 2007 to '08. But this program continued for years. It only ran out of money last year. The idea was that they would do their own policing, and then you were eliminating the number of times that the Israelis

had to interact with them, so this was a self-governance step. I mean, believe you me, we were very constrained in the type of equipment we were giving them, so they were not- that was one of the areas of great sensitivity that I had to be aware of was that there shouldn't be- you know, our trainers, for example, if you say well, what does this person need in order to do his job, they would give you a list of equipment, you know, they need this, they need riot protection, they need such and such, tear gas, and then the Israelis would go over that list and say no, no, no, no so that the Palestinian police would not be outfitted in the way that we would have done in some other country. But that was a sensitivity, but it was actually, I mean, I briefed a number of times in Congress. I had my military colleague side by side some of the time. People thought it was great.

Q: Well, were there any problems in this program that you had to deal with?

PFORZHEIMER: So, I was a new manager of managers. Like, I knew how to manage someone directly, but the people under me in turn had other people under them. So, what I missed in one case was finding out whether the person that I supervised directly, whether she had a handle on the contractors who were working for her and whether they had finished their tasks on time. I was in the position of having to reassure people that we were on schedule, and this was the creation of a new curriculum, and she wasn't keeping track. So, her failure to do that became my problem, and it was just a huge sinking feeling of not being able to give the right answer when asked. And we managed it; we flipped some of the elements of the training so that the curriculum that was ready was put first and they worked on the others. But we never really regained the trust of the military people who thought that we were supposed to have met our deadlines, and they were right.

Q: Well then, any other aspects of this job that-?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, another thing as a manager is that I had a woman working for me who was disabled and I mean, I'll make a very long story short to say that I had to do something that other managers had not done, which was to start her on a performance improvement plan. She was not performing her job. And so, the whole issue of her disability and I educated myself a lot on-

Q: What was the disability?

PFORZHEIMER: She was wheelchair bound; she had some neurological issues. She had gone through law school so she qualified as a GS-12, but her ability to type was impaired, her ability to talk was somewhat impaired and she couldn't walk. And she had emotional problems in the end. So, this was a basket of issues where it was not that large an office and to have one person who was simply not performing any real function-. I mean, in the end I was having her work on a newsletter. But she wasn't performing the functions which meant other people were performing them for her. And so, we went back and forth a lot. I consulted with a lot of people about equities, but I worked with the office of civil rights and I was proud of myself and the process in a way because I had the counseling

session with her with witnesses in the room and I thought okay, if I can do this as a manager and basically everybody agreed that I had taken her needs and the institution's needs into account and behaving fairly, then I can do a lot.

Q: Yes, well it's very difficult because the-. Well, were there any other aspects of this job that we should talk about do you think or problems?

PFORZHEIMER: Problems. No, no. I just loved it. I pioneered some things there and I found it- We were working at that time, you've probably been talking about SCRS, the Civilian Response Corps, and so at that point it was all the rage to imagine that we were going to go and invade other Iraqs all the time and they were busy defining how we would do it. And that's where, when I was defending my bureau for INL I got into my first set of fights with the Department of Justice and others to carve out space. I was turfy and territorial at that point. But no, nothing else about it.

Q: Well then, let's move on.

PFORZHEIMER: So, at that point I bid on and was named the political counselor in Kabul. So, I went to a year of Dari language training. That was exactly 10 years after doing the Turkish. So, I came back for another stint here at FSI and I was 10 years older, appropriately less mentally agile. I did pass my Dari, but that was the highpoint of my ability to speak it.

Q: I'm sympathetic. When I was in my 50s, I was taking Italian, which is not a hard language, but it's too late.

PFORZHEIMER: It is, I think. They should be stuffing people's heads with languages before they're 25.

So, I went in August of 2009 and had a hell of a year, some of which has even been documented in other people's books. So, I was there during the strategy review that President Obama had. And the surge, a similarly poisonous environment with our military colleagues. A terrible era of casualties by U.S. troops. It's pretty well documented. I'll just say that I took part in the drafting of two cables, which Ambassador Eikenberry wrote as part of the strategy review in November 2009, and they were highly, highly classified and compartmentalized. And then, within a month, leaked to "The New York Times" in their entirety. And these were cables that where we had cast doubt on the reliability of President Karzai as our ally. And I think we were vindicated, front line and center, but these were cables that argued against the surge.

Q: You might explain what these terms are. I mean, in the first place, Karzai; what was your impression of him at the time. At one point he was quite the darling of the United States.

PFORZHEIMER: By the time I was there, and I did a lot of note taking for my ambassador. He liked to have me as his note taker when he met one on one with Karzai or in small groups. Karzai was a mercurial and difficult person, still had his charm, but he was angry with us because we were- for a lot of reasons, angry for important and real reasons like our night raids by the U.S. military that were indiscriminately killing people. Or he was angry because we had not backed him for re-election in 2009, and I was there through that election and the aftermath. But he would say terrible things, and he had people on his staff who would feed him kind of misinformation and long before the term was used, fake news, random newspapers from the west of Ireland that would claim that the U.S. was doing, I don't know, medical experiments or something. I mean, like really bad data, and he would sort of fling that at the ambassador and ask him to explain it. So, it was a tough relationship. The whole issue with Richard Holbrooke, who was the special representative had arrived and promptly angered Karzai. I guess I got there in July of '09 and these things were all happening as a backdrop. And Karzai was well known to be in bed with a number of people who were corrupt, who were- not in bed, but I mean, he was close to corruption and his belief in the institutions was not, you know, it's not that strong. At the time maybe justifiably, he thought it was more important to keep powerbrokers happy than to go after them on corruption issues and risk tiny internal civil wars all over the country. And I think he was not wrong on all of his calculations, but for our purposes the idea of a surge of troops to our way of thinking was wrong because a surge would be reliant, it would stress Karzai and his institutions exactly where they couldn't stand it.

So, I was part of a process of debating these issues. It was incredible. With Ambassador Eikenberry, Ambassador Ricciardone, Ambassador Wayne and a couple of others, and we wrote this as a group. I mean, I was the junior, junior person in the room, but I was able to speak about what I was seeing and observing from my own section, which was a really crackerjack group of mainly women who were the political eyes and ears of the embassy.

Q: Is there any particular reason why women would be in the- basically running the political section when you're dealing with a- I mean, I'm a complete non-expert in Afghanistan, but I would think that they were dealing with politicians who were all male and who probably could not look kindly on women.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, and yet these are embassies that are on one-year rotations, so you take the best people you get, A. B, we don't run that way, right? We promote women and put them in positions of power, so we don't have that attitude in the rest of the Arab world as well. C, it was just a weird coincidence. And D, you know, I'm ashamed to say that my very first thought, I met one of my officers, she was assigned later, and I actually tried to flip her portfolio with the one and only man because it was the parliament portfolio, and she politely and firmly told me that she'd been assigned to the portfolio and she wanted to carry it out. And I heard myself and thought what am I doing? I'm wrong. And I didn't say anything else about it. And then, as you know and others have talked about, you get the honorary man status pretty quickly.

Q: Oh, yes. I mean, American diplomats, an American diplomat, there's no gender qualification on it.

PFORZHEIMER: There is none.

Our local staff were all men and they referred to us as their sisters. They were a wonderful group of people.

I worked on so many issues that year, but it was formative. And through it, having gone to the War College was important. It gave me credibility. I knew people, actually a couple of classmates came through Kabul. And I could assert myself as sort of a pol-mil expert as well as political. So, there's lots to talk about with Kabul but we can move on. I mean, I feel like it's probably covered by a lot of-.

Q: Well, you know, again, I'm sitting here not involved in any of this, but I can't help looking at what little I know of the history of Afghanistan, going back just up to Alexander the Great and all, you see pictures, girls aren't going to school, the Taliban and all, but what's in it for Americans? I mean, I really wonder that we get in and all of a sudden, we begin to identify with the disinvolved or people who are being neglected, and that's not, I mean, these are American lives that are being put at risk. How did you feel about it at the time?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, at the time it was overwhelming, the amount of resources that people kind of apparently felt like throwing at it. And it was too much. But when I went back to Afghanistan years later, I still found the same dynamic in one important way. American military and government culture is a problem-solving culture, and Afghans have a lot of problems, so that it was very difficult for people to say you have a problem, I actually know what the solution is, but I'm going to deliberately not do it. It's a weird dynamic. We don't, per se, feel like we want to, but it's almost a compulsion that we know how something is fixed.

Q: I mean, in this oral history program, again and again I find myself, and I respond to it too, if you go to a country, basically you should just report on the country and how it's going. But if we see a problem, we can't help but get in there. I mean, this is-

PFORZHEIMER: Well, my second tour there, when I was the deputy chief of mission in Kabul, I made it a real point to say to people you know, you have correctly identified the problem. Having identified it does not make it ours. So, if it needs fixing, what part of that is specifically ours? Sometimes there's a part of it, right? There's a specific U.S. imprimatur or it's a technology that only we have, etcetera. But mostly the answer is no, we don't need to be the people who fix that. And Afghans, bless their hearts and I love a lot of them, are awfully good at reading us, and so they love to bring us problems to solve. I knew one politician in particular and I can't tell you how many senior officials I would hear the same thing from; they'd say oh, well he asked me how I would approach

X, Y and Z. You get attached because that's ownership. You fix it for him, you own it, and he knows that. So, that the '09 to '10 was a surge in people and problem solvers and really, bless their hearts, there are some very, very good people I knew there who just went all out, and they weren't wrong in their prescriptions about things like the justice system, but they were totally wrong in their timeframe and they were totally wrong in assigning us the duties.

Q: Well, basically when you were there, it was the Taliban, was that it?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Now, what threat are the Taliban to the United States' interests?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, as one of my ambassadors would say, I could argue that round or square. I mean, you can say none at all, or you can say 9/11. You have those options. It was really hard, you know, it's easy in 2019 to make certain statements that we should work with the Taliban; a lot harder less than seven years after 9/11 to make those statements. So, we shouldn't go back and judge that. People genuinely thought- And also, economically we had a lot more money to play with. We were still in our surplus years or we were still in the big spending years and the people who had been in charge for years who had this belief in the fixability of certain types of problems. And some of them were doing it really for the most amazingly nice motives.

Q: Well, yes, I mean, you know, I always think of the stories about women not- girls not allowed to go to school. But again, I come back to well, that's Afghanistan, that's not America.

PFORZHEIMER: Right. I know, you're right. I don't know what to tell you except that it utterly has to start with your version of what U.S. interests are. If your interests are very coldly the physical safety of the U.S. mainland, no. But if your interests are slightly bigger and regarding South Asia's stability, maybe. If your interests are even bigger than that and it's human rights and sort of millennium challenge goals, yes, definitely. And education of girls has been shown to be an actual, sort of one of the single most important investments of any kind.

Q: No, I've got two daughters; you can't deny it. But I do wonder, I mean, about sometimes the American fixer, it's a tremendous impulse and it gets us into places we probably shouldn't get into.

PFORZHEIMER: I agree. And we're in an isolationist phase right now, clearly not just with the current administration but all the Democrats, where we're anti that. We're in a, you know, let them all figure it out and that's not our problem, whatever, but I think it's a phase or a pendulum swing. You know, what did we see after Vietnam and then we sort of saw it again and what was- looking at Rwanda where we said that's not our problem

and Bosnia, not our problem, and then suddenly we get deeply into it. I could see us in 10 years forgetting all those lessons and going right back into some other country.

Q: Did you find, with the mission how did people think? I mean, was it a united team or not?

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, it wasn't that united. It was an enormously overstaffed group of people. There were three or four or five people who all had kind of the same job titles in the sexy areas of fighting corruption or extremism. This is where I came up with my own philosophy of remembering what my specific job is, and if I can do my job with excellence, then I get to go do something else interesting. But if I haven't done my own job, then that interesting thing over there is, you know, I don't get to go do it.

My realization came because in a country team meeting somebody asked the question how many seats are there in parliament? And you know, there were a lot of issues out there, right, of political corruption and economic development, all these issues thousands of people were all engaged with, AID and Department of Justice and all these people were there. And I suddenly realized that only one person in the room was supposed to know how many seats there were in parliament, and that was me, the political counselor, and I actually wasn't sure. And that just taught me that if I don't get my own area in very good order, then I have no business wandering off and doing interesting things in other parts of the embassy. So, I would give that lesson to my subordinates.

Q: Well, let's take your first tour there. What occupied you mainly?

PFORZHEIMER: The normal tasks of a political section, reporting. We did a lot of reporting. We would report on everything we could, and my ambassador, what were we doing, we had a period of time where he was trying to persuade the power brokers to make a certain decision. And so, he and his top leadership divided out the universe of all the power brokers there were and then they had a series of meetings, and everybody's meetings got a report. And he would do meetings at night and come back at 8:00 or 9:00 or 10:00, and we were supposed to show up at his residence, which was in the compound, get his notes, go back and write them, bring the cable back for him to review, and send it out that night. So, we would be there until 11:00 or 12:00 or whatever. And yes, I mean, we were working with our intel people, which I won't go into, but we'll just say that all we were all like interagency driving at things, civilian agencies. The military, unfortunately, because of that cable, because it argued against General McChrystal's point of view, we were not in step with them. And so, there were times where they were hiding information from us and vice versa.

Our political section, we still had international visitors. We did a grants program for mostly women. We did human rights work, reporting and advocacy. We did external relations. We wrote stuff. The usual.

Q: What was the situation on the ground? I mean, was it- were- I mean, did the president have power or was it little separate tribal politics or what?

