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AMBASSADOR EARL ANTHONY WAYNE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning, this is September 17, 2021, and we are continuing our interviews with Ambassador Wayne. So, Tony, I wanted to talk a little bit about the economic issues that you probably dealt with during your time in Argentina. There had been a massive default in Argentina of foreign bonds. And the deal had been such of 30 percent of the dollar that not everybody took that deal. And I think it came up again during your time. So, can you describe what was going on with American bondholders?

WAYNE: Yes. I think most U.S. bondholders did not take the deal, and some of the European bondholders didn't either. A few did take it. And I remember there was a particular humanitarian concern over a group of Italian retirees who had invested in these bonds in a group effort, and they lost a lot of money, and these were retired people. So that was difficult to consider. But from the United States' point of view, the bonds largely had been rebought by larger companies that they wanted to get more return than the 30 percent or so that had been offered initially and accepted by some. I'm trying to remember it might've been most of the bond holders, but you had a lot of bond holders and important holdouts. Elliot and Company was one of the big holdouts, and the government of Argentina called these the "vulture" companies.

Ambassador Wayne

Q: And this is because they had bought them for pennies on the dollar. And now they were coming after the government?

WAYNE: That's right. They bought the bonds at a very inexpensive price, and they were now coming back to get something higher than 30 percent as part of the negotiation and via going to court in the U.S. to try to seize Argentine assets in order to press the government to be more responsive. A big challenge for the government of Argentina was they could not borrow on the international market with so many outstanding disagreements over their previous bonds. Their credit rating was just too low. Nobody would lend to them. They couldn't get a good IMF program going forward, either for this and other problems with their economic policies. Just a lot of problems. They didn't want to pay more money, because they didn't feel they could either economically or politically in their country. A deal might look like they were bending to the "vultures," while suffering continued at home among Argentines. This was all part of this blaming that continued—the fault for the crisis was portrayed as falling on the United States, the international financial system and the international lenders—all part of the "Washington consensus" that entrapped Argentina, in the view of many in Argentina's government. Yes of course, there were international lenders and accepted international norms in the 1990s, but it was governments in Argentina that did the deals and misspend the money, right? Nobody was forcing them to take the deals. They took them. They misused it. They borrowed more money and often acted irresponsibly with financial and economic policies at home.

But in any case, our task, at this time, was trying to facilitate a solution that was good for and acceptable to Argentina, to the bondholders, to the International Monetary Fund, and to the main international players. In no way did we support any specifics as to what kind of an outcome there should be. This was to be negotiated between the Argentinian government and as large a group of the bondholders so that they could get together to accept this. And so, a lot of what we did was just trying to urge the Argentine government to have serious negotiations, because they could get a lot of additional capital, which they needed to boost their economy again, if they could reach a solution. Up for grabs was not just how much you paid back of the original value of the bonds, but over what time period, you know, all the conditions around that. There was a lot to be negotiated.

Q: I think I read something about the final deal that came to fruition, I don't know, in 2019 or sometime relatively recently. And then at the bottom it said, which is about 30 percent. I don't know if what I read was correct, but you know, it's very complicated to know what deal might be possible.

WAYNE: That's right. It is, because of all the conditions and the final deals were negotiated by the Macri government, which was not the government as was in place when I was there, but it took all that time. And there were a couple of things, one, and we went through a bunch of different finance ministers and negotiators, even in my time. And then there were more after I left, right? So it's hard to be a five minutes minister and survive. And there was a guy named Lavanya who was one of their best known. He was briefly finance minister during my time. But he was one of their best-known negotiators. He ran for president subsequently long after I left, and Macri came to power in that time period. In any case one of the finance ministers later became ambassador to Washington.

And there were a bunch of different ones. And there was a Central Bank governor, which was very important also because the government was always looking for new sources of money. It was always trying to squeeze the Central Bank. And while I was there, the Central Bank governors were firm about, this is what we can do and can't do. After I left, the government replaced the Central Bank governor with whom I had worked very well and appointed a new one that allow them to do different things to meet their financial needs more easily. The government also took over the independent retirement funds after I left.

Q: And that was in order that was to fund government services?

WAYNE: Exactly because they were looking for money. And that search for money led to big tensions between the rural population who were making a lot, a lot of money relatively because it's such a fertile place and they could sell their agricultural produce. And there was a big demand in the world market. So, they increased export taxes on this in order to get federal government revenues that led the farmers to not export their stuff, but to store it. And then the government went around finding ways to suppress them, including reportedly getting some hooligans to go out and set some of the grains on fire, you know, in the storage fields and things like that. In turn that helped spur big protests in the cities where especially the middle class, would go out at night and clang pots together and things to show that they weren't happy with the government. And they were doing that a lot during my time in support of farmers and that, you know, and opposed to the

government, because they felt the farmers were being unduly penalized by the government, but the government was looking for money.

Q: Right, right. I didn't realize, I didn't realize before I started looking into this, that Argentina had export taxes before that. The one aspect of what happened in that part of the world was global. Climate change had made the soybean fertile area kind of moved down into Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. I don't know where else. So soybean was a big crop, right?

WAYNE: Yes. And there was big demand from China as well as other places, but China was the big new buyer in the market.

Q: That's right. And what I remember since I was in Montevideo for some of your time there was that the smoke from the fields burning was so bad that it came across the river, the Plate River to make life rather unbearable, even for us, some miles away,

WAYNE: Yes, this was a rigorous domestic dispute over this. And what they did was they just hiked those export taxes significantly. So, you know, the farmers just felt that was unfair. They didn't necessarily oppose any export tax, but they were saying, this is just making it impossible for us to make a living.

Anyway, that's going on most everywhere, looking for money. And they also were trying to extort money from businesses. So, they had this one famous internal commerce minister kind of named Moreno. And he was famous for, at one point in negotiating with people and threatening them. At one point, he put a gun down, a pistol down on the table, but of course that story, immediately got out and went all over. A number of times, we had to intervene just especially for American companies.

We couldn't intervene for all companies, but for American companies, we would intervene to say, you have to treat them fairly, you know, you can't do this or we're going to have to respond. And, and generally they held back with international companies. Not totally, but generally. There were some problems that we had, some specific ones, which the government didn't like when I complained about them even when I tried to do it privately. You know, no, no, you're interfering our domestic affairs. Well, it's the same thing. I deal with the Europeans all the time. If we disagree with you, tell each other what we did. Well, not here. And I said, well, why not here? So, you know, we had to work this all through

Q: And that's, that's what U.S. ambassadors do is advocate for fair treatment for their companies. Did the financial problems? Was that part of the reason that Argentina started getting so close to Venezuela under Chavez?

WAYNE: I think it was, that they saw it as a source of money and that, that, that and, and clearly some money. I have no idea how much some money did come down from Venezuela to help them. And I think that was one of the motivations. I mean, I think that Cristina Fernandez to Kirshner was by nature by her youth, more Chavista in her thinking, I think she'd grown up in universities. What I got from talking to her, she's still vice-president. So I'll be, she was very sympathetic with that kind of thinking. And she had a number of advisors around her that were sympathetic, less so with her husband. For

him, he was just a hard, and he played the left because he knew that could get him certain things. And he played with Venezuela because if he needed money, he could get money.

But it wasn't so much out of ideology as it was. I am steering my way to maintain power and influence here. And then all the time as this was going on, they had a bunch of buddies and friends who were skimming money off also, in getting special contracts and the money would be made off of those, those concessions or those contracts. And it was, as I mentioned earlier, where that one Argentine businessman said when I first got, remember this a digital economy– you know, if the president's digit points to you, you get the concession or you get the thing. So they were using that as had other Argentine presidents, to be fair. So they had a cluster of favored business people.

Q: And in I think they call it clientelist regimes or something like that.

WAYNE: Argentine client relationships are very important. And that included the Kirschner family. I mean, they got their own fair amount of cuts from various of these things, including a lot of hotels that they developed and land that they got down near El Calafate where they were from. And kickbacks, I think from other people along the way. And there was this whole system of kickbacks going on, which got revealed in part under the Macri administration. But the, but the archetype justice system was so effective that even when you had a president who wanted to reveal and then convict people, it couldn't move quickly to investigate and reveal them. But it, what it did reveal is people testified about delivering cash in sacks to various people, including why this guy who was the planning minister, who I used to have to go deal with all the time.

And it was clear just from dealing with him that he was not Mr. Transparency and Mr. Good ethical government, you know, but he was the most powerful economic minister. So we had to go in and talk to him and deal with them and try and get solutions. And generally when we focused on a specific problem and we got to fix this, he would, you know, would be responsive. He wouldn't just say now, after, after first protest, he, of course we shouldn't do that. And everything that he actually got around to doing it. But we knew we suspected all along. This guy was not crystal clean. (laughs)

Q: We haven't mentioned the pulp mills. I don't know if it was a very big issue for you at the time, but do you want to tell that story?

WAYNE: Yeah. That was a big issue for Uruguay. Yeah. So you have to help me remember. I remember that Nestor Kirchner closed down a bridge.

Q: So what happened was there was a Finnish company that was looking around for where to invest in a pulp mill. One of the industries that climate change had all of a sudden made possible in this part of the world was fast-growing trees. So for some reason the Argentines thought they should have it. And they tried maybe some of the tactics that you alluded to.

WAYNE: Like bribery. (laughs)

Q: But the Finnish company said, no, we want to go to Uruguay, where they didn't have quite that problem. And the trees grow just as fast. (laughs)

WAYNE: The Argentines said, no, no, we have an agreement that allows us a veto on anything that gets built on this river. Uruguay said, no, it doesn't. The treaty just says we have to consult. It doesn't give you a veto. And you know, we're going to go ahead and do this.

So in response, I remember one of the things Mr. Kirchner did was to block transit across this very important bridge connecting the two countries, causing people to go way up to the north to cross a small river crossing further up,

Q: I remember in February, 2008, the Finnish company's CEO came to Uruguay. And he made a very good speech. He said, "You know, we also live next to a powerful, big country," the implication being that Argentina was big and overbearing like Russia. "So we understand, we feel very close to you." But I guess that was not a big headache for you all in Argentina.

WAYNE: No, it was more just observing, it was another practice of that type. The other big thing that happened between Uruguay and Argentina is a lot of Argentines moved their money from Argentina to Uruguay and stashed it there in the banks. And for a while, as you know, Uruguay had a very bad reputation for lack of transparency on the money front. In subsequent years, they began to clean that up. And especially in the last seven, eight years, you know, they've gotten a lot better at it. But during that period of time, there was a lot of Argentine money there that came in because these individuals didn't want the government to tax it or otherwise take it away. And that was a legitimate complaint. And there were, I remember there were a couple of Uruguayan brothers who had owned a bank in Argentina. They'd moved it all out and hadn't paid any depositors and other things. So there were legitimate complaints, you know, as well as exaggerated complaints in the behavior between the two neighbors.

Q: But going back to Venezuela. So, Venezuela created an organization called ALBA. Do you remember, besides Chavez coming to Argentina when the US president was in Montevideo, do you remember anything else that was important in your relations with the Argentine government related to dealings with Venezuela or ALBA?

WAYNE: They joined ALBA and they were very supportive of all the different institutions, including a bank that they wanted to set up among the Bolivarian countries may join that and CELAC was something else because the Venezuelans liked it and Bolivia. They were close to the regime in Bolivia also, right.

Q: It just seemed a little odd—because Argentina is such a modern country, really, a prosperous country with a lot—going for it to be so closed.

WAYNE: It felt the international system had abused it. And that, it made it suffer. And for this government, particularly that meant you needed a more independent and nationalist approach. And they had this need for funding and Chavez at that time had a lot of money because of his oil. It was before the Venezuelan economy really tanked. That attraction became less strong once Chavez didn't have money to give out to people. But, you know, we would talk to them about how we didn't think this was wise but what are you going to

do? They weren't doing anything, they were joining the group, but they weren't actively doing things.

Q: So for us, it was just mostly troublesome UN votes on the side of Venezuela and Cuba, right?

WAYNE: Yes, and then at G-20 meetings, they would make, you know, outrageous long talks, especially Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner would just talk longer than any other leader, and everybody would just be rolling their eyes. Like, "why did we let Argentina into the G-20" kind of thinking. They didn't do a lot of things during my years there that were harmful per se, I would say,

Q: Well, so tell me the story of who approached who about having you go from there to Afghanistan. That seems like a big change.

WAYNE: It was a big change. I was back in Washington on consultations at the beginning of the Obama administration and trying to figure out what I would do next, because my normal rotation was supposed to be out of Argentina in the summer of 2009. I was walking down one of the hallways up on the seventh floor by the under secretary of economics' office, where I had just met with the under secretary to talk about things like Argentine debt. And out of the men's restroom comes Frank Ricciardone who'd been an ambassador to Egypt and with whom I had worked a bit in the European Bureau and from EB.

