How I Got Here

Lives In Public Service

"Dark times," Hannah Arendt once noted, "are not only not new, they are no rarity in history." She maintained her conviction, however, "that even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination, and that such illumination may well come less from theories and concepts than from the uncertain, flickering, and often weak light that some men and women, in their lives and their works, will kindle." It is in that spirit the present volume is offered.

All of the subjects interviewed here have led outstanding lives of public service, in fields ranging from diplomacy and national security, to law and aid, to journalism and the academy. They have excelled as professionals and people and speak frankly of how their lives and careers unfolded, what they got right and wrong, and what advice they have for those coming after. Glittering with priceless historical nuggets, studded with hard-earned wisdom, the stories are fascinating alone and panoramic in conjunction.

Gideon Rose, Editor

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Contents

Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

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Chair, U.S. National Intelligence Council
U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
Dean, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I grew up on a farm. I love the outdoors, and at first, I wanted to be a forest ranger. Then I briefly thought I might want to be a minister. Then I thought I would follow my father into business. He was on Wall Street. As a senior at Princeton I bumped into an old English professor of mine, E. D. H. Johnson, in the library one day. He said, "Nye, what are you doing next year?" I said, "I'm joining the Marine Platoon Leaders Corps." And he said, "Oh, you can't do that. You've got to apply for a Rhodes." I thought, "I might as well try." I applied and got it, and then spent two years in Oxford.

That all sounds very straightforward.

Were you nervous about it? Was it as big a deal then as it is now?

Oh, it's a big deal, and you have to take it seriously. But you also know that it's a lottery. You have to hit the right state, the right competitors, the right year, and so forth. I had a classmate who came up my year and didn't make it. The next year, he did.

What was your major in college?

I majored in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, which combined history and economics and politics, and that's basically what I've done ever since.

What did you study at Oxford?

Philosophy, politics, and economics, a continua-

I think there's nothing wrong with a bit of optimism as long as you let reality creep in.

tion of the same multidisciplinary approach. Back then, philosophy was a mandatory course, and unexpectedly, it turned out to be the part I liked best. The rigor of Oxford's analytical philosophy in and around 1960 really sharpened my thinking and has stayed with me longer than the rest. After my second year, I started thinking about a career and was leaning toward going into the Foreign Service. But there was another almost detour when I thought I wanted to be a novelist. I started writing a novel, and it was pretty awful. When I showed it to friends who were specialists, they said, "You've got a lot to learn."

You published a novel later on. Was it the same one?

No, no, very different. That was in 2004. I had spent a good deal of time going to summer courses on how to write fiction. It's totally different from the prose that I'm used to writing. With social science, you try to get as wide an angle as you can. With fiction, you zoom in, trying to find a particular detail that can illuminate something broader. Instead of looking at a meadow, you look at a dewdrop on a blade of grass in the early morning. I think the novel turned out pretty well. It was called The Power Game. But it definitely scratched an itch from years earlier.

So instead of becoming a novelist, you decided to become a political scientist?

I came back to Harvard to do a Ph.D. in government, because I thought I would go into the Foreign Service. I figured if that didn't work out, at least I would have a Ph.D. to fall back on. The academic credential was more of an insurance policy.

At that point, many African countries were becoming independent, and I would stay up and talk long into the night about African democracy with a good friend, a Ghanaian in my college at Oxford. I decided to use graduate school as a way to explore Africa and got a grant from the Ford Foundation to pay for it. One of my professors, Edward Mason, had come back from a World Bank mission to Uganda. He said, "As an economist, I don't know whether I should be telling them to plan for a market of eight million [Uganda alone] or 30 million [the East African Common Market]. Some political scientist will have to answer that one." I said, "Bingo, there's my thesis." And that's what I did. I went to Africa. I saw two countries become independent, Uganda and Kenya, got to interview leaders like Julius Nyerere and Milton Obote and others, and wrote a book called Pan-Africanism and East African Integration, which said it wasn't going to work. Sadly for them, happily for me, I was right.

Did your hopes and predictions for the newly decolonized states you were studying pan out?

No, I was too optimistic. I think there's nothing wrong with a bit of optimism as long as you let reality creep in. Having strongly supported the new pan-African leaders, I watched as they trampled on civil liberties, both for Africans and for the Europeans who had stayed on trying to help the countries. A sympathetic French observer [René Dumont] wrote a book called L'Afrique noire est mal partie—Africa Is Off to a Bad Start. That was how I felt, and I didn't want to stay in African studies. I didn't want to hammer these elites, but I wasn't going to become their toady, either.

That first book of mine was on the structural

factors that make it hard for developing countries to create common markets. I discovered there was a common market in Central America that was actually working quite well and decided to study why. So when I came back from Africa to Harvard as an assistant professor, I learned Spanish, applied for a grant, and soon went off to live in Central America, doing a study of the Central American Common Market. From there, I went on to look at the European Common Market and did a book on regional integration in general. Back then, people thought this was the future. Europe has done moderately well—or at least much better than it did before, although not quite up to what people like [the political scientist] Ernie [Ernst] Haas hoped.

I followed a thread of curiosity across regions, trying to explain a common puzzle. From there, I got interested in the politics of trade. I got asked to join a group that looked at trade in the nuclear industry and how it affected proliferation. And that led me to nonproliferation, which I handled in the Carter administration.

So you went from studying cooperation in economic integration to studying cooperation on nonproliferation?

In the mid-'70s, I was asked to join a group that the Ford Foundation set up with the MITRE Corporation, which produced the Ford-MITRE report, which became the basis for Jimmy Carter's nonproliferation policy. I see a clear thread from Africa to work I've done on nuclear weapons: How do politics and economics and ideas interact as you try to explain anomalies or puzzles? When students ask what they should study, I say, "Follow your curiosity. If you have an interesting puzzle, try to answer it."

How did you go from academia to government?

I had originally wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I enjoyed teaching and writing but still had an interest in the action of foreign policy. I had gotten to know Cyrus Vance through meetings at the Council on Foreign Relations, Ditchley, and other such places. A number of people from the Ford-MITRE commission went into the Carter administration. I was on the transition team for [the] State [Department], and when Vance was named secretary, he asked whether I would work with him on nonproliferation, and so I did.

What was government like?

It was fascinating. And I actually did some good. I think we prevented a couple of countries from going nuclear.

Which ones?

Brazil and Argentina. Brazil had made a deal with Germany for an enrichment plant, which, I was told by the head of the [National] Atomic Energy Commission of Argentina, was forcing Buenos Aires to follow suit. By stopping that deal, we were able, with other pressures, to turn off the Argentine program. And I think that nipped a nuclear arms race early. We also put pressure on South Korea and Taiwan not to develop nuclear weapons. And we were able to get the French to cancel a deal to sell a reprocessing plant to Pakistan (though our success there was undone in the Reagan period when the administration cared more about getting Pakistan's help against the Soviets in Afghanistan than in stopping its proliferation). All very interesting, sometimes tense experiences.

The novel that I wrote much later grew out of something Cy Vance told as I was leaving. He said, "I want you to write me a personal note, on personal stationary, no classification. Should we or should we not use force to stop Pakistan's nuclear program?" I wrote the note, saying probably not, because there were too many moving parts and too many unforeseeable consequences to the attempt. But I kept wondering, "What if I had answered that the other way?" And I decided to explore the other path through fiction. So the novel is about what happens when the CIA discovers Pakistan is about to deliver nuclear weapons to Iran and decides to destroy them beforehand.

The Carter administration was famously torn between Brzezinski and Vance factions.

Yes. Bureaucratically, it was quite tough. I had good personal relations with Zbig [Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security adviser], but I worked for and was loyal to Cy. A couple of times, I remember asking Vance if I could challenge what I felt was a wrong decision made by the White House on my issues. He demurred, because he had other things on his plate with the president and didn't want to spend his political capital. I said, "Would you mind if I talked to Zbig?" And he said, "Nope, go ahead." So I went to Zbig and said, "If we do it this way, the president is going to fall on his face." And Zbig, to his credit, went in and said that, and he got Carter

to reverse himself.

Did you approach academia differently after your stint in government?

Yes. I had been running around the world telling these countries they shouldn't have nuclear weapons, and they'd say, "But you have them." I kept thinking, "Is there an ethical basis for this?" When you're in government, you don't have time to think about that. So I promised myself: "When I get back to Harvard, I'm going to teach a seminar on ethics and nuclear weapons"—which I did, and eventually published a book called Nuclear Ethics, trying to think through that puzzle.

I also realized that the kinds of papers my colleagues in the Government Department had been sending me were totally useless. After 14 hours of work and processing all the intelligence and cables, I was not going to read a 40-page academic paper on Pakistan's nuclear program. So I decided to teach a course in the Kennedy School on how to communicate effectively in government, based on short, action-oriented memos. And I kept giving my lectures to undergraduates on international relations, going from the Greeks through the twentieth century. Six hundred students in Sanders Theatre. That was fun.

The Kennedy School and the Government Department at Harvard have been somewhat at odds historically, and you've been one of the few people to go back and forth.

That's right. I always had good relations on both sides. My tenure was in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and I only really switched over full-time to the Kennedy School when I became dean, which wasn't until I came back from the Clinton administration in the '90s. But I taught there and so had a foot in both worlds. The Kennedy School is able to deal with interdisciplinary issues better than the Government Department can. The most important questions are often at the peripheries of disciplines or in the seams between fields. That's where my regional integration work was. It was not in the mainstream of the field. But the importance of transnational relations increased and economics became central after the oil crisis. That was when Bob Keohane and I wrote Power and Interdependence, stressing that you had to think of power as not just military power but the ability to manipulate interdependence. It was basically because I didn't start in the middle of the field—I came at issues of power from a different angle, and that let me see things others hadn't.

Tell me about the Nye/Keohane partnership.

Everybody says, "You must have become friends in graduate school." Actually, we didn't even know each other there. That's how warm and fuzzy Harvard graduate student life was. In '67 or '68, we were both asked to join the board of the journal International Organization, which wanted to update itself. We went to a meeting and said, "All these studies of UN voting and exegeses of the UN Charter are not very interesting. We should think of our title with a lowercase i and o and look at the transnational relations that are going on." The other board members challenged us to do a special issue on it, which came out in 1971 as "Transnational Relations and World Politics." And that's when Bob and I started our intellectual collaboration.

With computers, working together on a paper is not difficult. But in those days, "cut and paste" wasn't done with the click of a button. It meant taking a pair of scissors and slicing up yellow pages with longhand or typing on them, then using Scotch tape to put them where you wanted. We would snail-mail these batches of pages back and forth across the continent (he was at Stanford then; I was at Harvard), occasionally getting together in person. It worked because neither of us wore our egos on our sleeves. Sometimes he'd destroy some words that I thought were just fine, and then I'd step back, and I'd say, "Well, you know, maybe they weren't quite as well formed as they should be." And he was the same. So we not only were able to work together effectively but also became good friends, which we are to this day.

You spent a lot of time on the Cold War and the Soviet Union, and then they both disappeared. Did you call that?

No, I certainly did not. I don't know many people who did. In the 1980s, I ran something called the Avoiding Nuclear War Project with Graham Allison and Al Carnesale at the Belfer Center at the Kennedy School. We did a series of books, including Hawks, Doves, and Owls. Another was Fateful Visions, which contained different scenarios of how things might turn out, including the Soviet Union decaying or standing down. But it's not as though we said, "This is what's going to happen." That was the closest I came.

You're a distinguished, big-shot professional in midcareer, teaching all of this stuff at Harvard, and then the world suddenly flips upside down. How do you keep pronouncing authoritatively on the future? Where does the self-confidence to do that come from?

It's not self-confidence; it's curiosity. If I knew the answers, I wouldn't have to worry about it. It's the effort that's fun. How should we think about the future? After the Berlin Wall came down, there were various views of what the future would be like. Sam Huntington had his "clash of civilizations." Sam was a close friend, but I told him I didn't think he got it right. It was the narcissism of small differences, not the clash of Toynbee-like civilizations. Frank Fukuyama had his "end of History," and I disagreed with that, too. I thought the world was going to become more complex and that the work that I had done on different levels of international politics was a better fit. Paul Kennedy, meanwhile, said that the United States was going the way of Philip II's Spain, and I didn't see that, either. So I started to write a book, which became Bound to Lead, arguing that Americans had more capacity in this odd new world than the declinists thought.

That's when I developed the concept of soft power. After I totaled up American economic power and military power, it was clear there was something else, something nonmaterial, going on that wasn't being caught by traditional measures. That was the ability to attract others. Several years later, Hu Jintao told the 17th Party Congress that China had to invest more in soft power. Sitting at the kitchen table trying to figure out what factors might shape the post–Cold War world, I would never have dreamt that the president of China would pick up the idea and spend billions of dollars on it.

You went back into government during the Clinton administration.

Right. Les Aspin was appointed secretary of defense, and he asked me to come work with him. I liked Les a lot, but I didn't like the way he was organizing the department. Meanwhile, Jim Woolsey [director of the CIA] asked me to head the National Intelligence Council. I thought I'd have more freedom there.

What does the National Intelligence Council do?

The National Intelligence Council does estimative

intelligence. Current intelligence is about immediate events: "Here's what [Slobodan] Milosevic [the president of Serbia] said yesterday." Estimative intelligence says, "Here are the bases of Milosevic's power and why it's likely to diminish." You create scenarios of the future and try to estimate their probabilities. And then, after you've coordinated the views from 16 different intelligence agencies, you say why it might all be wrong. The analysts hated that last part. They'd say, "We work so hard on this!" I'd say, "Yes, but you can always be wrong. The policymaker needs to be aware of why things could go wrong. That will expose your assumptions and give them more information to consider in deciding just how much they want to bet on this." Estimative intelligence and the NIC were great fun. I really enjoyed it.

How did seeing all the fruits of American intelligence change your view of the world?

You have illusions of omniscience, but you quickly realize there's just an awful lot missing, a lot you don't know. I remember reading a set of intelligence reports about how [Russian President Boris] Yeltsin was about to collapse, just before I went on a trip to Russia with Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen. I sat at a table with Yeltsin in the Kremlin, eight of us total. He was clearheaded, taking notes. Yes, he did have problems with alcohol, and he did collapse a few years later. But it gave me an appreciation that reading intelligence is not quite the same as being there and seeing for yourself.

Did knowing secrets make you discount the views of people who did not have clearances?

Not necessarily. The clearances were important, but if you focus just on secret material, you miss the broader context. I wrote an article for Foreign Affairs about this, based on my experiences at the NIC. I said that in the post–Cold War world, it was less important to know how many warheads were on a particular missile than to know who controls the missiles and what social forces control them. Secret intelligence can provide crucial pieces of the puzzle, but to assemble them, it helps to see the picture on the cover of the box, which you get from open-source intelligence and the academy and journalism.

From the NIC, you went to the Department of Defense.

Before going into the Clinton administration, I had chaired a study group at Harvard on what to do about Japan. It's hard to remember, but at that time, Japan was seen as a rising superpower. There were books about the coming war with Japan, exaggerated economic fears. In the Harvard study group, which I worked on with Ezra Vogel, and an Aspen Strategy Group one I was co-chairing with Bill Perry, I decided our approach to East Asia was wrong.

We were too focused on the economic threat from Japan and not paying enough attention to the rise of China. That rise was creating a regional system of three powers—the United States, China, and Japan—and we wanted to be part of the two. As head of the NIC, I could go to meetings in the Situation Room and tell people facts, but I couldn't make policy recommendations. People would say, "How can we punish Japan?" And I'd say, "Wait a minute—you've got a larger question. What relationship do we want between Japan and China?" When Bill Perry replaced Les Aspin as secretary of defense, he asked me to come over there and develop a strategy for Asia. So I traded omniscience for a little bit of potency.

And we were able to transform American policy toward Japan and East Asia. I don't think people in the U.S. were aware of it, but the Japanese called it "the Nye Initiative," which was fun. In 1996, [President Bill] Clinton and [Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro] Hashimoto signed a declaration saying that the U.S.-Japan alliance was the basis for security in East Asia after the Cold War. It was a 180-degree turn in our policy. The logic was that getting the balance of power right by reaffirming the U.S. Japan alliance would give us an insurance policy, allowing us to afford to try opening up to China. We called the policy "engage but hedge" and put the hedge in place first.

After that, you come back to Harvard yet again. Are you getting bored with teaching at this point?

I actually resigned my tenure at the end of 1994. The school allows you two years of leave, and my time was up. But I wanted to finish the work I was doing on Japan. Then the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 showed how many citizens thought government was evil and worthless. It was disillusioning, because the people I worked around were dedicated, hard-working professionals. So when

Harvard offered me the deanship of the Kennedy School a couple of weeks later, I decided to take it, because I could explore the role of government in the world. I told them I would take it if we could keep the appointment quiet until the Japan negotiations were done.

What was being dean of the Kennedy School like?

It was interesting. The school was by nature interdisciplinary, including faculty from about 20 different disciplines. It was a place where you could try to deal with real issues. We had to walk a tightrope, neither being yet another graduate school for economics and politics nor being yet another business school. I wanted to make sure we had a mission, which I saw as combining the best academic virtues with preparation for public service as well as private careers. I also wanted to increase the role of women and develop new centers in areas such as human rights. Perhaps the most intriguing project was called "Visions of Governance for the 21st Century." Elaine Kamarck directed that. We created a faculty study group and produced a lot of good work on what was happening around the world, including a book I edited with Phil Zelikow and David King called Why People Don't Trust Government.

How does all this come from studying the East African Common Market? To me, the continuous thread is following your curiosity. I find that one puzzle leads to another. Other people look and say, "He's all over the lot."

The Ivy League is much more diverse now than it was when you entered it. Did you realize back then how non-diverse American elites were?

I was aware. There were two African Americans in the class ahead of me at Princeton, but none in my class. I enjoyed Princeton; it was a great teaching institution. You had first-rate professors giving you precepts. Paul Bohannan, a leading Africanist, taught anthropology as a required sophomore course. But the social system was awful, and it was clear that it wasn't going to change. It was a different world. No women, very few minorities. I hoped to be a part of changing that.

Has there been intellectual cumulation and progress in political science since you entered the field?

We understand some problems better than oth-

You create scenarios of the future and try to estimate their probabilities. And then, after you've coordinated the views from 16 different intelligence agencies, you say why it might all be wrong.

ers. Unfortunately, it amounts to less than half of the major problems of the day. Take the field of international relations. When I was in graduate school, the mainstream approach was a very simplistic realist model—the Melian dialogue. It never occurred to people that ethical dimensions were just being ignored. As [the political theorist] Michael Walzer has said, "Thinking about ethics and international relations at that time was just outside the bounds of the discipline." The field was quite narrow. Today, with the rise of neoliberalism and constructivism, people realize the importance of institutions and culture, so we're better off than when I started. In general, however, as political science has become deeper, it has also become narrower and more dogmatic. It's so removed from practical questions that it's a lot harder now than it used to be to think about policy and academia simultaneously, to blend both in a career.

Were you surprised by the backlash against globalism and the rise of populism and nationalism?

That's part of the half we don't understand. I don't think we were very good at capturing the rise of populism. And we haven't done a good job of understanding the interrelations between domestic and international politics.

You've served in many organizations, including Harvard and government departments. Any thoughts on how to maneuver and survive in them?

The most interesting thing to realize was how different academic life is from government because of time. If you have to get a memo to the secretary of state for a 4:00 PM meeting with the French ambassador, you can't read it over at 2:00 PM and say, "This isn't quite right. I'm going to keep working until it's better." If you turn it in at 4:15 PM, it's an F, no matter how good the final product is—whereas in academia, you might take an incomplete and polish and polish, and eventually, the professor might say, "It's late, but it's brilliant."

If government puts a premium on time, academia puts a premium on truth. You try to say what you actually think about problems and their solutions. In government, you need to be careful about politics and bureaucracy. You say to yourself, "If I frame my position this way, these people will oppose it. By framing it differently, I can muster a coalition that will get the idea promoted." You should never write an

academic paper that way. But unless you write your bureaucratic memos like that, your ideas aren't going to have any effect inside the system. The key to government service is making sure you keep your sense of integrity as you make the necessary accommodations to time and power. You have to understand the compromises you're making, so that you can grapple properly with questions about resignation.

Academia and government are very different. The question is, can you cope? When I first went to Washington, in the Carter administration, it was the proverbial kid being thrown into the pool and told to swim. A couple of times, I thought I was drowning. Everybody else knew more than I did; they'd been there, had read all the files, etc. And my instincts weren't always right. If I got a lousy memo from my staff, I'd try to rewrite it. I quickly realized that in order to get things done, I had to learn how to encourage, tutor, mentor, and delegate.

Did you ever consider resigning on principle?

Several times. At one point, the Carter administration was going to take a position on reprocessing that was the opposite of what I thought we should be doing. I said to myself, "If they do this, I'm going to have to resign. I can't implement this policy, because I'm on record saying it's wrong." Luckily, I didn't have to. There are other cases where you tell yourself, "If I resign over every little thing, I'll have no power at all." Figuring out the line is hard.

How has the conduct of American foreign policy changed over the course of your career?

In the early postwar period, it was run by a relatively narrow elite, recruited largely from New York financial and legal circles. Harry Truman was a farmer from Missouri who became a senator and then an accidental president, but the people around him were the heart of the WASP establishment. When I first began coming to the Council [on Foreign Relations], in the early '70s, it still had the atmosphere of a tight-knit men's club. Diversity has been good, but with it has come an increasing difficulty of reaching any sort of consensus.

As a pillar of that establishment yourself, have you consciously tried to play a role bridging the old guard and rising cohorts?

Very much so. I've always tried to open things up, whether at the council, or the Trilateral Commission, or the Kennedy School, or the Aspen Strategy Group.

You have this amazing equanimity, a calm reasonableness throughout all circumstances and situations. Where does that come from?

That's a good question. It must be from my mother. She got through one year of Smith College before she had to drop out with the Depression and was always very stoic. It's an innate temperament. But some of my assistants might say, "We can tell when you're angry: you get quiet instead of screaming and yelling."

What are you proudest of in your career?

It sounds corny, but I'm proudest of the fact that I've had a warm, loving relationship with the same woman for 60 years; and surrounding that, children and grandchildren; and surrounding that, interesting friends; and surrounding that, a really large number of students. Then would be the things that I've written, and then the things that I've done in government. In the Carter period, I changed nonproliferation policy for the better, and in the Clinton period, I changed Asia policy for the better.

What are your greatest regrets?

I suppose my regret is that I didn't get to have more power, in order to be able to change American policy more than I did. I was mentioned as a possible national security adviser had [Michael] Dukakis won [the 1988 presidential election], and that would have been a great opportunity. On the other hand, as it turned out, George H. W. Bush was an excellent president. So although I regretted his victory at the time, I didn't regret it later.

What advice do you have for those starting out?

Follow your curiosity, find puzzles and think of solutions, be helpful and try to make the world better, and help others to do the same. If you do that, you're not going to be bored, you may leave a little good behind you, and you will feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Don't worry too much about whether you have it all planned out. If you're following your curiosity and keeping your mind open to new things and new events, you can roll with the punches.

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As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A Foreign Service officer.

What kind of kid wants to be a Foreign Service officer?

That's the key question. I was born on the eve of World War II. I saw my father join the war early and go into the intelligence service, the OSS. He returned to Washington to help found the CIA and rose to become the head of clandestine services. That's the world I grew up in. I could recite the names of every prime minister in the world, while my friends could tell you the starting pitchers in the American and National Leagues. When I was about 13, someone asked me what I wanted to be. I said, "An American diplomat." And I never changed my mind, ever.

How did you make it happen?

I always knew where I was headed. In high school, I was wretched at math and science but loved history and read it voraciously (as I do to this day). My parents were determined that I see something of the world, so they sent me to live with a couple of old ladies in a suburb of Tours to learn high quality French. When I got to university, I figured I needed to learn about areas I didn't know, so I started on Arabic. With my languages, I took the Foreign Service exam a year

early—and failed it. Happily, I managed to squeak by the following year. I learned later that people who did well on the written exam rarely became ambassadors, but people who did particularly well on the oral exam often rose to the top ranks of the corps. That says something about American diplomacy.

Was your Foreign Service class homogeneous?

Much more so than today. Out of 35 or 40, I think we had two women, one African American, and two Asian Americans. There was already broad geographic distribution: we weren't all from the East Coast and the Ivy League. We were all straight.

What was your first posting?

I had written my senior thesis at Princeton on Algeria and in the course of that had met with members of the FLN [National Liberation Front] in Cairo and French army officers in Paris. I knew I wanted to go to Algiers. And just at that moment, the OAS [Secret Army Organization], a terrorist group of French officers and settlers opposed to granting Algerian independence, blew up the American consulate there. Nobody scheduled wanted to go. I did, so I went.

So your time there was like The Battle of Algiers?

No. I got there just after independence. But you could still smell the cordite on the streets. After the French left, the different factions of the Algerian revolution went at each other's throats. Soon the army took over, under Houari Boumedienne, and his subordinate Abdelaziz Bouteflika later became president.

What was your job?

I was a jack of all trades, master of absolutely none. I was first assigned as the general service officer—the person who pays the bills and makes sure the facilities and utilities work. I knew nothing. When the wife of the deputy chief of mission called to say the power in their house had failed, I went to the Rolodex and called Monsieur Dupont, "electrician." Ahmed answered the phone, because Monsieur Dupont had gone to France. Ahmed and I went to the house. Ahmed put two wires in an electrical socket, there was a flash, and he was thrown on the floor. That was how Algeria was, reeling in the wake of the French retreat.

After a few months, I became a consular officer, issuing visas and taking care of American citizens. I had marvelous adventures doing that. I used the

interviews to ask how the shooting was in different neighborhoods and ended up killing a lot of ducks, partridge, and wild boar—and seeing the country as no other officer in the embassy was able to. I learned Algerian and colloquial Arabic and got to meet people all over, including the military generation that was taking over. Bouteflika became a friend: he was in his late 20s; I was in my early 20s. He actually asked me to come back and visit a few years ago. He finally left office in 2019, which shows you how sclerotic leadership in Algeria became.

At that time, we were still deeply caught up in the mentality of the Cold War. We thought America was in an existential race with the Russians and that newly independent Algeria was a target of opportunity—a field of play in the Cold War contest. Everybody was arriving—the Russians, the Cubans, all the liberation movements. The United States, too: President [John F.] Kennedy was interested. But the Algerians were deeply suspicious of us. Everybody read Frantz Fanon. We were seen as longtime allies of France, an imperialist power, ally of the imperialists helping to suppress the "wretched of the earth."

Eventually, I became a political officer and did a lot of writing. Once I was sent with a message from Kennedy for President [Ahmed] Ben Bella. The Algerian government was in chaos. No one knew where to deliver a presidential message. I finally found myself talking directly with Ben Bella. I gave him the message, he read it in front of me, and was moved to admit that he really admired Kennedy. Several weeks later, during a visit by [Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser, Ben Bella spotted me at an event and had me brought up to talk with the two of them, which was thrilling.

What was the reaction in Algeria to Kennedy's assassination?

A huge sadness. I was driving on the north coast when word came through that the president was dead. I thought Ben Bella had been killed and rushed back to the embassy, where I discovered it was our president, not theirs. There was a huge public outpouring of grief. As a person, Kennedy was greatly respected and appreciated. The Algerians named a street after him. After all, Kennedy had been the first senator to call for Algeria's independence.

Where did you go after Algeria?

Vietnam. When I got there, I was sent to the provinces to work with the pacification program.

You come from Algeria, where the French got pushed out. You go to Vietnam, where the French got pushed out. How could somebody so intelligent and clear-headed not see that the United States would meet the same fate?

That's a question that has dogged me ever since. I think you have to go back to what I said about being a child of World War II. We were confident America could do anything; losing was unthinkable. We felt we were in an existential fight with the Russians. And I believed at the time that we had made a commitment to Vietnam that we had to keep, and that U.S. standing in the world would be diminished if we didn't.

One of your peers there, Richard Holbrooke, wrote eloquently in private at the time about how impossible it was going to be for the United States to succeed. Did you feel the same way?

Both of us believed that with the right priorities, the right resources, and the right leadership, we could build the government of South Vietnam into a political and military force sufficient to beat the insurgency. It took a while to realize that that was not going to happen. In my case, I remained so committed to the idea that we had to win, could not afford to lose, that it came later to me than it should have—not until the Tet Offensive. Being in Washington, Dick Holbrooke had the benefit of experiencing the anti-war movement firsthand. He understood the domestic support for the war had gone.

So Tet was a shock because you thought an uprising like that shouldn't even have been possible?

Correct. We thought we had made progress in beating the insurgency and the North Vietnamese the previous year. It turned out to be a pause, while the North Vietnamese regrouped for a much bigger attack. I didn't lose faith in the effort right away, but it was different after that. I was in Vietnam another year, working to recover what had been lost. I thought we couldn't just leave these people to an uncertain fate. And I continued to feel that way after my tour ended. And so it was until the fall of Saigon, when I plunged into work on refugee resettlement. We moved nearly a million Vietnamese out of that country and into this one. Then I felt I had discharged a duty to people I had been sent to

help defend. When we could no longer defend them, I helped many reestablish themselves.

Did Vietnam change your views about the possibilities of American power?

It did. Asked at the end of his life what he got wrong, McGeorge Bundy said, "We underestimated the ability of our opponents to resist and overestimated our ability to compel them" to do what we wanted. And that double failure, overestimation of our power and underestimation of the will of the people sitting across the table, remains a central challenge for American foreign policy today. The guiding principle of my view of diplomacy became trying to understand what motivated the other man, so you could align your objectives and get him to do what you wanted at a price you could afford to pay.

How did you get your first embassy?

As a result of a series of accidents. I was working for undersecretary of state Joe Sisco, largely on the Middle East. He resigned to become president of American University, in Washington. Lawrence Eagleburger, then undersecretary of state for management, called me to his office and said Secretary [Henry] Kissinger needed somebody to do southern Africa. I told him I knew nothing about the region, but he said it didn't matter—he and Kissinger wanted somebody who could work hard and get the job done.