PFORZHEIMER: It was still very decentralized in terms of power. But power in Afghanistan is entirely related to what a central authority can deliver. And at that moment in time that I was there, between ’09 and ’10, the central authority could deliver a lot because we were putting a lot in. So, as a passthrough- I don’t believe, by the way, that Karzai is somebody who made himself wealthy. I think it was very important to him to have access to resources so that he could spread them and maintain a level of balance and stability. And so, there was a lot of money going through, but unfortunately, it wasn’t tracked as well as it should have been, it added to the rivalries, it made it more unstable over the long-term, but at that exact moment that I was there was one of the higher points of the government’s ability to control its territory.

Q: What about the people we were getting there, sending there? You know, you hear how in Iraq we were sending a 24-year-old kid to supervise the stock market in Iraq or something like that. I mean, were you running into anything like that?

PFORZHEIMER: Afghanistan’s level of development and sophistication is much, much lower so that we were probably sending people who were too junior, but it wasn’t to do things like that. They might have been too junior to meet with the governor or to supervise the digging of a well, but nobody was supervising stock markets. There were just too many of us at the time, though. There were American advisors who would represent ministries meeting with the American embassy. We were just in the room too much.

When I came back in ’17, it was one of the biggest differences to me that we had stopped talking to ourselves all the time, that a cadre of Afghans had grown into the positions of responsibility to speak for themselves.

Q: I was wondering, maybe this would be a good place to stop, do you think?

PFORZHEIMER: Okay.

Q: Because we’ve got quite a bit more to- we want to talk more, you know. Should we do that?

PFORZHEIMER: That’s okay, yes. I mean, I’d love to- because I think the final tour was-

…were Afghanistan and Dari. And in those days, there was a huge upsurge in numbers of people going, so the language school was busy. And it was kind of intriguing because one or two of the language teachers, one in particular, had been here at FSI throughout the period that the embassy was closed.

Q: Let's save this; we'll put it on-.

Are we on?

Today is September the 17th with Annie Pforzheimer, and we're talking about the FSI when you're going to language school for Dari.

PFORZHEIMER: So. Back in 2008 the Dari, one or two of the Dari teachers had been here in the language school throughout the period that the embassy was closed between 19, I don't actually know, '92 or so and 2001 when it reopened after we arrived. And so, now they were training again in Dari and they hand spent the intervening years teaching related Persian languages and they had to revise the book and all the rest of it. And it was interesting for me as the- I was going out as the political counselor, so a number of my colleagues to be and subordinates to be were in the class with me, so that was already the beginning of a professional relationship even though we were taking language together. I had to watch myself a little bit and make sure that I was always behaving a little bit more like a senior officer. But we did develop friendships at that point. So, our tour, although it was one year in Kabul, in some respects felt like two years together because we grew close during language training.

Q: Alright well, so you went to- First place, how did you find Dari?

PFORZHEIMER: It was tough. At that point I was almost 45 and I was really, you know, it was pretty hard to learn language at that age. I had learned Turkish 10 years before and so my Turkish got knocked out completely by the Dari. There were times where I could be pretty good at it and my best skill was comprehension and sometimes being able to speak, but I was not that great at the vocabulary, nor at the reading. I tested as a miracle at three/three, but I would say that was the height of my ability, was the day that I tested. But I had a very- I had a great colleague -- we say people's names, right? Is that okay?

Q: Is what?

PFORZHEIMER: I can say someone else's name?

Q: Oh, heavens, yes.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. So, my language colleague was Jim DeHart, and Jim and I used to joke that together we made a perfect Dari speaker because he was very good at vocabulary and things that I wasn't and I would catch the- So, as long as we went everywhere together we would be fine.

But the teachers were earnest and there was- Pashto was being taught. I mean, this was the period where people were being sent out to provincial reconstruction teams, so not just going to the embassy, we were on the verge of creating consulates. So, it was just this growth spurt in numbers of people training in Dari and in Pashto.

Q: Okay. At the time, you went out when?

PFORZHEIMER: So, I went out in July of 2009.

Q: Alright. What was the situation in Afghanistan at that time?

PFORZHEIMER: Afghanistan was- the situation was not great. It was a surge in, as I recall, the Taliban had been kind of out and biding their time and had started to come back into the south in particular, headed towards district centers and cities through intimidation, not as much armed confrontation at first. That started in 2000 maybe ’06 or ’07, and so, there was a reversal in what people had thought was the easy war and Iraq was draining everyone else’s attention, and suddenly the war in Afghanistan was far from easy and from over. So, the debate had started with President Obama’s inauguration in January of ’09 over whether to put more troops on the ground. And that occupied a huge amount of my time when I first got out there through the October/November timeframe because that was the strategy review that culminated in a decision to surge troops temporarily.

Q: As you read it, what was the situation in the United States? I mean, the public.

PFORZHEIMER: So, it’s hard to judge it by the attitudes of today, but people were still very much invested in the concept that we belonged in these overseas engagements, both in Iraq and Afghanistan. They tended to meld the two of them together way too much, to talk about them. Our soldiers were always talked about in collectives and then our strategies were sometimes conflated, even though the two countries were so different. And some elements were brought from one to the other, particularly the idea that there had been a surge in Iraq and it had been successful in turning things around in ’07 or so, and that was seen as a model that certainly people like General Petraeus were purporting would work again in Afghanistan. But the mood with the American people was that they wanted the wars to have an end in sight and President Obama had campaigned on the concept that he would bring the troops home during his term, so there was the beginnings of this political pressure to bring the conflict to an end.

Q: Let’s talk about the embassy when you got there. Who was the ambassador and what was the mood at the embassy?

PFORZHEIMER: So, there were many ambassadors. The top ambassador was Karl Eikenberry. Ambassador Eikenberry had been military commander of the U.S. forces and then retired from the military and was brought on as ambassador. And as he liked to say that when he was in the military he had a perfectly good relationship with President Karzai, and then as soon as he became ambassador and had to deliver hard messages to President Karzai the relationship changed. But he was the same person.

The deputy ambassador, which was not a title that existed anywhere else, was Frank Ricciardone, who is a long, long, long term professional Foreign Service officer, and their relationship was great. I think Ambassador Eikenberry really respected Ambassador Ricciardone and how much experience he had and judgment and really thought of him as like the finest of our Foreign Service and Ambassador Ricciardone probably, in his heart of hearts, thought that he could do Ambassador Eikenberry's job, but he was put there to support Eikenberry and I think he saw the benefit of having someone who had military background in the leadership role. So, they weren't co-equals, but they were very close to that and they spent a lot of their time deconflicting so that one could cover something and the other one would cover something else.

Then, there was a third ambassador who was more or less in charge of running the mission. That was Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli, who we referred to as Moose, and he was called the assistant chief of mission. Then there was a fourth who was Ambassador Tony Wayne, and he was in charge of coordinating our foreign assistance and economic policies. And then, there was a fifth who was brought on to work on the presidential elections, which were in August of 2009; that was Tim Carney.

Q: Why was there this proliferation of the title of ambassador?

PFORZHEIMER: The reason in some people's minds was that there were a lot of three-star, two-star and four-star generals who were running the military side of U.S. policy, and it was tough for the civilians to keep pace. There were lots and lots of meetings and events and trips and engagements with the palace, with the president of Afghanistan, etcetera, and if there was just one U.S. ambassador then it would always be the case that the military person would greatly outrank the civilian person who was sent. I mean, you would slip down to sending an oh-one and below pretty quickly. So, it was to keep the civilian side better represented at the senior levels. That was one reason. The other was just scale. I mean, it was a huge embassy and your deputy did not need to- it was not okay to make your deputy choose between solving a major crisis in one part of the country or holding the EEO weekly meeting. You know, you needed senior people to be engaged on the management side. And the third reason is that because it was a war zone, we all spent a fair amount of time out of the country. Compared to a normal embassy, you had more vacation time, so you needed coverage.

Q: Well, your section, you were in charge of the political section. What did this mean?

PFORZHEIMER: In that period, the political section was only a portion of what a normal political section might be. Some countries have both a political and a pol-mil section, so this was the case in Kabul. So, I did not have the pol-mil portfolio exactly and that occasionally was a little dicey to figure out what fell where. And then, there was also a separate section of someone who coordinated the work of the PRT, the Provincial Reconstruction Team representatives. A lot of that was logistical, but there was also some reporting that came from the center of the country and again, that in normal cases might be under political section, but I was more side by side with that group. But we had full

responsibility for the fairly traditional side of things, you know, foreign relations, politics, the parliament, the ethnic issues, human rights, women's rights, the, I'm trying to think, corruption. Well, a lot of people worked on the issue of corruption, people who were in the legal and the assistance areas as well.

But we had to do what political sections normally do and it started out with the elections. So, as soon as I arrived the election was in everybody's sights and we had to figure out how we would monitor it, how we would coordinate with other agencies to support it. And then, once the election did happen, we had a huge period of trying to persuade President Karzai that he had not won in the first round. So, the numbers we believed at the time, we had reason to believe were cooked, that he made it come out as sort of 50.1 percent, which would have meant only one round of the election, and we thought it was not far from that, but it was definitely under 50 percent. So, that was a big battle, somewhat internal as well as external. There were some within the embassy, and I can't even try to name names at this point because I wouldn't remember who, but there were some who thought well, what if we could just let it go, because this is enormously disruptive, we're in the middle of war, he was close. He was, even with fraud, and fraud was committed on all sides but particularly by Karzai, he was still a good 10 to 15 points ahead of his nearest rival, so I remain to this day convinced that he would have won anyway. But there was fraud and it was enough to require a second round and that was our strong belief.

And so, I had some people in my section who were passionately committed, and I was committed as well, to pushing for the second round because it was important for the credibility of the process. And we had our ambassador a little on the fence for a while and then he became committed, and then he had to do the heavy lifting with all of the political players, even some people in Washington who just wanted this to go away, some people in the UN who wanted it to go away, but he and the leadership decided they were really committed to this and they pushed. And then, there was an episode where Secretary- sorry. At that point, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry visited to try to be helpful. And he negotiated with Karzai; he was supposed to, Kerry was supposed to get on a plane to Pakistan and he delayed and delayed, and so there was this moment where they were going to go to the palace and talk to Karzai, and there was the usual motorcade being set up, and Ambassador Ricciardone's wife, Marie, saw me and she said why don't you go? And I said well, I'm not sure, and she said you should go, and Ambassador Ricciardone said yes, yes, come along to the palace. And I said well, I don't have a scarf, because we always had to have a scarf; we'd put it around our neck or whatever, but it was absolutely dogma that you had to have a scarf. So, somebody tossed me a black scarf; we were standing in the courtyard and I got in the car and I went.

And I sat with a lot of other folks and the memory that I have is watching Kerry- Karzai decided that he was going to order his election chief to rerun the numbers and we knew that that meant that he would bring them in under 50 percent. And Kerry and Karzai took this walk around the palace courtyard, which is a very beautiful place, in the fall especially, and Karzai had that iconic robe that was blue and green, and Kerry was

walking, I think he had a limp or something at that point from some accident, and Kerry has told the story about talking about how he- what it was like to lose the election in 2004, which was pretty fresh for him at that point. Anyway, so they made the change and then Karzai held a news conference which kept getting delayed but it was finally held, and Kerry unfortunately decided that what he wanted to do was stand next to Karzai when Karzai announced that there would be a second round, and really he loomed over him and it just looked entirely like Karzai was doing this because the Americans had forced him to. And our relationship absolutely suffered a lot from that one. And then, as it happened, Doctor Abdullah decided not to run in the second round and Karzai was angry about that too because he felt like he had been cheated out of an outright electoral victory.

So, then there was the fall- And all of this, of course, was Holbrooke as the special representative who kept coming out and sending his people out and we were in sort of a long series of turf wars.

Q: I was going to say, how did that, particularly from your perspective, Holbrooke is not a territorial man.

PFORZHEIMER: He's not?

Q: Well, territorial, I mean, he doesn't serve other people's territory.

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, yes. No, he was not. He came out in July; as soon as I had arrived, he was out for a big visit. I didn't have a huge amount to do with him, but that was the visit where he managed to anger Karzai so much that he essentially was unable to work with him going forward. There was a dinner at the palace where he pushed Karzai to say that if there was a second round he would accept it, and this Karzai took to mean that he was threatened to essentially make it into a second round even before the voting had happened. And Holbrooke had openly supported other people running against Karzai, so that was, you know, there was some foundation to the paranoia.

I remember Holbrooke writing- I may be putting two incidents together, but basically he was staying at the ambassador's residence and he had to work on the cable that reported on this conversation with Karzai, and Holbrooke still remembered how to write like a Foreign Service officer. And he also remembered how to make himself look okay, like a Foreign Service officer.

Anyway, there were lots of back and forth maneuvers. It's detailed in Holbrooke's biography about a point where he was almost fired, and I was watching that, very much loyal to my ambassador who treated me very well. He was tough on some folks. And we had a couple of people that Holbrooke sent out to work at the embassy or be at the embassy long-term, but those people were given instructions by Holbrooke that they should not tell us what they're doing. This was impossible for them and impossible for us, and we pushed back and said that we would not allow these people who were experts

who had their own contacts, we would not allow them to go and meet with those contacts without telling us where they were going or, in many cases, bringing someone from the embassy. And that's been debated back and forth, whether we were standing in the way of a kind of unorthodox but possible effective way of doing diplomacy because of our bureaucratic, small minds, and I think at the time what we could just see is the possibility of multiple U.S. Government messages going out there with people who are amateurs; you know, one from academia and the other one from the NGO sector talking on behalf of the U.S. Government. And that the Afghans would make the most of it. So, I don't know what the right way forward was, but we fought about that and we had issues.

