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

# VIVIAN S. WALKER

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber*
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: So, today is May 20th. We are beginning our interview with Vivian Walker. Vivian, we always begin with this: where and when were you born?*

WALKER: I was born on March 18th, 1960 in San Jose, California.

*Q: Is that where you grew up?*

WALKER: I spent the first six years of my life on a mountaintop – specifically, at Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton, an active astronomical research facility. My father was an astrophysicist with a reputation for total dedication to his research. According to a story told by one of the night assistants, when my mother went into labor on the mountaintop – which was an hour and a half from the nearest hospital in San Jose – he found someone else to drive her down the mountain because the "seeing," the astronomical term for the atmospheric quality of the night sky, was going to be ideal. When I was born, the hospital phoned the observatory, and he took the call while sitting in the observation cage, presumably glued to his telescope.

My mother was born in Budapest in 1924 to Jewish family whose conversion to Catholicism did not save them from persecution. She came of age during WWII War, confined with her father and stepmother to the Dohnanyi ghetto. Her father, whom she idolized, was murdered by the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Nazis, in late November 1944. After saving my mother's life by hiding her in a gas box, he was dragged from the ghetto, and, along with others, lined up along the Danube to be shot into the river.

My mother somehow survived in the bombed out streets and cellars of Budapest, scavenging for food, cigarettes and the occasional Red Cross package. She claimed to have served as a courier for Raul Wallenberg's network. In her final illness she hallucinated herself back to a cell in the basement of the Hungarian state opera building being interrogated by her captors, whom she confused with her caregivers.

She escaped from Hungary in 1956, during the October Revolution, first hitching a ride in a truck commandeered by escaped prisoners, and then on foot across the border to Austria. She found her way to a Red Cross camp where she made herself useful owing to

her fluency in several languages. She was ultimately invited to live in Stockholm by the royal architect to the Swedish court and his wife--among the many Europeans who opened their homes to the Hungarian refugees. In 1958, she was working as one of the interpreters at the International Astronomical Union conference in Stockholm, where she met my father, a newly minted PhD presenting his research. That's how my father, the zealous scientist and my mother the Hungarian refugee ended up on the mountaintop.

*Q: Wonderful. Do you have siblings?*

WALKER: I don't. I'm the only child of only children.

*Q: Wow. Now, he was assigned or working with this particular telescope. Did you spend your elementary school years and so on in San Jose?*

WALKER: I lived on the mountaintop until I was about six years old. I did my kindergarten year in the one-room schoolhouse, which was adjacent to the firehouse. I was largely left to my own devices—I'm told I had already taught myself to read. In 1966, management of the observatory and research facility transitioned over to the University of California at Santa Cruz, and my parents decided to settle just over the hills in Los Gatos. The public schools were quite good, and more importantly, my European mother, a city girl at heart, wasn't much impressed by Santa Cruz.

*Q: Because of the counterculture and hippies?*

WALKER: Maybe. My mother was focused on becoming a travel agent and knew there weren't many job opportunities in Santa Cruz, which was, at the time, a relatively small beach town.

*Q: So, what was your early education like, the school and the immediate surroundings?*

WALKER: Los Gatos was a typical suburban California town of the 1960s and '70s. We lived in a small, three-bedroom stucco ranch house. It was one among thousands of cookie cutter tract homes built on acres of former fruit orchards. All the streets were named after the trees that used to grow there. The public school system was first rate—I had some truly wonderful teachers.

*Q: Was your town the kind of place, when you were a kid, where you could go out in the morning and just stay out until sunset?*

WALKER: Absolutely. My bike was my ticket to freedom. My mother would set a time limit, and I had to be home by then. If I wasn't, there were consequences, but that was pretty much it. You remember those times?

*Q: Yes. I always called it the "feral childhood," where you just went out on your bike, and you were out until you came home. Whatever was up with the other kids, that was what you did.*

WALKER: Yes. I would take these long, solitary bike rides up into the hills. I did crazy things, like going downhill at breakneck speed with no hands and no helmet. It felt like flying.

*Q: Oh, well, how could you feel the wind without a helmet?*

WALKER: That was my point exactly, yes.

*Q: Alright. Once you're in school, were there particular subjects you liked? Did you get involved in any of the extracurricular activities? Music, girl scouts, anything like that?*

WALKER: Thanks to my early years on the mountaintop, where I spent most of my waking hours with my mother and no one else, I spoke English with a Hungarian accent. So when I got to first grade in the valley, I had to learn to speak like the rest of the kids. I still remember my first grade teacher Mrs. Graham calling me out for saying "yah" instead of "yes." I was mortified. My pint sized ZsaZsa Gabor turn didn't last long.

My mother had me take up ballet at age four at Miss Stratton's School of Dance for young ladies. Then the violin when I was eight. Looking back, I think that the interruption of her own childhood might have pushed her to create an idealized one for me. In any case, the ballet scheme lapsed early owing to my fundamental lack of grace. Thanks to my mother's will, the violin era lasted until eighth grade orchestra, when my persistent atonality could no longer be ignored.

Mindful of my status of an only child and budding introvert, my mother settled on the Girl Scouts as a path to socialization. I became a Brownie and then a Junior Girl Scout. I quite enjoyed doing the clearly defined and regimented tasks to acquire badges—I earned a startling number of them. I remember distinguishing myself on the storyteller badge, though I wasn't so good at the crafty stuff.

I spent a good chunk of my childhood perched in our front yard tree—my nose in a book and our long suffering cat in my lap. I also fancied myself a poet and wrote for my junior high and high school literary magazines. I was a typical nerd, studious, with thick glasses and, for some time, a mouthful of braces.

I truly didn't mind being uncool, with the exception of the mandatory coed dance classes in junior high. Once a week dapper, goateed Mr. Kasdan attempted to teach us the "Doorbell" and the two step. The boys were allowed to pick their partners at the beginning of each session, resulting in a mad dash for the most desirable girls. It was tough on us late bloomers.

*Q: Were there clubs or anything outside of it?*

WALKER: Yes—I joined the French club, the creative writing club, the speech and debate club, the student council—the nerd works.

*Q: Now, obviously your mother has international connections to Europe. What about your father's side? Have you looked back at his ancestry?*

WALKER: My dad was born in 1926 in Pasadena, California. His family history is a typically American story—the hardscrabble quest for a better life. His German and Irish ancestors came over as farmers and laborers as early as the 1800s—up through the Irish potato famine. Each generation kept moving further west, in search of more.

In the 1880s, his mother's immediate family loaded a wagon with all their possessions and traveled from Clarinda, Iowa to Roswell, New Mexico to homestead a claim. At some point early on in the homesteading process, the men (my great grandfather and a couple of great uncles) absconded, leaving his mother and grandmother to eke out an existence from a dry, barren tract of land.

To make a living—and likely to escape--my grandmother became a schoolteacher, and later, a skilled telephone operator. She ultimately married a man from a neighboring farm back in Clarinda, and they moved to Pasadena, where her husband's family had settled to work in the orange groves nearby—it must have seemed like the promised land after Iowa and New Mexico.

My grandfather was a farm boy who trained as a car mechanic at the dawn of the automotive age. He then became a skilled machinist, assembling telescopes at Mt. Palomar observatory, and likely nurtured my father's early interest in astronomy by helping him to design and build his first telescope. Sometime in the late thirties or early forties, my grandfather went to work for JPL (Jet Propulsion Labs), where, according to family lore, he worked on missile assembly. He died a few years after the war of leukemia--probably from exposure to toxic materials.

My father was drafted into the army as a private in 1943. He missed his unit's D Day deployment thanks to a bout of pneumonia and ended up instead at an army logistics base in India, where he was initially assigned to kitchen patrol. At some point his superiors discovered his typing and drafting skills so he became a command clerk writing, of all things, personnel reports. In the summer of 1945 he was on a troop transport ship headed for the Pacific when we dropped the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After demobilization, he went to the University of California at Berkley on the G.I. bill to study astronomy.

*Q: Did you do any traveling while you were in elementary school, middle school, or high school?*

WALKER: Thanks to both of my parents, I was keenly aware of a world beyond Los Gatos. My mother's European upbringing and subsequent career as a travel agent played a key role. As an astronomer, my father also went all over the world--to academic conferences but also to observatories on remote mountain tops. He was a pioneer of astronomical site surveying, establishing sites for future observatories. He camped out in

the mountains of Iraq to help the government establish its first official astronomical research station. He did the same for the Saudis. He surveyed the Canary Islands for possible sites. He helped to identify the location for what became a prominent observatory in the Chilean Andes—Cerro Tololo. He was involved in the establishment of the observatory at Mauna Kea in Hawaii.

My parents included me in their travels early on. When I was nine, my mother took me to Chile, where my father was doing a sabbatical year, as well as Brazil and Argentina. When I was 11, she sent me to a Swiss boarding school for a summer to learn French. At 13, I traveled with her behind the Iron Curtain to Budapest. At 15, I made my own way to Hungary. At 17, I spent the summer in France.

*Q: Were there any teachers or mentors that kind of pulled you aside and said, "You know, you want to be thinking about…"?*

WALKER: No, not in the sense of pulling me aside to make specific career suggestions. But I had a great French teacher in high school. The language that I learned from him is still the French I speak today, and his rigorous teaching got me a 3/3 upon entering the Foreign Service – which tells you something about the quality of his instruction.

Then I had an English teacher in high school who pushed me to do speech and debate. I was already a pretty good writer, but speaking in front of audiences did not come naturally. He helped me to confront my shyness. In truth, I was not a terribly effective debater, but I surprised everyone (including myself) by excelling at dramatic interpretation. I found that I absolutely loved immersing myself in a character. The audience wasn't looking at me as Vivian; they were looking at the persona I was projecting. So, I could still be myself within this outsized persona. In my junior year of high school I placed 5th in the State of California in the dramatic interpretation competition. I'm still proud of that.

*Q: Now, as you're approaching the end of high school, you must have been thinking about college.*

WALKER: Yes. But it was, again, a different time. There was very little push from the guidance counselors, or even from your parents, to start thinking about college in your junior year. The college admissions process was absolutely foreign to my mother, and my father had known from an early age what he wanted to do. So, neither of them thought to sit me down and talk to me about college.

Someone randomly mentioned the School of Foreign Service (SFS) at Georgetown, and I thought, "That sounds good—why not," so I put in an application. I knew I wanted to travel and loved languages, so I thought this would be the perfect fit. As it turned out, it wasn't quite right for me at the time. I didn't feel that I had a future in international affairs, and was happiest in my English classes.

For those of us outliers, it was possible to get a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service with a humanities concentration. That allowed me to fulfill the required SFS coursework in economics, history, political science, and languages, which, in retrospect, served me very well. At the same time, I was able to pursue the equivalent of a degree in English.

*Q: While you were at Georgetown, were there particular professors who began to get you interested in or motivated for international service? I'm just curious if international service began to emerge as a life path while you were at Georgetown.*

WALKER: Yes, Professor Goldfrank was an inspiring teacher of Russian history. And Professor Magerovsky agreed to do a special tutorial on the literature of Russian Acmeism and Suprematism. Although the focus was literature, our weekly tutorials turned into wide-ranging discussion about Russian history and culture. When I look back at how much of my Foreign Service career I spent in countries of the former Soviet Union, I wouldn't be surprised if those tutorials had something to do with it.

*Q: Did you take a junior year abroad or any summer abroad?*

WALKER: I did not because I was doing the equivalent of an honors English major while remaining in the school of Foreign Service. I needed to focus on completing course requirements.

*Q: Okay. You end up graduating, then, in '82?*

WALKER: Correct.

*Q: And you had a humanities degree with an English focus and so on. But now where are you thinking of going?*

WALKER: Right. I got a full fellowship for the doctoral program in English at UCLA. I ended up completing my master's there in a year and then moved on to the University of Chicago. My fellowship there covered tuition only, so I had to supplement my income by teaching. In addition to a night school course in the continuing education program at the University of Chicago. I also taught English as a Second Language and basic grammar in the Chicago city college system.

Truman College was in a rather rough neighborhood on the north side. My students were generally older, looking to move past serious challenges—political violence, exile, jail time, financial setbacks, health issues, and so on. Here I was, this young, privileged woman from the ivory tower. What could I possibly teach them? How was English grammar and sentence structure going to change things up?

*Q: Were you able to teach them English? In other words, were they ready to learn, and were you able to teach?*

WALKER: They were ready to learn. I wasn't so well prepared to teach. I had no ESL teacher training, and no one to supervise my efforts. I was on my own. So, I made it up as I went along. As it turned out, the students taught me how to teach them. So, for example, my Hmong students inspired me to let them draw on their own experiences as refugees to create teachable content. Their words became the text for the course. Once I had their stories I could start to teach them the basics of writing in English. But they had to own the words first.

I found that my native English speakers, mostly adults returning to school after years away, were turned off by grammar manuals. So I created my own exercises based on the world outside our classroom window. I used familiar and relatable images and actions, like ordering the special at Harold's Chicken, or riding the El, to introduce basic grammar and sentence structure. The experience was transformative for me.

*Q: How?*

WALKER: What makes a diplomat effective, in part, is imagination and the ability to insert yourself into your ally's or your enemy's thought process. If you can put aside your own assumptions and preconceptions to understand -- I'm not saying sympathize or buy into, but simply understand—their perceptions and experiences, you are much more likely to be able to achieve your own strategic objectives.

These early experiences in the classroom showed me that the best way to reach my students was to start with something they knew well, which I could then use as a basis for future learning. That prepared me for the audience engagement at the heart of public diplomacy.

*Q: So, you spend… Do you get your PhD at Chicago?*

WALKER: Yes. I got my PhD in reading books, as one of my sons called it many years ago. He was right. I was in it for the reading—but not so much the theory. I discovered that I did not want to spend my life coming up with deconstructionist interpretations of the poetry of Gerard Manly Hopkins or Shakespeare's sonnets. The prospect bored me to tears.

Don't get me wrong. I had some truly amazing professors at Chicago who opened my eyes to Victorian aesthetics, the power of medieval passion plays and Milton's cool Satan. But I simply had no patience for any of the emerging -isms or -ologies that had begun to transform departments of English. Applying a Lacanian or Derridean framework to turn a perfectly straightforward work of literature into an incomprehensible theoretical morass—no thanks.

The nail in the coffin of my academic career was my position as the copy editor for the venerable *Journal of Modern Philology* out of the University of Chicago press. To make ends meet, I spent days buried in the dusty old editorial office reading submissions from

hopeful scholars and then taking them from manuscript to publication. After two years of this I never wanted to read another scholarly article again, let alone write one.

At the same time, I had put a lot of effort into the coursework, and I knew that if I didn't complete my degree then, I would never do it. So, I took the Foreign Service exam, and at the same time, I redoubled my efforts to finish the dissertation. I did it, but it was close. The day of my graduation from University of Chicago, when I could have walked across the stage in my robe and hood, was actually one of my first days as a JOT (Junior Officer Trainee) with USIA (United States Information Agency).

*Q: Wow. So, to go back one step, you took the oral…*

WALKER: I took the written, and then I took the oral, yes.

*Q: When you took the oral, was it one of those periods when they told you immediately?*

WALKER: No. I didn't feel that I had distinguished myself during the orals, and, at the end, when we were gathered for dismissal, I made a move to collect my things and leave without bothering to provide my contact information. However, I remember one of the examiners leaning over me and saying, "Fill this out." I said, "Okay." And that was it. It took months for the letter to come.

