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PART III
AMBASSADOR A. ELIZABETH JONES

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INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning. It's November 30, 2020. And this is an oral history interview with Ambassador Beth Jones. Beth, you left the State Department in 2005 and you retired at that time. Would you like to talk a little bit about what brought you back to the State Department?

JONES: Sure. I was working for a private company called APCO Worldwide, a consulting company, for five years. And then in the sixth year, I became a counsel to APCO because I was not particularly enamored with that kind of work. I really missed the Foreign Service work, but I was working for them part-time. Then in late August, early September of 2011, Marc Grossman called me out of the blue and said that he was eager to have someone work with him on Taliban negotiations and other policy elements that involved the Afghanistan Pakistan portfolio that he had taken over after Dick Holbrooke died, and would I be interested? I told him that it was intriguing, that I needed to talk to my family, and could I call him back. And he of course said yes. So I consulted with my husband, who gave me some very good advice as to who else I might speak with, starting with Rich Armitage and a couple of other people.

Rich Armitage was deputy secretary of state when I was last in government, when I was assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia. In the meantime, he had started his own company called Armitage International and was working as a private consultant, but we had stayed in touch in the intervening years. Long story short, I called Marc back in a couple of days to say, "Yes, I would be eager to participate, and what would the process be?" He said to hold my horses, that there was a lot of work that needed to be done within the State Department to make this happen, and that I should just wait to hear from him. He called a couple of weeks later, maybe, or a week later, to say that everything had been approved at the appropriate levels at the State Department, mostly with the secretary's office.

One of the things he was particularly interested in was, was I still registered as a lobbyist? I had been registered as a lobbyist and registered under FARA [Foreign Agents Registration Act] for APCO. I took the position while I was at APCO that I wanted to be legally registered, even if I might not absolutely need to be. I took the position that if I didn't get a job because I was a registered lobbyist, I would rather not get the job for that reason, rather than not get the job because I had not registered as a lobbyist and had acted as a lobbyist. So I took the position that it's better to be on the proper legal side of things.

Marc suggested that I start not the first of October, which is what we first talked about, but later in October, because he wanted to be sure to be there in Washington when I started. He was planning a trip to the region in the meantime. So I started, I believe, October 15. I started the same day as Robin Raphel, a fellow Foreign Service officer ambassador—she had been ambassador to Tunisia and had worked on Pakistan for quite a while with Anne Patterson when Anne was ambassador to Pakistan. So I started as deputy SRAP [Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan]. It was a little unclear exactly what my job would be, but it was basically to get involved in all the processes.

Q: So you also had background in Pakistan as well, right?

JONES: Yes, Afghanistan and Pakistan. My first post in the Foreign Service had been in Kabul and that was during a time when we could travel everywhere. I traveled extensively around the country. So I had a good visual image of Afghanistan on the ground. Then many years later I was DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] in Islamabad for four years.

Q: So they weren't exactly bringing you in with Robin Raphel doing Pakistan and you doing Afghanistan. It wasn't that clear.

JONES: Not necessarily no, that's right. It turned out to be mostly that way, but that wasn't necessarily how we started out. Before I got there, Marc Grossman had worked very early with the SRAP team to devise a diplomatic roadmap for the kinds of issues that needed to be addressed in order to bring peace to Afghanistan. And the only way he and the team determined that one could bring peace to Afghanistan was to work out ways to negotiate with the Taliban, which was not politically such an easy position to take in Washington. But, negotiating with the Taliban required a tremendous amount of other kinds of work, which I'll get into. The first thing that we did, the first thing that I participated in, was what was called the Heart of Asia conference that was hosted by the Turks for neighbors and friends of Afghanistan. There were some fifty countries represented at this conference in Istanbul. It was in early November, November 2, 2011. The goal there was to demonstrate that many, many countries had an interest in Afghanistan, had an interest in Afghanistan's future and wanted to participate in a variety of ways to assure its stability, to assure its security, to assure its ability to govern itself and to assure its ability to protect itself, militarily both through training of the police and training of the military.

So that was one conference that fed into the 2011 Bonn conference. This was a conference in early December, just a month later, that was ten years after the original Bonn conference that selected Karzai as the president of Afghanistan. He was still president. This was ten years later. The idea was for all the countries who had participated in the original Bonn conference, plus many of those who were in the Heart of Asia conference, if not all of them, to come together to agree on what the future of Afghanistan would be as far as the international community was concerned.

Q: What does that mean to say what the future of Afghanistan would be?

JONES: How would Afghanistan be able to govern itself? How was it going to be able to do that? The goal there was for the international community to commit funding and training, to assure its ability to do those kinds of things, to do everything that it needed to do to become a productive, safe, secure member of the international community. The elements of that were the civilian training in every possible sector that was ramped up in the meantime through what was called the civilian surge or the diplomatic surge. So that as well as the U.S. military and NATO being there, there were huge numbers of experts who came from the Department of Agriculture to do agriculture. Training from the Treasury Department to help with the banking system, particularly after a big scandal at Kabul Bank; from the Drug Enforcement Agency to work with the Afghans on how to control poppy growing and distribution in Afghanistan; from, of course, USAID with the kinds of training and technical assistance that they could provide for anti-corruption, for education, particularly education of girls—sort of anything you can think of where, where it was potentially part of the agenda for the civilian surge.

Q: So Karzai had been president for ten years and obviously a lot of training and infrastructure spending had already, I assume, had already occurred, but this was a revamping with more of a global vision of strengthening governance in all ways, is that correct?

JONES: It was, but it was also meant to demonstrate to the Taliban that the central government of Afghanistan was a strong, viable entity that the Afghan people could rely on and that therefore, the future of the Taliban would be to participate in this in an appropriate way. There were particular requirements that Secretary Clinton—she was secretary of state at the time—that Secretary Clinton had laid out in an important speech in which she said, “These are not preconditions for negotiations with the Taliban. These are the kinds of things that the Taliban must agree to in the course of the negotiations.” Those were to break with al-Qaida, to end violence, and to live within the Afghan constitution. And that the key to living within the Afghan constitution was equality, especially equality for women and an appropriate treatment of girls and women.

Q: Isn't this kind of like what happened in Colombia, where you're trying to get them to become a political party participant, to lay down arms and participate more, as you said, as an actor in the political scene?

JONES: Right. That would have been the idea. We weren't explicit about a political party. The goal would be that they participate politically in governance in a way that was supported by the Afghan people. It wasn't something that was dictated by them.

Q: And at that time, did the Taliban control part of the territory?

JONES: I'm sorry. Say the question again.

Q: At that time, did the Taliban control territory in Afghanistan?

JONES: It was hard to know exactly where, because it often changed, but we still had teams all over the country. U.S. teams, NATO teams, civilian teams, usually with military protection.

Wherever those teams were, there was no Taliban. There could not have been Taliban, otherwise they wouldn't have survived, probably.

Q: Okay. So how did the conferences go?

JONES: They were considered a great success in the sense that there was tremendous participation, international participation. There were pledges for training, pledges for financing, pledges for funding and these conferences—the Istanbul Heart of Asia conference and the Bonn conference—then led into two other conferences that were to be in 2012 that were to further solidify the future of Afghanistan. And those two conferences were the NATO summit in Chicago in May of 2012 and then the funding conference in Tokyo in June of 2012.

Q: Okay.

JONES: And in the middle of all of this, particularly after the Bonn conference, one of the difficulties that we had was in staying on an even keel, shall we say, with President Karzai. He was very, very disturbed and frankly, rightly so by the collateral damage of the night raids by NATO and local Afghan national security forces, NSF forces on Afghan villages and Afghan homes after dark. When there was intelligence that al-Qaeda, or the Haqqanis, or some malign figures were hiding out there.

Q: Is this part of the surge, or is this something different?

JONES: No, the surge had already taken place. This was simply what was called night raids, because that was considered to be an effective way to eliminate some of the malign actors that were still at large around Afghanistan, who would disappear during the day, but they would seek refuge in villages and homes at night. There were so many civilian deaths as a result of these night raids, that it became an overwhelming political issue between the U.S. and Afghanistan. We undertook negotiations with the Afghans as to how to constrain the night raids in a way that was effective so that they would be controlled by—led by—the Afghan national security forces with NATO and U.S. forces only in the background, if there at all.

So I spent most of the late winter of 2011, spring of 2012, working on these negotiations. I went frequently to Kabul. I often participated in the discussions that Ambassador Crocker led with the Afghan negotiating team. I did not participate as much in the U.S.-Afghan negotiations. I was there to understand the rationale for some of the language that the Afghans wanted included in these agreements. They would be the bilateral security agreement and the SPA that—let me think what that acronym stands for—so that I could then get approval in Washington for these agreements or for language in the text of the agreements. As we know in negotiations, often the most difficult negotiations for the U.S. team are the negotiations interagency in Washington. There was a very strong antipathy in the Pentagon and to some degree elsewhere, but mostly in the Pentagon to restrict as much—as the Afghans wanted—the U.S. participation in the night raids. There was also concern in our legal department at the State Department over the language to make sure that the words we were using didn't have meanings in legal terms that we didn't intend. Harold Koh was the legal advisor. He was an extremely good colleague in helping us sort

out what language to use in order to write down what we actually meant the language to say, or to do.

Q: We wanted to be able to be sure that we didn't have legal liability? Or what were some of the key sensitivities that you were trying to accomplish?

JONES: As I recall, the key sensitivity was that we should not be too restricted, but that the restrictions that would reduce collateral damage were in place, so that there would no longer be such a divisive issue in the U.S.-Afghan relationship. We needed to be sure that we were not in front. We were not out in front. The U.S. was not out in front in these raids but that we could participate in a way that could be helpful.

Q: And get bad guys.

JONES: But to get the bad guys. And be helpful to the Afghan forces. Afghan national security forces, particularly if they got into a pinch, if they got into trouble: could we help extract them or whatever it was that needed to be done in order to help them out? And in the end it was the special operators in the U.S. army, General Votel, who agreed to some of the language that we'd had a very hard time getting Washington's agreement on. He was the one who said, "You know, we're the ones doing this, it's my troops, my forces who are participating in this, they're in the lead; as far as night raids are concerned, I can live with these restrictions. This is fine. This is okay."

Q: So he convinced the Pentagon?

JONES: Well, I mean, basically, because it was his units who were doing this. It was very difficult for the Pentagon to say, "You don't know what you're talking about." So he won the day based on what he knew he needed and didn't need in order to accomplish the tasks that the Afghans had in mind. He was in Kabul speaking with the Afghan negotiating team to understand what was needed. And it was in one of those meetings that he said, "Okay, we can live with this; this works." And we worked out the final language for the agreement. That, in my recollection, was some of the heaviest duty work that I had to do: working every day, almost, on the Washington negotiation. I spoke with Ambassador Crocker very, very frequently to be sure I knew every nuance that he was getting from the Afghan side so that I could negotiate appropriately for him in Washington and for the team in Washington. And I found that that worked, that worked extremely well. Ryan Crocker and I knew each other for a very, very long time, which is always helpful in these situations. We had served together in Baghdad, in the late seventies.

Q: And within the State Department, was Secretary Clinton closely involved in the discussions with the White House or with the Pentagon?

JONES: She was very involved in the sense that she was very supportive. Marc Grossman briefed her all the time. There was nothing she didn't know. We briefed her directly, or we briefed through Jake Sullivan, who was her senior executive and head of the office of policy planning. He was such a good colleague. He asked only appropriate questions, asked a lot of

questions, and absolutely valued the expertise that Marc and the SRAP team brought to the set of issues. And whenever Marc needed to speak with Secretary Clinton, he had access to her. Otherwise he could work through Jake. Marc spent a tremendous amount of time talking with the NSC [National Security Council] Afghanistan lead as well as more senior people in the NSC. Tony Blinken was at the office of the vice president. These are all names that we're hearing now, again, coming into the new Biden administration.

Q: Right.

JONES: Because they were, in any case, extremely good colleagues, I would have mentioned them anyway.

Q: Right. For sure. And then in the Pentagon, who is most heavily involved in the negotiations?

JONES: That was David Sedney. He was a former Foreign Service officer. He'd gone over to the Pentagon and was a very, very good colleague. He did his best to get the approvals that we needed, but he also represented his constituency extremely well also. So after all the time we eventually came to the agreements that we needed to get to.

Q: And Congress, were there a lot of concerns in Congress?

JONES: There were. That was Marc's portfolio. Again, I went to Congress on a regular basis, but to brief on assistance for Pakistan. That was a different part of my portfolio. And actually now that I think about it, I had a second time in SRAP. I think I spent more time on Pakistan and assistance during my second time in SRAP, which was a year or two years later.

Q: Okay. So in the late spring you were able to get this agreement signed.

JONES: Yes. I should mention one of the things that we did in order to put meat on the bones of some of the work that was done at the Heart of Asia conference and at the Bonn conference was we wanted to connect the Central Asians to Afghanistan. They're right there. They're right on the Afghan border and the Pakistani border to the north. But because they'd been part of the Soviet Union, there were very few physical connections between Central Asia and South Asia. We thought that it was appropriate for the Central Asians to participate to a greater degree. There were several reasons for this. One was, I knew Central Asia well having been ambassador in Kazakhstan and having been assistant secretary for the Central Asia region when I was assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia. I knew the assistance programs that we had undertaken in Central Asia and knew that the Central Asians were uniquely suited to help train Afghans. Some of them had the same languages, the Uzbeks for instance and they certainly had the expertise. They had the education, they had the expertise that they had achieved through USAID programs or through some of the EU [European Union] programs that were undertaken in Central Asia in the '90s and the early 2000s.

So in February an interagency team that I co-lead with General Mick Nicholson from the joint staff to all five of the Central Asian countries occurred, to give a presentation to each of them in their foreign ministries and interagency groups that were organized for us by the U.S. embassies

there. We gave them presentations on what improvements were underway in Afghanistan and ways in which we thought they could help in a unique way.

Q: And was the reaction different in different countries?

JONES: Basically they said, "Yes, we understand the role that we could play. But let us think about it." It was positive without being aggressive, shall we say. They were very welcoming of us. They were welcoming of the opportunity. They were welcoming of the attention being paid to them as potentially being valued contributors to regional stability and security. That was very important to them. And that was of course, a point that we emphasized.

Several of the Central Asians had already played a significant role in Afghanistan by allowing the U.S. and NATO to use some of their bases to get into Afghanistan right after 9/11. So Manas air base in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan was an important one. There was briefly one in Dushanbe in Tajikistan that the French used in particular, but the most important one was in Uzbekistan in Karshi-Khanabad, because it was the closest to Afghanistan. The other very important role that the Uzbeks played is they had a bridge called the Friendship Bridge from Uzbekistan into Northern Afghanistan, which was very, very important as military supplies, humanitarian supplies, clothing, et cetera, needed to be transported into Afghanistan and it could be trucked across the Friendship Bridge.

Q: And that was already happening? Or that was something that we wanted to do more of?

JONES: That was already happening. That was an agreement reached when I was assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia when Secretary Powell went to Uzbekistan and made that agreement with President Karimov at the time.

Q: So you did a five country trip?

JONES: So we did this five country trip. It was in a C-130, it was in February, so it was very cold. It was very cold. So it was a rough and ready trip, shall we say? Then our last stop was in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan. General Nicholson and I had a special flight that came out from Kabul to take us both to Kabul, to follow up on some things he needed to follow up on from his previous service there. And I too continue some of the negotiations that were underway. General Nicholson, by the way, a few years after that became the four-star general commander of NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan for three years, until quite recently. That was our first meeting, which was very, very, very productive. And it was clear why he would be an extremely good commander in Afghanistan.

Q: Okay. So were the five Central Asian countries still under the leadership that they had been under when you were assistant secretary or have there been changes?

JONES: They were still all under the same leadership except for Turkmenistan. Yes, except for Berdimukhamedov I believe had already come in. Yes. He had already come in following the death of his predecessor, but otherwise it was all the same leadership. So it was, for me, old

home week. It was great. So many colleagues and friends and many of whom I still see when they come to Washington.

Q: Oh, that's great. And then Uzbekistan was the most important because of the geography and the cultural ties?

JONES: It was the most important, but it was probably the most reluctant, other than allowing us to use the base and opening the bridge. They were, under Karimov, not so inclined to be interested in participating internationally. It's very, very different now in Uzbekistan. The most interested probably was Kazakhstan, but they were the furthest away. So it was a little bit harder, but they did participate militarily with troops. They of course are members of Partnership for Peace. So they sent troops to participate with the NATO forces.

Q: In training or in security?

JONES: Security.

Q: So when you got to Afghanistan at the end of that trip, were there some other negotiations going on? Were you starting to talk about talking to the Taliban?

JONES: All the way through there was an undercurrent of discussion of how to deal with the Taliban, how to engage with them, et cetera. I ended up not being on that team. There were others who were already very engaged with the Saudis, the Germans, the Norwegians and the Qataris on how to do this. That team was already in place and I had plenty to do with the negotiations of these various agreements. Other agreements that I worked on to a great extent were in working on how to transfer control of the POW [prisoner of war] camp or camps to Afghan control. They were under U.S. and NATO control, but this was one of the issues that was very important to Karzai—that the Afghans take control of these POW camps. That was another issue that was very difficult to negotiate. On a political level, we were able to do it. We ended up being able to do it, but there are also physical issues with the camps that had to be addressed in some way. One of the ones that I particularly remember—I toured the facilities—was that they were very, very high tech. They had all kinds of automatic elements. I can remember all the automatic ways to view the prisoners, unlock the gates remotely, lock the gates remotely. I can't remember if they were—I don't think they were fed remotely—but there were all kinds of electronic measures and electrical measures for control of one particular camp in Parwan, or prison I should say.

And one of the concerns that we had was if the U.S. wasn't there, if NATO wasn't there, who would keep the electricity flowing to permit the jail to function. So there were lots of workarounds that needed to be undertaken. That was part of it. Another part of it was protection of the judges. There were a tremendous number of cases being brought on behalf of the prisoners. The cases were being reviewed as to which ones could be released, which ones could be returned for rehabilitation into their communities. There were hearings all the time. I went, I sat in on several occasions on my trips up to Bagram base, to the prison. And one of the issues for the judges was their safety. They were doing the work that needed to be done to assure that the information that was provided on this person or that person was accurate so that they could

be released to their families, to their communities. But if there was ever a decision that someone didn't like, would those judges survive? So that was a big issue that we dealt with and we needed to deal with as a future element to whatever the agreement was for turning over the prison.

Q: And all of these agreements were along the idea of strengthening governance, and then with an idea that NATO would withdraw.

JONES: It was—well—it was strengthening governance. The emphasis was on the Afghan government taking over government functions. So that—yes, the Afghan government was in partnership with NATO and with the U.S, but that this partnership should be much more Afghan driven and in Afghan control. And this was exactly what we wanted too. We weren't being dragged into this. This was the whole goal, but we wanted to be able to do it so that there wasn't a drop in service, shall we say, or a drop in security that the Afghan government could seamlessly take over these functions effectively. And with full popular support, also. So there were the people who were very involved in the public affairs aspect of all of this who were extremely busy, making sure that as things were changing, that it was being explained and being explained to the public and being explained by people who had credibility with the public—explained by Afghans who had credibility with the public.

Q: Were some parts of the Afghan public concerned that the government was too corrupt and that retrenchment of the international community would be problematic or were they mostly in favor of more Afghanization?

JONES: I would say that the popular view was more control, more Afghan control. And of course that was part of getting the Taliban interested in participating, as the more Afghan control there is the more they could participate, potentially. It's a little sideshow to that, of course. But at the same time, you're right. There was tremendous concern in civil society about corruption and what to do about corruption. Corruption was at high levels of government as well as in various sectors. So the issue was what to do about that. And honestly, it was a constant conversation that all of us had all the time with everybody we talked to. They would say, "Corruption is high." And we would say, "We know. We've got this kind of training, this kind of training, this kind of training. What do you think works best? What would you do to stem corruption? What is the best plan?" So there was a lot of very, I would say, transparent discussion about this. But at the same time, there were certain handicaps that we had because we might have information that so-and-so was involved in some way in a corrupt deal, but he was a brother of somebody that was hard to touch. I mean, we could have, but that's not what we wanted to do. We wanted the Afghan government to decide to prosecute so-and-so or so-and-so for corruption. And that was very, very difficult to do.

Q: Right. And Kabul bank was a, basically a failure of—it was sort of the symbol of corruption in Afghanistan because the bank took in a lot of deposits and then basically bankrupted everybody who had deposits, it had been a Ponzi scheme, but also the regulators did nothing. Was that right?

JONES: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. One of the other things that I did toward the beginning of my time in SRAP, as I was starting, Pat Kennedy, who was under secretary for

management at the State Department, asked me as a sort of a side job, to do a study on all of the agencies, all of the U.S. government agencies, represented in Afghanistan. The study was meant to determine which ones were doing the job that they were meant to be doing, which ones were doing it with the right number of people, too many, too few and which ones down the way, down the road, as we made progress along the lines that Marc had laid out, could gradually be reduced or disappear. And the reason he asked for this study was because the civilian surge that we talked about, that Marc Grossman talked about, was at its peak. We were at the point of reducing the number of military in Afghanistan, which meant that there couldn't be as many military to protect so many of the civilian sites that we had around the country. And we also were hoping and planning that we could reduce the number of these sites and the number of people, because by then we would have done that. We would have completed the training that we needed on the farm to market the kind of work that the Department of Agriculture was doing, that we would have gotten a long way on controlling the poppy crops, all the things that the various different agencies were doing. As I say, the reason that Pat Kennedy was so interested in doing this, besides the fact that we were beginning to be on the downward slope for engagement in Afghanistan, at such a high level, was because we had been caught short on this in Iraq.

In Iraq, the U.S. had been unable to reach agreement with the Iraqi government on a status of forces agreement. So we were forced to reduce our numbers kind of dramatically very quickly on the military side and on the State Department side. But even before then, as the State Department reduced, what the military did and what the State Department agreed to is that the functions of the State Department were to be taken over by the military or the functions of the assistance programs were taken over by the military without much thought about how to continue implementing them in the way they're meant to be implemented. And it ended up being an unhappy situation and one that we didn't want to repeat. So my job was to interview as many people as I could from as many agencies as possible to try to understand what was working and what wasn't working. What thinking was already underway within these agencies as to when their programs should close, and what that meant in terms of personnel.

Q: The embassy was huge and there were many ambassadors, right?

JONES: It was gigantic, I think there were five ambassadors. There were five—there was Ambassador Crocker, and I think five deputy ambassadors.

Q: So I've heard stories of that being quite traumatic.

JONES: Well, it, I mean, it sounds terrible. It sounds frightening, but in fact, it worked pretty well for that time. And the reason it worked well is that each of these ambassadors had a military equivalent or several military equivalents to the kind of work they were trying to do. And for various reasons, the military is happier speaking to someone with an ambassador title than someone without an ambassador title. That's part one. Part two is that each of these people who were deputy ambassadors knew their work, understood what their lane was, coordinated with each other extremely well, coordinated with Ambassador Crocker extremely well. So there were not turf fights as you might otherwise have expected.

Q: I know a long line of ambassadors that did the economic portfolio, the reconstruction portfolio, some of them came from Latin America where I've worked, and I know that.

JONES: A lot did as a matter of fact.

Q: And they were all really, really talented, dedicated people, Tony Wayne and Mike McKinley later I think.

JONES: Yes. One of the people that I worked very closely with was Rick Olson, who was in charge of the economic issues when I was doing this study. And when the time came later for me to suggest people who could handle being ambassador in Pakistan, which is an extremely difficult portfolio, I put him forward and campaigned for him to be selected. And he stayed there two, if not three years, he was extremely good in Pakistan. And then Mike McKinley was one of the deputy ambassadors and he eventually became ambassador to Afghanistan. Well, it sounded weird, but all the people who worked for each of the ambassadors knew who they worked for and knew what they were supposed to do. And it was all, you know—there were not the kinds of turf fights that one might have expected.

Q: So you did this study for Pat Kennedy and what were the results?

JONES: The results were probably not surprising. I wrote the report after talking with all of these deputy ambassadors, all of the agencies, all the agency heads, people in the agencies, the management people who were having to manage all of this. And I wrote a report with very specific recommendations and justifications for the recommendations I made. And before I presented this report to Pat Kennedy and to Deputy Secretary Nides, I asked each of the people involved to clear it, because I didn't want to not have buy-in. I was proposing some pretty big changes in a couple of cases.

I got buy-in from everybody except Treasury as I recall. One of the reasons I didn't get buy in from Treasury is that I was suggesting that one of the people who was there had been so tough with the Afghans on the Kabul Bank problem, that he no longer was permitted by the Afghans to speak to them. So I suggested that the time had come for him to leave and he didn't want to. So that was the only one where there was a difficulty, but my main set of recommendations were timelines for reduction. These are the kinds of issues that you know—agriculture needs to stay until this point, DEA is finished as soon as this project is over with—so that there was actually a roadmap for what the staffing reductions would be over the next, I think it was eighteen months.

Q: Did they end up following those recommendations?

JONES: Pretty much as I recall. Yeah, pretty much. One of the things that it also helped with was, because recruiting for this civilian diplomatic surge had been a huge project on the part of the State Department and these other agencies, particularly Agriculture and AID, now there was agreement interagency on what the plan would be. They knew they no longer needed to recruit X number of people, or there needed to be only X number of people. That they didn't need to replace as many as they had thought they needed to replace. So it made for a more organized way to go about the embassy's business and the agencies' business.