The Cubans had recently intervened in Angola, and Kissinger saw the Cold War had come to southern Africa. He felt we had to establish an American position there, getting political settlements to the local conflicts and supporting stable governments we could work with. That meant engaging the four quarrels in the region: apartheid in South Africa, the end of Portuguese rule in Mozambique and South African rule in Namibia, and the struggle to achieve majority rule in Zimbabwe. The administration was also concerned to make sure southern Africa did not turn "red," especially when Gerald Ford was running for reelection. The pursuit of those objectives occupied my time from the remainder of the Ford administration, through Carter, and into the Reagan years. At the end, I was blessed to work for Chester Crocker, who was assistant secretary of state for African affairs. He set out a strategy to pursue the Kissinger objectives and restore American influence but with a different set of tactics.

Some cynics at the time considered constructive engagement a way of easing pressure on South Africa rather than making it more effective.

The cynics were wrong. It was a very difficult problem. Our strategy had two elements. The first was to bring American influence to bear in such a manner as to get the Cubans out of Angola and the South Africans out of Namibia, break Mozambique's association with the East Bloc and realign with us, and relieve South African fears of being overwhelmed. The second was to encourage changes inside South Africa which would lead to the mitigation and then the end of apartheid. I had several bites at this apple. I first got involved in the mid-1970s, when I worked on Zimbabwe and Namibia for Kissinger and tried to stop the Cubans before they took over Angola.

You backed the [rebel leader Jonas] Savimbi?

At a certain point, but realizing that Savimbi was leverage to achieve another objective. Later, the hard-liners in the Reagan administration lost their way, convincing themselves that Savimbi was some sort of liberator of southern Africa and that we could defeat the Russians as opposed to having to negotiate them out. And there were those who believed in RENAMO, the insurgent group in Mozambique. I was one of those terrible people in the State Department who believed we could achieve our objectives politically.

The Reagan administration was of two minds. Chester Crocker and I designed a policy of constructive engagement throughout southern Africa, and Bill Casey and the CIA pursued a different set of goals, aiming to defeat the Soviets.

What happens when American policy is internally inconsistent?

It depends on the situation. The South Africans understood what was going on, but they were split, too—between hard-liners in military intelligence and moderates who wanted to negotiate peace. So we reinforced the more moderate side, and Casey helped the hard-liners.

None of us wanted to see Soviet influence supplant Western influence in a troubled region. That was our national objective, and it sprang from broader attitudes about the Soviet Union during the Cold War. We pursued our objective by using American influence and statecraft to force the Cubans out of Angola and bring a peaceful Mozambique into a relationship with us. We calmed relations with Zimbabwe, although [Prime Minister Robert] Mugabe was never an easy character to work with. And all of this

strengthened the hands of those in South Africa who believed in peaceful accommodation, at home and abroad. Internal developments brought about the end of apartheid. But we helped create an environment in which white South Africa felt it could take a chance on black-majority rule.

Did you ever have contact with the South African opposition?

Yes and no. At the time, we had a stupid policy which precluded American diplomats from talking to the African National Congress. It was like our policy toward the PLO. Of course, we only pushed the ANC toward the Russians. However, at one point, while I was serving as ambassador to Zambia, just up the street from my house in Lusaka lived Thabo Mbeki, the representative of the ANC. We brushed shoulders enough that we knew each other, although I couldn't invite him over for dinner.

What came after southern Africa?

George Shultz, an extraordinarily kind and thoughtful man, became secretary of state and asked me to be ambassador to Egypt. So I went back to the Arab world, where I'd started my career.

When you move from one region to the next, do you stop following the old one?

I never gave up any country I served in. Each stays with you. And I had worked on the Middle East when I was deputy executive secretary. I was with [President Jimmy] Carter in Jerusalem when he stood in front of the Knesset and in Cairo when he and [Egyptian President Anwar al-]Sadat were on the telephone with [Israeli Prime Minister Menachem] Begin and sealed the deal that led to the Egyptian-Israeli peace. By the time I became ambassador to Egypt, in 1986, the United States was the dominant power in the region, and the close strategic relationship between the United States and Egypt was a pillar of American strategy. And when Saddam Hussein threatened all of that in 1990, Egypt brought the Arab world into opposition to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, providing us crucial political support, logistical support, and two divisions. I was delighted to have served through all of that. I also spent a lot of time dealing with peace arrangements between Israel and Egypt, trying to overcome mountains of difficulties between the two of them that threatened to weaken resolve on both sides to stabilize their relationship and the peace.

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You've done blacks and whites, Arabs and Jews. Did you ever go to Ireland?

[Laughter] No, I didn't do Ireland. I did a tour in Bangladesh and worked with Bangladeshis and Indians, though.

Do deep-rooted rivalries with cultural and historical and psychological roots get in the way of diplomacy?

Diplomacy, when used correctly, is about assessing situations, setting objectives, and trying to get people to do things for you that enhance your own security, well-being, and influence. I have always tried to forge relationships with foreign governments that enable us to work productively together.

What came after Egypt?

I was asked to do something that I never imagined would happen and I was delighted to do—be ambassador in the Philippines. The United States had been there from the beginning of the twentieth century, and I'd grown up with stories about it from people who had fought and served there. I came to Manila at a time of crisis. The base agreements that had been the bedrock of our security relationship with the Philippines were ending and hostility to the United States, in the wake of Marcos's presidency, was peaking. My task was to save our naval base at Subic Bay and then figure out how to rebuild our relations and rekindle our influence.

Is it better for a diplomat to stay in one region and gain depth and experience or rotate around the world and gain breadth and perspective?

That's been a perennial debate over the years inside the State Department. Do you want to have highly specialized people or generalists? I think it's good to have area and language expertise but also good to see how American diplomacy works in different contexts. I favor a balance of the two. And similarly, it's important to balance tours in Washington and abroad—being both a house mouse and a field mouse, as a colleague of mine used to put it.

Did you ever feel strange coming back to the United States?

When I came back from Vietnam, there were demonstrations in the streets. My brother and sister were putting flowers in gun barrels, and our family was divided. I continued to think we had an obligation to the Vietnamese to try to end the war in such a way as to preserve the continued existence of the Republic of Vietnam. I found opinion in United States hard against it. That was the only time I really felt out of sorts being at home. And it took me a while to understand how psychically searing the Vietnam experience had become for the country—and still is, in some ways.

What was it like being ambassador compared with being a junior officer? Did you continue to go duck hunting?

Yes, of course. But the leadership aspect of being an ambassador is actually one of the reasons why diplomacy is such a great career. Egypt, middle of the Gulf War. Saddam had begun to launch missiles. The American government evacuated employees and citizens, and American companies did the same. I believed that we had to stand steady. So I became sort of the mayor of a large American community. Every week, I would call the community together and stand up and take their questions, try to address everybody's concerns and keep people calm, make sure we stuck it out. You end up acting well outside your official training. And there's no school where you can go learn these things; you have to have an instinct for it.

Did the people who couldn't do that fail to rise in the service?

I would put it the other way around. If you were put in such a situation, ambassador to an important country in crisis, and you didn't lead well, you would not be given another significant assignment.

You make being a diplomat sound fun. Was it as fun for the diplomats' families?

Good question. Some children of Foreign Service officers never want to go abroad again. They want to find some nice place in Montana and settle down and become totally American. Many others end up committed to public service, often abroad. My son followed in my footsteps and is now a junior official in Algiers, just like I was. Of course, times have changed radically. He just spent three weeks in England with his wife and newborn baby son. In my time, it wouldn't have even been a question: your wife would go to England to have the baby, and you'd stay in the embassy in Algiers, doing your job. Today's State Department encouraged him to take an extra week to bond with his newborn son and build his family.

What came after the Philippines?

Undersecretary of state for international security affairs. There I was coordinating policy, and it was a big change from the field. You have to think about things globally and politically. I had to deal with crises in Somalia, Bosnia, and the Middle East, as well as completing the START II arms control agreement with Russia.

What do you mean "think politically"?

A good Foreign Service officer can tell you how a foreign government works, how to influence its decisions. But you have to come home and do exactly the same analysis of your own government. How does it work? How do things get through the NSC [National Security Council]? How do you handle the Defense Department? What do you do on Capitol Hill? How do you connect with the American public? By the time you become assistant secretary or undersecretary, you know your job is not just about foreign policy but also about the domestic context within which you work. How to make and execute decisions in an American context; how to deal with the intersection of politics and policy.

What came after that?

Bush lost; Clinton won; Democrats came to office. The job I had at the State Department went to a political appointee. I was asked by the new secretary of defense, Les Aspin, to join his team. I'd known him in Vietnam and came over to the Pentagon to serve as undersecretary of defense for policy. It was a complicated period. We had crises in Somalia and Bosnia, but one of the most serious involved the secretary of defense himself, whose health declined on the job; he never got his footing and was eventually replaced by his deputy, Bill Perry. At that point, I happened to be traveling with Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Australia. He called me in and said, "I've just been talking to the President, and there's a visit coming up by the Indian prime minister, and we've decided we'd like you to go to New Delhi." There was no ambassador in India at the time.

Because until then they hadn't appointed an ambassador, since they didn't care about South Asia?

Not quite. They had a candidate for the post, a congressman, but he couldn't pass the background checks. They had held the spot open for a long time, but when [Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha] Rao was headed to Washington, the President felt he had to

History is like a great chain, and I feel like my link in that chain was solid and opened the way for the next link to be locked in place.

make an appointment—and chose me. You're not wrong in your assessment of the administration's interest in the region until then.

The George W. Bush administration developed close relations with India in the early years of this century, but the groundwork for that was laid by the Clinton administration in the 1990s, no?

Things were just starting to change in the 1990's. Both countries changed. Some in India and some in America had a global perspective and wanted to move our relationship. But during most of my time there, India policy was constrained by nonproliferation concerns: we sanctioned and pressured India in a vain attempt to roll back and eliminate its nuclear program. And there were those in Washington who thought you couldn't do anything for India that you didn't also do for Pakistan. It took India's economic rise, after Manmohan Singh's reforms, as well as the rise of China, for its geopolitical importance to be appreciated. Events changed history—the 1997 Indian nuclear test. When it happened, the US was initially outraged, but then we realized it was the best thing that ever happened to us because it solved our problem. The impediment in US-Indian relationship, the nuclear issue, evaporated.

They tested. And Pakistan tested. And you couldn't blame Pakistan for doing it after India did it. And once both had done it, it was done.

It was like removing a speck that blinded your eye. With the nuclear issue out of the way, you could clearly see the strategic direction in which both countries should be headed.

But it wasn't just outdated American attitudes that had to change. So did Indian ones. They had to get over their self-righteousness and their soft alignment with Russia. Two things happened almost simultaneously that changed the core Indian perspective. The Gulf War raised the price of oil and lowered remittances from Indians who lost jobs in the Gulf. India had no money, and Manmohan Singh, then finance minister, had to come cap in hand to Washington and ask the secretary of the treasury for a swap arrangement. That was a big wake-up call. The collapse of the Soviet Union occurred at the same time and removed Russia as an ally against China. All of this led to a reassessment on the Indian side. So in the 1990s, both sides were stumbling around and getting closer to each other in the process. Then in the next administration, they were able to make a deal – reach a nuclear understanding and consolidate their strategic redirection.

The U.S. embassy in India has seen some colorful characters, such as John Kenneth Galbraith and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Did you feel that you were walking in the footsteps of giants?

And Chester Bowles. And Ellsworth Bunker. Moynihan kept trying to get things done in India, even as a senator. He was a pain in the ass, but a fun pain in the ass. One of my favorite moments was with Galbraith. He was a friend of my parents, and I had met him as a young man. So when I was asked to become ambassador, I called to tell him. Dead silence for 45 seconds. Finally, he says, "Oh, Frank, welcome to a life sentence." And he was absolutely right: I still go to India at least twice a year.

What came after India?

I faced a choice. I'd had four embassies, I was turning 60, I had put three kids through college with a fourth to go; I had pretty much exhausted my savings—and I was asked to be ambassador in Paris. I was torn, when in through the door of the American embassy in New Delhi walks Hank Greenberg [chair and CEO of AIG]. He asked me what I was going to do next, and I told him my situation. He said, "Don't be an idiot. You're not going to get any younger. This

is your last chance to get out, and I've got a job I want you to do." He ended up offering me the vice chairmanship of AIG for external affairs. I decided it was time to turn my government card in.

What was it like moving to the private sector?

A big wake-up call. Government is hierarchical, a giant pyramid. All decisions are carefully staffed and rise through the bureaucracy, and there's a lot of politics to be managed. Businesses are much flatter. Leaders can have responsibility for operating elements of the company. Government doesn't work that way—couldn't work like that. I had to learn new technical skills and figure out what the role of, say, a board is and what it does. I helped grow AIG's international footprint, helped it expand into countries such as Vietnam and Pakistan, securing new franchises. It was good work, until AIG hit the wall in 2008 and, several changes of chairmen later, I decided to move. I had no interest in sitting in my office, taking a big salary to do nothing. At that point, Tommy Boggs threw me a lifeline and asked if I wanted to come work at [his law firm] Squire Patton Boggs, and here I am today.

What do you do with Boggs?

I carry the title of foreign affairs adviser. I'm not a lawyer, and I'm not a lobbyist. I help people think through strategies. Say the Zimbabwean government wants the firm to help clean up its reputation in Washington, and I'm asked for advice. I can tell my colleagues to steer clear, because Zimbabwe's reputation is bad for good reason. No effort in Washington can fix the problem without a change of direction in Zimbabwe.

Let's talk about that. Most of your career has been spent dealing with thuggish, corrupt, authoritarian governments. As you look back, do you have qualms?

Absolutely none. You live in the world that exists. You don't get to choose your neighbors, and you have to get on with them. You don't have to approve of them, and you can choose how much you want to do things together. But it's crazy to ostracize them just because you have differences, even over important values. Unless they threaten you—that's a different subject. But even there, you have to be sensitive about who is threatening whom and what ways you might be able to deal with the situation other than force.

The world of your early career has largely vanished. Do you feel like a figure from a lost era?

If you can't reinvent yourself, you become a dinosaur. The world will change, and you won't be able to deal with it, and that's when you feel out of sorts. Much better to study history and politics and culture and try to account for the changes and reshape your life and strategies accordingly. That's a real challenge, and it's fun.

The world has indeed changed. American power has diminished, both because other powers have risen and because we've squandered some of our resources and authority. We have to figure out how to deal with other great powers—managing our relations with them constructively, trying to find shared objectives and opportunities to build consensus and alliances. You won't bring about enduring peace, but you can manage disagreements, reduce conflict, and promote your interests. We haven't learned this yet, but it's where we have to go.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I'm proud to have been able to represent my country during an important period and to have acquitted myself honorably in that effort. History is like a great chain, and I feel like my link in that chain was solid and opened the way for the next link to be locked in place. I am honored to have served my country and countrymen.

What are your greatest regrets?

I believe public service is the highest calling. I feel most comfortable being of some service, helping people through dilemmas, thinking through challenges. I was able to do that for my country. So I have no regrets. I am very disappointed, though, by America's inability to understand its place and proper role in a changing world and its failure to learn appropriate lessons from history that could guide us forward.

Any advice for those just starting out?

My old friend Les Gelb used to say, "Don't take a piss without a strategy," and it's good advice. Think broadly, conceptually. Create an intellectual framework to understand whatever you are trying to do, in life or in policy, and make sure you have the resources and will to see it through until the end. Otherwise, figure out another way of going at the problem.

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How I Got Here

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When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

We went abroad when I was ten years old [in 1952]. My father was a lawyer for the Veterans Administration, and the largest VA office in the world then was in Manila, because of all the Filipinos who had fought in World War II. We lived there for five years, and I liked the life. We had a swimming pool, a tennis court, five servants—my father was a GS-10 at the time. When I came back to the United States, entering the last year of high school, the mother of a friend asked me that question—"What do you want to do?" I said, "Something with travel." She said, "Well, Georgetown has a Foreign Service school. Why don't you apply there?" I did and was accepted. And afterward, joining the Foreign Service seemed a logical thing to do.

What was it like coming back to the United States after having been in the Philippines?

It wasn't a shock, because we had come back every couple of years on home leave, but it was certainly very different. A couple of months after we arrived, my mother told me I had to go get a job to help contribute. Life for civil servants in suburban Washington was not like in the Philippines.

What job did you get?

I sold magazines door-to-door. Getting people to buy things they didn't want was good training for diplomacy.

What was Georgetown like?

I chose the School of Foreign Service over Arts and Sciences so I wouldn't have to take math, Latin, and Greek and would only have to take two years of English, theology, and philosophy. Instead,

I took history, economics, and government. Those struck me as more interesting, and the instruction was quite relevant. It was excellent preparation, which I leaned on considerably later in life. [Carroll] Quigley's Development of Civilization class, ranging from ancient Egypt and Assyria to the modern age, was a highlight. Strong courses in international and constitutional law gave me such a good grounding in those subjects that I was able to argue confidently with lawyers decades later, just from those courses.

What came next?

At this point, the Vietnam War was just starting, and I assumed I would be drafted. I took exams for the Foreign Service and Naval OCS [Officer Candidate School] and passed both. The Foreign Service said they'd wait, so I went from Georgetown to the navy, and then from the navy to the Foreign Service. I didn't have to look for another job until I turned 60.

What was the navy like?

The four months of OCS was probably the most difficult, challenging time of my life—as it was designed to be. They flunked a third of the class just to encourage the others. A student committed suicide while I was there, and that was a fairly frequent occurrence.

That sounds like An Officer and a Gentleman.

It was. Except it was not physical. There was no judo. The only physical thing we did was a lot of marching, which was not very relevant to the navy but a way of regimenting us. The stress was intentional, because they were trying to turn soft, undisciplined 20-year-olds into officers. And it worked.

Where were you posted after?

I was on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific for three years, ensign to start, then lieutenant JG [junior grade] in the last year and a half. Again, it was eye-opening; it was rewarding. I don't regret it. It was 3,000 people, which is small for today's carriers but still a lot. You were in a small city. And you got increasing responsibility, first as a junior officer of the watch, then a junior officer of the deck, and then an officer of the deck. By that point, you were actually in command of the ship when the captain wasn't physically on the bridge, which was about a

> “Before Trump, the Reagan administration was the craziest, because, like Trump, Reagan brought in an element of the party that had never been in power before. When that happens, the administration gets filled with people who have no idea what they're doing or who have outrageous ideas.

third of the day. And in command of the other four to five ships of the task force.

Did you ever feel nervous about exercising that responsibility?

No, but I felt the weight of it. You could wreck the ship, and the captain's career, and endanger lives. This was wartime, off the coast of North Vietnam. You were alone, in the dark, and in charge. It was a lot for a 22- or 23-year-old.

Did you think about staying in the navy?

The navy tried to induce me to stay a bit longer, offering me a year and a half in Hawaii if I would extend my tour. They wouldn't tell me what for exactly, but it was with the Naval Security Group, which handled signals intelligence. But I had already passed the Foreign Service exam and didn't want to lose my position, so I chose the Foreign Service, and I chose wisely. But if I hadn't already known where I was going, I might have stayed.

What was it like moving from the navy to the Foreign Service?

They're both large organizations where you start at the bottom and work your way up. The substance of a diplomat's job was different; it was more intellectual. But the adjustment wasn't difficult.

What was your first posting?

I was very fortunate. We had a large class, about 50 people entering my year. You don't know where you're going until the last day. There's a ceremony where you go up and instead of getting a diploma, you get your orders. About every third person in my class was going to Vietnam. I was told I was going to Paris. And there was sort of a gasp in the room, because that was certainly the first prize. I found out many years later that the selection was made by an ex-naval officer; I think that was probably why I went to Paris rather than Saigon.

Was your class socially and demographically homogeneous?

The Foreign Service had been recruiting more broadly than the Ivy League by that point, so they came from a pretty broad social strata. A number of them had been in the Peace Corps, but one or two had been in the military, like me; a lot of others were straight out of college. Very few had gone to graduate school. It's completely different now. At that time, you couldn't apply to the Foreign Service if you were over something like 27 or 28. They didn't want old people; they wanted to take somebody and mold them from the beginning. There were a few women. I don't recall any minorities.

Did the Foreign Service have an equivalent to OCS, where they broke you down and remade you?

No. It was an up-or-out system, in the sense that if you didn't get promoted, after a time you would be forced out. So there was a bit of stress in that. But it wasn't intense, and it didn't start early. Going through OCS was like pledging a fraternity, really. I had pledged a fraternity at Georgetown, and it was the same kind of thing—hazing, breaking down of personality, enforced humility. The Foreign Service didn't do that.

What did you do in Paris?

First tour officers were usually assigned on rotations across the embassy—six months each in the consular section, the political section, the economic section, the administrative section. I showed such little aptitude for the consular section that I was moved out of it very rapidly and became a special assistant to the ambassador to the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], following him around, reporting on his meetings, sifting his mail. That was a good exercise for a young officer. Then the Vietnam peace talks began.

Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance were sent to Paris to open negotiations, and I was selected to be a junior officer on Harriman's staff. The other junior officers on the delegation were Dick Holbrooke and John Negroponte. We were all about the same age, but they had come into the service directly from school, and I had gone through the navy, so they were more senior and had served in Saigon. Philip Habib was the senior FSO in the group.

That sounds like an all-star roster of American diplomacy.

It was. And I monitored all incoming and outgoing traffic, so it was very instructive. I drew on those experiences later in my career. One lesson that stuck with me was from Averell Harriman. The Johnson administration was keen to announce progress in the Vietnam negotiations to help Hubert Humphrey get elected. Nixon didn't want this, and Kissinger, as his emissary, had visited us

several times to keep track of what was happening. Just before the election, the Nixon camp reached out to South Vietnamese President [Nguyen Van] Thieu to discourage him from accepting Johnson's proposal for a bombing halt and enlargement of the negotiations to include his government and the Viet Cong, at least for a few weeks. I remember sitting with Harriman and someone asking him how Thieu could possibly withstand the pressure from the White House, given his overwhelming dependence on the United States. And Harriman said, "When you're dealing with a client state, there's one counterthreat that can always trump anything you try. They can threaten to collapse."

Then there was May '68. After being in negotiations with the North Vietnamese in the day, in the evenings I would wander off to the Sorbonne or the Odéon and stand behind the barricades and listen to the speeches and experience the student revolt. The next year, I became special assistant to Ambassador Sargent Shriver—his assistant for youth affairs.

Did you see the disruptions of '68 coming?

No. I hadn't been paying attention to French politics. The general strike was remarkably effective—there was no gasoline, no cars on the road, everything shut down for several weeks. [French President Charles] de Gaulle returned from [West] Germany, called a national election, and went on TV and called for a massive demonstration. Now the streets were beginning to fill up with the bourgeois silent majority. Negroponte and I saw all this from a window of the embassy, and he said, "You're very fortunate to be here, to watch the collapse of a regime." It didn't collapse. But it came close and the experience was fascinating.

What came after Paris?

I had applied for Japanese-language training. Japan was buying half of California and was an economic competitor like China today.

Wait, in the late '60s? That's what it felt like in the '80s.

They were already coming. But it wasn't to be. I spent one day in Japanese-language training, and then they pulled me out because I had just married a Norwegian. The rule then was that your wife had to stay in the United States long enough to become an American citizen before going abroad, so she would be covered by diplomatic immunity. And the Japanese-language training was in Japan. So they kept me in Washington, where I became special assistant to the director of the Policy Planning Staff.

Was it as prestigious in your day as it had been in George Kennan's?

It was much bigger and had been given broader responsibility, but it was not as influential. And this was during the Bill Rogers years at the State Department, when it was overshadowed by Henry Kissinger's NSC [National Security Council]. So we spent most of our time running around in circles that Kissinger designed to keep us occupied.

Did you understand what was going on, and did that create low morale at State?

I was perfectly happy running in circles, because I was learning a lot. All the other people on the staff were quite senior, and none of them wanted to do anything except their pigeonhole. So I had to take their work and draw on it to write memos for the secretary or the White House. I learned a lot about policy, even though it was largely makework.

Reading about the Nixon administration, it seems a bit crazy. Did it feel that way at the time?

Before Trump, the Reagan administration was the craziest, because, like Trump, Reagan brought in an element of the party that had never been in power before. When that happens, the administration gets filled with people who have no idea what they're doing or who have outrageous ideas. The Nixon administration wasn't anything like that. It was pretty disciplined. It was dominated by Vietnam. And there was a good deal of anxiety and unhappiness among the staff because of that.

Did you have strong thoughts about Vietnam?

It wasn't until I read the Pentagon Papers that I really understood just how dubious some of the early policy positions taken were.

You hadn't realized up until that point? Reading the Pentagon Papers was a revelation?

Yes. When I was working on the Vietnam negotiations, I thought they were the right thing to do.

I read deeply in the big piles of briefing books, full of top-secret stuff. But we were mostly looking forward.

What came after Policy Planning?

I got offered a chance to go back to France, which I jumped at: vice consul in Strasbourg. It was great. We had our first child there. We had a nice apartment literally above my office. I spent a lot of time cruising around Alsace. The Council of Europe was there, and one of my jobs was to monitor it. I wrote reports on the debates about European integration, which I'm sure no one in Washington read.

I developed a capacity to listen and write a brief memo summarizing a long, divergent discussion. The European bureau of the department staged a contest for best think piece memo. I won, but was told I had to cut a line in which I recommended that the U.S. stop opposing the French nuclear force and actually help them [the French] build it, as we had helped the British. When I asked why I had to take it out, they said, "We can't tell you," so I refused. (I later learned it was because we had decided to do just that a few months earlier and it was a big secret.) After the memo was circulated, I got a call saying the new ambassador to the UN, John Scali, was looking for a speechwriter and wanted me to interview for the job. So we ended up moving from Strasbourg to New York.

What was the UN like?

It was interesting. We had several crises at the time—the Yom Kippur War, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the Arab oil embargo, a global recession. And we had Yasir Arafat's visit, during which they closed down the Long Island Expressway at rush hour, both morning and afternoon to get him to and from the airport. Imagine how popular that made Arafat.

I was mostly observing and learning. Writing speeches, being a sieve for my boss. I would decide what cables and intelligence he saw and relay instructions to people. Scali was an ABC newsman who had gone into the White House media office. His handling of Nixon's visit to China was a great success, and as a result he was made ambassador to the UN. I would be in his office and he'd be chatting with his pals in the White House, people like Chuck Colson and others who ultimately went to jail. If Scali didn't like his instructions from Rogers's State Department, he could call Kissinger

> A negotiation that had been going on for two years was reaching a critical moment, and suddenly people were coming to me asking what to do about it.

and get them changed (or Kissinger could call him to change them). After Nixon resigned, life became more difficult, because Kissinger became his sole boss.

Were you shocked by Watergate?

"Shocked" would be too strong a word. It was a drama that was fascinating. It didn't impinge on me directly.

What came after the UN?

I came to Washington to work for Hal Sonnenfeldt, who was Kissinger's top aide at the State Department. At this point, Kissinger was both secretary of state and national security adviser, so we worked closely with the NSC. We actually had two forms of stationary in our office, White House and State, and would send memos from both—because Kissinger would spend the morning in the White House and the afternoon at State and do much of the same work from both places.

This would have been the opposite of your previous situation—now you were working directly for the highest decision-makers of all, with no bureaucracy above you. What was that like?

It was fun! Sonnenfeldt was a very difficult boss but also very rewarding. He was very powerful. Kissinger had two main deputies. Joe Sisco was undersecretary for political affairs, and he did the Third World. Sonnenfeldt did the First and Second Worlds—Europe, the Soviet Union, East-West relations, arms control. This was what Kissinger really cared about. And Sonnenfeldt was so similar, he was called "Kissinger's Kissinger." They were both German Jews who had fled Nazi persecution, become American citizens, served in the U.S. Army in Germany during the occupation, and gotten Ph.D.s and become national security professionals. But they were different in personality. Kissinger was much more egocentric and obsessive and mercurial. Sonnenfeldt was steadier.

He was under merciless pressure from Kissinger, who would blow up, yell at his subordinates. Kissinger was a terrible boss, and Sonnenfeldt would come back and relay it—so we were under a lot of pressure, too. But we had amazing latitude and power. Kissinger would not look at anything about half the world if it didn't have Sonnenfeldt's name on it. Everything sent to him from the relevant bureaus in the department would come to us first, and Sonnenfeldt would attach a cover note summarizing the proposal and giving his own recommendation. We cleared all cables going out from the bureaus, as well. And Sonnenfeldt didn't want anything delayed—so when he wasn't there, we were supposed to pretend he was and keep things moving. We had essentially carte blanche.

So it was like being the night officer on the aircraft carrier.

It was. I signed his name hundreds of times. I'd write the memo, sign it as Sonnenfeldt—not "JFD for Hal Sonnenfeldt," but "Sonnenfeldt"—and send it. And he never once came back and said, "I would have said it a little differently."

Had you learned the trade enough by this point to be self-confident in your

exercise of power?

I was a little startled at first by the degree of latitude, and a few of the issues were new to me. On the day of my arrival, the officers who were doing the CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe] negotiations, which led to the Helsinki Final Act, came to me for guidance. Kissinger was negotiating directly with [Soviet Ambassador Anatoly] Dobrynin, without telling the bureaucracy. So we knew things the bureaus didn't. They'd come up with instructions, and we'd make sure they were consistent with what Kissinger was actually saying. If they were inconsistent, we'd have to order the instructions rewritten, without telling them why. That happened to me just after I started. A negotiation that had been going on for two years was reaching a critical moment, and suddenly people were coming to me asking what to do about it.

Was it hard to keep straight what you could say to whom?

Yes. It's something you adjust to. There were definitely people in the box and outside, and there were many rings inside. We were in one of the inner rings, although not the most intimate. There were a few people of my generation, like Jerry Bremer, David Gompert, and a couple of junior officers who kept things moving.

Was Kissinger's reputation for brilliance deserved?

Yes, but so was his reputation for being outrageously abusive to his staff. I saw him a couple of years ago. We reminisced about Sonnenfeldt and the old days. And as I was leaving, he said, a little plaintively, "I hope I wasn't too tough on you guys." I responded, "It was worth it."

I accompanied Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz to negotiate the first "Economic Summit" communiqué, at the first meeting of what would become the G-7, because Sonnenfeldt wanted to be in Washington for the final briefing of the president. That was typical of Sonnenfeldt. He didn't send Tom Enders, the assistant secretary for economic affairs, because that would have lessened his control. So he sent me, who knew absolutely nothing about the topic.