*Q: Okay. They gave you a date, then, for when your class began?*

WALKER: That's correct.

*Q: Okay. When you arrived for that class, how large a class was it? What were your impressions?*

WALKER: There were 17 of us.

*Q: Oh, and what year?*

WALKER: August '88.

*Q: Okay.*

WALKER: It was, in one sense, relatively familiar, because I had shown up ten years before on an equally sweltering August day in Washington, D.C. to start at Georgetown. But in another sense, it was mind bending. The newness of it, the excitement, the sense that we had been selected from hundreds if not thousands, the honor of it, the challenge, the responsibility… It was quite overwhelming... There was possibility, but also a bit of fear, a sense of great change coming.

*Q: Was the class, as small as it was, diverse?*

WALKER: It was not as diverse as it could or should have been. One of our classmates, a very promising officer, felt that as an openly gay man, he would not be able to thrive in the Foreign Service, and he also worried about subjecting his partner to such scrutiny. He was one of the first people to resign from our cohort.

*Q: Were you satisfied with the training you got as a USIA Junior Officer Trainee?*

WALKER: You know that was a subjective question then and still is, to some degree, a subjective question now. Your training is only as good as your trainers and how you respond to them. I found, by and large, that the program was useful enough, but at the same time no amount of training really prepares you for the work experience overseas. The value of what I learned, and the information gaps, didn't become evident to me until I had already started working as a junior officer, and even then, it took a while to understand what I needed to know.

*Q: One thing I'm curious about is this: They give you a lot of information about it, but do they prepare you for the importance of how to interact with foreigners? How to approach your various interlocutors or the people you're going to have to network with to accomplish your job?*

WALKER: That's very hard to teach. I think that I was predisposed to it by my own interests and upbringing. The very impulse that led me first to the School of Foreign Service and ultimately to the FS exam also prepared me to deal with a foreign audience.

None of us joined the Foreign Service to stay home. We joined because we thought that we would have this extraordinary opportunity to live and work in and be a part of different cultures and communities around the world.

*Q: Okay. You integrated, for a little while, with the regular State Department people. Two weeks, I think?*

WALKER: I love the term "regular."

*Q: Yeah, well…*

WALKER: I protest.

*Q: Go ahead.*

WALKER: Why were they regular and why was I "irregular"?

*Q: Maybe I should… You were still part of an independent agency.*

WALKER: Yes, that's true. At the time there really was this sense of the "regular" State Department Foreign Service and then the "irregular" USIA folks like me. People very quickly forgot that we all took the same exam and were assessed in the same way.

The "us versus them" dynamic dissipated to a great degree once I got overseas. USIA junior officer trainees spent a year working in all parts of the embassy before they actually took up their assigned function as the assistant information officer or the assistant cultural affairs officer. I worked six weeks in the political and economic sections learning how to do demarches and write reporting cables. I passed an interesting two months at the visa window (and earned the nickname "Dr. No").

I also spent a hideously boring month in the HR (human resources) section, rewriting personnel position descriptions. But let me tell you, it paid off. Ten years later, when it came time to integrate USIA into the Department of State (fast forward to Kazakhstan in 1999) I rewrote all of the position descriptions for my USIA Foreign Service National staff to match State Department classifications. Not one of them was demoted in the crosswalk and several of them ended up at a higher grade. My position descriptions were iron clad. That wouldn't have happened had I not toiled in the HR section in the basement of Embassy Rabat.

That in depth exposure to all aspects of service in an embassy made me an effective public diplomacy officer. Later on, as I transitioned out of public diplomacy and into broader management positions such as Deputy Chief of Mission roles, that initial hands-on integration into the full range of mission activities served me well.

*Q: Let's take one step back now. How was it that you were selected for – or you selected – Morocco as your first tour?*

WALKER: I was originally supposed to go to Seoul and started Korean language training. But then the JOT position in Rabat opened up and I was able to break the assignment. Normally, at that point, they tell you, "This is it. You've committed." But they needed someone in Rabat so they let me off the hook.

There was a reason for that. The PAO (Public Affairs Officer) in Rabat at the time was John Graves, one of the Iran hostages, and a great officer. But he was very particular about the French that his officers spoke. Passing the FSI exam wasn't good enough. Everyone had to pass an interview by John Graves in French. Few did. Luckily, I made the cut.

*Q: So, then, you arrive in Morocco in '89?*

WALKER: That's right.

*Q: New administration. The East is crumbling. What's it like in Morocco when you arrive in '89? What's the general scene? I guess more to the point is, when you arrived, what were you told were our initial objectives?*

WALKER: I was told very little about our mission objectives initially. I was immediately placed in the USIA office, which was not co-located with the Embassy. For about a

month I focused on the public diplomacy mission. Later as I rotated through each section of the Embassy, I started to get a better idea of what we were doing in Morocco.

*Q: Okay. As you were going through the sections, how did each section… What did you get out of each section, if you can recall? Were there particular values or skills or points of view that you could derive? I'm asking because, in essence, how do you rate this method of training?*

WALKER: I already described what I got out of my immersion in HR – the ability to understand the intricacies of position descriptions, which turned out to be absolutely invaluable. While in the political section, I got a sense of how to conduct myself in official meetings, and how to report on an event. That was very useful, to learn to think like a political officer—to focus on the policy issues, to identify and unpick the nuances.

In the consular section I learned a great deal about the visa process for getting local citizens to the U.S. while also dealing with our own citizens who needed help. We talk about the people to people focus of public diplomacy but in reality, the work that's done in the consular section in terms of personal contact and exposure to the U.S. ultimately shapes the way people look at us as a country.

*Q: Were there other benefits that you gained from being in Morocco as a junior officer?*

WALKER: Morocco was a place that everyone loved to visit. We had a number of official visits from the U.S. Everybody put in a few hours of official meetings in Rabat and then it was on to Marrakesh, Fez, Tangier – the storied places.

My first summer in Morocco I served as acting branch public affairs officer in Marrakesh Talk about your dream job. But it was also up to me to plan, organize and manage the official delegations. I spent a lot of time wrangling visitors. It was good for me. First, I met and spent time with interesting people. I also became quite skilled at visit planning and execution. I did legwork and logistics with local merchants, restaurants, and hotels. I arranged for cultural excursions. It turned out to be an immersive experience.

*Q: One thing that Public Diplomacy does – is deal with negative public perceptions, whether they are just public opinion polls, or they are negative articles, opinion pieces, or even going to a university and getting nasty questions from students about colonialism and Zionist conspiracies and who knows what else. Did you end up having a lot of that as well?*

WALKER: Not at that point in my career. I encountered that later on. As a junior officer I did programs that were fairly low-key and non-confrontational such as talks on American history, culture, and history. That PhD in reading books came in handy.

*Q: Two-year tour?*

WALKER: A two-year tour, yes. It was originally a one-year tour and I was supposed to move on to another assignment, but I met and married my first husband while serving in Morocco. He was a military officer with the defense attaché's office. At the end of that year I became pregnant with my first son. So, I spent a good part of the next year on leave without pay—for my son's birth but also to get my assignment cycle in sync with my husband's next tour of duty.

I was assigned to be the press attaché in Haiti. I arrived in summer 1991, a few months before the *coup d'etat* (overthrow of the state), to fill a gap created by my predecessor, who had been declared persona non grata after an indiscreet interview with the LA Times. That's probably a great place to pick up next time.

*Q: So, today is June 1st, 2020. We are resuming our interview with Vivian Walker. Vivian, you are leaving Morocco and going to Haiti in what year?*

WALKER: That was in 1991.

*Q: Okay. Was there anything particularly unusual about your departure? I realize you were married and had just had a baby, but was there anything in terms of how the Department moved you or anything like that?*

WALKER: No, there wasn't anything particularly challenging associated with the move. However, shortly after my arrival in Port-au-Prince, the democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown by a military *junta.* It was immediate and utter chaos. There I was, a junior officer with only one year of training under my belt, and I found myself serving as a press attaché in the middle of a coup.

A big challenge was communicating with the rest of the world given the initial collapse of the communications systems. Early on I managed to secure one of the few working phone lines to brief the director of USIA's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and the VOA Creole Service. Until they were able to reestablish contact with their journalists on the ground, I was the VOA's primary source of information on events as they developed.

But the most dramatic part of that, I think, was what happened at the airport shortly after the *coup d'état.* The Organization of American States, the OAS, had quietly stepped in to try to negotiate a truce and bring an end to the standoff. The decision was to meet at the Port-au-Prince international airport because it was deemed the safest place to be, under the circumstances--the city was pretty chaotic. My boss—PAO Christian Filostrat-and I were there to handle the press corps. While the negotiators were meeting in a closed-door session on the second floor, we stood gathered outside.

Then, just before the press briefing was scheduled to take place, we heard a burst of gunfire followed by shouting. The *petit soldats* (little soldiers), the enlisted men, had found out about these so-called secret negotiations. Convinced that their military leaders, led by Raoul Cédras, had betrayed them, they decided to storm the airport and confront the negotiators. The press corps eagerly recorded their movements, getting close up

pictures of the soldiers as they stormed up the stairs with their weapons out. My boss and I were focused on getting the journalists to safety before the soldiers realized they were being captured on film.

*Q: Oh, wait. Let me just ask one question here. This particular negotiation that was going on: I assume it was the creation of whatever kind of government would take over from Aristide, because they weren't negotiating with Aristide himself.*

WALKER: No. Good question. The OAS was negotiating with Raoul Cédras and the people behind the military coup. Aristide was in hiding and may have already left the country—in any case he was not involved in these negotiations.

*Q: Then, the only other question is, how did you manage to stay safe there with guys with guns? There you are, maybe one of two or three Americans running around.*

WALKER: We were just plain lucky. A soldier could have easily fired off a round. We managed to cram the journalists into a nearby room and hold them until the security forces could push the soldiers back and assure safe passage for those of us at the airport who were going back into town.

*Q: Remarkable story. Wow. Did the journalists ever get a notion of what was going on?*

WALKER: Our press statements gave the official version of events. But the journalists got the story they came for—the soldiers who believed that they had been betrayed, that something was going on behind closed doors that they could not understand. That's what made the news.

*Q: Makes sense. Okay, so you survived, somehow. You got out. During this time, you mentioned telephone communications were scrambled. But did you have a radio? Was there a cellphone?*

WALKER: The telecoms weren't scrambled. They just didn't work. Even before the coup infrastructure in Haiti was poor, to say the least. Access to electricity and running water was intermittent. Cellphone reception was unreliable.

Things got worse after the negotiations failed. That's when the OAS imposed an economic embargo aimed at the wealthy Haitian elites who supported the military and had no interest in Aristide and his democratic leanings.

Unfortunately, the poorest of the poor suffered most profoundly from the food and fuel restrictions. In fact, at the height of the embargo, the elites, to include the diplomatic corps, could still buy ten kinds of cornflakes and pretty much anything else we needed at grocery stores in exclusive neighborhoods. Meanwhile the average Haitian had even less to eat.

When we flew over the entire island of Hispaniola (Haiti shares the island with the Dominican Republic), we didn't need a map to tell us where the Dominican Republic ended, and Haiti began. There was a clear border line of deforestation, which got worse in the aftermath of the embargo. People were forced to cut down trees to make the *charbon* (coal) to fuel their cooking fires. That included the mango trees that had been planted thanks to decades of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) assistance programs.

As both food and fuel became even more scarce in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, the most desperate decided to flee to the U.S. The only option was by sea. So, Haitians set off for Florida in leaky, makeshift vessels. Unscrupulous types slapped a few boards together and sold these so-called boats to people who liquidated what little they possessed to pay for them.

Some boat people were picked up by the U.S. Navy or Coast Guard, taken to the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, fed, clothed, treated medically, and then shipped back to Port-au-Prince. That was if they were lucky. Most of them drowned. We'll never know the exact number of people who died, because with no accurate census, there was no way to measure the exodus.

A very few vessels actually made it to Florida. And that's when the plight of the Haitian migrants became a story for the U.S. media. As economic migrants rather than political refugees, we did not want them in our country. So, every time a U.S. vessel arrived in Port-au-Prince to return the migrants, the press showed up at the dock. As press attaché it was my job to wrangle the journalists and field their questions.

One horrific event stands out-- the sinking of a Haitian ferry with hundreds aboard. No survivors. A U.S. Coast Guard vessel picked up as many of the victims as it could carry and delivered them to the port. But, with no electricity in post-coup Port-au-Prince, the city morgue was closed down. To clear the decks, crew members piled the bodies on the dock in the relentless heat. When the body bags ran out, the corpses were laid in rows, covered by bits of tarp and garbage bags.

Then there was what I would call "tragedy tourism." Congressional interest grew along with the potential for Haitian migrants to appear on Florida's shores. And it wasn't just the Florida Caucus. Congressmen from all over the U.S. came to tour the boat building and launching areas to demonstrate their humanitarian concern.

As press attaché, I was assigned to scout and prep additional sites for these official visitors, who would occasionally bring their own press crew to record their actions. Travelers could conveniently fly out of Miami at a decent hour in the morning, land in Port-au-Prince by lunchtime, and drive directly to Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince's largest slum, located halfway between the airport and the city.

Once there, the official might tour an orphanage or school that I had pre-selected and vetted, hand over some bags of flour, or school supplies, get a photo taken for the

hometown paper with a few smiling children and perhaps a nursing sister or ailing baby, and then head back to the airport for the return flight, arriving in time for an evening cocktail at Joe's Stone Crab.

You may hear a little bitterness in my voice. It's real. It was our official policy to support the OAS embargo, which was intended to cripple the regime and its wealthy supporters while upholding democratic institutions. But it ended up targeting the poor, sending many of them on leaky rafts to their doom, and did nothing to restore Haiti's shaky democracy. As a press officer I was sworn to uphold the policies that served our national interest. But as an individual I disagreed with them.

Over the years people have asked me how as a diplomat you can continue to serve your country when you disagree with its official actions. I always believed that a good Foreign Service officer should keep a draft letter of resignation on hand. If you're not in honest dialogue with yourself about what you're doing and why, then I don't think you can be an effective public servant. You need to know for yourself the lines that can't be crossed.

At the time, while I was opposed to the policy, I knew that if I quit, they would quickly find another press attaché to fill my spot. My resignation would make no difference. But, if I chose to remain in the service, perhaps I could redress the karmic balance at some point in the future. So I stayed.

*Q: Where is your family, at this time?*

WALKER: I arrived with my infant son in July 1991, two months before the coup. We were there during the worst of the chaos. In the late fall, the post was evacuated as a sign of no confidence in the de facto regime. My husband remained in Haiti, but my son and I were sent to Washington, D.C. with two suitcases, a stroller, and a portable play pen. As it turned out I was also pregnant with my second child. I put my little son in day care, went to work as a desk officer at USIA headquarters, and carried on.

*Q: Oh, my God. Were you able to get some assistance from family or friends while you were in Washington, at least?*

WALKER: No. My mother came out for the first couple of weeks, which was helpful. But then we were on our own.

*Q: For the delivery of your second child, though, did they allow your husband humanitarian leave?*

WALKER: We were allowed to return to Haiti in April 1992 when I was about six months pregnant. Because hospital conditions in post-coup Port-au-Prince were so unpredictable (no electricity, no water, limited access to equipment and medicine) it was safer to deliver in the U.S. Fortunately the rules were fast and loose on Haiti TransAir; I was able to travel in my ninth month. Because my husband was a military officer, I

ended up at the hospital on Homestead Airforce Base near Miami. We just missed Hurricane Andrew, which destroyed the base shortly after we returned to Haiti.