He said hi and I asked what he was doing. And he said, "Oh, I'm going to work with Richard Holbrooke on this new civilian upsurge in Afghanistan." And then he said, "Would you be interested in doing that? We need somebody. We were just talking about somebody to oversee all the non-military economic and development programs there. We have a lot of money, but we're not really using the funds in a coordinated way. And we were thinking of increasing the programing and improving the results. And we're thinking of this as part of the new civilian surge. We'd like to bring in more senior people to work more effectively with U.S. agencies, with the military and with the Afghans."

I said, "Wow, thanks very much. That sounds very interesting. Let me think about that and discuss it with my wife." I went home and talked to my wife about both of us going to work in Afghanistan after Argentina and being part of this new effort under President Obama. As we thought about it, we agreed we'd like to learn more.

Q: Was he going to let your wife go? That isn't too easy in these unaccompanied posts.

WAYNE: Well, that was one of the things that he said, that the new chief of mission, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, was very supportive of having spouses go if they worked, as he wanted his spouse to go to work. And Frank Ricciardone's spouse was going to go and work also. So, with that, we said, Yes we would like to pursue this option. I went and interviewed with Ambassador Holbrooke. I had worked with him a long time before when he was assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, as the staff member in the Executive Secretariat for his bureau. I worked with him a little bit in EUR [Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs] when he was a special representative for Southwest

Europe. He was sort of like a whirling dervish in that former Yugoslavia job. In some ways a bull in a China shop, but a bull that got results.

Q: Yeah. He didn't just crack the crockery.

WAYNE: He cracked crockery, but he got results. I had remembered him from when he was assistant secretary in East Asia, which was when I first met him way back, and he had been very nice to me. The first meeting in which I took notes for a secretary of state was with Holbrooke and Secretary Muskie. I remember it vividly because Muskie was exhausted and kept nodding off during the conversation with New Zealand's foreign minister. Holbrooke just turned on his booming voice to revive both the conversation and the secretary [in a nice and effective way].

Q: What year are we now? What year did you go to Afghanistan?

WAYNE: It's in 2009. This was early in 2009, probably February or maybe March when I interviewed. So anyway, they agreed to bring me on board to oversee the civilian assistance programs and our economic and assistance dialogues with the Afghan government [which included law enforcement and justice assistance too]. They wanted me to come up to Washington to start preparing and meeting the Afghanistan crowd. I remember Holbrooke telling me, "And we're going to have this big, giant civilian-military gathering to talk about a strategy on Afghanistan. You come up and talk to us about corruption. What's the best way to deal with corruption?"

Ambassador Wayne with Richard Holbrooke

Of course, you know, (laughs) I had no good solutions for how to reduce corruption in Afghanistan, but from Argentina, I tried to put a presentation together, talking to people long distance, and then I went up to this meeting where they had hundreds of people gathered, and I gave a little talk about what we could do. I guess it was good enough, but I know it could have been much better if I had been able to talk to more experts. Nevertheless, it let me focus on what I subsequently concluded was a great weak point in our entire effort to support the Kabul government—widespread corruption in the government's ranks made it very hard to promote the government as a trusted, legitimate alternative to the Taliban. Many Afghan people, I came to understand, saw both as very bad and predatory, in their own ways.

My wife and I agreed to go to Kabul in early June with her to work at the embassy in a chain of command separated from my responsibilities [which turned out to be working as a community liaison officer], and we asked that my wife and I could return to the U.S. in August to attend our son's wedding. The powers in charge agreed.

My wife and I left Argentina in early June. We made a brief stop in Washington for consultations, and then we flew to Afghanistan via Dubai. We both started working right away in Kabul.

One of the big culture shocks and living style changes was, as we mentioned, I had this forty-two thousand square foot ambassador's residence in Argentina, and my wife and I moved into a one-bedroom apartment in a staff housing building in Afghanistan. It was a clean and efficient but little, teeny one-bedroom apartment [and of course, without staff]. The whole move to a secure compound in a very third world city with Taliban attacks taking place around Kabul, all made for a significant cultural shock. (laughs) Wow, okay, here we are. But we got right to work. Our colleagues were very welcoming, and we all were very busy.

I was starting to build a brand-new office to coordinate economic and development issues and non-military aid programs, and my wife started to serve as one of the two community liaison officers [CLO] for this rapidly growing embassy. In her second year, my wife worked for USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development], running the orientation program for all their incoming staff members.

People were really working long hours trying to ramp up and improve our efforts to help the Afghan government and people with civilian assistance programs and to improve coordination with the U.S. and international military mission [known as ISAF, the International Security Force, established in 2001 and which lasted until 2014] as it was also growing. This effort was trying to correct and make up for the reduction in attention and resources when the Bush administration turned its attention to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the gigantic effort to secure Iraq and provide assistance to a reconstituted set of Iraqi authorities. The USG [United States government] had significantly reduced attention and resources devoted to Afghanistan. President Obama came into office with the idea that we should turn down our involvement in Iraq and try to get out of that situation [a good idea in my mind, as I saw the invasion of Iraq as a strategic mistake with massive costs for the U.S. and not at all linked to countering al Qaeda]. But Obama concluded that we should try to revive the effort in Afghanistan to see if we could get a

good outcome in some way. What was "winning" in Afghanistan still needed to be defined, however. It was not clear to me or to many of my colleagues what was needed or desirable to have a more positive outcome for this intervention.

Obama and his team recognized correctly, I believe, that part of the problem of the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan was the United States had not really been paying attention, either to deal with their rebuilding in Pakistan and around parts of Afghanistan or to explore paths to reconciliation and peace for a very poor country too long caught up in conflict. So, there was a policy effort going on to define what this surge on the military and civilian side should look like and what we should see as our medium- and longer-term objectives. And, very specifically on the practical day-to-day spectrum, trying to figure out what combination of policies and what kinds and numbers of people were needed and what programs and deployments would be needed in Kabul and around the country. Plus, on the civilian side, we soon realized that we did not have the people readily available to fill the positions needed or with the expertise needed. And this turned out to be, I think, the biggest civilian surge in a short period of time in modern U.S. history.

And our civilian departments [State and USAID] were not ready for this kind of effort. We were defining, inventing, building, and doing all at the same time we were engaged in a serious ongoing conflict. And most people on the civilian side were only coming for a one-year tour with regular rest and recuperation breaks built in and arriving with hardly any understanding of Afghanistan. Plus, all of us felt the pressure to deliver change, transformation, and results quickly, when many of us knew that it takes a long time to transform economies, societies, and political systems. We were eager to try, but this was a very tough and demanding situation.

Q: And it was going on while you were there?

WAYNE: It started a little bit before I got there, but then really ramped up. It was late spring and summer when it ramped up and then it kept going through my first year there, reaching it peak in 2011, I believe, with President Obama announcing a withdrawal plan in June 2011, following the May 2011 successful operation against al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

President Obama had approved the idea of a surge in February 2009. ISAF Commander Stanley McChrystal asked for more troops in September 2009, and the president subsequently approved that. The U.S. ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, supported by the rest of us argued for a different approach with a longer time horizon for assistance to have more impact on Afghan institutions that fall, but did not carry the day. General McCrystal with whom we had workable relations, but at times, the cooperation was strained and the differences sharp. He was replaced by General David Petraeus in June 2010. Working relations with Petraeus were much smoother. We shared views about the importance of a strong civilian assistance effort, and he has a very sophisticated view of what was needed to make gains in Afghanistan.

Q: So, the front office in Kabul's embassy had a lot of both generals and ambassadors, is that right?

WAYNE: What Holbrooke, Eikenberry, and others tried to do was to reflect the needs of an embassy working in a warzone with a hundred thousand plus military and many multi-star generals and the consensus that we needed a strong civilian effort and expertise. Previously, the structure of the embassy had been similar to other embassies in the world [an ambassador and deputy chief of mission], except for USUN [U.S. Mission to the United Nations], where we have several ambassadors, and effectively what they were doing was making this a little bit more like USUN with multiple ambassadors. But the reason they did it was not because as they do it with the UN there are different committees where you need ambassador level people to lead those committees. It was in large part because there were so many generals in country. There was one four-star general and many three-star generals. And the three-star generals just wouldn't easily talk to a political counselor or an economic counselor seriously. I mean, they often wouldn't work with them as equals. So very correctly, Karl Eikenberry, the ambassador who had been a three-star general in Afghanistan himself argued that the embassy needed ambassadorial titles for key sectors of work going forward.

Eikenberry knew this from firsthand experience (laughs) and said, "No, we need ambassadorial titled folks," and Holbrooke agreed, to get the attention of people. So, in that first year we had a deputy ambassador who was Frank Ricciardone. He was like a COO [chief operating officer] and would fill in for the ambassador. We had an assistant chief of mission who was Joe Mussomeli. He oversaw the mechanics of building up the embassy. We had me as the coordinating director for development and economic affairs. I was to oversee all the USG civilian assistance programs and all our teams in the field. This encompassed USAID, State assistance [Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement and others], other USG agencies [Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, United States Department of Agriculture, and others]. And then, in my second year there, we added another ambassador which was to oversee the law enforcement and rule of law, because there was so much to do for me to oversee effectively. In the first year, I oversaw both law enforcement and rule of law and all the economic activities, but we split that for the next year. There was also a counterpart three-star admiral with which that new ambassador, Hans Klemm, could partner. I would just not have been able to do that.

And so, the idea with these, so for ambassadors the first year, and then five in the second year was that we would pair up people with different three stars on the military side, and this would make it easier to have more joint, more collaborative, work.

And part of the reason for doing this was a recognition that you really needed to take a whole of government approach going forward if we wanted to achieve more rapidly. And that collaboration had not been happening. There was just so much going on, so many different things, that there really was not a united civilian-military approach. Neither was there a united approach within the military or within the civilian side. There was a lot of lack of coordination. And that was a very serious problem.

Q: And were all those agencies there? Treasury and AID and not MCC [Millennium Challenge Corporation] obviously, but Agriculture and others?

WAYNE: Yes, I oversaw, in my first year there, seven hundred U.S. officers or equivalent, over 150 Afghans, three billion dollars worth of programs. They were from USAID, the State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Marshal Service, and the Federal Aviation Administration. Then, we added a couple more during that year that came in. So, we had all these people. And then at the same time as part of this uplift, we weren't just building up Kabul, we were sending civilians out to be with military units at over twenty places around the country. We had to hire many civilian experts directly under special hiring provisions to meet all our needs. This was a very complicated process to help oversee.

Q: Are they called PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] there like they were in Iraq?

WAYNE: They were. The civilians were also to be advisors to the military commanders, I mean the local U.S. military commanders running the PRTs.

So, when we were joking about all of this build up, we would say, it's like we're flying an airplane into combat. The airplane needs to be repaired while we're flying. We're changing crews while you're flying on your mission. We're getting enemy fire while flying missions. And we're trying to adapt your mission also, and at the same time we're working with constant supervision and communication and shifting guidance from headquarters.

Q: (laughs) And you didn't have time to learn because you were only in the job most of the time for one year, right?

WAYNE: Yeah, that's right. Most everybody was only there for one year. So, it was a very steep learning curve. A lot of people didn't learn enough, fast enough. We didn't know enough about the country we were in. You had to build relationships very quickly, both within your own team, with all the other international partners that were there, and with the Afghans.

And when I arrived there were no coordinating mechanisms adapted to this complicated situation, even within the embassy. And there were no coordinating mechanisms with the ISAF, which was a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] command, and there were not good coordinating mechanisms with other donors! And there were not effective coordinating mechanisms with the Afghans that worked! I mean, it's not that nobody talked, but there were just not working coordinating mechanisms to assure regular dialogue on progress or problems.

Q: So, they found the right person in you, right?

WAYNE: A big part of what I did was defined to get people to agree to do this and to find a partner on the military side, and then to find partners in the Afghan government, and then to build these ways of talking to each other. And it was hard to do.

And then, as I said, while we were doing this, we were trying to get final agreement on the strategy. And so, the military commander, Stan McChrystal had one view of what we

should do, which was to really ramp up the military presence significantly. The embassy, led by Karl Eikenberry and the rest of us, had a different strategy, which was not to ramp up the military presence so much right away, but to plan for a longer period, ramp up the military presence and for civilian and military assistance to produce good results among the Afghans. The idea was to get bigger changes by extending the timeframe for assistance—very few years and get a bigger set of needed changes.

As I recall, our proposal was to have to plan for a longer period. And this, if we're really going to change Afghanistan, it's going to take five or more years of constant high levels of assistance. To bring about the institutional changes that are needed for them to effectively be seen as the legitimate government and to be able to effectively resist the Taliban will take longer than a couple of years. Eikenberry argued that the president of Afghanistan, Karzai, was not a credible partner for a rapid buildup and success. (laughs) And that part got leaked to the press. And that destroyed Eikenberry's relationship with Karzai. Somebody in Washington decided to leak that cable, and it caused great damage.