Q: I think this might've been a year later, but I remember working in Washington in the Economics Bureau in this period and that there was concern that as the international community started to contract—that includes our people—that there would be a very constraining effect on the Afghan economy. I also remember some discussion about problems when you started to supplement the pay of Afghans in certain cases, judges and others, how do you pull that back? And what kinds of problems are you causing? So I don't know, it sounds like you were working more on the political side, but—

JONES: I was, but, and this gets into part two of my work. This was during that first tranche. One of the things that I worked on with the SRAP team was campaigning for pledges from the international community for train and equip work for the NATO summit and economic support for the Tokyo summit. It was the Tokyo meeting. So we were constantly doing what we called a tin cup exercise all over the world for Afghanistan. One of the things we had to be careful about and that I worked very closely with, for example, the Near East Bureau [NEA] on, is to coordinate with them this tin cup exercise, because of course, everybody wanted to go to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for money. So it was important that I coordinate with them on where to prioritize the Afghanistan work compared with all of the other issues that we were going to the Gulf States for and Saudis, and some of the other wealthy potential donors,

Q: 2012. So that was the Arab Spring as well, right? There were a lot of needs coming up in countries in North Africa.

JONES: That's exactly right. That's when we had a big effort underway led by Bill Taylor to work on the assistance programs for the Arab Spring countries.

Q: So did countries who had pledged in the Tokyo conference keep their pledges?

JONES: Well, I don't think I know because I left SRAP at the end of May, early June. The twelfth. So I left just before the Tokyo conference, but I did participate in early June in the last Tokyo pre-conference in Kabul with Bill Burns, who was then deputy secretary of state. He came out to represent the United States to try to get some of the language agreed upon that we wanted to have in the Tokyo communique. That was a meeting with many of the participants at the foreign minister or deputy foreign minister level, who would be going to the Tokyo meeting.

Q: So, were there any other important accomplishments that you felt you were able to have? I don't know if you had planned to be there for only that amount of time or not?

JONES: No. I had expected to be there for several years, actually. I should also mention I spent a lot of time, and this is partly looking at the personnel situation that Pat Kennedy asked me to do, but also just to make sure, to keep up, keep track of it for SRAP for Ambassador Crocker and for Marc Grossman—I spent a lot of time visiting the constituent posts in Afghanistan. I went to Jalalabad a couple of times. I went to Mazar-al-Sharif a couple of times. I went to Kandahar a couple of times. I went to Herat only once.

Q: So there were four consulates?

JONES: Four consulates, right. And at each of these posts, I was looking internally, but I was also looking at the buildings, what's going to happen with the buildings, because each one had its unique situation and drawbacks and positives. But I also spent time at each place going to visit the programs that we had underway either through USIS or USAID or DEA or Agriculture. I liked to be there and was often invited to come to be there for graduation ceremonies and that kind of thing. So I could see a whole group of people, see them in action, have a chance to speak with them—not at them—but to speak with them, especially at girls' schools. I especially appreciated being invited to girls high schools and that kind of thing, or for the graduation of women police officers.

Q: Well, what was your impression of what was happening in Afghanistan and Afghan society?

JONES: What came through to me was the courage of civil society. There were hundreds, thousands, probably hundreds of members of civil society who were very active, had very strong views about how they could participate to improve the future of their communities and of Afghanistan, whether it was in education or legal issues, legal affairs, or women's issues, or drug enforcement or anti corruption, or media. On any issue you could name, somebody—or there would be a group that was working very, very hard on it. They did this to some degree or to a great degree in danger, in circumstances that were dangerous. They were not always the most popular people in the community, but they rolled up their sleeves and they worked really hard at it. And it was those situations that really solidified in my mind, the importance of our continuing to be supportive of this work, that they were the ones taking the risk. They were the ones rolling up their sleeves. They were the ones prepared to take on the leadership, but they did need some support. And it was important that we try to continue that support in whatever way was the most appropriate, whether it was through funding, through equipment and materials, or just through paying attention.

Q: Was the Taliban continuing its attacks? Were they attacking civil society organizations?

JONES: One of the big issues at the time, a perpetual big issue, was the issue of the Haqqani network, which was based in Pakistan across the border. So it got safe haven in Pakistan. That was one of the difficult issues that we had with the Pakistanis that I tried to work on as well. The times I did travel to Pakistan, which was mostly a little bit later—

Q: Well, calling it a network makes it sound a little more corporate, but this was a terrorist organization, right? So they were basically going back to attack.

JONES: That's right. They had safe havens in various places in Pakistan, and would come across the border and in support of malign actors and attack NATO installations, they attacked the U.S. Embassy at one point before I got there. And so this was a very, very difficult conversation we had constantly with the Pakistanis, I should say, in 2011. I was involved only for a very small part of 2011, but 2011 was considered a very terrible year between the U.S. and Pakistan. It started with the Ray Davis affair in which a U.S. government contractor shot and killed two Pakistanis on a motorcycle he thought was chasing him in traffic in downtown Lahore. That was followed by Osama bin Laden being found finally and killed by U.S. forces in May of 2011. Then we had the Haqqani attack on the U.S. Embassy. I think it was in September of 2011,

which was something that made our relationship with Pakistan extremely difficult. And then there was a tragic mistaken attack on Pakistani soldiers at a border post in Salalah in November by American forces and an American aircraft. It was a complete, complete mistake, but it was a very terrible addition to the terrible year that we were having with the Pakistanis. So one of my jobs was, again, to go back to Pakistan. I went a couple of times for conversations with various elements of the Pakistani government on some of the things that we needed to talk about, but we took the position that the Pakistanis had to decide best how to come back to the U.S. They presented a plan in April that was passed by their Parliament in April of 2012. So we had a few things that we could begin to work on from then on.

Q: And just having been in Afghanistan many years before, too, was it much more modern? After so many years of war, was it very sad or what, what would it just—what did it feel like?

JONES: That's a good question. There were parts of Kabul that were very familiar. They looked exactly like they'd looked when I was there in the early seventies. The sad part was the number of bullet holes in various places or buildings that clearly had been blown up. But the other part that was hard to recognize was the area where the U.S. Embassy was because it was now all behind high walls whereas before, of course, it hadn't been behind high walls. The embassy that I knew that had been my first posting in the Foreign Service was still there. That became the unclassified embassy, that whole building. The new building had been our softball field when I was there before.

Q: The first time you were there was like Michener's Caravans.

JONES: [Laughter] Yeah, but a little bit after that.

Q: But now it must've been a very different country.

JONES: What I appreciated about Pakistan was that I recognized Karachi. Karachi looked very much the same. Lahore, very much the same. Peshawar looked very much the same. What looked different in Peshawar was of course where the consulate was, because that was behind high walls. And everybody was living in trailers inside those walls. So that was a very different looking thing. And during the period of time I was there, we moved out, you know, we did various things to our consulate in Lahore as well. That was later, that was in my second incarnation in SRAP.

Q: And then in Kabul, Karzai's government—were there women in the government yet?

JONES: There were a few; they were not prominent, particularly. But there were a few. So I wasn't the only woman in the room when I went to meetings. Of course there were plenty of American women there too. There were very prominent women involved—women activists who were in charge of, or leading civil society organizations that were pushing very hard for women participation on the Taliban negotiating team, on the high policy council that was leading the negotiations that the women needed to be represented there in order for the negotiations to include the kinds of issues that women were particularly good at. They didn't always succeed in

getting on these councils, but they were very vocal and they had a tremendous amount of support from Ambassador Crocker and his entire team, as well as of course from Secretary Clinton.

Q: Very good. So I guess something happened in May of 2012 to change your plans. What was it, what happened?

JONES: I got a call from from Secretary Clinton's chief of staff asking me if I would like to be considered to be acting assistant secretary for the Near East Bureau, because the assistant secretary, Jeff Feltman, was leaving very suddenly to go to New York to be the under secretary for political affairs for the UN, which was very prestigious, a very senior UN position that is usually always held by an American. He was replacing Lynn Pasco who was retiring and it was something he couldn't say no to. So I said, "Well, let me talk to my family." And Don and I agreed that that would be something that I should not turn down. There were several other candidates that were being considered. Liz Dibble was the principal deputy assistant secretary. I spoke to Liz about all the issues and the kinds of things that were coming up and because I knew it was going to be an extremely difficult, challenging job not least because of the Arab Spring. Then I had a meeting with the chief of staff, Secretary Clinton's chief of staff, which she then joined when I had asked for an appointment to see the chief of staff to say, "Yes. I would very much like to do this job," and then she made the offer.

Q: You said acting, so they weren't planning on putting your name up as a nomination?

JONES: No, this was toward the end of the administration. This was in May of 2012, there was an election in 2012. So the question was, would somebody else be asked to be confirmed? Would there be a new secretary of state, et cetera? So I expected to be in the job for maybe six months. That was sort of what I thought it would be. It turned out it was a year and a half. I was asked to start on the first of June. I asked for dispensation to start a little bit later because I did want to go to this final conference on Afghanistan that I had been so committed to and so involved in, in terms of the fundraising, the tin cupping and all of that. So I wanted to finish that off and everybody said, "Great, no problem."

So I started in early June in NEA [Near Eastern Affairs] and started out feeling completely overwhelmed by what was going on in Syria. That was the biggest issue on top of all of the other Arab Spring issues. In Syria, Ambassador Robert Ford had already been forced to leave by the State Department because of safety and security. The embassy had closed. So he was back in Washington, but still as ambassador to Syria, which was a very good thing. He was extremely good. Many of his embassy team were now in NEA on the Syria desk. So we had a large contingent of Syria desk officers and we had a deputy assistant secretary that also had some responsibility for Syria. So there was a little bit of who's going to do what on that whole portfolio. But we sorted that out pretty quickly.

Q: Let's back up on Syria. So the civil war in Syria had started earlier that year, is that right?

JONES: It had just barely started. It still looked like it was just another Arab Spring event. There were, you know, students were in the streets. Students wanted more say in government there. It was not yet a civil war. It was heading that way, but it was—you couldn't really say it was a civil

war yet. One of the issues was the Syrian opposition. Who was the Syrian opposition? The opposition, the group that called itself the opposition, was not in Syria. They were all over Europe—based in Stockholm, based in London, based in New York, based in Paris, based in Turkey. And it turned out that many of them hadn't been in Syria for a long time either.

Q: So if I recall correctly, there was unrest in other countries, starting with Tunisia. And then in Syria there was an event where some school children had painted graffiti and they had been arrested and mistreated. The parents started to protest, and that was something that started a series of protests, which the Syrian government started to repress very strongly. And that started to roll into massive unrest and opposition on the street.

JONES: Right. And arrests. That happened before I started in NEA, that was while Robert Ford and the team were still at the embassy in Damascus. There were various points at which the embassy was very, very forthright, shall we say, in support of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of people to express their opinions in ways that the opposition or the students—I should say the students not the opposition—the students were very energized and which were very upsetting to the government. One particular point that Robert Ford, a story that he tells is when he was up in—I can't remember which town he was in—but he was north of Damascus. And he was driving, with several members of his team and his car got caught in a demonstration. And the students recognized him and assumed he had come to participate with them in the demonstration. He did speak to them. As I remember the story, he did speak to them. But in any case, it was a big media show. It ended up being a big media show that he was there and it looked like he was there in support of the students. And that was something that was taken very badly by the government.

Q: And the timing?

JONES: It was not too, too long after that, that it became too dangerous for all of them to be there, to be in Syria. And the decision was made to close the embassy.

Q: And people went along with that? Everybody understood it was too dangerous?

JONES: Yeah. I mean, they would have liked to have stayed. I mean, that's always the way with the Foreign Service. You know, they would have preferred to stay. "We signed up for danger, we know how to do this." But one of the things that was a particular hallmark of the way we in NEA managed our work in Syria at the time after the embassy closed, was through Skype. Officers of the embassy and then their colleagues on the Syria desk were able to telephone on Skype, the student leaders, the journalists, the sort of self-made journalists. There are plenty of self-made journalists all the time. So, we had in NEA—because of the daily, early morning Skype calls that this team would make—we had very early information about everything that was going on there. And as the civil war got underway and military members started to participate militarily, you know, military people started to participate in opposition to the government. We also spoke to them on Skype all the time or just on the phone. I mean, some of them would call me even.

Q: So you started this off by saying that you felt very overwhelmed right away with what your responsibilities were in Syria. What was it that we were trying to do once we closed the embassy?

JONES: Frankly, what we were trying to do is to see what was possible in terms of supporting the military opposition, the free military forces against the Assad military who by this time were attacking their population with cluster bombs and from the air in ways that were extremely deadly. They were doing a tremendous amount of arrests and that kind of thing. So in the meantime, we have Libya going on. There was a civil war underway in Libya. The U.S. and international community have just sort of finished supporting the opposition. As I remember Gaddafi was already dead by the time I started [killed in October 2011]. What was underway, what was happening, was getting ready for elections in Libya, but at the same time that the Libyan military was considered to have gotten its act together pretty well.

So there was a lot of discussion, in fact, that we had with free Syrian military leaders and some of the opposition leaders. "Can you get it together the way the Libyans did, to take over if that's what your goal is, to take over in a way that's appropriate?" But like I say, in the meantime, the Syrian opposition was split and in all kinds of ways. So we had a developing internal opposition that was student leaders and, and some free military. We had all of these characters that represented various communities that hadn't been in Syria in years. And so the question was, how do we navigate all of this? What is the appropriate opposition? And is there a Syrian opposition? Can we get the Syrian opposition to get together enough so that they form a nucleus of an organization that could be the government, if all of a sudden Assad was gone?

Okay. So we have, we have that, that's the whole Syria piece. Then we have the Libya pieces. I started in NEA where we're trying to get ready for elections. The elections are right around the 4th of July. The question was who would be elected and would they be able to take power and how all of that would work. By that point, it was pretty calm. We thought it would be calm, and it turned out it was calmer. On the 4th of July, Senator John McCain went as an observer of the election. Another member of Congress, a senator, went with him. I had forgotten who that was. Senator McCain was very vocal, very helpful, very positive and demonstrated to the Libyans that a very important person in the United States was interested. And so that went along pretty well.

Q: Did we still have an embassy in Tripoli and the consulate in Benghazi?

JONES: We had no consulate in Benghazi. We had a house there. It was a villa. It was an embassy office. That was the most it was. We were just beginning to talk to Ambassador Chris Stevens about what he thought we should do with it. Should it be a consulate, should it not be a consulate? If it were a consulate, what would it do? Did we really need another consulate or could he get up there on a regular basis instead? We had contracts with a militia to protect it. And we worked with Pat Kennedy, the under secretary for management—we were talking with him about getting ready to give a recommendation in late September or October as to what we should do with this. There was a deadline coming up in November of some sort—I've forgotten what the deadline was—but we didn't need to make decisions right away. But we were getting ready to do all the work we needed to do in order to come up with a plan.

Q: Is this 2012?

JONES: This is 2012. Right.

Q: And how long had Chris Stevens been there as ambassador?

JONES: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I'd have to look that up.

Q: Actually he had been a special envoy, right?

JONES: Yes, he was the special representative to the Libyan Transitional Council from March 2011 to November 2011. And I think he arrived as ambassador in the spring [May 22, 2012] and was there at the embassy in Tripoli, maybe he had only been there a few months. He'd been a Peace Corps volunteer in Libya. So he knew the territory really well. His Arabic was fantastic. He of course had arrived by boat in Benghazi when he arrived as the safest way to get there.

Q: Okay. So you had that going on.

JONES: Right. And then Egypt was still in Arab Spring turmoil. It was getting ready for elections.

Q: The government had been overturned.

JONES: Yes. Mubarak was gone. There was an interim president and I'm not sure I'm remembering the timing correctly on all of this. I made sure I remembered all my Afghanistan SRAP stuff, but I didn't get into my NEA work so much.

Q: It's okay. We can keep going and fill in anything that you want to, or we can take a break.

JONES: Let me keep going, we can at least continue on Syria.

Q: OK, yeah.

JONES: So on Syria, things were really heating up in terms of the civil war. The civil war was really underway by July and August. And there were assassinations of some of the senior military people in Damascus. There were a couple of important defections. And one of the concerns that we had at the State Department was to be sure we knew what was going to happen, should Assad suddenly leave by whatever means. And this was with Bill Burns' encouragement. Bill was deputy secretary of state by this point. He would call every day to make sure he knew what the latest was. But also we agreed that I would lead what we called a Day After Committee, and that it would be something that was internal to the State Department. It would not be part of or led by the NSC. Of course, I would tell the NSC about it. The idea was to make sure that we had thought through all of the things that needed to be thought through, should Assad suddenly leave the scene or should something dramatic happen in Syria.

So we started this Day After Committee. We met once a week. We had eight or nine working groups. The working groups were issues like the constitution, education, sanctions, the military, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and the economic financial situation; basically those categories. With my team, my Syria team, and talking with appropriate people in the building, we selected leaders for each of these subgroups. So for example, Peter Harrell, who was in the Economic and Business Bureau, was a deputy assistant secretary in charge of sanctions issues. And so we asked him to be in charge of the sanctions group, basically to understand how to unwind all the Syria sanctions—the UN Syria sanctions, the U.S. Syria sanctions, EU Syria sanctions—so that we would know what needed to be done, how to prioritize it, et cetera. We had another group that was on the chem/bio weapons that was led by Tom Countryman and his team, so that we would be sure we had done all the research and all the digging on where were the weapons? Where did we think they were? What weapons did they have? How could they be contained, et cetera. And then, you know, like I said, we had all these other committees as well.

Q: Countryman was—he was under secretary?

JONES: He was assistant secretary for international security and nonproliferation. We met once a week. The reason we met once a week was to update each other on the progress we were making and answering the questions we'd set for ourselves. But the goal was also for the working groups to meet during the week to pass through what they needed to find out and who was in charge of finding out this piece versus that piece. I met with each of the working groups at various points, so that I would get a sense of the kinds of issues that they were addressing or trying to address. And also just to make sure I knew what they all were doing too. So when I got questions from either Secretary Clinton or Deputy Secretary Burns or whoever at the NSC, whatever it was, I could say, "This is what we're working on now," or "This is what the goal is of this particular effort." The NSC ended up sending a representative to join the groups on Thursdays—we met every Thursday afternoon—so that they would also know we weren't trying to be exclusive, but we did want to keep the lead of it at the State Department. And, we did have others. The Pentagon participated in the military group. The Treasury Department ended up participating with the economic group. So even though we kept it internal to the State Department, we didn't keep people out if they wanted to participate without taking it over.

Q: Was this the same group that was looking at how to help the opposition, or is that a separate task force?

JONES: That was separate. The Day After groups—this was how to make sure that we can get humanitarian assistance in, in the right way. What would it take to get it in? Now, of course, the humanitarian assistance group was also the same group that was working on humanitarian assistance pretty quickly, because so much was needed anyway. At first I thought, "Well, what's the difference between the humanitarian assistance group and the reconstruction group?" Well, in the U.S. government, those are two very, very, very different things. So the reconstruction group was all about building roads, buildings. How do you get rid of the debris and the rubble and how do you do all of those kinds of things.

Q: Very Corps of Engineer type of stuff.

JONES: Yes. A senior colleague at USAID [United States Agency for International Development], Nancy Lindborg, chaired the working group on humanitarian assistance. USAID had experts in each of these fields that could lead the working groups that they had for each of the different things that they were working on and could bring in the expertise from around the government. But the other thing we found pretty quickly is that first of all, it wasn't a secret. I talked about it with my European counterparts and Middle East counterparts. The Europeans especially wanted to participate. So various of the working group leads would spend time in Europe, in Geneva and Brussels, talking with European counterparts about the sanctions, about unwinding sanctions. They were talking to European counterparts about humanitarian assistance. How can we coordinate this? Or reconstruction. Those were particularly the working groups that were very wrapped in with their European counterparts, economic support. I don't recall so much that the constitution was a big issue with the Europeans, although we would have welcomed European involvement in and input into that work.

Q: I think the Germans were working on a trust fund or something. Is that right? Do you remember that?

JONES: They were working on a trust fund.

Q: I was in the Economic Bureau's Office of Development Finance at that time. So that was the one piece I was aware of.

JONES: Yes, they were. I'm trying to remember the details. I remember it coming up and being a feature at one of the Friends of Syria meetings—I think it was the Friends of Syria meeting in Morocco in December of—it would have been 2012, when Secretary Clinton was supposed to go but couldn't because she fell and had that terrible concussion. But that was when the Germans announced the trust fund, as I recall.

Now in terms of the opposition. So some of the members of the Syria desk itself were a part of the Day After group but there was a whole separate group that was working on the Syrian opposition. And what we were trying to do was to talk them into coordinating and cooperating with each other instead of bad mouthing each other and, you know, looking for their own aggrandizement. But also, it became pretty clear to us internally that what we needed was an opposition from inside. The Syrian population could care less about these guys that were based in Stockholm. They were not going to be the leaders, as far as the people on the ground were concerned, who were bearing the brunt of Assad's military campaigns against them.

So their work and our work was to try to identify people inside Syria who were already in a kind of a leadership position, or were seen as leaders by their communities. We kept talking to them about coming together in some way. In the meantime, we had also developed a Friends of Syria core group of several of the European countries' Syria envoy equivalents and several from some of the neighboring states. So there was someone from Turkey who was in charge of the Syria policy, somebody from Jordan, somebody from Saudi Arabia, somebody from Qatar, and from the UAE. So we had this Friends of Syria core group. Robert Ford and I met with them on a regular basis by phone and on the margins of other meetings. Secretary Clinton met with her counterparts in that group when she was in Europe for Friends of Syria meetings, or she spoke to

them on conference calls and that kind of thing. And it was in that group that we also broached the subject of look, we need to come up with a better opposition. Can we do this together in some way?

Q: Were the very rough groups, the al-Nusra front and al-Qa'ida in Iraq and other terrorist groups starting to come in yet?

JONES: Nusra was just barely beginning. No one else yet. Nusra was just starting. And that became an issue between us and the Turks which I'll get to. But at that point it wasn't an overriding issue. And we hadn't declared them yet a terrorist organization. So what we did, in terms of trying to get an opposition together, is we agreed among ourselves that we needed to have a conference. We needed to have a conference to which we invited all the Syrian opposition, anybody who considered themselves to be an opposition, including, especially some of these people that all of us had agreed, looked like they could be potential opposition leaders from inside Syria. We got the Qataris to host the conference in Doha in November of 2012. We didn't know how long we were going to have to be there. We didn't know if it would work. We had meeting after meeting, after meeting in small groups and large groups, one-on-one with Syrian opposition, with Syrian, you know, pretend opposition. We met with the core group leaders, with the Qataris and the Saudis, and all the representatives, my colleagues, any number of times to try to figure out who could use their influence on which opposition leader to do whatever it was that we needed them to do, which was basically to come to some agreement around a document saying this is going to be our future. This is what the opposition stands for. This is what we're going to work toward and to agree on a leader and the members of it. I think we were there for two weeks of constant meetings.

We were all in one hotel. Susan Ziadeh was the U.S. ambassador to Qatar at the time and did a fabulous job helping us get hold of the right people in the Qatari government whenever there was an "Oh my God" issue that came up, which happened pretty regularly. People wanted to quit and get in a temper tantrum and we needed the Qataris to help us sometimes tamp things down. Susan really was helpful in making sure that we could function with the Qatari government extremely effectively. She was terrific at it. We ended up getting the Syrian opposition to agree on a leader. There was a selection. I can't honestly say it was an election. It was a selection. He was announced at a meeting there, there was agreement on the text of the communiqués. And we finally had a Syrian opposition that people inside Syria could support.

Q: This included the breakaway military leaders that were fighting?

JONES: Yes. Right. It did. And the timing of this was important because we had already agreed on a Friends of Syria ministerial in Morocco in December. And we really, really wanted to have what we all considered to be a legitimate Syrian opposition to be there, to be agreed as "the sole representative of the Syrian people." It was an announcement that the U.S. made at that meeting. It was not so easy to get out of Washington, but we did, we did get that. What made it not so easy is that by saying that this Syrian opposition was the sole representative of the Syrian people we were saying that Assad was not. And that was not done lightly by the U.S.

Q: And the Russians were not particularly happy at this time.

JONES: No, they were not particularly happy, but I'm pretty sure they were at the meeting. Because throughout all of this, the U.S, the Russians and the Arab League, Arab League/UN representatives for Syria had been meeting in Geneva on a regular basis. Bill Burns always led the U.S. team. Robert Ford and I would go with him along with one or two of the other desk officers to help out. We met, and we had Russian counterparts. Lakhdar Brahimi was the Algerian who led the UN/Arab League group. We met, like I say, pretty regularly, maybe every six weeks. And the agenda was always agreed ahead of time as to the kinds of issues that we would discuss and one of them was the opposition. A big part of our discussion in these meetings with the Russians was, "You have influence over Assad. You agree that the way he's treating his people in terms of using barrel bombs and aerial bombardments, and that kind of thing, is wrong and that it is important to get humanitarian goods in there. Please help us get Assad to stop doing these things and to permit humanitarian goods to go in." And, and of course they often said, "No, we don't have as much influence as you think." And we said, "Well, we think you do. Can you at least try?" And of course, one of the difficulties was the whole issue of the opposition and were they going to replace Assad, et cetera.