*Q: The other thing I can't help asking is, how did you manage to avoid getting sick yourself in a situation where there are so many dead bodies and a lack of basic services?*

WALKER: It wasn't easy. In the absence of running water from the city, we relied on home reservoirs that were filled whenever the trucks had enough fuel to make the trip up to the mountain suburb where we lived. We used bottled water—(also trucked in) for drinking, cooking, and bathing the babies. We bleached all our fruits and vegetables. With no electricity from the city, we ran generators, but had to limit use to a few hours a day because fuel was scarce. As a result, refrigeration was also sporadic. I got quite ill from food poisoning more than once.

*Q: Holy cow. I should ask you all about policy and so on, but I'm more concerned about your two babies. How did you manage to keep them from… I guess they got vaccines, but were they okay?*

WALKER: My sons were safe. We had a wonderful housekeeper and nanny who looked after them. And we rarely took them out—post coup Haiti was pretty unstable—so they weren't exposed to much in the way of disease.

Ironically, a few weeks after the coup, the *Working Woman* magazine interviewed me for an article on "Women in Dangerous Professions." The featured story was a female helicopter pilot in the First Gulf War. Needless to say her heroism far outstripped mine.

The reporter, who interviewed me by phone from Mexico City, asked me about my experience as a diplomat and a mother in the middle of a coup—wasn't I afraid for myself and my child? I replied that I knew that we were not the targets of the violence. My husband spent long hours away from the house on mission, so I kept the doors locked and my head down. I added that I could hear random gunfire from time to time, but it was usually the neighbor trying to scare off vandals.

That got translated into the article as, "Ms. Walker has become adept at judging the distance of gunfire and its threat." That's not quite what I said, but it made good copy.

*Q: Oh my goodness. Incredible. Alright, to go back to your job: I realize that in Haiti, as in other countries, there are the one-day congressional delegations. But in terms of managing press, how did that go on a week to week or month to month basis? How much interest did the press sustain over that time?*

WALKER: Good question. First, some context.

In 1991 Bill Clinton was running for president for the first time. In one of his campaign speeches, he promised that if elected, he would welcome Haitian refugees to our shores. That certainly drew even more media attention to the situation in Haiti.

On election day, and well into the evening, as the returns started to come in, we got reports – which were later confirmed – that the number of people getting on makeshift rafts had tripled, if not quadrupled—all on the strength of this promise. Of course, Clinton did not make good on this campaign promise during his presidency. But the damage was already done. And the media interest remained.

Initially, as we struggled to find a good rhythm with the press, we took a beating. There was a lot to criticize, whether it was our support for the OAS embargo that had such disastrous consequences, or the resilience of the de facto regime, or all those people heading out on leaky rafts on a promise, only to return in body bags—or not at all.

That started to change when we made a practice of providing daily briefings and being as forthcoming as possible. The PAO made himself available at any time and facilitated frequent exclusives with the principals. That taught me a valuable lesson--more transparency is always better. It makes you credible.

It is also okay to say, "I don't know," if that is followed up with, "But let me find out." Finally, it was a great lesson in how to turn a hostile question into an opportunity to restate the policy. We did that by taking the question seriously, by acknowledging the concerns behind it—and then restating it in terms that we could then use to justify our actions.

It was a delicate balance. We had to acknowledge the obvious suffering and loss of life. But we also had to reframe it in a way that showed our effort to remedy it. A military *coup d'état* had overthrown Haiti's first democratically elected president. Our official narrative claimed that we were restoring democracy to Haiti peacefully, through an economic embargo, and reinforcing regional stability in the process.

*Q: Now, you have the international press, and of course there was some Haitian press. But as I understand it, as Cédras consolidated, he began censoring the press – the Haitian press, at least.*

WALKER: No question that bad things happened to members of Haiti's independent press at that time—and not just censorship. One of our good contacts, a prominent radio journalist, was murdered by the de facto regime. But the hands of Aristide's followers weren't entirely clean either. The more radical elements of his Lavalas party did their share of necklacing opponents. That is the practice of putting a burning tire around your enemy's neck, perfected by the Duvalier regime many years before.

In truth, Haiti has a long history of political violence, going back to its origins as a republic, when the slaves staged a bloody revolt against their masters on Hispaniola. It is a cycle of violence that has been repeated over and over. You can't understand what happened during and after the coup of '91 without knowing something of the history that preceded it.

*Q: So, for the very narrow focus of your own career, this was an unusually difficult tour. Were you noticed as a result? Were you able to talk to people about your next tour in a way that allowed you to move ahead?*

WALKER: You know, it was early in my career, but it was also a different Foreign Service. We were not given advice on how to lobby. And no one cared about the show down at the Port-au-Prince airport. The process was a little leaner and meaner. At that time, I had to find a post that was large enough that my husband could work there too. That's how I ended up in Tunisia as the cultural affairs officer (CAO) in 1994.

*Q: So, what I thought we might do, then, is just mention how you get your next job or how it becomes clear where you're going next, and then pick up from there at the next session.*

WALKER: Okay. I moved to Tunis in January of '94 to be the cultural affairs officer beginning in the summer of that year.

*Q: I had wondered if you had training to go to Tunis, either language or any other kind.*

WALKER: At the time it was a dual-language designated post in Arabic and French. I had French previously, but I was given six months of an Arabic language tutorial onsite in Tunis prior to starting as the CAO in summer 1994.

*Q: Did you find that it was adequate, at least, for what you needed to do in Arabic?*

WALKER: To be honest, six months is really not enough to be able to function professionally. The normal course of training for Arabic is two years. But I was not expected to obtain full fluency. I needed just enough to enter into basic conversations, and a few phrases and honorifics to allow me to open an event or launch a speech.

*Q: Alright. Now, as you get yourself started in the embassy there, what's the Public Diplomacy section like? What are the expectations for you at this time?*

WALKER: We had three Americans on staff: a public affairs officer, an information officer, and a cultural affairs officer. We also had a regional English language teaching officer and a regional librarian—both positions supported posts around the region.

*Q: Now, this is the mid-'90s. Tunisia… What was your sense of the political scene at the time? Was Tunisia relatively pro-U.S., or were there a lot of anti-U.S. rumblings? How did you need to use your tools with your Tunisian contacts and the greater Tunisian populace?*

It was an interesting time. The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) had just relocated to the Palestinian territories so Tunisia's centrality to the Middle East peace process had begun to diminish.

At the same time, the seeds of what would become the Arab Spring were being sown. Then-President Ben Ali really came into his own as a strongman. In 1994, shortly after I arrived, Ben Ali engineered a re-election campaign in which he won by 99% of the vote. It was clear that he was consolidating power. In retrospect, his autocratic behavior laid the foundation for frustration with government corruption that ultimately drove that Tunisian fruit seller to set himself on fire.

The French and the Brits were our main competitors for influence at the time. The French dominated the scene linguistically and culturally. Like us the Brits focused on English language teaching and programming. My British Council counterpart and I found that we were independently approached by the Tunisian government for funding for similar English language teaching projects. To avoid duplicating efforts, we agreed to divide and conquer. That meant that both of us could spread our resources a little more efficiently.

*Q: In spite of the fact that it was slowly becoming more authoritarian, were any of the activities that you ran related to civil society ___?*

WALKER: Less so than in later years. I focused on traditional educational and cultural exchanges--getting people to the U.S. for programs and bringing U.S. researchers and scholars to Tunisia. In that period we also ran out the string on what remained of the big cultural programs—when USIA sent American dance, theater and musical groups around the world. I was also responsible for our library, where we held events and programs, where anyone could come to read or get on the computer or watch videos with a minimum of security. This was before the embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar, which fundamentally altered our security profile.

*Q: The kinds of work that you were doing – did you end up working at all with USAID or the Peace Corps? I don't know if we had Peace Corps there, but I imagine we had USAID.*

WALKER: USAID was slowly being phased out. We worked with Peace Corps volunteers on English language teaching, which was common then because it was an obvious intersection of resources and interests.

*Q: Among the topics in your cultural and education portfolio, had women's empowerment yet begun to be an issue?*

WALKER: Not explicitly.

*Q: Now, what about Fulbright? Was it a full commission, or were you running it just out of the embassy?*

WALKER: I ran it out of the embassy.

*Q: Within the exchange programs that you ran, sometimes you find that you've really found an up and coming leader in one field or another. Do any stand out in your mind?*

WALKER: I had a couple of contacts who became quite prominent in education circles, either ascending to positions of importance in university administrations or within the ministries that governed education and cultural affairs.

*Q: While you were there, did you have any major VIP (very important person) visits that assisted in building U.S. bilateral relations?*

WALKER: We had the occasional congressional representative or staffer come through, but Tunis was really not so much on the map as a destination for VIP delegations once the PLO left town.

*Q: Now, you had mentioned that there was some regional activity with English language training and the library. Did you get to travel regionally as well?*

WALKER: With exception of the occasional call to support a large visit or major conference in the region, no.

*Q: While you were there, did the mission itself have to deal with any emergencies or evacuations?*

WALKER: No.

*Q: I don't want to characterize it too much, but it sounds like a relatively quiet tour.*

WALKER: It was a quiet tour, one that enabled me to sharpen my skills as a cultural affairs officer. I also started to make a point of giving lectures on American literature and culture, finding opportunities to program myself at high schools and universities, becoming my own target of opportunity speaker. I wanted to be credible as a representative of the U.S. government, but also as someone who could make American society and values interesting and relevant to local audiences.

*Q: So, you're gaining skills, at least, in public presentation, public speaking, and so on.*

WALKER: Right. I did a fair amount of public speaking in French, too.

*Q: This was a two-year tour?*

WALKER: It was a three-year tour.

*Q: So, now, in this period, it's all the same administration, the Clinton administration. Were there any major policy changes during that time that filtered down to you?*

WALKER: No, I was relatively insulated from all of that. The PAO served on the country team; the rest of us were rarely given opportunities to participate at that level.

*Q: I'm curious – at least towards the end of your tour, were you beginning to hear rumblings that USIA was going to be integrated into the State Department?*

WALKER: That all started when I was in Tunis. In fact, one of Jesse Helms' chief staffers came out on a factfinding mission, looking for evidence to help his boss make the case that we no longer needed a standalone agency focused on public diplomacy.

The U.S. government closure in late 94 or 95, when we were not able to pay our local staff salaries for several weeks, was also quite a shock. While that wasn't directly related to USIA's future, I know that we lost trust among our long standing locally engaged staff, kind of a preview of what was to come.

*Q: Were there any other consequential events or programs that stand out in your mind that I haven't asked you about?*

WALKER: Yes, the budget cuts. It really was the beginning of the end of USIA's ability to promote American culture and art around the world. We found ourselves in the position of having to solicit in kind donations or cut deals with local institutions in order to be able to program cultural events. I enjoyed rising to the challenge, but it was not the USIA that I joined, when Arts America commanded top level performers and artists, and had the resources to help posts put on a good show.

*Q: Had either the information revolution, in terms of the Internet, or communication, in terms of cellphones, changed your work?*

WALKER: Not at that point, no.

*Q: Alright. Well, I think it might be the moment to talk about how you began to look for your next position, and what your criteria was and how you went about getting it.*

WALKER: I wanted to be a PAO at a mid-sized post. I wasn't afraid of going to far-flung places; and I didn't mind learning hard languages. So, when an opportunity came up in Almaty, I put it at the top of my bid list.

*Q: Was there an opening as well for your spouse?*

WALKER: Well, at that point our marriage was starting to dissolve, and it became clear to me that I had to figure this out on my own. Therefore, it made sense for me to pick a challenging position that would get me promoted—especially since I was going to have to rely on myself to take care of my sons.

*Q: Alright. So, you do get the position as a PAO in Kazakhstan. When do you leave Tunis, and what sort of training do you get?*

WALKER: I left Tunis in the summer of '97 for a year of training in Russian language at the Foreign Service Institute. So, I moved back to Washington with my sons.

*Q: How did you find that?*

WALKER: I got there prior to major reforms in FSI's Russian language division. The instruction was literally old school. We used textbooks and grammars that were developed at the height of the Cold War. We were drilled in dialogues about Patrice Lumumba University and trained to produce monologues about arms control and the importance of higher education. We were not prepared to have conversations about ordinary issues.

*Q: Just by comparison, I took Armenian language training for the same number of months. By the time I got there, when I spoke to the extent that I could manage in Armenian, they told me I sounded like a professor.*

WALKER. I came out of the program with a solid 3/3 in Russian, and I used it as much as I could. My staff in Almaty would draft these beautiful, complicated speeches in literary Russian that I absolutely wrecked in delivery. It was embarrassing. I finally asked to write speeches using simple declarative sentences and keep the verbs of motion to a minimum. I was nowhere near fluent, but by the time I left three years later, I could make myself understood in a variety of contexts.

*Q: The only other thing before we go on to Kazakhstan: Was there other training that was helpful for you before you left?*

WALKER: The FSI Area Studies Program offered weekly lectures on country or regional politics, history, culture, and so on. Some of them were quite good, depending on the lecturer. If you were motivated, they offered a great starting point. But you couldn't rely on these lectures as your only source of information about the country and the issues.

*Q: Okay. Alright, now, you're going off to Kazakhstan. At this point, the capitol is still in the old city, although they're preparing to move to Astana.*

WALKER: Right. The embassy was still in Almaty, but soon after I arrived, we began to lay the foundations for the new Embassy in Astana. In 1998 I opened the first public diplomacy office in Astana in an old Soviet bloc apartment building. I also hired our first PD assistant—she eventually became the embassy's longtime protocol chief in Astana.

*Q: Alright. What about education for your kids? Was the Department at all helpful? How did you handle that?*

WALKER: The only English speaking option was Quality Schools International, which was not formally accredited. Unfortunately the quality of the program was extremely uneven, and I have regrets to this day about putting my sons through that. We talk about sacrifices made by families in the Foreign Service, and that was one of them.

*Q: Was life in Kazakhstan otherwise adequate? Did you have a consumables allowance, or were you able to more or less manage from day to day on the economy?*

WALKER: I managed just fine, but I wasn't that fussy, either. I enjoyed the adventure of shopping on the economy. We did have a consumables allowance, but I found everything we needed in the local grocery stores. Even boxed mac and cheese and American peanut butter. I remember buying bootleg Butterball turkeys from the back of a Lada on a quiet side street.

*Q: What was the public affairs section like when you arrived? You mentioned that you hired one person to assist in moving things to Astana, but what about the main office that was still in Almaty?*

WALKER: In Almaty we had a mid-sized section with a PAO, a CAO, and an IO. We also had a large number of local employees, and, as was often true in the former Soviet Union, the quality of our staff was particularly high. They had been engineers, lawyers, doctors, chemists, or professors before the collapse. The salary and stability the U.S. embassy offered was far superior to anything else available at that time.

While there I expanded the PAO position in Almaty to cover our embassies in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which at the time had no PD sections or officers. When I arrived in 1998, a few exchange and outreach programs for each country were being run out of our regional program office in Vienna. It was clear to me that if we wanted to project our influence in the region, we needed functioning PD sections at each embassy.