We also set up what was called the Quadripartite Group, composed of the U.S., the U.K., France, and West Germany, which has run the transatlantic alliance ever since. (When Italy became important during the Balkan crises, it became the Quint.) It was very secret at the time, because it would have ruffled the feathers of everybody who wasn't part of it. For the first few years, meetings were held in people's homes, not offices. Typical Sonnenfeldt: he said, "This is so secret, we can't all have note takers. We'll just have one set of notes, and they will be mine." And the Europeans went along with it. So I ended up summarizing everybody's positions for the record. One participant commended me for writing not what he actually had said but what he should have said: "Because my Minister reads these, so thank you very much."

What happened after that eventful year?

I became the French desk officer. I did that for two years. But by this point, it was the Carter administration, Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt had gone, and I was the only one with some of their institutional memory. So I kept the European integration portfolios, which drove other offices in the bureau wild. Then I went to London for three years, as the political military officer to Ambassador Kingman Brewster.

That was great. Really an idyllic time. Brewster was very close to Secretary of State Cy Vance—he would stay at Vance's house when he came to Washington. He discovered, when he was appointed ambassador, that his political section was filled with very senior people—because London was the plum post in the whole Foreign Service, a reward given to people at the end of their careers. Brewster ordered them all cleared out, made the two most junior officers section head and deputy, and told the DCM [deputy chief of mission] to recruit a whole new section filled with young up-and-comers. I was part of that group, and they were amazing. Every person went on to become an ambassador—I was actually the last to do so. Even the person seconded from DOD, who wasn't even in the Foreign Service, went on to become an ambassador. I was given an honorary membership at the Travellers Club for entertaining. And Brewster gave our section the best housing so we could entertain and have social contacts. Both of the big issues Washington had with the British government were mine: whether to replace Polaris with a new missile system and negotiating what eventually became the two-track INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces] decision. It was a fun time.

What came after London?

I came back to Washington to work for Rick Burt, which I ended up doing for eight years. Initially, he was director of politico-military affairs, and I was an office director handling European security issues. Then he became assistant secretary for Europe, and I moved up to deputy assistant secretary.

What was the Reagan administration like?

At first, it was very unnerving. As I said, some of the new people were kind of kooky—at least for those of us with a professional background, a set of expectations about how business was done and what the parameters for legitimate debate were and what was beyond the pale. It was very hard line, wildly irresponsible. Burt was opposed by the other Richard, Richard Perle in the Pentagon, a hard-liner whose nickname was the Prince of Darkness. [Defense Secretary Caspar] Weinberger had terrible relations first with [Secretary of State Alexander] Haig and then with [Secretary of State] Shultz. The constant battles between State and Defense ended up getting personified in the media through these two relatively junior but colorful assistant secretaries [Burt and Perle].

Was it tough making policy when bureaucratic politics divided everything?

It was. You had a very weak NSC at the time. Reagan went through six NSC directors. One tried to commit suicide, one went to jail, one left under probably unjustified shadows of financial irregularity, one was completely unqualified. It wasn't until you got to [Frank] Carlucci and [Colin] Powell at the end, after Iran-contra, that you had real stability. At PM [the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs], we had been responsible for trying to adjudicate the very substantial differences on arms control between the agencies, and it was very difficult. It was easier at EUR [the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs], because there we controlled communications with our embassies. Nobody could send an instruction to anyone in Europe without our approval; that chokehold over policy gave us power. But we still had endless battles on the arms control front. Perle was extremely talented and a lethal debater. He wasn't personally abusive. He was always charming. But it was a sinister charm.

Our most important accomplishment was the Euromissile deployment, which led eventually to the arms control agreement that abolished all the missiles in question, theirs and ours. Bringing five European countries along to accept road-mobile nuclear missiles that would cruise along their streets, persuading their governments that this was important enough to suffer all the political damage they were taking from millions of protesters in the streets—it was a real exercise in alliance discipline. After that, Rick was named ambassador to [West] Germany, and I went as the deputy chief of mission, and we spent four years together in Bonn.

You've done Paris, London, and Germany.

I never served more than 200 miles from Paris in my entire career.

Were people jealous of your postings?

Yes.

Did you feel bad about them?

No. I paid. The last 20 years was Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. I paid for my first 20.

Was Germany as fun as London and Paris?

It was great. It was the perfect place for a family. Bonn was a small town, lovely, beautiful hills and valleys within sight of our house on the Rhine. You could watch the barges go up and down. Across the river I could see the castle where Siegfried was supposed to have slain the dragon. [West] Germany was the most important country in Europe, and ours was the largest mission in the world. My job was mostly keeping the trains running and managing more than a thousand people.

I chose the spot where Reagan asked Gorbachev to tear down the wall. Reagan was coming to Berlin, and so Burt sent me to Berlin to look at sites, and I said I liked the one facing the Brandenburg Gate. Others thought it was too controversial, but I got it through. I didn't know what he was going to say though.

Toward the end of our tour there, Burt's newly appointed successor, Vernon Walters, said something to the effect that he thought Germany would be reunited during his term of office. Rick and I scratched our heads and said, "What is this guy smoking?" We had no idea that anything like this was coming, nor did anybody else. Vernon Walters

was a delightful person but completely unanalytical, and even he could not explain how he arrived at any of these conclusions.

If experts can't do things like predict when revolutions are going to happen, what good is expertise?

It helps you navigate the revolution when it happens. By definition, if people understood the revolution was going to happen, it wouldn't happen. If you could predict them, you could prevent them. It was dependent on what Gorbachev was doing, and it was hard for us to evaluate how seriously to take Gorbachev.

Where did you go then?

In 1989, I went back to Washington, where I became the principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Europe. I was acting assistant secretary for the first few months, before Ray Seitz was confirmed, and the morning after the wall came down, my secretary rushes into my office breathlessly and says, "The president is on the phone. He wants to talk to you." The only time in my career that happened. He was interested in some aspect of the diplomacy that followed the wall coming down.

Was that thrilling?

Yes. And like many things in my career, it was luck—I happened to be the most senior person in Washington with deep experience with Germany, in the right position at the right time. Lots of other people knew more than I did, but they were all abroad. I was there. So I got to participate in German unification.

Had you predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union?

No. We didn't predict the coup against Gorbachev, and that precipitated the collapse. It might have collapsed anyway, but perhaps not.

This period of turbulence seemed to usher in, just a few years later, a relatively calm post–Cold War era, with a unified Europe and a democratic Russia. Did you expect that?

What we did caused that outcome. You can't anticipate crises, but you can manage them. And the administration's management of Gorbachev and the collapse of the Eastern bloc was masterful. George H. W. Bush was the most successful president in foreign policy by far—which should not have been a surprise, given his vast experience beforehand.

What enabled him to be more successful than others?

He had vast experience. He had a reflective temperament that led to good decisions, combined

with determination once his mind was made up. And he ran an orderly administration and relied on good people, such Jim Baker and Brent Scowcroft. Most people consider this era the model for national security policymaking, and I agree. It had all the strengths of the Kissinger era without Kissinger.

I stayed in the European bureau for two years and was acting assistant secretary again for the last year, when Yugoslavia fell apart. That was less successful. Bush and Scowcroft decided the country was a loser and didn't want to touch it. I kept trying to get them to do something and spent the last half year of my time there butting my head against the wall, vainly trying to anticipate and prevent what eventually became a set of civil wars in Yugoslavia. Then I became ambassador to the European Community as it was becoming the European Union.

So the Gordon Sondland role?

Yes. I was the last career ambassador to the EU. All of the ones since have been political. And all the ones prior had been career.

As a career diplomat, how do you feel about political-appointee ambassadors?

They vary. Some bring qualities most career ambassadors are not likely to possess. Can you pull strings and get the secretary of state on the phone? No career ambassador could approach the prestige and connections of, say, Kingman Brewster in London or Mike Mansfield in Japan. But you also get crackpots. I remember one period in the Reagan administration when our Scandinavian ambassadors were all going haywire. The Swedish police came to us and said that they had detected a man climbing out the second-story window of the ambassador's residence late at night and followed him. It turned out to be the ambassador, on his way to some liaison. Could we please ask him to stop doing that? Then the ambassador to Norway was found serenading an unappreciative young Norwegian girl in the snow outside her house—the latest in a string of scandals. And our ambassador in Copenhagen thought the fact that Denmark had legalized pornography made it OK to have pornographic movies running during diplomatic receptions. All three had to be quietly disciplined or removed. Administrations vary in how much care they take in their political appointments.

Did you ever wish you served in the more autonomous diplomatic corps of other countries?

No. I could hardly imagine a career more fun and rewarding than mine. When you're the American representative, you're always the most important person in the room. Well, until the Trump years, anyway. I remember the wife of an ambassador from a smaller country asking me how it felt being under a political appointee. I didn't tell her what I really thought, which was that I had more power and better access as the number two than her husband, as number one. It was always better to be an American, even if part of the price was you had to serve under some odd political appointees, (which fortunately I never had to do). Moreover, including citizens along with professionals in American diplomacy is a good thing. It helps represent a large and diverse country more effectively. There were only a few true embarrassments; the rest served honorably and became lifelong advocates of what we were doing. It creates an important domestic constituency.

What came next?

The new Clinton team needed a post for [Stuart] Eizenstat. Mine was available, so they gave it to him. I was still on the payroll but didn't have anything to do, so I persuaded the department to let me go to [the] RAND [Corporation] as a senior fellow, essentially a diplomat in residence at their think tank. I started a project on Bosnia, but soon after it began, I got called back to State to handle our exit from Somalia. After the Black Hawk went down, they realized they needed somebody to negotiate the withdrawal, and so I came back as special coordinator for Somalia for six months or so. Then I worked on Rwanda for a bit, beginning preparations for a peacekeeping force.

And then I got a call from the deputy secretary saying that the president was considering military intervention in Haiti, and did I want to manage it? I said, "Can I do Rwanda, too?" And they said, "No, we're doing Haiti, not Rwanda." So I stopped doing Rwanda and took over coordinating policy on Haiti, under [Deputy Secretary of State] Strobe Talbott's oversight.

Haiti had the best-planned exit of any American intervention up to that point. They should clone you.

Well, for a while, they just used me. And person-

ally, I think Haiti was a dubious success, because we had to invade again ten years later.

It's true that the intervention didn't work. But the withdrawal did—you got the troops out without leaving a mess behind; you kept the retreat from becoming a rout.

Haiti was managed better than Somalia partly because we learned from our failures. The Clinton administration did four interventions in eight years—Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo—and each one was managed better than the last, because the same people were doing the same thing and getting better at it. At first, nobody knew what managing an intervention involved, what needed to be done. And once we learned, people would fight about who should do it. OK, so we need to train police. Who should be responsible—State? DOJ? DOD? Where will the money come from? (Arguments in the Situation Room are less about what to do than who will pay for it.) We slowly figured out how to settle those questions in ways that didn't have to be reopened with each new crisis. We became good at interagency management, alliance management, strategic planning.

What happened after Haiti?

My career was essentially wrecked by [Senator] Jesse Helms.

How?

A Republican congressman named Dan Burton accused me of lying to him in some testimony and forced the State Department inspector general to investigate. I was supposed to become ambassador to Argentina. Since I couldn't get confirmed while the investigation dragged on, I went to the NSC instead, where I was senior director and special assistant to the president for the Western Hemisphere for three years.

What happened with the investigation?

Sometimes nonpartisan professionals get trapped in partisan politics going on around them. I felt I hadn't done anything wrong, and I was told the investigator agreed. But the case went up through State, over to Justice, back to State, and ended up with me getting a letter of admonition advising me to be more forthcoming in future testimony. I didn't like that and appealed it. I won the case and was reinstated in the Foreign Service

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All countries are difficult to stabilize, and big ones are much more so. The Balkan operations can provide a model, but not one that can be easily scaled up to apply to countries as big as Iraq or Afghanistan, if only because of the forces required.

with compensation for the incorrect decision. In that sense, it was a perfect vindication. But it took five years, and Helms—then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—refused to confirm me for anything. Because of all that, I went to the White House instead of Argentina. And subsequently, I was drawn back into the Balkans when the Kosovo crisis erupted.

I came into the Kosovo planning process just before the bombing campaign started. Since it had taken only a few days for the bombing campaign in Bosnia to work, the administration assumed the one in Kosovo would be short, too. That assumption turned out to be wrong. For 11 weeks, we were in emergency mode, just trying to hold the alliance together. We were confident we'd prevail eventually, just because of the overwhelming power and Serbia's isolation. But I argued that we needed to supplement the air campaign with the threat of a ground campaign, following through if necessary. We eventually went down that route, and it was at the point where we had the ability to conduct a ground campaign—and also when negotiations with the Russians moved forward—that [Yugoslav President Slobodan] Milosevic caved. Then we had to figure out who was going to govern Kosovo. I led the negotiations for the [UN] Security Council resolution that set up the UN administration and authorized the NATO peacekeeping operation. We are still there, but in very small numbers. The United States hasn't lost a single person in Bosnia or Kosovo since we intervened more than two decades ago. My definition of success is getting out cleanly and leaving behind a peaceful society. I think both of those cases meet that test.

Did you plan any more interventions?

I was brought back again to do Afghanistan. Toward the end of the Clinton administration, I was appointed assistant secretary for Europe, and [Secretary of State] Colin Powell kept me on for the first six months or so of the Bush administration. I was going to retire then. I was close to 60, had 40 years of service, was making calls to see what kinds of jobs might be available. Then 9/11 occurred, and a few weeks later, I got a call saying Powell wanted me to work with the Afghan opposition, pulling them together so they could form a successor government to the Taliban once Kabul fell. So I did that. After [Hamid] Karzai was inaugurated [as interim president of Afghanistan], I agreed to stay and manage the situation temporarily. I spent four or five months fighting a series of losing battles to get the administration to take Afghanistan seriously, which they wouldn't. They were already focused on Iraq, thinking it would be easy because of the deceptively easy early successes in Afghanistan.

You are a hard-working, dedicated pro-

fessional. What keeps you going in the wake of repeated frustrations like that? Our track record in recent interventions is not impressive.

I've experienced successes as well as failures. I supported East-West arms control, German unification, the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberation of Eastern Europe, Bosnia and Kosovo. We failed to stop the collapse of Yugoslavia and the first several stages of the conflict but ultimately stepped in to end it. The Somalia debacle came because nobody was paying attention and everybody thought somebody else was in charge.

What lessons do you draw from all of this?

One lesson is that all countries are difficult to stabilize, and big ones are much more so. The Balkan operations can provide a model, but not one that can be easily scaled up to apply to countries as big as Iraq or Afghanistan, if only because of the forces required.

That has important implications for where the United States should intervene. We have learned from UN peacekeeping operations that it is possible to stabilize countries at relatively low cost, but you have to wait for the right opportunity. There are dozens of countries around the world living in peace today because outside troops came in and established security, put together viable governments, and eventually left. You don't hear about those because they're successful. But a peacekeeping force is not a universal remedy. It won't stop aggression, or genocide, or nuclear proliferation. If you want to do those, you have to commit far more resources.

Did you ever come back to Afghanistan?

I came back as special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2013. Everybody I encountered looked much younger, except the people I knew, who looked much older.

Was it depressing to see the lack of progress? Was it hard to watch American interventions lose the accumulated wisdom and knowledge that you and others had built up?

It was frustrating, but on the other hand, it gave me a second career. For 20 years, I became the go-to person to say what we were doing wrong and how to do it right.

What are you proudest of in your career?

It's hard to say, because there are so many things I enjoyed. German unification and the whole sequence of events that led to the revolution in Europe—to be part of something that consequential. Kosovo, where I had greater personal responsibility. And I'm quite happy with the studies I've done memorializing the lessons of these experiences.

What are your greatest professional regrets?

I wish I'd answered Dan Burton's question a little differently. But Burton and Helms actually did me a favor, unintentionally. By blocking the jobs I would have gotten, they kept me available for more interesting ones. If I had gone to Argentina, I wouldn't have gone to the White House, and then on to the Balkan and Afghan interventions. I wouldn't have been able to watch the [Clinton] impeachment crisis from within.

What was that like?

It was fascinating to watch. The White House functioned very well during that period. Very disciplined, very supportive. People were disappointed in the president's behavior, but they didn't think it was impeachable. So you had a sense that you were keeping the country on an even keel in a very turbulent period. And the NSC functioned without any political interference.

You've had an extraordinary career of public service. What was the driving force behind that?

I never really considered any alternative. My father was in the civil service. I took the Foreign Service and OCS exams as a teenager and spent the next 40 years on set career tracks. And then I had this second career studying and writing about interventions.

Any advice to those starting out?

Start early. These days, a lot of people go into the Foreign Service in their 30s with multiple graduate degrees. That's useful for a life spent alternately in and out of government. But if you're going to make a career of the Foreign Service, the earlier you start, the better.

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Lisa Anderson

How I Got Here

Professor, Harvard University and Columbia University
Dean, Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs
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As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A variety of things, because I was a curious child. I wanted to be a marine biologist for a while, and then I wanted to be ambassador to the Soviet Union.

What kind of kid wants to be ambassador to the Soviet Union?

I grew up in eastern Long Island, but I was always vaguely interested in the rest of the world: this was the era of Life magazine. Then I wanted to be a civil rights lawyer, and then I briefly flirted with being a hairdresser. My parents worried about the hairdresser thing and sent me off to Sarah Lawrence College, where I fell under the spell of a remarkable teacher, Adda Bozeman. She taught a two-semester course called "Politics and Culture and World Affairs": everything you wanted to know about the whole world. She was very conservative politically and a great enthusiast of the war in Vietnam. I went home for Thanksgiving supporting the war, and my parents thought to themselves, "For this, we're paying?" Her course took me down to the basics: What do I believe? Why do I believe it? How do I do analysis? This battle-axe of an instructor imperiously assigned people papers they should write, and at one point, she said I should write about Egypt. Sixty pages later, having read everything in the Sarah Lawrence College Library about Egypt, I was off and running, having decided to pursue an academic career.

What was it about Egypt that resonated?

I don't know. Perhaps the timing was good. When [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser died, and it was on the cover of Time magazine, I knew all about it. That sense of knowing something in depth was satisfying and energizing.

What came after college?

I went to Fletcher [Tuft's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy] for a master's. I hadn't realized that Bozeman was one of relatively few women in the field. When I got to Fletcher and there weren't any women on the faculty, I realized I had to navigate things a bit differently. I continued to do the Middle East and development, interested in what we would now call "the global South." And as I sat in class with people who would end up at USAID or someplace like that, I realized I was more contemplative. I wasn't sure I wanted to go out and change the world instantly; I wanted to think about it a little first. So I ended up going to Columbia for a Ph.D. While I was at Fletcher, though, I met my first Libyan. He was a wonderful guy, and it was very exotic. He ended up getting his Ph.D. at Fletcher and returning to Libya. But we used to sit over coffee, and he would teach me basic things: "This is Tripoli. This is Benghazi." As I thought about dissertation topics, I decided that everybody had written about Egypt. There were at least 150 years of scholarship, whereas there were probably six books in English about Libya. So if I wrote the seventh, it would be a contribution, even if it wasn't very good. I wasn't that self-confident at the time, but I wanted to have an impact. And the seventh book on Libya would have an impact.

What happened to your Libyan friend?

He ended up being prime minister when the United States negotiated renewed relations with Libya in the early 2000s. I saw him when I visited Libya again after a long, long time. We went out for dinner with his family; I wanted to talk politics and all he wanted to do was talk about Fletcher classmates. Unfortunately, after [Muammar al-]Qaddafi fell, he was found face-down in the Danube. It was a sad end to a fascinating career.

So at Columbia, you became a Libya specialist?

I became one of Jay Hurewitz's students, and that was a thing to be. Not everybody achieved that. But he decided that I was worth some investment. And he was not that generous with his investments, so I was very fortunate. I didn't know until after I defended my dissertation that he'd never been in North Africa, because he just seemed like he knew everything—very intimidating. When I said I wanted to do work in Libya, he didn't say no. At Fletcher, there was a little sense that women

couldn't work in the Middle East. Jay never felt that way. And actually, if you look at the senior women in Middle East studies, they're Jay's students.

So you first went to the region for dissertation fieldwork?

I had done a bit of language work in Tunisia and Egypt.

Was it weird going to a place you thought you were an expert on and realizing you didn't know anything about it?

It was fabulous. I mean, that was so fun. The United States had relations with Libya then, but only barely. Jay was very networked in diplomatic circles and introduced me to the Libyan ambassador to the UN, who said he would arrange to have a visa for me waiting in Tunis. I decided to do a comparative study of the two countries, and after I had done all I could in Tunisia, I went to the Libyan embassy. The officials look out their window and see this little American girl waiting at the end of a long line of Tunisian workers waiting for visas. They come out and get me, and I say, "There's supposed to be a visa for me." A consular official laughs when I tell my story and starts grilling me, presumably to figure out whether I'm legit. He said, "When was the first Libyan-American war?" I said, "1803." And he wrote 1803 in the dust on the desk and went and got me a visa.

You got on the plane with no plans at all?

I didn't know what was going to happen when I got off. As it turned out, I was taken care of by the wife of the drilling manager of Esso Libya, who knew that it was impossible to get a hotel room or rent a place—Qaddafi had closed things down. I ended up living in the maid's quarters of a beautiful villa on the water, within walking distance of the Center for Libyan Studies. I went in and said, "I've been writing to you." And they said, "We've been waiting for you!"

They showed me everything and introduced me to two men in their late 70s, the keepers of the archives. They had been born before the Italian invasion and had learned Ottoman Turkish as children, so they could go into the archives (cardboard boxes of old papers), find stuff, and translate it into Arabic for me. And we sat there for weeks, and weeks, and weeks, looking at tax records. It was a magical encounter. They had never in their entire lives thought something like this would happen to them. Nor had the girl from eastern Long Island. Without them, I wouldn't have figured out nineteenth-century Libya, which turned out to be crucial to the argument I made in the dissertation.

It sounds like you discovered your vocation—what you wanted to be and do.

Totally loved it. Yup.

So then what?

I came back, finished up the dissertation, and went on the job market. I got a couple of interviews but no offers. Columbia said it would put together a couple of courses for me to teach while I tried again. And then, just around Memorial Day, Harvard advertises a position. They had a strong inside candidate but decided to talk to this woman who had just come back from Libya. I went up, got to meet all these famous people, and had a great visit. Then they offered me the job, and I ended up teaching at Harvard for five years.

What was that like?

Harvard was not really ready for women. The year I came in, the Government Department hired five junior women. The chair of the department told us we were an experiment. Dita Shklar took several of us to lunch and asked us if we thought we were ambitious. Everybody but me said no. She said, "Are you kidding? You're all ambitious. You wouldn't be here if you weren't." She wanted us to think about what we were doing a bit more self-consciously.

I had a lot of fun. What was then CFIA [the Center for International Affairs], now the Weatherhead Center, ran some summer research money for undergraduates. John Odell had administered it, and he asked me whether I wanted to do it next, and I said yes because it came with a secretary. At the time, all I wanted was somebody to type for me, because I can't type. But it meant that I sat on the Executive Committee of CFIA, with Joe Nye and Sam Huntington and Jorge Domínguez and Stanley Hoffmann. I was the only woman and the only junior person. There were about a dozen people on the committee, and almost all were left-handed. I always thought, "That's how I got it: I'm a lefty."

Did you feel nervous?

Not really. I tried to be collegial, and did what I thought I was supposed to do, and focused on that.

> You need patience and the ability to appreciate people for what they can do.

By then, I had been married for a long time, and my husband was in New York, and I was commuting between New York and Cambridge. That was technically not allowed. So I got up there Monday morning, left Thursday night, and was in my office more than anybody who lived in Cambridge. I had some distance from the place and the people. I loved the time I was there, and the department was very generous with me. When I left for a position at Columbia, everybody knew it was because I wanted to join my husband in New York. I was pregnant, and neither school had maternity leave. So Bob Putnam did the most wonderful thing, giving me a semester's leave, even though he knew I had effectively resigned from Harvard and wasn't coming back.

What was it like coming back to Columbia as a big shot?

Most of my colleagues couldn't remember that I'd left. That's a common story: when people come back to where they did their Ph.D.'s, their advisers and others think, "Have you been away for a while?"

I was told you should go someplace different for your first job, because otherwise you'll always be seen as a student.

Definitely. People should go away. There's a style to a place. If you go to college and graduate school at the same place and then become a professor there, you'll read the same things many, many times.

How was Columbia different the second time around?

I increasingly did more administration. I was the director of the Middle East Institute, and then I was asked to chair the department. I did a whole revamping, with a strategic plan. My predecessor joked in one of the early meetings that he was beginning to feel like Herbert Hoover. Clearly, I like to boss people around. I enjoy administration and management, and I'm effective at it. It's different from teaching and scholarship, and many people hate it. I think it's important that the ones who don't hate it do it, so it gets done well. Academics aren't big on teamwork. They don't like hierarchy. So if somebody is good at herding cats, they should do it.

What is the secret to academic administration?

People would ask me, "Why are you willing to be department chair when your kids are so young?" And I would reply, "It's perfect, because I'm used to tying other people's shoes." You have to do things that others really ought to be able to do by now but can't. You need patience and the ability to appreciate people for what they can do. A lot of people get angry or frustrated by what others can't do, as opposed to enjoying and building on what they can. And just as with small children, telling people point-blank what they can't do is not going to work well.

Did this path lead you naturally to becoming a dean?

Pretty much. I was department chair when they were doing the search for the dean of SIPA [the School of International and Public Affairs], and I remember talking about it with a colleague in the elevator. She said, "Who would ever want that job?" And I thought, "Well, I would." So yes, then I became dean.

How was being in charge of a policy school different from running a regular academic department?

It was much more fun. I had gone to Fletcher and, from the beginning, had sort of one foot out of the academy. Even at places like Harvard and Columbia, the pure social scientists in the academic departments are somewhat removed from the real world, whether they think it or not. And I liked teaching the students at a policy school.

How are the students different?

They're less disciplined, in all senses of the word. If you teach graduate-level economics at a policy school, the students are going to drive you nuts, because they don't care much about academic economics—they want to know how the world works. I like the polymathic character of policy school students. We in academia can be overdisciplined, to the point where what we're doing is only of interest to a handful of other people in our field. These kids want to make a difference and will go out there and try, even if they're not ready. Sometimes I worry that some of the Ph.D. students are just building a résumé for some future purpose they haven't figured out yet.

How did you get to Egypt?

I was deaning and loving it. I learned a lot about the rest of the world. I joined the Board of Trustees of the American University in Cairo, where I had once studied Arabic, and that was a lot of fun. Then they did a search for provost. The search consultant asked if I'd be a candidate, and I said no. Then later the university president called and asked if I would reconsider, and I said yes. It was the same week my younger son got accepted to college. My husband says I went to Cairo to preempt empty nest syndrome. I think that's unfair, but it's probably correct.

What was Cairo like?

I enjoyed being provost—

That's the first time I've heard somebody say they enjoyed being provost.

I like working with faculty. My definition of a good day is if I've learned something. I used to tell my secretaries that if they got me to learn something by ten o'clock in the morning, we could knock off for the rest of the day. Dealing with faculty is a constant education. I would talk to people in the humanities, then to the mechanical engineers....

It's so much fun! Trying to figure out ways to help them do what they want to do more easily or more effectively—that's just a neat job. And that's what a provost does.

What was it like trying to get a major university to work in Cairo?

I arrived just as the university moved to its new campus, so it was complete chaos. The campus wasn't ready, of course. The faculty were furious about having to move from their familiar, cozy digs to this half-built thing in the desert. It's a fabulous campus now, really beautiful. But it wasn't very appealing at that time. It was in the middle of nowhere, parts didn't have electricity, and so forth. It was a very chaotic semester—which was perfect for me, because nobody noticed that I didn't know what I was doing. By the end of the year, I had gotten my bearings. I knew who people were, where they were, what they wanted, and what we needed to do to improve processes.

What's the difference between running a university in Egypt as opposed to the United States?

As provost, not much. AUC is accredited in the United States, has American tenure, and runs like an American university. You recruit faculty a bit differently, but not as much as people think. If you're recruiting to Columbia, you have to think about the anxieties that attend coming to a big city: Can I live in an apartment? What are the schools like? Etc. You recruit somebody to Cairo, and they think about the same things.

Is it different teaching about Middle Eastern politics in the Middle East?

My experience in Cairo was just before and after the revolution. I was provost under [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak, and it was less freewheeling. General education policy in the Mubarak era was described to me as "no politics, no religion," but AUC could do anything it wanted within its classes. We had a somewhat special status. Before I got there, there had been some occasional disputes about books assigned and that kind of thing. But my experience was that the regime knew what we did, we knew what they did, and everybody knew what the rules were, so it was pretty relaxed. Of course, when the revolution broke out, there weren't any rules anymore.

Did you see the revolution coming?

Absolutely not. And anybody who tells you they did didn't.

You've been studying North African politics your entire life, at the best institutions the world has to offer; you're running a major university in the country; and a revolution breaks out under your nose that you didn't predict. What does that say about the field of political science or area expertise in general?

If this was physics, we would have been able to predict it. I do think there's a complacency in a lot of political analysis. We had gotten so accustomed to the resilience of authoritarianism that we thought it would go on forever. The moment when I really worried about our ability to add value was less the outbreak of the revolution than when [Abdel Fattah el-]Sisi came to power. There was a lot of debate about whether it was a coup, and academic experts were saying, "We'll know in six months." I thought to myself, "It's right in front of us. Why can't we tell now?" Then I thought, "Even the physicists don't know whether something's a wave or a particle until they actually describe it."

Why couldn't you tell whether it was a coup or not?

In retrospect, you could say, "The defense minister comes and tells the president he can't be president anymore and jails him, and that seems pretty coup-like." But there were widespread and apparently genuinely popular demonstrations against the Morsi government at that point. And the cabinet that Sisi appointed at the outset was full of Egypt's most liberal leaders. It seemed like a democratic transition. There wasn't any way of knowing what Sisi was going to end up doing.

So if Sisi had chosen to use his newfound power to reestablish a more liberal or democratic system, that would have made it not a coup but something of a democratic restoration after Morsi's illiberal rule?

Yes. It really is quantum politics. When we label something, it becomes that.

What was it like to live through a revolution?