So, the fall was incredibly difficult. There were some days I was working until 11:00 and up again at 6:00 and getting to my computer and writing cables at all hours. And the ambassador had to sit in on strategy meetings with the White House. One or two of them, one took place at 3:00 in the morning because that was when the president was available. But we would spend hours preparing for these, the ambassador would be up at 3:00 then he was up doing his day job, and he was really at the end of his rope. And we had a team of inspectors at the same time and I still remember that the inspectors intervened with Washington and said that this was impossible and that the White House needed to make its meetings work for the time difference with Kabul.

And then, the last thing about that fall I'll mention is the cable. So, in November we worked, I worked with my ambassador, with the top two and sometimes with the others, on a cable that was the U.S. embassy's view about the surge idea. And we wrote that we thought that we didn't have a reliable partner with President Karzai and that the surge was not a good idea. That cable was supposed to go to only four people in hard copy, and instead it was leaked to "The New York Times" by Holbrooke, I believe, since the version that "The New York Times" has- had, has his name on it. And that-

First of all, Ambassador Eikenberry had decided not to tell General McChrystal ahead of time that he was sending the cable because his argument was, he had the right to give the president his opinion in a private channel, that was his prerogative as the ambassador. And McChrystal was livid and their relationship didn't really recover from that. Then it became public and President Karzai was livid. And all of that, unfortunately, and the president, President Obama didn't follow the advice and he went with the idea of a surge and he made it even less effective by putting in an expiration date at the end of the surge, so it was sort of the worst of all worlds. But I think of that cable with great pride because it was as clear and honest as we could make it, and the only thing that was good about it was that when it was leaked, there were a number of people in the embassy who came up to us and said we're glad to know that you're not fooled and that you see Karzai clearly.

So, that was '09. There were a lot of events. And the rest of the tour was very eventful as well, but I would say that that fall sort of crystalised the issues that we continued to work on.

Q: How did you read Karzai?

PFORZHEIMER: Karzai is a lot of things, and I would say one of the things I didn't think he was was personally corrupt in the sense of doing what he was doing to enrich himself. I think that he believed in- If people- A lot of people in Afghanistan feel like if Americans are intent on wasting money, sure, I'll take it. I mean, we didn't help things by kind of walking around with a giant wallet, flinging money around, and then getting mad at people when they picked it up. But Karzai believed in picking it up in order to hand it to someone else. He believed in power and peace and consolidating his family's security. I think his corruption as it were was not something that's easy to see from an American perspective. He doesn't want gold fixtures. He wanted to have everybody that he cared about taken care of.

Q: I think this is one of the things that I was in Vietnam at one point and where we saw corruption, we just saw people taking money in order to supplement their salaries because they weren't getting much.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: And it was usually- Mobutu is supposed to be- was very corrupt but he was passing a hell of a lot of the money that came in on to win allegiance with tribes.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. Well, the allegiance issue, I think, was especially relevant to Karzai because he had no personal- his family and tribe was very- had very high lineage but was not powerful. So, he needed to remain on good terms with a wide range of people, and that's where our money came in. And I think also, you know, our own, and especially intelligence services believed in this principle wholeheartedly, that corruption and rule of law and all the rest of it were nice concepts, but cold hard cash and power and anti-terror, these were the realities that we had to deal with right now and they thought the rest of us were being a little bit sky-eyed about what we thought was doable.

Q: Yes, we have a problem.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: Every nation has a national personality, and one of our personalities is we see things in black and white.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. True.

Q: How did your political section operate?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the political section was about 12 people and it was 11 women and one man. It was great. We had some personality issues, as you do, mostly with the routine of vacations. We had five breaks a year, three short and two long, and it tended to even out the bumps of people not getting along with each other. And I actually tried hard

to not know what all the personal issues were among my staff because it's a compound and it could get- I thought it could get overly intimate if I was also trying to be everyone's friend and hear the stories about what A said to B, so I was a little reserved about that. And as long as people showed up and did their jobs, that was my responsibility. My deputy was good at handling a lot of the personal stuff, but she had issues of her own and she left early.

So, we worked hard, really high-quality stuff in most people's cases. You know, when Afghanistan was a big staffing need, there were different levels of quality that you got. You did get a few people who were sort of laundering their careers in Iraq and Afghanistan, but you also got people who were up for a major challenge. So, I had my mix of those types.

Q: You mentioned that you had 12 women, one man or something?

PFORZHEIMER: Eleven, yes, 11 and one.

Q: This is sort of unusual. Is there any particular reason or this or did you-?

PFORZHEIMER: No. That's just who I was handed. I certainly didn't pick them because the- we're all paneled at the same time.

Q: How did your officers, I mean did they get out and meet people? I mean, how does that work in a wartime situation?

PFORZHEIMER: Kabul wasn't really as much of a wartime area. We got out a fair amount. In those days, and it was very different when I went back, you would be dropped off at the foreign ministry and the car would go back to the embassy and then when you were done you would call them. So, we got out.

So, that ended in July of 2010. And I came back to Washington. I had left my son and husband here for that year. They did okay. And then I did a two-year job after that in the Office of Peacekeeping Affairs, which I had been in earlier in my career. This time I was the director. I could have gotten maybe different jobs after coming through Kabul, but this was what I wanted to reconnect with my family and because it had been my dream job to go back and do peacekeeping, especially in an administration that really believed in it.

Q: Before we move to peacekeeping, how- and this particular tour, how did the- how did you view the Afghan apparatus, government, parliament and the bureaucracy? Because your officers would be dealing with this.

PFORZHEIMER: It was incredibly sort of at an amateur state at that moment. We had a lot of American advisors running around trying to create a ministry of agriculture or that sort of thing. I mean, the Afghans had been very bureaucratized under the Soviets, but it

had fallen away in the 10 years in between and there was a lot of just needing to staff offices with people who could use computers. And it was really, really tough to find someone at the other end when you were trying to move things along. I mean, the demands that we had of this government in terms of having this kind of First World security relationship and its capacity, which was entirely unformed in many respects; it was really a mismatch, it was hard. And so, being Americans with our character, it's not just the black and white, but it's also the everything is a problem that can be solved attitude, and I think that's incorrect, but we were problem solvers, so we just put ourselves into it. And if the ministry didn't have somebody, we would just give them another advisor. And there were oodles of military people to throw at the problem, so you would have colonels doing local government because that's why you had.

I think the politicians in the parliament, you know, being a parliamentarian is a different skill set and they were adept in some respects, at least appearing to represent their area. And there were more women because they had a quota system, so we got to know a lot of these women and they had incredible stories. I have some friends from that time who I, of course, reconnected with-

Q: Can you give a story or two that you can think of?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the deputy to the chief-of-staff to the president was a woman, and her name's Homayra, and she was- she had been in Switzerland during most of the war. She was married to a man who was related to the royal family. And she just had this great- she has this great sort of salty, perfect English, which was lucky for me, but she had this great salty take on everybody, and I had to stop myself from quoting her a lot. But she really knew people's character well and she knew everybody, and she taught me a lot about how you look for information.

Or another person who I was speaking to on the phone this morning, a young, young man at that point, I think he might have been 22, named Waliullah, and he was Hazaras, which was the ethnic group that had the least amount of opportunity under the old regimes. And he had been in Dubai during part of the war and had English and Arabic and Dari and Pashto, and at 22 he had started a think tank and he was doing online analysis of the Taliban by looking at the Arabic websites and figuring out the signals and the messaging. I mean, just so smart and still one of the best advisors I've ever had on Afghan politics, and so young. And I had asked my employees to find me new voices, so they went out and found people like him.

Q: Well now, how about the Taliban? I interviewed Ambassador Milam, who was in Pakistan, I think at the time. This is way back. But he said he was called upon to make contact with the Taliban and he came out of it feeling he'd been dealing with people from the 14th century.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I had no- we had no contact with them. The closest I got was one time with one of Holbrooke's advisors going to a conversation with one of the ex-Taliban

who had gone through a reconciliation process. But this was a high point of us not talking to them, of the concept that they needed to accept preconditions to even sit down, and the preconditions were that they accepted the Afghan constitution with its safeguards for women, etcetera. And looking back, of course, I don't know whether that was the right thing because it felt right, it felt like we had this overwhelming military force and sooner or later the Taliban would come to the table with these conditions and we would not have to do what we're doing right now in 2019, and worry about them going back to the 14th century. But we didn't take the opportunities that we had then to sit down with them. We told Karzai he couldn't do it and that was a period of time that people look back and say maybe it would have been better to start peace talks then.

Q: Well then, okay, then we'll move on to coming back to peacekeeping. What did this job entail?

PFORZHEIMER: That job was- it turned out to be very frustrating, but it was a very, very engaging, intense job. Long hours, big issues. The peacekeeping beat is basically whatever you're reading about in the paper. So, there was, what's it called, Cote d'Ivoire was having a crisis in my first couple of months with a president who wouldn't leave office. He had- his troops were encircling a hotel where the man who had won the election and then I think the UN was encircling those troops. And we were sort of in the middle of how the UN could use its relatively small amount of firepower to carry out the wishes of the international community. So, it involved working on Security Council resolutions to start or continue peacekeeping missions. It also worked on UN sanctions. And I did a lot of work trying to codify how we could put more U.S. people into peacekeeping.

Q: You were doing this peacekeeping from when to when, this particular assignment?

PFORZHEIMER: From mid-2010 to mid-2012.

Q: Okay. You mentioned Côte d'Ivoire; what other areas were-?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, this was a period with the Arab Spring and the Liberia intervention- not Liberia, Libya, sorry. So, the resolution, I didn't work directly on all of these, the resolution that created the no-fly zone and the intervention in Libya, the all necessary means, there was the doctrine of responsibility to protect. And my boss at the time, a woman named Tori Holt, who came from the think tank world, she and others in this phase of the Obama Administration honestly were incredibly activist about the role that they saw the U.S. playing and the UN playing, and so they tried to broaden the scope of peacekeeping missions to make sure that they were trying to protect civilians. Like in the Congo, there were these grotesque abuses against civilians in villages and the militias would come through and rape 75-year-old women and children, and these were horrible abuses. And so, if there was a peacekeeping mission in the area, what was their responsibility? Was it to sort of technically observe the peace agreement, was it to protect these particular civilians? Did that mean that those civilians could come and live with

them in an armed compound? So, these were very- they're incredible issues; life and death on a big scale and something we had to talk about.

Then, we also had the sort of minor bureaucratic drama of trying to pay for all of it, so I had to justify a $2 billion budget for our peacekeeping dues, and this was with a Congress that was skeptical. But at that point, we actually were able to get our money out of Congress to be more or less current with our payments.

Q: Did you feel that, by this time you'd been away and you sort of came back to this particular aspect, that the world was developing a pretty good peacekeeping cadre or was it sort of hit or miss all the time?

PFORZHEIMER: No, it remained hit or miss. I mean, the last time I'd worked on peacekeeping in the '90s, the needs were smaller. There weren't as many large missions. 2000 saw these huge missions in places like Darfur, Congo and one other that were 10,000, 20,000 people. It was very hard to get that number of soldiers. It was extremely hard to get the capabilities, like helicopters, that they needed. You had South Asia supplying about 75 percent of the troops, Africa. So, we spent a lot of our time- Tori's big push was how do you improve the mechanics of peacekeeping? How do you make- what's the military doctrine? And the UN worked on all of this. How do you make troop contributions better, higher quality? The First World militaries had sort of stopped contributing troops, so you didn't get large numbers from any NATO countries at all. Now, they could say oh, well we're in Afghanistan, we're busy, but it was becoming stratified so that it was not-

Q: Well, was there sort of a residue from the Dutch experience in Bosnia?

PFORZHEIMER: There was. Yes, there was. That, the fact that they were in Afghanistan, the beginnings of a turning away from trying to use the UN for all these things. Russia certainly was putting a chill on things, especially after Libya. I mean, Libya really was this massive diplomatic mistake when you look at it that Russia went along with the resolution, which ended up allowing the U.S. and Brits and the French to-

Q: Could you describe, this is for historical purposes and frankly, I'm not overly familiar with, what was the Libyan situation that you were dealing with?

PFORZHEIMER: So, this was the point when the Arab uprising had started and so it was early 2011, I think.

Q: It was known as the Arab Spring.

PFORZHEIMER: Arab Spring. And Khaddaffi was threatening violent reprisals against the people in Libya who were planning on- planning an uprising against him. And the thing about Libya the country, is if you write the word Libya, if you drew a vertical line between the B and the Y, that was the sort of division of who controlled the country.

Because the interior is mostly uninhabited, so the coastal area. And Khaddaffi was on the left and the rebels were on the right, and he was threatening to come in and massacre. And so, the resolution essentially allowed the international community to take the necessary means to protect the people sort of on the right from the people on the left, and it was probably understood by the Russians, at least, there's a no-fly zone between the two. But it turned into something bigger, and I'm fuzzy on the ground movements, but essentially it ended up with Khaddaffi being overthrown. And then, arguable, as people look back now, you see the sort of power vacuum in Libya having given rise to a lot of extremist groups taking root there. And the Russians think to this day that this was a huge mistake and that they were somehow put in the position of voting in favor of it at the Council, so when the Syria crisis emerged not long after, Russia literally said and it's historical record as well, that they were not going to support any similar action by the Security Council on Syria because they saw what had happened. But at the time, it was seen as a high water mark within the circle where I was, which is my boss and Samantha Power and Susan Rice and other folks in the White House and New York, they saw this is a high water mark of the doctrine of the responsibility to protect, and there was much congratulating that this had happened. So, you know, the good intentions.