The Washington area office agreed and gave me a modest travel budget to visit Dushanbe and Ashgabat once a quarter. I hired local staff, added new programs, and ultimately trained the first American junior PD officers at each post. At the same time, I launched the first ever Fulbright, FLEX (Future Leaders Exchange), Muskie, Humphrey and English teacher exchange programs in both countries. I also established internet access and training program centers for our alumni in what became the precursor sites for American spaces. These new programs along with steady expansion of FSA initiatives in all five countries, truly expanded the U.S. presence in Central Asia.

*Q: Did all of your funding come from USIA, or were there pots of money you could tap for various programs, perhaps out of USAID or some of the NIS (Newly Independent State) initiatives?*

WALKER: Both of course. The Freedom Support Act allowed us to significantly expand our programming and outreach efforts in the NIS, well beyond the traditional scope of USIA funding, which covered the professional and academic exchange programs.

*Q: Okay. This is sort of the process and preparation and the building. What were the key policy activities or the direction that you took with your assets?*

WALKER: Well, we were consumed by the Freedom Support Act agenda, which focused on democratic institution building, rule of law, civil society development, economic growth, women's empowerment, youth outreach, and so on. All of these programs were designed to help these newly independent countries become stable democracies.

*Q: Then, the travel to the two countries where junior officers became leads, what were your impressions of how well our public diplomacy efforts could go in Dushanbe and Tajikistan, given the nature of the governments there?*

WALKER: That's a really good question. Turkmenistan was then and remains now a closed country run by a dictator with very limited access to the outside world—think North Korea without the nukes. Tajikistan was isolated too and coming out of an extended period of civil war.

We worked on making internet access and training programs available to young people in both countries. We brought in English language teaching programs for local teachers. We sent high school students to the U.S. We brought in the Fulbright program for the first time.

We were a little concerned about what would happen to our program participants, especially the young people after sending them out to see the rest of the world. How would they react to returning home to a tightly closed environment like Turkmenistan? To the utter lack of basic infrastructure in Tajikistan? Were we creating a Tiananmen generation?

Our intent was not to revolutionize or weaponize our audiences but rather to provide access to new ideas and experiences to allow them to make change on their own terms. That creates a core of stability that the U.S. seeks in its future economic and security partners. But there is always a risk that the governments view the access to new ideas and practices as a threat to their legitimacy.

*Q: Right, and it's a bit of a long game, because you're looking towards a time when there will be at least some democratic institutions, some permission of free media and so on. That may not be immediately present, but the hope is that over time, by seeding people in these different areas of civic society, they'll eventually leaven.*

WALKER: Right. It's a long-term investment, and that has been the perennial challenge for public diplomacy. How can you prove that this investment has paid off? How do you measure success? How do you take credit for the investments in the future of other countries?

A very small percentage of grantees become prime ministers, supreme court justices, or Nobel laureates. But most do not. The point is that you have to make this investment, knowing that you don't know exactly how it's going to play out.

*Q: Yeah. It's always a bit of a small venture capital kind of thing, where you go in and talk to people and identify them as likely up and comers as best you can. Hopefully, most of your judgments will be right. Some will, sometimes for reasons beyond your control, not be right. Okay, back to Kazakhstan. Of all of the programs you were running, looking back on them now, which ones were the most sustainable, and why do you think they were sustainable, if at all?*

WALKER: The Democracy Commission small grants programs were quite good. These were modest grants administered by the PD section that drew on the expertise of the country team to identify grantees. A grant might provide $5,000 to an NGO to start an ecology newsletter for high school students, or $15,000 to a community association to set up an English language immersion summer camp for kids.

These were not grants cooked up in Washington by people who know nothing about the local context. Instead they were designed on the ground to meet actual needs. They were targeted, they were quick, and their impacts were relatively easy to assess.

That said, competition for these grants was fierce. New NGOs sprouted up seemingly overnight to take advantage of American largesse. It did not take them long to learn how to write a successful grant application. They all started to sound the same, and it became difficult to identify the most viable proposals.

It was nobody's fault, really. We were trying to empower our grantees to make change. Our grantees were trying to make ends meet. I still believe the democracy grants were very effective, but they also fed into a cycle of donor dependency that proved difficult to undo in later years.

*Q: As this was the period when everything was changing and the U.S. was trying to be in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to assist in the de-communization, so to speak, what was your impression of how we were moving the needle? Did you think Kazakhs were becoming more pro-U.S. or more open to the suggestions the U.S. was making for changes in their society?*

WALKER: During my time there, I wouldn't say that the Kazakh government truly embraced democratic values on the strength of our programming efforts. But neither did they actively oppose our efforts, probably because of their desire to expand export of their significant oil and gas resources. They also sought a more active role as in the NATO Partnership for Peace program as a counterweight to Russia and China.

I left Kazakhstan just two months before 9/11. Frankly, 9/11 changed relationships in the region profoundly. The Central Asians found themselves with unexpected leverage and influence, especially when it came to managing their borders with Afghanistan. Suddenly Western allies became very interested in acquiring intelligence, securing borders, and improving transportation infrastructure in a region that it had largely ignored. Meanwhile, the U.S. softened its stance on human rights issues such as

Uzbekistan's abysmal trafficking in persons record in order to support its national security objectives.

*Q: You had mentioned that many of the programs did, in fact, allow women greater visibility, at least, in society?*

WALKER: The women in Kazakhstan were responsible for much of the economic and social change at the grassroots level. They ran the shoestring NGOs and the community associations. They were the teachers in the classrooms and the entrepreneurs in the marketplace. I took advantage of that amazing vibe in my programming.

*Q: You mentioned some parties. Were you able to use representation in any ways that you felt were helpful?*

WALKER: I hosted two to three events a month at my home during the program season. We focused on developing new networks of contacts in the media, education and cultural sectors—to broaden our influence but also to deepen our understanding. We hoped to make ourselves and our Embassy colleagues as accessible as possible. People were curious about the U.S. in those pre Internet days.

*Q: Looking back on this assignment, in terms of the talents and skills that you acquired, what stands out in your mind?*

WALKER: I think the thing I am proudest of is the regionalization of my portfolio. The expansion of public diplomacy programming in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan was part of it. But I also worked with my PD colleagues in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to mount some joint initiatives, such as the first ever regional conference to raise public awareness about trafficking in persons.

We found ways to leverage post resources and integrate mission goals. But we also helped Washington to understand how USG interests might play out in different ways in each of the countries.

*Q: Were there any VIP visits or big issues or events that you had to deal with?*

WALKER: In my time we hosted one Sec State visit, several NATO PFP exercises, and a number of special envoys focused on everything from Caspian energy issues to the rocket launches at Baikonur. Again, this was pre 9/11, before Kazakhstan and the other countries in the region became key players in regional security and counter terrorism initiatives.

*Q: Now, you indicated that one of the reasons you wanted to go to a post like this was greater promotion potential. Were you promoted?*

WALKER: I was promoted to 01 during my last year there. That certainly enhanced my bidding.

*Q: What were you looking at?*

WALKER: I was looking at larger PAO positions and small DCM ships.

*Q: Where did you end up going?*

WALKER: I ended up going to Yerevan as DCM.

*Q: Okay. Once again, let's take a quick look at the preparation. How was it presented to you? You've already got Russian, which you could use there, but did you get some Armenian?*

WALKER: I had a year to fill. Thanks to my promotion, I was offered a slot at the National War College to get a masters in national security strategy, but I turned it down because I didn't think I needed another graduate degree. Instead I accepted a State Department detail at the U.S. Atlantic Council. I also took a two month course in basic Armenian and a refresher tutorial in Russian.

That Atlantic Council detail turned out to be consequential for my career. I started at the Council on September 4, 2001, a week before 9/11. Later that fall, I organized the first interagency discussion about post 9/11 public diplomacy. Using the council as a platform, I brought the new Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Charlotte Beers, and senior USAID and DOD (Department of Defense) officials for a closed door discussion to look at how we engage Muslim audiences.

You have to remember that many people saw the 9/11 attacks as a public diplomacy failure. From the President on down, the question was "why aren't we doing a better job of telling our story?" We came up with ideas for exchange programs targeting younger audiences, ways to provide alternatives to extremist ideology, and so on.

*Q: What came out of it? Is there now a study or recommendations that are still available?*

I put these ideas into an internal memo that was, apparently, circulated broadly. The chief of staff for Richard Stengel (who served as the PD under secretary 2014-16) told me a few years later that she found a well-marked up copy of my memo in the official files!

I can't take direct responsibility, but I will say that a number of the Muslim outreach programs that were created post 9/11 within the Department of State, to include the shared values campaign, originated with this roundtable. I will take credit for defining the problem set and framing questions that people then took back to their offices and agencies to address.

*Q: Well, I am curious. At that time, because I imagine things change over time, what were the key executive summary things that came out of it, to the extent that you recall?*

WALKER: Well, first, we recognized that we had to revisit our assumptions about our key audiences and what mattered to them. When we got into trouble with messaging, especially on sensitive issues in the Muslim world, it was because we prioritized our own values and interests over theirs. Our messages did not resonate with the people we most needed to reach because these messages were not couched in terms and values that were meaningful to our target audiences.

We also talked about the tendency to go straight to message transmission: "Here are our policies. This is what we intend to do." For the policy to resonate, you must first identify and understand what the target audience cares about, what it knows, what it doesn't know. That allows you to correct misapprehensions or fill knowledge gaps, which will then create conditions for message receptivity.

Finally, we acknowledged that the goal was not to try to create Jeffersonian democrats in Kabul and Baghdad but rather to provide a nuanced, context driven understanding of principles such as tolerance, pluralism and the need for broad participation in the political spectrum.

*Q: Alright. You're in Washington for some training and so on, but you're also on the Atlantic Council. Now, were there any other recollections or anything else that sticks out to you about the experience of 9/11? Maybe something about how the Department reacted that you saw?*

WALKER: On the morning of 9/11 I was supposed to have lunch downtown with a PD colleague. I came back from a run, turned on the TV (television) and saw the first tower fall. It seemed like a terrible accident. Shortly afterwards, I watched the second tower fall, and I knew it was an act of terrorism. I called my colleague and said, "We need to cancel lunch."

He said, "Oh, come on. You're just being paranoid." And then the Pentagon was hit.

While nothing prepares you for the shock, it did not hit me as hard as it did others around me. I already inhabited a world in which people hated our country. That's the world we inhabit as diplomats. A big part of our job is understanding how people feel about us, our policies, and then, finding ways to shift those attitudes in our favor. So, in a sense I had already been inoculated against the shock in a way that my neighbors in our townhouse complex, the parents of my boys' school friends, were not.

I was also struck by a remark made by President Bush during a press conference after the attack: "The problem is that they just don't understand us. We just need to tell our story better." He was wrong. The attacks on 9/11 had very little to do with a failure to explain our values—or who we are. They had everything to do with our policy in the region – the presence of military bases in Saudi, the treatment of the Palestinians, and the bombings in Iraq.

That's why I said earlier that 9/11 was perceived by many as a PD failure. Public diplomacy may shift people's ideas and attitudes and perceptions about our policies. It can provide background, explain motivation, describe benefits. However, it cannot reliably change a person's attitude toward the policy. This tendency to frame foreign policy success and failure in terms of our public diplomacy's ability to communicate it is problematic. The two are not related. Does that make sense?

*Q: Yeah. The expectations placed on public diplomacy are unrealistic because those making the expectations at the highest level simply don't understand where and how public diplomacy can be effective.*

WALKER: The majority of the world was with us on 9/11. We didn't have to convince our allies with our messaging. Rather, we were targeting those who would consider resorting to violence against us—where the stakes are the greatest and the expectations are the most unrealistic.

*Q: Yeah. Of course, because relatively few people, especially with guns, can make a great deal of trouble.*

WALKER: With guns and – and what really started to matter in this period -- cellphones.

*Q: Exactly.*

WALKER: As technology became increasingly empowering, a video became as effective as a weapon.

*Q: As you're preparing to go out to Armenia, what are your expectations for the job? This is the first time you're going to be in a front office management position.*

WALKER: I really looked forward to it. This was one of the benefits of integration—PD officers were being given opportunities to take such positions.

*Q: Now, once again, a basic question about your family support. You will be going out there, still, with two relatively young children. How did you manage the education? How did you prepare them?*

WALKER: Once again, the only available educational option was Quality Schools Internationals. And it was very uneven.

*Q: Okay. You arrive there in the fall of 2002?*

WALKER: That's correct.

*Q: Just as an example, I left there in the fall of 2001, so we nearly overlapped. I do recall many of the issues and things that were going on there, but it's your story. When you*

*arrived, what were the major things that had been set out for the embassy to accomplish? And one quick question before that: Had you moved into the new embassy?*

WALKER: No. We were still in the old building downtown, the former Komsomol headquarters, built over the subway. Our offices rumbled and shook every time the train passed beneath us. The construction of the new Embassy began on my watch. It was a challenge given how remote and inaccessible we were.

We were dealing with a number of security challenges, to include the protracted conflict between Armenia and neighboring Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Much of our time was spent supporting the Minsk group negotiation process. We were also concerned about Russian attempts to expand its influence in the Caucasus and reassert control over the countries on the "near abroad." Finally we were tracking the potential for regional spillover from the growing war on terror.

We were literally hemmed in by conflict. Owing to the NK dispute, the land border between Armenia and Azerbaijan to the east was closed, militarized, and littered with mines. To the west, Turkey had also closed its border with Armenia in solidarity with Azerbaijan over the NK conflict. Not to mention the historical enmity between Armenia and Turkey over the Ottoman empire's brutality treatment of ethnic Armenians. The Russian Federation maintained a large, active military base in northern Armenia, and played an influential role behind the scenes at the highest levels of the Armenian government.

Meanwhile Georgia, Armenia's neighbor to the north, was embroiled in a bitter dispute with Russia over the latter's support for armed Chechen separatists and jihadists on Georgian territory. Finally, Armenia's open southern border with Iran turned the country into a de facto transit corridor for potentially bad actors and suspect cargo.

So there we were--flanked by Iran, a country that was openly hostile to U.S. interests, sandwiched in between two countries hostile to Armenia, and vulnerable to Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior in the region.

The embassy also spent a great deal of time dealing with the consequences of the Armenian diaspora's considerable political influence back home. At that time, the Armenian Congressional caucus numbered around 125 members—or nearly one quarter of the Congress. Very few of the caucus members were Armenian in origin. Undoubtedly all received generous support from their Armenian diaspora constituents.

While often split internally along religious or cultural lines, the diaspora came together to persuade Congress to authorize generous funding for Armenia through the Freedom Support Act, among other means. In fact, in terms of per capita assistance, Armenia was second only to Israel at the time, thanks in no small measure to diasporan influence.

The diaspora also played a pivotal role in pressuring the U.S. government to officially declare the Ottoman empire's mass persecution, and killing of ethnic Armenians in 1915 as a genocide. The USG was reluctant to do so--its bilateral security and economic relationships with Turkey, along with Turkey's pivotal role in NATO, were too important to scuttle over the genocide label.

Yet, every year on the anniversary of those events, the genocide resolution would come up for a vote up in Congress. While the vote failed, it was often close, and always generated media attention.

It was truly fascinating to see tiny Armenia, with an official population of two million and no major industry or resource to speak of, exert such a disproportionate influence on U.S. economic and security policies in the region.

*Q: Okay. That was from 2002 to 2004. How did you go about… In other words, what were the programs and tools that you had? If I recall, we had USAID there, we had Peace Corps there. We had a number of tools to maintain bilateral relations, but there were also some frictions, as well.*

WALKER: Well, again, going back to the diaspora, you normally have two constituencies when you're at an embassy, right? You've got your host country relationships, and you've got your Washington constituency.