From the beginning to the last day I was there, I thought, "Lucky me. This is amazing." I had moved up from provost to president just a couple of weeks earlier. One of the things I enjoyed most was the day-to-day challenge of figuring out how to keep the university running. For example, early on, our IT people got an indication that the government might pull the plug on the Internet. We realized that we were going to have to communicate with each other via landline but didn't have a list of phone numbers because nobody had used landlines in years. I told the university cabinet, "Look, if we can't contact you, everybody has to be at the president's house at noon on Saturday." And fortunately, everybody got there. That was the beginning of what turned into the Emergency Management Team. There hadn't been one, because there hadn't been an emergency to manage in decades.

The end of January was approaching, and people got paid at the end of the month. But the banks were closed; everything was closed. We knew many of our staff, including security staff, lived from paycheck to paycheck. What was going to happen to them, and then to us? Our downtown campus is on Tahrir Square. Who was going to throw the Molotov cocktails out of the campus? We ended up literally gathering and handing out all the cash we could find, against handwritten IOUs.

At one point, there was a battle on our campus between the security forces and the protesters. Our security people, really quite wonderful in many ways but all straight out of the Ministry of Interior, said, "It didn't last long, and there wasn't much fighting." Then rumors started that there had been snipers on the roof of our building shooting into the protesters. Our security people said, "Absolutely not. That never happened." Then an employee came in and showed me on his phone the people on the roof shooting. So whom do I trust? Who's telling me the right story? Those questions did not come up at Columbia.

Presumably, a lot of your students were taking part in the protests. And presumably, the state was trying to crack down on them. How did you manage that situation? Did you treat the university as a sanctuary, like a church, where the police couldn't come?

No. We said, "The campuses are closed, and

General education policy in the Mubarak era was described to me as "no politics, no religion," but AUC could do anything it wanted within its classes. We had a somewhat special status. Before I got there, there had been some occasional disputes about books assigned and that kind of thing.

People change. Sometimes they learn. You don't know beforehand. We should still try to analyze things as best we can. But we need to be much more modest about what we expect our analysis to achieve.

nobody can come onto the campuses except the security people." That was a matter of contention with the downtown campus, because the protesters, many of whom were our students and faculty, wanted to use it for a field hospital and stuff like that. And we would say, "No. I'm sorry."

So you prevented yourself from becoming politicized?

Exactly. We said over and over again that we did not have a dog in this fight.

Did you really feel that way?

Actually, during the 18 days [of the protests], we did. We were an American institution; we had to be very careful not to be seen to be involved in anything political. We closed. We evacuated all of our foreign students, at the request of their embassies. We knew that most of our students and many of our faculty were in Tahrir Square, and that was fine. We were concerned about their safety. And we were concerned about the safety of people in our facilities and dorms. That's what we worried about. We didn't worry about whether Mubarak was going to fall or not. That was not ours to decide.

What was the rest of your time in Egypt like?

It got really interesting. The first year had the SCAF [Supreme Council of the Armed Forces] and the presidential election. We decided to let student groups ask candidates to speak on campus, as they would on an American campus. Some accepted, and it was great. I used to say, "It's the first time a presidential candidate has spoken at a university in Egypt in 7,000 years." I think it made a difference, even though now it won't happen again for a long time. A university is more than just what happens in class, and extracurriculars are not just folklore troupes and rugby teams. Those are important, but so is having a place to have open political debate.

After the revolution, we had to come up with a campus speech policy. We had a wonderful debate about what it should be, and eventually, we wrote one based on Carnegie Mellon's. The next edition of the student newspaper had a bunch of expletives. Other kids were unhappy about that. And the discussions went on and on. It was a great teaching opportunity, and I think that generation of students will live with that experience forever. They learned things neither their predecessors nor successors had the chance to.

When did you come back to the States?

My term finished at the end of 2015. There were differences between me and the trustees.

You were too liberal?

Yeah. It was partly political and partly conven-

tional debates about how a university should run—how budgets should be allocated, that sort of stuff.

fter Egypt, I spent a semester at NYU Abu Dhabi, because I wanted to see what a branch campus was like. I'm on the board of the Aga Khan University, and they're about to start a Faculty of Arts and Sciences in Karachi. I've been doing some writing on the university and the liberal arts in a globalized world, which is a very contentious and complicated question.

You're one of a handful of American Libya experts. The United States recently fought a war in Libya. Was there a lot of regional expertise involved in that operation?

No. And if you look at the people who have subsequently written about the intervention in Libya, it's amazing how little, to this day, Libya itself matters. The debates were all about bureaucratic politics in Washington.

What should the United States have done when Qaddafi's regime went into crisis?

I wasn't consulted about it, but had I been, I would have agreed with the analysis that Qaddafi would slaughter his opponents if he survived. But what are you going to do about it? That's the problem. It was the Obama version of Iraq: "We're going to take out the tyrant, and everything will be fine." That's what Bush did in Iraq, and that's what Obama did with Qaddafi.

So should we just leave the dictators in place?

If we're prepared to live with the slaughter, as it appears is happening in Syria. If you want to go in and change the regime, then have a day-after plan that is not just waiting, as I believe Colin Powell said, for a country of Thomas Jeffersons to appear.

You've studied Middle Eastern politics for decades. Do you know more now than you did at the beginning? Can you predict it, or are you constantly surprised?

I know more in the sense that I feel constructively chastened. There have been times when I really thought I knew what was happening and I was wrong, in interesting ways. One example I often use in class involves Tunisia. When [Zine el-Abidine] Ben Ali turned out [President Habib] Bourguiba in 1987, there was a period when he had a national pact and he seemed very liberal. Then Ben Ali turned out to be a dreadful kleptocrat. I had been optimistic, calling it a case of a transition to democracy. It wasn't just me: his cabinet was optimistic, too. But it made ask, "Why was I so wrong? What should I have been looking at instead?" One answer was not to be swept up in the views of your sources. Ben Ali's cabinet wanted the new system to work and believed it would work. It took him a while to consolidate his kleptocracy.

Ben Ali turned out worse than expected. Rached Ghannouchi turned out better.

Exactly. People change. Sometimes they learn. You don't know beforehand. We should still try to analyze things as best we can. But we need to be much more modest about what we expect our analysis to achieve.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I've had a great career, and I've enjoyed it a lot—and that's something to be proud of in itself. Keeping AUC not just afloat but thriving through that whole period was difficult, and it was not a foregone conclusion that it could be done. Not everybody could have done it. I did, and I'm proud of that.

And your greatest regrets?

I would have liked to stay longer in Cairo. But I don't regret the positions I took that differed from those of the trustees, so that's not really a regret. I've been pretty lucky. I don't have a lot to regret.

Any advice for those starting out?

Keep doing what makes your heart sing until somebody says you can't. Surprisingly often they don't, and you can just keep doing what you love.

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Eliot Cohen

How I Got Here

Professor, Harvard University, U.S. Naval War College, and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Director, Gulf War Air Power Survey

Counselor, U.S. State Department

Dean, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

In my high school yearbook, for career objective, I wrote, "To get Henry Kissinger's job." So let's stipulate: I'm a failure.

Which job of Kissinger's did you have in mind? Secretary of state? National security adviser? Harvard professor?

I was struck by the idea that you could be an intellectual and wrestle with the world of ideas and at the same time be constructively engaged in the world of action. And that didn't abate. When I went to college, I took a course called "The Education of Henry Kissinger," taught by Jack Montgomery and Marvin Feuer. We read Kissinger's works and then books about him. It was quite interesting to explore the connection between ideas and practice—something I've wrestled with for the rest of my career.

So this precocious kid goes to college with the intention of becoming the next Henry Kissinger and takes a course of study appropriate to that.

That makes me sound more cold-bloodedly ambitious than I hope I was. I knew that I loved books. I grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, and there was a wonderful local library branch right near the subway stop I took to school. Every Friday, I would stop there and come back with a stack of books, and my mother would get upset because I'd begin reading the books as I was walking the mile back to the house. By college, I knew I loved

the academic life, but I also desperately wanted to be engaged with the real world. The generation of teachers I had at Harvard—people like Samuel Huntington, Ernest May, James Q. Wilson, Judith Shklar—were serious intellects but also practical.

You were such a geek, you turned your undergraduate senior thesis into your first book. Who does that?

Geeks. My adviser and mentor Sam Huntington encouraged me and helped me along. The great thing about Sam was, he'd be unsparing in his criticism and unsparing in his encouragement. He was not an effusive man, but he let you know what he thought, and he was always honest.

What did you do after college?

I went directly to graduate school, also at Harvard. I got married right after graduation. I'm not sure I'd recommend that to most young people, but we've been extremely fortunate. I had been anxious about what to do next. Sam encouraged me to get a Ph.D. Another adviser—subsequently chairman of the department—said, "I'll write you a letter of recommendation, but first let me tell you how terrible the academic life is and how impossible it is to get jobs." So I took the LSAT. That nearly caused my fiancée to break off the engagement. But as it turned out, I ended up loving the academic life.

You were briefly in the military.

When I was in graduate school, I got increasingly neurotic about studying something that I would have no personal experience of, so I joined ROTC. I drilled at MIT with the undergraduates and was commissioned as a reservist. I had a brief and inglorious military career, but it was a wonderful experience in several ways.

First, military service teaches you leadership. Your priorities are your mission, your people, yourself. The person in charge eats last. Lead by example. Basic principles that stick with you throughout your whole life. But also practical things, like never be without something to write on and something to write with. Second, military service exposes you to the limits of brainpower. There is nothing quite like being lost in the woods with a dozen sleepless Harvard and MIT undergraduates with guns, and finding yourself shaking people by the lapels and shouting, "Do it!" to make you realize there's a lot more to effectiveness than just being smart. And for me, a third thing was the opportunity of getting

to work as a military assistant to Andy Marshall in the Office of Net Assessment, which turned out to be a second education.

You once said that during this era, you were taken less seriously in your uniform than out of it.

I was a second lieutenant, an anomaly at the Pentagon. I had officers stop me and say, "What the hell are you doing here?" The benefits of serving were not improved credibility but individual growth.

You've taught at Harvard, the Naval War College, and Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). What did you learn from each?

All three are institutions. They have been here quite a while, Harvard the longest, and they'll be here long after I've gone. They embody certain values and intellectual traditions. Institutions never love you back; you have to be aware of that. But all three attract unusual loyalty and commitment.

At Harvard, I had great teachers, colleagues, and students. It was just a wonderful place to grow, particularly back then.

The Naval War College was terrific. I started teaching there when I was 29, very much a kid. I remember a grizzled old salt (who, of course, was 20 years younger than I am now) saying, "How old are you, son?" I had to teach people who were much older than me, who had much more experience of the real world—being respectful of what they knew and I didn't, but also using such skills as I had to develop them further. Moreover, I had to do so in a military setting, fitting into that culture.

What the military respects is expertise and professionalism. If you behaved professionally to them, and you had expertise in your areas, that was enough. My students didn't expect me to know how to drive a ship. But they did expect me to be able to guide them through a discussion of Thucydides in a way that would be useful to them. If you could do that, while actually being a kid, then you became kind of a mascot. A lot of civilian academics, particularly the products of elite schools, had trouble. They came from a wise-guy culture, with a lot of banter and putdowns, and that often comes across as patronizing and condescending. Once that happened, you lost the students, and when you lost them at the beginning of the semester, you never got them back.

And SAIS?

The only job I ever really campaigned for was to become a professor at SAIS. I first encountered the school in the late '70s. Bob Osgood, one of the grand old men of the place, ran a seminar together with Huntington on the utility of military force, and I was the rapporteur. I was the only graduate student in the room with a lot of heavy hitters. It was heady stuff. And so when a job there came open some years later, I applied for it, and called in all my favors with my mentors, saying, "I really want this one." And I got it, and have lived happily ever after.

Why?

Because of its mission, which is to be a professional school of international affairs, with a faculty who can understand and interpret the world but also teach students how to change it. That's hard, but it's a great challenge. Johns Hopkins University has two unofficial mottoes that I love. One is "Selective excellence": "We can't do everything; we're not big enough. But what we do, we do really well." The second is "Knock yourself out": "We don't have a lot of money; we're not going to give you much. But if you want to build something, knock yourself out—we won't get in your way." When I came here [at the end of the 1980s], I stepped into Osgood's former chair. The Security Studies Program had been oriented toward the Cold War and was essentially defunct. I said, "I want to rebuild it and turn it into a strategic studies program." And the school was extraordinarily supportive. Then, when I wanted to take time off to go into government, first to run the Gulf War Air Power Survey for the air force [in the 1990s] and then to be the counselor at the State Department [in the following decade], they said, "Good for you, that's great." To be supported and given freedom like that—I am really the luckiest academic alive.

After your early teaching, you had a brief, instructive stint in government.

I worked on the Policy Planning Staff in the Defense Department. One of my jobs there was to write a speech for then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney explaining why Senator Sam Nunn was wrong in his critique of Bush 41's defense policy. This was just before Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. Nunn had given some speeches saying the administration hadn't adjusted to the end of the

Cold War, and I was told to draft Cheney's rebuttal. I get Nunn's speeches, and reading them, I say to myself, "You know, he's right." Then I realize: this is government, it's not about the quest for the truth, you're just a cog, so you have to write the speech. Which I did. But the internal discomfort that I felt at that told me, "You really are a professor." In many fields, telling the truth can be a luxury and is not always the most important thing.

Soon afterward, you swore to me that you would never go back into the system, for exactly those reasons!

My self-knowledge is limited. One big difference between government and academia is that government service is not about the pursuit of truth, and you should not treat it that way. Another is that government is a collective enterprise. Our part of the academy is a much more solitary enterprise and puts a premium on in-your-face truth telling—a style that is completely dysfunctional in government. Finally, the impulse of an academic is to try to understand, while the impulse of somebody in government is to act.

I now think that ideas are really important but that they're meaningless without implementation. I bake bread, which is a very therapeutic thing, in addition to tasting good. And I think of ideas as yeast. But if you're going to make bread, you also need lots of flour, water, salt. And that's just for basic breads—fancier stuff requires more. Academics tend to focus on the yeast part and often ignore the rest, which is why they frequently come a cropper when they go into government.

When I went to the State Department, my friend David Gordon, head of the Policy Planning Staff, gave me great advice. He said, "Speaking truth to power every month or two in an op-ed—that's great. Speak truth to power every day, face-to-face, and power gets seriously pissed off." And that's true. It's not enough to have the right question; you have to ask it at the right time.

And yet … in my experience, the U.S. government has a huge bias toward action to deal with whatever the headline of the day is—often ill-considered action the country would be better off avoiding. So wouldn't you be providing a great public service inside by asking annoying basic questions like, "Hey, do we really need to do this?"

It depends. I think people in government are more sensitive than academics, who are used to having infinite time to gather information, to the fact that inaction is also an action. And particularly for the United States, inaction is a consequential decision.

Say more about refreshing security studies at SAIS.

When I took over, the Security Studies Program was all about arms control and the Cold War, which had just ended. I thought you had to go beyond recent history and tackle a broad array of issues surrounding the use of force. All of this was accelerated by the Gulf War. As the 1990s rolled on, it became clear that large technological changes were afoot that would transform the nature of military power. But I also always had an inkling that the unipolar moment wouldn't last. So you try to prepare intellectually for future security challenges that you know are going to come but aren't sure what they are going to be. That's the nature of this business.

One of your great professional accomplishments, the Gulf War Air Power Survey, heralded the coming revolution in military affairs. You follow that up by creating a program that takes students to Gettysburg. Why prepare for a future of highly technological twenty-first-century combat by walking across a nineteenth-century battlefield?

Civil War soldiers had to deal with a whole array of new technologies, such as the railroad and the telegraph. The railroad transforms logistics; the telegraph transforms civil-military relations. The first Situation Room is Abraham Lincoln going to the telegraph office and getting real-time communications from commanders in the field. They also had to deal with brand new weapons, such as the rifled musket, that transformed tactics. In war, human beings make decisions under extremely difficult circumstances. Much of what you do on a staff ride is explore command, decision-making, leadership, organization. Those things are timeless. At Antietam, we ended up discussing how Robert E. Lee would cull his senior leadership ranks after every battle and what the cumulative effect of that was, and the parallels in business and elsewhere. Last year, we went to France to do

a staff ride on occupation and resistance. How do people decide whether to oppose or collaborate?

You take a holistic approach to history, teaching literature and poetry along with battles in World War I, for example. How come?

One of my favorite poems is by Emily Dickinson:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—

We don't learn the truth all at once, and we learn different truths in different ways. My parents instilled in me a love of poetry, and through that I saw that we can gain insight and skill as observers of the world through many mediums, including fiction.

How do you define yourself professionally?

First and foremost, I'm a teacher. That's the most important thing about me. I am a defense policy intellectual. I'd like to think of myself as a military historian. But I think it's important to be an intellectual, plain and simple. My next book, when things settle down a bit, is going to be about Shakespeare and politics.

Aren't there lots of books on that already?

I've been very fortunate to have a ringside seat for a lot of power politics, and I know a lot more from history. Shakespeare has things to say about these subjects that may not be quite as apparent to people who are literary scholars.

Your personal labels didn't include political scientist. Do you think that field exists?

I got a degree in government, not political science. I believe in the primacy of politics and the importance of studying political institutions. I am eternally grateful to my many teachers and have learned much from political philosophy in particu-

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lar. But if you pointed a gun at me and said, "Define yourself in one discipline," I would say, "Military history." And the reason is that I've concluded that political science has a lot of trouble dealing with two crucial things: contingency and personality.

You're chugging along, about 45, midcareer, and then 9/11 changes everything. What happens then?

I was less shocked than other people were, but not so much because I had been following al Qaeda in particular. I had a conversation with a colleague afterward. He had three kids, a bit older than my four. We come back to work, and the smoke is still rising from the Pentagon, and there are jets circling overhead and National Guard troops on the streets, and he says, "How do I tell my kids that everything's going to be okay?" I looked at him and said, "Forgive me, but that is the difference between us. I have never told my kids everything is going to be okay. In fact, my kids know that things can be pretty severely not okay. They've heard of Auschwitz. They know that really bad things can happen."

You go back into government, despite having sworn off it. Why?

I was asked to serve. I was not looking to go in. I got a call asking if I'd be willing to meet with Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice, whom I knew casually. I said, "About what?" She said, "To talk about American foreign policy." We go in, we talk about a bunch of issues, and at the end of it, she says, "I need a director of policy planning, and I need a counselor. Which one would you like to do?" I had been on the Defense Policy Board. I had supported the [Iraq] war. I had been somewhat critical, although respectfully, and had engaged in conversations with administration officials, including the president. I just felt, and my wife felt as well, that if you're asked to serve at this level at this time, you have to do it.

It was a very satisfying experience. I'm very glad I did it. I think I did a good job. The hard part started at the very beginning. I got word that my friend Andy Bacevich's son had been killed in Iraq. He had the same name. I'd met him once. They looked just alike. And Andy senior had been bitterly opposed to the war. So one of the first things I did was to fly to Boston for the funeral, and it was hard. And I kept young Andy Bacevich's picture on my desk until I left office. It brought home the seriousness of everything we were doing.

Do you have regrets about Iraq?

I think anybody who was in favor of it should have regrets. But they're complicated regrets. I do not believe in going around wearing a hair shirt and flogging yourself. I do not believe it was the biggest mistake we ever made. I think it could have turned out considerably better than it did. I think it actually did, in some ways, turn out better than people are willing to acknowledge. So I have a complicated view of it. Contingency and personality came into play—I saw how up close.

Before I went into government, I was at a meeting with the president where I think I was the first one who said, "You should put [General David] Petraeus in command." And I think that was helpful. Once Petraeus was in [as commander of multinational forces in Iraq] and the surge was underway, there wasn't a whole lot for me to do on Iraq. I went there quite a bit, and that was very instructive. But in truth, I did more on Afghanistan than I did on Iraq. There, I know I made a contribution. I spent a fair amount of time over there, either on my own or with Doug Lute, who was the deputy national security adviser. Pretty soon, we started coming back and telling the secretary [of defense] that things were going worse in Afghanistan than we thought.

What are your greatest career regrets, and what are you proudest of?

What I'm proudest of is teaching many generations of wonderful students. I don't really have any large regrets. I mean, I wish I'd phrased some things differently. I would have taken a more nuanced view on Iraq than I did. When I'm in the middle of something, I'm always beating myself up about, "Am I doing a good enough job?" And of course, I'm never doing a good enough job, because I'm human. But I don't have any big regrets. I've had a blessed career. I've been fortunate to work with great people, and I think I've written some things that are worth writing. I served my country. I have a wonderful family.

In the later stages of that life and career, the world seems to be heading in a different and darker direction than expected.

Yes, it's a darker world in many ways. But I've been thinking about this a lot, and here's what you have to understand: I grew up in the shadow of World War II. In my synagogue, all those people with thick Eastern European accents, they'd been refugees. One of my teachers in yeshiva had a number tattooed on his arm from Dachau. Others had fled Poland across the Soviet Union. My uncle married a woman who survived Belsen.

The morning after the 2016 election, my students said, "Professor Cohen, you have to talk to us about this." I told them, "Remember what Ben Franklin said leaving the Constitutional Convention. A woman in the crowd asked him, 'Dr. Franklin, what government have you given us?' He replied, 'A republic, if you can keep it.' Our founders understood that this experiment was precarious, and we should, too."

I also spoke from personal experience. My mom passed away in 2015, at 90. I thought about what she had lived through—the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, McCarthy, Korea, Vietnam, American cities going up in flames. And then I thought about my grandparents, who had lived through all those things—and also, before that, pogroms, World War I, the influenza epidemic, and more. Who said we would be allowed to get off easy? When people today wring their hands, I push back. It is a different world, much more challenging. But all that means is that we're supposed to stand up and do something about it.

Any career advice for those just starting out?

A tip from my friend John McLaughlin: however you begin, give it your all. To a greater degree than you realize, merit gets noticed and usually (although not always) rewarded. Understand that you cannot plan a career: you will stumble into opportunities, and it is up to you to decide whether to pursue them. Find yourself a wise old bird (or two or three) in whom you can confide. You may or may not follow their advice, but having someone you can share your trials and successes with, who will listen with an understanding ear and a shrewd head, is more valuable than you can know. Last and most important, remember that you can recover from professional misjudgments, mistakes, and setbacks. But you cannot recover from throwing away your integrity.

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How I Got Here

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When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

By the time I was in fifth or sixth grade, I knew I wasn't going to be Barbra Streisand or a ballerina. I considered being a senator. I worked on Ed Brooke's campaign when I was in high school. But I learned quickly that I didn't want to be on center stage, exposing myself as much as politicians do. I was drawn to international issues and did a high school exchange program in Israel, right after the Six-Day War. It was terrific, a transformative experience. I lived with two Israeli families, one a modest family in Upper Nazareth, the other an affluent family in Tel Aviv. Then I went to Cornell University and spent my junior year in France. Using mostly French and a little bit of Arabic, I worked on a research project comparing the integration of Moroccan Jews in France and Israel. It was a wonderful experience, greatly improved my French, got me into neighborhoods and homes in Paris that I would never have seen.

What was your major?

I was in something called the College Scholar Program, so I was allowed to create my own major. I moved between politics and cultural anthropology

and threw in the Middle East. I took Medieval Arab History with Bibi Netanyahu's father, Benzion.

What was he like as a professor?

Very pompous and patronizing.

Did you ever tell Netanyahu you had studied with his father?

No. [chuckle]

What did you do after college?

I ran a restaurant in the Worcester Art Museum with some friends, Cafe Pomodoro. It's a beautiful small art museum in Massachusetts. I had taken a lot of AP classes and so had enough credits to graduate early and was thinking about the Peace Corps.

Why did you leave the restaurant?

As my father pointed out, I had zero interest in pricing things correctly. He would ask, "Why did you charge $1.00 for this and $1.50 for this?" and I'd say, "Oh, it just sounded right." I loved the cooking, the people, the museum. But I discovered that I was missing the business gene and didn't have a clue how to make money.

How did you come to Washington?

I started doing intensive Arabic at Georgetown while working part time. Eventually, I applied to SAIS [Johns Hopkins's School of Advanced International Studies], because a lot of the professors were practitioners. I found practical issues more interesting than conceptual ones and wasn't drawn to the academic Ph.D. track. SAIS worked well for me. The Arabic studies were excellent, and I did a summer program in Tunisia that was very useful. In my second year, I applied for a fellowship on Capitol Hill, to work in a liberal Republican senator's office. I didn't get it, but the organizer of the competition came to me and said, "Look, you were just as good as the guy who did get it, so call Biden's office—I know they're looking for someone." And that's how I started working for Joe Biden. It was his first term as a senator. I wasn't a Delaware groupie, so I didn't exactly fit in. But I had two wonderful bosses: Paul Laudicina, who went on to become the head of [the management consulting firm] A.T. Kearney, and my first real professional mentor, Joyce Lasky Reed. She was quite a character, had lived all around the world. Biden knew he needed to fill in some of the gaps in his own education and learned about foreign policy

and judicial issues from her. But she wasn't particularly interested in the nitty-gritty of policy.

What did you do?

All the stuff a junior person does—research, correspondence. I had a small portfolio of my own, including veterans' affairs. Delaware had a VA hospital doing facial reconstruction on soldiers who had been grossly disfigured in the Vietnam War. That was powerful, and Biden really cared. I also worked on legislation getting billions of dollars to the Philadelphia shipyard rather than Virginia—a rust belt versus sun belt victory for Biden and the Pennsylvania and New Jersey delegations. It was a great learning experience.

Did you like working on the Hill?

By my second year, I decided I wasn't enough of a political animal. I was more comfortable on the research side. After seeing a notice on a bulletin board, I applied for a job as an analyst in Middle Eastern and North African affairs at the Congressional Research Service and landed a spot they had been about to give to somebody else. That was one of my great lucky breaks.

What did you do at CRS?

I came there in 1979 and stayed for 11 years, with a couple of little sojourns to the State Department along the way. I started as the lowest of three analysts doing the Middle East. My portfolio was the Maghreb, Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus, and I backed up Arab-Israeli issues. The senior analysts gleefully dumped the Cyprus folders in my lap when I arrived and said, "Over to you." But the most profound impact on my experience came from the Iranian hostage crisis, which began within weeks of my starting.

What does CRS do?

CRS is the nonpartisan, nonpolitical research center for members of Congress. At the time, our work was considered proprietary and exclusive for members of Congress. Now, virtually all CRS products are available online. It started as a reference service staffed by librarians. Members could ask a technical question: get me a map of such and such a place, or the GDP of a country I'm going to visit. Over time, it expanded beyond reference to research. Our greatest impact came when a committee would task us to study a problem and produce a report. When Lee Hamilton was chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for example, we did some really interesting, important work. He commissioned reports on disputes between the branches over the conduct of American foreign policy, recognition of the PRC [People's Republic of China], sanctions against Rhodesia. In my second year, I did a report on the Turkish arms embargo. Again, just a great growth experience.

Why would writing about the Turkish arms embargo be a great growth experience?

I interviewed all the players involved, at the State Department and in Congress, on why they had such a profound disagreement. It was crystal clear that the executive branch will always put security first in its appreciation of Turkey, and Congress will care more broadly about issues such as human rights or how good a friend Turkey is in general. The Turks had intervened in Cyprus in the summer of '74. The Nixon presidency was falling apart, and there was a crisis of legitimacy in the executive branch. And Congress, with a newly empowered Greek lobby, stepped in to fill the vacuum, saying we don't trust the White House to make a wise choice right now. The embargo Congress imposed lasted four years, until Jimmy Carter lifted it in '78. It was a serious foreign policy issue, and I got to become the in-house expert on it. There was a funny cartoon about the Chad analyst at the State Department sleeping at his desk and, boing, Qaddafi invades Chad—and suddenly, being the Chad expert is a big thing. Sometimes you get a break like that and are lucky enough to work on a crisis that gets you visibility.

Was it frustrating doing nonpartisan research for partisan clients?

On some issues, such as Arab-Israeli ones, it was definitely frustrating. I wrote a careful, clinical, almost encyclopedic paper on settlements, citing Israeli, Arab, U.S., and European views. I was scrupulously neutral. And I realized that Congress didn't want to read the paper, because it was inconvenient. They didn't really want to be experts on settlements; they wanted support for their predetermined political views. That was when I knew this chapter of my life was coming to a close.

What did you do on your rotations at the State Department?

The first was to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, where I worked on Turkey. I started two

days before the 1980 coup. I had not even been read in yet to my full level of clearances and had to comment on the breaking situation. I wrote a piece saying the Turkish military are very unhappy but are not going to act at this time. Ten hours later, I turn on the radio and hear they kicked out Suleyman Demirel [the prime minister].

Did anybody yell at you for having gotten it wrong?

I go to the State Department the next day, and they rush me into the morning meeting, and around the table are luminaries who had served in very senior positions in Turkey, like Phil Wilcox and Ron Spiers. They all started laughing when I walked in and said, "When we read your piece yesterday afternoon, we agreed with it, but we thought we would just wait, sit on it for a day." So they hadn't put it in the secretary's book for that morning, and I was spared that ultimate embarrassment. But they were very gracious. They said it was a sound piece analytically—I had just gotten the timing wrong.

Has your ability to predict things increased?

I was in the intelligence community at the time of 9/11. I think we are capable of giving strategic warning. But despite huge amounts of effort and resources, you have to get really lucky to be able to say it's going to happen tomorrow at 9 AM. Tactical warning is the hard part. You can have the right sources, identify the right threat, monitor it closely, and still only rarely do you get that last little piece of information about exactly when and where something is going to happen, with enough lead time to prevent it.

What was your second stint at the State Department?

I was a member of the Policy Planning Staff in '86-'87, which was a blast. I gravitate to small offices that sit high in big institutions. That's my niche. You don't have a lot of power, but you get a great perspective on how institutions work. George Shultz was secretary. I was there when Iran-contra first broke and saw how completely distraught he was, the breakdown of trust between the State Department and the White House. I did North Africa and the Middle East in a very impressive group. Aaron Miller, Bob Einhorn, and Zal Khalilzad were there. Dick Solomon was the boss, and he and Shultz got along quite well. It was a very exciting time.

How did you come to the National Intelligence Council [NIC]?