Anyway, it was a little tough working for a person who had come from outside of the government. My boss had brilliance, but she also had a lot of ideas. And when you're in a think tank, that's your stock in trade is having ideas and excitement and you're going to write reports and you're going to get- and they have to fundraise and all the rest of it. When you're in the government and every idea behind it is another idea, you have some very frustrated bureaucrats. So, I spent time trying to mediate between my people, who would say well, what does she really want us to do, because yesterday it was this and today it's that, and a boss who thought that we were just being sluggish, unimaginative civil servants, and it was tough. It was a hard two years.

Q: You'd been around the block a bit; did you realize what you were getting into?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, that's an interesting question because I interviewed for the jog on the phone because I was in Afghanistan, and all I could see were two things. Number one, that she and I totally hit it off in terms of what we thought was important and what we wanted to work on. And number two, I thought that the IO bureau was a nicer place. I didn't want to stay in the world of the Holbrookes and the hard-edged Afghanistan people; I'd had enough. I wanted to be around nice people and so, the International Organizations bureau, it really does have some offices that are just characterized by being really nice; you know, their economic and social affairs folks. But I had put myself in the office that was actually much tougher, you know, it has a tougher beat. And I did enjoy that. I liked being in the middle of things. I went to a ton of interagency meetings, White House meetings. I had to be there when big topics were being discussed because there was always a UN peacekeeping angle to them.

And then, of course, the one other complication was that there was bureaucratic friction between the State Department's International Organizations bureau and New York. So,

there always is friction. When I worked there before it was Madeleine Albright in New York and we used to joke that we call them instructions to post and they call them suggestions. So, we sort of had that again but in a big way it was Susan Rice. And Susan Rice and her crew were very much bureaucratically empowered. They could call their principle, they could call Susan into an argument far more easily than I could call the secretary of state into an argument, so they were generally speaking, escalating and prevailing.

So, we did that for two years, I did that for two years, and then it was, for me, a career crunch point of whether I wanted to go overseas as a deputy chief of mission or not. And I needed to go overseas because I needed to do something for my son's freshman and sophomore year of high school so that he would be in a position to graduate with his friends. And that was important to him and important to me. So, I needed a two-year assignment, it should be Latin America, and I decided against trying to be a DCM or a principal officer. Those were available, I think, at that point for me, but for my own decision making as a parent, both of those types of jobs were the kind of jobs where your time is really not your own. You absolutely can't say no, I'm not going to do that, Mr. Ambassador, my son might need me for a math homework problem. But I wanted to be the kind of parent who was home, home for dinner and that sort of thing. So, I- And I'm not sure whether there were other reasons as well, whether I didn't see myself in the limelight, but for whatever reason I made the decision to be the next director for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement in Mexico City. And I think part of it was that it was a very big job, so I wasn't going completely off the grid. I would still be competitive for other interesting things after it. And I liked the idea of it, it was practical application of a lot of the peacekeeping and rule of law and even human rights issues that I'd worked on before. So, it came together. And Mexico City, oh my goodness, such a great place.

So, that was a really wonderful tour on many levels. It was not wonderful personally. Both my husband and son were fairly unhappy there despite my best intentions. But on a professional level it was amazing. I had about 115 people who worked for me. I had a budget of about $700 million, a lot of latitude of what I could do. A lot of really smart people working for me doing creative things. And I learned a huge amount about managing programs.

We ran into trouble at the beginning because there was a change of Mexican leadership, so there had been a president who loved this program and worked very closely and everyone in his change of command worked very closely with us, replaced by a president who hated the idea. So, we had to spend a good eight months reselling ourselves to the Mexican authorities.

Q: Who was the president the second time?

PFORZHEIMER: That was Enrique Peña Nieto, who took office- he won the election in September of 2012 and he took office in December of 2012.

Q: Was he a PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. The party before had been PAN (National Action Party) and they liked us, so by almost definition we had to be bad. And the PRI, the government came in and all levels, I mean, they go deep; when they switch out parties, they go deep into their bureaucracy of firing people or moving them out of positions of authority. We had people who'd been dealing with the head of procurement for IT and that person was moved out. It's not just the, right, the senior director of something or other; it was- they were sort of a massive house cleaning.

Q: Well, tell me what you were doing with your huge, State Department-wise; a lot of people and you had a lot of money. What were you doing? Or should I ask?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the program has about 10 elements to it, everything from border security, canines, police training, prisons, demand reduction, anti-corruption, internal affairs. It was really comprehensive and what we did at the start, what I was doing was there was still quite a bit of money that had been programmed, so people were managing their programs. What they couldn't do was start new ones, so that they'd turned into a bit of a lag about a year later when a bunch of new programs had not been planned. But we were still busy. You have to get permissions from the Mexicans to do a lot of things. They were very touchy about being kept informed of every aspect of our programming, and they, you know, we did of what you do in these situations, which is you sharpen your weapons or your tools, getting ready for the next phase so that if you're not that busy you look around and see how's your accounting system and your invoicing and how well prepared are you to move a lot of money through the system. So, before I got there, they had had a huge push to spend a lot of money for sort of a political messaging purpose, and they had to go back and look at everything they had done and make sure that everything was accounted for. I'm very proud of the folks that work there who had come up with a whole new system that was a software that tracked from the planning stage to the very last invoice, every penny. And if somebody asked me from the Mexican government where a certain dollar was, I could tell them. And so, it's complicated, but there were some really great people who had it in hand.

Q: Well, I mean, the problem of all the things you mentioned, prisons, police training, anti-corruption, everything else, drugs, I mean, all these things have been around for a long time, so you must have had a very experienced staff by this time.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the Mexican program with INL, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, ironically 10 years before, seven years before had been almost zero. I mean, they had had- the guy before me built that program from 19 people to over 100 in a three-year period. So, they really didn't have a whole lot of super experienced staff. I mean, some of the staff had worked in other forms of U.S. management, but no, the program was relatively new, the size of it was new. They put a billion dollars through- they spent $500 million in a year; that was the big push. That's completely unheard of.

There were some big ticket, high cost equipment items that make it easier to spend that kind of money responsibly, but when I got there it was phasing more into spending money on training and capacity building, some equipment, but it actually slowed down the rate of spending.

Q: Well, did, I mean, right now Mexico has been going through a horrible series of gang violence. I mean, people in the narcotics trade killing people. Was that going on when you were there?

PFORZHEIMER: Absolutely. It was worse. It was- there were some extraordinarily bad times that they had gone through- especially when a new drug cartel creates itself, they have, there's some sort of academic work on this, they have to be more brutal, so they have to establish themselves and put fear out there. If you're a well-established drug cartel, and frankly, if you have dominance over a city, you don't have to kill as many people. And so, we actually have a debate, there's an honest debate that the tactic, especially the U.S. DEA of trying to kill or arrest the highest level cartel people which breaks it up, that that tactic went- made Mexico go from having like five cartels to 15 and made it more violent. So, if your counter-narcotics push is coming up against your desire to not have as much violence push, you do have a policy debate in there.

I was the director of this program. I used to describe it as going into meetings with my invisible suitcase full of cash because I had all the money. And it was super fun to have that because sometimes I could actually say yes to people, which was very fun after all these years.

Q: What'd you do with the cash?

PFORZHEIMER: What'd we do with it? Well, one example was that the issue of kidnapping was just becoming excruciating. There was- this was a brutal tactic that people were using to make money and to intimidate, and within the U.S. Government, the FBI is the lead and the highest authority on kidnapping and trying to fight it. And so, eventually we decided to put some of our money into paying for a detail, a secondment of an FBI authority to come to Mexico for two years to help Mexico stand up a more effective anti-kidnapping unit and capability. I was in a position to do that, to say, you know, to talk to my FBI counterpart, get his advice and tell him that I was open to putting money into that because INL money can be used for other federal agencies to come and do capacity building. And that was, I thought, a great way, rather than buying them stuff or putting them in a classroom, this was paying for someone to be a senior advisor to the highest-ranking Mexican person who could in turn- Mexico's not poor. They can pay for their own staff. But there were things that we could impart.

You know, the United States, among other things, is a great big social lab of things that have been tried, with our law enforcement, with our cities, and we were in a position to share experiences with Mexico. There's anti-gang training, which frankly, goes both

directions. So, we bring people from cities who know what they're talking about and they learn from their Mexican colleagues. So.

Anyway, it was a really, it is, I think, a really good program.

Q: You mentioned that the Mexican president was looking rather skeptically towards the United States. How did that play out in your time?

PFORZHEIMER: It was so hard. When I first arrived, there was a whole architecture of our bilateral relationship and how we were managing this money, and little by little that architecture just fell apart. You know, meetings just didn't happen. And the Mexican side was given instructions, basically, to not work with us. But nobody was wholly honest about it, so we would kind of keep going as if we were still in the same relationship, and then just things would not happen. And that went on for a long time. So, we sort of- we stopped trying as hard, but we would still try from time to time, and the money kept piling up, and I said to Washington, we kind of need to stop asking for new money if my burn rate is so low I'm not able to get rid of the money I have. If I'm spending $200 million a month or $20 million of $2, you're going to just create a pipeline of unused money if you keep appropriating large amounts. And they said oh, well, I'm sure it will all change eventually.

So, eventually it did, and I still remember being so excited when I finally got a document that had been promised me over and over again that was the list of what the Mexican government would allow us to spend our money on. And that list was about $3 billion worth. I mean, we had $700 million or so to spend and $3 billion was not a good way to consider it, but it was a start. And so, we wrote back to them and said no, we're not buying you tanks or whatever it was that they wanted that was so expensive, but we are happy to consider this amount.

That began a discussion that was really fruitful where the Mexican side, I had a counterpart and he worked for the ministry of interior, and he made a call out to all of the law enforcement community within the Mexican side of what did they want. So, they all wrote up their wish lists and they funneled that to me and then I sat down with my interagency and we reviewed all these proposals. And people were really honest that sometimes it was a proposal by their counterpart, and they say things like they don't need this. Or in some cases we'd say we don't want them to have this. But it was, you know, people would say you know, it would be nice, but I think this makes more sense. And we shook it out to what we thought we could say yes to and then there was sort of another category of we could consider it, but we needed to hear more. And we had a series of meetings with Mexican groups so that they could talk us through their proposals. And again, sometimes it was the Mexican side, my counterpart who would say to them you know what, that's not a very good idea, and he would shoot his own side's proposal down. And through that I think we came up with about $500 million worth of new potential projects, so that started the process again of getting the approvals and starting the spending.

Q: Merida Initiative is basically is equipment, wasn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: No. Some equipment, but also training.

Q: When the new president came in and sort of stopped things, did the- how about the rate of criminality? Did that sort of dictate let's keep this going?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. I think it was that in part, that he found the whole problem set to be far more daunting than it had seemed when he was a candidate. And so, he just- It was that.

Q: Surprise, surprise.

PFORZHEIMER: He kept coming back to us with a question here and a question there, and we kept saying we're really ready to help you in all sorts of ways, and we promise this totally transparent process, we're not going to sneak around and empower- I mean, there were a lot of bureaucratic issues. Like, we were empowering certain parts of the bureaucracy that were good at coming to us and asking for money, and so there needed to be more discipline on their side. But once that discipline was imposed, he saw the point of letting us help him.

Q: How did you- did you get involved in- I've talked to people that served in Mexico and all and say that in a way there are two different sort of aspects; one is government to government and all, and then all the American cities along the border and all that, and states have almost their own relations. Did that mess you up or help you or what?

PFORZHEIMER: That is a true phenomenon. It didn't really mess me up. We tended to draw real strength from those relationships in the sense that there were effective lobbyists on both sides for a more healthy bilateral relationship. Like those mayors and governors associations, because they believe in their border to border kind of health, they want Washington and Mexico City to get along. So, that's what we wanted, so by and large this was not something that got in the way; it was they were helpful in pushing the line that cooperation was good.

Q: How did it work out for- I'm told that at various times it was not a good idea for Americans to drive into the interior of Mexico, driving down, because either criminals or the police were out there stopping cars and demanding money or even killing.

PFORZHEIMER: Sure. Yes, we had a lot of restrictions. The U.S. travel warning for Mexico makes that very clear. Nothing bad happened to us or anybody at the embassy when I was there, I think. There had been a killing of two agents, I think they were DHS (Department of Homeland Security) not that long before we got there. they'd been stopped somewhere, and I guess the guy rolled the window down or something and that

was it; they were shot. But with regular precautions you were okay. We drove a little bit. We drove to Acapulco, but mostly we flew when we went places.

Q: So, how about school for your son?

PFORZHEIMER: Terrible. He was at the American School there, and it was a place dominated by elite Mexican families. He was bullied at one point. Even though he is very fluent in Spanish, he's half Colombian, he doesn't look like a classic gringo, but they were people who- the kids seemed to have these crazy lives of drinks, party-alcohol-fueled parties at age 14 and 15 at their parents' homes. I think they didn't have drinking ages per se, but they had lots of luxuries and it was tough. And I'm not sure whether my son made it any easier; he was a combative person. He didn't like being there, he missed his friends. He went to, I think he made a point of bringing the Christopher Hitchens book that's the one that says like god is dead or something, the highly atheist- I'm trying to remember the title of it. But it's not the kind of book that will win you a lot of friends in certain circles, and with Americans there from the embassy there were quite a few conservative Christians, so he was just on his way to alienating a lot of people. But he survived and he did well enough in most of the classes, had a couple of very good teachers, had a couple of not good teachers. And I was angry with myself by the end that I had not- I had done quite a bit of advocating for him here and there, especially when he was bullied, but I should have done even more because I think that it was hard to tell which part of it was him being an adolescent who didn't like things, and which part was that the school was really deficient. So, the school was quite often really deficient.