In Armenia we had a third constituency--the diaspora. The U.S. based diaspora leadership traveled frequently to Armenia, and we treated them the same way that we would treat a congressional delegation. They had to be taken very seriously, in part because of the influence on assistance budgets and the genocide recognition issue, but also because of their role as potential donors or investors.

To make things even more interesting, many Armenians viewed the diasporans as the privileged descendants of those who abandoned their country, while those who remained suffered through Soviet rule and the hard times following independence. In truth, the Armenian government had a somewhat contentious relationship with the diaspora. Officials didn't like being told how to run their government by outsiders. At the same time, the USG remained acutely sensitive to diaspora influence.

Managing this three-constituency dynamic was like playing three-dimensional chess. It added another layer of complexity to our efforts.

*Q: Were you involved at all with the talks over Nagorno-Karabakh?*

WALKER: The Embassy was not directly involved. The talks were handled by the tripartite Minsk group—Russia, France, and the USG-- under OSCE auspices. The U.S. special envoy for NK would brief us periodically on the status of the negotiations, and we would share what we were seeing and hearing on the ground.

*Q: How about the day to day management that the DCM is involved in? This was your first tour as a DCM. How did the management of a small to midsize post go?*

WALKER: In the tiny little cul-de-sac that was Armenia, during the growing war on terror, with a hostile country to the south and two warring countries on either side of us, we were really thrown on our own resources. We had a great team. With occasional exceptions, morale in general at the embassy was pretty high. We felt as if we were working on important issues in a challenging environment and doing a tolerable job at it.

*Q: There is a natural tendency for Public Diplomacy officers who become DCMs to… I don't want to say meddle…*

WALKER: You can say meddle.

*Q: Okay. To meddle in public diplomacy. How did that go?*

WALKER: I made sure that I offered myself as a resource for public diplomacy initiatives but not as a driver of public diplomacy programming. When the PAO asked for my advice, I gave it. Occasionally, I would see a good opportunity, but I framed it in a way that allowed the PAO to take the initiative and get the credit. And I always advocated for the value of the programs with the ambassador.

*Q: Were there also, as there were in Kazakhstan, democracy grants and things like that?*

WALKER: There were, but I was not directly involved with them as DCM.

*Q: Were you able to travel within Armenia at all, and what were your impressions?*

WALKER: I did travel quite frequently, representing the ambassador at events around the country, usually funded by the FSA and implemented by USAID. Many of them focused on commercial and economic development, with direct support for small farms and businesses. I opened creameries and handicraft cooperatives, inaugurated skills training centers, and so on.

A number of our programs focused on conflict resolution—or at least mitigation. I cut ribbons at mine-clearing sites along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and schools refurbished by participants in joint military training exercises.

*Q: What did post do in terms of assisting local human rights organizations?*

WALKER: Under President Kocharian's authoritarian rule, there were no true local human rights organizations to speak of. With international community support, a few NGOs quietly addressed some human rights issues, but in general it was a difficult brief to manage in that era.

Like so many of the leaders of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, Kocharian had played a prominent leadership role in the communist party. He was still an apparatchik turned party boss, and that legacy prevailed after independence. That did not bode well for the implementation of forward looking human rights and civil society initiatives.

*Q: Shortly before I left, there was a large amount of money coming into the country from Krikorian development funds. Had that sort of topped out by the time you were there?*

WALKER: I think it was winding down. The diaspora members who arrived after Armenia's independence eager to do business were beginning to feel disillusioned by pervasive corruption on the state and local levels. More than one wealthy diaspora businessperson told me, "I can't do this anymore. I can't run a business here."

The focus began to shift away from business deals to charitable initiatives and humanitarian outreach. One such initiative sent a fleet of mobile mammography test centers and breast cancer triage units across the country.

*Q: As you look back on the tour in Armenia, what was your most important takeaway, either in terms of skill building or networking? What effect did it have on your career?*

WALKER: I had started my career with the intention of being a Public Diplomacy officer from beginning to end. While at the Atlantic Council, I began to think about public diplomacy from a broader national security perspective. My time in Armenia exposed me to the effects of geostrategic competition and just how deeply national culture and history influence behaviors and outcomes. And how all of that impacted our ability to carry our foreign policy.

*Q: The only other question I want to ask about Armenia before we leave is, how did your kids like it? What was, in general, their reaction?*

WALKER: We were lucky. Our housekeeper was kind and understanding and so good to the boys. Through her we met a young woman, a fluent English speaker who loved video games and movies. She took them around town to the parks and monuments but also to the arcades and Internet cafes—exposing them to life outside the house and the school.

As FS kids in places like Armenia and Kazakhstan , my sons were exposed early on to a range of new and different social and economic conditions and cultural and linguistic variety. But they were also frequently quite isolated and thrown on their own resources for entertainment. I think it was a mixed experience for them.

*Q: Alright. What we'll do then is we'll pause here, and we'll pick up with your next assignment in the next session. That assignment is back in Washington?*

WALKER: Yes, it is. My first ever Washington assignment. I joined in '88, so that was… When did I go back to Washington? 2004.

*Q: Wow.*

WALKER: Yeah. I waited a long time to go back.

*Q: Okay.*

*Q: So, today is June 11th, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Vivian Walker as she completes her tour as DCM in Yerevan, Armenia. Vivian, what year is that?*

WALKER: That would be 2004.

*Q: Okay. What was going on in terms of finding and getting the handshake on the next assignment?*

WALKER: I took an office director position in what was then EUR/ACE, which managed the Freedom Support Act and other assistance monies, primarily to the countries of the former Soviet Union. I was brought in based on my experience running FSA programs as a public affairs officer in Central Asia, where I had coverage of three countries. That was followed by my work in Armenia, which received generous FSA support to promote civil society development and democratic institution building.

*Q: Now, is that where you ended up?*

WALKER: No. About a month or two into my time there, I was asked to join the European Bureau Office of Press and Public Diplomacy (EUR/PPD), the public diplomacy component of the regional bureau that reported up to the assistant secretary. I accepted because it was a return to public diplomacy, but I also felt that I would be filling a genuine need. We were in the midst of building our resources to support the war on terror and rethinking the role that public diplomacy should play in the effort. I wanted to be a part of that.

*Q: Now, where did you fit in in terms of the European Bureau? Were you a deputy assistant secretary, or how did it work?*

WALKER: I was a deputy office director. This was just before the creation of Public Diplomacy deputy assistant secretaries (DAS) so the office director served as the de facto PD DAS, providing direct support to the assistant secretary and the other principals in the office with respect to public diplomacy and public affairs.

*Q: Okay. Now, this is just a few years into the integration between USIA and State. How well integrated was it, in the sense of… Was this new office… Did it have clear guidance? Did it know exactly what it was supposed to be doing, or were you still sort of defining its mission?*

WALKER: The guidance on policy priorities remained clear. The problem was process. The cohesive organizational structure under USIA was broken down into separate bureaucratic entities within State, each with its own chain of command and funding streams. This bureaucratic stove-piping cost us dearly in terms of flexibility and responsiveness.

Pre integration, a PD geographic desk officer could reach out directly and without supervision to the Fulbright office in ECA (Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs), or the speaker program in the Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP). Post integration, this lateral engagement was no longer possible. An inquiry or action had to go up the chain of command in the originating bureau, and then back down another bureaucratic stovepipe to reach the action officer. Additionally, bureaus such as ECA and IIP quickly developed their own fiefdoms and processes, which prevail to this day

*Q: Nevertheless, in theory, the public diplomacy element was supposed to be supporting what each of the regional bureaus was trying to do. Were there ways around it? Were you able to do anything informally?*

WALKER: With respect to…?

*Q: Well, given that you are looking at all of Europe and trying to determine how much attention each European country needs from public diplomacy funds or public diplomacy programs, were you able to at least talk informally with the people who were conducting the programs over on the other side?*

WALKER: The Press and Public Affairs Offices, then and still today, are field-focused. We had a budget within EUR/PPD that allowed us to allocate money to posts to carry out special projects. However, after integration the area offices had no input into the funding for the Washington based bureaus like ECA or IIP, who controlled, managed, and supported the bulk of PD programs and initiatives. The new institutional and procedural barriers also impacted our ability to be responsive to crises such as 9/11.

*Q: Okay, so this is still the George W. Bush administration. What were your goals in your office, in the European office, for the period of time you were there?*

WALKER: During my first year there, as deputy director, I focused on team building and restructuring office functions. I took over the office director position after my boss moved on, but that promotion coincided with the decision to appoint the first ever public diplomacy DAS for EUR. The new DAS positions effectively undercut the office directors, who were no longer able to participate in the senior level meetings and report directly to the assistant secretary.

However, things were a bit different for me. The new DAS for EUR/PPD had no experience in public diplomacy, and like so many political appointees, knew nothing about navigating State's arcane bureaucracy. So I ended up going to all of the DAS level

meetings and working with bureau leadership, while running the largest regional PD bureau in the Department.

I had two initial priorities—first, to set the DAS up for success and second to streamline the bureau's ability to stay ahead of media reporting, especially on late breaking developments. I came up with the idea to produce a daily one page overview of the top press stories from or about the region that might require immediate front office attention and, possibly, public affairs guidance. We called it the "Rapid Response" brief, and it caught on very quickly, later morphing into the Rapid Response Unit.

My next task was to better integrate the public diplomacy function into the work of the regional bureaus. When I took over the EUR/PPD the PD desk officers for each country/or region sat in our office and reported to me. They had little to do with their policy desk counterparts in regional bureau offices beyond attending one or two staff meetings a week.

I knew that if public diplomacy officers were not present when policy was being discussed, then PD strategy would never be fully integrated into policy planning and execution. So, I made the case to embed our PD officers directly into the regional bureaus, bringing them back to our office several times a week for meetings and planning sessions.

*Q: Can you give an example? I think that at this point you've given a very good explanation of how the framework has been established.*

WALKER: An example of how a desk officer would be used to…?

*Q: Yeah.*

WALKER: OK. So at that time (2004-2006) the Balkan states were working on post-conflict resolution and the economic and political reforms necessary to qualify for membership in the EU and NATO. PD programs played an important role in all of this. The Balkans PD desk officer, who sat with the policy desk, was able to plug PD resources and support directly into the policy. If a VIP visit was in the works, she would propose guidance and press opportunities, offer to prepare speeches, etc. Was there something that post could organize around such a visit? Could they turn a policy event or meeting or conference into an expanded outreach opportunity? Were there targeted press stories? Because she knew exactly what was happening on the policy side, she was in a position to make recommendations to Washington and to the field about how best to use existing PD resources.

*Q: Were you, then, the ones who actually spoke to your counterparts in the embassies?*

WALKER: Yes. The two deputies and I personally maintained regular contact with every public affairs section in every embassy in the region--through weekly phone calls, conference calls, and email rounds. We would also bring the PAOs together for regional

conferences and training sessions. That was not only to maintain the Washington connection, but to build up strong networks amongst the PAOs in the field so that they could learn and benefit from one another's expertise.

I also encouraged the PAOs to maximize program resources by turning single-country programs into regional opportunities. If a speaker was going to Croatia for a program, why not incentivize the PAOs in the region to make it a collaborative event so that that expert also gets to Bosnia or Albania for very little additional cost. I wanted to build mission cohesiveness, but also empower posts to do the most with what they had.

*Q: Were improvements and changes in the use of social media and the 24/7 information cycles… Was that also part of what you were doing?*

WALKER: The 24/7 news cycle was already a reality. What became increasingly clear was the degree to which the new social media tools and platforms were already transforming the global media space. Not only were we going to have to start using these tools to stay competitive, but we would have to restructure our bureaucracies and processes to use them effectively.

*Q: Were you, at this point, also working in any way on an interagency basis with what slowly became known as strategic communication? Were there joint efforts, using USAID or DOD or any of those other agencies?*

WALKER: The effort to cooperate across the interagency on messaging, outreach or countering disinformation dates back to the very beginnings of the Cold War era. The Eisenhower administration launched the first of many attempts to set up interagency coordination groups across the information spectrum.

The interesting thing about the interagency process is that everyone complains about how unwieldy and difficult and ultimately relatively ineffective it is, and yet when a particular interagency coordination mechanism has been abandoned, the gap is filled by calls for its restoration.

I think there is value in talking to one another across the interagency. But the problem is that the process itself is exhausting and time consuming. The actors have so many other demands to meet, requiring them to prioritize their responsibilities along with their loyalty to their home office or institution.

The reality is that competing institutions of institutional equities will almost always compromise the efficacy of the overall effort. In my own experience and looking over the history of American public diplomacy in the last 70 years or so, I would say that the most effective interagency working groups were those with very specific goals whose outcomes could be easily measured.

*Q: Were there any of what you would call public diplomacy crises that you needed to handle while you were there? Something where you really had to marshal all of the tools and people you had?*

WALKER: No, there was no great crisis. Or at least not on the scale of a 9/11, or a Russia-Ukraine conflict or a pandemic.

*Q: But at the same time, your office, if I remember right, would be the one that receives all of the embassy master plans, however they were called at the time, for what their public diplomacy goals were.*

WALKER: That's correct. The name has evolved, but in my time, it was the Country Program Plan or the Country Strategy. I think that by the time I left EUR/PPD, it might have been called the Mission Strategic Plan.

*Q: MSRP, the Mission Strategic and Resource Plan, I think it was.*

WALKER: Right. The name evolved; the function endured. That was a USIA process easily cross walked into the Department of State. The Public Diplomacy plan morphed from a standalone strategy to an integral part of the country team effort. It reinforced the point that public diplomacy is part of everything that we do.

*Q: How did you use them, or how did you… What value did they give to your planning and your efforts in Washington?*

WALKER: Who's "they"?

*Q: I'm sorry; the various country plans.*

WALKER: We had an opportunity to review those plans, and we could comment on them from a resourcing and programmatic perspective. But these country plans were field-driven, reflecting on-the-ground realities and how best to use existing resources under those conditions.

*Q: What I'm actually getting at is, how was it decided how much money each post got in this new world of USIA integration?*

WALKER: I don't think the decision-making process changed, in the sense that it was and remained a collaborative process between the field, the regional offices, and the functional bureaus. At the time certain PD funds were firewalled, which created a bit of resentment in the field. But in reality, the Public Diplomacy sections had the lion's share of representational, outreach and programmatic activity.

*Q: Now, I guess the last question I have is, looking back at the level of integration that had occurred by the time you were there, what were the benefits and drawbacks?*

WALKER: The benefits were felt most prominently in the field, where the process of integration was much less disruptive. The PAO remained a valued member of the country team as a section head. OK, I was no longer a head of agency at the mission in Kazakhstan, and I had to give up the gold rimmed dinner service and dedicated vehicles. So what? Our work still mattered.

And, funny story, the management section eventually returned the representational crockery and silverware to my residence because I hosted 3-4 events a month and the GSO crew got tired of packing, boxing and shuttling the plates and glasses back and forth to the warehouse on a weekly basis.

Seriously though, integration also made it possible for PD officers to have a seat at the policy table. It opened up new professional possibilities for people like me to serve out of come, or compete for DCM positions.

As I've said earlier, the real issue was the failure to actually integrate the PD function into the Department of State. The stove-piping, the compartmentalization, and the rise of fiefdoms among the PD bureaus and offices remain a challenge to this day.