I need to back up to an important conference, which I left out. Not too long after I started in NEA, there was a conference in Paris in July of the core group, Friends of Syria, that was led by Kofi Annan, who at that point was the UN/Arab League representative for Syria. In preparation for that meeting, we at the State Department had worked on a document that we wanted to have agreed at that meeting that would lay out with a core group, which included Russia and China, included all the Security Council members plus the friends, a few friends, but it started with Security Council members. We wanted to have in this document the outline agreed for how we were going to proceed in Syria to end the fighting and get to a negotiated agreement about the future government.

There were very few people in the room. I was for a while. The only one there for the U.S. was Secretary Clinton working on this document. The most difficult negotiations were with our French colleagues and with the Russians. So I was in the room with her part of the time because it was agreed there could be only a plus one for a secretary or minister. So I was there for a while. Then I traded out with Jake Sullivan. And by the end of the day, we had hammered out an agreement. I'm going to have to look up the exact language, because there was a passage in there that outlined how the new government of Syria would be selected. And the key phrase in that document is it had to be a Syrian, it could be a Syrian official, but it had to be a Syrian without blood on his hands. As I recall, the document did not exclude Syrian military officers, but there had to be mutual agreement as to who those people would be.

So, discussions that we, the U.S, had with the Russians and the UN/Arab League were based on that document. They were based on our understanding of that document. The Russian understanding of that document was different. And that was a key point in trying to decide on who was going to be the new Syrian government.

Q: What did the Russians think?

JONES: I need to look at the document to refresh my memory about what exactly the argument was. But basically we argued that the opposition had veto power over who could be in the

government. And as I recall it, the Russians probably disagreed on that point, but I need to look at the language.

Q: And the idea was that this is what the government would look like before there was an election?

JONES: Yes. I have forgotten where the election came in, but let me back up. So we have that meeting in Morocco in December. It was a very big deal because the U.S. and everybody else at the conference agreed on the opposition as the sole representative of the Syrian people. That was a big, big step. And the effort from then on—and Robert Ford led this effort—was to work with the opposition, to get them to agree on who these people were, who didn't have blood on their hands, who were nevertheless appropriate people for government, or to be in the various ministries and who would these people be that Assad could turn over to?

That was sort of the idea—that he would turn over the government to this other group. That turned out to be an extremely difficult effort that Robert had to lead. As you can imagine, the opposition leaders had a hard time agreeing on very much. They had a hard time spending time on it because they were so concerned about being in Syria and doing the kind of work they needed to do in Syria. And of course these meetings had to be outside of Syria. So there was one in Egypt and various places and not too far away. So that was something that Robert really worked on hard for the next year.

Q: And when you said they needed to be in Syria to work on things—so there was fighting going on. Were they also having fiefdoms, like there were parts of Syria with one leader setting up an alternative government or something?

JONES: No. Well, not exactly. I mean, I wouldn't call them fiefdoms. It wasn't at all like what happened in Afghanistan. But, there were areas that the opposition controlled or the, you know, the opposition free military controlled. And so they needed to get back to make sure that the police were working and that there was sanitation and that the water was on. The civic duty kinds of things that they needed to pay attention to.

Q: So there was more than one government going on in this country?

JONES: Well right. But the reach of the Assad government didn't get to these places that were not under government control. They were under the control of these various communities, shall we say? So there was community leadership in a lot of these places, sort of a civil society kind of leadership.

Q: This was as a result of the unrest. It wasn't as if the government of Syria had not had control of the whole country before that, right?

JONES: Right. Oh, yeah. Right. So now in the meantime, there are other things happening. The first is that the access to Syria, of course, was easiest through Jordan and Turkey right on the border. So the question was how to get military material, if we were going to provide any, into the Syrian opposition. And that became a very difficult issue for the U.S. government which I'll

leave aside for the moment because the point of this part of the story is that the Syrians, the Saudis, the Qataris, and the Emiratis were doing a lot of work to provide the Syrian opposition military with weapons. There was a separate group of this Friends of Syria core group that was the military core group. Bandar was in charge of it on the Saudi side, Petraeus was in charge of it on the U.S. side. So they would have meetings among themselves and with the Syrian opposition free military about what they needed and who was going to supply what, et cetera. Now here's where some of the problems started, because just then Nusra is starting to go into Syria. They're getting in from Turkey. The Turks don't love that, don't love Nusra, but the Nusra fighters were the most effective fighters there from their point of view. And so they said to themselves, and then to us, when we said, "Hey, wait a minute." They said to us, "We're going to let them in. They're going to fight Assad, and then we're going to control them. Don't worry. We're doing the same thing."

They were also in support with the Turks and Nusra on the military side. In the meantime we, the U.S. government, we're finding out more and more about al-Nusra and realizing that it was actually a terrorist organization. We couldn't talk the Turks into preventing them from crossing into Syria, but we could declare them a terrorist organization, which we did, and it took a while to do it. And the decision to make them a terrorist organization unfortunately happened just before the Morocco ministerial. So it is a bit of a headline in the ministerial that was considered a negative headline because the Syrian opposition said, "You've just made them the most attractive group to join. You've just empowered them when you should be empowering us." And we said, "Well, we're empowering you as much as we can." We explained why we needed to designate them as a terrorist organization. But it was a tough discussion.

Q: That was empowering how? And was their concern within Syria, or also was Nusra bringing in outside fighters from other places?

JONES: At that point, it was just the Nusra fighters. The other thing that was starting to happen of course, was as Assad's attacks became more and more violent, refugees started flowing and they started flowing mostly into Turkey. The Turks had quite good refugee camps, a lot of services in the refugee camps. I've forgotten the timeline on this. At an early point, right about this time, they said, "We're full. We can't take any more." But the other thing that was happening was the Turks were not happy to have international humanitarian organizations in the refugee camps in Turkey. They did not want outside help. They kept saying, "We can't do it by ourselves." And the international community kept saying, "So let us help you." And they kept saying, "We don't want you to." And we said, "Well, you can't have it both ways."

Q: Okay. And so we will go ahead and pause here, where we're talking about refugees from Syria and how the Turks were handling the situation. And we will pick up again next week.

Q: Good afternoon, it's December 7, 2020 and we're continuing our oral history discussion with Beth Jones. So Beth, I believe we were starting to talk about your time moving over to the acting assistant secretary of the Near East Bureau, NEA. So did you want to pick up from there?

JONES: I do. I started a little bit late. I was meant to start the first of June 2012, but started a little bit later in June because it was agreed with the secretary's office that I would finish up my work in SRAP with a final meeting, the final preparatory meeting, for the big conference that was to take place in Tokyo on economic matters. And that conference took place in Kabul in mid June. So I flew back to the U.S. on Sunday—that was Sunday, the 17th of June. And the thing I particularly remember is that we had a big problem on the airplane. We had to suddenly land in London. We were told we couldn't get on the plane until the next day. I had to figure out a way to get back so I could actually start on Monday morning in NEA as I promised to. So my time in NEA started out in a big rush of difficulty.

Q: But nobody was hurt on the airplane?

JONES: No, somebody took ill on the airplane and had to be offloaded in London. I was on a non-stop from the Gulf, but because of how long it took to do everything, the crew timed out in London. And so we couldn't continue on to the States. Anyway, I started on the 18th of June in NEA. The first thing that happened was the King of Saudi Arabia died very suddenly. He was older. I was asked to be the State Department representative on the formal U.S. delegation to the King's funeral in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh.

Q: Who was the head of delegation for the U.S.?

JONES: The secretary of defense. I think I'm right about that. So I started that way with three days in Saudi Arabia, which meant that I was even further behind than I thought it was going to be by the time I got back. So one of the first things that was on the agenda, when I got back, were the results of the election in Egypt that was run between a retired general and the head of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Morsi.

Q: This had been an election that was held after the Arab Spring forced out Mubarak?

JONES: Well, Mubarak had been forced out the year before. There had been an interim government. That interim government then set up the elections for this government that elected Morsi.

Q: And this was a pretty spirited election?

JONES: It was a very spirited election. There was a liberal opposition that also had tried to participate in the election, but they were very divided among themselves. They could not really figure out a way to combine forces to become a genuinely united party that could have been elected in place of either the military leader or the Muslim Brotherhood leader. And that was an issue that continued in Egypt actually after Morsi was elected. The liberal opposition there, they called themselves the democratic opposition, never could combine forces, even though many of them were very well-educated; they were patriots, they knew the kinds of things that needed to be done in Egypt for improvement of the lives of the people. But they absolutely could not force themselves to compromise sufficiently to agree on how to combine forces.

Q: And what was the concern in Egypt about the Muslim Brotherhood? Because I know that for many, many years, certainly the Egyptian diplomats I've met and many others have always expressed concern about them coming to power through elections.

JONES: Right. So the problems that were articulated about the Muslim brotherhood were: what would they say about women? Would they actually be democratic or would they impose their firm conservative religious beliefs on the population? Would they be democratic? Actually, when they came into office, they were popular. They were elected in a genuine way. They were truly elected over the military because they ran on a platform of how we can support the people? How can we assure that poor people get a living wage? How can we assure that their housing is improved? How can we assure that they have water, that they have access to medical care, all the kinds of things that had been sorely lacking in on the part of the Egyptian government for decades, actually for centuries.

Q: And the Muslim Brotherhood was also made up of community or religious faith-based community organizers, right? They were activists. They developed community services all over Egypt?

JONES: Well, yes. Not only were they proselytizing these things, but they were living those goals. So wherever they were, wherever there was an active group of them, and they were all over the country, they genuinely did provide these kinds of services to the poor populations in their communities.

Q: And had the U.S. helped with election set up and election monitoring?

JONES: The U.S. was part of an international election monitoring force, as I recall. Since I was just starting, I don't remember all the details that went into preparations for the election. What sticks in my memory though is the day after the election, when the tally was to be announced. I was in the Sit Room [situation room at the White House] as the second to the seventh floor State Department person in the room to try to understand number one, what had happened in the election, to hear from the intelligence community, from the U.S. Embassy and from the rest of us, what we knew of the results of the election. What we were hearing about the results of the election. And it was at that time that the intelligence community said, "We know from the conversations among the Egyptian leadership that Morsi won the election, that the votes are in his favor. What we don't know is if that's what they're going to announce." And it was while we were in the room having this meeting that the Egyptians did announce that Morsi had won.

Q: The day after. So they handled it correctly.

JONES: Yes. They stayed with the results of the elections.

Q: They told the truth, which isn't always the case.

JONES: They told the truth. And I mean, honestly, we were concerned about it because one of our conversations was if they don't tell the truth, what do we do? But since it came out the way it did, we didn't have to finish that conversation. But what we did discuss is what our posture

should be in public. And we agreed that we should appropriately welcome the democratic result. We should applaud the Egyptian people for having exercised their democratic right to vote for whom they wished to vote. And we applauded the government for announcing the results that we understood to be the results of a free and fair election. The reason I emphasize that is that the liberal opposition, the democratic opposition, was extremely upset with the U.S. for having done that. They turned this into "The U.S. supports Morsi. The U.S. supports the Muslim Brotherhood. The U.S. has killed democracy in Egypt by doing this." And we got that firsthand very quickly. Secretary Clinton went to Egypt in early July to Cairo and to Alexandria. I was with her on that trip as the acting assistant secretary. And after the meeting, she was browbeaten, I mean, really criticized in very strong terms for having betrayed democratic principles in Egypt. And almost nothing she could say, or any of the rest of us could say, could make them understand that Morsi won the election fair and square. This was sometimes in meetings with the opposition groups. And we said, "You know, if you all had your act together, you might've had a better chance of winning the election yourselves."

Q: I remember in the press, it was as if the whole Egyptian public believed the U.S. had falsified their elections, right?

JONES: Well, not so much that we falsified the election, but that we did something to put Morsi in office, that we had put our finger on the scale of the election in some way that was never articulated, but was very widely assumed. Secretary Clinton had planned to make a speech in Alexandria. We wanted her to go to Alexandria because we had some indications from the Salafi leadership—which is a different religious group that is even more conservative than the Muslim Brotherhood—but the Salafis had reached out to the embassy. They had reached out to the delegation to say that they would welcome a meeting with Secretary Clinton. They were in Alexandria. So it was one of the reasons we went, but also we wanted her to go to Alexandria, partly because there's a big audience there too. But also, she could see the building that was the consulate general in Alexandria that we hoped to reopen that had been under repair for some time.

Q: Is Alexandria a big city?

JONES: It's a gigantic city, a port city of lower Egypt. It's on the Mediterranean. Very, very famous of course, from some of the novels of the fifties and sixties. A very pretty Mediterranean looking city.

Q: And our consulate isn't always open, right? Is that for security reasons?

JONES: Yes, that's right. It had been closed for security reasons during the Arab Spring. And it needed to be. It needed to be redone because it didn't have the kind of security setback and the kinds of things that are needed in a U.S. government building overseas. But that work had been done and there was hope that she would reopen it, which I believe she did. I recall that we had a reopening ceremony there. She was going to give a speech, but then we decided that there really wasn't a good theme to use with the speech at that point. That her time was better spent meeting with groups of people. That she could be more persuasive in person and have more of an impact in person with a series of meetings in Alexandria, than by making a speech. There were also

some security concerns about her presence there at the time, and the ability of the Egyptian security forces to keep her safe and everybody else safe.

Q: So Morsi, this was right after the election, but before his inauguration, I guess?

JONES: I don't remember what the deal was with an inauguration, but I do recall very clearly her meeting with Mohamed Morsi in Cairo. We were maybe six on our side, in the room. The secretary, of course, sat next to Morsi. They had a—not an unusual meeting. They had a normal meeting in terms of the kinds of issues that she raised. And his responses were probably—I don't remember them clearly enough, but they showed that he was not necessarily closely wedded to what we would call democratic principles. And he exhibited some harsh attitudes about any opposition to him. But what I particularly remember is Secretary Clinton coming out of that meeting and saying to the few of us who were in the room, "This is not a good thing that he's the president of Egypt. This is not going to result in the kinds of change that the Arab Spring demanded and, and that resulted in Mubarak being thrown out." She had an immediate difficult reaction to him, much more than I did. And she was right as it turns out.

Q: Right. He made quite a lot of moves later that were anti-democratic?

JONES: He did. Through the fall and the winter their constitution was to be drafted. It contained many clauses that were anti-democratic. The interesting thing was that the initial group of people that he chose for his cabinet were social and economic progressives. We called it a dream team of Egyptian leaders in the political, social, and economic realm. They worked very hard. They tried very hard to develop and implement the kinds of legislation, regulations, and systems that would have produced the kinds of reforms that the Muslim brotherhood had promised. But it became pretty clear by December, by the end of the year that we were headed for a very, very difficult time, that Morsi was extremely controlling. He did not keep this dream team cabinet for very long. And for the next period of time, it was a constant struggle and a very strong effort to keep advocating to him for the kinds of changes that he himself had campaigned on, that his initial government had put forward, but that just didn't didn't come to fruition.

Q: And was there a particular move he made the next year that gave the excuse or the reason for people or forces to combine, to remove him from office?

JONES: So what happened then? Let me do that next time to be sure I've got it right. We will leave for next time what triggered the problem, and then things that we ended up having to do about it.

Q: Okay. So we'll leave Egypt there then. It was a very busy year, 2012.

JONES: It was. So, okay, that was the whole Egypt thing going on. Anne Patterson at the time was the ambassador to Egypt. She was ambassador when we took Secretary Clinton there and she stayed through all the Morsi period. She had arrived relatively recently. And the reason I mentioned that is that she gained the reputation completely unfairly in the Arab world for being pro-Morsi and pro-Muslim Brotherhood, which made it difficult for her when she replaced me as assistant secretary a year and a half later. But we'll get to that.

Q: Sorry. Do you remember when she started in NEA?

JONES: In late December, 2013. So I was in the job for eighteen months. She started December 24, 2013.

Q: Oh, okay. Okay.

JONES: So we're discussing the Morsi period in 2012.

Q: It seems, it just doesn't seem that long ago that—[Laughter] It's amazing how many years ago—

JONES: Yeah, it doesn't seem so long ago until I try to remember everything [Laughter].

Q: You're doing great. Okay. So do you want to go back to discuss Syria?

JONES: So, yes. So, in Syria, I think we talked about why it was that we closed the embassy. That occurred before I started in NEA. That occurred in the spring of 2011. Oh, sorry. No, it was in spring of 2012 when I joined NEA. And in June of 2012, Ambassador Robert Ford was already back in Washington as was his team from the embassy. They, many of them, very many of them had simply been assigned to the Syria desk. So we had a very large Syria desk, rightly so. We needed every single person there. And as I mentioned the last time we spoke, one of the big assets they brought were all of their contacts in Syria with whom they spoke by Skype every day, every morning.

One of the things I instituted when I first started was in addition to the regular daily meeting I had with all of the country directors and deputy assistant secretaries of NEA, I had a pre-meeting with various desks. And I did that because often while I was in that meeting, I would often get a call from Bill Burns, who was at first under secretary for political affairs and then later, deputy secretary, asking questions about what had happened overnight. And invariably, I either had just been told what the answers to his questions were, or I had people in the room and I did with his permission, put him on speaker phone so that they could brief him immediately on what it was that had occurred overnight on the basis of the Skype calls that they had already made. It was really, really terrific. So I met with team Syria almost every morning. I met with team Libya a couple of times a week in the early morning. I did them back to back cause I had several that I needed to do before our morning meeting. And before I went upstairs to the assistant secretary meeting with Secretary Clinton I had, depending on what was going on in Egypt, I had team Egypt in to see me as well to make sure I knew what was going on with them. And then occasionally depending on what the set of issues was, I would have team Iran in.

Q: That's exhausting.

JONES: Well I'll tell you, it wasn't, because these were so good. They knew so much. And they were so aggressively active and so informed. Their Arabic was good. They did a lot of these conversations themselves in Arabic. And it meant that I started the day feeling very, very positive about my job, that I actually might know something that would be good for decision

makers. Yeah. So for me, it was essential. But it was very uplifting too. It was a big charge that I got every morning from these great, great, great officers telling me all that I needed to know. And sometimes, Bill Burns would have a question that they hadn't thought to ask and they would say, "Okay, we'll come back in fifteen minutes and give you the answer."

Q: So that, I mean, it's incredibly useful for—

JONES: They would call up their buddies and say, "Yo, Ahmed. Do you know what's up?" Yeah, it's really, really helpful because as they get up there, the under secretaries and the deputy secretary, they're on the line every day, you know, too, and they're not living this. And there's so much value to have teams like that.

Q: I just had that experience once with a flood and hurricane and needing to get to Under Secretary Pickering every morning at eight am on what happened the day before. That's why I said it must be exhausting because doing that for two weeks was exhausting, but it was just me.

JONES: Yes but you were in a crisis. This was kind of a crisis mode. It was a very long-term crisis. So, there was a great deal of continuity in everything we were hearing and the guys that they were talking to were people that we knew or knew of, you know, all the time.

Q: Right. And just for our readers of the future, this is also something we have to do every day, anyway. When news comes out, when the newspapers come out, there are immediate questions that come to the State Department press people. And every day, we're trying to make sure that we can respond to those things, that we have the best factual information. So it's something State folks are used to doing for the press in any case.

JONES: That's exactly right. One of the big issues that we had was that the various press reports would report something that would be just plain wrong. And one of the issues I had was that the Ops center would get questions very early in the morning, you know, as the papers came out and the tickers came and the online media sources would start reporting and the Ops officers would take it on themselves to call the embassies to say, "We've got this report, what's going on?" Unfortunately, several times, several of them got in the habit of calling the ambassador every time. And I started hearing about this and then got my DASes, or sometimes I did it myself, to work with each of our embassies in NEA to say, "Who would you like the Ops center to call? And who's the backup person? Because I got complaints from ambassadors saying, 'I'm tired of talking to Joe Schmoe from the Ops center about these things when they could be calling my public affairs person, they could be calling the political section. They could be calling the consular section. They could be going to the dog catcher.'"

Q: That's right.

JONES: That was just one of the organizational issues that I worked out with all of our embassies, because they all got questions at some point from the Ops center. But that was also something that I took a special note of and had my teams tell me what ridiculous thing was being reported that day and how do you know it's not true? Who told you? Because when I went upstairs to brief the secretary's meeting, I couldn't just say, "Oh, that's not true." I had to say who

says it's not true, and how they know it's not true. Or what did happen? Why is there any kind of report? And so sometimes the answer would be, that's not true, but this is what happened.

Q: And on the seventh floor, everybody was interested in Syria. I expect.

JONES: Yes. Everyone was interested in Syria. One of the things that I also particularly recall from that time, some of my more senior colleagues in NEA would say, "Why is Bill Burns calling all the time? Doesn't he have anything better to do?" And I said, "Remember, he's got bosses too. He's being bombarded by the NSC. He's being bombarded by the secretary of defense. I don't know who all he was being called by, but he's being bombarded by the secretary or the deputy secretary or the NSC director. I don't know if the president's calling him, but he needs to know these things too. That's why I'm asking you what the deal is. And we should be proud that he's asking us and not somebody else."

Q: So what was the NSC, all these people that were bombarding them, what were they trying to get at? Did they want us to ensure any particular result?

JONES: Most of the time, these sort of daily things, it was just to know what the deal was. And then, all of that built into the next meeting of the deputies committee or the next meeting of the principals committee, depending on what the set of issues was that we were trying to address; in this case with Syria, let's say. So my early days related to Syria had to do with the various reports of opposition attacks on the Assad family, on the president's family and opposition attacks on the military headquarters in Damascus, which were successful in the sense that they killed several senior generals.

The other things that we were hearing at the time was dissension among the Assad family. Some of the family and some of his close allies, we would get reporting, press reporting sometimes, of the wives and families of some of these people who were living in the Gulf or living in London or living elsewhere—they were not in Syria—making statements about, "Oh, this looks bad." Or, you know, "It's time for us to leave," or something like that. There was considerable effort at the time to identify military officers who were prepared to be anti-Assad. Were there any? And we were surprised that there weren't. We had expected that there would be more who would declare their opposition to us. And part of that came from what had happened in Libya, because there were senior Libyan general officers who announced their opposition to Qaddafi and led the opposition, joined the military opposition and were quite united. In fact, we used to use Libya as an example to the Egyptians on the political side and the Syrians on the military side, in terms of opposition, that you know, you need to unite the way the Libyans did because they were united politically and militarily in being anti-Qaddafi.

Q: In Syria, there were—I don't know if they were considered religious or ethnic divides—but the Assad family was part of—

JONES: Allawi, the Allawi sect. Yes. Which is a sect of Islam that is particularly closed. It does not proselytize adherence. But the other thing we realized as we looked at this and talked to our intelligence analysts and people who understood Syria extremely well was that Assad had such

good intelligence himself that no one dared breathe a word of opposition to him in terms of his military or some of his closest associates, because the minute they did, they would be executed.

Q: Yeah, I guess what I'm trying to remember—I don't know if this was important—is that it's kind of the opposite of Iraq because the Alawis are like one million out of—I don't know—eight million or something, it's a kind of minority rule and they're sort of a Shia related sect. But it's at least a million people, so it's not like the family could just leave. And then the majority were Sunnis. So if it divided that way it was hard to see how a political settlement would happen.

JONES: Right. That's right. And that became quite an issue of discussion as we moved into what kind of political negotiation could there be about a transitional government and how a new government, a replacement government, would be formed under the assumption that Assad would relinquish power given the extent of the protests and given the unity of the international community around the need for this transitional government. There was a lot of work that was done by Kofi Annan, the UN rapporteur for Syria. He was the UN rapporteur for Syria and the Arab League rapporteur for Syria. So he had two hats pulled together and he worked with—I think it was called the Action Group. This was the Security Council, plus some of the neighbors of Syria who were particularly active in or wanting to be particularly active in working on Syria, not least because they were the recipients of refugees from Syria.

Q: But there was one exception. I think that Russia was not on board right?

JONES: Russia was a member.

Q: So Russia was on board with the possibility of a transition?

JONES: Yes. Yeah. That was what was so interesting about this. So this Action Group met in Paris at the end of June in 2012 at the ministerial level. And its goal was to finalize a draft agreement that ended up being called—I actually printed it out to remind myself—it's called the Final Communique of the Action Group for Syria. Let me just see—

Q: And this is happening your second week on the job?

JONES: [Laughter] I've gotten back from Saudi Arabia, Morsi got elected, and then we went to Syrian negotiations. Frankly, we called it the June 30th agreement and the longer form was the final communique, the Action Group for Syria dated the 30th of June. It had ten paragraphs with quite a bit of detail. Five pages long. A lot of it had been written already. Various of my level colleagues from the Action Group had participated in drafting this document. It discussed what the steps would be to get to a political agreement, what the agreed actions would be, what the steps would be for the transition, how to implement the six point plan of the Security Council, et cetera. The key point of this was that we negotiated in the room that day at the ministerial level, with not all members of the Action Group—it was the Security Council members mostly negotiating this and we brought in the other members of the Action Group later to endorse it.