Q: Who said it, the ambassador?

WAYNE: Several cables, we put our proposals in written cables to Washington. And they were very limited distribution, you know, eyes-only cables, but they were leaked to the press by either somebody who didn't like it, or somebody who didn't like McCrystal, but whatever, the effect was that it undermined the credibility of Ambassador Eikenberry [and the embassy] with the president of Afghanistan. Eikenberry was writing what he sincerely believed about Karzai's weaknesses. He was not arguing to replace Karzai but was flagging his shortcomings for trying to implement McCrystal's proposed strategy. And I came to conclude that Eikenberry was right.

In any case, McChrystal's plan took the day, and Obama approved it, but as he approved it, he announced at the same time that this was only going to be a two-year surge. So immediately from our perspective, we just thought, The Taliban can say, two years. Well, okay, we'll wait that out. Because they don't have to worry as much about increased U.S. military pressure, because they can retreat into Pakistan if needed! And this Pakistan haven will be a serious problem.

And so, then this weakness eventually led to the U.S. effort to send drones into Pakistan, which led to deterioration of relations with Pakistan. But we never really effectively could get at their safe haven areas in Pakistan. And it was a flawed strategy from many angles to begin with. And then at the same time, right, we're still trying hard to get everybody together and to work together and do as much as we could to make progress.

By the fall of my first year in Kabul, it became clear that the corruption in Afghanistan was very serious. (laughs) It seemed to be pervasive, and it went right up to the president's palace. It didn't apparently involve him, but it involved several people around him. It became clear to me that his power within Afghanistan was based on a patron-client relationship [not ideology or doctrine]. And so, his chief of staff and others in the palace would hand out money to people to meet the needs of those individuals and their localities or clans or family groups, you know, without even knowing where the money came from. Well, we do know where much of the funds came from. It came from

parts of the United States government, but as far as I could discern, who the money was handed out to wasn't controlled by those parts of the U.S. government that supplied the funds. They just handed out to different people to cement support for the president.

And then a number of people around the president and related to him, not surprisingly, were corrupt. They would give out certain deals and access, and contracts for money. You know, some of this happens everywhere, but the problem was that the public could see this system in action in various ways and in various parts of the country, especially when the government was not good in delivering public services. And so, while the system cemented support for the president, it simultaneously undermined the credibility of the government, especially because it was so widespread and repeated in other institutions. When you had so much corruption at so many different levels, people came to resent that they did not benefit, and the government was not functioning well. Certainly, everybody in the government was not involved, and the benefits were not massive for everybody, but there were a lot of people for whom the benefits provided big homes, cars, private security, et cetera. It was visible, and it affected the perceived legitimacy of the government of Afghanistan.

Q: Did the failure of the Bank of Kabul, did that occur in your time?

WAYNE: That scandal became public in the second year that I was in Kabul. I think the reports of corruption emerged in August 2010. And that was of course a dramatic example of this corruption-ridden system and the lack of accountability. And it also highlighted the problem we had with our aid programs. So now let me shift to our aid programs, since we had a technical assistance program with contractors working at the Central Bank helping them to strengthen their supervision of banks, and Kabul Bank was the biggest of the private banks.

We were trying to pump all sorts of money very quickly into all sorts of assistance programs. Some of those programs were well-designed and they were thoughtful. Many of them, however, were only going to work over a long period of time, and for many we did not have good monitoring and evaluation systems in place. And you have to carefully watch them because if you start putting too much money in a society with weak institutions and different ethical rules than we're used to, a lot of funding gets diverted to family, friends, and, you know, Afghanistan is a society where you have to take care of your family. You're expected to support them. Plus, you have inefficiencies of implementers, and as I mentioned serious challenges monitoring implementation and evaluating results. Plus, many of our contracting officers were handling portfolios much larger than was the norm elsewhere in the world, because of the shortage of staff, the abundance of funding, and the pressure to start programs and get results.

And so, you can understand the serious challenges, but then we added all this money and then all the money on the military side, which of course was much more than on the civilian side. So, there was massive leakage out of that funding into the society and many Afghans seeking to benefit. Some for good and some for bad, because the programs and some of the leakage also kept people working. But anyway, we had these big programs.

We were trying to surge. We had let's say a mixed quality of staff because we were trying to entice people to come to Afghanistan. We got a lot of people who were not good officers, on the State side, the AID side, and among contractors and other agency folk. I mean, they were maybe adequate, but mediocre. And so, you get mediocre or bad officers coming in as well as a good core of solid and excellent, hardworking officers.

And now we were hiring people out of the general economy because we didn't have enough AID or State officers. This was a massive effort I had to spend time on. I'd be on the phone with the deputy secretary of state every week or other week, going through each of the positions and asking if we found somebody for this position or that position and seeing how many vacancies we still had. It was pretty amazing to have so many high-level officials going over these details each week, but it was a very high priority to staff the civilian surge. We'd ask if the Department of Agriculture or other agencies had found somebody to come to fill this position or that position. And some of the people found were good and other people, you know, just worked.

I remember one day I saw some people arrive who had been hired as part of this process, and they couldn't even carry their own bags off the bus to the temporary bunks because they were of a certain generation, let's say, and I'm sure they were very intellectually capable, but not physically capable—and they were supposed to go out to the field, not stay in Kabul! I specifically used that example to have us add some additional quality controls.

And so, you were getting people that had questionable skills, people who had questionable endurance to go live in the countryside with our military colleagues in some of these tough places. And then just some people were just bad performers and/or just there for the money. We had serious social and behavior problems too as you might imagine. We faced drinking problems and sexual morality problems and everything else that comes from being isolated and under pressure and stress. This was all going on at the same time. I mean, it was, you had to manage all of this. Plus, there were serious morale problems with people working very hard and having poor accommodations. We had to hear people out and try to find solutions. I remember, for example, getting to hear out people who were very upset not to be able to have feral cats as pets, and others who wanted the cats banned for health reasons.

So, to come back to the Kabul Bank example: we had twelve or fourteen advisors at the Central Bank providing technical assistance as the Central Bank sought to supervise and audit Kabul Bank and others. This was a sizable USAID program aimed at improving practices and capacities. But the advisors and the Central Bank did not catch this, and they did not catch the billion dollars' worth of fraud and embezzlement that was going on in the bank of Kabul! To be fully honest, the Central Bank's governor said he and his staff had suspicions about the bank but were not able/willing to probe too much, given that one of the leading figures in the scandal was a brother of the president.

You know, I don't know in all honesty, whether the advisors we had supplied the bank weren't very good or if they didn't have access, but it was really embarrassing. As I understood the assistance program, the advisors were supposed to be looking at the way the Central Bank was doing its supervisory work. Why had they not picked up or reported

any hints of the problem? With a reported one billion dollars of embezzlement, I asked why we didn't have some signs of problems. The illegal activity was discovered by U.S. officials working on illicit finance issues and looking for drug-related illicit flows. But they often uncovered evidence of other corruption in the process. And so, in addition to uncovering a massive corruption scheme among elites, including a close relation of the president, it also underscored that we were trying to do too much, with too few people, in too rapid a period. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace did a very good study on the illicit financial flows related to this case in 2020.

Q: So just to clarify what happened. The Bank of Kabul was a private bank or a state bank? If I recall, they took deposits and so when they crumbled, everybody lost their savings. Right?

WAYNE: That is correct. It was the first private bank that was set up, but it was under the supervision of the Central Bank. And this fraud was discovered in 2010, but it started happening earlier. And what happened was the owners of the bank were shifting money out of the country, mostly to Dubai as I recall. So, we had advisors at the Central Bank working to strengthen the supervision of all the private banks, because we imagined that the banks were involved in questionable and probably illegal activities. The Central Bank found a number of irregularities working with the support of our advisors, but they missed these sizable outflows. And so, the money was flowing out despite the Central Bank supposedly overseeing this process and supposedly auditing the Kabul Bank's activities.

In addition to the Central Bank of Afghanistan, part of the Ministry of Finance was supposed to be overseeing it. And we and other donors had advisors at the Ministry of Finance and they were supposed to be working to make sure that Afghanistan's financial oversight system was working well. But it wasn't working well, and they did not catch this, and likely other bad practices.

And then we add in that one of the Karzai brothers was involved in this scandal as one of the big holders in Kabul Bank, as well as the chairman of the bank and well-known and well-connected Afghans. So, it looked even worse.

And then when the Central Bank governor tried to investigate it after the fact, he was pretty embarrassed himself to discover that this was all going on and he didn't see it. And he basically got fired or got pressured to the point that he had to resign and leave the country. I think he was getting too close to corruption by powerful and wealthy Afghans and felt danger to his life. And so, he had to leave the country and went to the United States where he is a tax accountant in northern Virginia. He subsequently wrote a book in the U.S. with his side of the story.

So anyway, a really disturbing point was, of course, that we were supposed to be aiding both of these government ministries to oversee the system, and it hadn't been working. And again, I don't know for sure who might've been to blame. And I mean, clearly the people who were doing it were not paying close enough attention.

But what it led me to discover when this happened was that our AID officers were overseeing program portfolios that were much, much larger than they would do anywhere else in the world. They didn't have the time and, you know, the human capacity to watch each of these programs as closely as they would have done in another country. I was also very grateful for our treasury and law enforcement teams who were tracking down illicit finances. They uncovered many really concerning illicit flows [see the 2020 Carnegie study]. Sadly, however, we were not able to operationalize or systematize going after and bring to justice many corrupt individuals. I thought at the time that if there could be a few big arrests and convictions, that would send valuable signals to others involved in corruption. But were unable to get a concerted effort mounted. I think some people feared the political costs to our close Afghan allies might be too high. But at least after the Kabul Bank scandal broke, Washington dispatched the deputy secretary of treasury to Kabul to demand action and the U.S. and others imposed sanctions on some of the financial entities involved. Some of the Afghans involved also eventually went to jail and some, but not all, of the stolen funds were recovered.

Returning to our aid programs, of course the U.S. supervising and contracting officers couldn't freely go out to look at a lot of the projects. They would have to arrange special security to travel to many projects. If the projects were outside of Kabul that meant asking the military for protection. The USAID and INL officers could get to the bases and the PRTs, but then they had to have a military escort to get to the program sites—and the military often and understandably had other priorities.

Ambassador Wayne visiting a USAID project

The Kabul Bank scandal really got me to focus on how much we were asking these contracting and program officers to do. And I already knew that they were a mixed quality because when I had questioned them about different program goals, processes, and results. A lot of them didn't have good answers to my questions. And now I started to understand why even for good, hardworking officers, they may not be able to get good answers. Even with the surge, in a number of areas we didn't have enough expert people with the regular access needed. And some of them were doing super work and others were just not keeping up with what had to be done in this high-pressure environment.

I was discovering as I went forward, what some of the problems were. It took time to learn, but most people only stayed for a year which limited the learning opportunities. The same kind of challenges were happening in INL programs, and similarly on the military side and the military commanders. They were trying really hard to do the best they could, but there were serious knowledge gaps and few systems for tracking results and lessons to be learned. I came to understand that military units would go in and try to get the favor of local people by saying, what do you want, what do you need? And then they had money, so they could build a well, or build an irrigation ditch, but it had not been linked into any development plan. So maybe that, well, wasn't really the right thing they needed. Maybe they needed a dam further upstream, but nobody looked at that. So too often there wasn't a local development plan. And so, then the next commander would come in and say, what do you want? Somebody would say, we need this road here, but how did it fit with the other road? You know, the road network and all that. And it just wasn't happening because again, not out of ill will, but there was just so much going on and no easy ways of coordinating. To their credit, many military commanders wanted to have civilian development advisers with their unit and at the PRT or regional command.

So anyway, it comes back to a repeat theme—we were trying to do all sorts of stuff at the same time, and it was really hard to do in a way that produced good results and lessons that could be applied and shared going forward.

Now, we made progress over time. There were certain programs that got better because of enhanced scrutiny. There was better monitoring put in place. Different offices and units started to discover management and evaluation mechanisms that could help in a conflict environment. There was better planning and justification for why you were doing certain things.

We tried to do this within the civilian agencies and with our military counterparts. We set up these working groups between the military and the embassy that would meet on a regular basis and then report up, identify problems if there were problems that report up to the ambassador and the ICAF [Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework] commander that started working. And then we started bringing the Afghan ministers into that planning process, which had not been done before. In the second year I was there, we got the Afghans to participate in part of the planning with us, and then, you know, have their input, their feedback, and then get buy-in for where we were going.