*Q: There was a slogan that slowly began to take hold of, well, now that USIA is integrated, everyone is a Public Diplomacy officer. You've been sort of addressing that throughout all of your remarks here, but I wonder if you'd take that head on. Were people outside of Public Diplomacy beginning to understand its importance and think through what the public diplomacy aspect of their work was?*

WALKER: That's a great question. I take some responsibility for that slogan. Back in 2005, the EUR assistant secretary, Dan Fried, asked me, as office director, to provide an overview of EUR/PPD tools and programs at a bureau-wide newcomer orientation session. I began by asking "How many of you are Public Diplomacy officers?" A few of them raised their hands. I said, "Wrong! You're all public diplomacy officers!"

I was making a point about the ubiquity of public diplomacy, and its centrality to the function of diplomacy. But in making that statement, I was acutely aware of the risk of devaluing the function. If everyone can do PD, why designate it as a distinct cone?

The dilution of the PD skill set began after integration, which did away with the yearlong intensive training program for junior PD officers. More and more PD officers spent their first and second tours doing consular affairs. When they finally caught a PD assignment, there were no mentors in place to give them guidance.

At the same time, the position descriptions and performance expectations embedded in EERs (employee evaluation reports) did not change after integration, with the result that PD officers were being held to performance standards for which they were no longer adequately prepared.

*Q: Now eventually, in all of the Foreign Service generalist evaluations, the area of public diplomacy did have to be remarked upon. Eventually, everyone had to do something related to public diplomacy, even if it only got a sentence. Once again, as you watched the integration over time, did that have a positive effect in terms of raising consciousness among all officers about how you plan what you're doing to include public diplomacy?*

WALKER: Over time, FSOs began to appreciate the value of the skillset and how it could further their own professional development. And let's not forget the impact of newly evolving information technologies, particularly social media platforms, which required everyone—not just PD officers—to learn to function quickly and effectively in this space.

I don't think we can put all of that on the elimination of the U.S. Information Agency. In fact, were USIA to have survived, it would also have been forced to adapt to the digital age. Change would have been inevitable in any case.

*Q: Alright. Now, in this position, you're a grade above your personal grade. Was that helpful for you in your career? Were you now being considered for other higher positions?*

WALKER: Well, I got promoted to Senior Foreign Service in that position.

*Q: Okay. So, from there, what were you thinking about, in terms of your career? Now, suddenly, of course, what you were thinking about when you first came into USIA may have been one thing, and now that you're integrated into State… How did that change?*

WALKER: I decided to do another DCM tour after my experience as the office director. In retrospect I wonder if I should have taken the opportunity to run a large PD operation overseas. But I chose the policy track and went to Croatia as DCM.

*Q: Croatia. Did you first, though, have to take Croatian language training?*

WALKER: I did. I did a year of Croatian language training.

*Q: How was that?*

WALKER: At the time, FSI reflected the sharp linguistic divides in the Balkans. If you were studying Croatian, you had to be taught by native Croatian speakers and use only standard Croatian. Heaven forbid you used a Bosnian or Serbian word in class!

I earned the requisite 3/3, but once again, I was not at a point where I could carry on formal high-level discussions. As a PAO with a 3/3 in Russian, I could get away with talking to anyone who would listen--making the world safe for democracy in my so-so Russian.

As a DCM, I did not have the luxury of just being okay at the language. As a result I rarely used my Croatian for official business. Also, I never quite got the Russian out of

my head, and the false cognates between the two Slavic languages frequently landed me in a muddle.

*Q: Now, when you went, did you go out with your family? Were your kids now grown? How was the family support?*

WALKER: My sons and I and my husband – I had remarried by then – went out together often to take advantage of all that Zagreb (and Croatia) had to offer. The boys enrolled in the international school in Zagreb which had a good IB (International Baccalaureate) program. I had finally learned from my previous mistakes about putting the job ahead of their education needs.

*Q: What was the post like when you arrived? This is now 2007?*

WALKER: Yes. 2007. Negotiations for Croatia's entry into NATO were in their final stages when I arrived. We were also involved in the effort to prepare Croatia for EU (European Union) accession while assuring that our own security and economic development civil programs were consistent with EU objectives.

While the memory of the war was still prevalent, there was also a sense of moving forward into a future defined by NATO and EU membership. It was a great time to serve in Croatia.

*Q: Now, the post itself – about how large was it?*

WALKER: It was a midsized post, with about 120 Americans. It also served as a regional base for Commerce and several other foreign affairs agencies.

*Q: Now, how did you work out with the ambassador what your particular areas of responsibility were?*

WALKER: My first ambassador made it clear that my job was to keep the mission in good working order, but that I also had to be prepared to step in at any point to represent him and further our policy objectives. I cultivated my own set of working counterparts, primarily within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also among the diplomatic community.

During my second year at post, the OIG (Office of the Inspector General) conducted a routine inspection, concluding in their report that Embassy Zagreb was the best-run and best organized mission that they, as a team, had ever encountered.

While a good deal of the credit goes to the Ambassador and our tremendous American and local staff, I will say that I worked hard to turn the mission into a cohesive community—a platform for people to advance their own careers while promoting U.S. interests.

For example, I developed an innovative entry-level officer (ELO) mentoring program using the USIA JOT model. Every ELO was given a brief rotation through one or two sections of the Embassy other than their own. Then, every couple of months, we went on an official trip such as a prison visit or an on-site review of a humanitarian assistance project. This approach was designed to permit first and second tour officers to explore their strengths within their own particular areas of specialization while broadening their exposure to the rest of the mission.

*Q: Were you yet in the new embassy building in Croatia?*

WALKER: We were.

*Q: Were there problems with it? Often a new building will have glitches that the DCM ends up, along with the management counselor, trying to resolve.*

WALKER: No, the building itself was fine--lots of open spaces, lots of light. Everything worked. However, the Embassy literally sat in a corn field well outside of town. It used to be in the city center, close to everything. The five minute walk to the MFA became a 30-60 minute drive depending on traffic, affecting everything from accessibility to wear and tear on the motor pool.

*Q: Well, let's take a look at the sections that you oversaw. During the three years there, were there particular political goals? You had mentioned entry into NATO and entry into the EU. Was there anything you took a particular interest in?*

WALKER: Those were the main goals. The whole mission was engaged.

*Q: Of course, Public Diplomacy officers who then become DCMs can, then, become half-time Public Diplomacy officers because their heart's still there. Did that happen to you?*

WALKER: We had two very strong PAOs while I was there. I established from the outset that my aim was to be as supportive as possible. If they wanted advice, I was always happy to provide it. I encouraged them to program me and other members of the country team in any way that would further mission goals. Of course, you'd have to ask them, but I hope they felt that I was their best advocate.

*Q: Alright. Also during this time, both the Department and independent posts are using social media much more. How did that work itself out in the time you were there?*

WALKER: We weren't at the point where the ambassador had his own Facebook or Twitter account. We focused on upgrading the Embassy website, on connecting the American corners and turning them into online resources. We began to experiment with virtual events.

*Q: Another area the DCM has to always be particularly attentive to is security. Were there security challenges for you during that time?*

WALKER: Not particularly. It was a safe, stable environment. The RSO maintained very good working relationships with the police and the Ministry of the Interior. I put the regional security officer on the law enforcement working group to make sure that he was fully integrated into the mission's broader security goals

*Q: The same with natural emergencies. There weren't…*

WALKER: No. We were spared earthquakes and so on.

*Q: Okay. Were there major VIP visits that had… Obviously, you have to support them, but were there any that resulted in any major developments in bilateral relations?*

WALKER: Yes, a big one. Then-President Bush along with Secretary of State Rice travelled to Zagreb together to celebrate Croatia's admittance into NATO. It was a historic moment for the country and the region.

Bush addressed the people of Croatia – and indeed the world – from the medieval square in front of St. Mark's Cathedral up in the old town. It was a stunning jewel of a location--and a security nightmare—but we pulled it off.

I was overall control officer for the visit. The White House and State Department advance teams were remarkably efficient—it was a truly well-run operation.

*Q: And it wasn't terribly difficult to work with the Croatians? Sometimes the host country can make demands.*

WALKER: Not at all. The Croatians were so pleased to have the U.S. president and the Secretary of State together in their country, and to have the American president address the world from St. Mark's square with that gorgeous cathedral behind him. They were willing to do whatever it took to get that iconic moment.

*Q: Did things change in terms of your responsibilities when the ambassador changed?*

WALKER: I continued to do the basic DCM functions. However, the new ambassador, who did not know me and had not chosen me to work with him, was a little more cautious, shall we say, about giving me responsibilities outside of the traditional "keep the mission going" purview.

*Q: Alright. Other than these, were there other major events that I've missed that, as DCM, you had to pay a great deal of attention to?*

WALKER: I developed a strong interest in the Jasenovac memorial site and museum, which commemorated the victims of the Croatian fascist regime—the Ustasa—in World War II. It was modeled along the lines of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

The museum turned the names on the wall and in the photo captions into human beings--elevating and personalizing their stories. And the exhibit made it clear that the victims cut across ethnic and religious lines—Croats, Serbs, Jews, Muslims, Roma—all were persecuted.

Every year, around, time of the official commemoration of the camp, Croatian conservative groups would accuse the museum and its director of being anti Croat, or pro Serb. It brought home to me how, years after WWII, these questions of victimhood and responsibility come back to haunt us. And how important it is to tell these stories, no matter how painful.

*Q: And obviously, Croatia gets into NATO and into the EU, but were there still human rights frictions?*

WALKER: There are always… I wouldn't say human rights frictions, but there are always, in every country, issues with corruption, failures of justice, religious intolerance. But I wouldn't say that they were anything out of the ordinary.

*Q: Okay. Now, as you approach the end, after two DCM-ships, had anyone begun to consider you for an ambassadorship?*

WALKER: Yes. In fact, after that OIG report I was being considered for a small ambassadorship in Europe. But to take that ambassadorship I would have had to leave Zagreb at the end of the second year rather than complete the three year tour. That would have meant pulling my younger son out of his senior year at a high school where he was thriving, and placing him in a school that was not nearly as good. So, with great regret, I turned down the opportunity and instead took an assignment in Afghanistan the following year

Turns out I made the right choice—my son had a great senior year and went to college on a scholarship.

*Q: Now, you went with your husband. I neglected to ask you earlier, were you now a tandem pair?*

WALKER: We were a tandem couple. He was a management officer, and under nepotism rules, the DCM-management tandem is a no go. So he reported to the regional management center in Frankfurt and traveled to our embassies all over Europe to do management, budget, and personnel training for American and LE staff. He was on the road two weeks out of every month, but that was the only way for us to be together at post. And that experience turned out to be a real career booster for him.

*Q: When you decided to go to Afghanistan, there were jobs for both of you that would not cause any of that difficulty?*

WALKER: Yes. I served as the regional border coordinator with a focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and he served as a GSO and then HRO. There were no nepotism issues.

*Q: So this is now the fall of 2010 that you're going to Afghanistan?*

WALKER: That's right.

*Q: What made you choose Afghanistan? Was it the tandem issue, where there were enough jobs that you both could work there?*

WALKER: My husband really wanted to serve there, and I felt that I should do my part as well.

*Q: Alright. What is it like in the embassy in Kabul? Obviously, it's in constant motion and constant development and building and so on. What was it like when you arrived?*

WALKER: We were there from 2010 to 2011. In that period the U.S.-Afghan relationship deteriorated considerably, especially in the aftermath of the WikiLeaks release of classified Embassy cables critical of President Karzai. Our ability to work effectively with the Afghan government was thoroughly compromised.

That was also a period of tremendous domestic pressure on the Obama administration to draw down the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. The expenditure of blood and treasure was enormous. We were asked to start developing drawdown plans.

Finally, the security situation began to worsen. Threat streams grew significantly, along with an increase in random attacks, limiting our ability to move around safely and complicating missions outside Kabul.

*Q: Now, you personally, where did you fit in the embassy structure?*

WALKER: I was the regional border coordinator. This position grew out of Richard Holbrooke's efforts to support the peace process through confidence building measures designed to foster cross border cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. These Track II type initiatives focused on customs and border regulations, trade agreements, biometric and other data sharing, joint improvements to road, bridge and rail infrastructure, agreements on environmental issues, joint training and education programs, etc. As you might imagine it was a pretty steep learning curve for me.

I worked for one of the four deputy ambassadors who was responsible for the coordination of assistance from State, USAID, CBP (Customs and Border Patrol), DHS (Department of Homeland Security), and the U.S. military.

*Q: What were your duties, at least as you understood them?*

WALKER: Holbrooke's vision was to set up dialogues between Afghanistan and Pakistan to coordinate on issues such as customs and border management, trade and tariffs, environmental resource management and so on. The hope was that a set of agreements on these "soft" issues could create a framework for a broader, more enduring peace between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ultimately, the goal was to set the conditions for successful negotiations with the Taliban.

In Kabul, I worked closely with officials from CBP and DHS to coordinate with their Afghan and Pakistani counterparts on the passage of people and goods across the border. With USAID, we looked at cross border water, agriculture, and health initiatives. The political section in the Embassy focused on the mechanism of the negotiations process as well as cross border refugee issues. Finally, I worked with NATO headquarters on setting the security conditions for these confidence building measures.

The idea was to set up a series of small conferences or dialogues on all of these issues along the Af-Pak border. These meetings would culminate in a high level session in DC during which representatives from both Afghanistan and Pakistan would commit to a set of confidence-building measures. That meeting never happened, largely owing to the difficulty of getting both sides to come to the table, even to discuss these so-called "soft" problems.

When I arrived, the focus was exclusively on Af-Pak issues. It became clear to me that we should include Central Asian governments in these confidence building discussions. There were a number of significant concerns, including the cross border passage of foreign fighters, narcotics, and weapons, not to mention transboundary water and environmental issues.

My legacy, such as it was, was the organization of a series of regional cross-border conferences at each of the five major diplomatic/military platforms around the country: Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar al Sharif. Each conference focused on the cross-border issues that were particular to that region, or section of the border. There was no one size fits all. The issues on the border with Iran to the west, were distinct from those with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, or Pakistan to the east and south.

I created opportunities for dialogue on both the military and civilian sides about identifying specific, actionable issues and coming up with some short-term confidence building measures to address them. I traveled to all of the major border areas to organize these events, and build momentum for stronger regional cooperation.

Travel around Afghanistan wasn't easy. I remember seesawing blindly through a dust storm on the way to Jalalabad; a trip over a lunar landscape at dusk with nothing but a seat belt and a few inches of deck between me and the desert floor; an air abort on a C-17, when an engine exploded and caught fire, resulting in a precipitous, near vertical

return to the tarmac at Bagram; a landing gear failure on approach to the Kabul airfield. Afghanistan ruined air travel for me--I'll say that.

More seriously, my time in Afghanistan made me question the value of traditional diplomacy in a war zone. The security situation was so unpredictable and volatile that we were unable to create and sustain long term investments in relationships, processes, and institutions.

I concluded that we truly had no business in attempting to impose our version of democracy and civil society development on a country like Afghanistan, whose history and culture were so very different from our own. Our hubris was matched only by our naivete. As you might guess, I left Afghanistan feeling disillusioned and demoralized.

*Q: So, there's one concluding question about Afghanistan that I'd like to ask, which is, given the experience you had, and looking at Afghanistan now… We know that there have been some kind of talks going on between the U.S. and the Taliban, and maybe to some extent with the Afghan government and the Taliban. What do you foresee for Afghanistan in the future, to the extent that you've been able to follow it?*

WALKER: In my view, these talks will continue only as long as they serve our strategic interests. But if we ever come to a point where involvement in Afghanistan is no longer essential to the preservation of our national security and economic priorities, when we can no longer make a persuasive case back home for the expenditure of blood and treasure, then we'll pull out, leaving Afghanistan to the untender mercies of the Taliban.