But one of the key elements was how were the members of the transitional government and the replacement government to be chosen? And the language that we ended up with said that they

had to be chosen by mutual consent of the existing Syrian government, the current Syrian government, and the transitional group that was yet to be formed. And what this meant was that the opposition leaders there, the transitional government, which would be the opposition leaders—basically we negotiated so they had veto power over which members of the Syrian government could be included. But the agreement did specifically allow for members of the Syrian government to be included. And in the discussions, it's not written in the agreement—I was mistaken on that when I talked about it last time—it doesn't say that they can't have blood on their hands, but that was the consensus of the group at the time, as we discussed it in this room, in Paris, I think it was—did I say Paris, or were we in Geneva now? I can't remember.

Q: And you were there. Were you the highest ranking person in our delegation?

JONES: No, no. Secretary Clinton was because it was a ministerial. She was the one who negotiated this with the others. Probably the most difficult colleague who was the hardest to negotiate with was the French. Secretary Clinton had all she could do to persuade her French counterpart to accept this by mutual agreement language. Lavrov, who was the Russian foreign minister, was there. He did agree to this. He agreed to all of the language in this. But—

Q: What did the French want?

JONES: They wanted more explicit reference to who could or couldn't be chosen. And we said that we couldn't determine that. That should be up to the Syrians to decide, but that we were giving them a very powerful tool by giving them veto power over who could be chosen. But it was agreed that, however, it was up to the Syrian opposition to get its act together, to agree on who this transitional group should be, who would make these decisions. Let me, just for the record, tell you who was in this group. This Action Group for Syria. It was of course Kofi Annan, who was the representative of the Arab League and the representative of the UN. So China, France, Russia, the UK and the U.S. as Security Council members were in it. Turkey. Iraq, there because they chaired the summit of the Arab League States. Kuwait chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Arab League States. Qatar. The EU. Let's see. Yes, those were the ones.

Q: Was Qatar considered a problem at that point?

JONES: I'm sorry, was who considered a problem?

Q: Qatar?

JONES: Oh, not at all. No. The one thing that they objected to was being left out of part of the negotiation. They were, you know—the foreign minister was a very voluble person. He was unhappy about this, but Secretary Clinton said, “You know, we didn't mean to leave you out for so long. We're sorry about that. But we needed to hammer out some language here among ourselves that was acceptable to China, Russia, France, and the UK, which is not easy as you all can imagine.” And so, they came along.

After this meeting and after we announced this agreement, this communique, we asked Robert Ford to gather with as many people who identified as the Syrian opposition as possible in a place that would be easy to manage. They decided on Cairo, that Cairo was a place that they thought would be—that was close by and would be a little bit more neutral maybe than Turkey would be, or Saudi Arabia would be in terms of trying to put their finger on the scale. So I don't recall of course all the details of the negotiation, but it was an extremely difficult negotiation. There was a tremendous amount of competition, of disagreement, of high drama to the point that Robert Ford had all he could do to keep everybody in the room at any given moment to keep people from walking out in disgust or leaving altogether. And we tried very hard. He tried very hard to get them to make some kind of an agreement that would move the situation forward so that we could go back to the Syrians through the Russians and say, "There's a group that's been formed. Let's sit down and have a negotiation as outlined in the June 30th communique, as to how the transitional government will form itself." And the first time that that happened was a year later. That's how long it took. And it happened only because Secretary Kerry at the time was absolutely insistent that it would happen.

A lot of other things happened in the meantime. One of the things which I talked about last time was the realization that the Syrian opposition didn't really represent Syrians. It was formed of people who had been out of Syria a very long time who were not based there. And we along with our colleagues in this Action Group and a few other countries that then nominated themselves to participate also, like Saudi Arabia, like the United Arab Emirates, like Jordan, to see if we couldn't work out a Syrian opposition group that was more representative of the Syrian people that could speak for the Syrian people in a more credible way, because at that point, what we were hearing from inside Syria was, "These guys don't represent us. We want to talk with you about how to implement the June 30th communique. We don't like at all who these guys are, they don't represent us. And so give us a chance." So one of the tasks that Robert Ford and his team had was to identify those inside Syria who appeared to be, from everything they could tell, natural leaders or people who were already leading in their communities who possibly had more greater standing than just within their communities and could be representative of the broader Syrian people in an opposition group.

Q: So nobody, nobody in Cairo was from inside Syria?

JONES: I don't, I don't think they were at that point. No. Okay. One of the issues, which you mentioned earlier, was the issue of treatment of members of the Assad government and Alawite people, members of the Alawi sect. And that was something that, as I recall, we put into the communique—let me check to make sure that I'm right about that. But it's something that we advocated all the time that there should not be retribution on the Alawi just because they're Alawi. And that just because somebody was a member of the government didn't mean that they had blood on their hands. That term was used a lot. And that the opposition had to commit itself to fair treatment of of the Alawi of all sex, of women, you know, of the Druze of all the different ethnicities and and religious sects in Syria.

This Action Group—and we called ourselves the London 11, just because that's the first time that they met as ministers was in London, not too long after this. They met for the first time in September. We agreed that we needed to get together to try to form this Syrian opposition and

Qatar offered to host it. And so we all went sort of at my level as Syria representatives of the London 11—went to Doha to work with the Syrian opposition. And we did as much as we could to invite as many members from within Syria that we could. And we requested help from the Russians in particular to help us get them out if we needed help from the Assad government. But we, of course, also needed help from the Turks to let them cross the border and fly from Turkey to Doha, if that's the way they came out. Some came out through Jordan, depending on where they were. But again, the Jordanians were part of the London 11 as well. So everybody ended up in Doha for, I think it was almost two weeks in November just before Thanksgiving, that we spent with the opposition, including the opposition that was not considered to be that good. They were all there as well. And we were able to persuade them. We did it in groups. We did it individually. Sometimes I would do it with my British colleague, and sometimes I do it with my Emirati colleague, and sometimes we'd do it with all the Gulf States in the U.S. We had hundreds of meetings with all different opposition groups and different people of the opposition during those two weeks to try to talk them into ways that they could consider compromising to come together as an opposition so that they could form a united front against Assad as a primary goal.

But the other action forcing event we had was a Friends of Syria ministerial meeting that was scheduled for Marrakesh in December. And we wanted to be able to announce this new Syrian opposition at that ministerial in December. In the meantime in the U.S, in Washington, we were working in the interagency to get agreement on recognizing the opposition once we finally got it, as the sole representative of the Syrian people. In other words, we basically unrecognized Assad as the leader of the Syrian people, which is a pretty dramatic step.

Q: How did that happen? How did we? Who were the leading forces besides Secretary Clinton in convincing the president to unrecognize Assad?

JONES: As I recall, it was a gradual thing. We knew we had to figure out a way to do that. We at State in the Syria group in NEA, we wanted to do that. We wanted to give the opposition something that they could coalesce around, which was that they were the representative of the Syrian people, they weren't just, you know, some fly by night group out there that the U.S. may or may not support in the end. So that was a big, big deliverable for them. And we saw it as a way to juice their willingness to sort of drop their personal animosities and form a united group. We worked on it for quite a while through the government. Denis McDonough was the president's chief of staff at the time, as I recall. And he was, he was quite amenable to it, but he was absolutely insistent that the opposition had to be united. And it was our recognition of that plus his saying that the only way that this is going to work is if you've got an opposition organized. That sort of generated our effort to get this big meeting in Qatar organized. And I still remember when we came back, in the first meeting that Robert Ford and I went to in the situation room. We were sitting behind Secretary Clinton, Denis McDonough in the course of the meeting talking about, "Well, we now have this, and we'd like to present this proposal again, that we now should agree in policy terms to recognize the Syrian opposition. We would like to announce it at Marrakesh, to recognize the Syrian opposition as the representative of the Syrian people." And Denis McDonough turned to Rob Ford and me and said, "Thank you for all your work. That couldn't have been easy." That was very sweet. I still remember that very well as very gracious. He was always very gracious, but it was particularly welcome at that point, let's say.

Q: Well was there any concern that if we did that, we were sort of declaring war on Syria?

JONES: Not really. That wasn't part of the worry about it. It was just that it was a very strong position to have taken. And certainly, the president and his closest advisors wanted to be sure that we weren't going to screw this up, that we had a group together that made sense. And the opposition leader that the group selected was very personable. I can't remember what his background was. I think he was a teacher or a professor or something like that and was charismatic and committed and had been leading in his area for a while and that kind of thing. So it was a credible choice that they made. And when he made his speech, he did a very good job talking about the kind of government that he wanted this opposition to work toward. And he said all the right things. I think we probably made sure he did, about not doing ethnic cleansing of the Alawi—I doubt he used that term, but that's what we were worried about.

Q: So I guess it also would have helped that the Action Group was united in this, that we weren't doing it on our own. We were doing it with all these other people.

JONES: Critical. That was critical. And frankly, we wouldn't have been able to succeed without everybody being in there because at various points through those two weeks, we didn't know how long we'd be there. The Qatari foreign minister would call some of us together, call all of us together to say, "How's it going? Do you need help with anything?" And every so often we would say to him, "Could you please call the so-and-so and see if they can't get their delegation to be a little bit more helpful," on whatever it was.

Q: And then all this time there was fighting going on in Syria.

JONES: Yes. Yeah. I mean, particularly Assad attacking his own people. That was the worst of it. Now at this point—and I have to look, like I said, I didn't look at 2013 so much yet.

Q: We can come back if you want.

JONES: At this point, the whole issue of chemical weapons use was not a big issue. There had been a few reports of it as I recall, but it wasn't the big issue that it became the following year. So the big meeting in Qatar, and then the meeting in Marrakesh which Secretary Clinton was to attend, but in the end, didn't because she had fallen and had this really bad concussion. Now at this point as we went to Marrakesh, I had gone with Bill Burns to Bahrain. The Bahraini did an annual security conference there and Bill was going to meet with the Syrian opposition leadership. We had them come to sort of talk more about the kinds of things that needed to be done in order to pursue the transitional government in the right way. Plus, we had issues that we needed to discuss with the Bahrainis about how they were treating the Shia minority, et cetera.

So we had a whole set of issues that were difficult that we dealt with there. I had a trip planned to visit various Gulf States after the Bahrain meeting. And then I was going to go to AmeriCash for the Syrian ministerial for this Friends of Syria ministerial in Marrakesh in December. While we were in Bahrain the secretary called Bill and said that she had had a conversation with Lavrov and maybe several of the others and that the Russians wanted to have another meeting of the little Syria group in Geneva, and would he please go there after Bahrain? Those meetings were

meetings that were chaired by the replacement for Kofi Annan, and I've got to look up his name, the Algerian, who chaired it as the UN rep and the Arab League rep.

So Bill and I got on a plane, we got a military plane, and we flew all night. We left that night. We flew all night to Geneva, got to Geneva in the early morning and went straight to meetings with the Russians and the UN/Arab League rapporteur. The issue that I recall that we spent most of our time on was humanitarian access. We were having a terrible time with the Assad regime, getting access to communities that were hemmed in by fighting. And were about to be overrun by the Syrian military, who was beginning to be able to do that and needed either to be escorted out and to get a safe quarter, or we needed to get humanitarian supplies in.

So as I recall, that was the chief issue in that discussion in which we said to the Russians, "You're the ones with the contacts with Assad, you're the ones who can influence him to permit this to happen. You agree that the humanitarian situation is terrible. Your foreign minister signed on to the communique that said that humanitarian access should be guaranteed for the people of Syria. Please help us." And we went round and round and round, but they eventually agreed to do it. And as I recall, it worked a couple of times; some of the access did work. At that point, Bill left Geneva and went back to Washington and I went on from there to Marrakesh. Before he got back to Washington, as he landed, he was told, "You need to go to Marrakesh because the secretary fell last night," or whenever she fell. And so poor Bill had to get right back on a plane and come out to Marrakesh. Now, I had gone early of course, to Marrakesh because there were lots of meetings there—preparatory meetings that we had with the Syrian opposition, with the London 11, with the humanitarian people, with everybody to make sure that we had communicated correctly in a way that was appropriate.

Q: Okay. So all of that sounds really exhausting, but I'm thinking at my level about the office directors and the DASes. Did they have to be churning out all kinds of paper and talking points and watch out for and all that for each of these things?

JONES: Certainly for Bahrain. I had a book already of all the issues and the talking points that I needed for Bahrain, as did Bill. For Geneva, for the Syria meeting—Robert Ford, I'm pretty sure was with us in Bahrain because of all that, because there was so much concentration on the Syrian opposition. I'm not a hundred percent certain about that. Because I have this memory of flying with him from Geneva to Paris to get the plane to Marrakesh. So we had him with us. I mean, he and I were the ones who wrote the talking points for Bill. I mean, we tried to do them overnight, you know, nobody else is going to do it. And, we just had the conversation with the Syrian opposition. So we knew the kinds of things that were on their minds, so we could do it. Plus Bill had been in those meetings. So he kind of knew the issues anyway, so we were able to do that work.

Q: So this is high level personal diplomacy that the staff are probably running to try to catch up. So did things go okay in Marrakesh?

JONES: [Laughter] Yes. And by the way, I did have a staff assistant with me who was very, very helpful. She was great. And she was meant to be with me on the whole trip. So she went with me to—I'm pretty sure she went with me to Geneva. I'm not certain. In any case, we went to

Marrakesh. Robert was there obviously, we spent a tremendous amount of time negotiating all these documents, but the other issue that was difficult for us at the time—and I think I mentioned it last time—is that the Nusra group was just starting to infiltrate into Syria through Turkey. We had worked and worked in several meetings with the Turks, with the Turkish counterpart to get them to stop these Nusra fighters from getting into Syria through Turkey, that they did control the border. We knew that because they knew exactly how many refugees were coming out into Syrian refugee camps. And we said, “Please, please stop them.” The Turks said, “No, these nests are fighters of the best fighters. We're going to let them in. When the time comes, we know that there are bad guys. We know that they've done bad things in other places, but they're the best fighters. And so in order to get rid of Assad, we need the Nusra fighters in there.”

Q: Nusra were coming from Iraq? Were they coming from Iraq or Turkey?

JONES: I don't remember. They were coming through Turkey for sure. Right. I mean, through Turkey, because that's how they could get into the opposition held territory. I don't think they were coming through Jordan yet because the opposition didn't hold that much territory along the Jordan border.

Q: So I'm sorry. The Turks wanted them fighting?

JONES: They wanted them fighting and we said, “But they're bad guys. They're going to take over and you're going to be sorry. You can have them all over Syria.” [Turkey said,] “No, no, we've got them under control. Don't worry about it.” In the meantime, the U.S. government machinery had been working to declare them a terrorist organization. But the work that has to be done in order to complete that is extensive. So it had taken longer than we had wanted it to. And it turned out that the interagency agreed to it's being named as a terrorist organization just before we got to Marrakesh and Robert Ford wanted them to be designated no question about that but tried to at least hurry it up so it would be way before the Marrakesh ministerial or to delay it until after, but it didn't succeed. So that turned out to be one of the big issues that we ended up having to discuss at Marrakesh with the Syrian opposition, who basically said, “You've just increased the recruitment ability of Nusra.” They were adamant, They were very upset with us about that. And, you know, I can't say that they were wrong. I mean, certainly it was a bad organization. No question about that, but that by designating them, we had increased their ability to recruit. That's probably correct, but that wasn't going to change our view about them.

Q: So what else happened in Marrakesh?

JONES: That was the critical point that the organization adopted the principle or the position that the Syrian opposition was designated as the representative of the Syrian people. Bill Burns went on to Tunis. There was a conference there and my deputy, Liz Dibble, went with him to Tunis for that. I went back to my original plan, which was to visit the Gulf. I didn't get to all of them at that point, but I'm pretty sure I went to Kuwait and to Oman at that point. I think I'd, on an earlier trip, been to Baghdad already. Yes. I went to Kuwait, Muscat, and then I went to London where we had a meeting with the British and several others about Libya. And that was in December. So of course that was after the Benghazi attack.

Q: So okay. So we'll stop with Syria there. To be picked up next time.

JONES: Well the one thing that I should mention, but we talked about it before, was all of the work that we did internally with a Day After group. But we'll just meld that in that, because that was the domestic work that we did in Washington on the issues related to Syria to be prepared for any contingency that was to occur in Syria. If Assad were to leave, if the opposition should win, if you know, chemical weapons were used or nuclear weapons, whatever kind of weapons we had, we had these eight or ten working groups on every subject we could think of to make sure we had a plan in place no matter what happened. And we could pull it out the next hour, not even the next day and be able to tell the decision makers in Washington and elsewhere what the next step should be on whatever the contingency was.

Q: And I would imagine that what happened in Libya was underlining why all that work was so important.

JONES: To a degree, though actually the Day After groups started before the Benghazi thing happened. That started in August. And it started principally because we really thought somebody might assassinate Assad and we needed to know what our next step was. We needed to not fumble around. We needed to be ready.

Q: So, would you like to switch over to talk about Libya.

JONES: Yeah. Okay.

Q: So, where should we start? Before Benghazi?

JONES: Yes. Last time we talked about the Libyan election that took place right around the 4th of July that had been prepared for, for quite a long time. The Libyan opposition leaders were well-known, well-respected. They were well-known in the international community, France in particular and Italy, which were the two other countries that were particularly interested in resolving the problems in Libya. Senator McCain went to Libya as an observer and was there after the election and was there to congratulate the Libyans on having done such a good job. We weren't sure, frankly, if the election would take place without bloodshed. It did take place without much bloodshed, much. And we were a little bit surprised, but very relieved that that was the case.

The person who was the head of the group that was elected, Jibril, worked hard to put together a cabinet government. He had a very hard time doing that, finally gave up, and we were going back and back and forth and back and forth with him and with others as to what was needed in order to get a government agreement. Chris Stevens, who was the U.S. ambassador in Tripoli was very active in that. He was extremely well respected in Libya, having his Arabic was fantastic. He had been well-known there as a Peace Corps volunteer. He traveled all over the country. He knew all the players really well. And there wasn't anything I needed to do to instruct Chris, let's put it that way. He was the one making the suggestions on what kinds of things needed to be done by the senior leadership in the U.S. If there was a point at which Secretary Clinton should call somebody, if the president should call somebody, if we should do something

with the UN whatever it was, Chris and the desk were the ones who would discuss it and bring it to me. And we'd agree to it or take it forward if we needed to, but at that point, there weren't big decisions to be made. So we didn't need a lot of deputies committee meetings or principals committee meetings on Libya.

Q: He was well-respected in Libya because he had been there not only as a Peace Corps volunteer. Wasn't he there during the violence?

JONES: He was. He was there during a good bit of the violence. He arrived on a ship to Benghazi. So he set up shop in Benghazi first as the fighting died down. He moved over to Tripoli to reopen the embassy in Tripoli.

Q: Was he already confirmed as ambassador and then gone back?

JONES: Yes. Yes. He was confirmed as ambassador already. And one interesting point. My husband teaches counter-terrorist driving in West Virginia at BSR where all of the State Department security training is done. And Chris was there. When I was PDAS in NEA, Chris had been on the Iraq/Iran desk. So I had known him very well from those two years as PDAS. And so I knew him well, as he went off to Libya as ambassador. He left for Libya just before I started in NEA as I remember. There were a couple of issues, sort of housekeeping issues that we were working on at that time, as I started and Liz Dibble, who was the PDAS, worked on them for me and kept me informed of. One was what to do about the building that we rented, sort of the big building and compound that we rented in Benghazi that Chris had used when he first arrived. It was considered an embassy office. It wasn't a consulate, it had no real standing. And the question was, should we keep it, or should we not keep it? What would it take to keep it? And we had decided and told Pat Kennedy, who was the under secretary for management, that we would come to him in October-November with our plan as to what we thought the best use of that building should be, should we keep it, should we not keep it? If we kept it, what would we do with it? I mean, we're just starting. We hadn't even had a discussion with Chris Stevens about it. We said we would have a discussion about it later in September which is what our plan was.

But the other issue was, there had been a military contingent and a security contingent in Tripoli and in Benghazi that had been supporting the embassy in security terms that the Diplomatic Security in the military wanted to withdraw. Chris wasn't happy that they were being withdrawn, but there didn't seem to be much justification to keep them. There were a couple of security incidents that had occurred with other ambassadors in other embassies—I've forgotten who they were—but the German ambassador was held up one time, or one of them was shot at, but nothing happened. And so it was one of those things that Chris tried to fight, we tried to fight and we just didn't win. We just didn't win the fight over keeping that security.

Q: Libyan security forces we contracted?

JONES: No, these were Americans. This was American security. This was American military and DS security teams that had been with him when he went in.

So that was, as I recall, in August of that year. So then on September 11, 2012, this is, in the early, mid day, I was hearing from the chargé in Embassy Cairo. And we were hearing it from the station that there was a demonstration outside the embassy in Cairo because of Pastor Jones in Florida having burned a Koran or saying he was going to burn a Koran. I don't know if it had already happened. And the embassy was having a terrible time getting Egyptian security to come protect them. And the demonstrators had ladders and were climbing the walls over the embassy. They were setting fire to the walls, et cetera. There was a new Egyptian ambassador in Washington who was, I think, a professor, he had not been a diplomat before. He wasn't really so plugged into the government in Cairo, but I called him right away. Anne Patterson was on consultations or on leave in Washington, so she was not at the embassy, but she was in the State Department. So I got hold of her and said, "Who can you call in the foreign ministry or in the interior ministry to get them to get the police over there?" And so I called the ambassador for that, Anne Patterson calling her contacts. I was in touch with the CIA, my counterpart there to say, "Can you get your guys to call their pals in the military and security and the security services to get help." And the problem was, and I could see it almost immediately, that the police and the security services had basically been disbanded, almost, by Morsi because of course the security services—and we saw this throughout the countries where the Arab Spring took place and a new leadership took over—the security services had always worked in support of the regime, not in support of the people. So they were considered suspect by the incoming administrations. And this happened in Tunisia. It happened in Egypt. It happened in a couple of other places. It happened in Yemen.

So, the police who came were ineffectual. They didn't know what to do. They were just cops on the beat. They didn't stop anybody. So this is going on all afternoon where, you know, we're all trying to call people. I'm trying to brief the seventh floor and the NSC over what's happening. The demonstrators have not been able to get into the embassy at all. They're in the compound, they're in the garden of the embassy in Cairo, but they haven't gotten any further, but of course, this is all over the news. Then at about five o'clock, I get a call through the Op center from the DCM in Tripoli saying, "We're just getting a report. Chris Stevens has just called me and said that they're under attack in Benghazi."

Now I knew Chris had gone to Benghazi. He and I talked about it. He wanted to be there for a presentation, an event that was being organized with several hospitals in Benghazi with American doctors who had come to participate and to give donations of various kinds and to form a hospital partnership with these hospitals. And he'd gone there for that, for that purpose. So his DCM called me and said "Chris just called me to tell me this was going on." I said, "Well, get him on the phone and find out if he is safe! What's the deal? What's going on there?" And I let people know that, okay, not only did we have the attack in Cairo, we have an attack on the compound in Benghazi where Chris Stevens is. And the DCM called me back and said, "I can't reach him. He's not answering his phone." And I said, "Okay, keep trying," at which point I called my CIA counterpart again on secure and said, "This is what I'm hearing. What are you hearing?" He said, "Yes, we're just now getting this, we're hearing the same thing." So I get the Libya team together and talk to them about, "Okay, who do you all know in Benghazi? Who can help us figure out what's going on there? Who can you call among the diplomats there? Do you know any of the FSNs there, the LES [local employee] staff, the former LES staff that you might

be able to reach to say, 'Can you go find out what's going on? What is going on? We can't reach the ambassador in the compound in Benghazi.'

Q: And this is around 6:00 pm our time?

JONES: It started at five. So by the time I get this, about 6:00 pm our time.

Q: Okay. And you had just talked to your counterpart in the CIA, is that what you said? Yes?

JONES: Yes. Yeah. Talked to my counterpart in the CIA, who said he was hearing the same thing. And I said, "Can you find out from your guys what's going on there?" I knew that they had an ancillary office up there. I didn't know where it was, to be honest. And he said, "Okay, I'll check with them and see what's going on."

Q: And then the embassy in Tunisia was also being attacked that day.

JONES: Not yet. No. That was later. That was the next weekend or the next day. It was within a couple of days but that had not happened yet. Okay. Yeah. So throughout all this, I was also briefing upstairs by email. I had sort of an email chain that I just kept typing into, or Liz Dibble did, cause I wanted to keep a regular briefing to everybody who needed to know in the NSC on the seventh floor as to what I was hearing was going on. But I was also talking to Pat Kennedy about you know, "We don't have eyes up there. We don't know what's going on. What do you think about calling the military, getting our military assets to help us out," which he started on right away, calling the military command center and he said, "Okay, well, they can call up—it's not really an AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System], but it's like an AWACS kind of thing that they could fly over and see what was going on." And he said, "They'll have it up immediately." And so I called fifteen minutes later and said, "Well, is it up?" Well, long story short, it turns out immediate means that starts the three hour notification point. And then, once the three hours is up, then it's immediate. So we did not have eyes up there until about ten o'clock at night, ten or eleven. And at that point we still hadn't heard from Chris. We could not reach him. We knew there was a fire there. We did not know where he was. We were starting to hear right about that time that the communicator had been found dead, probably from smoke inhalation, that the security, the DS [Diplomatic Security] officers who were with Chris and the communicator, had all left. They had been able to get out of the compound up on the roof and had been able to leave when the people who were over in the CIA annex came over to pick them up at whatever time it was. And I don't remember the times now, but that was basically the sequence.