But this needed to happen if we were to be more successful. It was going to have to happen over several years in a row, however. And it was just longer than the timeframe we had [or the personnel rotation system that we were working in].

I remember that at one point during this first year, one of the three-star generals got really just frustrated with us on the civilian side. He got on the horn with briefing all of his colonels and generals around the country. And he started cussing out USAID and the civilians for not doing enough. He was just frustrated, but we all heard about it.

Q: The end of that first year was not a happy time.

WAYNE: What that incident did was to force us to have frank conversations. In essence, we said look, guys, we know you're working hard, and you're trying to build governance stuff in a short period of time. But we don't believe it's going to work in such a short timeframe. We can make improvements and remove bad individual partners, but governance is not going to get fixed. You're not going to change people's behavior in a short period. It takes time to build institutions and to change ways of thinking. We want to be good partners and to help as best we can, but we need to be realistic about what is possible. We expressed understanding for their orders to produce results around Afghanistan in a very short timeframe, but we do not think you can expect big, lasting improvements in Afghan governance locally or nationally in the very short term. There can be improvements, but this will take concerted efforts to get Afghans to think and act differently and they will need enduring incentives and disincentives to learn and change. We'll do as best as we can to support you. And we'll work very closely with you.

Fortunately, by this time, General David Petraeus had become ISAF commander, and he understood these issues well. He was very supportive of better and closer dialogues and teamwork.

Q: And he became a big advocate for more resources for State, right? Or was that after him?

WAYNE: Well, he was also an advocate for an important civilian role and saw that as a vital part of a plan for success. And he believed it, and he understood it was going to take time.

Q: And he had worked in CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] and in Iraq.

WAYNE: Of course, this is what he'd done in Iraq. And he was brought in to replace McChrystal. McChrystal had never done this kind of whole of government strategy before. For example, McChrystal and his team, which included now well-known Major General Mike Flynn, had this idea of "government in a box" that we should get the Afghan government all prepared to come in right behind them and unveil a government in a box. Well, that was a non-starter. (laughs)

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Q: Good afternoon. It's October 1, 2021. And we're continuing our conversation with Tony Wayne. Tony, we were talking about your first year in Afghanistan as the deputy ambassador for economic and assistance issues. I'm sure I got the title wrong.

WAYNE: Coordinating director for development and economic affairs as one of four U.S. diplomats with the title of ambassador. Very catchy.

Q: Before we move on to your time as number two, as deputy ambassador, I wanted to ask if there were assistance projects that you thought went well or badly or very notable. We did talk about the collapse of Kabul Bank and the failure of the U.S. trained Central Bank administrators.

WAYNE: Part of the difficulty in this first year was just there were some four billion dollars worth of programs underway. So first, a big challenge was just figuring out what these programs were, what they were doing, and if they were producing desired results. And, gradually, we were seeking improved monitoring, as we talked about. So, we can tell if this very expensive array of programs were being efficient and productive or not.

And it was hard to get a handle on such issues. This went beyond the specifics of each program to trying to determine if they were having positive impact and being seen as positive by the Afghans that were supposed to gain benefit from them. I remember I tried to apply, in my first year, some of my public diplomacy lessons from Argentina. So, I would try to go visit some of our projects to highlight the benefits for Afghans and bring attention to good things that the U.S. was doing with its aid money. Much of our work was aimed in good part at "winning hearts and minds" in Afghanistan.

I still remember going to meet street cleaners in Kabul that we were supporting as both for job creation and for helping to maintain central parts of the capital. We were paying these not very well educated, unemployed Afghans who otherwise would not likely have a steady income. They were hard workers, happy to be working, and did a good job of keeping the streets of Kabul clean. This was a project that common Afghans could appreciate.

And so I went to a place where they were gathered to begin their workday, as I recall, and walked down a line to shake their hands, express gratitude for what they were doing, and take photos with them. And it was really a quite successful event as public diplomacy—not just hanging out with elites but with very low-income Afghans. And the program itself was successful in keeping the streets clean and keeping money flowing to these people and their families.

But beyond some of that type of programming, that sort of short-term giving people jobs to build and maintain basic infrastructure, it was very hard to get quick results. I remember in that first year I was struck that some of our most successful programs were long-term investments in human capital, and that included the health care and education systems. These were good for Afghans and the country, but they did not necessarily help with near-term challenges of fighting the Taliban.

I remember going to several graduations of midwives. In Dari and Pashto, they called these women "angels" because they kept mothers alive and delivered the children alive, greatly reducing maternal and infant mortality rates especially in rural areas. Afghans still remembered very vividly how previously so many had died. So, these young women midwives, that USAID programs supported, were just so valued. These were revered programs in rural Afghanistan, and you know, those kinds of programs, we were having a big, positive impact. Many Afghans remembered and valued them.

Bigger infrastructure projects, on the other hand, were more complicated. Some of them worked, but there was a lot of corruption and inefficiency. In some cases, for example, to get things built, people were paying the local Taliban not to attack, and they were paying their brother-in-law to provide the lumber, you know, at twice the normal price, and many other problems which the various U.S. inspector generals would report. It was just hard to monitor effectively in an underdeveloped society at war. It was hard for U.S. and other aid agencies to run these programs well, and it was hard to figure out in a systematic way where we were really making progress.

And the pressure to act and to get results, as we talked about last time, was to produce results, to do stuff, to spend the money, to get out there and do it because we are in a war and if we put more money into action, we're going to have a better chance of improving the situation. I often felt as if that was the sort of the dominant philosophy, particularly on the military side. It's not that they were trying to waste the money, but they were used to coming in and putting all sorts of resources into their mission and trying to change that situation rapidly.

All these factors—emanating from the situation in society, fighting on the ground and the pressures from on high for results—meant that we had a mixed bag of projects and results as we were going forward. There were some things that seemed to work [in addition to long-term investment in basic health and in education]. For example, the setting up a first ever anti-drug court in Kabul produced some good results during my tenure. DEA and their Afghan partners in the anti-drug struggle brought drug traffickers that we captured to this newly built secure facility where they could be held and tried. The court was in the large facility that served as a jail and housed and secured the judges and judicial personnel. Security was good and the trials seemed to proceed with due process, fair results, and without evident corruption. After a couple of years, there were some cases of corruption as the drug syndicates found ways to exert influence, but the years that I was there, the judges were sealed off. The criminals were sealed off. And you had a little atmosphere where one could carry out justice! But that highlights a serious problem. This was a successful example because it sealed it off! (laughs) And that's what seemed to be needed in many cases, because there was just so much corruption and malign influencers.

Q: We are talking in 2021. And we have come to an abrupt end in our presence in Afghanistan and generals and others are going up to the Hill right now, talking about these things. And one of the comments that a high-level military source said last week was look, we were able to create a state, but not a nation. Do you think that that sums it up a lot? Or is it more just that—

WAYNE: Oh, we didn't really even create a state. I mean, we created parts of a state. But we could never create a nation. And we realized that when I was there, and we realized that we weren't creating a nation as we were going forward. We realized that there were many ethnic, religious, ideological, and other divisions among the Afghans. These were based on clan, ethnicity, language, and religion. Certainly, there were coalitions among them but those would break up. And there were very few of what we would consider modern political structures, political parties to integrate groups together. And so, we created structures working with Afghans and encouraged them to use institutions, legal norms, and rule of law. And we educated people and exposed them in the process to other

modern political systems. We had a finance ministry, for example, with smart and capable people working there. But that didn't mean that you did away with all the factional infighting, or the necessity to pay off the factions, or to give prizes to this parliamentary deputy from this state, or the strong ties of family and clan. And you had a centralized state structure at the national level with much autonomy and independent mindedness in the regions.

Thus, one tries to undertake a project in this situation, with all that was all going on, and you didn't have the time to sit down and really fix all the problems that arose. That was the "in-a-war" effect. And to repeat a point I mentioned earlier—there was serious corruption at many levels and from many angles. I remember by the fall of 2009 [I got there in June], it was quite clear to me that this massive corruption seemed to be present everywhere and that this was a real problem to have the Afghan government appear to be legitimate to the Afghan people. We were not going to get rid of all the corruption, everything, but we needed to be better at limiting it and finding a way to punish the most egregious abuses. Sadly, we just didn't act as vigorously as we should have, and while I was there, we didn't get better at it for several reasons. And, you know, I think as I said, we raised some cases up to the highest levels. We just couldn't get people to take the really hard decisions, I think, because it was too tough to act against some individuals who were in key positions and acting as key partners against the Taliban.

We did try to introduce anti-corruption programs and to strengthen investigators, prosecutors, and the judicial system, but it was still tough to get results especially in a short timeframe. We tried to do better and try to get programs going, but you just had to keep moving. And that was one of the problems that goes back to that analogy about the airplane. You got to keep the airplane flying, right? If it crashes, it's over, but we kept it flying with money and dedicated human effort. And there were a lot of Afghans who did want to work with us and to make things better. Many of whom were not corrupt, and others were a little corrupt by our standards, but basically okay and able to do good work for their ministries or programs.

In addition, it was hard for me to differentiate between the truly corrupt people and those who could be satisfactory partners. Some of our Afghan colleagues, for example, appeared to be modern and with Western education and good English, but once you got to know them, you realized, no, (laughs) they didn't really think in the same language that they were talking to you about even though they had a degree from a Western university. Back in Afghanistan, they were thinking, through the lenses of their Afghan family and tribe or with strong cultural norms that just made it really complicated for us to know what to expect.

So anyway, there were small aid and development programs that were working to some degree. First, the long-term investment in humanity—training and educating people with skills to better support their livelihoods and to sustain and educate other Afghans. Education and health programs seemed to work over time with consistent effort/spending. Infrastructure was a mixed bag—some was well done and lasted and other was poorly done and quickly in need of repair, plus the varying degrees of corruption. And then there were parts of USAID that were specifically designed to be tactical stabilization programs. And that seemed to work because it was working with the military out in the field for

short term gain in winning Afghan support. The real challenge was getting good results with the range of development programs that USAID carried out in non-war zones. What might be a "normal" development program elsewhere around the world as they didn't easily fit into a war situation, a conflict situation. It was hard to monitor, hard to evaluate and hard to bring to fruition. That was a real challenge for my colleagues trying to help transform parts of the economy and society.

Q: Was it during your time there that we decided to fund a lot of the public sector salaries?

WAYNE: During this time, donors were moving to put more funding through the Afghan government using trust funds and other funding vehicles. For example, there was a big trust fund for police and security into which the EU [European Union], the Europeans, put a lot of money into as did the U.S. And there was a World Bank trust fund into which many countries put their aid money. The rising philosophy among donors was that donors by going individually with their own programs were not helping the government build their own Afghan capacity. It also made it very hard for Afghans to deal with all the requirements of individual donor aid programs. Thus, many were arguing that donors should put more money through the Afghan government coffers to let them strengthen themselves, while simultaneous providing oversight and monitoring. The theory of that was very good. The problem was it was going to take a long time to make those channels work well, especially when many Afghan ministries were still very weak on the ability to implement their budgets or to deliver the services that were assigned to them.

As one might suspect, some ministries were able to improve budget preparation and program implementation and others never seriously improved. But in all of them there was leakage. And you know, as I have said before, a real problem was there was just not enough time to bring about these massive transformations in people and in bureaucracies. You know, you don't change people or institutions in a year or two or three years. It takes a concerted effort. It took decades in the U.S., for example. Why should we expect it to take less in Afghanistan? We are talking about a generational effort. This is what we in the embassy argued in the fall of 2009 when I got there. We need to plan for more time for the surge in civilians and civilian aid to work. We need to invest more for a longer period. And then maybe we could change things, maybe, not for sure. But that wasn't the political timetable that President Obama set. We were going to have to work within a timetable largely determined by the U.S. political timetable. It was a very daunting task which we doubted was possible, but we worked hard and at least I hoped the timetable could be extended. But the Taliban no doubt thought they could just wait us out. We would work within the timeframe set and it was very hard for all, the military and civilians, the U.S. and international folk trying to help. And it was very hard for the Afghans from many perspectives.

In any case, we tried as best we could to support programs that produced good results, knowing that many would only be partially successful in that environment. We spent much time debating how to make programs better and whether to prioritize near term or longer-term objectives. I remember having long debates about providing energy for Kandahar, for example, and whether it made sense to be paying for diesel fuel, which was expensive, versus waiting longer and building pipelines, electric infrastructure, more

electricity lines, et cetera. The problem was just, the warfighters and key Afghan entities wanted the fuel now. They needed the electricity, now, because they were running sizable operations in Kandahar and there. We and the Afghans had been trying for years to get electricity flowing from the Kajaki dam but had been unable to repair a key turbine and to assure the safety of transmission lines because the Taliban were controlling the area near the electric dam. And the local Taliban were able to turn electricity flows on and off, depending on who was paying them. Our military colleagues were hesitant to consistently deploy the military units that would be needed to secure the electricity supply, and yet they needed electricity. So in the end, the U.S. bought these big, expensive diesel generators and paid to ship diesel in through Pakistan. A lot of people made a lot of money, both fairly and unfairly. This was a costly and inefficient expense of the war and did not help Afghanistan's long-term development.