I went back to CRS for another two years and was thinking about what to do next, when I was approached to be the national intelligence officer [NIO] for Near East and South Asia. I remember saying, "That's crazy. I'm not qualified. That's for a much more senior person." But Fritz Ermarth, who was a political scientist from [the] RAND [Corporation], very generous-spirited, said, "We're ready to try something different." My predecessors had almost all been career intel officers from the operations side who had lived in the Arab world and were street smart about working with Arab intelligence services. But they were not analysts or writers. Ermarth let the pendulum swing all the way to hiring an analyst from the Library of Congress. It was pretty shocking, and I think a lot of people were looking for me to fail. Large bureaucracies don't trust outsiders, and they don't want it shown that non-guild members can do the job well. But then Saddam invaded Kuwait, and nobody had a chance to sabotage me, because we were all working too hard.

Tell me about the Gulf War.

Structurally, the decisions to go to war against Iraq in 1990 and 2003 look the same, but attitudinally, they were very different. With Bush 43, it was an extremely cynical exercise involving the misuse of intel. With Bush 41, it was the opposite. Working for the Bush-Baker-Scowcroft team [James Baker was secretary of state at the time, and Brent Scowcroft was George H. W. Bush's national security adviser] was truly a peak experience. That administration was impeccable in terms of process, the quality of decision-making, and also in its use of intelligence.

They saw the inevitability of using force by late 1990, before we analysts did. I thought Saddam might act rationally and withdraw when he saw how many troops we sent. But we now know Saddam thought he understood the American psyche, believed Colin Powell [then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] was traumatized by Vietnam and the country didn't have an appetite for the use of force. He was in a self-validating, self-contained system, and no fresh information was coming in.

Did Saddam's invasion of Kuwait surprise you?

I wasn't inside the system when he invaded. The regional analysts were saying, "This is just coercion;

it's not the start of a full-scale war." That's also what we were being told by King Hussein [of Jordan], by [Egyptian President] Hosni Mubarak, and others in the region. "He's bluffing. He's not going to do it." The warning analysts, in contrast, watching very carefully for what kinds of equipment was being moved where, predicted he was going to attack. But that was only in the last 72 hours, so the intel community did not give senior decision-makers much advance notice.

Did you imagine Saddam might survive the war?

Mainstream analytic thinking was that he was badly weakened and that given the history of Iraq, there was a reasonably strong chance his generals would turn against him. Maybe 30 percent, certainly less than 50 percent. We planted that idea in the minds of policymakers, and they took it as license to believe the postwar Iraq problem would take care of itself.

How did you come to the National Security Council?

I was NIO for three years. In 1993, Bruce Riedel and I switched places. He became NIO, and I took his job as director of Persian Gulf and South Asian affairs at the NSC.

What was it like moving from intelligence to policy?

We had a three-person directorate that covered the area from Morocco to Bangladesh. A very smart team. Martin Indyk was senior director and focused on the peace process, as well as the Gulf. David Satterfield did Morocco through Jordan, and worked closely with Martin on the peace process. My portfolio was Iraq, Iran, Arabian Penisula and South Asia. The Clinton administration thought Iraq was a Bush thing and did not make it a super high priority. Martin and I generated a number of policy ideas that fell flat on their face when they got to Tony Lake's desk [Lake was then national security adviser], because he knew the president wouldn't like it. So we largely stalled on Iraq. But there were some really good things happening in that office, a lot of progress made on peace negotiations with Jordan and the Palestinians in that period.

Tell me about dual containment.

It was an attempt to say that we had more than one problem in the Gulf—and while they're not iden-

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Few know that the improvement in U.S.-Indian relations that came under George W. Bush was the culmination of efforts started by Bill Clinton the previous decade.

tical, they're linked—and we could defend against both Iraq and Iran simultaneously, while also preventing them from interfering with the peace process.

You said that the administration wasn't very concerned about the threat from Iraq, but weren't they more concerned about it than about Iran, with the pressure on that front coming from outside?

For sure, some of the stuff we did on Iran was because of the midterm elections and the mood in Congress. But it wasn't just the Republicans who were hard-line. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who had negotiated the release of the hostages and loathed the Iranians, got Clinton alone and pushed a total trade ban. [The] Treasury and Defense [Departments] were trying to keep trade alive while restricting it heavily. The president knew early it would be difficult to do more innovative diplomacy.

Your office was handling both Middle East peace negotiations and conflict with the Gulf powers. How did that work?

The peace-process folks worked in a small, tight group and it was pure diplomacy. I liked my account because it had a pol-mil mix. We didn't get the equivalent of a ceremony on the White House lawn [like for the signing of the Oslo accords], but we got more exposed to the competition of ideas across the bureaucracy. It was a much messier mix, and we had to coordinate policy among a wide range of people in different parts of the Pentagon and [the] State [Department]. I rather liked that, because that's what I thought the NSC was supposed to do.

The complexities of Iran policy made it impossible to get anything done, and you're saying you enjoyed that?

Well, maybe "enjoy" is the wrong word. The NSC is supposed to reconcile competing interests in the big machine of government, and I got to actually see it firsthand and try to do it myself. We had our triumphs and failures. It was good to learn. I also handled the arrangements for two state visits, of [Pakistani Prime Minister] Benazir Bhutto and [Indian Prime Minister] Narasimha Rao. These were working visits, and everybody across the system interested in India wanted a spot in the meetings. That was fun.

Few know that the improvement in U.S.-Indian relations that came under George W. Bush was the culmination of efforts started by Bill Clinton the previous decade.

Absolutely. Clinton laid the foundations. We would have been eager to make more progress, but we realized change was going to happen more slowly on their side than ours. One example: a

senior Indian official comes in to meet with Tony Lake and starts out by saying, "We want to talk about large global issues." Tony is thrilled, says he'd love to discuss Russia, China, other topics. That was talking point one. Points two through ten were all about Pakistan. [chuckle] You could see Tony's face fall as he thought, "Okay, this isn't really happening yet."

Did your view of Congress change when you moved from the Hill to the White House?

I already knew that the Hill sometimes did things in a dramatic and flamboyant way without thinking through all the consequences. Having to deal with such legislation myself hardened my views a bit further. But I at least was lucky to have been a staffer when Congress was stronger on foreign policy.

How did it feel going from intelligence to policy?

It was quite an experience. I learned from watching the peace negotiations, and what I saw was that when you are deeply engaged in real diplomacy, talks that might actually change major things in the world, a lot of the actual policymaking is very tedious, tactical stuff. Who's going to invite whom? At what level do you receive the person? How do you convey to the parties that something is really important? As for my previous experience, on many issues, intel plays a moderately useful supporting role, but not much more. On Iraq, however, a single piece of intel could pull it off Clinton's back burner, forcing a meeting with the president to discuss what was going on in this closed-off society. When it came to the Gulf, intel and policy were so closely entwined that there was much continuity between the work I did before and after coming to the NSC.

How did you come to the UN?

One day in the driveway between the White House and the Old Executive Office Building, George Tenet [the CIA director] asked me if I would consider going to New York and working for Madeleine Albright [then the U.S. ambassador to the UN]. She and I had crossed paths a few times at conferences, and I always liked her, so I said yes, and that began two terrific years of being the liaison between the intelligence community and the U.S. Mission to the United Nations [USUN]. I briefed the top three ambassadors and also worked with the UN, sharing intelligence on peacekeeping operations. I worked a lot with Charlie Duelfer when he was number two in UNSCOM, the UN Special Commission on Iraq. I helped get support for humanitarian operations in the Great Lakes by giving Mrs. [Sadako] Ogata [the UN high commissioner for refugees] imagery and other material that helped them understand the scale of the refugee problem.

What did you learn about the UN's strengths and weaknesses?

Like most people, I ended up with a love-hate relationship with the organization. When I was working for Albright, the Council [on Foreign Relations] got her and Jeane Kirkpatrick [a former Republican U.S. ambassador to the UN] together for a conversation, assuming they would have wildly different views about the importance of the UN. But it was more congenial than expected. Kirkpatrick said she had come to the UN thinking it was a terrible place and having all these ideas about how to fix it or allow the United States to escape its interference. But then she realized that she could use her position to represent the United States to parts of the world Washington often ignored: "The ambassadors from small countries who were never going to get a White House visit? I was the most senior American they interacted with. So I tried to do business with them." She came around to the view that the UN is one of the important ways the United States conveys its interests to the world and tries to shape its environment.

But it's not a healthy organization. It's not a meritocracy. There's political patronage at all levels. The specialized agencies get a lot of work done, for which they don't always get credit. Conversations in the Security Council can be infuriating and feel like a dead end.

Where did you go next?

After USUN, I went back to the National Intelligence Council and spent five years as vice chairman. I was responsible for estimates and for recruiting NIOs. I worked for John Gannon and John Helgerson, two career CIA guys, and I think the insider-outsider team worked well.

Were you surprised by the 9/11 attacks? In some ways, you'd been warning about things just like this.

Everybody was shocked that they were as successful as they were, that the terrorists picked

such extraordinary targets and could pull it off. We thought it was much more likely they would attack the U.S. overseas. And if you had pressed Tenet about possible attacks on the mainland, he would probably have focused on car bombs, kidnappings, or assassinations. Some people said, "Oh, three years ago, we wrote a piece noting they could use airplanes as weapons." Sure, in theory, that was on a list somewhere. It doesn't mean people were actually warned about it. Bin Laden was hiding out in Tora Bora. We couldn't quite envision the technology, the capabilities they had acquired.

Were you there for the wars afterward?

Only some. In December 2001, the Stimson Center approached me about coming on as president and CEO. I wasn't a nuclear nonproliferation specialist, but they liked my broader portfolio, cross-disciplinary work, and government experience. I was nearing five years at the NIC, and 25 years in government, and my 50th birthday. I decided it would be a good moment to start a second career. It all came together very nicely.

Talk to me about the Iraqi WMD [weapons of mass destruction] fiasco.

By late 2001 the NIC was tasked to produce an unclassified white paper on Iraqi WMD. It was clear that the community's Iraq experts were using well established judgments that did not contain any new information, and I was troubled that the analysts were largely dismissive of UNSCOM's judgments. By that point, UNSCOM knew more than the U.S. government did. They had more time on the ground, more sources, had physically observed some of these facilities, and they were saying, "There's nothing there."

Didn't our intel people think the UNSCOM people were being fooled by Saddam?

Yes and no. I think it was deeper than that, and involved some professional arrogance and jealousy: "We've got the big technical systems; we know what's really going on." We built UNSCOM; we wanted it to be multilateral; we got them up and running. Years later, officials on the U.S. side were loath to accept how good UNSCOM had become or concede that their own [intelligence] collection had atrophied.

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, did you think Saddam had prohibited WMD?

I was shocked that we didn't have more of a protocol for finding such weapons during and after the war. I was flabbergasted that U.S. soldiers didn't have it high on their task list to go and secure these alleged WMD sites. They just ignored them. Eventually, we'd find dumps by tracing Iraqis who came in after getting sick from drinking water contaminated by old material. So maybe WMD was more of a pretext than the real determinant of going to war.

Were you surprised by the Duelfer report's eventual finding that there wasn't anything there?

No.

How do you square the Bush administration's supposed worry about WMD with its lack of preparation for handling actually existing WMD? Were they lying? Incompetent? Worried about long-term rather than short-term threats?

I don't know. It's still a mystery. One can dig

through the recent US Army "interim" history of the Iraq war to determine how much effort was made to seal off old WMD sites.

What was it like running a think tank?

I had spent most of my career in think tanks for Congress and the executive branch, so I knew what they did in terms of policy-relevant analysis. But the business model was very different and I faced quite a new set of challenges in running a non-profit. Nonetheless, it was fun to see things from the front-office perspective. Having been vice chairman of the NIC was a big help, because it gave me experience with the human resources part, scouting and recruiting people.

Do you like management?

Parts of it. I was never great at budgets and fundraising, but I liked the external communications, working with the board, nurturing rising talent.

Does management require different skills than analysis?

In both diplomacy and intelligence, people are promoted into management because they are good at the jobs below, not because they necessarily have the appropriate skills for it. I have always liked doing a mix of both. I never wanted to be alone at my desk just staring at a screen all day. So for me, Stimson was a really good fit. And I had a great time. We did a lot of projects, but the most rewarding part was helping good people, particularly women, set higher goals for their own professional development.

After ten years, including a lot of fundraising, I said, "I'm really tired." And then it took me another few years to leave. I had long conversations with my board about succession planning, and we worked it out smoothly. After that, I wrote a monograph for the Atlantic Council on Iran policy, did a project with the Georgetown Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, served on a few boards. I loved taking a bit of a break. Then I took a new position as director of the international security program at George Mason University.

You spent 25 years in very tense, high-level national security positions, dealing with some of the world's biggest crises. How did you have a life and raise a family in that context?

First, I was not at senior levels for 25 years, only the last five years. Second, I married late, and we adopted a child when I was in my mid-40s. So I was able to do a lot of professional stuff early without family responsibilities. For women starting a family early, who are still establishing themselves professionally, it's much more stressful.

How did gender affect your career?

CRS was a fairly gender-neutral environment. In the executive branch and tough national security positions, there were just fewer women. I was certainly in circumstances where men took credit for points I made. Sometimes, traveling with military officers, there would be awkward moments about what you do after hours, where it seemed inconvenient to have a senior woman on a delegation. Sometimes in the Middle East, a female official would be treated as a curiosity. They'd be very courteous and solicitous but sometimes just ignore you or assume that you were junior. By the time I got to Stimson, there were several think tanks in Washington being run by women. I've never been prone to looking at life through a gender prism. It's not that I am uninterested in the issue, but in my own career, I operated on the assumption that my professional situations were meritocracies until absolutely proved otherwise, that I would generally be assessed based on the quality of my work. And it was usually true.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I take a great sense of satisfaction in what I did. I was in interesting jobs in interesting times, got to look at national security from many different vantage points.

Any regrets?

I got into the Foreign Service just after I started at CRS. They pursued me, but I had already started to settle in, so I passed. Occasionally, I'm jealous of people who spent more time overseas. I've never done what diplomats get to do, which is really burrow in and be in a place for several years.

Any advice for those starting out?

Have an honest conversation with yourself about what you like and what you're good at, find out where those two lines converge, and do that.

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Michèle Flournoy

How I Got Here

Co-Founder and CEO, Center for a New American Security
U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy
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As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

An architect. I loved engineering, drafting floor plans, designing fantasy houses. I figured out how to convert my uncle's house to solar power (at least in my head). My high school had an engineering and architecture program, and I took everything in it, went to the state fair, all that stuff. I was lucky to have a college counselor who said, "It's hard to know what you really want to do when you're 16. Instead of going right to architecture school, you should go to a liberal arts college. You can take design classes there, but you'll also be able to explore other things." So instead of going to the great architecture school at UC San Luis Obispo, I ended up at Harvard. I started on design, but along the way, I discovered international relations and national security.

I had been an exchange student in Belgium in high school, and that opened my eyes to the world.

I continued working on my French in college and was able to travel in Europe and then work in France for a summer. I had a great academic mentor, Dr. Michael Smith. He had gone to Oxford and suggested that after college I compete for a scholarship there. He said, "You need to get a non-American perspective on international relations, because we're too self-centered in our worldview." I followed his advice and got a master's in international relations (and rowing!) at Balliol College. It was a fantastic experience. The

morning after President [Ronald] Reagan chose to invade Grenada, lying in wait for me in the breakfast room of the graduate dorm was a mini United Nations. Not only the Brits but also the Germans, a Mexican, a Chilean, a Russian, a Chinese, and a Japanese student. Everybody saying, "What the hell are you people doing?" I had to learn what had happened, figure out what I thought about it, and interpret American foreign policy for people from other countries. Oxford also gave me a great grounding in the fundamentals of international relations theory and practice.

What came after Oxford?

I applied for a job at think tanks in Washington. This was in the mid-1980s, with nuclear saber rattling between President Reagan and [the Soviet leader Mikhail] Gorbachev, and I decided that I wanted to work on reducing the nuclear danger. Nuclear weapons were like the climate change of my day: if we don't solve this, we won't be around to solve anything else. This is before email—I'm writing these thin airmail-paper letters to everybody in Washington, trying to find a paid internship. I got one paid offer, and I took it sight unseen. It was at a place that no longer exists, called the Center for Defense Information. What I didn't understand then was that think tanks in Washington are arrayed across the political spectrum. CDI was not just progressive, it was at the extreme left end, where I was not very comfortable.

You didn't know that CDI was lefty when you applied?

I did not. It was a bunch of former military officers who established a think tank. They must be pretty centrist and bipartisan, right? Nope. I found out very quickly that I was more moderate than they were. I was also the first woman they had ever hired other than secretaries, and that was challenging for some of them to deal with. So it wasn't a great fit. But I determined I was going to do my job, get a publication out of it, and use it as a springboard to do something else. I wrote a piece on how to avoid accidental nuclear war. And I learned to choose the boss, not the job.

Looking for a great boss, I found Jane Wales, who was leading the DC office of Physicians for Social Responsibility. They needed a policy person. I wasn't sure I was cut out for advocacy but decided to try it. I worked there for a couple of years and gained all kinds of great skills. Jane was fantastic and became a lifelong mentor. I realized, however, that I was an analyst and policy wonk, not a lobbyist. So once again, I learned something important from a job—what I didn't want to do.

I ended up next at the Arms Control Association, then a truly bipartisan, largely analytic organization with the attitude: "We want to promote arms control, but through really great analysis of how best to protect and advance U.S. interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union." I stayed there for a number of years.

What were your credentials for writing about nuclear strategy at this point?

Through college, I moonlighted for Time as a stringer. I became a good, fast writer and a quick study. That was my ticket in a lot of these jobs—I could get smart about things quickly and write about them coherently. That was a huge advantage. But I was also a total nuclear geek. I had been working toward my certification in the nuclear priesthood for years. So I knew my stuff.

Did you dream of ruling over the entire community of geeks one day? Or were you happy to be an analyst?

I was passionate about my work and wanted to be excellent at it. I wanted to be an expert and contribute to the debate. This was the late '80s. We were literally conceiving and debating the design of the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty, START II, what the future of arms control should look like. I didn't have a ten-year plan. I still played with the idea of going back to journalism. After the Arms Control Association, I moved to Boston, mainly for personal reasons, because my future husband was there. I was able to land a postdoc fellowship at the Kennedy School at Harvard, even though I didn't have a doctorate, because somewhere in the fine print it said you could substitute the equivalent in professional experience. And I ended up running the Avoiding Nuclear War Project for Joe Nye, Al Carnesale, and Graham Allison at the Belfer Center, where I learned an incredible amount. And then [Bill] Clinton got elected.

Had you worked on the campaign?

No. At that point, I was an independent. But several of my mentors were going into the administration as assistant secretaries, and they were all looking for staff. One choice that sounded

In general, as a young, civilian, female, Democratic political appointee, the initial expectations for me among some were low, shall we say. There was definitely bias. But in my experience, DOD was a fairly meritocratic culture, and if you worked hard and performed well, that was recognized.

perfect on paper was working on the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, what became the Nunn-Lugar Program. Another was helping to reestablish a strategy office in the Pentagon. That one was working for incoming Assistant Secretary of Defense Ted Warner, who was already well known as a mentor of young people. He said, "The learning curve to go from arms control to defense strategy at large is steep, but I'm confident you can do it, and the more you achieve and contribute, the more work I'm going to give you. If you come here, you'll have multiple jobs over time." I chose the boss over the job, and it was the right move. I started as an office director, in two years became a DASD [deputy assistant secretary of defense], and two years after that, I was the principal deputy. He was a fantastic mentor, particularly to young women at a time when we were pretty scarce in the field.

What did those jobs involve?

The first was to understudy Dave Ochmanek [the deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy] in standing up a new strategy office. We had the pen on the Bottom-Up Review and became the driver of what became the Quadrennial Defense Reviews. We would write the secretary's defense strategy which drove the planning, programming and budgeting guidance for the Department. We operated as something akin to an internal think tank in the Pentagon for the secretary and the deputy secretary.

When Dave went back to [the] RAND [Corporation], I was made a deputy assistant secretary. As DASD, in addition to running the office, I led the first Quadrennial Defense Review. In classic Ted Warner fashion, when it came time to brief the entire DOD [Department of Defense] leadership—the secretary, the chairman, the chiefs, the combatant commanders, all of the service secretaries and undersecretaries—he said, "I don't need to stand up there. Why don't you do it? It's a great professional development opportunity. I'll kibitz from the side." I was in my early 30s and pregnant. The QDR was born six weeks before my first child.

Did it feel weird doing that briefing?

I didn't think so. But it made some people nervous, particularly when I was standing up. They kept offering me a chair. I think they were terrified I was going to go into labor on the spot. [Chuckle] In general, as a young, civilian, female, Democratic political appointee, the initial expectations for me among some were low, shall we say. There was definitely bias. But in my experience, DOD was a fairly meritocratic culture, and if you worked hard and performed well, that was recognized. While that is certainly not always the case, I was fortunate that it was in mine.

What exactly is the QDR?

At the beginning of every presidential term, the Defense Department goes through a review of the strategic environment: what U.S. interests and objectives are, what the role of the military is in advancing them. Out of that comes a defense strategy—guidance for budgeting, risk management, and so forth. In theory, it's the intellectual framework for what the Pentagon will be doing

over the next four years.

In practice, isn't it just a bureaucratic exercise in which everybody submits their standard departmental wish list and you cobble it all together and put a strategy on top?

That depends on how it's done. In the Bottom-Up Review and the first QDR, we used the process to try to align the various stakeholders in the department around a common set of priorities. The process was as important as the product. It was really about getting people bought into a set of post-Cold War priorities and a way of thinking about things going forward.

What did it mean to go up to principal deputy?

In the second Clinton term, there was a reorganization of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Ted Warner's strategy and requirements portfolio was combined with [assistant secretary of defense] Ash Carter's nuclear and Russia, Ukraine, Eurasia portfolio under one assistant secretary. They created a second principal deputy, and that was me. I covered strategy and requirements and Russia, Ukraine, Eurasia. Frank Miller oversaw nuclear and missile defense. I had to do much more management than before. And I had to be able to support and stand in for the assistant secretary.

So at this point you started to move from analysis to administration?

Definitely much more management and leadership and less time as an individual performer.

What were the upsides and downsides of that?

I've actually always loved leadership and management. Dave Ochmanek is an incredible thought leader, but he wasn't that interested in management. So early on, I jumped into running the office and found that I really enjoyed it. You inherit people with very different backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses, and styles, and you have to get them normed and formed as a team—bring the best out of each person, establish some common ways of working, and hopefully have a culture that's not only productive and high-performing but also fun, that makes people excited about coming to work. I always loved that challenge.

The fun part is giving people the opportunity to shine and coaching them to help them grow.

This is the Pentagon. Don't you just give orders?

[Chuckle] No. You had civil servants, political appointees, and military folks in the same office. It was a very mixed group, with people having different expectations, backgrounds, styles of working, and so forth. The key to managing the situation well was spending time as a team, talking about how we wanted to work together, what our culture would be, being clear about the vision and guidance, trying to play to people's strengths and compensate for their weaknesses, empowering them while also holding them accountable. The fun part is giving people the opportunity to shine and coaching them to help them grow. The hard part is sometimes having to find them another opportunity if they're not performing.

What you just described could summarize leadership best practices in many areas, including both the corporate world and the military. You've always been military adjacent. Has that affected your thinking?

I have spent a lot of time working with people in the military. My father served in the Army Air Corps in World War II. I'm married to someone who spent 26 years in the navy, active duty and reserve. My son is now training in the navy. So it has been around me all my life. What I appreciate about the culture is the strong mission focus and the strong altruistic element. People sign up to serve. They sign up to be part of something greater than themselves, and that's a wonderful motivation to work with on a team. But there's also a tradition of accountability. And a tradition of recognition—of recognizing important achievements, promotions, retirements, milestones, the contributions of spouses and families. Having my first child when I was in the Pentagon was an amazing experience because of the incredible celebration in this community when someone in their midst has a child. I have a wonderful picture of one of the service chiefs of staff, on his knees on the carpet in my office, coochy-cooing my firstborn.

Was it tough being a young mother in that kind of incredibly demanding job?

Yes and no, because I had wonderful support—not only Ted Warner but also Walt Slocombe, who was the undersecretary at the time. They were very supportive of me taking maternity leave. When I came back, they were very supportive of actually trying to use the flextime and flexplace policies that were on the books. Unless there was a national emergency, they tried to get me some time at home one day a week, working remotely. These were all policies on the books, but little known and rarely used. They used me to provide an example of how to create a more family-friendly work culture. Later, when I came back as undersecretary, I was able to push that to a new level, which was great. But it was tough being a new mom and a senior defense official at the same time.

What came after the Clinton administration?

I went to work at CSIS [the Center for Strategic and International Studies] for John Hamre. He had been deputy secretary of defense and was

working on interesting projects in national security—everything from post-conflict stabilization to nuclear nonproliferation.

How did your work as a think-tank analyst differ now that you had been inside and knew what the real world was like?

I understood what was really useful to policymakers. There are some kinds of work that the Defense Department does really well and doesn't need a lot of outside quarterbacking. But there are other kinds of work that are extremely useful but hard to do inside. And that's where good think tanks can help.

Such as … ?

The department is very good at assessing and responding to current threats, current intelligence, and immediate crises—zero to six months out.

So an op-ed that says, "Here's what you should do on Syria tomorrow" is worthless to policymakers?

It's not that helpful. What's really hard for people inside to do is look over the horizon, to say, "This is what is coming a year from now, or five, or ten, that we're not paying enough attention to or preparing for." Only a few little enclaves in the building do this kind of work—Andy Marshall's former shop [the Office of Net Assessment], parts of the Strategy Office, a few others. This is where the think-tank world can be invaluable—providing a longer-term perspective.

When you talk about "invaluable" think tanks, what kinds of institutions do you have in mind?

The most useful ones tend, in my view, to be clustered around the center and open to diverse perspectives. They're less about advocating for one particular point of view than about bringing together people with different perspectives through deep, fact-based analysis. The ones that are more bipartisan are more able to bring together the full range of stakeholders needed to think through complex national security challenges—civilian and military officials, diplomats, the development community, etc. I spent a handful of years at CSIS, and it was a wonderful experience. Then my colleague Kurt Campbell [who at the time led the International Security Program at CSIS] and I got this crazy idea that Washington needed yet another think tank. Just about everybody thought we were nuts and tried to discourage us, but we persisted, and the result was CNAS [the Center for a New American Security].

What was the gap you were trying to fill?

We wanted to create a think tank that was nonpartisan but not overly cautious or afraid of offending one end of the political spectrum or the other. At that time, for example, the Iraq war was a giant problem. There was a huge debate about whether it had been a good idea to get in, but we were in, and the question we wanted to focus on was how to end the war responsibly, in a way that protected U.S. interests. Many people were uncomfortable with the topic because they thought it would create partisan divisions. Our response was that CNAS should "go to the pain"—take on the hardest, most consequential issues, even if controversial, and make headway on them.

We also wanted to create a place that would give young people real professional development opportunities. If they worked on a report, they would get a byline on the report. They weren't always just ghostwriting for senior people. We gave them media training, op-ed writing training; we paid as much attention to human capital development as to policy development. We were trying to produce people who could serve – the next generation of national security leaders. We wanted to showcase futures as opposed to formers.

Did it work out the way you had planned?

I think so. It has endured: we're heading toward our 15th anniversary in the next couple of years. It has become known as a great place to go if you're interested in professional development. It has done cutting-edge work that has had a direct impact on U.S. policy. One of my favorite anecdotes involves former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates, who hired a lot of folks we trained when he was Secretary of Defense. Someone once asked him, "Why haven't you gone to speak at CNAS?" He said, "Why do I need to go to CNAS? I can just call a staff meeting." That to me was evidence of the model working.

So Barack Obama wins, the Democrats come in, and you go back into the system. Did you work on the campaign?

I did work on the Obama campaign, and I co-led his transition team in the Department of Defense. We started to write a foundational memo on defense policy for the president and, we assumed, the new secretary. Then Obama decided to keep Bob Gates on, which was a wonderful choice, and the memo became an opportunity for Gates to think through his new agenda. He had come into the job a few years earlier with an extraordinary focus on Iraq, where his job was to turn things around and put them on a solid footing. Now he could embrace a much broader defense agenda. So what should that be? I worked closely with him on that and then was honored to be asked to stay as the undersecretary for policy.

What does that job involve?

Under most secretaries [of defense], the undersecretary for policy has a couple of functions. First, you run the policy organization that supports the secretary in all of his international engagements, at home and abroad. You also support the secretary in the interagency process, serving, for example, as the secretary's representative on the [National Security Council] Deputies Committee. You also support the Secretary of Defense's civilian oversight of military plans and operations. The deputy secretary, in contrast, is essentially the COO of the department, managing this massive organization and all the subsidiary agencies.

How many people did you have to manage?

Close to 1,000. I also had oversight of three agencies: the Defense Technology Security Administration, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. I had a handful of assistant secretaries and dozens of DASDs to help me, so that was great. Because the United States was in two wars, the Senate moved very quickly on defense appointments, so several of us were confirmed in early February. I inherited a wonderfully talented civil service staff and some military officers who were detailed to the office. But the problem was the two layers in between, which were vacant. Almost all of the DASD and assistant secretary positions were for political appointees and would not be filled for months. So you come into the job and are responsible from day one, staffing the secretary, traveling to Afghanistan, undertaking a

We basically decapitate ourselves every four years. Across the entire U.S. government, the top 3,500–4,000 people leave. And just when you finally get most of those positions filled—say, by the end of the second year—the natural turnover process starts, and you have to do much of it all over again. It's just crazy.

President Obama was the first president that I got to spend serious amounts of time with.

series of major policy reviews, and so forth, even as you have 50 plus positions to fill. I would spend evenings going through résumés, making calls, and trying to staff up a good team as quickly as possible.

You had just been running the transition planning. Didn't you have binders full of candidates?

We did, but until you're in there and you have hiring authority, it's all theoretical. Then you have to find people, interview them, match them with jobs, get them to say yes, and bird-dog the lengthy Pentagon hiring process. It was challenging; it took a lot of time. You end up filling your DASD middle-management positions first. Your assistant secretaries—who require Senate confirmation—don't start rolling in until month eight or nine.

Is this any way to run the world's largest empire?