Q: The DS people would have been like the routine bodyguards from DS?

JONES: Yes. yes. They were the DS team. There were five of them, I think.

Q: They would have come with him from Tripoli?

JONES: Yeah. Yes. They did. They were all first tour. They had not been there very long. They'd been there a few weeks is all.

Q: They all just arrived? Because he had just arrived in June or July.

JONES: They arrived just a couple of weeks before. So they were new. They were really, really new. They hadn't even come with him. They'd come much later than that. And they were first tour. They'd never been overseas before. They'd never served in overseas capacity before. In the meantime, the country director for Libya had gotten hold of a Libyan retired general officer who had been a good contact of his when he was in Libya and Chris's and asked him to find out what was going on because we still didn't know what had happened to Chris. In the meantime, the DCM had gotten a call from Chris's cell phone from someone who was not Chris to say, "We know where Chris is, he's fine. He's alive, he's in X hospital," something like that. And so we thought, okay, well, that's a good thing anyway. And in the meantime, Bill Roebuck, the country director had gotten hold of this retired general officer and told him what we knew so far and asked if he could do anything at all with his contacts to find out, number one, what was going on? And could he find Chris? And we told him we'd had this word that he was at whatever hospital it was. And he called back and said, "I'd been over to the hospital. It's full of the people who are injured, who attacked Chris or attacked the compound. So it's unsafe for me to go in there." He said, "But I'm calling my friends to see if there's anything that can tell us." And he called back maybe an hour later to say, "I've talked to my contacts, they've talked to the doctors, Chris is there and he did not survive." At that point we didn't know what had happened to him. But we were starting to get reports of this photograph of Chris being carried out of the compound by Libyans who later claimed that they had been taken to the hospital. In the meantime, this plane that was supposedly overhead wasn't doing anything. And it turned out that it needed to be refueled. So it had gone away to be refueled and still wasn't telling us anything.

And then in the meantime, there had been an attack on the CIA compound not long after they had gotten there with the DS people they evacuated from the State Department compound. And the rockets that were aimed at the CIA compound had killed two of the Americans and had seriously injured two more. So we needed to get all of them out. So in the meantime, we had—again, all this time, Pat Kennedy had been trying to figure out if he could get a plane in from Incirlik or from whatever it—I've forgotten the name of the base in Italy—or could one come even from Spain to get to Benghazi, to evacuate everybody or to help or do something.

And in the meantime, I found out that the agency had a plane in Tripoli. We had asked for that plane to go immediately up there. Oh, sorry. In the meantime, the Libyans had said they were going to send a plane up and we said, "Okay, good. That's great. The Libyans are going to send a plane up. At least we can get people out of there." This was before we knew what had happened to Chris. And then nothing happened, nothing happened, nothing happened. And then he said, "Oh, we don't have a crew." So we got the CIA plane to go up there. And now the problem with the CIA plane was that it was very small and it could only take X number of passengers. It probably couldn't take everybody. Now I actually can't remember if we actually just crammed everybody in, or I think in the end it made two trips.

What we did is we had the two very badly injured and a couple of others go out the first time. And then when they came back by then we had been able to get help from the Libyan retired general to have his friends help us have Chris removed from the hospital and escorted to the airport so that he could be on the plane. And in the meantime, the communicator and the other

two that had been killed, were also put on the plane. And in the end by, I don't know, three in the morning or so, three in the morning, my time, they were all back in, they were all in Tripoli. Now the two who were very badly injured were treated immediately at the airport by Libyan doctors who were there. They were in a nearby hospital and the Libyan doctors basically saved both of their lives. But one of the people who really saved the life of one of them who was losing a tremendous amount of blood was the consular officer. This person had whatever the rarest blood type is—I'm not going to get it right—maybe O. She had that blood type and she went out to the airport and gave blood to save his life.

It was really—oh, it is still hard to talk about. In the meantime, of course, we had to call the family of the communicator who was on TDY[temporary duty travel] from Denmark. And Liz Dibble did that. She found the DCM or chargé and explained to him what had happened. And he talked to the widow about what happened. I, with the help of the embassy in Tripoli, found I had the phone numbers of Chris's parents in California, and eventually got the phone number of his sister. I called his parents and they weren't home and learned that they were on a trip in Europe; separately there. They were both divorced, but I reached his sister, who's a pediatrician in California and San Francisco and my first call to her was, "I have to tell you that there's been an attack on the compound. We can't find Chris." I did reach her before we knew anything about what had happened. And I explained to her all the things that were going on in terms of our trying to locate him, you know, the planes we had trying to go in, the overhead flight that we had trying to help us see what was going on. But then a couple of hours later, I had to call her to say that we had found him and that the news was terrible. And at that point, of course as soon as we knew what had happened, I called—I didn't do this by email, this time—I called the secretary through the Op center to tell her, and I talked to the NSC as well.

Q: This was in the middle of the night on the 12th?

JONES: Yeah, this is three in the morning. I don't remember what time it was actually, but it was all night. I mean, I ended up spending the night in my office. I went to sleep for a couple of hours on my couch, but also in the meantime, as this was unfolding, before we knew very much about what had happened, Liz Dibble and I called INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] and said, "We're hearing about this group. There seems to be something about this group that has taken responsibility for this attack. What do you know about them?" And INR came to us in about half an hour, forty-five minutes and said, "We don't have very much at all. We hear a little bit about it, but we don't know that they're active in Libya. We've seen them active more in the Levant but not so much in Libya, but we'll keep looking." So we didn't have very much at all to go on as to who these people were, who might've done this. At the time, of course, I was in touch with the CIA who was in touch with the station this whole time as to what they thought had happened. And then we still didn't know very much the next morning as everybody came back to work and I—luckily in my office, I had a shower—so I was able to take a shower and freshen up a little bit. But right away, I had a call from the NSC saying, "President Obama is coming to the State Department to pay condolences to you and your staff. You guys organize it."

And so I talked to Pat Kennedy and the secretary's office, and had the Libya team—the people had been up all night—Liz Dibble, all of those, in the front row of the event. The entire State Department was there, of course. And President Obama came with Tom Donilon, who was the

national security advisor and several other people to pay condolences. And the president went over to each of the people. I was asked to introduce him to my team, which I did, and he went over and shook everybody's hand and thanked them. And told them [breaks up a little] what a great job they'd done and how sorry he was.

Q: And then I remember there was also at the airport, a private ceremony when the plane came back?

JONES: Yes, that was a couple of days later. In the meantime, his parents had come back from California. They did not come to the ceremony. And I do not think his sister came to the ceremony at that point. But we had—Bill Burns flew out to Tripoli to escort the bodies back. And we had a big ceremony at Andrews to receive the caskets with Secretary Clinton and the president. And I think Secretary Panetta, I think he was there as well, because of the military aspect of it. I'm not sure about that anymore, but I particularly remember Secretary Clinton and President Obama being there. We had done our best to invite as many people to this ceremony as we knew had a Libya connection or a connection with Chris Stevens and with the others who had been killed. And one of the things we found is that there were quite a number of people who told us that they were Chris's girlfriend. Which was probably true.

Q: Okay.

JONES: In any case, that was just one of the things that can happen.

Q: So—

JONES: So that was all extremely sad and very difficult, but in the meantime—so this happened during the week, like a Wednesday night to Thursday, something like that, or a Tuesday night to Wednesday. And, the question was, why had this happened? Why had there been this attack? And there was a report from the intelligence side of the government that there had been a demonstration formed in Tripoli because of Pastor Jones and that they were doing this because of that. I believed, and the embassy believed, and the station believed that—because it was kind of a cryptic message—that they hadn't heard right. That whoever they were listening to hadn't been talking about doing something in Benghazi. They'd been talking about the attack on the embassy in Cairo.

Q: It was garbled? That what they listened to wasn't explicit about where the attack was, but the way they talked about it and the timing was that they were hearing news reports about the Egyptian demonstration at the embassy in Cairo, and that they weren't actually planning anything in Benghazi in terms of a big demonstration? But nevertheless, they said that this had been a news report, or had this been an intel report?

JONES: Intel report. And that was hard to understand. It wasn't all that clear, but became a belief, a firmly held belief among the analyst side, that there had been a big demonstration at the Benghazi office. From what we heard from the guards who left as soon as anything happened—the Libyan guards of the compound—was that a group of people came rolling up in like two cars with lots of weapons and started firing. That it wasn't a big demonstration. It was an attack. And

the Libyan guards all left and they took the compound, and started firing there. And the local guards all left.

But the problem with this discrepancy—let me back up. So there was this report then—it was sort of an analysis—that there had been a big demonstration. Embassy Tripoli and the station both sent separate reports saying, “No, no, no, that is not what happened. From everything we know, it was a specific attack that was not related to the attack in Cairo. It was not related to the pastor. It could have been, but there's nothing that says that. But it was an attack that was maybe spontaneous, maybe planned, we don't know. And that's what happened.”

So there were a lot of deputies committee meetings and principals committee meetings that I was part of. And there was a very firm view held in spite of—and they specifically said, “We are going to wait to see what the station chief says. We're going to wait to see what Embassy Tripoli says.” Both of them came in saying, “That's not what happened. It wasn't a demonstration.” And the senior intelligence people said, “We're sorry, we're going with our guy that says it was a demonstration.”

Q: Who did—who said that?

JONES: The senior intel people. Even though they had the report from the station chief, they had the report from the embassy that said, “This is what happened.” Unfortunately, this was before we had access to the video at the gate. This decision was made like on a Friday that, “No, no, no. We're going to stick with the analysis of our analysts, not of the people on the scene.” Which was, to my mind, a travesty. But the result of that was that there were talking points that were drafted, as we know, by the intel community that were wrong. And what I didn't know, even as acting assistant secretary, was that anybody had been asked to go on those talk shows on Sunday morning. And Susan Rice [U.S. ambassador to the UN] was given the wrong talking points. And nobody asked me to look at them. Nobody asked anybody in NEA to look at them. On Monday, I talked to my desk and my public affairs people, “Did anybody call you?” Nope. And on Tuesday, we got the videos and we saw that it wasn't a demonstration. It was an attack. And because of that mix up, the whole story started about, you know, we're covering it up or whitewashing. I can't remember even all the complaints that were made about all of this, you know, how could this happen, et cetera, et cetera. And because Susan Rice, unfortunately, was given the wrong talking points, she's never been able to live it down.

Q: Right. And it became very politically charged because there was a presidential election going on. It was awful.

JONES: So the election is going on, and the other thing is that Hillary Clinton couldn't defend herself because as the heat got bad on Benghazi, that was just as she fell and had a bad concussion. She couldn't read, she couldn't see. She was seeing double. She couldn't be out of a dark room. So she couldn't do a hearing early on that, where she could have potentially defended herself and defended the State Department, defended us. And one of the reasons for this big delay was that they, of course, formed an accountability review board and ARB as totally appropriate. I was interviewed twice by the ARB. All the rest of us were interviewed about what had happened and what we did, et cetera, et cetera.

Q: Tom Pickering was the head of it, right?

JONES: Tom Pickering headed it with retired joint chiefs chairman Admiral Michael Mullen who was very stern in kind of an odd way. Anyway, what the ARB said was that Chris should have known not to go to Benghazi. And then there was ‘blame the victim,’ which was wrong—as we know, there was no intel at all saying that there was going to be any kind of attack or that there was any group up there that was going to plan on doing him harm. There was a last minute issue. His team, his security team, at the last minute that Wednesday night or whatever night it was—he was supposed to have dinner with a Turkish ambassador who was also up there. And at the last minute they said, “You know, we're hearing a lot of stuff around town. It seems a little bit unsettled. Why don't you just stay in tonight and not go out?” So they did try to protect him, but in the end, that meant he was in the compound when the attack happened. It was just, you know, a bad circumstance. It could not have been anticipated.

But the thing that was impossible for us to understand is how all of the security, the DS people, got out safely, no scratches and their two protectees were dead. And what the ARB reported is that they went to the room—they put Chris and the communicator in the safe room in the house, the one that had been designated. And when the attackers set fire to the house, they went to get them—one went to get them, I don't know where the others were—and just said, “Get on your hands and knees and follow me,” without actually grabbing them by the belt and making sure they followed. And the DS agent who did this said he got to the roof and they weren't there. And the only person he could find was the communicator whom he found dead. And it was too smoky. He couldn't go in and find Chris. So you know, all the security people got out fine. The communicator did not. The ARB talked about them being heroes. And it's hard to explain.

Q: Right. The ARB focused on this issue that we kind of get used to signs of violence and then don't react. Like you are just sort of in the water as the temperature is rising. They talked about how the Department as a whole should have been more careful. So I think I remember reading it, seeing them trying not to blame the victim, but therefore blaming everybody else in the Department is the way I read it at the time. It's a long time ago.

JONES: I mean, right. But they said Chris should have known not to go. We did not tell him not to go. But, you know, like I say, we discussed it. I discussed it with him at the time, and we agreed that it was okay to go. That there were no specific threats. And one of the things that the ARB does not say, I don't think, is that all of us in the Foreign Service know that it's risky, the work we do. We know how to mitigate that risk. We know how to manage that risk, and we do the best we can at all times. And that's what Chris did, you know, he took advice. He didn't go to dinner at the Turkish ambassador's that night, for instance.

Q: And the issue that there had been teams, both in Benghazi and Tripoli, that had been a higher caliber of security that had been pulled out—that was not mentioned either?

JONES: Actually, it might have been, I can't remember. Because that was a decision that was blamed on Washington. Right. I mean, rightly so, because they were the ones. Chris wanted to keep them. I don't remember how that's dealt with in the ARB actually. But when the ARB came out—it didn't come out until after I got back from Marrakesh and then the Gulf, Oman, London,

and then it came out—because I remember coming back from that trip. And as I got on the shuttle bus in Dulles, I had a message to call Secretary Clinton's chief of staff, Cheryl Mills. And I couldn't reach her. And I got back to the Department, it was late afternoon. And Liz Dibble said, "I know what she wanted to talk to you about. The secretary is accepting all the recommendations in the ARB, including that the DAS responsible for Libya be removed."

Q: And that was Liz or somebody else?

JONES: No, that was someone else. I'm trying to think of his name now. He had been ready to retire; he was going to retire at the end of the week that Chris was killed. And he came to me and he said, "I think I should stay on. There's too much work to do. Why don't I stay?" And I said, "Okay, if you would like to, but we can handle it." And he said, "No, no, I'll stay." And that turned out to be a mistake. I mean that neither he, nor I could anticipate, but—

Q: But it wasn't fair. Right? I mean, there wasn't anything that anybody had done that had been wrong except for—

JONES: No. That was a travesty. It was a terrible thing. At first I was told I just had to remove him from the job. And then later, I said, "You cannot take a security clearance away. You know, it's not warranted. You can't take his Department pass away, it's not warranted." And I spoke to him about it to say, "We'll come up with good work for you to do until your retirement does come, but this might be the time to do that." Which is what he did. And, he wasn't the only one. There was the head of Diplomatic Security.

Q: That wasn't—that wasn't Greg Starr, right?

JONES: No, it was his predecessor.

Q: So what do we know now, or what did you find out later about the group who attacked and why they attacked?

JONES: I don't think we ever knew why they attacked other than it was known as the American compound. It was not clear that they knew that Chris was there. It was not clear that they even knew—when whoever carried him out—knew who he was. And we never found out for sure very much about what the plan was. Was there a plan? But it was a group that was infiltrating into North Africa from the Syria war zones and they were starting to form groups all through North Africa because they discovered that it was very easy to move weapons back and forth across all of these completely unguarded borders. And you'll remember that a couple of months later, there was a very serious attack on a western energy company camp in Algeria, right on the Tunisian border that was done by a similar kind of group. And that was one of the manifestations of this infiltration of all of these groups, of these militant groups across all the borders of North Africa.

Q: So Qaddafi had left caches of weapons in the desert was the story in the papers.

JONES: It was unclear how much he left. But they didn't need to have caches of weapons there. They could bring them in easily. They could get across all kinds of borders, because I mean, there was plenty in the Sinai, from the Sinai you could cross into Egypt, from Egypt you could cross into Libya. From Libya you could cross into Tunisia. From Tunisia you could cross into Algeria. No problem.

Q: So the best possible explanation is just that they were trying to destabilize the government of Libya by attacking?

JONES: And there wasn't much of a government at that point. I mean, it was opportunistic. I think that's the best way to put it. It was, you know, "Let's create chaos. Let's see how much we can take over for our group in terms of installations or territory," or whatever it was. But the other thing that happened at the same time that night, the night that Chris was killed, we also got a report. This was on a news station that a different group was prepared to attack the embassy in Tripoli. So as all this was happening with trying to find Chris, I was in touch with the DCM in Tripoli to say, "You got to move. We've got to move people out." And people were living in the compound where the embassy was; we had to move them all over to the agency's compound that night.

Q: That very night? The 11th, 12th of September? So that was Greg Hicks, right?

JONES: That was Greg Hicks. That's right. So at that point he was chargé.

Q: Sorry, this is the first time I heard about this part. So, this was the night after, or this was the same night?

JONES: The same night. So, at the same time we were still looking for Chris, Greg Hicks had to turn around and was talking to the agency as well to say, "We've got to move them out. Where should we go?" And the agency said, "They can all come over here." So we did that and then we reduced staff. I can't remember if we had dependents there—no, we couldn't have had dependents there then. That's crazy. We didn't have dependents. But we had to reduce staff and then eventually we went back into our buildings, but nobody lived there at that point.

Q: There was a task force that was set up for several days in the State Department, around the clock, for all these events. At some point Tunisia happened, I know more about the Tunisia event.

JONES: So I have to look. Yeah, so then very quickly—maybe it was that weekend, maybe. It seems to me it was a Friday and a Saturday and a Sunday. The embassy in Tunisia was attacked. Those were big demonstrations, but they were violent demonstrations. They first attacked the school that was across the street from the embassy, and I believe burned that. At the same time, the ambassador, Jake Waller, called the security people and said, "You've got to help us. You have got to help us." And again, it was the same kind of situation. The security people didn't really know what to do. They weren't very well-trained. The security people that had been there had all been fired by the new government. And the mob turned on the embassy and attacked it. The embassy had all it could do to keep itself from being burned and entered. They just about got in. The attackers were able to crack some of the ballistic glass at the embassy. I think they started

a fire, but they were able to douse the flames pretty quickly. But in the meantime, before they got too far—it went on for several hours. Before they got too far, I believe it was a military unit who finally came and forced the attackers back.

Q: And then we drew down the embassy in Tunisia pretty quickly.

JONES: We drew down the embassy completely, well not completely, but substantially. But at the same time that the attack on Embassy Tunis was going on, the embassy in Yemen was being attacked as well with the same kind of thing. Big demonstration, a mob was able to break through the gates of the compound, the embassy compound—they got close. They got to the embassy, but they weren't able to get in. But still again, they had to get the military for help to get them out.

Q: Still because of Jones burning—or talking about burning—the Koran?

JONES: Yeah. This wasn't the first time he'd done this. He had done this several times before. We had already dealt with this in Afghanistan several times with demonstrations there because of Koran burnings in the U.S. Quite a number of U.S. media outlets said, “We're not going to give him any more air time, when we see the kinds of things that can happen to our embassies,” but that resulted in a big drawdown in Embassy Tunis, a big drawdown in Embassy Sanaa. A lot of discussion about where could people live? How was it all going to work? What about the setbacks? It was a very, very, very, very difficult time.

Q: And in Cairo, they decided not to do a draw down.

JONES: Well, we did a bit of a reduction in staff. We said, “There's just too many people there.” And so we did do a bit of a drawdown. I don't think we forced families to go from Cairo. There were families in Tunis. They left because the school was burned in Yemen. I don't think we had families. We had adult dependents only, I think, but in Cairo, I was able to talk the NSC and DS into letting us keep the kids there for school principally, because the school was so far out of town and it was down in Mati. So it wasn't likely to be in the center of any bad demonstrations, et cetera.

Q: And did we go back to Sanaa? Or did we close at that point?

JONES: No, we didn't close it. It never closed. We kept it open. There was a lot of discussion about what kind of staff to keep and who did we need to keep, because that was when they were doing all the negotiating about an interim government and, you know, that was another issue. I'd totally forgotten about this. One of the big discussions that we had, especially with the Italians and some of the others, is what to do about the Yemeni president who should leave, who finally did.

Q: This was going on in 2012 as well?

JONES: Yes. Yes, it was.

Q: Well, I would propose that we pause here and we pick up next time with Yemen and anything else that you want to talk about in 2012.

JONES: Great. I'll go through all my notes again and make sure I haven't forgotten any of the stories from 2012.

Q: Good morning. It is December 14, 2020, and we're continuing our very interesting conversation with Beth Jones. But as we did some talking last time about the attacks in September 2012, I probably was confused a little bit on the timing of the different attacks. So did you want to start with the September attacks?

JONES: Yes. We talked about the attack in Benghazi. That was obviously on September 11. Then the embassy in Tunis was attacked and the embassy in Sanaa was attacked. Those attacks took place on September 13 and 14. Sanaa was the 13th and Tunis was the 14th, as nearly as I can find in the record. Both of those attacks were follow-up to the other attacks. These weren't the only attacks that were going on. There were attacks in South Asia, as well as in Africa because of the burning of the Koran in the United States by this Pastor Jones.

Q: And that was in Florida, right?

JONES: In Florida. That's right. That was roundly condemned by Secretary Clinton at the time. Eventually, not right away, but eventually most journalists agreed not to publish the kinds of antics that he undertook because it was so dangerous for American embassies and American businesses overseas. Not just embassies.

Q: So there probably were all kinds of attacks going on in the Muslim world at that time. But the attacks on embassies are particularly notable and had a lot of implications.

JONES: There were. They were particularly dangerous and they had huge implications because the Obama administration was very, very concerned about what had happened to Ambassador Chris Stevens and the three other Americans who were killed with him in Benghazi and wanted no further deaths of American diplomats on their watch. The implications of that were that it was very, very difficult once we drew down the embassies in Tunis and in Sanaa—which we did—it was very, very difficult to get people back that we needed to have back in order to do the work there.

And it was also quite a struggle anytime there was any possible threat to any embassy in my bureau in the Middle East. It was very difficult to persuade people at the White House—not so much the seventh floor State Department leadership as they understood what we do and why we need to be there—to allow us to keep people. To allow us to keep diplomats there in order to continue to do the work that we needed to do, including to advocate why this crazy guy in Florida was not typical of the United States and we were not an anti-Islamic country by any means. We wanted very much to keep our staffs there so that we could continue the work that we needed to do on the whole range of programs that we had underway.

I wanted to talk a little bit more about Yemen because that was one of the big issues that I dealt with in NEA. At the beginning of the Arab Spring, there was sentiment in Yemen including on the streets that the leader of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was on the way out. There was a consensus among the leadership. There was even a consensus among his cohort, his allies and supporters, that it would be a better thing to go to—not necessarily a more democratic government, that's going too far—but to a government that would be more attuned to the needs of the country. A government that would be more prepared to help the people of Yemen in the kinds of things that they needed, such as a better life, more jobs, healthcare, and housing. The vice president, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, took office on February 27, 2012.

Q: So I think Americans don't know quite as much about Yemen as they do about these other countries we have been talking about. Yemen at one point had been two countries and they had been in some way—but that had been some time in the past, right?

JONES: It had been some time in the past. There was Yemen itself, and then there was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. We called it PDRY, the short version. And through the years, the radical nature of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen faded away and the two countries seemed to have a lot more in common. They agreed to reunite to something that would be of greater interest and greater support to the people of Yemen, to the integrity of the country and to its independence, because it was always considered and considered itself an acolyte to Saudi Arabia. Although at one point, it had been an acolyte to Egypt and been overrun by the Egyptians.

Q: On the day of the attack on the embassy in Yemen, was it the same situation as in the others that the police and the military were not prepared to protect people?

JONES: That's right. They were unable. They had bad leadership. They didn't have the capacity to do the protecting of the embassy the way it needed to be done. And as I mentioned before, my theory was that the newer Arab Spring leadership was not prepared to order the police—they didn't have police leadership or military leadership that was capable of doing the kind of protecting that needed to be done. This was partly because they were so used to having the police be in support of the regime, that the idea that it would support the common people—i.e. American diplomats and the hundreds of Yemeni staff in the embassy—was something that they couldn't do. They didn't know how to do.

Q: Do you remember who was leading our embassy at the time?

JONES: It was Gerry Feierstein. He was the U.S. ambassador at the time. Jake Wallis was the American ambassador in Tunis, and both of them did a really excellent job of keeping people safe, making good, quick decisions, and being in touch with any part of the security services—in Tunis for Jake Wallis and Gerry Feierstein in Sanaa—that could give the help that they needed. Eventually Ambassador Wallis was able to get the Tunisian military to help. And that was what finally pushed the demonstrators away from the embassy in Tunis and got the firetrucks there to put out the fires. The same thing happened in Yemen finally, but it was after the mob had been able to break through a rather substantial series of sets of metal gates. So they got very close to the embassy itself. Both of these embassies were what we call Inman embassies. They were built

to very strict security standards, which is what saved everybody in both embassies, because they had extremely thick glass that withstood the kinds of weapon attacks that the mobs used. But when I later visited and they showed me all the damage, they said that it was really just minutes away from those structures actually failing.