Another category of U.S. aid projects involved construction of buildings, e.g., schools and medical clinics or local government facilities. They had the buildings constructed, but for security reasons, often the AID officers could not go out and look at the buildings to make sure that the lights and plugs were all safely installed, et cetera. And so, then they were criticized by the special inspector general for not doing post-construction reviews/monitoring. Civilian aid specialists and advisors were very dependent in most parts of Afghanistan on the availability of troops to travel with them and troops/commanders had other missions. And so it was just constant difficulty in doing anything as well as one would like.

Ambassador Richard Holbrooke had been in action as the president's special representative for Afghanistan. He had a lot of super qualities, which I deeply admired. But along with them came a lot of impatience to change the situation on the ground and to show the White House and others that we were making progress with the civilian surge. He could be tough on people and ask for things to get done and be fixed ASAP.

I remember vividly organizing AID briefings to give to him. And, as I think I may have mentioned earlier, I felt that I had to throw myself between him and them, to save them from being excoriated, because they gave poor presentations about their programs, plans, and results achieved. Most of the AID staff weren't used to this type of very sharp questioning. In the State Department, many of us were trained by fire, at some point. I had to urge them to think through the presentation, to anticipate questions, to be clear, brief, and crisp, and to get ready for tough questions with someone able to think well in the pressure of the moment. And to be fair to Holbrooke, he was just under all sorts of pressure to deliver also. He had many critics back in Washington. Everybody was under a lot of pressure to deliver whether based in Afghanistan or in DC.

And for Holbrooke the civilian surge and the military surge all fit into a bigger strategic goal. Holbrooke really hoped we could negotiate a peace process and eventually start getting serious dialogue going with the Taliban and others and find a way forward that would allow peace to emerge and the U.S. to reduce its presence. He couldn't do that during his time before he had his heart attack and died. But sadly, I am sure he was much more vulnerable to a serious heart attack because he was doing this job and feeling tremendous pressure to deliver and to find a path for the U.S. to leave with some degree of success.

To come back to a constant theme: everybody was under pressure. I had never worked harder for such an extended period in my career.

In my role as economic and development coordinator, we continued to do our best to identify dysfunctional programs and eliminate them. We started trying to do new programs. We encouraged AID to talk with the Corps of Engineers, INL [State's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau] and others to collaborate on programs. So, there was progress. For example, to narrow the gaps between the military and civilians we started developing a rehearsal of concept drill. Planning for the presentations of this joint event got the civilians and the military to talk to each other in depth about the goals and programs both were undertaking. Then the task was to come up with a united concept/strategy/vision of action for the year ahead. And so, there was a little progress bringing together the planners and the senior U.S. officials in Afghanistan.

It is hard to recall another time when the U.S. had upscaled as rapidly as we were doing in this surge of military and civilian presence. Maybe in World War II or the Korean War, we had upscaled so rapidly. I was told this was being done more rapidly than we did in Iraq but that was certainly similar. General Petraeus has learned a lot during his experiences with Iraq, so he was a driving force to develop first a united U.S. [military/civilian] concept and then in my second year we worked hard to bring the Afghans into the process in a more meaningful way.

But was there a lot wasted in this U.S. surge? Yes, there was. And where were we going to get in the end of the surge effort? We didn't know. But we were trying to make our efforts better as we went along. And in my mind, this brings us to what we might be able to accomplish for Afghanistan. We couldn't make it a nation with our effort. Of course we couldn't make a nation. That really depended on the Afghans. Could we make the situation better for Afghans? Yes. But they still had to figure out how to better forge unity and a workable political system among themselves. Even among the non-Taliban, did they have to better deal with their own divisions? Yes, they did. We couldn't do it for them. And did we have flawed partners? Yes. We had flawed partners. They were flawed, divided, often unable to take hard decisions, unable to forge more modern democratic institutions that worked well. Were there a lot of good Afghan people struggling for a better, more modern Afghanistan? Yes. Were a lot of Afghans dying on a regular basis because they believed they could make it better? Yes. There were. So that helped give us hope and explain why we were there working so hard and expending so many resources.

And am I surprised that in the end, this didn't turn out with better results? Yes and very disappointed because I came to care deeply about the Afghan people. I met and worked with too many of them not to see their good qualities and their hopes for the future, especially among younger, more educated generations.

You know, my closest military partner during 2009–2010 was Colonel Frank McKinsey who is now [2021] CENTCOM commander. And Frank was wonderful to work with. He understood how the civilians and the military had to work together if we were going to find success and he did all he could to facilitate that collaboration. And, he rose to be commander of the U.S. military command overseeing Afghanistan and our withdrawal. Do I think he probably tried to do the right thing all along? Yes, I do. Because I think he

understood the situation and why we were there. Was it easy to do the right things to get us to a good end in that country? No, it was hard. We had shifting policies and unrealistic timetables and flawed partners. Should we have been trying to do so much so quickly? No, there's no question about it. No, we should have understood that bringing about change for the good in Afghanistan and having hope of nurturing peace would be a several generation effort.

At the start of our involvement, we made a serious mistake when Rumsfeld and the Bush team turned down the Taliban offer to have a dialogue. Then, we made an even bigger mistake by diverting so much attention and effort to Iraq, a massive mistake that has cost the U.S. dearly. Then as we tried to build up again in Afghanistan to regain leverage over the Taliban, but we had set a timeline the minute we announced the surge. We gave the end of the surge at the same time. And, we did not have a plan to deal effectively with the Taliban's haven in Pakistan.

So effectively the Taliban responded: "Hey, from Pakistan! You guys go ahead and shoot at us, and we'll shoot at you, and we'll be here when you're done." And, we talked about that, and we kept trying to figure out how to change the dynamic, but in the conversations the military guys are saying, "How can we get at them in Pakistan?" And then that led to big tensions with Pakistan. We started to launch drone attacks into Pakistan reportedly mounted by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. The aim was apparently to find a way to respond to the Taliban sanctuary there, but in the end, it created serious tension with Pakistan's military and civilian leaders and between the U.S. ambassador and those mounting the drone strikes. In addition to being unable to deal with the Taliban sanctuary, we couldn't really deal with the ineptitude and the corruption among our Afghan allies.

And yet we had these wonderful Afghans that we would get to know who sincerely wanted their country to be different, to be democratic, to be modern, to be well connected to the rest of the world. And they had a whole different set of hopes for their country and for their children, but in general, they did not have the power to overthrow the generations of warlords and corrupt people who still held the reins of power.

And then there were the short tours for U.S. and other international personnel assigned to Afghanistan. I was there for longer than a lot of people. I was there for two years. Most everybody else was there for a one-year tour, as we discussed before. So how could you really understand or start to help bring about meaningful change in Afghanistan in that period? You couldn't do that. And you faced a serious brain drain during the yearly rotations.

But anyway, for me in the first year of the civilian surge, it was really all about trying to get U.S. actors and the Afghans, and then the international donors, going in one direction: one path to take us all forward. And we started to do that. The second year, then I moved more from focus on just the assistance side to managing the broader embassy, the broader relationship with the U.S. and international military, and the broader political relationship with the Afghans under the leadership of Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and talking and coordinating more with ICAF [Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework] about what they were doing more strategically. [By the way, Ambassador Eikenberry had an excellent strategic view of the situation and a deep appreciation for the strengths and

weaknesses of our Afghan partners. He also had a deep understanding of how the U.S. military viewed the tasks at hand from his long military service rising to become a three-star general serving in Afghanistan.]

Back in Washington during my second year in Kabul [2010–2011], people were getting frustrated. We weren't accomplishing enough. We weren't doing enough, quickly enough, in the eyes of many. Eikenberry sort of fell out of favor because he was pushing too hard at some things people didn't like, including the idea that transformation in Afghanistan would take a long-term commitment. Not surprisingly, there were a lot of tensions and looking to blame different people for what wasn't working.

And then we had Afghan President Karzai, who was becoming more and more critical of the Americans. And it seemed that part of the reason was that as we ramped up the military efforts to get at the Taliban, more non-Taliban Afghans were being harmed and killed with drone and airstrikes as well as operations by U.S. and Afghan special forces. With drone and airstrikes, people make mistakes, as we were reminded by the erroneous targeting of a civilian aid worker and his family in Kabul in August 2021. The targeting teams were not trying to make mistakes, but they did and do. So, villagers were getting killed and their homes damaged. Then Karzai had to receive the village elders who came up and said, Look, we had twenty kids here killed by these Americans. Have you given up all your sovereignty? Are you truly the Afghan president or do they control Afghanistan?

And I think this pressure from his people influenced Karzai, and he became psychologically disturbed by it. I mean, it really weighed on him. He was really a split personality in my observation because it would overwhelm him at times, and he would just blame us for things. And then at other times, he would switch back to the sophisticated, reasonable, and strategic thinker that many had experienced. He could be a very insightful and diplomatic guy. He was not an institution builder however and seemed much more comfortable relying on traditional patron-client relationships. And I understood, he was under all sorts of pressure and lobbying by various politicians and interests as a president, and he was very isolated in the presidential palace. I also understand that a number of these figures, including close advisors, were regularly passing on the view that the Americans were working to weaken and undermine him. When you hear all these people coming in and saying these kinds of things and you do not get out to talk to others directly, it has an effect. Plus, he had not been president for a long time. Burdens like that weigh heavily.

So, on all fronts, it became harder during my second year. I found an unclassified PowerPoint presentation we prepared for Karzai on all the civilian assistance we were providing for Afghanistan. In the first half of 2010, Ambassador Eikenberry got him to agree to sit down with our aid teams, and we went for an hour through all our programs. We talked to him and told him about them in detail. Our hope was that he could see what we were doing and that we weren't just trying to kill Afghans. We were trying to do all sorts of good things, including preserving Afghan cultural heritage, investing in the future capacity of younger Afghans, seriously supporting counternarcotics work, and encouraging economic growth, and much more. And he was polite and seemed to listen intently to about half of it.

And it was an okay opportunity to change his perspective and to try to remind him that we were really investing to do all these good things too. And we wanted to do better and help provide better things for Afghanistan. Sadly, he didn't believe that consistently after all the other stuff that was going on and the complaints he was hearing from Afghans. So, it was a tough situation.

And then he was in competition and political infighting with other parties, with members of Afghanistan's Congress, and with other warlords with their own groups of supporters in different parts of the country. And it just made a complex situation. There were democratic structures there, but they did not function well. There seemed to always be threats to them because people would get frustrated and didn't want to be waiting to be patient for democracy, especially with so much corruption and influence peddling going on. Interestingly the UN special rep often was the one who worked on challenges in Afghanistan's democracy and politics in my second year. So, I worked a lot with him and other countries supporting Afghanistan when there were political crises that came up in Afghanistan. Staffan de Mistura was the UN representative during most of my time there, and he did a very commendable job.

Q: Tony, you alluded to something I've been thinking about a lot. Do you think the drone strikes and the violence in the countryside were a key reason that in the end there were some in the rural areas that felt the Taliban would be better or that it would be better to make peace? Or is that too simplistic?

WAYNE: Certainly, when you miss the target, it helps recruit people for the Taliban. On the other hand, people didn't like the Taliban either. By every effort to measure people's views, most Afghan people didn't want the Taliban to govern them, and they didn't want Americans and the Afghan government attacking their villages—many just wanted to be left alone to live peaceful lives! These are people with wives and children and after two decades of fighting in many areas, they just felt, Everybody just let us be! That was really the kind of thing. Why are we stuck in the middle of all of you fighting?

When I was there, you could see where we went in and we were doing development projects, people were genuinely happy. Kids were generally genuinely enthused to be in school. Did I tell the story about visiting this one city where it had been a big opium poppy center? And I went up and talked to these two guys. I think I did, two guys who were shoveling cotton.

Ambassador Wayne standing in front of a poppy field

Q: No, I don't remember you telling that story. Go ahead.

WAYNE: So, we were visiting this big opium center of Marjah in Helmand province. This was my second of three visits to this rural agricultural center which had long been under Taliban control and a center for opium production. There were big poppy fields all around us as we landed and walked the streets. They were still growing poppy. I have a picture standing in front with Gerardo Rivera, the Fox news reporter. Oh, and Ollie North was there, he was a reporter at this time. And he was there on that same mission to look at "progress" months after the U.S. and Afghan forces had taken over the area.