Q: Well, you were there for how long?

PFORZHEIMER: Two years.

Q: And then what?

PFORZHEIMER: Then I came back to- I had trouble getting a job after that. I was trying for something that I wanted to be sort of high-profile and interesting, but back in DC. And because I had made this promise that my son would get to finish high school in the U.S., I was not looking for a DCM job, which probably would have been more logical at that point. So, I had a lot of difficulty finding a good job and I was feeling worried. It was getting to be towards spring or whatever and I got an opportunity to go work for the National Security Council. I was fairly over grade for it, but it was a temporary position that was being set up to handle the Central American crisis, which in 2014 was a wave of unaccompanied children who were coming to the border. So, there was a new Central American engagement strategy, and I went to work for a guy named Ricardo Zúñiga as a temporary director within the National Security Council's Western Hemisphere directorate.

So, it was really incredible in many respects. This was the Central America- something, Alliance for Prosperity. I worked closely with Vice President Biden's staff. I got to listen to Vice President Biden in many aspects, including sort of meetings, phone calls and whatever as he worked his magic with the presidents of three Central American countries to get them to accept conditions for our assistance. We worked on a billion-dollar budget request for assistance to the Northern Triangle. This is basically the money that was just turned off by the current president. I was in charge of that money and getting it turned on. And it was designed to try to mitigate issues in three main categories, development, security and governance, governance being corruption and just plain ability of the government to do things.

Q: This was centered where, in Central America or where-?

PFORZHEIMER: So, I was in Washington.

Q: In Washington.

PFORZHEIMER: And working in the National Security Council, so going to work at the Old Executive Office Building next to the White House and sitting in on big ticket meetings. And it was very interesting. I mean, I was a fish out of water on some levels, but it was a great experience for me to bring what I knew about interagency coordination and budgeting and the region together.

Q: Did you get any feel for President Obama?

PFORZHEIMER: I did not, I think. I spent more time with the Biden people. And for Obama, I mean, he had- I was at some big staff meetings where he spoke, and it was inspiring to hear him. His graciousness was very real, I think, in personal interactions. I got to have my picture with him in the Oval Office which was when I was promoted. My OC to MC promotion happened while I was there and the seven or 10 or 12 people from the State Department detailed to the White House who had been promoted, we were all told that we could go and get our picture taken with the president. So, we- I wore my best suit and I stood in line and I went into the White House and I remember very distinctly not really smiling. I mean, I'm sure he said something like congratulations; I don't remember that either. But I remember not smiling because I was pretty sure that if I smiled it would be really goofy, like it would just break out everywhere. So, my face was fairly serious. Everyone thought the picture was hilarious because he's grinning because he grins in pictures because he knows how to smile, and I look very serious. And somebody said it looks like he's so excited to meet you and you're like oh, yeah, him. But that was absolutely a high point.

But no, it was more about Biden. And Biden was a little high maintenance, I think. He knew what he wanted. But if he had not lent his energy to this initiative, it would not have gone where it went.

Q: How does the program work?

PFORZHEIMER: It was- a lot of it was focused on that billion-dollar request because in a way, a little bit like in Mexico, we had to put together all of this laundry list of what people wanted to do and rationalize it. But it was also fleshing out a strategy, which I had not written, I just received it when I got there, that had 20 lines of effort. And so, in these different lines of effort, there were different U.S. agencies and departments that had something to contribute. Like, one line of effort might have to do with money laundering and another one would have to do with getting development out to rural areas. So, they stacked themselves somewhat neatly, although there were always turf battles, and I held interagency meetings called the Sub PCC, Policy Coordinating Committee, every two weeks. And I made sure that people felt they were included because they always- people always moan about not being included in meetings, and then you hold a meeting and they don't come, but they don't moan either. So, the meetings were open, I held them in a conference center that's across from the White House that doesn't require the same security clearance to get into, and I had usually between 35 and 40 people every two weeks. And we would talk about, you know, make sure that we were coordinating high-level visits and policies and asking people to talk about progress in their area of the strategy so that I was always in a position to report to my bosses or Congress or whoever how the strategy was being implanted, that you write it and it doesn't just sit there; it's living and it gets implemented.

And when the budget was being formulated, the State Department came in at more like $500 million and everybody was sort of at that area and President Obama in January said no, I want a billion. And because we had done so much work to flesh out all of the requirements, I was able to bring up the number with plausible activities, and the Office of Management and Budget said you know what, we believe you. Usually it's just complete made up numbers, but we were doing so much of this work already that we were able to add the money.

Q: Okay. Could you talk a bit about what you were doing?

PFORZHEIMER: What I was doing?

Q: Well, I mean, you're saying these projects, that they were-

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, what the strategy was doing?

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I mean, at the time that I was working there mostly what they were doing was planning. So, we had to get Congress to go along with this budget request, and we had to condition some of it on- we had to put together a list of what we wanted from the countries. While we're putting together our idea of what we're going to give them, we needed to know what they should do. So, we were asking for them to do

more, like in Guatemala they needed to do more to collect their own taxes because it was hardly fair to ask us to pay for things that their own taxpayers were not, so their tax collection rate had to come up and that was a metric that we could use to judge their commitment. Or with- or also with Guatemala it was whether they would allow this OAS (Organization of American States) and UN anti-corruption commission to continue. So, we were requiring things of the country and we were putting together our plan to help them and help them in those three areas I mentioned to try to stem the root causes of migration.

Q: Well, were you up against the problem that I'm told that in some of these Central American countries that the gang violence was imported from the United States by young people who have gone to New York City or Los Angeles, picked up the wherewithal of how one runs a gang, and then we expel them and back they went to Guatemala or other places and started up these gangs. I mean, what were you doing about-?

PFORZHEIMER: It was a long-standing problem. I mean, I was actually dealing with that problem in the mid-1990s when I was working on the Caribbean, the same dynamic there. It was true and I think it was exacerbated with the temporary protective status that Salvadorans, for example, are here and they can't go back, and the families are broken. And you have sometimes grandparents raising children and they're not capable of giving them a lot of discipline and control.

There were lots of reasons that gangs existed, but once they exist, they have their own dynamic. The deportation dynamic wasn't really, to me, what was fueling it anymore. It may have contributed to the rise of gangs, but once they're there they keep themselves going just fine because it's a way of life and people- they do terrible, terrible things. They will threaten an 11-year-old girl that she has to become someone's girlfriend or she's going to be killed. These are not good choices. And once she is someone's girlfriend, then the other gangs are welcome to kill her. I mean, these kids have done nothing, and they're faced with a death sentence. And the extortion of small business people, etcetera.

So, there are a few methods that we've hit upon ourselves over the years that work on violence reduction, so that was one of the priority programs. And they had some programs in place already and this augmentation was supposed to speed up the process of trying to keep kids out of gangs and mitigate the effects of gangs. And the programs that they have are very solid. They show reductions in violence where they are applied. We just can't seem to get our president and Congress to give the money in a consistent enough fashion to spread the effects.

Q: Well then, where did you go after this?

PFORZHEIMER: So, after that I stayed here in DC; I was the director for Andean Affairs. So, that's the office that covers Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. So, as we used to joke, we fixed Colombia and we broke Venezuela. This was the period of time between 2015 and '17 that Colombia signed- finished the negotiations of its peace

agreement. It is also when Venezuela had its last free election, which was in the fall of 2015.

Q: Yes, was it Alex Lee? I've been interviewing him.

PFORZHEIMER: Oh, he was my boss. What a great guy.

Q: Well, you've certainly got a lot of Colombia in there.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes.

Q: What about your- Well, let's talk about, I guess Colombia and Venezuela are the two big things, aren't they?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. You know, it was a great job. I sort of, because it's more recent I'm awash with details that may not be that interesting. But we essentially had to deal with Colombia, you know, the negotiations were supported by a special envoy, Bernie Aronson, and we supported him and he traveled to Cuba where the negotiations were going on once a month and sort of just held everyone's hand successively and asked them what they needed and was- he was helpful. He was somebody that both sides trusted, and he offered his advice. And it was a way of knowing what was going on, so having the envoy was a good thing. And eventually, in 2016, it was finalized. There was a massive rush for people to go to the signing, however, there was also a referendum among the Colombia people about whether or not they approved of the agreement, and they rejected it. This was not exactly expected and I still remember- You know, as a diplomat, when the unthinkable happens, you always take that sort of moment to go huh, and then you just figure out well, what do we do now or what do they do now, and in their case they kept going and decided that the referendum was not the final approval but the congress was, where the president had a comfortable majority. But it has cast a shadow over the implementation.

It was a good lesson for all of us. When they came out with the tallies of the yes and the no votes, it was very clear that the highest percentages of no votes happened in the part of the country that had not been most involved in the fighting. Where the fighting was the most intense was where they were most likely to see a compromise as a good idea. And I certainly think of that when I look at the problem set for Afghanistan now.

Q: Well, was there anything dealing with Venezuela? I mean, it seems like a country that's on a downward spiral and it's continuing.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. The DCM at the time in Caracas, we used to say things like well, you know, it can't get worse or surely now people will turn against Maduro and Brian would say to us, there is no floor. Just remember, there is no floor. It can always get worse, it always has. I mean, it is extraordinary how bad it was then and how much worse it's actually gotten.

Q: We're dealing with a huge population exodus from-

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, we are. And Colombia could have done quite a bit more earlier in this process to avoid this. Colombia is being the most affected by this exodus, but their leadership did not want to touch the issue in an effective way when they could have. And I think that is a big mistake on their part. They wanted to stay sort of neutral or not make too many waves, and instead they were the most important player in trying to keep- to signal to Maduro that he had to change. At this point, there's no amount of bureaucratic- I mean, sorry, diplomatic pressure that's going to do it. The only thing that will really matter is the money. And I used to make that point back in my time; people talked about how they could do this or that at the Organization of American States, and that cost us a huge amount of time and effort. And in the end, the only thing that will really move Maduro is his military, and the only thing that will move the military is running out of money.

Q: Well, where is the money coming from?

PFORZHEIMER: They're selling off the country piece by piece. They're stealing Venezuela from future generations of Venezuelans. They have mortgaged- you know, they borrowed money and mortgaged all of their oil. And I would not be surprised to find out when this is all over that they're selling the land. I mean, they've got resources; it's a resource-rich country, so they can continue to get money to keep themselves in business right now by promising to pay sort of double that amount but in the future. So, the long line of people who are owed money by Venezuela is going to be something to see, and legally speaking, it will take many, many years or decades to untangle it.

Q: What about Bolivia and Ecuador and Peru? They've been at odds with each other from time to time. How were they during your-

PFORZHEIMER: They were not at odds with each other. Ecuador had a very hostile president for most of the time that I was there, although then a less hostile one took over. Bolivia has a hostile president to us, and they- but Bolivia keeps itself more or less out of our attention span. I mean, Morales at that point had his own referendum to try to get permission to run again and he was defeated, and he still managed to run again. And Peru had an election; their new president met our new president and was able to charm him, so that was interesting. But I think since that point that president has gone to jail, like many Peruvian presidents do.

So, we used to refer to our office, we would use the Brady Bunch analogy, so for anyone who comes after who knows what the Brady Bunch is, so there's the attention grabbing older kids, you have Greg and Marcia, Colombia is the good one and Venezuela was Marcia. And then we had the sort of middle kids that nobody paid attention to and that was Peru and Ecuador.

Q: The Brady Bunch is a serial on tv of a family.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. That somebody who is my age, 55, would have watched as a child.

So, you had sort of the countries that could never get the attention of the parents, basically. So, we always- in many State Department offices you have that; you have the sort of attention-grabbing big countries and then you have the other ones who sort of just do what they do.

But we did some interesting stuff with Peru. I was very proud of my desk officer who worked on a big- he worked with his counterpart at the embassy on a big memorandum of understanding between the U.S. And Peru on illegal gold mining because he pulled together the aspects that were environment, economic and security, like drug trafficking, etcetera, and it was just really interesting the way that a single issue was spread across so many offices and agencies and pushing it together meant that we had a chance at having a coherent approach. So, I'm an in the weeds person, as you can tell.

Q: And you did this how long?

PFORZHEIMER: This is two years.

Q: This is when to when?

PFORZHEIMER: 2015 to '17.

Q: Venezuela, had it sort of basically collapsed during this period?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, it depends on how you define collapse. I mean, their currency inflation rate was ridiculous, their food was disappearing, the middle-class exodus had begun; but no, it was not a full-scale collapse like it is now. It was just the seeds of it.

Q: How did the, say, diplomatic relations, I mean, what was your relation to the ambassador from Venezuela?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, they had an acting ambassador for a while. We tried to get along, but he had instructions sort of to not work with us. And then, they had a new one whose name I've forgotten. He hosted us for a lunch one time. He was very nice. He had been a professional diplomat. That second ambassador was recalled to Caracas and died, it was rumored, after a fairly tough interrogation, he had a heart condition. So, they were not good with their own people.

And we had- there was an American named Josh Holt who had been living in Venezuela. He met his wife online and he went there to marry her, and he was arrested, and he was in jail without ever getting a trial date, just sort of detained for months and months. And so,

he was a big bilateral issue that we raised with the embassy. It took another year after I left to get him home.

Q: What was the reason? Was this somebody down in the bureaucracy had it in for him for family stuff or something?

PFORZHEIMER: He was an innocent guy from, I think, Utah. I mean, he was genuinely in the wrong place at the wrong time, but he had- there had been a police raid in this sort of not wealthy barrio where he was staying, and he took pictures maybe and they decided he was- he had to be a CIA agent. I mean this big, tall gringo, what was he doing there? And I mean, really, really just a guy who was in the wrong place. And then, once they had made the mistake, they compounded it and didn't want to let him go.