Q: In both countries?

JONES: In both cases. Because these buildings can withstand a tremendous amount, a huge assault, but they can't withstand it forever. And it got pretty close, which of course they didn't know at the time. They just knew they were in severe danger in any case.

Q: And in those cases, these people that were demonstrating and attacking, they were not anti-government. So it wasn't the same situation as we think happened in Libya, where they were trying to show the government as being feckless or whatever?

JONES: In Libya, it's hard to know if they were trying to show the government to be feckless. They were just acting because they could. I'm not sure that they had that ulterior goal. They just were a group that wanted to demonstrate its power and you become more powerful—if you're a group like that—the more you can show success. It's a huge recruitment tool to be successful like that. That, I think, was the operative goal in Benghazi, whereas in Tunis and in Sanaa, I believe it was much more instant outrage over the burning of the Koran. Maybe it was used by people who had ulterior motives, but that was much more of a genuine mob attack, an emotional reaction to the Koran burnings.

Q: Was anybody hurt in Sanaa?

JONES: In Sanaa, I can't remember. I believe several of the demonstrators were killed in the end as the military finally was able to push back the demonstrators. In Tunis, I believe the military in the end killed four of the demonstrators. I think four of them were killed. Several were injured.

Q: And our people were safe.

JONES: That's right, none of ours were injured or killed.

Q: Did we close the embassy in Sanaa after that?

JONES: No, we kept both embassies open. We reduced staff in both places. There were a tremendous number of other agencies there, especially in Tunis because it was considered such an easy place to live. It had easy connections to other countries. So for example, we had an office there that was responsible for maintaining the American military cemeteries in North Africa from the Second World War. So we closed that office, for instance, and other regional offices in Tunis. We moved them elsewhere, some to Jordan, some to Frankfurt. And we told other agencies that they needed to reduce their staffing in these embassies.

And in Sanaa of course we didn't have regional people there, but we had a very large USAID mission there. This was because we were doing so much work on the election planning and

support for the government on demonstrating how one does the kind of political support for election planning, for generating support among the population through education programs—genuine education, not education about the election—health support, job creation, job training, all those kinds of things. So we had to make some really difficult choices about reducing staff there because of severe pressure from the White House about reducing staff. I spent a tremendous amount of my time working with Gerry Feierstein, the ambassador in Yemen, and his team on explaining exactly who was doing what and why each person needed to stay, so that I could make a really strong case for every single person that we wanted to keep on the list of those to stay.

It was not only USAID. It was the U.S. military also. We had a big U.S. military training program, as you can imagine, because we were working to train the Yemeni military so that they could be more in support of the population rather than the regime and so that they could secure their borders, and the kinds of things that a military in support of its citizenry would normally do. I spent a tremendous amount of time with the Diplomatic Security Bureau first to get their support for each of the people that we wanted to have stay. And with my seventh floor—with the under secretary for political affairs, with the under secretary for management. The under secretary of political affairs was Wendy Sherman, who was our senior advocate for the regional bureaus. She was our go-to person.

On the management side, it was Pat Kennedy, who was the go-to person for Diplomatic Security and for all of the management issues that were obtained because we needed to pull people out. In Sanaa in any case, we had to pull people out of their individual residences, because we were concerned about the safety of people moving back and forth between home and embassy and wanted to put them in one place. That was another extremely long, extremely difficult negotiation. We found a building that was suitable that was very close to the embassy, which was already occupied by some members of the embassy staff. And we wanted to use as much of that building as we could. But because of setback issues and blast issues with glass, we had to have everybody on an inside corridor, which meant that there weren't that many rooms available. In the meantime, because of the requirements of the White House, we had moved everybody into the embassy itself. So I worked with them every day to figure out, okay, which bathrooms were the women's bathrooms, which bathrooms were the men's bathrooms? Who would be living in whose offices? And how would it all be divided up? And how would they assure security/safety for people who were sleeping next door to each other.

Q: Families were gone?

JONES: Families were gone. Families were all gone.

Q: I may be wrong. This is just from my impression from Iraq the next year. But my sense was that the White House says they only want so many people there, so that if something goes down, we can get them all out in a certain number of planes or helicopters or whatever. So they talk a lot about the "footprint."

JONES: That's right. That's right. They would give me a number, just a number out of the clear blue sky. I shouldn't say that it was out of the clear blue sky. It was that it was the number of

people who could fit on whatever the evacuation plane was that the military said it was going to use. Basically, that was it. And so I had to work within that number. But I also needed to do things like account for people changing places with each other so that somebody could—let's say somebody needed medical care and needed to leave. I had to negotiate extremely hard to get permission, to get somebody in, to replace that person for the month that it took. It was really tough, really hard. I spent hundreds of hours in meetings and on the phone, trying to make sure that these embassies could continue to function.

Q: And you mentioned elections and also on the day of the attack, you mentioned the new government wasn't used to handling the security forces. Had the elections already happened?

JONES: Yes, they had already happened, I think. But the other thing that was going on at the time was the whole issue of the previous leader, Saleh, being prepared to leave Yemen. The population and even his family, agreed he should leave. But then the question was, where does he go? We had a tremendous number of discussions with our Arab colleagues, colleagues from Arab countries, and our European colleagues as to which country would take him under the circumstances that he wanted to go and not be jailed and have a place to live, et cetera.

Q: Okay, I just checked the dates. So there had been elections in February, 2012—although there was only one candidate—and Vice President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi became president on February 25. Saleh resigned that day. So, it still was a fairly new government during the attack.

JONES: That's right. That makes sense. Right. And the new president, Hadi, was actually a very good guy. It's coming back to me now. He was a good guy. He got it about what he needed to do, but he wasn't too good at constituent outreach, shall we say. He had a hard time getting his government to stay together and to be as cohesive as it needed to be in order to make some of these tough decisions on domestic policy. The previous president, Saleh—finally the Italians said they would take him and we negotiated the whole thing. You know, the European Union and other European countries were involved in this. The Saudis were certainly involved because they were helping us persuade him to leave, Saleh. But, in the end he refused to go.

Q: He refused to go?

JONES: Yeah. He just said no. I think at some point he was gone for a while, but he came back. But I will say that Gerry Feierstein, the ambassador there, did a very good job. There was a small group of ambassadors who worked with the government on all of these arrangements. So Gerry, with his colleagues, did a good job in persuading the elites there as to what the plan should be and how we should go forward both on Saleh leaving and on the kinds of programs that were needed in order to put some heft into the government. He worked with them to understand the kind of work that needed to be done in order for the government to be able to function, for there to be a parliament, for there to be decision-making in the parliament, for the ministries to function and make decisions about the kinds of things that needed to be done so that the assistance money could be spent.

That was part of the problem. We had the same problem in Libya. The government there was a set of nice people, but they had a very hard time making decisions, a really hard time making decisions. One of the themes that was common, I thought was common throughout, was fear of financial decisions. One of the reasons they all had a hard time making decisions was that anything that had to do with any kind of funding or a budget or whatever, is they were worried about being accused of corruption, of having taken money in order to agree that that was the program that they were going to use. And that this was the budget that was going to happen. It was going to be used for whatever the program was, the domestic problem that they needed to fund. And so in order not to be accused of corruption, they made no decisions.

Q: Well, it's not easy being a brand new government, all of a sudden, right?

JONES: That's right.

Q: After being led by a king or an autocrat for so long. So, did the attack on the U.S. embassy affect internal politics at all in Yemen?

JONES: I wouldn't say it did, no. I mean, they were very upset that it had happened. They said all the right things. They were helpful as much as they could be in terms of what we needed to repair the embassy and all that kind of thing. So that wasn't a difficulty.

Q: So in the aftermath, Yemen wasn't really that dangerous?

JONES: Well here was the problem. As the attack on the embassy happened and the government was ineffective, shall we say, unsure of itself? In the meantime, the Houthis in the north of Yemen were becoming more active. The question was, why were they becoming more active? And we knew enough about it from various sources that we knew that the Iranians were fomenting a lot of their activity, number one. Number two, Iran was shipping them weapons.

Q: Okay. So tell us about the Houthis.

JONES: So they're a different ethnic group, a different tribe, basically, based mostly in northern Yemen. They felt that they were not being given enough positions in the new government, that they were not being treated properly. And so they began putting pressure on the new government for that, which the new government resisted probably unwisely. But in any case, it complicated the work that we were trying to do in Yemen because of the Iranians' support for the Houthis and the weapons that the Iranians were trying to ship in by sea.

The Iranians were doing an awful lot of things at the time supporting the bad guys in Syria, supporting Assad. They were active in Iraq. They were active in Bahrain. So we were on the lookout for all the kinds of things that the Iranians were doing that were against our interests. And one of them was shipping weapons, to the point that we were able to actually find some of the ships and stop them en route. We made a public deal about it to demonstrate that they really were doing these things and that they needed to stop.

Q: So Iran falls in NEA's realm, so under your purview. Were there a lot of conversations or disagreements about policy toward Iran or tactics?

JONES: There were no disagreements about it. No. It was clear that the Revolutionary Guards in Iran were a very negative influence. It was clear that there were different factions in Iran and that there were some who potentially could make some connections with the West and others who were just sort of "unreconstructed" in terms of the kinds of things that they were doing all over the Middle East to try to basically take over. Nevermind that they were anti-U.S. They just wanted to control Bahrain. They wanted to control Yemen. They wanted to control Lebanon. I don't know that they thought they were going to get control of Syria, but they certainly were supporting Assad.

Q: So this was basically on ethnic grounds. These countries that you mentioned were more Shia than Sunni?

JONES: They were supporting the Shia. These countries weren't more Shia, but they were supporting the Shia in these countries. And Assad wasn't Shia. He was a different sect, but it was considered to be kind of like Shia. But the Alawi would never agree to that description. The irony of all of this is while we were having serious difficulty with Iran on the military side—on antagonism to Israel, on its developing nuclear weapons—at the same time there was a completely separate track to engage with the Iranians, to get them to close down their nuclear program. I was not involved in that. I didn't know about it. I didn't even guess about it until much, much later. Much, much, much later. But at this point I had no hint of it at all,

Q: It wasn't happening within the State Department or just at a much higher level?

JONES: It was happening within the State Department at a very high level. And there was zero hint about it. I think, honestly, for very good reason, for very, very good reason. I think they did it the right way. I mean, I would have loved to have known about it, but there was no way I could have been involved in a way that was sensible because I had so much else to do with so many other countries. I couldn't be off for days in wherever it was that they were negotiating these things. Yeah. And Bill Burns was involved in it. Toward the end, when the negotiating got very heavy duty, his office would say, "Well, you know, he's got a very sick mother. He's got to be gone for about a week." But, that was in 2013.

Q: [Laughter] Good cover. Okay. And so going back to Yemen, the Houthis were getting more active, they were getting arms from Iran. What else was happening in Yemen?

JONES: Lots was going on. And then the denouement of this story happened in 2013, I'm pretty sure. The Houthi moved down to Sanaa, to the capital, and basically took control of the capital and the elected leader had to move. He moved down to Aden. Now, in the meantime, there are a lot of groups operating in the Aden area, sort of southern Yemen bad groups, terrorist groups. There were drone attacks on them by the U.S. military that were successful in the sense that they got the bad guys. But there were also reports of collateral damage and civilians being killed and that kind of thing. So that became another quite difficult issue for us to manage on the political side, as to what we were really doing and why were we killing Yemenis?

Q: So it was a new government, parliamentary or whatever, a new presidential system and very weak. And the attacks of armed groups were sort of dooming the democratic process?

JONES: That's right. And you know, since then, it's gone from bad to worse. So as I was leaving NEA at the end of 2013, the situation in Yemen was almost—it was very hard to manage—and the new U.S. ambassador after Gerry Feierstein left couldn't go to Yemen because it was too dangerous. I think I remember bumping into Karen Sasahara in the State Department around that time. She was the DCM and she said their embassy was physically located in State. You know, the embassy had moved back to DC. Yes. Elizabeth Richard was the DCM with Gerry Feierstein and then Gerry left in the summer of 2013 and Elizabeth left at about the same time. They both came to NEA. Gerry Feierstein took Liz Dibble's place as PDAS when Liz went to Embassy London as the DCM and Elizabeth Richard took over the assistance programs in NEA for me.

Q: So support for Yemen, getting people in. And you were trying—

JONES: Yeah, it was really tough. We eventually did get people moved out of living on the floor of their embassy offices into this other building, but that was another extremely tough negotiation with the Diplomatic Security people, with the U.S. military, with other agencies, as to who got which room and who was going to stay there and who didn't need to be there. It was very, very, very, very difficult, I must say.

Q: And then during this time Congress was starting Benghazi hearings, is that right?

JONES: Yes. So at the end of 2012, in late November, is when the Accountability Review Board report was issued. That was very critical of the way the State Department and the administration had handled what happened and what led up to Benghazi happening. Not so much what happened that day in Benghazi, but what led up to it. In the meantime, Secretary Clinton had had the concussion as we talked about. So she was not able to appear for congressional hearings when they wanted her to. She did it much later. But there was hearing after hearing that various of my more senior colleagues had to go to. Bill Burns was one. Pat Kennedy was another as under secretary for management. The assistant secretary for Diplomatic Security—the man who had been head of Diplomatic Security who was relieved as a result of the ARB report—had to go. Liz Dibble and I were asked to be deposed by the congressional committee. We didn't actually have a public hearing, but we each spent a day or two. I can't remember. It was a very, very long time, eight hours, ten hours up on the Hill in a meeting with the committee staff. We were interrogated by the Republican side and the Democratic side.

Q: Was it joint, the House and Senate together?

JONES: No, it was not. I think it was only the Senate committee. In order to prepare for the hearing we asked, “Is there something we should know in legal terms about all of this?” And the State Department hired, under contract, a lawyer who had been on the Hill, but he came from Justice. I think he was terrific. I can't remember his name, but he ended up being appointed to a judgeship not long after he worked with Liz and me. We worked separately. There was no way legally we could work together on this because all of our testimony had to be our own testimony and not assisted by each other, that kind of thing.

But in the meantime we were also asked—the State Department was asked—for boxes and boxes and boxes of documents for all of this. And so I had a whole team to whom I delegated this project to look through the documents, to look through emails and other documents, to choose the ones that would go up to the Hill, which they did. And those are the ones that Liz and I separately reviewed to refresh our memories as to the kinds of email exchanges that we had. And it was those emails that the committee staff would read a part of it and say, “Did you write this?” And I said, “Well, you know, if it says it's from me, I wrote it.” I didn't say it at the time, but I mean, I wrote hundreds of emails a day, literally hundreds.

Q: Right. And sometimes in the heat of the moment, State Department folks just have to do stuff from home. But you didn't get caught up in that kind of complaint about working on private email, a big issue, at that time?

JONES: I did. I did. And it wasn't so much doing it from home. It was doing it when I was on the road. And so I would have a conversation in Benghazi, in Tripoli with a group of senior people or the prime minister or the defense minister or the justice minister or whatever, because we were trying to do an awful lot of things then too. And I was very careful to keep it as unclassified as I could. But when you're traveling, you don't have access to a classified computer twenty-four hours a day, and people in Washington are yelling at me for a report on the meeting. So I wrote a lot of emails. Now, when the whole issue happened with Hillary Clinton and the unclassified emails, there were a lot of us who were caught up in that.

And in the review of the emails, which happened much later after I left government, I think there were about a dozen of my emails which were then considered to have contained classified information. I was going to get security violations for them. They didn't pertain that much to Benghazi. There were maybe one or two on Benghazi. It was mostly about Syria. There were some about Syria, some about Iraq, as I remember. I was able to demonstrate that everything I reported on in an unclassified email had already been in a newspaper article. I was able to find newspaper articles that talked about, you know, whatever it was that I reported on. An example I remember in particular was the Iraqi oil minister who was being very difficult with the Kurds and had said something about the budget because there was a big fight with the Kurds about the budget and the portion of the budgets for the Kurdish areas. He was the oil minister as well. And so I reported on my conversation with him where he said the same thing that had already been in the newspapers. So, all of my emails in the end were considered to have been unclassified.

Q: Okay. So we'll move off of Yemen now. And I don't know if there's anything else you want to talk about on the hearings. I think you covered that. Do you want to talk more about Iran? About what was going on with Iran in 2012?

JONES: The work we were doing on Iran all had to do with what they were shipping, flying over Iraq to Syria, both in terms of men, military men, and materiel to support Assad. We had suspicions about what it was that they were sending over from various indicators. Each time we had that indication, we went back to the Iraqi government to say, “Do not give these guys flight clearance. Don't let them fly over Iraq because they are not bringing in humanitarian goods to Syria. They're bringing in goods to support your enemy, Assad.”

At first the Iraqis—this is Maliki. Then the Iraqis said, “No, no, no, it's all humanitarian.” We were able to demonstrate to him—I can't remember how we were able to demonstrate to him—that we knew it wasn't, and it wasn't humanitarian. We knew that he should also know the way it was being done or whatever it was. I can't, like I said, I can't remember what it was that he had every indication he needed in order to go to the Iranians and go to his own people and say, “Don't give them overflight clearance, just say no.” And so they said, “Okay, okay. Okay.” And then they never had the guts really to deny them overflight clearance now, but that was a constant battle. And, you know, every time I went to Iraq, I would talk to all of them—Maliki the defense minister, the opposition leaders, the foreign minister, all of these people, all of whom I knew from previous work—not so much from when I served there, because that was a little bit too long ago, but I knew them from my time as PDAS for the Near East Bureau when I was in charge of Iraq policy.

Q: All right. So then I don't know if this was in 2012 or 2013, but the transportation minister who would have been involved in that was actually very close to the Iranians. He had been a leader of one of the Shia Iranian-backed militias. The transportation minister. So it was a very delicate dance for Maliki.

JONES: So that could be. Yeah. That was the period you were there as well?

Q: Yeah, I was there August, 2013 to July. I was there to see ISIS taking over Mosul and a third of Iraq. So that was 2013/2014. So that's a little later than the period we're talking about today.

JONES: And the other thing that was going on with Iraq was, in a way, a domestic issue. A domestic U.S. issue. The MEK was a group of Shia Iranians who were anti the current Iranian government, who were in Iraq. They had been supportive of the Iraqis, but then fell out of favor with them. But in the meantime, they had curried favor in Washington.

Q: Including with Giuliani, right?

JONES: Including with Giuliani, including with John Bolton, including with a huge number of people who were constantly calling us at the State Department to explain that we needed to do better by the MEK. Now, in the meantime, the U.S. had declared that the MEK was a terrorist organization because they were undertaking terrorist acts in Europe, against Iranians in Iran, all over the place. But this group of advocates for the MEK—who were being paid very handsomely by the MEK whose leader was now based out of Paris—was constantly calling us. So we at the State Department had to do regular conference calls with this huge group of MEK adherents who were quite senior. That was my job. Bill Burns and Wendy Sherman said, “We're not doing that.”

Q: [Laughter] The MEK was very hated in Iraq. I mean, they were supposedly anti-Iranian, not anti-Iraqi, but they were truly hated anyway. Any time any defenses came down, they were attacked.

JONES: Yes. They were hated and feared because of the kind of terrorist work that they did. To the point that in the end—I think this is how it worked—The MEK came to the U.S. and said,

“We need safety. Our adherents aren't safe in Iraq. And we gave them a base or put them on a base called Camp Ashraf—I think it was called—just outside of Baghdad. So they set up their community there and they had their own guards. Somehow, the U.S. military was involved in protecting them, all because of the kind of pull that they had with the Congress in Washington.

Q: And then we had the military drawdown, right? In Iraq.

JONES: We had the drawdown and the U.S. said, "We're not going to protect you anymore." And we said, "You need to move your adherents out of Camp Ashraf. You can move them anywhere you like. We don't care where." The leader Maryam in Paris was adamantly opposed to their moving. She wanted to keep them at Ashraf. That's when we began to hear stories about just how awful it was for the MEK people living in the camps. First of all, married couples were separated. There was a men's side of the camp and a women's side of the camp. So people had lived there for a dozen years or more and had never seen their spouse in that whole time. There were really terrible stories of deprivations, of beatings, of just horrible living conditions because of the terror camp that it was thanks to this Maryam person in Paris who enforced it.

However, in the meantime, we, of course, went to the Europeans and to everybody we could think of to say, “Who will take these people? Can't somebody offer them a place to stay?” The Albanians came through. Finally, the Albanians came through and we negotiated very heavily with them as to what the conditions would be. Where would they live and how would they be kept safe? We wanted to try to break up the cult camp atmosphere there. At first, Maryam and company were very opposed. They didn't want them to move, et cetera, but we finally were able to prevail upon them that we were going to close the camp and they were going to have to leave. And if they didn't go to Albania, we were done with protecting them. We were able to make that stick. And they finally did move to Albania.

Q: Most of them.

JONES: Most of them did. Yeah. But then—and this is now moving into 2013 when John Kerry became Secretary of State. He decided he wanted to have a representative to the MEK in NEA and he had somebody I knew quite well, Jonathan Weiner, do that as a sort of a semi DAS level person who worked for me doing that. I knew him from the consulting company where we had both worked together. It was quite good for me because it meant that he was the one having to do all the conference calls [Laughter].

Q: And that was his full-time job?

JONES: That was. That was his full-time job, to be the MEK political manager for the building.

Q: They also, I think that, in those years, 2012-13 maybe, they camped out across the street from the State Department.

JONES: They did. They spent every—it was every Friday, there was just constant noise. And then at the UN at UNGA—the UN General Assembly—there was always a big MEK contingent yelling.

Q: How many people were in it? Do you remember how big this group was?

JONES: I do not remember how big the group was. I mean, it was 10,000. I mean, it was a lot. At least a few thousand.

Q: Well, in 2013, maybe early 2014, there was an attack on the remaining MEK in Iraq. So, like I said, as soon as any guard went down, they were to be attacked because they were, for whatever they had done, really hated. So I don't know about the timing. I don't know if they were still trying to negotiate people leaving for Albania or if these were the people that stayed.

JONES: Yeah, I think my recollection was that Maryam finally agreed to let some of them leave. And I don't remember what the criteria was for who was allowed to leave. But it was meant to be in tranches somehow. I don't quite remember all the details though.

Q: Thinking about it, the Albanians are very interesting people [Laughter], interested in helping during Kosovo.

JONES: They were. Well, the one thing I particularly remember was when I was in EUR, we were recruiting from the Partnership for Peace countries for units to go to help us in Iraq. And we asked the Albanians, we asked all of them for help. And the Albanians offered and we said, "Would you be the guards for—I forget what—you know, X place?" And they said, "We don't want to be guards, that's lame to guard. We want to be fighters. We're fighters." They were very out there. They were quite fun actually,

Q: Yeah. Bob Cekuta is doing his oral history and he was, I think, DCM in Tirana during Kosovo. A million people were coming over the borders and they were Muslims. They were Muslims, but he said the Albanians were just kind people. And there was a very old Catholic nun standing at the border, giving out bread to everyone.

JONES: Oh, that's sweet.

We're sort of finished with 2012. I think that's all I have on my list. Okay. So in 2013, one quick thing. The year 2013 started with me discovering I had breast cancer. But that turned out to be, luckily, easy to deal with. So I was out of the office for only four days and then was able to do my radiation therapy by walking up to GW [George Washington Hospital]. Once a day, I was gone for an hour. Nobody knew that that's why I was out except for my OMS [Office Management Specialist], the wonderful Sandy Grigola. She's an indomitable character, a fabulous OMS who knew how to get every person I needed to get to at any time, including on their yachts in the Gulf [Laughter]. She could find any shaykh I needed or any emir that I needed to find. So she knew. Liz Dibble knew, of course, my deputy. She had had exactly the same thing five years earlier. I told both Wendy Sherman and Bill Burns because I was going to be out of the office, which was unusual for me. I was never out of the office.

I really couldn't be doing too much during that time. But anyway, it all worked and I was fine. But it meant that I couldn't travel as much as I normally would have. Before the surgery I went on one trip with Secretary Kerry, who became secretary right at the beginning of February in

2013. There are a couple of interesting stories as he started as secretary of state. One of the first things he did was he announced he was going to make a trip to the Middle East. I didn't know it. I didn't know anything about it. So I called his office and I said, "The press just announced that the secretary is making a trip to the Middle East and I don't know anything about it, what's the deal?" And they said, "Ah, it turns out the White House doesn't know about it either."

Q: He just decided to go.

JONES: And, you know, he'd been a Senator for, I don't know how many decades where he didn't need to check with anybody. If he wanted to make a trip, he made a trip. So I called my counterpart at the NSC. And I said, "Do you talk to the secretary? What have you talked about? Have you talked to Secretary Kerry about this trip and is there any conversation going on?" They said, "Yeah, there's conversation going on. His trip is being canceled. He didn't coordinate with the national security advisor of the president. He's not going."

I had several counterparts at the NSC. There was a very important one for Afghanistan/Pakistan, which had been the SRAP one. But the NEA group at the NSC, when I first started, was not as plugged in, shall we say, as they could be. My EUR counterpart at the time was Phil Gordon. And in 2013 he was asked to go to the NSC as the Middle East director. And so I ended up spending a lot of time with him when he was the Middle-East director. In any case, the White House said, "Oh, no, Secretary Kerry. You're not going on a trip in the Middle East without having a big discussion with us about why you're going, what the goals are. There is a policy process."