Anyway, I had my American security agent walking with me, and we were safe enough. I could walk the main street with just my one bodyguard. And I mean, there were others around, but one near me and then an interpreter. So, there were these two Afghan guys with pitchforks pitching cotton. And I asked, "What do you think about this situation, about where we are, what the future holds for you?"

And they said, Well, look, we've never gone to school, but my little brothers here, they can't go to school either. If you guys can help them go to school, and get better jobs and have a better future, that's worth it, completely worth it. You know, we're going to be out doing the shoveling of agricultural goods for the rest of our lives. But if you can help them go to school, that is completely worth it.

I think people did appreciate it when stability could be established in the area. When services came back, people were genuinely thankful. When they weren't thankful was if the Taliban came back in and then we sent a drone that killed brothers and neighbors. They wouldn't be thankful for that. And that happened in some areas, it didn't happen in all areas. You know, the original idea had been, you expand the stable areas and provide certain services and that will create a good base for support for the Afghan national government. And that worked as long as the U.S. and its Afghan allies could do that. When for any combination of reasons, you could not provide a stable area with basic services and the opportunity for people to have normal lives, it was often a problem.

Q: Even with the large size of the embassy, it can be hard to cover a country that large. But you had several consulates as well as the embassy?

WAYNE: We did. We had consulates in Herat, in Kandahar, in Mazar, and then we had more than twenty places around the country with civilian staff living and working with the U.S. and allied military who were part of ISAF [International Security Assistance Force]. We had embassy civilian staff assigned in different mixes, some State, some places USAID, some places USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] depending on if it was an agricultural area or not, trying to help with local programs to build support for the overall set of U.S. and partner goals in Afghanistan.

As we were doing this, we started to work more intensely to get the Afghan government to be more efficient, meaning we had more people in ministries in Kabul for example. Part of this civilian buildup included adding more advisors in the Finance Ministry or the Agricultural Ministry or the Electricity Authority or the Education Ministry. After we deployed a good number of advisors, Karzai then got upset because he thought we were establishing parallel institutions because there were too many foreigners giving directions. Now, we said, No, that's not what we're trying to do, we're just trying to improve control of the money and do other things to improve the provision of effective services by the ministries, but it created a lot of tensions.

And it's just hard to know, where is that line? Where is it legitimate for you to go in and say, Well, this is what we think you should do. And so, with more U.S. presence, it got tougher at least in part because we were overseeing more activities and offering more "advice."

And then, I remember well that we had this big crisis when Karzai decided no more private security companies, and everyone had to have government-approved security companies. There were certainly problems with having too many private security companies operating, some of which seemed to act like they had more authority than the official security forces. When we undertook the military and civilian surges, we employed many thousands of contractors to do all these projects and to provide many services to support all the new embassy and military presence. These contractors wanted to be safe, so they, of course, were hiring private companies to protect them. They correctly did not have confidence that the Afghan security services could do so effectively. Several Karzai's advisors became convinced that these security companies were becoming states within the state, and successfully persuaded him that the Afghan government needed to create a security force to provide security for all these contractors

hired by the U.S. and others. This became a gigantic crisis that took us months to navigate and for which to negotiate solutions, and from the civilian assistance perspective, this also took us away from the other focus on the work, the projects, that needed to be done. And it's just another example of the complexity of the mission.

At its biggest, when I was there 2009–2011, we had over eleven hundred direct-hire U.S. government civilian personnel. We had sixteen different agencies. We were at seventy-five locations around the country. And this is not counting the non-American security personnel or all the contractors working to implement programs and to provide support services. Plus, there were a hundred and thirty thousand coalition soldiers and civilians in all in the middle of my second year, which was 2010–2011, and again not counting the contractor personnel. It was a huge presence with many different activities and lines of effort, within which we just had many mini-crises that came up regularly. There was a lot going on to distract one from just focusing on the job as written in any formal work requirements.

There was one point, I remember an incident where a contractor's car ran over some kids in the street, and, as in any country around the world, that kind of incident creates a big problem. Many of us had to stop everything to manage that crisis and resolve it. We arranged to have special medical attention for the kids and flew them out of the country, and apologized and offered support to the families, and took other needed steps. These kinds of unexpected events just happen, and one needs to adjust. They happen in many countries, but when you're in a war zone, they need to be managed immediately and well and safely, not allowing the balls to drop on other urgent tasks. And thus, there was often little or no downtime to catch up or recover. People got tired and stressed and that is one of the reasons that civilians got out of country R&R [rest and relaxation]. Of course, the R&R created other challenges with key people being out of country and not available to help. But that was the situation.

Q: I had an excellent ambassador in Iraq. There was a short period in which he would tell me every morning, Have I mentioned how much I hate my job?

WAYNE: (laughs) Right, a number of folks felt that way. I don't think I felt that, but I would get very concerned and work long hours into the night and then wake again in the middle of the night to think and pray about handling the challenges on my agenda.

Q: You must have felt like that a lot. I mean, it's just so overwhelming, right?

WAYNE: It was overwhelming at many times. I remember I got three hundred emails a day to which I'd have to respond. And so, you know, from nine to midnight, I would answer emails from the day that I had addressed. And then I'd sleep until five and then I would get up and answer the emails which were already coming in because by five, it was already the middle of the day in Washington. Or I'd be on the phone, sitting there still in my pajamas talking to colleagues before I had to hurry up and get down to the office.

Oh, yes, did I tell the story about falling asleep in a NSC [National Security Council] meeting? (laughs)

Q: I don't think so. (laughs)

WAYNE: So, we had these NSC meetings that were very late Afghanistan time. If they were at four in the afternoon in Washington, it was 12:30 at night in Kabul, eight and a half hours difference. Understandably, the principals in Washington were busy but so were we, starting very early and working late. We kept arguing to have DCs [Deputies Committee] and PCs [Principals Committee] earlier, and sometimes they did, but many other times not. Anyway, I went to a lot of them, but there was one meeting where I thought I would be nice to my colleagues. My staff was exhausted. So, I said, I'll do this one all by myself. And I get on there. It was chaired by Dennis McDonough, the national security advisor at that time. I remember at one moment, I'm seated at the end of the table, you know, sitting up like this in front of the zoom screen, in front of the whole national security council, right? And the UN ambassador and many others. And then the next thing I hear is "Tony? Tony? Can you hear me? (laughs) I wake up and quickly say, "Oh, Dennis, could you please repeat that question?" I was very embarrassed to say the least.

Q: (laughs) Hopefully they made the meetings a little earlier after that.

WAYNE: What I made sure of was that none of us were ever in there alone again, so somebody could help keep the lead officer awake. And I could see the same thing happened to others. I remember my good friend and colleague Jerry Fierstein who was DCM in Pakistan, they were a half hour later than us. And I remember the same thing happened to him, and I saw him doze off. And I sort of said casually, "Jerry!" And he popped back up. (laughs)

It was hard. You were tired, exhausted. And yet you're talking with all these senior people. They are trying to figure out what to do next. They wanted insight and thoughts from the field. Of course, it's nice that they have you on there to offer input, but it was often challenging to stay focused for a sixty- to hundred-and twenty-minute meeting in the middle of the night.

In the second year, I recall we negotiated a new security agreement. It was to define the security framework between the two countries. I was happy to participate in that work with Afghanistan's national security advisor and members of their National Security Council. That was different from the economic stuff that I did during my first year, but in many ways, it was much easier to hammer out an agreement. We made good progress and final agreement was reached after I left [in early 2012]. It was a good framework, but I don't know that we used it as seriously as we should have, and we seem to have abandoned it in 2020–21.

And then of course after I left, Obama and team made the decision to draw down significantly. I was there as we were at our height of staff and capacity. We only stayed at those levels for less than a year. And, then what many of us thought would happen, happened. The economy collapsed because the Afghan economy was running on U.S. government spending and ISAF military spending. All sorts of people lost their jobs. Unemployment jumped up and economic growth disappeared, and the GDP shrank and

not surprisingly, despite the programs aimed during the time I was there with strengthening the private sector, the private sector suffered seriously.

We always wondered if we could be successful while the fighting continued. Who's going to invest in a war zone? And what kind of incentives does it make to make investment and commerce sustainable in a conflict situation? How many rugs could Afghanistan make to sell to other parts of the world? Some, but not enough to keep a whole economy going. Some agricultural exports were possible but not enough. Some mineral and natural resource exports were possible, but corruption was a serious problem, infrastructure was bad, and big natural resource development projects were hard to launch.

And then, Pakistan would not cooperate in allowing free flowing Afghan export, especially to the biggest market nearby, India. One of the things we tried to do in my first year there was to negotiate a trade agreement with Pakistan so the Afghans could get their products out to sell, including their agricultural goods. We could reach some agreement on paper, but the Pakistanis kept finding ways to maintain barriers especially regarding exports to India. Can't you let it go through, we repeatedly asked as did the Afghans. No, never could get that done. And the agreement finally was agreed between Pakistan and Afghanistan with our help and pressure, but the Pakistanis never fully implemented it. They blocked it. So how was the Afghan economy really going to have any hope of significantly growing its private sector beyond minimal levels? It was a frustrating situation.

Q: We're now talking about 2011 and that was the end of your second year?

WAYNE: June 2011 was the end of my tour. In early 2011, I was starting to look at other jobs and things, but I didn't know what I was going to do. At the beginning of 2010, they talked about me leaving and going and becoming ambassador to Colombia. And I said, "Okay, happy to do that." Then Holbrooke passed on and other things happened. And then Secretary Clinton and her chief of staff asked if I would stay in Kabul because they wanted to have some continuity. So, I agreed to stay. I think it was the end of 2010, maybe the beginning of 2011, I got worried about what I was going to do after this.

A meeting with Secretary Clinton

And I also worried about what my fellow ambassadors were going to do. Cause we're now three other ambassadors, besides Eikenberry. We'd added a new ambassadorial ranked person to oversee the security-related assistance: the police, anti-drug, and other law enforcement and justice assistance that I had overseen during my first year. Because the portfolio that I had in year one was just too big of a dossier. We brought in another ambassador, Hans Klemm, for the security and justice role in the summer of 2010. And Bill Todd took over the economic and development dossier in the summer of 2010. And by the end of 2010, I was thinking about getting them good onward assignments too. How could I help find them good jobs after their very hard work? And then what would I do? Then I got a call and a request. Would I come back to Washington and come in to see Secretary Clinton's chief of staff? I figured, well, hopefully it's positive.

Q: Did they tell you what the meeting was about?

WAYNE: It was something about a next position, but it wasn't clear what position they were considering. And so, I flew back to Washington and went into the State Department to talk with Secretary Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills. She greeted me and then said, "Oh, somebody wants to talk to you." Secretary Clinton then entered Cheryl's office through the door that comes directly from the secretary's private office. "Tony? How'd you like to be ambassador to Mexico?" "Wow," I said. "Well, that's a big job!" And she said, "Well, you speak Spanish, don't you?" And I said, "Well, yes, I do though I haven't gotten to practice it lately, but yes I do." "Well, you know, we need an ambassador to Mexico. Something unexpected has come up, and this is a very important relationship. You have been doing good work in Afghanistan and we think you can do this well." So, I

said, “Okay, I am honored. I would like to talk to my wife if I might and would like us both to think about it overnight?” They agreed, and then we talked for a few minutes about the situation and work in Afghanistan.

I subsequently learned more about what had happened. For several reasons, the president of Mexico had decided that our current ambassador there was not the right person for that job. When Secretary Clinton had gone to visit him in Mexico, he had pulled her aside and said, “You need to replace your ambassador, because some recent events have raised serious concerns in my mind.” One Wikileaks had surfaced cables that he wrote criticizing the government of Mexico and the Mexican military for not being too efficient, not being effective and being corruption fighting criminal groups in the context of our joint the Merida program for cooperation in fighting crime. This leaked material has created a severe public problem.

Q: That can sometimes be misleading. Lots of people write cables in an embassy like that, but they all have the ambassador’s name at the bottom, right?

WAYNE: Calderon apparently had in mind one the ambassador had written or at least approved. And the president was also apparently upset about a speech the U.S. ambassador had given at Stanford University with a muted version of similar criticisms. Calderon was also unhappy that U.S. assistance under the Merida program was arriving very slowly. He very much wanted that sped up.

But his concerns were apparently not about the U.S.-Mexico public security cooperation. I was told that one of Calderon’s close associates and former chief of staff was separated from his wife, and the wife had become the girlfriend of the U.S. ambassador. And the dad of the wife/girlfriend was the head of the opposition party [the PRI] in the lower house of Congress. And this also apparently upset President Calderon. It appears that for several reasons, the U.S. ambassador had fallen out of favor with the President of Mexico. [By the way, I knew the ambassador from my work on Europe and liked and respected him. He was/is very capable and smart.]