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Do the members of the so-called deep state, the officials below the political appointees, actually run things?

They're critical. They're ballast in the system, incredible institutional memory and knowledge. The political appointees provide tremendous innovation, energy, and new ideas, which are very valuable. But a system built on an endless flow of political appointees in and out can create severe management challenges at the beginning of an administration, when no one's home, and toward the end, when people start leaving and you can't fill the jobs.

What was it like being a senior bureaucrat in one of the world's largest bureaucracies?

You need to have a clear understanding with the secretary about what your job is, what they want you to focus on, how your success will be evaluated, and what authority you have. Getting all that is incredibly empowering. Under Bob Gates, I knew what my job was, he empowered me to do it, and he defended my lane. Many people wanted to go to the White House for Deputies Committee meetings, for example, but he would say, "No, that's Michèle's job; she's going. Tell her what your issue is, and she'll represent the department." And he would prevent bureaucratic game playing by enforcing good process. When that happens, a lot of the bureaucratic nonsense goes away. A lot of the friction in the system comes from the time and energy people spend fighting over turf instead of getting the mission done. With bosses like Gates, Panetta and Obama, I learned that even a big bureaucracy can actually function well—if you've got clarity, discipline, and priorities you're trying to achieve.

You served in two different administrations. What was similar, and what was different?

I've also worked for five different secretaries of defense. The early Clinton administration taught

some tough lessons. The whole painful experience of Somalia, for example, with its tragic losses, forced the National Security Council, State Department, and DoD to learn the importance of having a whole of government strategy, of working together better, and of providing proper oversight and support to people in harm's way. That was a very difficult evolution, and you had a secretary of defense lose his job over it.

Did that say anything about what kinds of people should not be put in charge of the department?

A lot of people come into the secretary's position from the Hill or elsewhere, and they try to run this massive organization from their front office, and they drown. The Pentagon is like a giant corporation; you've got line leaders and managers in charge of various areas of responsibility. Unless you use them and align them and make them your team, get them rowing in the same direction and hold them accountable, you're not going to get much done. [Secretary of Defense] Les Aspin was a brilliant man and an incredibly creative defense intellectual. But he was not a leader or manager well suited to running one of the world's largest and most complex enterprises. And pairing him with someone like Colin Powell as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was both, set up an unhealthy imbalance in civil-military relations. You had a secretary who was not really running the department, which was not a good thing. With the elevation of Bill Perry to secretary and John Shalikashvili to chairman, the authority of the secretary and a healthy civil-military relationship were restored.

You've said that DOD is a "planning organization." What do you mean by that?

It has a planning culture. When you're sending people into harm's way, one of the ways you buy down risk is trying to anticipate every possible contingency. And then you plan for them; you train for them; you make sure you're equipped and ready for them. That narrows the risks and makes them more manageable. This culture is not widely shared in other parts of the national security and foreign policy arena, and so sometimes people give the Department big eye rolls: "Oh, look, DOD wants to do another plan, or exercise, or war game. Can't they just leave us alone and let us do

Your impact on policy may be ephemeral, but the impact you have on developing people and bringing up the next generation is incredibly long-lasting and meaningful, in ways you will never even know.

our jobs?" But that's what DoD does, and that's how it succeeds. Look at the bin Laden raid, for example. The detailed planning that was done for that meaningfully reduced the risk. When the helicopter went down, it didn't mean disaster, like Desert One back in Iran [in 1979]. We had planned for a helicopter going down, so we had two other ones forward positioned and ready to go.

You've talked about secretaries. What about presidents?

I was too junior in the Clinton administration to have a lot of contact with Bill Clinton. I met him, but didn't have to brief him. President Obama was the first president that I got to spend serious amounts of time with.

Were you nervous?

First time, sure, you're absolutely nervous. You're in the presence of the most powerful person in the world. And I was a huge Obama fan, so that made it doubly nerve-racking. But as you get to know someone over time, you get more comfortable with them, and it gets better.

What did you do when you came out of government the second time?

When I came out of the undersecretary position, I decided to challenge myself, learning some new things and growing my skills. The business side of the Pentagon was very frustrating. Having oversight of three agencies, I saw just how badly broken its business practices were. It felt too late for business school, and I had to make a living, so I came up with a plan. I approached a couple of management consulting firms and said, "I want to work for you and get the practical equivalent of an M.B.A. through the case method—and in exchange, I'll advise you on how to build your public-sector practice and your defense and aerospace industry practice." Boston Consulting Group made me a senior adviser, and off we went. I learned about supply chain management, market-share analysis, how to manage change in large organizations, how to read a corporate balance sheet. It was a fantastic experience. You're never too old to learn, to pick up new tricks and new tools. The experience also gave me the skills and perspective to move on to my most recent project, which was starting a business.

What's the business?

WestExec Advisors is a strategic advisory firm. We help Fortune 100 U.S. companies manage geopolitical risk and seize opportunities in new markets. We help investors doing international deals understand the broader, nonfinancial factors that could affect returns. And most fun and exciting, we help small technology companies navigate the national security space. We're trying to help bridge the gap between the national security world and America's best tech talent—something that we as a nation need to figure out urgently if we don't want to be overtaken by other powers.

Are the institutions in Washington in which you served going to survive the current era in any recognizable form?

The Department of Defense, like the State Department and the intelligence community, has experienced a lot of brain drain. That has created a vacuum, and the Joint Staff and other parts of the military, in many cases, have stepped in to fill it. The department will have to do a lot of human capital building to rebuild the civil service, bring in a strong team of appointees, and restore a proper civil-military balance. The secretary of defense is in the chain of command and always has formal control; the question is, do they have a capable, empowered staff that can offer independent perspectives—on policy, law, budgeting, and everything else needed to do a good job? Having lived through an earlier cycle of this, I know that with the right leadership—both civilian and military—civil-military relations in the Pentagon can recover very quickly. So I have hope there. The larger problem will be replacing the senior civil servants who have left. You can't just manufacture someone with 20 years of experience overnight.

As for the NSC [National Security Council], the process there is unrecognizable at this point. The president doesn't use it; you don't have regular principals or deputies meetings. There is no disciplined mechanism for bringing the interagency voices together, encouraging and hearing dissent, or making sure diverse views are fairly represented all the way up to the president so he can make well-informed decisions. So that needs to be reset.

Why should any non-geek care about the bureaucratic process of the NSC?

You have to care. If you care about the quality of presidential decision-making, you care about the process behind it. And the NSC process ensures that the president will hear everything—consensus, if there is one, disagreement or dissent if there is any. Dissent often points to some risk that needs to be managed. If you're not aware of that dissent, or unwilling to acknowledge it, you don't get the opportunity to manage that risk—so you end up with bad decisions, or at least decisions that are worse or more costly than they should be. The value of the multidisciplinary, multilevel staff process is that senior policymakers get better information, a more diverse range of perspectives, and a fuller exploration of the decision space—and, hopefully, as a result of that, make better decisions.

What are you proudest of in your career?

The work I've done on building human capital—at the Pentagon, CNAS, WestExec and elsewhere. Your impact on policy may be ephemeral, but the impact you have on developing people and bringing up the next generation is incredibly long-lasting and meaningful, in ways you will never even know. So that has been my greatest source of satisfaction, other than my family and dear friends.

Your greatest regrets?

I don't have a lot of regrets. I feel very blessed and honored.

Any advice for those starting out?

Choose something that you're passionate about and go deep. Establish some expertise, and pursue that and be excellent at it. Don't worry about not having a grand plan. Find bosses and mentors that will help you develop to the next level, and don't be afraid to change paths. I have gone from journalism to think tanks to government to another think tank to starting my own think tank to government to management consulting to starting a business to serving on nonprofit boards that I'm passionate about that have nothing to do with defense. Don't be afraid to try something new, even later in your career. Be a mentor to others. And always, always make time for the people you love.

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Martin Grant

How I Got Here

Law Clerk, U.S. District Court, Middle District, North Carolina
Counsel and Vice President, Federal Reserve Bank of New York
Chief Compliance and Ethics Officer, Federal Reserve Bank of New York

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a lawyer. I decided this in sixth grade, after doing very well in social studies.

What kind of sixth grader wants to be a lawyer?

A sixth grader who gets tremendous positive feedback from his parents on professional choices. I think my vision of lawyers was mostly formed from television, watching Perry Mason.

How did you prepare for your future career?

I went to public school in the Bronx, Harry S Truman High School in Co-op City. I was in a magnet program there, and it had a legal track. My teacher, Mr. Lesser, was excellent at communicating about law and the Constitution, and he took us to court a few times. By junior year I was hooked. I went to college planning to study government or political science and then go to law school afterward. I was the first in my school to go to Princeton University, and I think that was a combination of my brother and my academic advisers suggesting that could be a possible choice for me. It was not, in the past, a choice for many of the kids I went to school with.

What was Princeton like?

Princeton was a shock after Truman for a number of reasons. The workload was much more difficult, and the student body drew a cross section of the United States rather different from my community in the Bronx. Co-op City opened in the 1960s, on the

> [Clerking] was a great lesson on how people interact with the government and how law helps decide conflicts between individuals.

grounds of what had been the Freedomland amusement park. It was an integrated working and lower middle class community with a lot of civil servants, and there was a sense of solidarity because it was new, and somewhat isolated, and people grew up together. I was with the same cohort of kids all the way from elementary school through high school. Princeton drew on private schools from across the United States and around the world. It was much more diverse. I grew up with whites and Protestants, but I never met a white Protestant until college. I didn't know I was short until I went to college. [chuckle]

Did you have trouble fitting into this new environment?

It took me a while to find a place within Princeton, and the close friends that I cherish to this day. Many of them became lawyers, as I did. Over lunch and dinner in the residential colleges, we forged bonds that have lasted a lifetime.

Which was tougher to adjust to, the social side of Princeton or the academic side?

The social aspects of Princeton in 1982 were a surprise, in large part because the drinking age was 18 then. I was a bookish kid who hadn't been exposed much to alcohol, and it was odd to have your initial socialization experiences with people who were largely drunk.

Were you in an eating club?

I joined the Quadrangle eating club at the end of my second year. It was an experience. I joined with seven other roommates. It improved my sense of belonging at Princeton and was a good place for me.

What came after college?

As I was graduating, after having gotten into law school, I briefly wondered whether the choices I had made at 12 were right. Then my mother told me it was important that I go finish my degree, and I went to Harvard Law School.

What was that transition like?

Easy, because it was a dream come true. After four years of Princeton, I felt well prepared, and unlike my lonely high school to college transition, this time I went with more than 30 of my classmates, and that provided both social and academic support.

This was The Paper Chase era.

Yes. That was when I realized I was less outspoken than others.

So Princeton taught you that you were short and Harvard taught you that you were quiet.

Yes. I didn't understand people who raised their hands and wanted to volunteer. They called on you and you had to be prepared and state the holdings on your cases and the principles the judges were trying to articulate. But it was mostly a terrifying experience.

Why was it terrifying for you, given how well prepared you were?

Because it involved speaking in public.

Were you in a study group?

I was, and it was an excellent way to learn a tremendous amount of subject matter together. We prepared outlines and questioned each other about the cases and lectures. I enjoyed law school. I was a prelaw tutor, so I had an opportunity to mentor some college kids, and that was an extraordinary experience.

What came after?

I went to work as a clerk for a federal district court judge in North Carolina. It continues to be one of the most important experiences I have had. I was a New York City kid who hadn't had much exposure to the rest of the country. North Carolina was very different from where I was raised. It was more different from the Bronx than Princeton, for sure. I woke up to the fresh smell of tobacco being cut and processed at the RJR Nabisco factory where Winstons and Salems were produced. It was a small town with a few large businesses—Hanes and Sara Lee were two others. And it had a vibrant law business, because Wachovia Bank had its headquarters there.

What was clerking like?

It was a great lesson on how people interact with the government and how law helps decide conflicts between individuals. I was able to sit and watch trials and learned a tremendous amount about the criminal justice system. It was like watching Perry Mason again, but in real life.

How did it compare with the TV version?

The drama was more intense. Vast numbers of young men, mostly, were being sentenced under tough crack statutes and sentencing guidelines to very long sentences at young ages. In one case I remember, a 22-year-old went from two relatively minor interactions with the law to a life sentence in his third interaction. He was younger than me. That is seared in my memory.

One thing I realized watching people argue in court was that it didn't strike me as a good fit. I wasn't confrontational in that way. I liked learning how to write briefs and make an argument. I got a tremendous education on the rules of evidence and how to phrase questions and how to admit evidence into court. But I thought I wasn't cut out to be a litigator. So I joined the Federal Reserve. Ironically, a few years later, I was back in court litigating and enjoying it.

Why was the Federal Reserve the non-contentious legal option you chose?

I was interested in public service, and I was interested in the regulation of financial institutions.

Why?

Rudolph Giuliani. I graduated from law school in 1989. He was the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, making a number of cases on insider trading. That got my interest and made me want to return to New York and regulate finance. I joined the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's legal program because it offered an unstructured or generalist program where you could learn about banking law and contracts in addition to litigation. I could expose myself to a wide range of legal practices.

For the first three years, I wrote long, research-heavy legal memoranda during the day. But then I added another role. It turned out that even though I didn't love litigation, my clerkship had given me useful skills that few of the other attorneys in the department had. So I ended up spending my evenings preparing and defending the bank in lawsuits.

Did you enjoy doing that?

I did. I knew I could write and make a persuasive argument. I had to overcome my fear of public speaking, but advocacy turned out to be easier than I had thought when it was done on behalf of an organization I strongly believed in.

Where did you get the self-confidence to make that professional leap forward?

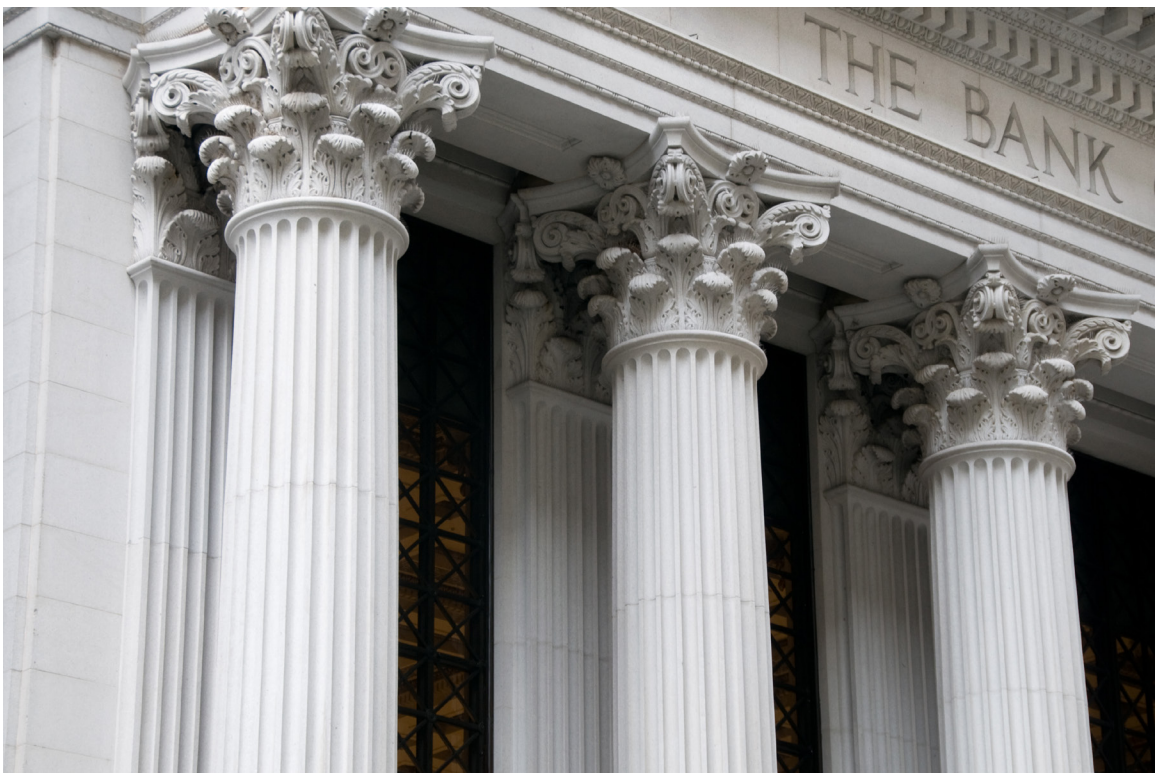
Age. At a certain point, you come of age and realize you've been working on a particular matter and know you are the best one to handle it, and you find your voice and can be more expressive.

When did you ascend into management?

The failure of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International had a major impact. There was a tremendous investigation and the conclusion was that bankers could be up to no good and the Federal Reserve had to play a more active role in enforcing financial laws. Congress made some changes in the law, and the Federal Reserve created a division at the New York Fed for enforcement. I joined that group and we set our sights on investigating unsound banking practices and banker misconduct.

So you became a cop?

I became a financial institution regulator. We didn't



put people in jail; we wanted to hold banks and bankers accountable for errant behavior.

Did that create tension in the financial community?

Sure. The Federal Reserve has lender of last resort authority, and the price of that is bank supervision. We are here to support financial institutions that are in distress, and we employ large staffs to ensure the safety and soundness of those institutions and make sure they have appropriate controls in place. Having a separate body critical of both bankers and banks for particular practices was not a perfect fit.

Did you face opposition from people inside the Fed as well?

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York is an incredible deliberative body that has a consensus orientation. I developed skills as a litigator, putting a case together with evidence, talking to people, getting witness statements. You learn that if the facts are on your side, you can persuade people about a progressive definition of what's wrong. When I was in law school, we did not study financial derivative products. But when large banks entered this market and confused their clients with their sales practices and pricing, we were able to develop a sense of what was safe and unsafe, sound and unsound, honest and misleading. That was a great learning experience. It's different from prosecution, where you need clear laws that say, "This is acceptable and this is unacceptable." In our world, there is room for financial innovation, and institutions and practices are allowed to evolve. But we can set boundaries and establish lines of conduct, say, "This has gone too far."

That sounds a bit naive. Wise, beneficent experts regulating finance capitalism on behalf of everybody's best interests, coming to agreement through facts and reason, and then getting appropriate compliance. In the real world, does it actually work like that?

Take price transparency. We investigated firms that were not sharing full information on pricing with their customers. They backed out some of the fees they had to pay to the government, didn't put them in the accounting. So when transactions went south and positions got marked to market, the payment was more than expected—the loss on the trade, but also the fees that hadn't been factored in. Both customers and firms ended up with losses far greater than they had understood, because they hadn't acknowledged or didn't realize what the innovative

At a certain point, you come of age and realize you've been working on a particular matter and know you are the best one to handle it, and you find your voice and can be more expressive.

products they were buying really cost.

Our role was to monitor the system and find fault with institutions that failed to be fully transparent about their prices—that gave their counterparties prices different from what they should have given. Over time, derivative markets have expanded enormously, and we have tried hard to provide clear rules to guide their behavior. I think we have matched intention and conduct. There are now vastly more transactions and yet, because of improved practices, far fewer problems and less need for enforcement.

What's the difference between the Federal Reserve and the New York Federal Reserve?

The New York Fed is one of 12 reserve banks that are operational arms for the Federal Reserve System. We all are supervised by the Federal Reserve Board, currently chaired by Jay Powell. The Federal Reserve is mostly known for establishing interest-rate policy. But I'm a lawyer and a compliance professional. The only time I deal with interest rates is with my mortgage and credit cards.

You're a financial institution regulator in New York. Why have you traveled so much abroad?

So, in 2005, I transitioned to a role as the bank's chief compliance officer. One of the things the Federal Reserve does beyond monetary policy is hold dollar reserves for much of the rest of the world. There is a payment business associated with that, part of what is broadly considered correspondent banking. I liaise with the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence in the Treasury Department and with the larger intelligence community in order to understand the transactions that go through our books and note irregularities.

Can you tell any stories about that?

Several years ago, we saw a rise in requests for large amounts of currency by the Central Bank of Iraq. We asked them to provide more data. And when they provided more data, we came to understand that they were providing access to dollars for the Central Bank of Iran and an Iranian commercial bank—something that violated agreements and commitments they had made.

The Federal Reserve of New York delivers dollars to the world, largely hundreds and fifties. We had intermediaries, like UBS, who were responsible for the second-level distribution. Lots of dollars were found in Iraq. Looking at the serial numbers, we knew they were not supposed to be there. After a tremendous amount of work, we were able to backtrack and see that they came from our facilities in New Jersey. It turned out that UBS had not lived up to its obligations, was misreporting data, and understood that the currency was being transshipped to places that weren't supposed to get it. At this time, money-service businesses in ISIS-controlled territories were also a concern. So I and others at the bank developed a more rigorous and robust compliance program, in order to enforce sanctions better and prevent illegitimate business being done with enemies of the United States.

There are lots of dollars around the world, since people everywhere like to hold their savings in fifties and hundreds. They move around, and eventually they come back to us. I follow the patterns, which are very interesting. We never shipped money to Turkey, for example, but we got a lot of dollars back from them. At one point, in fact, more dollars were being returned from Turkey than from any other place on the globe. I would inquire about that kind of case, go to Turkey and engage with bankers and government officials. There are lots of good reasons for something like that to happen. But there are also bad reasons. We are always looking to have a better understanding of dollar flows.

Many people would be surprised to hear the Federal Reserve has a chief ethics officer. What do you do in that capacity?

We support the personal integrity of our staff, primarily to make sure that they don't have any conflicts of interest that would interfere with the objective and independent discharge of their responsibilities. We don't allow people who own Microsoft to decide whether we should do business with Microsoft. We don't allow people who oversee a large financial institution to have stock in that institution. Federal employees who make more than about $140,000 have to provide financial disclosures.

How many people do you supervise?

About 40 people. It's a great privilege and honor to support people's careers and aspirations. And we are lucky at the Federal Reserve that there's so much important work, people have opportunities to do things they never imagined. As a manager, I need to make sure they have the resources to accomplish their mission and the guidance and

In 2010, banks recognized National Coming Out Day for the first time. I was one of the first people to announce my sexual orientation and describe a little bit about my life as a gay man.

support to answer the challenge. There are bureaucratic elements to the Fed, but we are still agile and adaptable to the circumstances. The [2007-8] financial crisis drove tremendous innovation and improvisation by policymakers to restore access to credit. When we have to act, we can act very quickly. We just try to have some thought and deliberation first.

Given what you just said, do you resent the times when you have to walk through protesters to get to the front door, with people screaming about how the Fed is messing up the world?

I think it is healthy for public institutions to have a dialogue with the public and for officials to understand why people are angry. Policymakers have an obligation to explain the reasons for their actions and respond to criticism.

As a regulator, do you worry about capture from the financial industry and its interests?

I no longer worry about that. The dialogue that the Federal Reserve had with the public in the wake of the financial crisis made us much more mindful of public concerns, and we have put into place lots of efforts to keep our analysis and oversight of financial institutions independent and objective.

How has race affected your career?

There are always challenges for African Americans in work, but I feel like I've been extremely lucky in my career. The luck, in my case, was trusting my gut that if I put in the work, my effort and accomplishments would be treated fairly by public-spirited professionals.

How about being gay?

In 2010, banks recognized National Coming Out Day for the first time. I was one of the first people to announce my sexual orientation and describe a little bit about my life as a gay man.

Was that difficult?

I was so happy and proud to do it. Our society has changed so much, and it's important to make visible the successes of alphabet people like myself.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I'm proud of the team I have and the work I've done as compliance and ethics officer. These are important jobs, and I'm happy to have had the opportunity to do them well.

What are your greatest regrets?

Having found so much purpose in the work we have done, I have few regrets. Still, having spent over thirty years at one institution, I sometimes wonder about the professional avenues left unexplored.

Any advice for those starting out?

Learn what you like and what you don't and try to find jobs that match your interests and your abilities. It makes work less like work.

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Calvin Sims

How I Got Here

Foreign Correspondent and Multimedia Producer, *The New York Times*
Program Officer, Ford Foundation
President and CEO, International House

As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A journalist. The first job I ever had was as a paperboy for the *LA Times*. I was ten. I learned a lot from it, because my mother made me read the paper. Her attitude was, "If you're going to do this job, you better read the product that you're delivering." She also told me, "You're delivering the LA Times, but *The New York Times* is better. When you do a report for school, go to the library and always look for their clippings, because those will be more useful."

So by ten, you knew you wanted to work at *The New York Times*?

I did. We had a newspaper in elementary school, and I wrote for it for two years. You could see your name in print. I would write about the things the other students wanted, which made me very popular.

Did you do journalism in high school?

Yes. We lived in Compton, and the school district decided to open a journalism program. They were discussing whom to name it after. This was just after Roots, and so we sent a letter to Alex Haley asking him if he'd come and be honored and put his name on it. And he did, and it was glorious. He was a great reporter, a writer for major magazines, had done these incredible interviews. There was a lot of news coverage of the opening of the Alex Haley Journalism Academy, and from then on, I had the bug. After that, I wrote for the local community paper in Compton, and then I went to college and wrote for the Yale Daily News and other publications.

So it was straight out of Compton to Yale and *The New York Times*?

That is exactly what happened. It was almost

dreamlike; you couldn't have made it up. I grew up middle class, not well-off and not poor. My father was the first one in his family to go to college, which changed everything. When he bought the house that we grew up in, Compton was 50 percent white, 50 percent African American. There was white flight, but our neighborhood was very stable. He did grades 13 and 14 at Compton Community College and then went on to Cal State and got a degree in engineering. He applied for a job at Beckman Instruments. Dr. Arnold Beckman from Caltech, who created the spectrometer, hired him. He was the only person of color on the research team. He would get his name listed in the papers they published, but he was never allowed to be in the photo; he was always sent off somewhere to do research. When I found out about it, I asked, "Why did you put up with this?" And he said, "There was no HR then; there was nobody to complain to. I was lucky that I was getting paid what I was. I got my name there. But those were the rules at the time." We have a very large family. His job allowed him to enrich us in ways that most people didn't have. He paid for all of us to have music lessons at the conservatory at Compton College. They were $10 a lesson. Back then, that was expensive. But our parents wanted us to be exposed to all these things. They sent us to STEM summer camps, music camps. All the money he made was invested in our enrichment.

Is it true that the kids in your family had a chamber music group?

It's true. We could actually have a quintet, including my mother. She played violin. She was the first African American to play violin at Alhambra High School in Pasadena, and she loved it. And she made sure that we all played something. I played string bass and still do. I'm not very good. But my brother Darryl plays in four orchestras and is about to become the conductor of a regional symphony.

We were very lucky. We lived in a community of about 25 families. All except one had two parents. All of the guys in my age group ended up going to college. It was just part of the culture. It seems antithetical to what the city devolved into, but by then I was off at college. And even in the midst of all of that, with the crack epidemic and other things happening, our neighborhood was still fairly stable, because of the middle-class values. We had our own community social club. We had breakfasts. People looked after each other. My father worked in a predominantly white neighborhood, so we saw both worlds. We

would be the only black kids in the summer music camp, but the police would follow us if we left the neighborhood to visit people.

February was African American History Month. From when I was little, I was taught all the luminaries in the community and what they had accomplished. Lewis Latimer, who created the filament. George Washington Carver, with the peanuts. Daniel Hale Williams, who did one of the first open-heart surgeries. They would quiz you on them and tell you, "These are the footsteps that you're walking in. You represent that." It gives you a sense of history that is not just about discrimination, up from slavery. It's also: "You're part of a community of people who represent the best of the best, and your responsibility is to continue that tradition."

Why Yale?

Because my father wanted to go there, and he didn't get in. All I heard growing up was, "Calvin Hill went to Yale; you can go to Yale." I loved football, and the Dallas Cowboys were my favorite team, and Calvin Hill was my favorite player. So when the time came, my father pushed me to apply there. I didn't get into Harvard or Stanford, got into UCLA and Yale, and it was an easy decision.

How was college?

It was magical for me. I was well prepared for most of it, but not all. I had been on a college-prep track ever since kindergarten. The kids that I came into school with who could read and write, we went all the way through, never mixing with the other kids except in gym or shop or home economics. The counselors always told us, "You're the best of this community. You've got this opportunity. You're going to do well. When you get to these universities, you're going to find that in some respects, you're not as well prepared as others. But you have two years to catch up, because the heavy work in your major starts junior year, and you'll have come up to speed by then." So that was always in the back of my mind, and it was just like they said.

You were a science and engineering geek.

I was. Because my father was an engineer, and he thought the journalism thing might not work out. Also, I became intrigued by Carl Sagan's Cosmos, Jacob Bronowski's The Ascent of Man, all this stuff on PBS. I said, "That's what I really want to do starting out—be a science and technology writer." That's most of what I wrote about in college, and that's what got me, in large part, into *The New York Times*.

I got an American Association for the Advancement of Science fellowship, a ten-week media-training program for students in science and engineering who thought they might want to be science writers or journalists. I did mine at the ABC affiliate in Cleveland. I was basically a summer intern producer. The reporter I was producing allowed me to do my own standup separately, and that was amazing, to be able to write and broadcast like that. We spent a lot of time at the Cleveland Clinic doing medical stories.

Toward graduation, I applied to work at the *LA Times*, *The New York Times*, *Business Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Back then, newspapers and magazines were cash cows, and I got offers at all four. But the Times was the one I really wanted. I got an interview to become a copy boy. They were called copy boys and copy girls back then. Highly competitive to get, but the job itself was to run and get coffee for the reporters, do research, go to the Bronx to the scene of a murder, write the color, ask the questions, and call it back on the phone. They'd shout "Legs!" and you had to go running. In the interview, the editor Craig Whitney says, "You're not going like this because you're not going to be able to write much. You won't get a byline for the first two or three years. We make it so onerous that people just leave after a year or two. We're trying to identify the folks who have the stamina and the know-how and the entrepreneurship and the creativity to actually get through this to become a reporter. So Calvin, don't waste your time." And I said, "Then why did you have me come down here?" And he said, "It just worked out that way." So I go, and as I'm leaving the building, the security guy says, "Are you Calvin? They want you to come back up." I went back up, was introduced to the science editor, Rick Flaste, and after a three-hour conversation, he said, "We don't normally do this, but I'm going to try to skip you past the copy-boy stuff and have you become a reporter trainee." And that's what happened.