*Q: Alright. So, you go through Afghanistan until the summer of 2011.*

WALKER: Right.

*Q: Now, arriving at the War College, what had you agreed that your position was going to be?*

Having spent a year in Afghanistan doing something completely unrelated to my previous assignments, I found that people in DC had forgotten about me. I could not find a job. So I went for an appointment at the National War College as a State Department faculty fellow.

*Q: Right. Was it actually a linked assignment?*

WALKER: No. I had to lobby for it. My PhD probably helped. Also my service in Afghanistan, which resonated in the war college context. The position had the effect of further distancing me from the Department and removing me from consideration for senior leadership positions. But it also turned out to be transformative. That's when I began the transition from diplomat to scholar.

*Q: Just a quick question about the National Defense University, where the War College is located. The other large school there has now been renamed Eisenhower College, but at the time was the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Was that seen as similar to the War College? How did they differ?*

WALKER: ICAF, now Eisenhower, was structured as a more traditional academic institution built on the semester system. The curriculum focused on industry, technology, management and logistics. By contrast, the National War College curriculum was structured as a series of 6 to 8-week courses that built upon one another with a high level focus on national security strategy.

*Q: What topics or what areas did you teach or were you responsible for?*

WALKER: The sequence has since changed, but in that era the curriculum began with an intro to strategic theory, followed by courses on the military instrument of power, the nonmilitary instruments of power – diplomacy, economics, and information--U.S. government processes and institutions, international relations, and geographic specializations which culminated in field studies programs.

I started as a back chair in the intro to strategy course. That's when I first encountered Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, Machiavelli's *Prince,* and other classic texts. Catnip for a PhD in reading books.

Then, I became one of the 14 faculty seminar leaders in the nonmilitary instruments of power course. We either facilitated seminar discussion following the keynote lecture, or put together our own approach to the topic for that day.

We were given the curriculum and the readings, along with suggestions on how to discuss. But when we walked into that seminar room, what happened next was entirely up to us. I took to it immediately. Especially the opportunity to come up with creative approaches to teaching the big ideas. I also taught regional studies and led a field study trip to Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Finally, I created a new elective on public diplomacy and national security.

In my second year I was tapped to become the deputy course director for the non-military instruments of power and was lucky enough to work with a brilliant course director, who profoundly influenced my thinking about the role of diplomacy in national security. When I returned to the National War College as a civilian professor a few years later, I became the director of that course and was able to put my vision to work.

*Q: That's an excellent point to ask the question, what was your vision? What were you emphasizing for these officers who were selected because there was an expectation that they would rise to at least flag rank or brigadier general?*

WALKER: Not one of the instruments of power exists in a vacuum. Every state action in the foreign policy space involves a combination of military, diplomatic, economic, and

information elements. So a diplomatic negotiation may focus on a trade agreement, or a post war peace treaty, or require overt messaging about intended outcomes, or covert collection of information on key actors. It's diplomacy, but it relies on all of the instruments of power.

My vision was to teach the course in a way that helped the students to understand the integration of these elements in statecraft, but at the same time gave them an appreciation for the nuances of each instrument.

*Q: Were there foreign military officers?*

WALKER: Yes. Every year, there were around 30-40 foreign military officers, usually identified by our embassies, in cooperation with the military attachés at post. They brought all great experience to the classroom, and many of them went back home to become influential senior military leaders.

The NWC experience was pivotal for the students—in terms of knowledge and networking but also through exposure of stereotypes. State Department officers had a chance to see things from the perspective of their military counterparts, understand the nuances of military culture, and appreciate the burden of responsibility that comes with command. For the military officers at the NWC, diplomats went from being pinstriped cookie pushers to individuals with the skills and knowledge to get things done through dialogue, influence projection, and persuasive engagement.

I played with that cross fertilization and debunking of stereotypes in the classroom. Of course I would rely on the subject matter experts to share their knowledge. But I would also engineer role reversals, getting military officers to take the diplomat's role in an exercise, or assign them to a project that required them to come up with a diplomatic solution to a problem. And vice versa.

*Q: What struck you about the students there? What was surprising, or what did you take away after you had really become a full-fledged teacher or professor?*

WALKER: These students were seasoned professionals. Not undergraduates. They had commanded troops on the battlefield and brought them home. They had led high level negotiations and ended crises peacefully. They had run intelligence operations in high-threat environments, and dealt with hostile interlocutors in the public space. Every time I walked into a new seminar with 12 or 13 students, I was acutely aware that I was dealing with, easily, 200 years of combined professional experience. My 20 plus years of diplomacy did not stack up.

So, that's your starting point. How do you get them to take on new information in a way that appeals to their interests and experiences while filling a knowledge gap? How do you do that in a way that doesn't condescend to them but also doesn't embarrass them or make them feel inadequate? How do you further elevate these already high value performers?

*Q: Did you use a lot of practical exercises? What were the main tools for teaching there?*

WALKER: You start with understanding that the intention is not to turn these students into scholars or theoreticians. They need just enough macroeconomics and IR (international relations) theory and historical context to be able to make informed strategic decisions on the battlefield or at the negotiation table.

But at the same time, this is not just a tactical school. It's not purely operational in focus. The challenge is to find that sweet spot between theory and practice. The way we did that was to double down on the use of case studies in the classroom, looking at actual historical examples while highlighting the big ideas or issues that framed them, and then drawing out lessons learned.

That's when I started to write my own case studies for public diplomacy. My first one assessed USG messaging in the aftermath of the tragic attack on the facilities in Benghazi in September 2012. I still teach it, and in fact it continues to be used in a number of graduate courses on public diplomacy.

My approach was not to assign blame for what happened—there was already plenty of that going around. —but rather to look at USG messaging about Benghazi as a cautionary tale about the challenge of effective messaging in a media saturated age.

The case examines the difficulty of establishing the facts about the attack, how challenging it was to develop an accurate sequence of events in the absence of information. Then it shows how factual errors in the initial messaging undermined public trust. It also explores the divergence between the White House and State Department narratives about the origins of the attack—and its implications for national legitimacy.

As the case demonstrates, these divergent narratives created public doubt, then suspicion and then outright paranoia, which was exploited domestically in the context of a national presidential election, and internationally as another indication of weakening American power.

Ultimately, the case study illustrates the challenges of multiple and competing information sources, the need for transparency, competing institutional equities, and the importance of nuance in message content and framing. Insights that the students could use as foreign policy professionals.

*Q: So, today is June 18th, 2020. We're resuming our interview with Vivian Walker. She has just completed her tour at the War College. Vivian, how did it come about that you went on to the next tour?*

WALKER: I was required to go back to the Department--two years being the maximum for a war college detail. I was lined up for a job in ECA but at the last minute, the handshake went to somebody else.

I then had a lead on a regional office director slot in SCA but the bureau abruptly decided to turn the job into a DAS position and give it to a political appointee. So now I was really scrambling.

*Q: Let me just ask here quickly, at this point, are you OC (Counselor) or MC (Minister Counselor)?*

WALKER: MC.

*Q: Okay.*

WALKER: But I was an MC who had spent a year doing something that nobody understood in Afghanistan, and then spent the next two years teaching at the National War College. So, when I returned to the Department, the folks who were running things didn't necessarily remember me. I was not the first person that came to mind when they were looking for people to fill positions.

*Q: Yeah. And this is actually a common problem, even for people of lower rank who change bureaus or are outside of bureaus for a little while. Literally, if you are not plugged in, you can get forgotten.*

WALKER: Right. Finally, I found an unexpected opening as the director of the Office of SCE (South Central European Affairs)—covering Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece. As soon as I accepted the handshake, I was told that a new DAS position covering the office had just been created—and given to a political appointee who would be taking over the policy issues in the portfolio.

At that point I realized that I had probably run out my string with the Department. I did not want to be remembered as a has been eking out my time in class. I remained one year in that job before leaving the Foreign Service. In that time I focused on training and mentoring the extremely able officers working for me in that office, many of whom have gone on to do quite well in the Service.

*Q: Interesting. Okay. So, now, the year that you spent in the office director position was 2018 to '19?*

WALKER: No, it was 2013 to '14.

*Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay. During that time, obviously with all of the things going on, were you looking for other positions, or had you really begun to think about retiring?*

WALKER: At the National War College, I experienced an opportunity to train the next generation of national security leaders, both civilian and military, and to note the sense of fulfillment that gave me.

Once back in the State Department bureaucracy, where I spent my last year pushing paper up and down the clearance chain, without having any real influence or impact, I concluded my skills could be put to better use elsewhere.

I also realized that if I was going to reinvent myself and be credible in the academic or think tank world, I had better start soon to build up a reputation as a lecturer and a scholar. So I began looking for a way to do that.

*Q: How did you go about doing that? In other words, had you developed contacts? Were people interested? They knew your work, and they approached you.*

WALKER: Initially I looked for academic, NGO, and policy advisory positions based on my experience in public diplomacy, programming, outreach, assistance, and development. I'd really done it all.

But the problem was that I didn't have a real network outside the Department, having spent the bulk of my career overseas. No one in DC knew me—so no one was looking for my resume, which ended up with hundreds of others at the bottom of the pile.

Luckily, the former dean at the National War College had moved on to take a leadership role at the National Defense College (NDC) of the Emirates (UAE) in Abu Dhabi. He was looking for faculty to help him launch a new master's program in strategic studies. This was a program funded by a bilateral military cooperative agreement between the USG and the UAE.

He invited me to submit an application, and I arrived in Abu Dhabi in August 2014 to develop a course in diplomacy for the rising generation of military and civilian leaders in the UAE. Ultimately the goal was to create a regional hub for PME studies in a very important part of the world.

It was a great opportunity in so many ways. For example, in creating the course, I had to make the content relevant for the local culture and context. Too often, we apply our very U.S.-focused, Western-centric ideas and resources and materials to training programs designed for individuals whose cultural and professional experiences are very different from our own.

In the meantime, I submitted an application to the National War College, and a year later, in August 2015, I returned to campus as a civilian professor of national security strategy. where I went on to serve for another two years. I was immediately given the directorship of what was then the core course on non-military instruments on power, focusing on diplomacy, economics, and information.

I redesigned the course, giving it a case study focus. I found that I had a knack for curriculum design and development.

*Q: Okay. So, looking back on the curricular instruction, given that it's being focused for different audiences and purposes, what elements did you use? What did you think was important to convey to these students who are well along in their careers but want to sharpen their skills in this area?*

WALKER: We've already discussed integrating the instruments of power and examining each one in sequence. After each deep dive into a single instrument, students analyzed a historical case study that showed that instrument in action. The course culminated in four final case studies, with students divided into teams to assess the use of diplomacy, economic statecraft, and information instruments in each case.

The readings and lectures established the theories and concepts. In-class exercises and structured discussions enabled students to tease out the practical elements and their applications. Taking advantage of the significant expertise in the room, I would get a military, or political, or intelligence officer to provide context and nuance, supplemented by their own experiences. My hope was that when the students returned to their active duty positions, whether in a ministry of foreign affairs or a conflict zone, they would have enough knowledge to assess the problem, and the tools to solve it.

*Q: What would a successful student look like after they completed your course?*

WALKER: I don't know if that's the right question, because they were successful before they began the course.

*Q: Yeah. I didn't mean so much successful in the sense of moving up in rank or something like that, but did they, for example, after the end of the course get back in touch with you with questions about things? Did they ask for a little more guidance here or there?*

WALKER: In addition to broadening their knowledge base and skills, the networking opportunities certainly set them up for later success. NWC graduates could pick up the phone and talk to their classmates serving at NATO headquarters, at Africom or leading a task force at State. This access and understanding benefited the institution they worked for, and the government they served.

*Q: Yeah. That's basically what I was wondering. Right. Over time, do you change the course? Are there skills or talents or approaches that you think need to be modified, given the geopolitics?*

WALKER: The courses were regularly updated and subject to curriculum reviews. Changes in administration, evolving geopolitical competition, emerging conflict—all these factors impacted course design and direction. As they should.

*Q: Interesting. So, that, then, takes you up to 2017? It was always understood that this position would be limited tenure, because every three years or so the position moves?*

WALKER: My tenure was contingent upon a review every three years, and would have likely been granted, but my husband had accepted an assignment as a management officer at Embassy Budapest. So I left the college and moved to Hungary in summer 2017.

Initially I found work as a researcher and adjunct professor at the Central European University. I also stepped up my role as a faculty fellow at the Center for Public Diplomacy at USC (University of Southern California), taking over the editorship of their "Perspectives" series. I began to teach regularly in the CPD summer institute courses for public diplomacy professionals and short courses in Europe on aspects of strategic communication.

In Ukraine, I worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to stand up its public diplomacy division, and with the Ukrainian diplomatic academy to design and teach courses in public diplomacy for their professional diplomats. I also had the good fortune to work with the Ukrainian Institute as it developed into an amazing platform for the projection of Ukrainian culture and identity.

For the Republic of Georgia's premier foreign policy and national security think tank I developed and taught a course on strategic communications in a non-degree security studies program for rising government, academic, media and NGO leaders. I also consulted on the development of effective counter disinformation strategies and training programs for the media and NGO sectors.

I began to turn my attention to writing in that period as well. I produced a series of public diplomacy case studies based on events in the UAE, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as book chapters, essays and commentary on the practice of public diplomacy, narrative development, and countering disinformation effects.

*Q: Now, you arrive in Hungary in 2017. By then, Orbán was beginning to make noises about how much he did not like the Central European University.*

WALKER: I had a front row seat for that process.

*Q: Do you want to take a minute to explain it from an outsider's point of view? I have a rather prejudicial view of Orbán and his approach to things. I served in Hungary for a while, and I knew what Orbán was. I'm not very friendly to his form of governance. But perhaps, since you were there, you have a better insight into what happened.*

WALKER: When were you in Hungary, by the way?

*Q: 2005 to 2008. Just at the very beginning of his premiership.*

WALKER: His first term.

*Q: Yeah.*

WALKER: Right. Well, let's start with Orbán. As you know, during the heady years after the fall of communism, Orban emerged as an ardent supporter and defender of democratic principles. The Soros Foundation supported his political party and even sent him to Oxford to study civil society development. He served as a member of Parliament, rose to prominence as the head of Fidesz, and became prime minister for the first time in 1998. But then his coalition lost the election of 2002.

When he returned to government as Prime Minister in 2010, something had changed. The democrat was gone, replaced by an authoritarian whose speeches championed traditional values, nationalism, Hungary's Christian identity and so on. This approach had some appeal for a country with a long history of occupation and suppression. But Hungarians were also ecstatic about their newfound freedom from the yoke of communism.

The question becomes, what happened? I think part of it has to do with the fact that Hungary's transition to democracy took place under the supervision of technocrats, rather than ideologues. Perhaps Hungarians did not experience a passionate embrace of democratic institutions—nor an understanding of the implicit social contract.

That brings us to CEU. Central European University, under the sponsorship of the Soros Foundation, was essentially "democracy central" for the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Rather than being designed as a traditional academic institution, it was intended as a training ground for leaders in the new fight for the promotion of political freedom and social equality. CEU was meant to prepare the next generation of political leaders and judges and civil society activists.