And so anyway, this turn of events was a big surprise to me. I hadn’t served in Mexico. In fact, the funny thing was at one point I’d asked about serving in Mexico when I was working in the secretary of state’s office. I’d written and asked the political counselor, could I bid on a job in his section and if I would have a chance of getting the job? He basically replied, no, you don’t have any Mexico experience. We do not see you as a strong candidate. So, I went off to France to serve instead, which was a wonderful assignment.

By the way, after consulting with my wife we agreed to accept the offer, but I realized that this was a very big and important relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, and that I would have a lot to learn [as well as re-learning my Spanish].

I went back to Kabul and worked a very intense bunch of months and worked to recruit a team to replace me and others in the ambassador-ranked jobs in Kabul and to help find onward assignments for my colleagues. But I now had a sense of direction for my

post-Afghanistan assignment [pending formal nomination by the White House and confirmation by the Senate], so that worry was gone.

At the beginning of June, the team had a very nice farewell for me. And others at my rank and those people that worked for me all got good jobs. The person that didn't get a job was Ambassador Eikenberry. I was very sad about that. He deserved a good onward position after his dedicated and inspired service. It was bittersweet for me when I left, knowing that and he was understandably, very upset because he had worked very hard. And I thought that was a very sad outcome given how much I respected him and his tireless service. I was very happy that several times Ambassador James Cunningham agreed to replace me as deputy ambassador and then stayed on as ambassador.

Q: He wasn't a career diplomat like you though.

WAYNE: No, he was career military. He'd been a three-star general and led the U.S. force presence in Kabul earlier. But I guess his relations with some in Washington were poor. Very sad. I often think that he deserved much better treatment.

That reminds me that I should add that for the last year that I was there, Dave Petraeus was the commander of ISAF. He was a wonderful guy to work with, smart, really brilliant. I enjoyed tremendously working with him. This was before he later became head of the CIA, and he did subsequently get in trouble for some things that happened with a woman who was writing a biography on him while he was there. But he was an exceptionally smart guy, had a superb strategic vision, and was very good with which to work. And then, he brought in General McMaster who worked with him during that period. And he put him particularly in charge of trying to clean up corruption, which he was not too successful at doing. He did try, you know, he did try to launch investigations working with Afghan and U.S. partners. But he also got into some serious disagreements with our Justice [DEA] and Treasury guys who watched and worked on illicit money laundering and anti-drug efforts. He had some clashes with them about how to go after corruption most effectively in the Afghan context. We worked through the conflicts, it was a period where there was always so much going on, so many different issues, so many tough issues, so many things you couldn't solve.

For a while, we tried to have a civilian-military working group to identify the Afghan figures most linked to significant corruption and then to decide what to do about them. I remember we had long debates over an Afghan commander in the south, based in Kandahar. He was very effective on the battlefield against the Taliban, but also quite corrupt and had several very serious allegations of human rights violations against those he arrested or captured. We could not reach agreement on what to do about him because he was the most effective Afghan commander in the south at that time. [He was later assassinated.] We also had long debates about a governor in the east of a state bordering on Pakistan. He was politically successful in his province, good at directing his public security forces and state-level administration, but reportedly very corrupt and had a system for getting many paybacks from all sorts of individuals in his state. Again, we could not reach a consensus to take bold action against him. Then we had a very difficult case where a member of the palace staff close to Karzai was linked by our Treasury and DEA teams to drug trafficking organizations. We were unable to persuade the Karzai

administration to act against him or to get top level DC approval to press the case with Karzai.

In a related effort, we had DOJ prosecutors training Afghan prosecutors how to build cases against officials for corruption. The mostly young Afghan prosecutors were very eager and prepared excellent cases, but often their bosses and the attorney general of Afghanistan blocked the cases. Our DOJ team was very frustrated. I recall going to see the Afghan attorney general in an unsuccessful effort to persuade him to allow cases to move forward. We even had the U.S. attorney general visit at one point to try to urge more progress on the work to strengthen Afghanistan's justice and prosecutorial system. We did cordial meetings but very few results. It was very frustrating and never succeeded in moving effectively against corruption.

Q: Had the Taliban gained a lot of strength during the two years that you were there?

WAYNE: No, they had not. They didn't start gaining strength until later. The U.S. military strategy and tactics seemed to be very effective in checking the Taliban inside Afghanistan and the combined U.S. and Afghan forces were expanding areas under government control. But the Taliban would pull back into Pakistan when pressed militarily to regroup, recuperate, and heal.

Q: And Pakistan, what role did Pakistan play in this?

WAYNE: Pakistan allowed them sanctuary. This was viewed by the U.S. and Afghan security and military teams as a major problem during my years in Afghanistan. The Taliban would fight, have serious fights with Afghans and with the U.S., and then they'd withdraw to Pakistan. And so that was a very big frustration among my colleagues guiding the military actions. Many on my colleagues privately indicated that they could not really make decisive blows that would change the Taliban's willingness to pursue a peaceful, negotiated solution because of this.

There were a few efforts in my time in Kabul to try to get a dialogue going with the Taliban on peace. Some of the reported Taliban offers were just fake, for example, people saying they were Taliban, and they weren't, and then there were other soundings that may have been real but just didn't bear fruit. Some efforts were made while Holbrooke was still alive, and I had the sense that he really wanted to get a dialogue going that could lead to a negotiated solution and U.S. drawdown. When Mark Grossman became the special representative, he also pursued these options seriously. He has written about those efforts. But anyway, sadly none of that bore fruit. It would have been a lot better to negotiate a peace during that time. I think the Taliban's ability to have havens in Pakistan for fighters and for their leadership, just fed the Taliban consensus that they could wait out the U.S., that we would leave, and they could prevail.

Q: I interviewed Beth Jones. She worked in SRAP [United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan] twice around this time. She was explaining what they were trying to do to get the Taliban to come to the table, but it didn't sound like they were ever going to come to the table.

WAYNE: Yes, the challenge is when you have a group that very strongly believes that their cause is righteous with a mix of religion, culture, tradition, and nationalism, and you have a safe place to heal wounds and rebuild for battle, it's hard to get folk to come to the table. It would have been a lot better for everybody, if they would have been more open to talks and to reconciliation. But that path requires a mix of pressure and incentives. We just were not capable during my years in Afghanistan of creating that mix of leverage and enticement to get the Taliban to engage seriously. Plus, even if a process started, it would have required a long process of building trust and understanding. Reconciliation is hard. There was much anger and mistrust on both sides. It would have taken a lot of hard work and several years to foster a good peace-building process. Plus, as we discussed earlier, Afghanistan would need international development and financial assistance for a long time going forward. I always hoped that would be one of the incentives to bring the Taliban into a serious process. But they were seeing the conflict from a very different perspective.

One of the things that I just must mention is what I learned during this period of time about stress. When I left, I did not realize how exhausted I was, especially during my second year in Kabul. I didn't realize that I was really running on adrenaline. And what I subsequently found out from experts after I left is that your body starts producing more adrenaline on a regular basis during a sustained period of stress. So, it regularly is feeding you with a higher level of adrenaline than normal. [This always makes me think of the challenges that Afghans must have been facing physically and psychologically as they were living through decades of conflict and stress.]

I came to understand that such a stressful situation means you can do a lot more, but you can also become very short with people. You're tired and your body is very tired, you're also subject to having physical problems. So, I went back to Washington, and I didn't fully realize this. I had to go back, and I had a very short vacation and then I had to prepare for Mexico and for my Senate confirmation. Of course, I hadn't read anything about Mexico. I couldn't prepare while I was so busy in Afghanistan. I had to start reading all this stuff, grapple with very different issues and get to know a range of people across the U.S. government who were working on Mexico. And then I got terrible muscle pain about my back and shoulder just as I was being briefed for my confirmation hearings. And I now see that I was still tense and tired from Afghanistan. And I hadn't realized the stress I was still carrying. I remember I was sitting there in my Senate testimony, just trying not to grimace because it was so painful.

Happily, the confirmation went just fine. Even Republican senators like Marco Rubio were very friendly to me. But it was hard and tense to get up to speed on the issues and to practice for the potential questions and answers.

And then right after the hearings, I had to start practicing Spanish again because I hadn't spoken Spanish really for two years. One of Karzai's chiefs of staff spoke French, not English, really. I had to speak French with him. So, the French was back in my mind and not the Spanish. I had to go back and study Spanish, while I was continuing to learn Mexico-related issues. It was a very difficult time. Many wanted me to be in Mexico for their September National Day celebration [El Grito], and Secretary Clinton has

specifically said that she wanted me to make sure that all the promised Merida assistance was being delivered by December 31, among other urgent tasks.

To flip back to the Afghanistan effect, it was probably not until I'd been in Mexico five months that the adrenaline really wore off and that I started being fully normal again. I didn't realize when I got to Mexico why everybody, Americans and Mexicans were working at such a slow pace. I expected that everyone would work with the pace and energy and long hours that I had been used to living in Kabul. That's the way we had to do things for two years and that was still my normal. Well, that's not the way most people operate, but I was still seeing things through the eyes of Afghanistan. And I was still feeling the pressure to meet the expectations for delivering results that I had heard from so many with whom I spoke in preparation to go to Mexico City.

Q: There's a book called Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, which talks about all the physiological effects of stress.

WAYNE: And different people react in different ways. I understand it. And understood in principle the PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] phenomenon. But it is another thing to live through the transition from such war-zone stress to a new situation where people were seeing the world [and me] differently.

Q: But there's a whole lot, just like you said, of physical health problems, physiological effects of stress that are real medical issues beyond the psychological basis.

WAYNE: Right but, well, I thought that's not going to happen to me, you know? (laughs) Because, I mean, I could still function, right? I could still carry out intelligent conversations and think about things and give orders and get stuff done and go do things. But I came to see that I was doing them not in the optimal way for some time.

Q: And you didn't really get a break because you'd been in prep and then you went right to Mexico. When did you get to Mexico City?

WAYNE: Right before their national day. September 11 or 12, I got there. So, I left Kabul in early June. I had July, August, so three months later.

Q: Oh, my goodness. So fast.

WAYNE: Yes, the three months were getting through my confirmation, learning the issues, and doing some Spanish.

Q: So, no time to decompress, but the president was glad that there was a new ambassador, I guess.

WAYNE: The president was glad there was a new ambassador. Secretary Clinton told me my job was to get a billion dollars' worth of Merida assistance delivered by December 31. And some in the Mexican press were writing [critically] that I was being sent because the U.S. now saw Mexico as facing an insurgency as in Afghanistan. This was the situation starting off. Right? So here, you got this guy coming out of an adrenaline pulsing place and the secretary of state tells him, Okay, your job is to get this delivered

by the end of the year! So, you know, I said, Okay, let's go. There's a war to fight! (laughs).

Q: In Afghanistan, did you make some good Afghan friends?

WAYNE: Yes. I made some very good friends. And one, for example, was a colleague named Rohullah Osmani who had worked in an Afghan ministry during my year as assistance coordinator and we got to know each other well. He then came to Johns Hopkins to do his dissertation, and we kept up the relationship. I went to his graduation then taught for a while at Johns Hopkins. And he and I partnered to establish a working group on Afghanistan, among Americans and Afghans who had devoted time there and wanted to see a good outcome. And we started meeting in 2016. And still meet today. Many former ambassadors and senior officials participate. We have fifty or so participants. We explore the key issues, invite speakers [Afghan, U.S., and others] for private conversations on the state of play, and some of us write op-eds together to try to help influence policy decisions.

Q: And that's separate from what you do at the Wilson Center?

WAYNE: That is separate, though now the Wilson Center says they want to enhance cooperation with this informal group.

Q: All right. Let's go ahead and cut here. And next time we will talk about Mexico.

WAYNE: I look forward to that conversation. Before leaving Afghanistan, please allow me to add some thoughts about lessons from Afghanistan.

I was involved at the start in the fall/winter of 2001–2002. From my economic, development, and sanctions portfolios in the Economic and Business Affairs Bureau, I helped well in U.S. and international planning and work to aid Afghanistan after the Taliban regime fell and a new government was being established. My involvement continued until early 2003. I served in Kabul, as we just discussed, in 2009–11. And, since 2016, I have led informal, private discussions among experts and officials and have written and spoken extensively on Afghanistan issues [see www.eawayne.com]. This informal group has met every six to eight weeks to keep up with Afghanistan issues and to help members be supportive of better outcomes.

The U.S. made a series of mistakes, some strategic, many tactical, throughout our twenty years or so of involvement in Afghanistan. Some of the important missteps involved the capacities of our institutions and staff to surge, to communicate, and to deliver and evaluate results on the ground. Some of these mistakes, we repeated during the years as lessons were not learned and shared. But importantly, many of the lessons have yet to be learned or internalized in our national or institutional "memory banks."