Q: How much did your area, did it rank fairly high in priority as far as the State Department was concerned?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. It was a hot- both were very hot issues. Visits to Colombia, lots and lots and lots of meetings on Venezuela. I spent a certain amount of time as acting deputy assistant secretary. Alex, of course, as he'll mention, had to leave early from his job and I even testified to Congress in that capacity in 2016. And it was a lot of attention. And Tom Shannon, the undersecretary at the time was deeply involved in our Venezuela policy. So, I spent a lot of time outside think tanks, the Hill, being the face of the policy.

Q: Was there any proposals floating around about our doing something in Venezuela, interfering with the government, moving in? I mean, this wasn't a-

PFORZHEIMER: No. No, I mean, like, I sort of thought after all these years, I'm in this job and I'm one of the people who would be there in the room to say no. And so, it was not hard to say no. If it ever came up, which it rarely did, most people would have thought that was a silly idea. And I could be there to say no and other people in Department of Defense as well. I mean, it was the sort of- bottom line for any conversation was that there was no military option, and then we could talk about everything else. So, I did, when the new administration came in, I wrote an options paper and I went up to the letter P without ever putting a military option on there.

Q: Yes. How did the Trump Administration affect your work?

PFORZHEIMER: It was surprisingly unaffected, I have to say, for the six months that I was in that job and they were in office. That was pleasant. There was no real change in policy. They took such a long time getting any kind of people in place and traction and then there was the whole churn at the NSC because there was some guy whose name I've even forgotten who was supposed to be the senior director, he didn't last very long at all. It was under Flynn, but this guy got bounced because he was doing imitations of the president or something and it got out. It was like, on Monday we were told there was going to be an interagency policy meeting on Friday and on Thursday we were told this

guy had been given a big box of his stuff and told to leave. So, they just kind of kept making it up as they were going along. Yes, we had a hardline policy under Obama, so there wasn't actually a big need to flip it, even though the basic ethos has been if there's a policy under the old administration, reverse it; in this case it was very consistent.

Q: Well then, after this Andean job, did you go have another job?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. My last overseas tour was the deputy chief of mission in Embassy Kabul.

Today is the 26th of September 2019, with Annie Pforzheimer. And where did we leave off?

PFORZHEIMER: I think we were just going to talk about my last assignments in Afghanistan and then back in Washington. So, in the fall of 2016, I got my handshake for the DCM job for Embassy Kabul, and I want to tell a little story about that because it was the end of October, I had to break the news to my parents, who were really unhappy that I was going to go back. In fact, I almost hadn't bid on the job because I felt like I had promised that I wouldn't do it, but it was too important in my life to try for this job and I knew it would be pretty much my last one and it felt like the right thing to do. So, I did and got the job and told my parents, and that was the end of October. With the election of the current president. I really faced a dilemma about going overseas and being this person's representative because I so firmly disagreed with him.

Q: You're speaking the American-

PFORZHEIMER: The U.S. president, yes. And I so very much disagreed with what I had seen on the campaign trail and what it represented in terms of my own beliefs in international relations and the United States that I was really torn about taking the assignment which I had just accepted. So, the day after the election I called my son, who at this point is 18 and in college, and is a wise person, and I said I don't really know what to do. I kind of want to make sure that you're okay with whatever I choose, and this is what I'm thinking. And he said mom: they need somebody as steady as you, are in a place like that, with a man like him as president. And I said okay, I'm going to do this and then I'm going to quit, which is what I eventually did. But it was my kid who has good instincts, and I thought I can bring a certain amount of trustworthiness and steadiness, which is something I think I do have as a manager, to this very difficult job in this difficult place.

Q: Now, the dates you were this, and I think you were the one who told me that at least one point there were five ambassadors there; were you the DCM to all five?

PFORZHEIMER: No. At that point there were- there was only one ambassador. The job that I went into at one point had been known as the deputy ambassador had been filled

when I was there the first time, between ’09 and ’10, had been filled by Ambassador Riccardone who was a three-time ambassador, a very senior, senior guy. By the time I went back in 2017 this was downgraded, as you could say, to a slightly more normal position. But what they had was the ambassador and they had the deputy chief of mission, and then they had something called the assistant chief of mission, the ACOM. And the ACOM was the number three in the front office and that person had the lead on management and security issues. So, it was a bit of a division of labor between the DCM and the traditional roles that the DCM usually had. What I did was more swing back and forth between either being the alternate ambassador or being a lead on the management and security. But in general, I spent more time working on the ambassadorial, political-economic reporting roles and the public facing roles.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

PFORZHEIMER: So, when I went out there the ambassador was not a full ambassador at the time. He was the chargé, a permanent chargé position. His name is Hugo Lorens. Hugo and I knew each other somewhat from time working on Western Hemisphere Affairs. Hugo had been an ambassador previously in Honduras, and he had also served as the ACOM position and the assistance coordinator in Kabul previously, so he had Afghanistan experience. But he was a little bit more of a Latin Americanist, and so that was something that we knew about each other. I think we had a good relationship. It got better. It was only an overlap of about two months. I got out there in September of 2017; within 10 days Hugo actually was back in the United States because one of the hurricanes that season had taken a direct hit on the place where his home was and blown the roof off the house and there was a lot of damage and things he needed to attend to. So, within 10 days of arriving I was the chargé, which was a little daunting. He got back and then he went away again to an event in India called the Passage to Prosperity, so I was chargé again, and I was chargé during a visit by Secretary of Defense Mattis. And then, Hugo and I, I guess we were together in the month of October, and then I left at the end of October and when I came back that was the end of Hugo’s tour, so I didn’t work with him after that. So, then for a month, from mid-November to mid-December I was chargé again and then Ambassador John Bass, who had been in Turkey, came and took over.

Q: Well, it sounds like at the top level there we were sort of switching, I mean things weren’t very steady. I mean, people were in and out and all that.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, it was something of a normal rotation, but tours- in Hugo’s case, because he had been a chargé and not a confirmed ambassador, I’m not quite sure where that fell through the cracks, that was before my time, but he was there for about 10 months. And our tours there are short and so it does lead to a certain disjointedness. The other thing about serving there is that you get these long breaks so that’s why having three people in the front office makes sense. There’s always, basically, two of you there and the other one in all likelihood is on vacation or sometimes on travel.

Q: Well, I'll let you organize this, but sort of what was the situation when you arrived initially?

PFORZHEIMER: When the current president took over, he was taking over from a policy that was- that President Obama had left in place of first of all, the United States no longer being operationally in charge of the war although the support that they gave to the Afghan forces is pretty significant. And then secondly, the idea that Obama had had a drawdown was sort of stopped in 2016 as the Taliban started to gain a lot of ground and they decided not to continue with the policy until a new administration was in place. Now, this president had campaigned on the idea of getting out, and so anything and everything was on the table, whether the drawdown would continue or something else; those were all options that were considered. General McMaster was the national security advisor after General Flynn flamed out early, and General McMaster had served in Afghanistan, actually as had Flynn, who I met the first time he was there. But McMaster's view was that actually this was an important war, if not to win, I don't think he thought it was winnable, he thought it was important not to lose it. But he managed to work through this administration the South Asia Strategy, which was published and finalized in August of 2017, a month before I got there.

The South Asia Strategy was- essentially my task was trying to get that implemented. Part of the strategy was actually a more robust U.S. military posture. We had gone down to under 9,000 troops and this strategy brought it up again, mainly in order to bring the training, advising and assisting function back down to lower levels of Afghan forces. It also gave the commander, who at the time was Nicholson, gave him more latitude for an air campaign. Supposedly, I wasn't in the room, but many people repeated this, when the president of Afghanistan and his number two heard the rollout of this strategy, they're bitter political enemies but they hugged each other because it was such a relief. I mean, they could have been facing a complete U.S. pullout or anything, and instead what they got was a renewed commitment and the McMaster strategy also eliminated what had been hanging over them from Obama, which was kind of a time bound idea of withdrawal, so this was conditions-based. And, for the first time, I think it put a political negotiation at the centerpiece of the U.S. strategy. So, overall the South Asia Strategy was really good and so I got lucky. Throughout the department and when I had been working in the department until July, all kinds of terrible things were happening in terms of other policies. In my case, for Afghanistan, the policy actually improved.

So, the other thing that was very different about serving my second tour with this administration was how little they seemed to follow what was happening overseas. And as somebody put it about the Obama White House, you would call it nano management, except there was no actual management. I mean, it was really not always handled well. There were a lot of requests for information and meetings that didn't improve the situation. So, oddly enough, I found myself working on a policy that was better than it had been before with a less intrusive Washington, so for a little while that was certainly good, but it was also the sense that something was hanging over you, that at any minute this capricious White House would change its mind, which, of course, we've seen.

Q: This is early on in the Trump Administration, was the capriciousness policy pretty evident at that point?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, it was. And I'm sure others who were closer to different policies would know it better, but I mean, the refugee issues right away were, you know, draconian changes to law and practice through executive orders and of course, pulling out of the Paris climate pact and pulling out of the Iran deal and saying completely terrible things about NATO when we were being bolstered by NATO in Afghanistan and elsewhere. So, all over were examples of policy- pulling out of the Transpacific Partnership, which had been worked on for a decade and used to have bipartisan support. So, there were all sorts of things that had been reversed and even reversed back again. Sometimes a policy was pulled in one direction and then pulled back. So, we, I think, had good reason to believe that at any moment things could get a lot worse.

Q: Was that, I mean, was this a matter of, I'm trying to get the flavor of early Trump Administration. I mean, here you are in a real hotspot; I mean, were you sort of sitting around figuring out what shoe was going to drop now or-?

PFORZHEIMER: We were, and we weren't. I think we had the sense that during the strategy review that led to the August unveiling of the South Asia strategy, during that review everyone was waiting for shoes to drop and they were concerned. Once the strategy came, I think we entered into something of a zone where we didn't feel like Washington was paying a whole lot of attention to Afghanistan and so, for a little while, we weren't all that worried, we weren't looking over our shoulders constantly. Because that's how, you know, that's the rhythm of a lot of administrations, even this one, is that they have intense interest in a place then they make a decision and then they forget about it for a while because something else comes up.

We had morale issues right off the bat because of Secretary Tillerson's series of stupid personnel decisions, including ending the eligible family member program at that point. And I had one woman working for me who was a newlywed and her husband was supposed to come out to post to work, and we needed him, he needed the job, they wanted to be together, and because of this decision -- that was based on nothing -- they were separated for a year and we didn't have the person that we needed. So, that happened over and over again, so every single time we got attention from the State Department we would raise this. Hugo had a passion for a lot of things and one of them was trying to do right by the people, so he would raise this every opportunity he got with the acting undersecretary for management, Bill Todd.

Q: How was the war going then?

PFORZHEIMER: So, I got there in September; the fighting season continues through, generally through November. It was not going well. It wasn't going terribly. The Taliban would make kind of hit and run attempts to take over district centers and provincial

capitals, which forced the Afghan military and the U.S. military into this constant reactive posture. You know, we- the military folks tweaked our approach. They decided at one point that they could bomb drug labs where heroin was being processed and that that might make a big difference to the Taliban. I think there's a lot of misconceptions about how dependent the Taliban is on drug income, but that was a great option, so they tried that out. It didn't have an appreciable effect. Over time, they found that the Afghan special forces were very good, but they were also so good that they were being misused by the Afghan government, overused, sent into all sorts of situations even when it should have been regular Afghan military. At the same time, they were pushing this reform, they being the U.S. military leadership, was pushing this through President Ghani, a reform which would lead eventually to the retirements of several hundred generals and colonels. It was called the inherent law, and the problem was that generals were old and they were- I mean, there were generals who were older than the average age of Afghans; most of them were older than the average age of Afghans, and like, they had been generals for decades. And they were risk averse, they weren't very- they didn't have great leadership qualities. Anyway, our diagnosis of the problem had been for a while that the leadership needed to change and qualified people needed to move up through the system, which meant you needed to retire a bunch of people, and those were people who had a lot of political clout and networks of influence, so it had to be done very cautiously. But they managed it, which was a lot of effort and time by General Nicholson.
So, that was the war.

Meanwhile, there were bombings in Kabul, that that's kind of the area that both the Taliban and, of course, what was emerging then, which was ISIS, that was where they would get the most attention. And there were terrible- it came to a head with terrible bombing and attacks in January of 2018.

Q: What was the Taliban's strategy? Were they using the bombings to make America get out?

PFORZHEIMER: Essentially. I think their strategy has been to outlast and to make the war painful, to convince the Afghans that they were stronger. I mean, there's a certain quality of, I would say bandwagon in Afghanistan that Afghans who, you know, they want to survive, and they are watching to see who's the most powerful. And the government is powerful because it has the United States. It's not inherently powerful. So, the minute that we decide that we're not with them, the power calculation would change radically. The Taliban have outside sponsors such as Pakistan and they're just powerful because being an insurgent is easier. You only need to destroy, you need to intimidate; you don't have to file human rights reports with people. So, they used any tactics that they wanted to and their main effort was- you know, the fight is over the confidence of the Afghan people, and if you are the one who the Afghan people believe is more powerful then, kind of as a self-fulfilling prophecy, you are.

Q: Well, was there any contact with the Taliban when you were doing this? I mean, was there any sort of movement towards some sort of peace?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, the Afghan government had its channels. They would send certain people to talk to certain others, not so directly, but definitely through intermediaries. There were intermediaries in the Gulf States who were advocating their utility. We the U.S. Government were doing very little of that. But they were there, people knew where they were, but they had certain set preconditions to talking, which was essentially you know, they said, they would only talk if they could talk to the United States first, or they would only talk if we withdrew.