In all honesty, the Times is the best place I've ever worked; it is the best training I ever got. But it's still a vicious place. The internal competition is as fierce as the external. You not only have to beat everybody else who's out there in the market, but you've got people clawing at you inside, too. The internal competition is healthy; it makes you a good journalist. But someone will step over you at any given time. If you don't have somebody looking after you, you're not going to make it. You've got to find folks willing to mentor you.

Who were your mentors?

Rick Flaste brought me in, but after that, it was Al Siegal. When you get there, you know how to write, but you don't know how to write in the Times way—what a Times story is and how to add value. Al wrote the stylebook. Rotund guy, and feared. He was the brightest person in the building. I realized I had to get somebody to help me. So I invited him to lunch. He started laughing and said, "Do you know how much I eat? I'll take you to lunch." And we went to a restaurant where he had a regular table, and as we ate, he said, "What do you really want?" I said, "I need a mentor." He said, "Send me some of your stuff, and I'll get back to you." I sent it, and he called me over and said, in the newsroom where people could hear, "This is the worst shit I've ever read in my life. I don't know how you got in here. You can do two things. You can run away and cry and say, 'He's being mean to me because I'm black.' Or you can come sit next to me, and I'll walk you through it, and I'm not going to be nice." And that's what he would do for me from time to time. And that's what helped get me from reporter trainee to reporter. Sometimes people take a liking to you. Other times you've got to get them. Like an orphan in an orphanage: "Look at me! Take me!"

How did you advance at the Times?

After science, I did all the rounds—business, metro, D.C. I got lucky. I hated covering subways and happened to find this guy who was willing to leak me documents about the terrible shape New York City bridges were in. He got fired, and I won a prize.

Did you feel guilty about that?

No, because they were going to make him the fall guy. He called me from the transportation commissioner's office, saying, "I'm being fired. Get over here."

How did you get a leaker to come to you?

He saw I was covering transportation, and he reached out to me. We would meet at my apartment; he would bring tons of stuff and say, "Here, here, I made copies for you."

So if you're a good journalist, sources sometimes will recognize that and bring other stuff to you?

They will. And of course, then you have to verify everything and go to the other side. The administration kept asking, "How did you get that stuff?" [Mayor David] Dinkins had the evil eye for me after that. Eventually, I got the bug everybody gets, and I decided I wanted to go overseas. They said, "You're only 28. You're too young. You have to wait your turn. We'll give you a region for now." So they sent me back to L.A., where I spent a year and a half. There was a huge earthquake in '94. I ended up taking the lead on most of those stories, which increased my visibility. Seth Mydans, who had been a foreign correspondent, was also in the L.A. bureau. He heard that a job in Buenos Aires was opening up and told me to call the foreign editor, Bernie Gwertzman, and tell him I wanted the job and could speak Spanish. I call, and he says, "How the hell did you know about that? I just got off the phone with him two hours ago! I have to check. Do you have a wife? You have kids?" I said, "No, I don't have any of that." "That's good," he says, "'Cause you could leave pretty quickly, right? This might solve a problem." And he calls me back two hours later and says, "Joe Lelyveld [the Times' executive editor] says you can go, but you have to leave in a month."

So your first foreign posting was the bureau chief in Buenos Aires?

I was 30. I was responsible for Argentina, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, and sometimes Brazil. There was not much breaking news, so a lot of it was roaming around trying to find things interesting enough to have a chance of landing on page one. South America was coming out of the age of dictators. Democracy was being embedded. They were starting to prosper. A lot of what I wrote was explaining Latin customs and traditions and perspectives to Americans. Then the Túpac Amaru rebels took over the Japanese residence in Lima, Peru, and held 600 diplomats and others hostage, including President Fujimori's mother, sister, and brother. Over time, they let almost everybody go, but they held the brother and some others for six months. Government forces finally stormed the building and killed all the rebels. We knew what was going to happen, but I couldn't say it. But I got there first: we had all these great breaking stories that explained the raid in detail. That was the end of almost seven years there.

I had done well, so was in line for a good posting next. I had lunch with Joe Lelyveld, and he says, "What do you think about language training?" That's when you know they're going to send you to a great post. I said, "I do very well with languages." He said, "Okay, what about Tokyo?" So I then spent a year and a half at the Monterey Institute studying Japanese, five days a week, eight hours a day. It was ter-

rific. And then I went to Japan, which was glorious. I was living in one of the most advanced societies in the world. I could speak the language fairly well, could go anywhere I wanted. I was the first non-Korean to go on a Hyundai trip from South Korea to North Korea. I had to grapple with questions like, How do you continue to advance stories that people don't know about? Or, How do you handle whaling, not just from an American perspective but from a Japanese one? I was always looking for things that were counterintuitive, or things that could promote empathy. I tried to understand why things were the way they were.

From Japan, you went to Indonesia. Did you learn any new languages for that one?

I learned a tiny bit of Bahasa, but most people I dealt with spoke English well, and translators were cheap. I found it fascinating. I had never lived in a predominantly Muslim country, let alone one where the religion came by trade and not sword. Indonesia has 240 million people, 6,000 inhabited islands, 300 languages. You could travel and find stories you would not see anywhere else.

In the western portion of Papua New Guinea, there are two of the largest gold and copper mines in the world, owned by an American company. There were widespread rumors about human rights abuses there, and I wanted to check them out. At first, we were invited to go by the mining company, but then they canceled the trip, so we went on our own. I had an anthropologist showing me around, two stringers, a photographer, two drivers. We get there and start talking to human rights activists, and all of sudden, we realize we're being followed by these goons, officially from the government but really working for the Americans. They told us we had to leave. We refused, and one evening the goons jumped me and beat me up, saying, "You want to be leaving here right now." Afterward, I called the American ambassador. That was a bit awkward, because I had written a story about how he was accused of interfering in Indonesia's affairs and was going to be replaced soon. I told him what was happening, and he said, "What do you want me to do about it? You've ruined my career. I'm done now." I said, "My editors know what we're doing. You need to call the goons off so we can get the hell out of here or else it's going to be all over CNN." He called me back a bit later and said, "You have 24 hours to get out." So we left. That was fun.

> In anything that you do, first ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish?" You don't want to take a job and just sit there.

What came after that?

After having been overseas for more than a decade, I was ready to come back. I was 41. I thought I might want to start a family. I decided to apply for the one-year Murrow Fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations. The Times didn't want me to do it. I applied anyway, and got it. Lelyveld let me take it, but he wasn't happy. "Oh, you want to be with the wine-and-cheese diplomats on the Upper East Side." My time at the Council was great. 9/11 happened, and I ended up spending two years there. It allowed me to put things in perspective and think about what I should do next. It taught me about influencing policy. Journalists don't think about that. We're not players. At one point, for example, I was writing a paper on the rise of radical Islam in Indonesia, and [the Asia scholar] Liz Economy arranged for me to go to Langley and talk with the Indonesia experts at the CIA. I wasn't there as a journalist, so we could speak openly. It was a very fruitful exchange. More for me, I think, because they verified a lot of things, like who was behind this, who took bribes from whom, and so forth. That eventually became a documentary for PBS.

A documentary for PBS?

The Times came calling and said, "You were supposed to be back a year ago." I said, "Oh, no, Joe told me it was two years," because by that point, he had retired. When I came back, they didn't know what to do with me, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had to pay a penance for my sabbatical, and the new regime in charge didn't know me. So they said they were going to send me back to L.A. I was not happy, but I did it for two months. Then they started NYT Television, a production company, one of the new attempts to generate revenue as the market for print advertising was collapsing. I thought it would be fun to make documentaries, have podcasts, and all that. So I did it. I anchored this little evening news program on Discovery Times, and then we had a weekly program with the CBC, and we were making documentaries. We applied and got a grant from PBS for a documentary on whether Indonesia would become radicalized like the rest of the Muslim world.

Eventually, you leave the Times to go the Ford Foundation.

Yes, because the Times ended up selling my division. The documentary came out and was popular, but I had to find something else to do. Luckily, Ford came knocking—they knew me because I had tried, unsuccessfully, to get a grant from them—with a wonderful offer, to run a program increasing the quality and quantity of journalism focused on social justice issues. I had a $10 million annual portfolio. We funded things on PBS and public radio but also investigative reporting at The Washington Post (before Jeff Bezos rescued it), local media organizations that were foundering, investigative reporting consortia in Latin America and elsewhere.

It was a great job. Ten million dollars is not a whole lot of money, but used carefully, it could produce quality reporting. We had benchmarks for grants. You had to advance public knowledge of an issue in some way, be seen by large and influential audiences. If you could show impact—changed legislation, increased community activism—you'd get more money. The

Chicago Reporter was getting $50,000 to $70,000 a year. It's a newsletter that goes out to a couple of thousand people. But they broke the Countrywide scandal under a grant that we gave them. The editor was African American. She went with her husband to get a loan, and the terms were unbelievably bad. She started digging, and that grew into reporting that started a case that helped drive a settlement of billions of dollars.

How did you go from Ford to I-House?

At Ford, you get six years. They tell you in advance, "You will want to stay, but you can't. We need fresh eyes." So I was trying to figure out what to do next. A headhunter called me about International House. David Steinberger was responsible, actually—the guy who decades earlier had leaked me the information about the bridges and got fired. He had become the head of a publishing company, and we had reconnected. He had been asked for ideas and suggested they call me.

When I first heard I-House described, it sounded like an international dormitory, and I wasn't sure whether the job was right for me. But the more I learned about the organization and its history, the more excited I became. By this point, I wanted to run something. And they were looking for somebody who could take this historic legacy institution and make it relevant for twenty-first-century millennials. I had helped oversee and restructure media organizations as a grantor, so I was confident I could do it. I came up incognito for a regular tour, to see what it was like, and decided that I loved it, and landed the position.

What was the potential that you saw?

In my final interview, I told them, "You've created a whole new value system here, one based on respect, empathy, and moral courage." That's what attracted me. That's what I-House had been doing for 90 years. Our residents come from around the world, they're incredibly diverse, and they form lifelong friendships through cross-cultural exchange.

So I-House is a hub and a training center for tolerance and cosmopolitanism?

We don't say "tolerance," because nobody wants just to be tolerated. We value empathy: "I don't agree with you, but I understand why you think that way. But I can't empathize with you unless I first respect you as an equal human being. And if I can do that, then I have the strength to be morally courageous." We're very careful who we pick for residency, and they form a strong community. Every single day here, there are two or three events taking place: speakers, film screenings, book events, a difficult dialogue, an indoor soccer or hockey match, an ice cream social. We had a journalist come and talk about transgender issues. A student got up and said, "I'm from a rural place in China, and we don't even have this concept." Everyone started to boo and hiss. I had to get up and say, "Wait a minute—this is a place of free speech. What we don't allow is hate speech. Let him finish his question." And he continues: "I'm just trying to get my head around this, and I'm hoping you all can help me understand, because we don't have this concept." It led to a good discussion. I think it's intellectually lazy to try to squelch somebody who thinks differently or offends you. What gives you the right never to feel offended?

Looking back on your career, what are your greatest regrets?

No major regrets. I'm glad that I took risks. I'm glad that I jumped into things. I may have wallowed in some places too long, waiting for others to acknowledge and reward me for the good work I had done.

What are you proudest of?

The way I pursued stories. I went after those nobody else was covering or that would enlighten people—not just to be on page one because it was a breaking story but because things needed to be chronicled. Trying to be objective and balanced, providing context, being able to empathize, explaining how and why people acted as they did and what we can learn from that. That's what Al Siegal taught me, way back in the day.

Any advice for those just starting out?

In anything that you do, first ask yourself, "What do I want to accomplish?" You don't want to take a job and just sit there. You should come in saying, "I'm doing this for a reason." What is the purpose? Then you need to establish a process to get things done. Without protocol and procedure, you will eventually fail. Before you make a big decision, ask, "Have I gone through the protocol? Does this comply with my ethics and values?" You betray yourself when you go off the path that you've set. I've seen it happen many times.

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Jacob Weisberg

How I Got Here

Writer, *The New Republic*
Editor, *Slate*
CEO, Pushkin Industries

As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be involved in politics or write about it. I grew up on the North Side of Chicago, in a very liberal milieu. My dad was a civil rights lawyer, later a judge. My mom worked for the government. We thought of ourselves as middle class. When I was eight years old, I sold buttons for George McGovern on our street corner. I raised $5.25, and my parents took me to the local campaign office to give them the quarters I had gotten. I was amazed when Nixon was reelected, because everyone I knew was for McGovern.

In Chicago in those years, the Daley machine ran everything. I grew up thinking that this particular form of local despotism was really wrong, that breaking its stranglehold was an overwhelming imperative. The heroes of my childhood were local people who resisted, including my dad. I actually went to the 1984 Democratic convention as an at-large delegate for [Chicago Mayor] Harold Washington.

Did you work on student papers?

I did, but that wasn't how I defined myself. I was drawn to writing about politics more than reporting news. In college, I had a summer job working for Chicago magazine and another working for the City News Bureau of Chicago. And then I took a year off to work at *The New Republic* and had a great time. After that, I knew I was going to do journalism.

TNR was legendary in that era. What was it like?

Michael Kinsley was the editor when I first got

there. *The New Republic* was just a terrific magazine back then. It was troublemaking; it was clever; it was in the middle of all the interesting debates that were going on inside liberalism and the Democratic Party, but with open-mindedness and insight that transcended the ideological boundaries of the era. It was a place where young people just out of college or even still in it had tremendous opportunity. If your stories were good enough to publish, they were treated more or less on a par with those of much more experienced journalists and academics. You got to sit at the table with distinguished intellectuals and political thinkers. It was a lot of fun. There was an atmosphere of naughtiness: TNR never thought of itself as part of the establishment. Particularly under Kinsley, it saw itself as a place that hurled spitballs at the establishment. And I fell in love with doing that kind of journalism. I went back to college, graduated, went to graduate school at Oxford for a couple of years, and then came right back to *The New Republic* as a writer and editor as my first real job.

In retrospect, were those wonderful opportunities open primarily to white Ivy League males? And was the debate more constricted within centrist technocratic liberalism than you realized at the time?

It was more diverse intellectually than sociologically. Michael Kinsley was, and is, open to a range of ideas in a way that is very unusual. As for demographics, it was even narrower. Almost everybody was from Harvard. I was an outlier in that I wasn't a student of Marty Peretz [then owner of TNR who taught at Harvard].

Are you actually saying you were a minority at *The New Republic* because you came from Yale?

Funnily enough, that was kind of true. They all talked about Harvard. I thought of myself as a kid from Chicago. I may have gone to Yale, but I wasn't from the East Coast. I didn't feel like I fit in. A friend of mine—Evan Smith, who now runs an important experiment in nonprofit journalism called The Texas Tribune—had idolized *The New Republic* and always wanted to work there. He finally got a job there a bit later. He felt like he was meeting all these great figures—Charles Krauthammer, Leon Wieseltier, etc. His disappointment was unbelievable. He realized these people were petty, had dark and ugly sides. And he couldn't get out fast enough.

In the late Reagan era, there was something going on around the merger of celebrity and politics, and new ground was being broken.

How come you ended up staying?

Because you could have the opportunity to write. And there were some wonderful people there, too. Kinsley, Dorothy Wickenden, Ann Hulbert, Hendrik Hertzberg. It was my apprenticeship in journalism. I learned how to write from them. I learned about politics. I've counted them as friends and mentors my whole life—the core group of people who actually ran the magazine. The slightly extended group beyond them, the feuding aunts and uncles, could give you a different impression.

Your first New Republic cover story was about Roger Stone.

I was a college student. I'd been there about a month. Kinsley assigned me to do a piece on this shocking character, Roger Stone, who I thought embodied the corruption around the Reagan administration, the merger of political consulting and lobbying. Roy Cohn was one of his mentors. He worked for all sorts of horrible people, and I thought he was the epitome of everything rotten. Mike had this idea of putting it on the cover, with the headline "The State-of-the-Art Washington Sleazeball." I said, "He's going to sue us or kill us or both." But the headline and the image got everybody's attention.

What would you have said if I had told you then that Stone's style would come to dominate American politics and that three decades later his and Cohn's client, the real estate developer Donald Trump, would be sitting in the White House?

That would have been preposterous. But in the late Reagan era, there was something going on around the merger of celebrity and politics, and new ground was being broken. I've since written a biography of Reagan, and I think I understand the reality of his career much better now than I did then. We'd never had an actor elected as president, and that paved the way for a reality TV star.

In the mid-1990s, you left behind print to follow Kinsley into digital, at *Slate*, boldly going where no journalists had gone before.

Robert Wright, one of the really interesting thinkers at *The New Republic*, had written this piece about how important the Internet was going to be. We all had these early versions of email accounts. I remember one of them: you would send someone a digital message on your computer, and they would then get it in the mail, printed out like a Telex. Kinsley was focused on the question of how magazine editors could achieve greater independence. Mike had been the editor of Harper's, which was run by a foundation, and he was fired because he tried to do gutsy journalism. *The New Republic* was subsidized by Marty Peretz. Mike always used to say, "There are worse forms of subsidy. A rich guy has weird quirks and tends to interfere. But it's not a giant corporation, and you can have a lot of freedom when the rich guy gets bored or isn't paying attention." But he was always chasing the Holy Grail of a magazine that would pay for itself. He had this idea that the Internet might be a way to do that.

He was also frustrated by lead times. Weekly political magazines were sent through the mail. You would finish, go to press Wednesday night, and the earliest anybody got the magazine was Saturday. Most people got it the following week. In politics, even then, a week was a pretty long time. You would have your idea or your reporting that you were so proud of and walk on eggshells until your piece came out, because you didn't want to be scooped or overtaken by events. It's funny now to think you could write something that people would read a week later, and it would still seem original. I mean, these days an original thought lasts 45 seconds. We thought of the Internet as a quick-distribution mechanism. We'd still do a weekly magazine, which people would get digitally and print out and read in order.

By that point, I was working at New York magazine, doing a weekly political column covering the 1996 presidential campaign, one of the most boring ever. Kurt Andersen was the editor there, another mentor of mine, formerly the editor of Spy, one of the brilliant editors of our era. He got fired—partly, I think, because of negative stuff I wrote about Bob Dole—and I quit. Mike had just started *Slate*, and I called and said, "I just quit my job in New York. Do you still have a job for me?" And he said, "Yeah, great. When can you start? How's tomorrow?"

Did you go out to Seattle?

I never moved out there, because I was still covering the campaign, so I was traveling with the candidates. Jake Tapper was then at Salon, and we were the first two Internet journalists to cover a presidential campaign. With Bob Dole's campaign, in particular, you would try to get on the bus and they would say, "What's the Internet?" But eventually, you could talk your way on.

How would you describe *Slate*'s role in journalistic history?

It was one of the first Internet magazines. A new medium doesn't come around very often, and the chance to be part of figuring it out was really exciting. We thought, "This is like the early days of TV or radio." There's a period when the rules aren't established, when nobody knows what to do, and it was great. There were so many features that we developed just because we could, thanks to email and the Internet. We used to do all these dialogues, online diaries, breakfast tables, book clubs. We did the first news aggregation, "Today's Papers," which Mike and I came up with. Scott Shuger was the original writer of that. There were five national papers—*The New York Times*, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the LA Times, and USA Today—and they were all released at 11 PM Eastern Standard Time. He was on the West Coast, where it was only 8 PM, and he would work the night shift, writing a cogent summary of what each paper played as the big story. You could read the whole thing in five minutes before getting out of bed and have a real understanding of what the news of the day was. No one had ever done anything like that before.

There was a great feature on Fridays on what you could talk about to sound smart over the weekend.

"Cocktail Party Chatter," by Jim Surowiecki. It's had a few other lives since then.

Did everything you tried in the 1990s work?

No. We tried writing a collective novel, with five writers using email. It was a fun experiment, but it didn't catch on, and we didn't do a second one. We tried a digital art gallery, but people were still connecting with slow modems, so it was too difficult to download. A bunch of the ideas we had were just too early; they relied on the kind of always-on, high-speed connections we got a few years later. That is the still underheralded tipping point around digital media and digital journalism—when large numbers of people got high-speed connections. They started to become standard in 1999, 2000, and everything became possible. Before that, we used to always think, "Is it too much bandwidth? Will people wait while this downloads?"

You took over from Kinsley in 2002.

Yes. The Internet in 2002 was a different creature than in 1996, and it was different again in 2008. For *Slate*'s first few years, we were so innovative that we were ahead of the technology. We got a little complacent. And then The Huffington Post came along, which was the first digital publication to really take advantage of search and social media. And they became much bigger than *Slate* very quickly, and it was a wake-up call for us. The Huffington Post was never good journalistically. You would never hear people talking about

their pieces, except the people who would tell you, "I wrote a piece on The Huffington Post," which was like putting something on your Facebook page. But they were very innovative with the tools of digital journalism, the way they interacted with the audience.

And HuffPost leads to BuzzFeed, and the monetization of Internet journalism starts in earnest and leaves *Slate*'s political journalism behind as an interesting, innovative journalistic story, but not one that captured the main monetary value of the Internet?

It's worth noting that The Huffington Post never made money. It achieved a high valuation based on the idea that it could someday make money, which as far as I know never happened. BuzzFeed became the place you could learn the most from if you were a competitor. But that's a parallel story about how difficult it is to make money in journalism.

Slate was originally backed by Microsoft, which insulated us and gave us a lot of freedom to experiment. We tried to make money, and we didn't lose much. But we didn't have to raise capital or satisfy investors, so we didn't participate in the Internet boom-and-bust cycle. *Slate* always had around 30 people. Other early publications had gotten big as part of this frothy, bubble mentality; Salon at one point had 120 staff, with offices around the world. Then it all went kaboom. When the bubble popped, people became very skeptical about whether anything on the Internet could work as a business. The audience for Internet journalism was growing, but so was skepticism about whether it could ever be successful as a business. I came to the conclusion that *Slate* needed different ownership, that we needed to be part of a media company and not a technology company. And so I more or less engineered the sale of *Slate* to what was then the Washington Post Company, because I knew that Don Graham and the Graham family were the best stewards of journalistic businesses around.

Where did you get the self-confidence to do that?

I was part of a group of people who were trying to solve a big problem—not just for our publication but also for the world, because independent journalism is the backbone of a healthy democracy,

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I was part of a group of people who were trying to solve a big problem—not just for our publication but also for the world, because independent journalism is the backbone of a healthy democracy, and figuring out how to make that work economically is a crucial issue.

> If you're a good journalist, you get promoted, and suddenly you find yourself managing people. But the thing that makes good journalists is usually a high degree of independence. The great reporter, classically, is a lone wolf who doesn't necessarily work well in an office. So there is a flaw in the system.

and figuring out how to make that work economically is a crucial issue. It didn't really matter whether *Slate* made or lost a million dollars. But it mattered a lot whether independent journalism could support itself. So once I took over as editor, I had a strong sense of mission about trying to solve that problem—which remains fundamentally unsolved. *The New York Times* has more or less worked out an answer for itself, but nobody can say that there is a healthy, sustainable economic model for serious journalism as a whole.

Michael Kinsley helped teach Bill Gates what it meant to be a good owner of a media business: that you could never interfere, you could never pursue your private agenda—basically, that if you wanted to be taken seriously, you couldn't be Marty Peretz. Bill got that very quickly. He could be really annoyed by stuff *Slate* would write, including around the Microsoft antitrust case. But he understood that he couldn't say anything, and couldn't try to influence us, even if we overcompensated to try to prove how independent we were.

When Gates went to work on his foundation, it became clear that Microsoft wasn't really the best place for us. I didn't know Don Graham, but I called the switchboard and asked for him, and he picked up the phone. And I said, "Would you have any interest in buying *Slate*?" He said, "I love *Slate*. Does Bill Gates really want to sell it?" I said, "I think he would, to you, under the right circumstances." And he said, "Great. I'd love to." It took a while to work it out, but Bill agreed to sell it to Don because he thought he'd be a good steward of it going forward—which he was. Don supported and invested in *Slate* for the rest of his career as CEO, and the Graham family proved to be the kind of owners that I hoped they would be.

You went from being editor to being the head of the *Slate* Group. What did that involve?

We washed up at the Washington Post Company at the beginning of 2005. I was still the editor but effectively also the CEO. I always thought the traditional division between church and state was a bad idea, because the business side and the content side needed to work together to solve the problem of paying for journalism.

So a unified media operation is OK, as long as editorial's in charge?

When the person who has business responsibility comes out of a strong background in journalism, it's OK, because they have the right values. I always say that when people have integrity, you don't need a detailed set of rules. And if people don't have integrity, the detailed set of rules doesn't help you. So the fundamental thing is for people to be focused on the principles of independent journalism. And those principles are that in an advertising-supported business, the advertisers don't affect the content and you don't confuse the audience about what is advertising and what is content.

During those years, you gained ever-greater executive responsibility and became a suit rather than just a journalist. How did that change your perspective?

That's a good question, because if you're a good journalist, you get promoted, and suddenly you find yourself managing people. But the thing that makes good journalists is usually a high degree of independence. The great reporter, classically, is a lone wolf who doesn't necessarily work well in an office. So there is a flaw in the system. To gain the respect to run a big newsroom, for example, you need to have been a reporter, but the skills of running a big newsroom are not necessarily those of a reporter. I became the editor of *Slate* in my mid-30s. I'd never really managed anybody before and was very conscious that I had to learn about it. I didn't go to business school, but I read a fair amount and talked to a lot of people. In some ways, the biggest influence on me was Bob Rubin, the former treasury secretary. As a side project, I'd written a book with him, and we talked a lot about management. He saw it as fundamentally psychology—understanding what motivates people and tailoring the way you manage them to their goals and ambitions. That influenced me a lot. There were also a lot of negative examples that were really useful to me, people I had seen manage badly, in a self-centered, thoughtless way. I was very conscious of some of the pitfalls and things to avoid.

Do you feel a responsibility to make the field and the workplaces that you're in better than the ones that you were in and experienced early in your career?

Absolutely. And that started for me when I took over at *Slate*. The staff skewed male. I thought it would be a better environment if it were more balanced. I didn't have a rule against hiring men, but I hired mostly women, and eventually, the senior management and staff became, if anything, skewed female.

You make it sound so easy.

It was easy. It is easy.

So all the people who say, "We would do that if we could, but we just can't find the people," are not really trying?

Certainly in that period, women were undervalued. You could find women who were better than men, and it wasn't at all hard to hire them. It was harder to retain African American writers, because *Slate* was very much a training ground. We didn't hire established talent; we liked to develop talent ourselves. And we hired a lot of terrific African American journalists. But they would make their name, become known at *Slate*, and then suddenly everybody wanted them. And it was very hard to retain people when they would get offers from *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*.

Has the Me Too movement changed your view of the institutions you were involved in?

Yes. I was unaware of a lot of things that were going on around me. And also, particularly at TNR, I might have been dismissive of things or thought that they weren't my business if they didn't involve me. But we had a very different kind of environment at *Slate*. There was no Me Too scandal at *Slate*. We had a female editor during my later years there. There was a strong sense of equality and fairness. No place is perfect, but I think *Slate* was exceptional compared to some other media organizations.

In recent years, you've pioneered yet another journalistic revolution, in podcasting. What got you interested in that?

In the early 2000s, *Slate* formed a partnership with National Public Radio to create a midday show. They wanted something between Morning Edition and All Things Considered. I hired Andy Bowers, who'd been an NPR reporter and producer, to produce it. We had a really good time and got to do all kinds of crazy, fun stuff. But over time, the show became more conformist, more like the other things on NPR, and hence less interesting. Andy came to me and said, "The show's getting less fun, but there's this new thing called podcasting. I think *Slate* should start doing that." I hadn't heard of it but said, "Great," and we started not long after that. Our first show was the *Slate* Political Gabfest, with John Dickerson, Emily Bazelon, and David Plotz. It's one of the longest-running podcasts. All three of them have left *Slate*, but they still do that show every week, and I still listen to it every week.

Did you imagine when you started that it would be going strong nearly two

decades later and would help pioneer an entire new industry?

Not remotely. But I did know that the people on the show loved making it, that there was a loyal audience, and that it didn't cost much to make. There was always this fantasy in journalism that what was really interesting was the reporters talking to each other at the bar at the end of the day, and it would be great if you could figure out some way to capture that. That's what the *Slate* Political Gabfest was, and still is. It's the journalists telling each other what they really think and mixing it up and arguing. And the format we developed for that show, with three regulars talking every week, we then applied to culture, to business, to sports, to economics, and it's one of the fundamental forms of podcasting that's turned out to work.

How has the podcasting sector developed?

There was an early boom in 2005 and 2006. Twitter was originally a podcast directory company, before they pivoted and became a version of what they are now. Then the bottom fell out, and everyone gave up on it. We figured if we kept doing it and growing it, there'd be some revenue at some point, and that's in fact what happened. People point to Serial [first launched in 2014] as the breakthrough show, but if you look at the audience growth, it's more of a straight line. Apple putting an undeletable podcast app on iOS was the crucial thing. The term "podcasting" comes from the iPod originally, which is how people first listened.

You eventually decided to leave *Slate* and start a podcasting company. How come?

I'd started a podcasting company with Andy Bowers at Slate called Panoply. We thought of it as a content company, but it evolved to be more a technology company. The CEO I hired thought that the opportunity around technology was bigger, and he was probably right, but I wasn't sure how much I had to contribute to a technology company. I was very excited about podcasting and had started a number of successful shows, including Revisionist History, with Malcolm Gladwell, who'd been a friend of mine since I was in college. I'd been thinking about leaving *Slate* someday. So I said to Malcolm, "Maybe it's time." And we started Pushkin.

What's Pushkin?

There's never been a better time to be a journalist. The range of forms of storytelling is vast, and the opportunity for a young person to reach audiences everywhere is absolutely unprecedented in history.

We're an audio publisher, a little more than a year old. We create editorial content—mostly podcasts, although we've just made our first audiobook, which is actually the audio of Malcolm's new book, Talking to Strangers, which we produced like a podcast, with recorded interviews, archival sound, music scoring. We make shows that we want to listen to. We started Against the Rules with Michael Lewis, which made an interesting argument on the role of the referee in American life. We've just launched a show with Laurie Santos driven by psychological research into the science of happiness. A lot of podcasting comes out of the world of public radio. It's firmly grounded in narrative and storytelling but tends to be less comfortable with opinion and argument. Malcolm and I come out of book and magazine writing, and the shows tend to have a different tone, more driven by a thesis or a hypothesis.