So I sat down with my NEA teams and said, "Okay, there's a new secretary of state. Let's be very aggressive about reaching out to his staff, his close staff. He didn't bring very many people with him. He only brought like two people with him. So let's talk to them all the time and make sure that they know that as he's ruminating about a trip somewhere, that he talks to us, so we can say, 'Okay, that makes sense for these nine reasons, add these other stops to the trip for these other reasons.' That's how we formulate a trip. And by the way, you don't just go to the Middle East. If you're going to the Middle East, you ought to stop in Brussels, or you ought to stop in someplace else where we want to talk with our allies about what it is we're trying to accomplish there. We're not a one man band around here." So that was a little bit of a teaching effort on our part with the new secretary of state.

But the other thing we discovered with Secretary Kerry was that he was not used to being briefed very much. He had the impression that he already knew everything. We had a very, very hard time briefing him and getting him to understand that it wasn't just a question of him having a conversation. Each conversation had a goal that would lead to other conversations that would lead to other meetings. That whatever it was that he did was part of a game plan. It wasn't just a one-off conversation. So it took me a while to figure out how to present things to him in a way that he would buy into the idea he was part of a bigger effort. That he shouldn't just be off making things up as he went along.

Q: So did he get to go on a trip early?

JONES: Yes, he did eventually. I did one trip before I had the surgery with Bill Burns to Geneva. We did one more Syria trip. The name of the UN Arab League negotiator was this wonderful Algerian diplomat called Lakhdar Brahimi. So he would always generate the meeting, but he usually did it at the request of Wendy Sherman or Bill Burns, who was his main go-to person in the State Department, other than me.

Q: And this is for Syria?

JONES: For Syria. So, we went one more time in very early January to meet with the Russians. Now, one of the things that had been going on—it just had started with Syria—were chemical weapons attacks on Syrian civilians. So not only was the humanitarian situation getting worse, but the chemical attacks were getting worse. Now, the problem with the chemical attacks were that they were small and we didn't have enough information about what the chemicals were that were causing the problems that people were experiencing. So we worked with the intelligence agencies and frankly the medical people to say, "What is it that you need in order to find out what it is that's being used? And, how can it get to you in a way that you agree that it hasn't been tainted along the way? That it has clean, secure transit from wherever the chemicals were used to Turkey or Paris, wherever it is, that the French or we, or the Turks, or—usually the security services would pick up whatever the evidence was to a lab in a way that everyone could agree that it was a pristine sample?"

So we spent a lot of time working on that, making sure we understood what it was and getting that back to our Syrian colleagues again, through the early morning Skype meetings that my team kept having with them. One of the other things we did during that time was we said, "Okay, we get it that we can't confirm that X chemical is being used in this or that chemical weapons attack. And this attack, even though everybody thinks it's the chemical weapon, we understand that we can't officially corroborate that that's what it was or confirm that that's what it was. But help us draft a public service message that we can get to all of our contacts in Syria and so that they can put it on their radios or in their newspapers or whatever it is that they have that says: 'When you think you're being attacked, this is how to protect yourself.'" So we were able to come up with public service messages that we got full interagency agreement to do.

Q: Some of these were even happening in the capital.

JONES: Yes. They were there on the outskirts of the capital. Exactly. It was mostly not, but even so there were just enough of them. I mean, that was a major effort on our part to get that public service announcement agreed. And we of course talked about it with all of our Arab and European Union colleagues who were trying to do the same thing so that we all disseminated the same message to all of the contacts that we had inside Syria, which were of course many by the time you have what we call the London 11 and all of their contacts inside. So it would be civilian contacts, military contacts, wherever it was, so that we could get the word out in a way that gave people information. But it was done in a way that it couldn't be said that the U.S. was confirming that X had happened. It was kind of a delicate balance, but we found a way through, a delicate balance.

Q: Just before we leave that, President Obama at some point put a line in the sand on chemical weapons. Has that happened yet?

JONES: It had happened.

Q: So that's why you were tracking this so closely because the U.S. government had made a decision that that would be an action forcing event. Is that right?

JONES: That's right. That's right. Okay. Yes. President Obama had made a statement in August of 2012 that if Assad used chemical weapons, that would be a red line for the United States. That was the date of that statement. That was a result of these little reports that this was the kind of thing that was happening. Then in 2013, there were more and more of these attacks that looked like they were chemical weapons of some kind to the point that in the summer of 2013 in June, July, there were serious enough attacks that in our interagency discussions on Syria—which were almost every day at the deputies committee and principals committee meetings—the interagency got instructions to look at what a military reaction would be or could be. What were the options for military reaction to the use of chemical weapons by Assad against his own people? So those plans were already underway.

Now, the other thing to remember is that in 2012, we had been asked to start this Day After group that I mentioned when we talked last week. One of the Day After working groups was about weapons of mass destruction. What about WMD in Syria? What do we know about it? What would it take to get rid of it? How would you get rid of it? What kind of stuff is it, and how do you handle it? I think we started in August of 2012 through to the summer, with this group meeting every week. They had a huge amount of information about what they thought it was, how it might be handled, where they thought it was, how it was protected, i.e. guarded. We had been discussing it with our European colleagues, so that they had an idea of the kind of information we had, what we thought it might be, because they were just as concerned as we were about these chemical attacks, with the French, British, and Germans being way up on it, as was the OPCW, the Organization for Prevention of Chemical Weapons, in Brussels.

So then there was a very serious chemical attack in Damascus, this time, on August 21, 2013. And we were able—having done all this work on how you would get the right samples collected in the right vessels carried out in the right way as quickly as possible to the right people. We had that this time. It was confirmed that this had been a genuine chemical attack. In the interagency, decisions were being made as to which of the military options that had been prepared would President Obama choose to use. His choice was to take out several command centers, military command centers, particularly the air command centers where the planes were taking off and were dropping not only the chemical weapons, but undertaking the barrel bomb attacks that were killing and maiming so many Syrians. The idea was to do the attack at night when there were fewer people at any of these places, that it was very surgical, that it was only a few of these places, and they would be in and out. And that was it.

The date for the attack was all set. Few of us knew what it was. It was held very closely. I was the only one in my bureau who was permitted to know when it was. I actually had one other person helping me, because there was a lot of writing that needed to be done. We had a whole set

of talking points and advocacy points that we had to have ready to send out to our allies the minute it happened, or just before it happened and it's definite. So we had a lot of things ready, and I had one of my officers help me do all of that.

Then the day that the attack was scheduled, that was a Saturday, I was called to the secretary's office—I was already in my office—first thing on the Saturday morning, to be told that he had been told the night before by President Obama—he'd been told by Denis McDonough, the president's chief of staff—that the president was going to go to the Congress to ask for permission for a military engagement with Syria. And the attack was not going to happen.

What happened of course, was that the Congress declined to vote in support of it. Although we heard that members said and the White House heard, "You shouldn't have asked us. We would have supported you, but don't ask us to say yes." So that was a very unpopular move in the Middle East. Our Arab colleagues were extremely upset that we hadn't gone ahead with what we had planned to do. They argued that we looked like paper tigers. Assad would just take courage from this and he would treat his people worse. There would be many more attacks and he would feel he'd gotten a big "get out of jail free" card.

Early the next week, I was at a deputies committee meeting at the White House, Wendy Sherman was in the chair for the Department and we were talking about, "Okay, what kinds of things can we do now to shore up support for the U.S. position? What can we do to support the Syrian opposition?" Because they were very dejected. They really wanted us to give Assad a lesson. Secretary Kerry was traveling in Europe, so I wasn't on the trip. And while we were in the meeting, we got word that he had just announced that if Assad would give up his chemical weapons, then there wouldn't be a military attack.

Q: Did he have some kind of—?

JONES: Well, nobody, nobody had authorized that. He hadn't even suggested that he might do this. That was not part of any discussion that anybody had had. And so the group around the table was saying, "Okay, what do you know? What do we do now?" They got to Kerry on the phone and he said, "Oh, I just thought it would be a good thing to do." And so there was discussion about do we walk it back? What do we say? Because what he'd done was he had threatened another military attack. He basically threatened another military attack if Assad didn't give up his weapons. And that wasn't what the President had authorized.

Well, it worked! [Laughter] It worked. The Russians, Lavrov, I can't remember when, like the next day, said, "We're calling a meeting. We're going to have a discussion about this. And the meeting is going to be in Geneva on Friday." This was like Monday. And the Europeans all said, "Oh my God, Oh my God. We don't know anything about this, about chemical weapons Assad might have." And we said—I said, "We do. We have an entire plan. We know exactly what this negotiation needs to include. We know exactly what they have. We know where it is. We know how it's guarded." And it was Tom Countryman who had led this group. And I said to Kerry's staff, I said, "There is a team that needs to be on the plane. It needs to go to Geneva. Kerry was staying in Europe. An interagency team that's been working on this for a year. A year. And they're all going. And they will make sure that this agreement has all the elements that it needs to

have in order to be foolproof.” And that's what they did. They went. They had chapter and verse. They had maps. They had details. And Lavrov could not walk away.

Q: Wow, quite a coup. So Tom Countryman, he was in charge of T, right? He was in charge of the Pol/Mil military stuff?

JONES: No, he was the assistant secretary for international security and nonproliferation. Yeah. I don't think he was the under secretary. I think Rose Goettemoeller still was.

Q: Okay. But he was in charge of the bureau.

JONES: Yes. And he was head of my team, my working group, under the Day After committee. He chaired the group on WMD. So, talk about being prepared. We were prepared, completely prepared. A lot of the fall of 2013 was taken up with this. We had the agreement that was signed on the Saturday, I think it was in Geneva, that Assad would remove all of his chemical weapons. We had the agreement. Assad had agreed to it, thanks to Lavrov. And then it had to be implemented and it had to be implemented through the Organization for Prevention of Chemical Weapons, OPCW, who were completely onboard. I'm pretty sure they must've been at the meeting too, because they have all the expertise as well. They were meant to have the oversight over whether the Syrians did what they needed to do, what they said they were going to do, based on this agreement. It was all agreed that OPCW would be the one who would determine whether or not they'd done the right thing. That wouldn't be the U.S, it wouldn't be Russia. It wouldn't be the French. It would be OPCW, but of course, we're all on the board of OPCW. So we all have a say anyway, so it was an extremely good arrangement, as far as we were concerned.

Q: And the chemical weapons were shipped out of Syria?

JONES: Well, that was another big element to the story. OPCW said, “Okay, we have found what we can find. We think we found all of it. The Syrians have brought all of it out or showed us where it was, but it needs to be destroyed. And it can't be destroyed there, that wouldn't be the right thing to do. It has to be destroyed elsewhere.” So there was a big go around about, “Okay, how do you do this?” And the decision was, it could be destroyed through hydrolysis, with a hydraulic machine, on ships that do this. So we had to find a ship that would do it. And we did. It took awhile, but we found a ship that would do it. Then we had to get the Syrians' agreement to let it dock, but there was a lot of chaos in the port. So it couldn't do what it needed to do. And then it was the whole question of how do you ship it securely to the docks and how do you do this? Anyway, it was all extremely carefully done. It took a huge amount of negotiation. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing about it, but it got done. Now, I think in the meantime—I mean history will tell we didn't find all of it, but we found all that we thought we knew about. And we ended up not attacking the Syrians.

Q: So I was in Iraq then and Ambassador Beecroft came back from a meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, and he said, "Maliki thinks we're brilliant! He had constructed this very very elaborate theory of how we had done this brilliant strategy and tactic," the ambassador said to

us, it was very interesting. On the inside it looked like some mistakes were made, but to the outside, not.

JONES: [Laughter] Well. I mean, it's just one of those situations that—and when Kerry talked about it later about why he said what he said, it was something in the way the question was posed. And, as I recall, the question was kind of a leading question. If they did this, would you—and he sort of said, “Well, yeah, I guess so. Yeah, I guess so.” It wasn't that definitive, it wasn't like he had planned this, but it came out in a very definitive way as well. It's certainly the way it was reported—that he had made this offer and that it wasn't exactly what he meant, but, you know, it seemed to be a reasonable thing to say at the time.

Q: [Laughter] So okay. So on Syria at the end of December, 2012, we have basically found the international community had decided that Assad should leave, but we're in 2013 and he has not left yet.

JONES: Right.

Q: So what happened?

JONES: All this time, Robert Ford is working with the Syrian opposition, with a new Syrian opposition leader that was selected in Doha in November of 2012 to get them together to name the people that they thought would be in a transitional government. Which were the ones that it would include? Who were the ones that were in the government now who could be considered to not have blood on their hands? And it was meeting after meeting after meeting with these guys to try to get them to come up with a plan. Lakhdar Brahimi, through all this time, and the London 11—the Arab League countries involved, Turkey, the European countries and us—we're all trying to figure out how to form a conference that would discuss this. Was there any timing that worked for the Syrians to have their list and the opposition would have their list so that members of a transitional government could be discussed and a transitional government formed?

As you can imagine, there were a lot of distractions because of the chemical weapons and chemical weapon attacks. There was a distraction because of that, of the work that needed to be done to get the chemical weapons out of there. But in the meantime, there were huge humanitarian issues as well. So we kept meeting with Lakhdar Brahimi and the Russians to make agreements about, “Okay, there's a large group that's surrounded in X town or X village that needs to have safe passage out. The UN monitors are prepared or international organization groups are prepared to go in, as is the UN, to help them to give them safe passage. But we need guarantees from the Assad crowd that they're not going to attack these people.” So there was constant negotiation about getting supplies in, getting people out, getting women and children out, getting medical people in and wounded out. So that was, I mean, I can't tell you how many—every third day there was another situation that needed to be addressed in this sort of, “Oh my God,” dramatic way.

Q: In fact, there was the massive amount of refugees out of Syria that threatened to overwhelm everybody—Lebanon and Turkey.

JONES: Right. Exactly. So, there were huge numbers of refugees going out. The Turks, at first, their refugee camps were very sophisticated. They were very well-planned. They even had TVs and all those kinds of things. And they said, "Oh, we can't handle it anymore." And we said, "Well, you know, the camp doesn't have to have TVs [Laughter]. People need safe housing away from guns, away from the cluster bombs or the barrel bombs. The international assistance agencies are prepared to help you."

At first, they wouldn't let the assistance agencies in. So that was another whole set of negotiations that I worked on with Phil Gordon, head of the European Bureau, and with his team to negotiate with the Turks, to get them to allow humanitarian aid workers into the camps so that they could provide the kind of services that humanitarian aid workers did. These Turkish camps were just meant to be very temporary. So there was no schooling. There was no winter clothing, there was no set up for how these camps would be run and how people would actually live in them.

In the meantime, there were a tremendous number of refugees going to Jordan as well. The Jordanians were more and more and more upset about this, because the Syrian refugees were taking the jobs away from Jordanians. As the Jordanians kept saying to us, "They're better educated than we are. They're taking all of our jobs." They—the Jordanians—then started controlling the borders better. They would truck or bus refugees coming across the borders into camps that had been built by the U.S. army. That's something that we got the U.S. army to do, the U.S. military, to build several big camps, big installations, that these refugees could move into. And, we negotiated with the Jordanians on allowing aid agencies into these camps.

That was another thing that two of the groups that were part of the Day After did. There was a whole group dealing with refugees and refugee camps. Negotiating with the UN, negotiating with aid agencies on getting assistance in to assure education for the kids. And we had another group that worked on policing in the camps, to bring in trainers, to train people in the camps to police themselves, going on the basis that in Syria itself, these different communities that had liberated themselves from Assad had set up internal local policing units for the little areas that they did control. So we tried to get them to emulate that in the camps. I went to the camps several times. A lot of us did, to see what the situation there was, see if we could understand what was going on and what needed to be done so that we could advocate more effectively for what the aid agencies needed from Congress or from the EU or from whoever it was. To make sure that all these poor people were better taken care of.

We also had to advocate to the Jordanian government because for a while, they wouldn't permit the kids to go to schools. There were local schools. The local school districts didn't want these refugee kids in their schools. We negotiated ways to give them support so that they would let the kids in or start schools in the camps themselves. I think that's what we ended up doing in the end. Lebanon was also having its own difficulties. It was trying to form a government again, as always. I went there several times and they were overwhelmed by refugees as well, but they did their best to treat them well. I must say, the Lebanese tried hard. It was very difficult, but, you know, for Lebanon, it was the same families. It was the same rivalries. It was the same, "I'm worried about being assassinated by the family that assassinated my uncle 300 years ago."

Q: Refugees went to northern Iraq, too. Right?

JONES: They went to northern Iraq as well. There didn't seem to be much of an issue with that. I don't remember really having to work hard on refugee issues in Iraq. Not that many went, I think, compared to the numbers that were flowing into Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. At least the numbers weren't so notable that the Iraqis were complaining to us about it, that I can remember. It didn't seem to be much of an issue.

Q: Yes. Remember the head of the UN High Commission on Refugees being in town in Baghdad. And I can't remember if it was 2013 or a little later, but he was saying that these people aren't going back, we have to switch over from planning for them as refugees to absorbing them as displaced persons. That we have to start giving them schools and building communities with services for them, because they're not going back in the near term.

JONES: Certainly not in the near term. I mean, we were having to make the same arguments in Jordan, you know, these kids are much better off in school rather than—yeah. He was talking about the whole region, not just Iraq. Was it António Guterres, then? He was really such a good guy.

Q: That's right. I just happened to get to go to this cocktail party off the compound. They didn't have anybody to go from the political section, which was nice for me to get to talk to him. So, okay. So Nusra. The Turks had made the bad decision to let Nusra in and ISIS, the Islamic State, was rising in Iraq.

JONES: Right. And Syria.

Q: Yes. And at some point there was a break between Nusra and the Islamic State, I think, but there were lots of bad guys.

JONES: Yes. And one of the difficulties for us was that one of the staunch supporters of the anti-Assad group was Qatar and, of course, Turkey. But the Qataris were supplying Nusra to a great degree and potentially also some of the other very bad groups. We didn't know for sure what they were doing.

Q: The Iraqis, Maliki, was sure that the Qataris were contributing to the Islamic State?

JONES: They were sure. And I think the Saudis were sure that they were. That was one of my jobs, to meet with the Qataris often, which I did either in Qatar or at these other London 11 meetings on Syria all over, or in Saudi Arabia or Jordan. I mean, almost every month, there would be a ministerial on Syria. And so one of my jobs was to talk to the Qataris about, "Do you realize what you're doing? And do you realize that if you supply these guys, and you are supplying these guys, the result is going to be very bad for the region for a very, very long time, if you give them this kind of toehold?"

Q: Why would they? Why were they doing it?

JONES: They were very conservative Muslims as were these guys. And not Wahabi. It was a different sect, not completely, but different. They were sure that they needed that. They felt fundamentally that these were their guys. Now, talking to me, they would deny it. But it was clear that they felt a great kinship and had for decades. They had the same kind of sense of, “We're different from the Emiratis, the Kuwaitis, and the Saudis.”

Q: And they got kicked out of the Gulf Cooperation Council at some point.

JONES: That they did. But that was later, that was after I left. Thank goodness.

Q: So were there kidnappings by ISIS or by Nusra of Americans during your time?

JONES: There were. One of the ones that I worked on the longest was The Washington Post journalist who was kidnapped pretty early on in Syria. Austin Tice. It was one that we thought we knew who had him, and we thought that the Syrian government could have influence on who had him. And so I went to Ryan Crocker who still had good contacts with the Syrians who was, at this point, out of government and I asked him for help. I was in touch with this fellow's family, so was Ryan. I have forgotten all the cutouts, but there was one particular person that we were both in touch with to talk to the Syrians about this. I had full permission from Kerry and from others to do it this way because we weren't talking to the Syrian government obviously. But we could ask Ryan Crocker to do that—and that could work.

Of course, Ryan had been ambassador, so he knew all these guys really well, and they trusted him. He was somebody that they would speak to. Several times we were told he—Tice—was going to be released on X date. And, you know, it was a very complicated arrangement by which he would be released in X place in Lebanon. And so I had our ambassador in Lebanon involved in arrangements to pick him up and the military attaché there made arrangements to pick him up. And it never happened. Never. He still to this day, hasn't been released.

Q: And I guess it was after your time, but there was an attempt to rescue American hostages of ISIS in 2014, I guess.

JONES: Yes. There were several. There were several. We had no agreed system to deal with it. Let's put it that way. The hostages were nominally meant to be managed by the Consular Affairs Bureau. I was managing this one situation and then there were several being managed by my Syria desk. We were kind of halfway involved in some of the others. So we realized that we weren't getting it together very well. And I would be in touch on occasion with DHS [Department of Homeland Security] and the FBI about the case I was working on, and the others would be in touch with others, et cetera. Partly because of congressional panels, partly because we just realized that there was more going on, we needed to have our act together so that we could tell the seventh floor that we knew what we were doing. We figured out how to organize ourselves. We agreed on who had the lead for all of them, who was the deputy lead for all of them, how would we communicate with each other, how would we coordinate it, who would be in touch with the families? How would we do that, et cetera. And so we got it organized in a way that when we went to the Hill or had meetings with members of the Hill, or with the FBI, whoever, we were speaking with one voice, which we hadn't been before,

Q: ISIS having the hostages I don't think was well publicized. There was a little bit of extra leverage against us, because we were worried about the hostages if we were to do anything against these groups, these terrorist groups, right?

JONES: Yes. Part of the problem was, of course, we had no idea where they were. We had no idea where they were.

Q: I think the same years, we had Americans in Colombia taken by the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia], and they were held for five, six years. And there was a search, you know, they were moved around all the time. So, yeah, hard time for that.

JONES: Was it in those years that Bill Brownfield was able to get them released? Did he negotiate?

Q: It was a sneaky operation in 2008, I think. The FARC thought they were delivering the hostages to a Red Cross plane with Chavez' imprimatur, but it wasn't. But going back to Iraq in 2013, I was just remembering as an observer without any information that the fact of the hostages just seemed to cause a delay in our decision to go after ISIS. It seemed to me that first came the failed rescue attempt. And then after that, they just went ahead and started building up the military and security in Embassy Baghdad.

So you were in NEA for a year and a half. Were you involved when the Iraqis did not agree to a status of forces agreement and we made the decision to start pulling the troops out? Was that before then?

JONES: That was before then. Because that was why, when I first started in SRAP, I did that study for Pat Kennedy as to who should stay and who shouldn't stay among all the agencies as the civilian drawdown in Afghanistan started. I wanted to make sure that we didn't end up having to leave any projects to the military to be sure not to do what had happened in Iraq.

Q: But we were having the drawdown of the military. Right? So the U.S. military had a drawdown.

JONES: Right. Whereas everything I was doing was on the civilian side. That drawdown I think was mostly already underway. We weren't replenishing, we weren't sending in hundreds of USDA people to replace those leaving and gradually all of the projects were closed down or turned over to Afghans. That was the plan anyway.

Q: Okay. So anyway, going back to Syria. Assad ended up not leaving that year.

JONES: He did not.

Q: So, is there anything more you want to talk about on that?

JONES: Well, we talked about that we kept working, working, working on when there would be a meeting, a conference, to talk about the transitional government, to try to put meat on the bones

of the agreement that had been agreed on June 30, 2012. Kerry tried several times to get this meeting and get the meeting in Geneva agreed upon. It was on and it was off, it was on, it was off. And it finally was agreed to be in January, 2013 outside of Geneva, not in Geneva. We were very heavily involved in getting it organized. Robert Ford was really working hard to get the opposition to, number one, stay together, and number two, come up with their position for all of this.

In the meantime, Kerry had asked Anne Patterson to be the assistant secretary for NEA and she had turned him down several times, I think, three times. She and I talked about it a lot while she was still ambassador to Egypt in Cairo. She finally agreed, but she didn't agree until late summer of 2013, about the time she actually left Egypt. When she left, I argued to the seventh floor, "We need to have a senior person in there as ambassador." We had David Satterfield, head of the Multilateral Force and Observers, in Rome. We asked him to go into Cairo as the chargé until there could be an ambassador confirmed for Egypt.

In the meantime, Anne Patterson couldn't get confirmed. So neither one of us was ever sure when she was going to start. I didn't know if I was going to the UN General Assembly, but I did go. I didn't know if I'd be there in October, November, December, but I was there for all of those months. I said goodbye to my team a few times thinking that she would be confirmed over this or that weekend and then wasn't. But in the meantime, we had David Satterfield in Cairo who did a very good job at it. Of course what was going on in Egypt at the time was that in the summer, General Sisi, the chief of army staff, took over from Morsi in basically a military coup. He put Morsi in jail, arrested him, put him in jail. On the provocation, I guess you could say, that there was so much unrest in the country both fomented by the Muslim Brotherhood and against the Muslim Brotherhood that the country was quite unstable.

Q: Earlier, Morsi had kind of changed the constitution or put in a controversial amendment that was anti-democratic.

JONES: Yes. In December of 2012, I think it was, he had promulgated a constitution that was very anti-democratic and among the dream team, a cabinet that he had, he either dismissed people or they quit. Increasingly he led a very draconian government, if you can call it that, in which people were extremely badly treated, students were beaten up and murdered, and there was no consequence for those kinds of things. We talked to them about it all the time. Secretary Clinton when she was still there and Secretary Kerry tried to a bit. He was more diffident about that kind of thing. And Sisi took over. The question then was what do we do? Because when there is a military coup—

Q: Our law says that we have to stop assistance. Right?