At present, we are grappling with the many consequences of a very poor exit strategy and poor implementation of our departure, leaving us with massive humanitarian, human rights and "moral responsibility" challenges while dealing with a repressive Taliban regime and with very little U.S. leverage available to influence Taliban behavior. The international reputational costs of our poor exit have also been substantial.

A few of the bigger examples of missteps and miscalculations include:

- We very poorly organized the international aid effort in 2002. The Taliban government had been swept away, but the new Afghan government faced massive challenges to recreate ministries, security, service delivery, et cetera. The initial idea of how to organize ongoing relief, rebuilding and development assistance from international donor countries and organizations was to give the leading responsibility to specific donors for different sectors. However, it became clear in early months that under this approach there was not effective cooperation among donors or systems for monitoring and evaluating success. It was not successful. For better or worse, the U.S. gradually established a wide-ranging aid program, and different donors continued to invest in projects of interest to them. This resulted in Afghan ministries being confronted with a range of different donor demands and systems [including at times different demands and offers from U.S. civilian and military entities]. Eventually, a number of donors agreed to contribute to trust funds, notably the World Bank Trust Fund for development assistance, which eased some of the coordinating burden. And efforts were made to have regular donor coordination meetings so donors and the Afghan government could coordinate. These were manageable arrangements, but they fell far short of an effective, transparent process for distributing assistance and measuring results.

- On the political/military side, the U.S. made a major miscalculation in failing to seriously explore or accept Taliban expressions of interest in reconciling when they were weak and disrupted in late 2001. Rumsfeld is reported to have dismissed the offers. Another offer reportedly came in 2003. Seeking reconciliation should have been a U.S. priority to limit our strategic commitment and to craft an exit strategy that allowed for fewer U.S. and partner security forces and exploring a peaceful path to an economically developing Afghanistan that would not be exporting terrorism or instability.

- By late 2002/early 2003, we reduced our attention to Afghanistan and shifted focus and money to Iraq where we were preparing to launch a very costly and ill-conceived invasion. This significantly undermined our efforts in Afghanistan to reestablish a secure and stable regime and to build regional cooperation to this end. Effectively, we failed to invest heavily early in Afghanistan, when we had the advantage, in a military or civilian structure to coordinate aid and efforts to help build institutions and when creative diplomacy might have been able to establish a path to reconciliation and development with effective international and regional support.

- Overtime, we did have successes in education and health investments, but we did not seem to learn well how to help build stronger Afghan government institutions or to deal with the dynamics of Afghan politics. Our development and aid programs were not effectively designed and synchronized with security assistance, nor were our assignment/personnel policies designed to provide for the length of service and expertise needed to maximize impact. On a micro level, our commanders, development specialists and diplomats were far too often relearning

the practical lessons about work in Afghanistan that their predecessors had learned.

- More broadly, we poorly understood Afghanistan and the dynamics of its politics and society. This held for the Taliban too; we did not understand that group well, its dynamics or its motivation. We never developed with our Afghan partners an effective plan to sap Taliban morale or its attraction. [In fact, in the end, they were able to be mobilized based on the U.S. image as a foreign invader.] We reinforced this lack of understanding with our short-term rotating assignments for U.S. personnel in the country. Not enough of us could speak the languages well.

- The Taliban were able to regroup and rebuild in Pakistan. Even during the "surge" from 2009–11, we never developed an effective strategy to get the government of Pakistan to limit their havens. Nor did we develop an independent military strategy to effectively inhibit the Taliban in Pakistan. Instead, we seem to have built anti-American sentiment in Pakistan. This Taliban "haven" or sanctuary was a significant flaw in our policy.

- In this connection, three U.S. administrations were not able to forge or maintain a longer-term vision, strategy, or timetable. Once the U.S. decided that we needed to help build basic institutions in the country to assure U.S. security interests, we needed to be willing to plan for the time it takes to create institutions that could last and function well. That takes a five-, ten- or twenty-year consistent investment. This was particularly clear from the side of providing civilian assistance, but it also held for military, public security, and intelligence institutions. A prime example was the Obama civilian surge. We announced the end time frame for an out surge when we announced the surge itself, and the U.S. and partners were at full military and civilian strength for less than a year. On the civilian side, we saw the need to plan for assistance provision over the longer term and so did some our military colleagues. In this connection, we did not successfully figure out how to best aid the Afghans to build institutions and capacities that were good enough to produce positive results and that they could run by themselves. These challenges were especially clear on the military and public security side and especially in the final years and months in which the most effective "Afghan" military tools were dependent on U.S. contractors to operate.

- We did not sufficiently recognize that our own spending was reinforcing corruption and undermining governance, nor did we find effective strategies to hold corruption in check or reduce it. There was far too rarely a price to pay for corruption, and our efforts to create stronger anti-corruption institutions largely failed. Also, with all our spending to support the surge, we boosted the Afghan economy in a way that was unsustainable. For example, we warned from the Embassy in 2009 and 2010 that if we abruptly ended our significant spending to support the surge, the Afghan economy [and GDP] would drop significantly. That happened in 2013 and subsequent years.

- We did not develop sufficient strategies for dealing with the weaknesses among our Afghan partners and to overcome their factionalism, the tensions between a

constitution that promoted a strong central government and strong preferences for decentralization and more regional autonomy among many Afghans. These Afghan tensions plagued the U.S. involvement throughout our twenty-year presence, and the non-Taliban Afghans often relied on the U.S. and other internationals to help them sort through their own weaknesses and division rather than finding Afghan solutions. This Afghan factionalism became especially evident as the U.S. drew down and planned to leave.

- In this context, it is important to recall that the same strategic and timeframe problems apply to making democratic institutions function well. It takes a lot of time and coaxing, more than we were willing to invest. And it takes serious local [Afghan] buy-in and leadership over time. I often think of the time and effort required for South Korea to move from a corrupt dictatorship to a functioning democratic system.

- In this connection, we educated and supported the development of a very capable generation of young leaders with an international perspective and a desire for a "modern" Afghanistan. However, they were blocked from authority in many cases by corrupt warlords and long-in-the-tooth politicians, who continued to jockey for power right up to the Taliban takeover. The patron-client, and family-clan-tribe-region-religious ties remained very strong compared to more "modern" political ties. We did not develop a successful approach to deal with this daunting challenge.

- The Obama years ended with a military drawdown that sapped the Afghan economy and morale but did "pull the plug." Obama was persuaded not to leave in part because of arguments that he should not preclude a fresh look by his successor. Thus, the U.S. had a "gap" in strategic direction.

- The Trump years began with a well-crafted strategy couched in a regional context that promised to use a range of tools including more active Afghan/U.S. targeting of the Taliban to get to the negotiating table. This strategy was driven by National Security Advisor, General H.R. McMaster. In concept, it seemed to have a chance not of "winning" but of getting the Taliban and Pakistan more interested in talking about a solution. But as its enhanced military attacks on the Taliban were implemented, it also clearly fed resentment among Afghans living in areas where the U.S. and Afghan national forces carried out raids. In any case, by late summer of 2018, Trump changed national security advisors and U.S. strategy to put a focus on negotiating a deal with the Taliban and getting U.S. troops out.

- This policy resulted in a very bad deal with the Taliban under which the U.S. would give up much leverage and not hold the Taliban accountable for delivering much. It did not involve the Kabul government substantially in the negotiating process, but the U.S. would press the government in Kabul to make concessions such as releasing five thousand Taliban prisoners. This led to sapping of morale among Afghan security forces and elites and seemed to fuel further infighting in Kabul between President Ghani and other elites.

- This U.S. process prioritized a U.S. troop drawdown as Trump desired. It failed to recognize: a) the need for a prolonged period to build trust and reconciliation for a government that could embrace Taliban and non-Taliban, and b) the need for substantial external leverage to keep the parties abiding by any agreement.

- The very bad deal negotiated under Trump and the very poorly designed drawdown at the end of his administration, set the stage for a disastrous departure scenario under the new Biden administration once President Biden decided to stick to the withdrawal timetable that the Trump administration had set with the Taliban.

- The U.S. further undermined remaining Afghan air and special forces capacity with drawdowns of essential U.S. contractors. While the Taliban successfully waged a political-military campaign to take over large swaths of Afghanistan, while the Kabul government floundered.

- Meanwhile, the USG did not plan well for taking care of the hundreds of thousands of Afghans who had fought with, worked with, and supported the U.S. and who would likely suffer under a Taliban regime. It is hard to understand the poor reading of intelligence and poor planning for those last months. It was a very poor exit strategy devised by the Trump administration and very poor implementation of the exit by the Biden administration.

- Costs were massive: a great blow to the U.S.' international reputation and morale authority; throwing away twenty years' investment in Afghanistan's people, economy, and institutions; creating massive human suffering via economic collapse, humanitarian crises, and grave abuses of human rights, particularly for women and girls. Plus, the Taliban continued to support al Qaeda.

Some Lessons from the U.S. experience with Afghanistan:

- Need to clearly assess a vision of strategic interests, objectives, and mission, including an exit strategy early, in any military intervention. Need to be transparent and build consensus around this vision and plan. Avoid wishful thinking.

- Remember the so-called Pottery Barn rule—if you break it, you own it. That is okay, if the overall strategic interests of the U.S. weigh in favor of action, but then one needs to be responsible for what comes next.

- Need to be clear-headed about what is achievable and in what timeframe. This is especially true if trying to build institutions that function and/or democracy. These take a lot of time and effort and they need local buy-in. Need also to be realistic about what capacities one possesses to bring about changes—try not to overestimate your ability to deliver or to underestimate the difficulties you will face.

- Need to devise a realistic exit strategy. If trying to end a civil war or internal conflict or a war between states, one will need a set of checks and balances that

remain to encourage adherence to an accord. Make sure one does not overreach or overextend. Need to be honest about timeframes, incentives, leverage, et cetera needed to build peace and reconciliation. Need to seriously consider possible negative effects of a departure and how to mitigate them.

- If a longer-term mission and presence is agreed as needed for achieving U.S. objectives, then that needs to be explained at home and abroad. Specifics can be adjusted, but the vision needs to be clear-headed and well understood. Repeated messaging about timetables for departure should be recognized as potentially counterproductive for achieving U.S. objectives.

- In devising strategies and tactics, whether military or civilian, one needs to understand the human terrain of the country [for example, culture and politics)] and of one's enemy. Need to be explicit, transparent, attentive, and honest about the factors that can undermine one's efforts, for example, corruption, safe havens, weak institutions. Need to try to be honest about progress along the way. Don't be overly optimistic.

- Need to learn and adapt within the strategy but need to be patient and committed to a timeframe that is realistic.

- Need to be humble about our capacities to "win" or to bring about change, not haughty given our technology and military might. Need to realize that changing people, norms, and practices, and building new institutions takes immense effort and time and needs dedicated local partners and support.

- Recognize many mistakes are likely. Admit them and make sure to learn lessons with regular monitoring and evaluation of results, not with gotcha motives, but with the idea of learning and getting better.

- Need to know your partners [warts and strengths]. At some points, need to try to do enough to overcome serious weakness or you will lose—for example, corruption and poor service delivery undermined legitimacy of the Afghan government and the U.S. Need to find ways to promote strong points among partners, for example, roles for younger, educated, forward-looking leaders. Need to be patient at the same time. Will be hard to get the balance right here on these and many issues.

- Don't try to build things using U.S. models if not appropriate, for example, Afghan armed forces and key roles of air mobility. Try to find tools and practices that partners can make their own.

- Admit when you do not know how to do something—brutally honest evaluations.

- Get the exit strategy as right as possible—plan and think of consequences. U.S. blew this with a poor U.S.-Taliban accord with few checks on the Taliban built in, a poor U.S. drawdown which left the U.S. with fewer and fewer levers and weakened allies, and a poor final pull out scenario with steps that crushed morale

and capacity of allies, and that left the U.S. unprepared for the rapid fall of government and Kabul.

- As with a decision to enter or to continue in a conflict, don't base an exit on poor assessment of the situation and wishful thinking. One needs to carefully think through the potential consequences and act accordingly. The costs have been and will remain very high for the Afghan people and for the U.S.' reputation in the world. While the violence from the conflict has greatly reduced, but suffering from shortages of food, healthcare, and jobs/economic activity have grown immensely. Malnutrition and poverty are more widespread. Families are selling off their children. Women and girls face severe restrictions. We left behind hundreds of thousands to whom we owed much for service with us.

- Don't magnify costs or chances of failure with inconsistent decisions implementing an exit decision, for example, taking out U.S. contractors for the Afghan military with no alternatives developed.

- Again, in an exit, as in other stages of a conflict, be humble, listen and be ready to adjust the initial plans.

- Try to deal responsibly with problems that one leaves behind. To its credit, the Biden administration has been providing more humanitarian aid than any other country since the U.S. departure, but other serious lingering problems remain to be addressed.

End of interview