Unquestionably CEU had an outsized role in the promotion of Western style liberal democracy in the 1990s and 2000s, primarily, but not exclusively, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. But it also posed a significant threat to an authoritarian government like Orbán's, thanks to its uncompromising embrace of freedom of speech, media freedoms, human rights, tolerance, diversity, and so on.

All of these principles ran counter to Orbán's nationalistic and increasingly isolationist narrative. By the time I arrived in Hungary, Soros and the CEU were lumped in with the greedy Western capitalists who were attempting to impose their immorality and venality on a pure, traditional, Christian country. Not so different, by the way, from the Kremlin narrative about the corrupt and corrupting countries from the West bent on destroying Russia's traditional values.

The demise of CEU also coincided with Orbán's espousal of what he called "illiberal democracy"--a form of democracy that includes certain illiberal or authoritarian elements in order to protect national sovereignty.

The actual shut down of CEU's began with the passage of a law targeting foreign accredited institutions in Hungary. Even though CEU complied with the requirement to open an accredited campus in the U.S., the Orban government refused to sign off on the agreement to allow CEU to operate. The accreditation issue became the chink into which

Orban could insert the crowbar and bring down the edifice. Orban loyalists mounted a series of attacks, citing CEU's illegal, divisive and dangerous impacts on Hungarian society.

What Orban did to the CEU is absolutely reprehensible. But CEU could have done a little more to prepare itself to withstand the onslaught. In my view (and I'm in the minority here) CEU had not sufficiently transitioned beyond its identity as a champion of democracy to establish itself as an academic institution whose reputation and influence depended on the quality of its scholarship and teaching rather than on its ideological foundation. Its politicalization became a vulnerability that Orban effectively exploited.

*Q: Could you give an example of that? For people who don't know Hungary, it may be a little difficult to conceptualize. The reason I ask is that I certainly remember it as a location where just about anyone could come and give a lecture that may be in support of what the Hungarian government was doing, or critical of what the Hungarian government was doing. Perhaps they would even discuss Hungarian history, skewering one sacred cow or another.*

WALKER: That's true, and that's what made CEU so valuable. But I think more could have been done to invest in CEU as a full service academic institution rather than a platform for the study of human rights, media freedom, and so on. That lack of foresight ultimately contributed to its political vulnerability.

CEU also had a significant economic vulnerability. It was initially funded by the Soros Foundation, but when that ended CEU had to rely on support from international donors to keep its doors open. That meant that to a certain degree external donor interests, rather than domestic drivers, defined the research and policy focus. That worked well for CEU during the heyday of democratic institution building. But it did not contribute to the development of long term financial support, especially given Orban's pivot to illiberal democracy.

*Q: Yeah. Just its size sort of argued against it becoming bigger. Its campus was limited to just a few buildings, and I don't think there was much of a growth strategy beyond that. It's not that you can't do the kind of basic master's programs in small spaces, but even back in 2008, it surprised me that its growth plans did not include beginning to become more of an institution. They did have a modest endowment, but it was pretty modest.*

WALKER: You were the cultural attaché, right?

*Q: Correct. We worked with them very regularly on all kinds of things, and I certainly agree with you. As of 2008, when I left, they were much more of a kind of clearinghouse. Yes, you could get a degree, but it wasn't entirely clear to me that the degree was the typical kind of degree someone would want to get from a university institution. Rather, it was something that would be valuable for you if you were in some other international field and could use the fact that you spend a year or two at the Central European*

*University doing a master's on some aspect of human rights or transparency and media freedom and so on.*

WALKER: I've got a good analogy. CEU fulfilled a necessary function as PHREI--a professional human rights education institution. (I just made up the term.) Professional military education institutions are not expected to resemble traditional "academic" institutions. They have a specialized function, and they are recognized as such. The expectations about those institutions are matched to their capabilities. That did not happen with CEU.

*Q: Yeah. It's still a pity.*

WALKER: CEU is being reincarnated in Vienna. Its survival there will depend on its ability to transition into a truly solid academic institution called Central European University. We'll see.

*Q: I think you're right. I think that part of what we were hoping would come out of the Soros investment in CEU was that Hungary would sort of grab onto it and become one of those countries that stood in the lead with us, at least at that time, in demanding better press freedoms throughout the changing Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Union. That clearly did not happen.*

Q: *So, your husband's tour takes you to 2019?*

WALKER: Actually, 2020. He's still there.

*Q: Okay. Then, I imagine he'll be finishing this summer?*

WALKER: Yes. He will. We hadn't planned on spending so much time apart, but…

*Q: The lives of Foreign Service officers, especially if you're tandems…*

WALKER: Right, and COVID threw us off, like everyone else.

*Q: Of course. Alright, so where do you go back to? Are you back in Washington when your next opportunity presents itself, or were you already talking to people from Budapest about where you would go next?*

WALKER: I was asked in the summer of 2018 to apply to be the Executive Director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. It took a long time to be appointed. I had to be brought back into government service, which required a new security clearance. It wasn't until May 2019 that I returned to Washington to take up my duties.

*Q: Now, take a moment to describe what your current position is.*

WALKER: The federal government has a number of advisory commissions that are formulated to provide advice on particular issues of concern and interest to the American people. Some of them are presidential advisory commissions, like this one, while others focus on specific legislative or institutional questions.

The idea is to bring together a mix of outside experts who research issues of national importance – whether it's foreign policy, national security, commerce, etc.—provide policy recommendations as appropriate, and share those findings with the federal government as well as the public.

My role as executive director is to facilitate the advisory process on the conduct of U.S. government public diplomacy programs, provide periodic program assessments, make policy recommendations, and create opportunities for research and amplification of ideas

The ACPD was established in 1948 as part of Smith-Mundt legislation that empowered the State Department to carry out public diplomacy activities overseas, largely to enable the containment of Soviet influence. Smith-Mundt also famously established a strict firewall to prevent the domestic use of PD programs and tools. The ACPD initially served as a watch to guarantee that State did not engage in propaganda at home. Now the longest running foreign policy advisory commission in the federal government, the ACPD has been a catalyst for all major developments in US government public diplomacy in the last 70 years.

*Q: I meant to ask, who does it report to?*

WALKER: It reports to the White House, the Congress, and the Secretary of State.

*Q: How many members?*

WALKER: The number of commissioners cannot exceed seven. We are at three right now. We anticipate that we will be taking on a few more at some point, while maintaining the bipartisan balance.

*Q: Okay. What would be a good example of an advice or a recommendation you made that was then carried out or would have been seen by the public?*

WALKER: Public diplomacy focuses on informing and influencing foreign audiences, meaning that it has no domestic constituency. The commission plays a critical role in addressing that knowledge gap by demonstrating to the American taxpayer that the money spent on public diplomacy abroad contributes to security and prosperity at home.

You asked for examples. The comprehensive annual reports review every public diplomacy program in every region carried out by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media. In addition to offering program overviews and assessments, the report indicates how much money was spent--when, where, and why. No other report makes such detailed accounting available to the public.

The ACPD also produces special reports, such as the one focused on data driven public diplomacy. That report has become one of the most influential analyses of academic and practitioner approaches to audience research, program monitoring and impact assessment.

Now, that sounds boring, but in fact it's truly important. In order for public diplomacy programs to be truly effective, you need good data about target audience needs, interests, and perceptions.

You also need to be able to accurately assess impacts. How do you know when to change messaging content or tone to be more effective? How do you know when an approach is not working and a course-correct is required? Too often, people view program evaluation as something done in hindsight. In reality, evaluations are forward-looking: they are meant to shape the direction and content of future programs. We use past findings to understand what worked, what did not, and how to improve public diplomacy going forward.

This report's recommendations are slowly changing State's risk-averse culture, pushing back on the resistance to data driven and technologically enabled changes to program design while integrating private sector expertise into public sector initiatives academic and professional expertise from the private sector.

*Q: Is that available to the public?*

WALKER: All of these reports are available on the USACPD website, going back to 1948 via the archive link.

Speaking of the archives, in reading through more than 70 years of ACPD reports I've been struck by the overall consistency in key findings and recommendations. The need for better interagency coordination, more consistent and flexible resourcing, broader audience research, and rapid adaptation to emerging information technologies—these challenges never go away.

*Q: Very good. Alright. Are there any other aspects of your position right now that you want to describe that would help the average person understand your day to day work or the products that you create?*

WALKER: While we do provide answers in the form of data and practical recommendations, I like to think that our true function is identifying the next big challenges and the hard questions that will serve as catalysts for change.

Take, for example, that report on data driven public diplomacy, which was inspired by the radical transformation of the global information space. The ongoing question was—how can public diplomacy practices and skills adapt to meet the challenges of the digital age?

And how can we take advantage of new data collection and management technologies to fine tune monitoring and evaluation efforts? Once we had our questions, we found the experts who could answer them.

Another recent special report assessed State Department response to the exponential growth in state and non-state sponsored disinformation efforts. What are the most effective counter disinformation tools and techniques? How should they be prioritized? What does winning look like in this highly contested space? The answers, in the form of policy recommendations, are already part of new training and program initiatives.

*Q: Alright. How long will you remain on the board?*

WALKER: Anywhere from two to five years.

*Q: In the recommendations you make, I'm certain it addresses certain practices and procedures in the Department. Do you also make recommendations about training for Foreign Service officers?*

WALKER: We have, in the past, made recommendations about training at the Foreign Service Institute as well as the expanding access to academic and private sector training opportunities.

One important caveat—while the ACPD does address practices and procedures in the Department, we are not the Office of the Inspector General. No one is required to implement our recommendations. There are no consequences for noncompliance.

*Q: Do any of the recommendations you make address the decision to have integrated USIA with the State Department, and the subsequent affects that that has had?*

WALKER: Over the past 70 years, the ACPD has frequently called for the more efficient integration or consolidation of public diplomacy activities within the Department of State. But it has also made a strong case for the creation of a standalone institution, such as USIA, to assure the independence and integrity of the public diplomacy functions. In other words, arguments for and against consolidation are not new.

I would say that the ACPD has been a catalyst for rather than an arbiter of change. Take for example the recent (2019) merger of the Office of Information Programs (IIP) and Public Affairs (PA) into the Global Public Affairs (GPA) bureau. In previous reports the ACPD had recommended better coordination of IIP's external outreach practices and content. We also argued that public affairs activities should be more transparent and consistent within the Department. Elements of these recommendations made their way into the creation of GPA, but ACPD cannot take full credit for the outcome.

*Q: Interesting. Okay. Now, looking back, then, over your career in public diplomacy, what would you say has been the most successful approach that you've seen as you applied them in various countries over time? In other words, if you were the Under*

*Secretary for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy, how would you organize things to make them as effective for the U.S. as possible?*

WALKER: There is no such thing as a perfect approach. Over time, we have seen that good results emerge from a mix of short term advocacy, information dissemination, and outreach, longer-term investment in cultural and educational exchange programs, and reliance on international broadcasting. The under secretary has the difficult but vital task of defending, promoting, and upgrading these practices.

Historically, approaches to public diplomacy are determined by prevailing threats to our national interests—on the battlefield, in the marketplace, and in the global information space.

During World War I, the Creel Committee attempted to shape domestic and foreign perceptions about American involvement in the war. During World War II, VOA countered German and then Axis propaganda. During the Cold War, public diplomacy and broadcasting activities were consolidated to contain the spread of communism and provide a credible alternative to Soviet influence. In the aftermath of 9/11, which Bush framed as a failure to tell our story persuasively to the Muslim world, State doubled down on outreach to counter violent extremism.

In a time of national crisis, when national security and prosperity are at stake, public diplomacy is called on to fill the breach, to correct gaps in public understanding, to turn the tide of negative perceptions about the U.S. This dynamic is constant throughout the history of American public diplomacy.

*Q: Now, I'm pretty sure that earlier in our interview, when you quoted George W. Bush as saying that our problem was that we were not explaining ourselves well enough, you also added a judgement that he wasn't exactly right. In other words, public diplomacy cannot simply by itself, or at least the amount of public diplomacy the U.S. is willing to invest in can't move the needle alone.*

WALKER: It's the policy.

*Q: It's the policy exactly. I mention that only because I wouldn't want a reader to think that, in simply quoting him, you quoted him without reminding people that it was an easy whipping boy for him to use when it was really policy that was a major factor in why many countries were…*

WALKER: Right.

*Q: Another question, Madam Undersecretary: to what extent would you leave the decisions on public diplomacy to embassies? To what extent would you control it from Washington?*

WALKER: That's a great question, and it underscores the perennial tension between Washington and the field. The policy top lines come from Washington. Obviously, embassies cannot create policy as they go along—they are implementors, not designers.

At the same time, the embassies know how best to frame and contextualize the policy. The field should be fully empowered to decide how and when and to whom the message should be delivered, what to emphasize, and what to soft pedal. That should not be Washington's call.

*Q: What is the best way to evaluate the success, then, of posts that are trying to do this?*

WALKER: Public diplomacy is charged with influencing people's behaviors and perceptions—but no one can prove conclusively that a particular program or message changed someone's mind.

Now there are many things that can be done to assess public attitudes and perceptions. Polling and surveys; commentary on and reactions to traditional and social media platforms through editorials, placements, rebroadcasts, retweets, re-publications; audience size, the number of readers, viewers, listeners, likes, and downloads, the list goes on.

Knowing where your audience stands on the issues allows you to frame your policy advocacy and messaging in terms that will resonate. The idea is to use the evidence from past behaviors and outcomes to shape future approaches.

*Q: Okay. Oh, I do have one more question: In today's Foreign Service or today's State Department, if somebody wanted to enter the field of public diplomacy, what would you recommend them to do in terms of preparation?*

WALKER: First, I don't distinguish between cones or specializations in making recommendations. I would tell a would be public diplomacy officer what I would tell a future management, consular, political, or economic officer. Read widely. Stay on top of current issues. Know some world history and geography. Know our history. Have some exposure to economics, social sciences, art, culture, literature. Hone your drafting and briefing skills. Think critically. Keep an open mind. Above all, be curious.

*Q: Very good. Alright. To the extent that you supervised Foreign Service officers, have you seen improvements? Not so much improvement? How would you describe the Service today, at least in terms of its public diplomacy function?*

WALKER: In my experience, the quality of officers has been consistently high. What has changed, at least for the PD function, unfortunately, is the growing deficit of early career public diplomacy training and mentorship opportunities. USIA's now defunct junior officer training program provided a yearlong embassy wide orientation program followed by a second year as an assistant information or cultural affairs officer positions under the direct supervision of an experienced PD officer.

In the absence of that intensive preparation, you cannot expect the rising generation of Public Diplomacy officers to have the skills and experience that my cohort possessed. Add to that the fact that incoming PD officers often spend one or two tours in the consular section before taking on their first PD job, often a mid-level position for which they have not been fully prepared. Yet the performance expectations have not changed. That's unfair to the officers—and to the profession.

*Q: That basically concludes my questions. There may be things that I have not asked you that you would like to comment on, looking back on your career.*

WALKER: I would just say that I gravitated towards assignments that seemed interesting, or exciting, or posed a unique set of challenges. Although the promotions came quickly, that's not what motivated me. Satisfying my curiosity and sense of adventure did. And I was fortunate enough to be able to do both throughout my career. I'm truly grateful for having been given the opportunity to serve our country in this way.

*Q: That sounds like a good place to end the interview. I would like to thank you, on behalf of ADST, for being willing to share your story of service with us. We'll end the interview here, and I'll stop the recording.*

*End of interview*