Q: Were there any great initiatives taken while you were there on the part of the United States? Or major initiatives?

PFORZHEIMER: You mean military?

Q: Yes.

PFORZHEIMER: No, it was the holding pattern. While we were doing that, we were pursuing a reform initiative, the military reform that I mentioned. There was something called the U.S.-Afghanistan Compact that was also agreed to in August of 2017, and my job was to chair one of the four working groups of the compact and it was also to make sure that the whole process was underway. So, I received reports from the other three working groups. Those were- the working group I chaired was on governance, which had to do with elections and corruption issues and justice issues, rule of law. There was a working group on the economy, which worked on ways in which the economy could be more accessible to private investment and general fiscal reform. There was the military working group. And the fourth working group was very amorphous. It was on peace. So, while the talking with the Taliban and fighting the Taliban and all the rest of that was going on, at the same time the Afghanistan government has this opportunity, which I think they have, in fact, squandered, in 2017 and ’18 to develop a very strong domestic constituency for peace but not just sort of peace in its most amorphous state, but peace through their constitution and the protection of rights for women and minorities.

Q: At the heart of our policy and the Taliban policy was the role of women, wasn’t it, in a way? I mean, women going to school. I mean, up and down the line.

PFORZHEIMER: In a way. I think it could be overstated to say that it was the heart of the U.S. policy. When not just this administration but others talk about what we’re doing there, they don’t say we’re there for the women. They don’t say it in private and they don’t say it in public. I mean, I think they think it’s important and they don’t want a withdrawal to jeopardize what we have achieved, but it’s not a fair statement to say that we went in to liberate women or that we stayed in to liberate women. What we say that we are there for is to make sure that no 9/11-style terror attacks can be generated from Afghanistan ever again.

Q: That, in a way, that argument about no 9/11-type attacks can be generated there, to me it sounds like there's something wrong there because the world has changed, and we've got ways of dealing with that by killing off possible terrorists and all. Did that bother you or-?

PFORZHEIMER: Does it bother me? That's an interesting way of putting it. I agree with you. I think it is overly simplified and not particularly compelling rationale. I would counter argue that we should be paying much more attention to the outer suburbs of European cities than the hinterlands of Afghanistan. How do I put this? It was the argument that we went in with and it's the argument that people are sticking with. And whether or not it's compelling in a strictly kind of intelligence sense, it has political resonance and it covers everything. So, that's sort of it. There are people who argue that if that was our goal, we achieved it immediately, and as you say we could achieve it at any given moment, and that's a whole constituency of policy debate. You know, just leave and if things go the wrong way go back and hurt somebody and leave again. I have to say, if I had to give my opinion about that and sort of have had to give my opinion about that, it would never be that simple. You would never get past the fact that you have to travel over a lot of people's airspace to do whatever it is you think you're going to do, and that it behooves us to leave Afghanistan in a state of stability where we have access and a government that allows us to have a security relationship.

Q: How did the other NATO countries fit in, particularly in your relation with them?

PFORZHEIMER: I think that NATO countries had a varying degree of impact on our policymaking. I was sad to see it start to diverge and in terms of what this president as of last December, of December of 2018 when he just randomly said we were leaving, there was no consultation with NATO at that point, and it was an enormous blow to the credibility of us having allies. But at the time that I was there, I think that our commander treated his NATO allies with a huge amount of respect. I went to a ramp ceremony, which is when a soldier dies and you see off their coffin, I went to one ramp ceremony, it happened to be for three soldiers from the Czech Republic, and that happened. We had allies putting absolute effort into this, and so we did our best to treat everybody with a lot of respect. One of my best contacts there was the NATO civilian representative, a German ambassador. I think they provided kind of an EU proxy, although the EU was there as well, and gave us a better- more credibility with the Afghan people and government.

Q: Well, did you find, in general I'm talking to your NATO colleagues, your Afghan colleagues and all, that when the subject of our president came up, kind of everybody rolled their eyes? I mean, look, realizing that you're not dealing with, maybe I'm wrong in this but, a particularly stable force.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, first of all, fortunately for us, the South Asia Strategy was enough of a proxy for having a stable president. So, we had a stable policy and so, we could talk about that. Secondly, my diplomat colleagues were wonderful and so tactful,

and he would say and do the most incredible things and they wouldn't really bring it up. They were sympathetic. At some point, all of them had had embarrassing leaders, so they didn't throw it in our faces.

So, our interest there was in preparing for elections as well. So, this was late 2017, early 2018, we were trying to push readiness for parliamentary elections, which were supposed to take place in early 2018 and didn't actually occur until October. And every day I worked there, there was some version of needing to work on the elections, pushing the tiniest of details. I mean, they stopped the process over and over again over things that didn't matter very much without a sense of a deadline.

Q: Well, who was stopping it?

PFORZHEIMER: Who was stopping it? We talked about that endlessly. Who knew? Inertia, the desire of the current president of Afghanistan to run the country without a functioning parliament. That was, to me that was a big part of it.

Q: Karzai was the president?

PFORZHEIMER: No, Ghani.

Q: He's long gone?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, it's-

Q: Not long gone.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, it's Ashraf Ghani as of 2015. I think Ghani decided that having a parliament was some sort of a democratic requirement and he wasn't going to stand in its way forever, but he was in no rush to have the elections held and have them be credible because as soon as a parliament got its feet under itself, it would be another pole of power and he enjoyed running the country through executive decrees. And he centralized power enormously in parliament's absence and kept appointing ministers who had not been confirmed and it was- and passing. I mean, every law pretty much, except for the budget, was done through executive decree. And I have to say, I think we were complicit. There were a lot of important laws that went through and it would be hours and hours or months of work to get it through parliament, and it was five minutes to get the president to sign in, and we needed to- we had such a huge agenda, so many things needed to get done. Tax exemptions for our foreign assistance; that was an important matter. Getting the airport to function; that was an important matter. We had so many agenda items that having a simpler way of doing business through an empowered president was easier, I will admit. But I also think that over time what we helped was in the weakening of their very, very nascent branches of government.

Q: What was your impression of the Afghans running their country?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I respect so many of the Afghans that I encountered as being smart and dedicated and survivors. I think that it's very difficult to extricate ourselves from the calculus of how good or bad the government was. Because sometimes they would do things that were what we wanted them to do, but they took the blame. And we ourselves, of course, carried conflicts. There are parts of the U.S. Government who think it's terrific that there are still, essentially, warlords in different parts of the country because those warlords help keep the peace, and they are also the kind of people who know everything that's happening in their territory. So, that makes them easy to work with and fruitful to work with for the intelligence folks, for the military. On the other hand, a warlord is not a part of the rule of law. And one important feature of that, for example, is there are five or six kind of big men who have control over different parts of Afghan territory, and each one of them essentially controls a border crossing with Iran, with Central Asia, with Pakistan. And when you control a border crossing, you're controlling the customs revenue. So, we see that and if we wanted to have that change, we would have to make ourselves part of a power struggle. So, a lot of decisions by the United States, I mean, logically we don't want to be part of a power struggle; on the other hand, it's not really fair for us to just accuse the Afghan government of corruption. They're unable to control these people because we help keep them in place.

Q: Yes. Well, how did you find relations with various parts of our government, particularly CIA had a big role there, didn't it?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, I feel like I can't really go into that.

Q: I know you can't. I'm just thinking about overall. I mean, was this a problem on a different- I mean, were you all on the same course?

PFORZHEIMER: I mean, that's a really tough one to answer. Generically, sure, but I think, you know, like I just described, there are many examples of where pursuing their policy goal to its utmost butted up against other people's policy goals. I mean, I had people from the Department of Justice who were outraged at what we didn't go in terms of holding the government to account. But then, at the same country team table you had people from agencies where of course they didn't hold the government to account. And as the deputy chief of mission, I probably had, along with the ambassador, the best working knowledge of what each of these sections was doing and how those imperatives did, in fact, contradict each other. I mean, I think when policies are made, agencies are not supposed to get everything they want or else we wouldn't have it interagency. But when one of the agencies can shroud everything it's doing in secrecy, they have a better- and including their budget, they have a better chance of getting everything they want. And the other agencies sort of look mystified why things don't work out the way they're trying to make them work out. I mean, we had an interagency anti-corruption working group with AID and Department of Justice and INL and all of these political-

Q: Treasury.

PFORZHEIMER: Treasury, the military. All these people in the room and the one thing I did is I said to the intelligence agencies, you at least have to attend. You have to listen to what these other people are trying to get done. But I think sometimes different parts of the government would see the anti-corruption brief as being very idealistic and even at times contrary to the better interest of the United States. So, as I said, it's hard to throw all the arrows at the Afghans when I know very well, I mean, I had conversations with military people who told me outright that to get fuel shipments through, of course they paid off people. Well, how does that square with the finger wagging reprimands to a very weak government? So, we have been a part of this issue from the start and as our military presence drew down and as our assistance drew down, the opportunities for huge amounts of graft and fraud, etcetera, have started to at least reconcile themselves. So, we're no longer fueling the creation of instant millionaires.

Q: Did you, particularly with a new administration and particularly with a sort of a disorganized administration, I think particularly in the early- I'm not sure it's changed much in the last few years, but certainly early on did you find you were getting a lot of so-called experts coming out and coming up with ideas and all this and that you were not quite sure how much clout they really had?

PFORZHEIMER: Actually, no. I mean, that was a feature of the Obama Administration. I was in Kabul the first year of the Obama Administration, that's exactly what happened, people like Robert Kagan and other folks who were on a kind of vague consultancy to the government come and out and talk about things. No, it was really the opposite with this group of people; nobody wanted to go. There were real signs that they were afraid of coming. We had- when General Mattis came at the end of September his airplane was parked at the main airport, and so they actually rocketed the airplane or the airport. So, that caused consternation when Secretary Tillerson made it out there for his first visit, which was in October, so kind of, you can see where Afghanistan had dropped if the secretary of state didn't get out there until October of his first year in office. And they were afraid to come to Kabul. So, what they did is they decided they could go to Bagram Air Force Base. They called Hugo, the chargé, at something like 6:15 in the morning and told him that he needed to get President Ghani to come up to Bagram at 9:30 that morning, which is about a 20-minute helicopter ride. They needed to give the party an answer by 7:30. So, they put Hugo in the position of needing to call the president of the country, tell him that he needed to haul himself to a U.S. military base in order to meet with our secretary of state, and needed to give him an answer immediately.

So, we did this, and Hugo jumped on a plane and went up to Bagram to help make things ready, because nobody had any idea that this was going to happen. They prepared an office, the commander's office, and dressed it up as nicely as they could and they made one error, which is they forgot to take the Zulu clock off the wall, the clock that showed Zulu time, very military thing to have, and they showed Secretary Tillerson meeting with President Ghani. But when President Ghani circulated the picture, his people erased the Zulu clock, however the other version of it, the American photographers had it, so that

became a bit of a scandal for him. And the point was, it was insulting that our senior diplomat couldn't make it to the capital.

Q: I mean, the reason was security as far as his and his group's judgment.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, the reason was security and his group's judgment. However, that was a really hard to swallow reason, especially with an embassy with several thousand people in it that went about its business every day.

Q: But it showed sort of a distaste for going to Kabul.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes, well, and the current president has never been. He's never been to Afghanistan; he's never been to Kabul.

Q: You know, I served in Vietnam and we were deluged with visitors.

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. The earlier days in Afghanistan, absolutely; everyone had a solution. And over time everyone's solution has been tried. So, we're stuck.

So, I don't know. I mean, other details, it was a huge embassy, much, much larger than when I had left it. They had new buildings. There were many more security people. I had to adapt to having a security detail that would walk around with me, even on the compound, which was crazy. And I got out a bit, more than most people did, but it was quite difficult to go. When I traveled, I traveled in what was known as a low-profile convoy, so rather than look like a VIP, we would travel in ways that were much more sustainable and it was a really great security decision. The security people were amazing. Every day at an early hour they would sit down and go over the day's movements and what they knew about current threats and reconcile them. And there were times where, knowing the movement and knowing the threat, they would call up an embassy person, including me and the ambassador, and say look, it's not advisable; can you reschedule your meeting, can you meet somewhere else, can this person come to the embassy? And they had to do that every day in order to put the risk at a- pitch it at the right place. This was obviously Post Benghazi when people were not good about accepting risk, but I think we pushed it as far as we reasonably could at the time I was there, knock wood, and still they haven't lost people. And we were still able to get out and do most of our business.

Q: What reaction were you getting or reactions from the people, the Afghans you were seeing on business?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, for the first half of my time there it seemed that it was straightforward. I was- we were talking about the South Asia Strategy and we were trying to implement it, so there was- there were efforts to be stronger with Pakistan, and that was popular with the Afghans, there were efforts to push anti-corruption, there were efforts to engage the Taliban militarily in a more serious fashion. People wanted to know

what the long-term plan was, but it looked like we had one and the idea of a political solution was tested. So, in general the conversations were not difficult ones. What was difficult was pushing this election because the line between sort of sheer incompetence and deliberate malfeasance was skinny, and I had to come up against it, as I said, on a daily basis, and we had to push the government to do things that you couldn't believe they weren't doing.

Q: Could you give some examples?