While you've been doing all of this, you've also had a separate career as a pundit and a writer. How did those paths intersect?

I've written several books, generally alongside other jobs. But in each case, I would take a couple of months' leave. I like to write short books you can do fast. You can lay the groundwork, then plunge in and write, then finish up when you're back at your job. But you can't do that when you're a CEO of a startup; it's full-bore. I can write one or two articles. And I teach a course at Yale each spring term on the ethics of journalism.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I'm proudest of the work we're doing at Pushkin right now. Everyone here is fired up and inspired about it. But I've loved every job I've had. When you're not excited about it anymore, it's time to do something else. I'm less proud of things I've written myself than I am of the people whose careers I've helped. I think Slate is a really good magazine, and I'm proud of that, but I'm really proud of the people who came out of it and who got their start there. That's really satisfying, when you look back and say, "I was the first person to give that writer a place to write for a large audience," the same way *The New Republic* gave me a chance to do that.

And your greatest regrets?

Gosh, I don't know. I was at Slate a very long time. I had a lot of responsibility, and there wasn't an easy way to separate myself from it. But I think I would have liked to have tried a few other things in that period of time.

Any advice for those starting out?

There's never been a better time to be a journalist. The range of forms of storytelling is vast, and the opportunity for a young person to reach audiences everywhere is absolutely unprecedented in history. Journalism today has great economic challenges and is under attack in so many places around the world, including, shockingly, here in the United States. But there are fantastic creative opportunities. It's very exciting!

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Sue Mi Terry

How I Got Here

Senior Analyst on Korean Issues, CIA
Director for Korea, Japan, and Oceanic Affairs, National Security Council
Deputy National Intelligence Officer for East Asia, National Intelligence Council
Senior Fellow for Korea, Center for Strategic and International Studies

As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I grew up in [South] Korea, doing music and art like many Korean kids. So an artist. My birth father passed away very young, when I was nine. I'm an only child. My mother was a book publisher, one of the very few women in that society at that time to have a real career. But she decided to leave to give me a better life. In Korea then, anything abnormal was a negative. You didn't have interracial marriages. You didn't have single parents. You had to follow certain norms or become an outcast. It was difficult for us, and she ultimately decided to leave, and we moved to Hawaii. My mother remarried, and I became a naturalized citizen. That's where my last name, Terry, comes from, my stepfather. He was a colonel in the U.S. Army, and eventually, we moved to northern Virginia because of his job. Even when I came to the United States, though, I continued to paint throughout high school.

So what happened to art?

By college, I realized I was never going to make it as an artist, so I needed to do something else. I had always been interested in politics. I volunteered for Chuck Robb's campaign in northern Virginia in high school. I wrote an essay called "Why Everyone Should Vote," and it won some award. I didn't want to go to medical school, and law school was the other typical option. So at NYU, I decided to do political science as preparation for law school, and I double-majored in political science and East Asian studies.

My first job was working in the New York City Mayor's Office for Asian Affairs, under David Dinkins. It started as an internship and when [Rudy] Giuliani came in, I lost the job. I was in my early 20s, living in New York with a roommate, without a job. I didn't want to wait tables, so I went through the classified ads in *The New York Times* and took a job in the fashion industry as an assistant to a big shot, basically Anne Hathaway's character in The Devil Wears Prada.

I did that for two years. The fashion industry is nuts, absolutely nuts. But the money was good, and it was a glamorous job. I went to fashion shows, got clothes, had my hair and nails done. But after two years, I said to myself, "This is taking me in the wrong direction; it's not what I want to do." So I quit. I had a very traumatic goodbye, just like Hathaway's character with Meryl Streep's.

What came after fashion?

I decided to go back to graduate school and applied to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, at Tufts. My initial plan was to get an M.A. and a joint degree with a law school. It was clear that China was the future, so I focused on Chinese foreign policy. Over time, I liked what I was doing and realized that I didn't know a single lawyer who was truly happy. So I dropped the plans for law school and continued on after my master's to get a Ph.D.

Then my dissertation advisers gave me some good advice. They said, "Everybody's doing China, and you have no competitive edge there. But not many people do Korea. You're Korean American; you speak the language, know the culture. Korea's important, not only because of the security problems of the North but also because of the economic potential of the South. And if there's ever unification, nobody knows what that would mean. Korea is what you should study." And they were right, so I did. You can't really do a dissertation on North Korea—there just aren't enough sources—so they encouraged me to do something on modern South Korean history and foreign policy, and I ended up writing on leadership during the Park Chung-hee era. It's important to have good mentors.

Then what?

I wanted to be an academic and to live in New York. But there are very few jobs like that, and I realized I might have to go be a professor someplace else first, which I didn't want to do. That was when I went to a campus recruiting session with the CIA. I'm a curious person; I'll try anything once. So I went to the orientation, and the guy jokingly says, "Sue, do you want to know what

Kim Jong Il eats for breakfast? We know everything." That hooked me. By the end of graduate school, my choice was go to northern Virginia and join the agency or be a junior professor someplace else. And northern Virginia was only a train ride from New York. I hated the polygraph test and almost didn't take the job, but in the end, I did.

What was the CIA like?

It wasn't as sexy as I expected. It's not a lot of James Bonds walking around. It's much more boring than people realize. It's like working at a large think tank or being in academia. It's filled with normal, hard-working people. There were a lot of pluses I really enjoyed. For example, I spent years researching and writing my dissertation, and maybe four people read it. You write the President's Daily Brief—it goes right to the top. You get feedback the next day: "President Bush said this." "The secretary of state said that." Or the vice president presses you with a tough follow-up question. I thought that was really cool.

You get six months of training, and then you're it; you're in charge of your account—politics, economics, leadership, whatever. I remember the first briefing I ever had to do, for the Defense Policy Board. I had to say to myself, "Well, you're the expert now." When you submit something for the PDB, though, it's not like it's Sue Terry's piece. You might have authored it, but by the time it goes through the ringer, it's an agency piece, with nobody's name on it. The editing process is insane. If I'm writing a North Korea piece and I mention the word "China," it has to go to the regional analysts in the China group, and they have to approve it. If I say "nuclear," it has to go to the functional experts for them to approve. And then the piece goes to the team chief and many other editors.

Is the bureaucracy necessary or excessive?

Both. It's necessary because including all the experts brings rigor to the analysis. This is going to the president, the National Security Council, where people are making important decisions. Every word has to be correct. So there are a lot of checks to make sure that some junior person is not going off and creating a crisis by mistake. But it's also excessive, because you don't need nearly as much of it as they actually have. By the time you're done, it doesn't look anything like when

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you started. But that's the process. Policymakers don't always understand what the analysts went through to produce their papers, how much people had to work and fight to make it perfect.

Is it true you hold the record for the number of items by an analyst gotten into the PDB?

I did have a high number, but it's not because of something great about me—it was because of my account. I started a couple of days before 9/11. In his State of the Union address the next February, President Bush called North Korea part of the "axis of evil," and then in October, we found out that North Korea was pursuing a uranium enrichment program covertly on the sidelines despite the 1994 Agreed Framework. And then there were repeated nuclear crises. If I had been covering Norway, I could have been the greatest analyst ever but might not have produced a single one.

Did you ever brief the president yourself?

Yes. They're like movie stars, so you don't really expect to meet them in person. It's an interesting, cool experience. President Bush is a very fun, likable guy. He has a great sense of humor, a self-deprecating, slap-your-back kind of thing. He put you at ease. President Obama was much more serious. I found him more unnerving, because he would look at you very seriously and not say much, just nod. I felt nervous, like I was talking too much.

You went from being an academic social scientist to being an intelligence analyst with the highest possible security clearances. How did the world look different?

It's really, really hard to get at truth. In political science, there are all these models, and you're supposed to have strong theses. My experience at the CIA taught me that you just don't know. There are no easy answers at all. Every morning I would come in and turn on the computer and find, say, 10,000 pieces of information tailored for my account, North Korea. Signals intelligence. Diplomatic cables from State. Reporting from the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon. Satellite imagery—North Korea is the most heavily imaged place on the planet. Translations and analyses of every North Korean statement. You

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have all of that, and yet you still can't answer the most difficult questions. It's so frustrating! The world is too complex to model.

You were the most knowledgeable person in the entire U.S. government, perhaps the entire outside world, on your account. Did that enable you to predict the future accurately? Was your analysis much better than other people's because you knew all this classified information?

No. [laughter]

Any better at all?

No.

So what's the value of all the classified information?

I knew what I didn't know. That was the gift it gave me. What I used to love, and the one thing I really miss, was going to conferences and listening to all these people talking and knowing that they were wrong or didn't have the answers. I knew they didn't know what they were talking about, because we simply didn't have the information to support whatever they were saying. Now, I don't know what I don't know. I miss that confidence.

Then you went to the NSC. What was it like switching roles, moving from intelligence analyst to policymaker?

I liked it better, on balance. You get frustrated on the intelligence side after a while, because you do all these analyses and it doesn't necessarily make a difference on policy. Now, I was in a position where I could do something about it. But in that role, you're more action-oriented and have no time to think.

What does the NSC staff do?

The NSC staff's job is to understand the president's direction in foreign policy and try to implement it, making sure that all government agencies are working together effectively to get things done. You're coordinating the Pentagon, the State Department, the Treasury, everybody.

What was a normal day like?

Drinking out of fire hoses. There's always some emergency. It could be something small, but even small things can be minor diplomatic crises. Managing allies and relationships is difficult. Sometimes there's a genuine crisis; sometimes there's not. But it always feels like a crisis at the moment.

Did you have to read the same amount at the NSC that you had to at the agency?

It was crazy. You have no time to be sitting around reading anything. You have no time to do any kind of analysis, because you are running around meeting with your counterparts in different agencies and countries and constantly managing crises. You read analysis instead of raw reporting.

So what you were reading at the CIA was primary sources, and what you were reading at the NSC was secondary sources?

Exactly.

Where did you find the confidence to recommend one course of action over another if, as you said, you didn't know anything?

Because after doing it for decades, I knew more than others.

After leaving the NSC, you went to the National Intelligence Council. What is that?

There are 17 intelligence agencies in the U.S. government. People don't appreciate that. Not just CIA. FBI, NSA, INR, DIA. The army, the navy, the air force, each has its own intelligence agency. The Energy Department has one. Treasury has one. And they don't always agree. Take the question of whether North Korea is pursuing certain kinds of uranium enrichment. Let's say, for example, that INR, from State, says, "We don't have enough information to make a decision." DIA might be more aggressive: "Based on this and that, we think they are going full force ahead." CIA might be somewhere in the middle. Policymakers don't find this helpful. So they set up the National Intelligence Council to oversee the entire intelligence community and come up with a single assessment. For a National Intelligence Estimate, 17 people from 17 agencies sit down at a big conference table and review the document word by word—do we agree to this? do we agree

to that?—so we can produce a single assessment from everybody. The criticism of that process is that by the time we've agreed, it says little more than "North Korea has a nuclear program, and it's threatening." It's still helpful, as a bottom-line assessment about what the intelligence community as a whole thinks.

Were there times when you were proud of calling things accurately or embarrassed at getting them wrong?

We were better about things like nuclear tests, because your analysis was supported by imagery. Calls about open societies are often wrong. We didn't predict Kim Dae-jung's or Roh Moo-hyun's win. Predicting elections is very difficult.

What did you do after the NIC?

I came to the Council on Foreign Relations as an intelligence fellow, another detailed assignment.

What was it like being at a think tank?

I really liked it. Think tanks are the bridge between academia and the policy community. In academia, your research often focuses on esoteric issues, and you don't necessarily think about policy recommendations at all. At a think tank, you study your subject and are also expected to think about the implications of your research for actual policy-making. You're more practical than scholars, but more objective than people inside government, who have no time or energy to do their own research and think.

When did you leave the CIA?

I had a lot of great rotations. Too many. So I had to go back to the CIA, and I knew that I would go back to doing the same things I had done when I started out at the agency. But I had worked outside too long, had seen too much of the world to go back and do what I had done initially. So I left. That said, I still highly recommend the intelligence community to any young person starting out. It's a great place to begin your career, because you can learn your issue and become an expert. Then you can either stay and continue to serve or go somewhere else and use the expertise.

How did your experience differ from those of your male peers?

I had fewer role models at the highest levels. I'm so glad to see Gina [Haspel] as director, the first woman director of the CIA! Often, I was the only woman in the room. And an Asian woman at that. The Koreans didn't know what to do with me at first. "Are you a translator? Why don't you sit over there?" "No. I'm Sue Terry from CIA." I

You just have to show up. You just have to do it. Sit at that table. Sit next to your principal. Speak up, and if you get criticized, the hell with it.

had some trouble being taken seriously. Being in a continual male environment is a challenge: Do you speak up or not? Also, when I started out, I looked very young. I looked like an intern. Now that I'm older, I like looking young. But when I was younger, I didn't.

How did you deal with all of that?

I just persevered through it. You find courage somewhere. Initially, I tried to be nice. All the guys sit at this big round table in meetings. I'd say to myself, "I'll just sit in the second row." I wouldn't talk too much; I didn't want to be too aggressive and not be liked. But you learn fast that's not going to work. You just have to show up. You just have to do it. Sit at that table. Sit next to your principal. Speak up, and if you get criticized, the hell with it.

What are you most proud of in your career, and what are your greatest regrets?

I'm most proud of my analyses and pushing back when I had to. There were times we got pushback from the higher-ups. Day one, they said your job is to tell truth to power, but it gets harder and harder to do that. Staying true to your principles is sometimes difficult. But if you can, you can be proud of it.

I don't have too many regrets, only because I feel like I've taken every opportunity that was given to me. I usually regret things that I have not done.

Any advice for those starting out?

Not everything can be planned out perfectly, so you need to stay flexible. Pursue a passion. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I think if you pursue something that you're passionate about, you're going to end up fine, because you are interested in what you're doing. And I know it sounds like another cliché, but be persistent. You're going to have ups and downs; just persist through it all. Finally, one thing that has always worked for me is I don't say no. I always say yes, and worry later. Whatever challenge it is, I think, "Oh, shit, maybe I shouldn't have said yes. How am I going to do this?" But you realize it's not that bad, and it always has a way of working out. And even if you fail, it's just a moment, a little nothing compared to the long timeline of your life. So say yes a lot.

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Paolo Cernuschi

How I Got Here

Aid Program Administrator, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Country Director, International Rescue Committee

Master in Public Policy candidate, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University

As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to follow my mother's footsteps into business. My dad was a doctor, and the family moved from Italy to Zimbabwe in 1991, when I was six. He was working on a development project funded by the Cooperazione Italiana, the Italian version of USAID, providing technical assistance to local hospitals. After a couple of years, we decided to stay. My dad got into private practice, and my mother opened a business. She started by importing Italian floor tiles, and it just grew bigger, into food products, toys, and leather goods, even some exporting. I was in awe.

What was it like moving from Italy to Zimbabwe?

I loved it. It was a completely different environment. Looking back now, it seems more authentic. The first few years, we were in a small town about an hour and a half outside the capital, and after that, in Harare. I was the third of four brothers. It was less stressful than today. As a six-year-old, race didn't actually register at all. I was in mixed schools, with mixed groups of friends. It was not until later that I started engaging with the implications of being part of a white minority in a black-majority country.

What languages did you speak?

In school, we spoke English, and I studied French. At home, we were forced to speak Italian. My grandmother, who would spend a few months a year with us, had been a teacher, and we took classes with her to make sure we could read Italian literature properly. I hated it then but was grateful afterward because it kept us truly bilingual.

What happened to your plans for business?

I finished high school in the early 2000s, at the peak of President [Robert] Mugabe's disastrous policies. I loved Zimbabwe, but it was clear to me that if I was going to study business, it had to be somewhere else. I ended up doing an undergraduate business degree in Dubai. Afterward, a family friend who was expanding his health-care business in South Africa asked me to help with the planning, and it seemed liked fun, so I said yes. I worked there for six months, then looked around for other opportunities. I had interned with a management consulting firm in Dubai, and I arranged to take a job there after a few weeks' break. That was in mid-December 2004. On December 26, a tsunami hit Southeast Asia. It was all over the news, and I wanted to do something useful during my break, so I reached out to my parents' humanitarian networks to see if anybody needed help. A small Italian NGO said yes, and so I went off to Sri Lanka to volunteer for a month. Fifteen years later, I'm still doing the same job.

What did you do in Sri Lanka?

I showed up in Negombo and was told to handle finance and administration for the NGO's field operations. But as with any humanitarian response, there's what you're tasked with doing, and then there are the 27 other things that you end up doing. Two things struck me immediately. The first was that the work was more fulfilling than anything I'd ever done. The job had a purpose—it was doing something good—and that appealed to me more than sitting in an office writing reports for a management consulting firm. The second thing was how inefficient the NGO sector was. Having just come out of business school, I knew what good processes should be like, and I was extremely frustrated by what I saw around me. I said to myself, "Your business background could be put to better use and have more of an impact here." So after a couple of weeks, I wrote to the guys in Dubai and said, "Sorry, this isn't happening."

How long were you in Sri Lanka?

I worked for a year with that organization, and then I stayed for another year, working for the Italian embassy to provide finance and administrative support for NGOs getting funding from the Italian government. Then a former supervisor asked me to join him in Lebanon working with NGOs handling the aftermath of the 2006 conflict with Israel, and I ended up spending two years at the Italian mission in

Beirut, doing information and communications for the post-conflict rehabilitation program sponsored by the Italian government.

What did that involve?

Some of it was directed back home, bringing in Italian journalists to tell the story of where their taxes were going. Some of it was local, working with Lebanese newspapers and other media outlets to tell the story of what Italy was doing in their country—both to facilitate our efforts and to make sure Italy got credit for them. We funded irrigation projects, school reconstruction, agricultural activities, water and solid waste management, post-trauma psychosocial support. It was great to see smart projects actually change lives. And it was deeply frustrating to see other projects that were obviously poor uses of scarce resources. I said to myself, "If we can do it well in some cases, why can't we do it well in all of them?"

What came after Lebanon?

In 2008, I went back to Zimbabwe for a visit. This was at the peak of hyperinflation, and the situation seemed beyond saving. I can't explain it, but something told me the country was about to hit bottom, and that there would be an upward trend afterward. I realized I wanted to be part of that reconstruction, that rebuilding of my home. I'd been away for almost a decade, and it was time to go back. So I gave my boss in Lebanon six months' notice. I had nothing lined up, but in a stroke of luck, just before I got home, I landed a position with an NGO offering capacity building to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health, managing a healthcare program funded by the Italian government.

Is capacity building the same thing as training?

I see training as a subset of capacity building. When you say "training" to me, what comes to mind is putting someone in a classroom and telling them how to do something. What we were doing was shadowing officials and pointing out how they could do their work better—budgeting, forecasting, whatever. Sometimes, it was helping nurses from rural health centers get attached to bigger hospitals, so they could learn new skills and take them back to their clinics. It was a good program.

Small things can be critical. The Ministry of Health, for example, wanted to gather the health management teams from the district we were responsible for every six months, to coordinate strategy and make sure everybody was on the same page. But the government was so broke, it couldn't afford bus fare and lodging to bring 50 people in for a meeting. We paid for that. It wasn't a technical intervention, but it went a long way toward helping the district move cohesively and effectively to, for example, roll out antiretroviral treatments for HIV/AIDS.

How did you come to the International Rescue Committee?

The Italian government effectively went broke and ceased making payments to NGOs on already approved contracts, so that project ended earlier than expected. I did a series of short-term missions in South Sudan with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then came back to Zimbabwe. And after a couple of months, a spot opened up at the IRC. I actually misread the position description; I thought it was a project manager job. But during the interview, I realized it was a level up from that, managing the project managers. I debated telling the interviewer but decided to wait and see what happened, and somehow, I landed it.

Did you have impostor syndrome?

I was terrified from day one. I got over it eventually. But walking into the office the first day, almost every person reporting to me had more experience. They had been running programs for a decade and more, and suddenly I come in and take charge. It was tough. I told myself, "I'm going to make it work." Every position I'd taken had always been a stretch, so I took comfort from that. My advantage, given my previous experiences, was knowing how all the different parts of the operation worked together—finance, logistics, communication, and so forth. I just had to learn how to manage them all in the field. My boss was wonderful. He said, "Go in and be yourself. It's okay not to be the smartest or most knowledgeable person in the room. That just means you have a good team. And you've inherited an amazing team. Let them provide the technical input, and you put the pieces together and make sure everyone works in sync toward a common goal." So that's what I did, and it worked well.

What programs did you manage?

The IRC had come to Zimbabwe in 2008 in response to a cholera epidemic. We drilled and rehabilitated wells, supported medical clinics, and promoted hygiene and sanitation to prevent the spread of waterborne diseases. Eventually, we also started looking beyond that, to what you might call the early recovery phase, as communities emerged from crisis

and tried to get back on their feet. We built value chains and helped small farmers produce goods for market. We also had some governance programs. One involved bringing together local officials from different parties to develop common community priorities. That worked really well. It taught me that a lot of problems can be resolved at the local level—it was national partisan politics that had put a spanner in the works.

Your next big project was trying to jump-start rural economic development in the absence of a functioning national government or economy. How did that go?

We did a market analysis to see what products and services were needed, what was currently being produced, and where there were gaps that could be filled or barriers that could be removed. Our first effort was with chili peppers. They could grow in our area, and there was a company in Zimbabwe that was willing to export them. So we brought 50 farmers together into a group and arranged to have the company purchase the chilies they grew. The firm set up a grinding mill and provided seedlings and fertilizer on credit, in return for guarantees that the farmers would sell the chilies to them at the prearranged price and repay the loans. It took months of back-and-forth until we could build enough trust between the two sides to get it going. But once we did, the project was so successful, it grew to include 200 households.

It sounds like you were teaching basic capitalism.

You could put it that way. And it worked, very well. So we took that experience and replicated it in different contexts. We decided to bring the elements of all our programs together in a coordinated effort to build local economic capacity. Our goal was to develop functional economic networks that would increase communities' resilience to climate change. The district of Beitbridge, in rural Zimbabwe, for example, is one of the most arid areas in the world. Some parts will get only two inches of rain per year. Life is very difficult there, and climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of droughts. We tried to generate revenue and increase community resilience under those conditions.

For example, we helped farmers diversify their sources of income so they could survive a bad year. We saw potential in a sweet indigenous fruit called marula, which grows well in the local climate, even during droughts. Elephants love to eat it after it has fermented on the ground a while; they get drunk. People, too: it's made into a popular liqueur, Amarula. We realized there was a lot of marula fruit just lying around and decided to produce jam. We helped a group of local women start a small cooperative, and now they not only consume the fruit off-season but also sell it in town and beyond. That project has worked remarkably well, even with all the challenges.

What do the locals think about your efforts?

They are very appreciative, but sometimes they have unrealistic expectations that you will swoop in and fix all their problems. On every trip to the field, there will be some point when you'll get the laundry list: "We need this, and this, and this, and this." The aid industry has often been complicit in creating dependency, coming in and providing everything that's needed. At the IRC, we try to fight that. We see development as a joint responsibility, not just a problem for the government or aid agencies but also one for the communities themselves.

Tradition can be a problem. Some of the hardest conversations have to do with cattle. In many parts of southern Africa, your status in the community is directly related to the number of cattle you own, from a few to a few hundred. A cow can sell for several hundred dollars, and so a herd represents a large stock of potential investment capital. But it is incredibly hard to have a conversation, particularly with men, about selling any cattle, even to pay for measures necessary to save the rest of the herd. They'll often prefer to take their chances and hope to get lucky rather than deliberately sacrificing their social status now in an effort to regain it later. You can acknowledge that it's ultimately their decision. But it's your obligation as a development professional to try to help them understand that there are better ways of herd management than hoping for rain, and that if they adopt those better ways, they will be less likely to need food handouts when the next drought comes.

The IRC puts a particular focus on helping women and girls. How does that play out?

In two ways. We have specific programs that target women and girls, such as preventing gender-based violence during humanitarian crises. And then there is arguably the even more important challenge of narrowing the gender gap across all programs that we do. Women start out livelihood programs at a disadvantage, for example, because they have traditionally been relegated to raising kids and looking after

the house and garden, not making decisions about money and business. Some of the most challenging conversations we have involve how to empower women without threatening men (which could lead to increased household violence). Specific programs always depend on the local context. In Zimbabwe, one effort that worked was getting groups of women to join village saving schemes. The groups would get together weekly, with each member contributing a small set amount of money and the pooled funds being loaned out to members for collectively sanctioned projects.

Did you manage any humanitarian relief operations?

Yes. The latest was in 2019, when Cyclone Idai hit the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. There were a quarter of a million people affected and over 300 dead. We started with the absolute basic necessities—delivering food, making clean water available to the affected communities as quickly as possible, and protecting women. Whenever people are displaced in the aftermath of a natural disaster, there is inevitably trauma and sexual abuse. So we distributed dignity kits, with female hygiene products, flashlights, and other items, and set up safe spaces for women to talk to qualified medical staff. After that, we started planning for how to deliver cash to people quickly.

Tell me about giving cash.

I could talk for hours about cash transfers, but the basic idea is that you let beneficiaries decide what they need. Assuming that local markets are functioning—a big assumption that you have to validate first—we give money rather than stuff and let the locals make their own purchases. This has huge advantages over traditional forms of aid. First, it preserves people's dignity. Instead of lining up to get a bag of maize or flour as a handout, they can walk into a shop and buy what they need like regular customers. Second, it allows flexibility and efficiency. Somebody might need two bags of flour, but somebody else might prefer to buy one now and spend the rest of the money on school or medicine. And finally, it keeps markets and local businesses operational after a crisis. Cash transfers should definitely be adopted more widely.

Are you still trying to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the NGO sector?

Yes! Every program the IRC implements is either based on evidence or generates it. We offer cash

We decided to bring the elements of all our programs together in a coordinated effort to build local economic capacity. Our goal was to develop functional economic networks that would increase communities' resilience to climate change.

> Try to push the boundaries of what you think you can do. The more you feel in your comfort zone, the more you should try to step outside it.

transfers, for example, not on a whim or a gut feeling but because research and analysis has demonstrated their effectiveness in certain situations. We draw on evidence to design our projects and study them after to learn generalizable lessons. That sounds obvious, but it's remarkable how rarely it is done, in any policymaking context. I love working for the IRC because they deliberately ask, "Is this the right way to do it?" And sometimes the answer is no. We've tried projects, done an evaluation, and learned they didn't work. Fine. Next time, try something else.

What's an example of something that didn't work?

We had a governance project, training community leaders on their roles and responsibilities. It was funded through USAID and designed as a controlled test. We trained some village heads individually and others alongside another community leader. It turned out that training people on their own had no impact on governance practices but training them alongside others led to big improvements. The researchers concluded that it was crucial to have somebody other than the village head understand what the powers and responsibilities of that position were, so the village heads could be held accountable. It was reasonable to assume that giving officials individual training would be useful, but the assumption didn't stand up to empirical evidence.

I think we've learned a lot in the past decade or two about what works and what doesn't. Development aid is hard, and humanitarian aid is even harder. There will inevitably be failed projects, just like there are lots of failed businesses. But we are getting better at reducing the number of unsuccessful projects and increasing the proportion of successful ones.

What did a typical day visiting the field look like?

Get up at the crack of dawn, to get on the road early. Drive many hours to the project area and check in and schmooze with local official stakeholders, so they know about the program and support it. Then start visiting project sites, such as farms or cooperatives. You ask a few leading questions and then listen to the stories. It's when people start talking that you realize what their issues are and what problems you need to work through. You might visit an irrigation scheme and check on trenches for new piping or a farm where new crops are being grown. After several of those, it's back to the office for conversations with the team to discuss what everybody saw, what can be done to support or improve the projects, and what support the team needs to succeed.

The obstacles we talk about are things most people in developed countries can't imagine. There you take utilities for granted. Flick a switch, a light turns on; open a tap, water comes out. That's not how it works in the field. You have to plan for having power only six hours a day or emergency supplies of drinking water. Bureaucrats hold up authorizations. Goods don't get delivered because the supplier's truck breaks. Each problem has to be painstakingly unpacked and addressed, because it's your job to make sure that everything works properly. And then there's everything else: fundraising, communications, designing new programs.

Well, at least you get high status, high pay, and lots of vacation.

[Chuckle] I don't remember the last time I took more than a week of complete vacation. There's always just too much going on. People in this line

of work don't do it for the pay or the perks. If we wanted that, we'd be in finance or business. We do it because it's amazing. It's incredibly challenging, but it is undoubtedly the most rewarding career that I can think of. You get up every day and ask, "How can I make the most positive impact on people's lives?" Maybe a doctor might feel as good. But nobody else.

You went from Zimbabwe to the Wilson School at Princeton, to study what you had just been doing. Who knows more about development, the academics or the practitioners?

Academics think in broad, general frameworks, and it has been very helpful to see how all the things I've been doing fit into a larger picture. But sometimes they'll write a 40-page paper to come to a conclusion I could have told them after reading the first sentence of their abstract.

What are you proudest of in your career?

When I was heading up IRC efforts in Yemen in November 2017, the Saudi-led coalition blockaded the country, cutting off all access to humanitarian and commercial supplies for weeks. The entire humanitarian community protested that, and since we were one of the largest agencies working in Yemen at the time, I felt we had to take the lead. After some difficult conversations, we opted for being vocal and sounding the alarm about the humanitarian disaster the blockade would cause. The noise we and others made was heard, and soon [U.S.] President [Donald] Trump issued a statement calling on the Saudis to allow the resumption of humanitarian supplies, which they did a few days later. It was a huge win for the people of Yemen.

And your greatest regrets?

I don't think I have any career regrets. Everything has luckily fallen into some sort of logical sequence that has allowed me to get to where I am today, having the chance to spend a year studying at Princeton and then go back to run aid programs in another country in crisis somewhere.

Any advice for those starting out?

To anybody in the aid world, stick with it. It is an amazing career. There will be times when you're stuck someplace in the field, eating rice and beans for weeks on end, when you'll say, "What the hell am I doing with my life?" But stick with it, the rewards far outweigh the challenges. And for everybody, try to push the boundaries of what you think you can do. The more you feel in your comfort zone, the more you should try to step outside it.

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