PFORZHEIMER: Move money into the budget for the election commission. Make a decision about what identity documents would be used. We had to push the government not- I mean, the timing, you're heard this a million times, the time you exhaust on things that don't happen is amazing. We had to push the government to not introduce new census numbers four months before the elections that would have redrawn the parliamentary numbers in the president's favor. And I mean, how this was something we had to spend time on was unbelievable. We had to push the election commission to hire people for vacant positions. I mean, what is that attributable to? It's so hard to know. We had to push- I had to go in person with a helicopter, I had to go to the election commission and warn the head of the election- the seven member commission, that he needed to do his job or we weren't sure we were going to be able to justify funding the election. But in every way that was a threat that was hard to use because if what you imagine was that they didn't want this election to happen, then threatening to withdraw our funding was not a threat.

You know, we did- I unfortunately have so many more of these examples. They ran these elections in a complicated way, but most of it was locked in stone in their election laws, so they couldn't change their election law easily and they couldn't carry it out easily, and it was enormously frustrating. But they would lose time over as I say, not hiring people. They had no media plan. They didn't get information out to voters. They didn't have- I mean, the one thing we knew was running okay was the security side because the U.S. military sat down with its counterparts and said you will run this. But we were unable to corral the different elements of the civilian side. It was exhausting. It was a full-time job on the level of the technical side. There was one officer in the political section who did nothing else. And then, unfortunately, it required senior level intervention on a regular basis to make the president choose among three candidates to fill an empty seat. Why was this our job to tell the president to sign a piece of paper? And yet, he would just claim that he was going to, that he had to study it further, and another week would go by. So, we had way too many of those sorts of exhausting discussions and battles and lies to get through in order to come up with an election, which in the end was pretty flawed, but at least helped to move the process along. And what we were worried about, some people said oh, let the election go further and just combine it with the presidential ones. Well, the presidential ones were almost derailed. We had no confidence that there would actually be elections if we just let the parliament one slide. And as one of the UN people said, if the presidential elections go off the rails and those are the ones that are scheduled for four days from now, two days from now, then you want one of the branches of

government to be legitimate. So, if you waited and held parliamentary and presidential elections together you would basically have no branches of government. Anyway.

So, that was a big, big part of what we did and not something that really made headlines on a regular basis.

Q: How did they come out?

PFORZHEIMER: The parliamentary elections were in October. They were enormously flawed. There was one province out of 32 that never got a registration going, which meant it didn't have an election. The elections had corruption that altered the outcome in a few of the cases, but I think they're muddling through. And they had a lot of complaints, they resolved most of them, and they have a parliament again. So, it was a highly imperfect result. And it didn't have to be that way. You know, running elections is really not that complicated, actually, even with a hard election law. We had UN experts standing by to help and they gave advice and the advice was disregarded.

Q: Was it disregarded, do you think, part of the thing was they didn't want it or was it that they had their own ideas?

PFORZHEIMER: Yes. It was really, really impossible to know. That's the piece of the puzzle. And it didn't matter completely, I mean, whether it was deliberate or whether it was incompetence; you had to handle some of it the same way. But it was very frustrating.

Q: The presidential election?

PFORZHEIMER: Is happening in two days and President Ghani is a candidate, which is causing most of the other candidates to either drop out or essentially call the election into question before it's even happened.

Q: What's your feeling on it?

PFORZHEIMER: I think they're right that he is stealing it. As a wise friend of mine once said, elections are not stolen on the day of voting. So, over time you can stack the deck and make conditions more favorable. One of the accusations out there is that he has spent a lot of time putting people into local offices as police chiefs and district governors who are going to be helpful to him.

I also think, though, that he has his adherents. When he took a stand, essentially against the United States and against Ambassador Khalilzad's peace efforts in early 2019, he was managing to put together something of a nationalist focus which before he had been seen as essentially a creation of the United States, and then he somewhat cleverly distanced himself from the U.S. in the peace process and gathered- You know, I mean, Afghans have a huge amount of pride, and so he made the case that he had been kept out of the

peace process. That is arguable, but essentially that has gotten him something of a defender of the nation aura and he is using that with the voters. It's hard to say.

I mean, the candidate Abdullah Abdullah who's running against him has not got the kind of power and reach that Ghani does. He does have a lot of powerful allies, so it could be close, but I think that Ghani is favored to win, and I believe he will.

Q: How about our Congress? During the time you were there the second time was there much in the way of visiting?

PFORZHEIMER: Congresspeople came out there on a regular basis, not nearly as many as I had thought and not nearly as many as I remembered from the other time. We used to have to ration congressional visits, you know, they could only stay one night and they- Or, not that, but really there were so many of them. But in 2018, '19 there were actually, I don't know, 10 or 15 or so, and there were a lot of people who came to Afghanistan, but they didn't come to the embassy; they were only there to see the troops or they were there to have intelligence briefings.

Q: How did you find your job?

PFORZHEIMER: This is the highest profile thing I'd ever done, and I liked it. I didn't know how I would feel about it. I had periods at the beginning in particular where it felt very out of body, that I would hear somebody refer to the DCM and I would not quite but almost look around to see who they meant and sort of watch myself be this person. There was- I felt like there were some responsibilities I had in terms of how I behaved. I mean, I was the kind of DCM who would show up early for a party and then leave so people could have fun. I didn't believe that it was my job to have fun with them. I liked to show up and thank volunteers, there were lots of activities. I tried as hard as I could to be pleasant to everybody. I remembered very well that if senior people weren't nice, didn't say good morning, it could ruin your day. And so, that I thought was my bare minimum, is that I had to smile at people and say good morning or good afternoon and thank them and always be courteous because it mattered a huge amount.

Q: With such a major military component did you find that being a woman was advantageous or non, disadvantageous?

PFORZHEIMER: I think it's been a neutral- This military is really, really adept at getting the point that women are in positions of power within their own military. I mean, the number three, essentially, in the structure was female, a two-star general, and I didn't find myself treated with any lack of respect. I also found occasionally it was an advantage. The number two, a general name Chris Haas, I was kind of- at first, I think I held him at arm's length, he might have done the same to me. I knew that he'd been very good friends with my predecessor, and I felt like okay, this is kind of a special forces two-star big burly guy, whatever. Well, once he and I kind of thawed out with each other we ended up having lunch once a week with our- the number two at the agency and we got a

lot done and he was smart and funny, and it was just a really great match. And I don't know if it was easier because I was female in a way because he thought I was hilarious. I will say that having gone to the National War College has always since that time has always been helpful to me.

Q: I'm sure it has. Well, how about, again, coming back to Trump. I mean, one can't have any conversation of this period of time without including the president. How did that-?

PFORZHEIMER: You know, I think the- that mostly- I mostly escaped the effects. And yet, by the middle of 2018 you got the sense- when McMaster left, you got the sense that maybe the South Asia Strategy would lose its power, which it started to. And then, the specter of the 2020 presidential elections started to emerge, and you had certain people like Senator Rand Paul who kept goading the president that you know, he needed to get out of Afghanistan, and it is a case that the president has sort of seen his campaign promises in 2016 as something of a tick list, so he's going through them and doing the things he said he would do and this is one of them. So, when I came back in September of 2018, I went into the South Central Asia bureau front office as the acting deputy assistant secretary for Afghanistan. And at that point the Washington focus started to be on why hadn't we seen enough results. They gave the new commander, General Miller, who started in early September, they gave him 45 days to write some kind of assessment. And that was the end of our reprieve, so to speak, where the president and the White House let the military people be in charge of this.

So, in September, late September, they named Ambassador Khalilzad to be the negotiator for peace. And it was well understood that he basically had a very short timeline in order to stave off the next thing from the president, which would be the order to just take everyone out. So, that the Afghan government had had a year since the South Asia Strategy to do something, to unify itself, to work on a national consensus for peace, to do anything at all, and they really hadn't done it. So, now we were putting our diplomat in the driver's seat and he was going to go forth and put a lot of things on the table that hadn't been on the table before. And the Pentagon was unhappy, they remained unhappy that they had had, I would say, this idea that they could continue as they had been for a long time, telling the political people we just need a few more months, we just need a few more thousand people. And that had worked for a really long time.

Q: In other countries, Saigon- Vietnam, we've all been around in .

PFORZHEIMER: And so, that was a surprise to people in the Pentagon and it came to a head with the December 17, I think, announcement by the president that he was ordering full withdrawal from Syria and Afghanistan was on the table and General Mattis quit at that moment in time. I remember being in the front office in my colleague's room watching the tv, thinking this can't be happening because Mattis had been one of the people trying to keep the full withdrawal option off the table. And I think at that point we were actually being told to prepare for this. I mean, it was genuine. It was an honest to

god decision and many senior people were standing by to do this, and I was- this was probably one of the lowest points of my career. I mean, I knew I was retiring, I wasn't giving the idea that I needed to resign very much thought, I was retiring within three months, but I felt that I was being asked to do something evil. And I wrote down at the time what it felt like to be inside the system when you're asked to do something that you believe is fundamentally wrong. And the problem sometimes is that it's not illegal; to withdraw troops from a country is not illegal, it's not even necessarily a bad policy, although I thought it was. But there was no process, there was no debate, there was nothing logical about it. It was whimsical; today I feel like taking troops out. Lives would be ruined. Little things, like the people who worked at the embassy, because I could see the helicopters on the roof. Or big things like all the women. These were what were being cavalierly discussed and I remember thinking how, when you're in the system and this happens, your mind, you know, it skitters around rejecting it, and then you find yourself breaking even the worst task into small tasks the way you've always done, and you think oh, I guess we'll need a demarche cable to tell our allies. You know, that sort of thing that you- I mean, this is what, I'm sure, good German bureaucrats did; you just put these things into your own context because it's very hard. Your mind doesn't go in any other direction. And I did a little bit of work personally to try to persuade otherwise.

What happened next, fortunately, was the Mattis resignation and some reaction to this idea of a full withdrawal started to gather some steam in late December and then Ambassador Khalilzad, who'd been on vacation, came back and met with the White House and I think single handedly persuade them to allow a peace process to go forward. But once this had all happened, at that point the Pentagon no longer had the power that it always had to not agree. So, the idea of a full withdrawal was now really openly on the table. It was something that Ambassador Khalilzad had to negotiate around, and with that he started the process which I watched but was not part of necessarily that began basically in January with meetings with the Taliban and culminated in this September's failed announcement of a signing of a framework.

Q: In your heart of hearts did you feel that anything could be reached with the Taliban?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I mean, Ambassador Khalilzad, if he were not so handicapped by the wide public knowledge of the fact that his president wanted to just withdraw, actually had a lot of ideas and abilities that needed to be tried. I mean, the Taliban are dogged and ideological, but they are also somewhat interested in inheriting an Afghanistan that's in one piece. They have a certain amount of respect for our military abilities. They seem sensitive to Afghan public opinion. So, negotiators work with what they have, and I think that there were ways in which we could have given Am Khalilzad much more to work with. But he's doing a lot and it's very important that he's reaching out to Russia and China and Pakistan.

I mean, the other thing that was hamstringing him is the fact that this administration is so deeply paralyzed with rage over Iran that they can't- you know, working with Iran to

achieve peace in Afghanistan would actually be a huge benefit, but that avenue was totally closed off.

Q: Well, how long were you in this special office in the State Department?

PFORZHEIMER: I was there, I got there beginning of October and I left March 1. And I retired.

Q: How'd you feel about the office?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I was working for Alice Wells, and she's amazing. And I really liked it. I liked my colleagues, but I was extraneous in a way to the main event, which was happening in the special representative's office. It wasn't an adversarial relationship and I did my best to not have a big ego about any of it. And I was trying to find ways that I could be helpful working on things like the economic development issues, some outreach to the Afghan diaspora, the nuts and bolts of running the embassy. These were things where I at least could be of extra use. And when it came to the sort of- the former DAS role, the deputy assistant secretary role of going to interagency meetings, I was totally ready to do so, but there weren't any. This was not a crew that ran meetings.

Q: How did you feel- Had we developed- We'd been involved intimately with Afghanistan for some time; did we have a solid core of Afghan experts in the State Department?

PFORZHEIMER: We have a core. There are not necessarily that many people who served there more than once. It could be better. But it's a strange and unique part of the department because it has stood alone for so long. It would be good if it could become more integrated into the rest of South Asia. I mean, I found that I was occasionally representing the South Asian bureau, and I'd never set foot in 90 percent of the countries, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. And the South Asia bureau has absorbed Afghanistan, but there aren't people- there aren't that many people who've done both, serve in India and serve in Afghanistan. That doesn't seem to be a career path yet. And so, it doesn't feel as integrated into the concerns of the rest of the region as it could be.

Q: Is there anything more we could discuss?

PFORZHEIMER: I can't think right now of any-

Q: Well, I'll tell you, you'll have another go at this because you'll get a transcript and we encourage you to say gee, I forgot to mention this.

PFORZHEIMER: Really?

Q: Oh, yes. Add. You can even add my question, whatever they are. I mean, because more is better than less in this type of thing. And going back, flush out things that you feel or remember. And any personal people or incidents or something like that that occur to you,

because it makes it more interesting. I mean, I think academics find these oral histories are a lot more fun to read than the normal State Department dispatches.

PFORZHEIMER: Well, absolutely. That's our intention, make our dispatches as dry as possible.

Q: Absolutely. Okay, well, thank you very much.

PFORZHEIMER: Thank you, sir, what a pleasure.

Q: I've been enjoying this.

What are you up to?

PFORZHEIMER: Well, I'm moving to New York in three days. And I'll be looking for work there and trying to stay involved in Afghanistan.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

PFORZHEIMER: Thank you.

Q: And if you run across anybody who has retired or seems like might be an interesting person, point them my way.

PFORZHEIMER: I will, I will. I have. Thank you very much.

Q: Okay, thank you.

PFORZHEIMER: Bye.

End of interview