JONES: That's right. So the question was how much of a coup was it? And was there any way through some of the prohibitions—because at the same time, we were working with the Egyptian military quietly and the Israelis to stop the transit of terrorists across the Sinai into Israel. So the Egyptian military was working very closely with the Israelis, unbeknownst to Morsi. They specifically told us, "Don't tell Morsi, he'll make us stop," because he was so anti-Israel. That was one of the biggest problems with Morsi from our perspective. But also the Egyptian military

were in a position to at least help control the transit of weapons across Sinai, across the rest of Egypt and into Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, et cetera. And so increasingly, the Islamic State in North Africa were getting weapons, which were just flowing back and forth across North Africa.

But then we needed the Egyptian military to help us at least try to close some of the border crossings and some of the borders, and they needed to have helicopters to do that which were en route or they had some of them. But then the question was, okay, are they using those helicopters to shoot at their own people and demonstrations in Cairo and Aswan and Alexandria and places like that? So that was the big discussion, the big debate, that we had with our lawyers and with Congress as to what would be permitted and what isn't permitted under the law, given that there were certain U.S. interests that still needed to be fulfilled. In particular, protection of Israel. I mean, that was our ace in the hole, frankly, as to how to make the argument that they needed to have some military capacity in order to continue to help the Israelis, which they were perfectly willing to do. Sisi was.

Q: Sisi was the defense minister, and then he promulgated the coup and he became the head of government but there wasn't a lot of resistance. The bureaucracy was very comfortable with that, right?

JONES: Well, yes, because Morsi had really turned Egypt on its head in terms of any kind of pretense of democracy or human rights or religious freedom. So the Coptic community—which had good ties to the United States—was terrorized and terrified about the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of the way they were being treated. Their churches were being desecrated. There was no condemnation of that or results to the perpetrators. So it wasn't unpopular.

Q: And so we, at some point, the United States had to recognize the government, recognize Sisi?

JONES: Yes. The position we always take is we recognize the government. We don't recognize a particular person in government. The only time we changed that was with Libya, which we shouldn't have done, but anyway. So we still had relations with Egypt. We just had to be careful about how we dealt with this government. Now, we still met with them. I went with Kerry to Egypt in November of 2013. We had meetings with Sisi. We had a lot of advocacy points to make. I particularly remember it because as I was walking out of the foreign ministry, I twisted my foot somehow and broke a bone in my foot. It was painful. But it was one of those difficult situations in foreign policy where you've got to figure out how to obey U.S. law and still try to accomplish U.S. interests in foreign policy around the legislation that you have to abide by and make sure that you're explaining it properly to the Hill and interest groups.

Q: It sounds like during this period, unlike your period in charge of the European Bureau under a different administration, it sounds like there weren't a lot of interagency arguments over general strategy, at least in this part of the world?

JONES: That's right. The only—I would say the most difficult agency for us was the NSC, was the White House. That was probably the only one that was difficult because they kept such a tight grip on how many people could be at post. For example, I would be in a principals committee meeting, sitting behind because I'm not a principal. Susan Rice by then was the

national security advisor and she would be very unhappy in very clear terms about why certain projects hadn't gotten off the ground in Libya. And you know, whoever was there, usually it was Secretary Kerry or Bill Burns, or Wendy Sherman, would turn to me to say, "Can you explain it?" And I would say the reason we haven't been able to do the kind of education program that we've talked about, or the kind of community organization program we've talked about, is that I am not permitted to send in any AID people who can manage the program. She would ask, "Well, why can't they go?" And I said, "Because you won't permit more numbers." We had a lot of those kinds of conversations.

Q: So it was kind of the White House balancing certain political imperatives?

JONES: The problem was they wanted to control the staffing numbers. Okay, I get that. But I failed with them to show the problematic results. I was able to talk to Greg Starr—at this point he was the head of DS, Diplomatic Security. Pat Kennedy was the under secretary for management. Wendy Sherman was under secretary for political affairs. I could talk to all of them about—I needed this one person in Libya to do whatever it was or this one person in Yemen to do whatever it was, this one extra person in Egypt to do whatever it was. And they would agree. They would get it. We, all of us, failed to get the White House to let us agree. Even when we offered to take somebody out as an exchange for someone new. But they would just pocket it. If we ever take somebody out, they would say, "Fine, that's a reduced number. We like that." So crazy. Very difficult.

Q: And then last time we talked on Egypt, we talked about how people in Egypt somehow blamed the United States for Morsi coming to power, even though they had voted for him. But did the same people, activists, get upset with the United States for continuing to recognize Egypt after the coup a year later?

JONES: No, no. And the people who were upset with us were the elites. The people weren't upset with us at all. They didn't care. You know, they were the ones who voted for Morsi, the elites hadn't. When Sisi came in we still had all these meetings with the political groups, they would say, "Oh my God, the military is in charge. We don't like this." And we would say, "Get your act together. Form a party. Form a coalition. Form some kind of a political group and get support from the people. So when there is the next election—which, you know, Sisi kept promising—you can be elected." You know, we never got very far with that. But we were able, even with Sisi and the whole coup situation, we were able to continue a few programs. So one of the big programs that we really worked on and that Secretary Kerry was very supportive of was an economic development fund. It was a public-private enterprise fund.

Q: Right. Enterprise funds were pretty popular that year.

JONES: Yes. And we worked and worked and worked to get respected, well-known people to be head of the Egyptian Enterprise Fund and head of the Tunisian Enterprise Fund. I worked very closely with colleagues in USAID and Treasury on what the precepts would be for the enterprise funds, how they would be managed and what the oversight would be. And how to generate interest in the private sector, in the entrepreneurial crowd, to come up with projects that these enterprise funds could fund. That was something that I remember doing a couple of times when I

went to Tunisia with the embassy there. We'd go visit some of these entrepreneurial groups to say, "Have you thought about applying for grants from the enterprise fund?" Same thing in Egypt. Because of the security situation, at one point the embassy brought in all of these entrepreneurs with little samples of all the things that they were doing, and every one of them was fabulous and terrific. I mean, they were so ingenious. They were young and they were enthusiastic and they really wanted to make something work. The enterprise funds got off the ground. That was happening just as I was leaving . So I don't really know what happened with all of that, but it was slow to get them going. I mean, Secretary Kerry was constantly on my case about why haven't they done nine things yet, but—

Q: Yeah. I remember working on it too before I left for Iraq, trying to encourage AID to move faster. So would you like to take a break here and continue next week?

JONES: Yeah, that'd be good. Yeah.

JONES: Here are the names of some of the people involved in Yemen. Ali Abdullah Saleh, of course, was the president who was then ousted as a result of the Arab Spring. He was in place and not in place at various times when his vice-president, Mansour Hadi, was elected to be president and took over. But Saleh still being there made it much more difficult to get things done and to get decisions made. Saleh went off to Saudi Arabia for a little while. The Gulf Cooperation Council was very much involved in helping Yemen and the international community work with Saleh to give up authority and give up the presidency, which eventually worked. Although after I left NEA, Saleh was back and was doing more difficult things. At one point during the time I was there, he did go off to New York in the end in January, 2012. So Hadi was very much in place and his own boss at that point, but that was also during the period of time that it was quite difficult for Yemen.

Q: Okay. Let me just back up and say it is December 21, 2020, and we're continuing our conversation with Beth Jones. And she had a couple of things to add on Yemen and then on Libya.

JONES: So then the other thing I wanted to particularly mention about Libya is all of the work that we did to stand up a military force for the Libyans, an independent military force for the Libyans and by the Libyans, so that they could control their own territory. This was something that the international community was committed to doing. There was a group of countries that met regularly with Libyan counterparts to decide how to do this. And one of the issues was where would this group be trained? And how would it be done? The Italians took the lead on all of the military training. However, they had the experience, or they knew of the experience that had occurred previously when a group of Libyans had gone out for training. The experience had been a difficult one where the trainees were not happy with their surroundings, not happy with where they were staying or whatever the rules were.

Basically the word we got was they did a lot of damage, physical damage, to the training area. So there was quite a bit of hesitancy as to how this new training would take place, where it would take place, how it would best be done. One of the issues also was there was funding for this

training that we needed to have the government approve and accept. And the new prime minister was very reluctant to do that without having quite a bit of a buy-in from the cabinet, and particularly from the finance minister. That was a very, very difficult process. It was explained to us that one of the big reasons it was a difficult process was that any acceptance by anybody in this new government of funding carried with it the suspicion of graft or some corrupt move. It became very difficult to get the full cabinet or at least the agreement of relevant cabinet officials to accept this funding in order for the training to happen.

Q: This was after Benghazi?

JONES: Yes. This is after Benghazi. The person who was there as ambassador, Deborah Jones, was a terrific ambassador. Initially after Chris Stevens was killed, we needed to have a senior chargé there. The DCM who became acting chargé turned out not to be up to the job and by mutual agreement left quite early. Bill Roebuck, who was my deputy assistant secretary for the region, went to Tripoli as the chargé and did a terrific job for several months. But of course, he couldn't stay forever since he had a job back in Washington. I needed him back. He was there as we searched for someone who could spend a little bit more time there. We were very fortunate to recruit Ambassador Larry Pope to do this. His Arabic was extremely good. He agreed to go and went there as soon as he could. He was there for several months. He understood how to rally the government around the kinds of issues that we needed to get them to take action on, such as getting them to accept financing, to work with the U.S, and with the international community on various other issues that we were trying to help them with, such as community policing, such as community management. How do you set up a trash collection service? What about schools? How do you get people to give up weapons that they might have in terms of their militias, et cetera. Larry was very, very good at that and really rallied the embassy in Tripoli at a time when it was quite difficult. People were still quite traumatized over Chris' death.

Q: So there was Bill Roebuck temporarily, then Larry Pope, and then—?

JONES: The understanding was that Larry would stay until we could recruit a full-time ambassador who could be confirmed for the job. Deborah Jones was slated to go to Yemen. I knew her very well from years in NEA and knew that she was extremely good in very difficult situations and her Arabic is excellent. She readily agreed to switch from Yemen to Libya, was confirmed by the Senate, went to Libya, and worked extremely well with the new Libyan cabinet. She worked well with the new prime minister, the new foreign minister, the new defense minister, finance minister, all of the key people whose agreement we needed to do any number of things that were part of U.S. policy priorities. Not only U.S. policy, but there was, of course, this international group as well led by the UN, there was a UN representative there as well.

Q: Well, for these tough kinds of jobs, are the ambassadors tapped for three years, as usual, or do they go for two?

JONES: The agreement is usually one or two years for these very difficult and dangerous posts. We like to have them agree to two, but we didn't actually demand it if we knew we had an extremely good person because the key was to get somebody there who could work with quite young staff who would do well with strong management and experienced leadership, which

Deborah could provide. I traveled to Libya several times in the course of the time that Deborah was there. We were able to move around quite a bit even though the security situation was quite difficult. Each time I went, Deborah and her team would arrange for me to meet civil society leaders, certainly with the cabinet, various cabinet ministers and teachers, people who were really working at bringing Libya into the international community and facilitating reforms and improvements in the communities and in the country.

I remember one trip in particular in which we were still having a very difficult time on the military training part. We'd gone a long way, but we weren't quite there yet. Deborah and I were in a meeting with the foreign minister. Toward the end of the meeting, the foreign minister said to Deborah and me, he said, "What are you doing for dinner?" I looked at Deborah—the question was directed at me and she sort of nodded. I said, "Well, we're actually free." [He said,] "Oh, well, you must come for dinner. We will meet for dinner at such and such a restaurant." While we were there, he called up the prime minister and the defense minister and the finance minister, and invited them all to come to this dinner as well.

So Deborah and I appear at this fabulous seaside restaurant with an outdoor patio bar where white wine is served. It's very elegant. Everybody's very relaxed and cheerful, and we're having a wonderful conversation. We go into an extremely elaborate dinner with lobsters and fresh fish everywhere and have a wonderful conversation. It's clear that they have Deborah on speed dial. In fact, one of the ministers was quite late and the prime minister turned to her and said, "Can you get the foreign minister on the phone? You can do it faster than any of us." And she did. And he arrived and it was all fun. Then partway through the dinner, a group of trombone players came in and serenaded us. It was one of the most interesting sort of business-wise events. Interesting because we got a lot of work done, but it was also an example of how absolutely terrific Libya could be if only we could help them get things organized so that one could have these kinds of conversations without everybody coming with huge security units with them. I particularly remember that. That was also just after the meetings that I had with Kerry in Cairo where I broke my foot. So I was still hobbling around on what turned out to be a broken foot. I didn't know it was, I just knew it hurt a lot.

The other thing that Deborah and I worked on at that time and previously was where would the U.S. embassy be? Because at that point, she was living in the embassy on the upper floors. The dining room was in the embassy. The staff was living in buildings near the embassy, some of them still under construction. That's where I stayed. Other embassy elements were in a building not that far away. But the question was, where would the U.S. military come if they were going to participate in some of this military training? Because at one point, we finally got the Moroccans to agree that maybe they could help with this training. So we did a lot of looking around at a site that Deborah had found that was quite secure and off by itself. I mentioned that only because we never did that—adding U.S. military units to the embassy—as security got much worse. After I left NEA, Deborah was forced to close the entire mission. They moved first to Malta. We established Embassy Tripoli in Malta at the U.S. embassy there, being pretty close by, but also quite secure. And then after a number of arrangements were made, none of which I was involved in as it happened after I left, the embassy moved to Embassy Tunis.

Q: Okay. And she retired after that. Right?

JONES: She did. That's right. That's right. So those are the couple of items that I realized that I had forgotten to tell about.

Q: That's great. That's very, very helpful. So during all this time that you were in NEA, the peace process was continuing between Israel and various other countries. So what was the stage when you were there?

JONES: The peace process was underway, but for quite a long time—well before I was in NEA, and in fact, this had been the case when I was PDAS in NEA in the late nineties, there was a separate Middle East envoy. That office was physically placed in NEA, but didn't report to me. I didn't supervise the peace process. That was supervised by a separate peace process office that for a long time was headed by Dennis Ross and others who had long been associated with the peace process.

Q: So they were sort of like an SRAP equivalent? Like it was not quite in any chain of command?

JONES: It was a little bit different from SRAP in the sense that SRAP really didn't report to any other bureau. It was housed with another bureau but reported directly to the secretary, not even through P [Office for Political Affairs]. That was the SRAP arrangement. Whereas the Middle East peace process was housed with NEA and David Hale, who was the peace process envoy for the Middle East peace process, didn't report to me, but he reported on issues to me.

Q: Was this a time in which George Mitchell was negotiating? Or was George Mitchell finished by then?

JONES: He was not part of it. George Mitchell had left. David Hale, I think, had worked with him, but then he took over to run the peace process for Secretary Clinton and stayed on with Secretary Kerry. I'm not sure how long David was there, but in any case he would regularly, whenever he came back to Washington after a negotiating session or negotiating weeks, he would come in and tell me where things stood and what kinds of things they were trying to accomplish. That was because I still supervised the embassy in Tel Aviv and the Consulate General Jerusalem. And as you'll recall, those were two separate diplomatic establishments. So Consulate General Jerusalem did not report to Embassy Tel Aviv the way a consulate general normally would have reported to an embassy—say, in the way Consulate General Frankfurt reported to Embassy Bonn or Berlin.

So I directly supervised the consul general in Jerusalem and the ambassador in Tel Aviv. The reason I mentioned that in particular was because there were issues that would come up with either one of them, but one in particular came up with Consulate General Jerusalem. That was a very difficult thing to manage. The consul general and another agency had a very difficult relationship and one wanted to do some things that the consul general didn't want him to do. I mention that only because I spent hundreds of hours with the seventh floor and with my colleagues in other agencies. It was just one of those things. In the end, we got it sorted out. But, it was a very difficult situation.

Q: Did the consul general win, or did the State Department?

JONES: No, he did not. There was an appropriate agreement reached between agencies that I helped negotiate and it was not to the satisfaction of the consul general.

Q: Okay. And then the embassy in Tel Aviv fell under you.

JONES: That did fall under me as well. The primary issue that we were always dealing with was security for the staff whenever there were threats of attacks by the Iranians mostly, sometimes by organizations in Iraq or in various other places. That was the primary issue that I remember being very much involved in. In addition to the dilapidated building that was their embassy. That was also a difficulty.

Q: So my sense is the peace process didn't advance much during that period?

JONES: It did not. It did not advance very much. I mean, David worked very hard at it. The difficulty was that it was very, very difficult to get decisions out of the Palestinian leadership. The Palestinian people did not support the leadership fully and there was a considerable suspicion on all parts as to what was really going on. It was very, very difficult. I was often involved in meetings that the secretary of state was involved in, since I would normally be on the trip. So I was able to witness just how difficult some of it was. But I wasn't directly involved in the policy process or in the negotiations other than to know what was going on. That meant that when I needed to advocate to other countries about this or that aspect of the negotiations, I could do that.

Q: Was there assistance being given to Gaza at that point?

JONES: Yes, yes,

Q: Did that come through Consulate General Jerusalem or more from Tel Aviv?

JONES: From Consulate General Jerusalem. A lot of it was independent. It was PVOs and NGOs that were working in Gaza on a variety of very important projects. One of the issues that I would get involved in regularly was security for American citizens, particularly the private volunteer organizations, leadership and staff going back and forth between Jerusalem and Gaza to assure that they could get through the security checkpoints that the Israelis set up so that they weren't too badly held up. They tried to get back and forth so that they could complete their missions.

Q: So what do you think in terms of organizational theory or whatever do you think that the U.S. government, over the many years that you were working on these issues, organized itself as best as it could to try to meet the goals relevant to the peace process? This was always something that had a lot of presidential involvement. I know you were involved in various aspects or present to see it.

JONES: I actually thought it did. I was not always a fan of the special envoys, even though I was a special envoy myself at one point. But I thought particularly with the Middle East, the Middle East peace process, because it was so utterly time-consuming—I mean, David Hale was

extremely busy all the time, either meeting with Palestinians and Israelis or talking to the EU or other organizations to coordinate the kinds of messages that we were giving and they were giving. We weren't dictating to them, but we were trying to coordinate to make sure we're all trying to accomplish the same things, working toward the same goals. There was no way that an assistant secretary could have done that. On various issues, I thought it was a good idea to have a special envoy for X, so special envoy for the Middle East? Yes, absolutely.

And then that special envoy job I did was on Caspian Energy. That also was very time consuming because of the travel involved. It was something that was specialized, that involved certain other countries. It didn't really take away at all from the policy process that the regional bureaus or even the functional bureaus were involved in, because I could coordinate with them easily on whatever it was that I was trying to accomplish. It just freed up the assistant secretary to do the huge number of other things she or he had to do.

Q: Just the year and a half you were there in NEA was as busy as one can imagine. Yeah?

JONES: It was just constant. What I would say, it was constant "Oh my God" issues.

Q: [Laughter] Right. Okay. Anything else on the peace process you wanted to mention?

JONES: Not that I can think of. I've been thinking through how it all worked and thinking about how much time I did spend with David Hale. He was always extremely good about making sure that I was briefed so that I could be helpful. And I made sure that I didn't get in his way.

Q: Was he assistant secretary of NEA before or after that?

JONES: After. I think it was after. And then getting ahead of myself a little bit, but then I talked him into taking the ambassadorship in Pakistan.

Q: So you've mentioned a few times in passing about Iran and your concerns about Iran. I thought maybe it'd be good if you kind of gave an overview of what was going on with Iran and how it affected everything else during that period.

JONES: So with Iran, we didn't have diplomatic relations for a very long time. The Swiss were our protecting power in Iran. We had ways of getting messages to the Swiss there to represent U.S. interests. If there was a message that we wanted to convey to the Iranians, we would prepare what we call a Swiss channel cable. And that Swiss channel was a regular department of state telegram that we would telegraph to Embassy Bern in Switzerland, who would hand it over to the Swiss Foreign Ministry. It was always classified releasable to the Swiss and to the Iranians—to the Swiss government and Iranian government is how it was labeled. So we would have embassy Bern hand it to the foreign ministry who would then copy the whole thing and send it to their ambassador in Tehran.

We met regularly—a small group of us. I, as assistant secretary, my Canadian counterpart, my EU counterpart, and I'm trying to think if there were others. I think it was the Canadians and the EU. And then whenever the Swiss ambassador came out of Tehran, we would have a meeting

with him. This group would get a debrief from him to get a sense. Then we would be able to give him a sense of where we were on developing policy ideas or whatever it might be. These were always very valuable. We sometimes met in Canada, sometimes I would go to Brussels for this meeting, never in Tehran of course. I don't remember that we ever actually did it in Washington. I must have always traveled for these, but I particularly remember the Swiss ambassador saying that he was the envy of his diplomatic colleagues in Tehran. And I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Because whenever I got a message to deliver, I would call the foreign ministry to say I needed an appointment because I had a message from Washington." He said, "I would get the appointment faster than I could physically get there." [Laughter] And he said, "Of course, I used that as an opportunity to discuss a lot of things beyond whatever it was that you guys wanted us to say to them. So that I had much more access than anybody else, any of my other diplomatic colleagues in Iran." So he said, "I was really the big shot there. Everyone would meet with me because I knew more than anybody else." [Laughter] That was really an interesting little vignette on how this worked.

Q: So at that time, was it before we were working on the nuclear issue a lot?

JONES: We weren't working on it very much. Well, we were in the following respect. We were working very hard to get the entire world to agree to the set of sanctions that would close off Iran's ability to sell oil. To sell anything, but mainly oil. And you know, this was certainly extraterritorial in terms of the requests that we made.

Q: But the reason—I'm sorry—the reason that we were looking for international agreement on these sanctions was because of the nuclear issue or Hezbollah, or—?

JONES: It was all of them. It was because of the nuclear issue. It was because of the activities of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran in terms of human rights issues. It was because of the American hostages that were there. This wasn't the hostages in the embassy, but there were various other Americans who had been arrested for no good reason and were in jail and being tried and all that kind of thing for espionage, which was absurd. But also for the threats against Israel and the terrorism activities that they were undertaking and arms shipments they were undertaking in Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain in particular. Those were the three countries that we were very, very focused on in terms of arms shipments.

So it was the whole range of issues. When we sent instructions to the Swiss ambassador through the Swiss channel, it was usually about one of those issues or several of them together. Some of them had to do with something that had just happened, that the Iranians had just undertaken or an American had just been arrested, et cetera. So the messages that we were having the Swiss ambassador deliver were not pleasant messages at all. They were very tough messages, but they left open the possibility of a conversation. We didn't ask for conversations all the time, but that was part of the diplomatic backdrop, shall we say. So that was the part that I knew about.

We had an extremely good Iran desk that was on top of all of this and would follow everything. We'd talk regularly about when is the time for another representation, another set of advocacy points to the Iranians if there wasn't a particular hook. But usually, there was a particular hook that we could use to have another conversation, or have the Swiss have another conversation

with the Iranians. There were times when we would speak to the Iranian ambassador in New York about some of these issues, just principally, because he was accessible and it was something that we felt comfortable doing. What I didn't know until much later was that one of the reasons that it was considered to be okay to have conversations with the Iranian ambassador about an arrested American or what they just threatened to do on Israel was that along the way, my senior American colleagues were having a different conversation with him that was about how to get started on nuclear talks. They were very secret for a long time. I didn't know anything about them. There were a few hints now and then that Oman might be facilitating something or other, but it was nothing I knew about.

Q: Were the sanctions put in place?

JONES: Yes, the sanctions were put in place and it was very hurtful, very damaging to the Iranian economy, very damaging. That went on for quite a long time before any outreach that my colleagues did to start discussions took hold. But it was clear that the sanctions had had their effect. What we know now is that there was a group in Iran that was saying, "Okay, let's see what we can get out of the Americans and the others on the nuclear issue by having these conversations."

Eventually I did find out about them. Then when I was traveling with Kerry a few times, we would stop in Geneva between other stops that I was doing with him in the Middle East, so that he could have these Iran negotiations. I wasn't at the table but I was outside the room and could help corral people to go in, or get some research done, or do something to be helpful. But it was very much as an adjunct. I wasn't party to the discussions. But what I will say is that when it did become public that we were working on negotiating this agreement with the EU, the Russians, and the Chinese with sort of the Security Council—was that these negotiations were about the nuclear issue only. The agreement did not include anything on terrorism, on human rights, or on Israel, which, as you know, became a big problem. However, I fully, completely supported separating out the nuclear issue as an existential matter for the United States and for the world. It was absolutely critical to undertake that negotiation and with the detail that the experts were able to hammer out in that agreement.

Q: Was it finished in 2015?

JONES: No, it [the set of direct talks between the U.S. and Iran] was finished at the end of 2013. I was involved then in and working with my colleagues on the seventh floor on explaining the agreement. So for instance, Wendy Sherman, the under secretary for political affairs who had been very involved in the negotiations, and Bill Burns, who was the deputy secretary—very, very involved with the negotiations from the very beginning—would call meetings. Meetings of a variety of ambassadors, let's say, or of interest groups, you know, the Arab Americans or the various groups supporting Israel or the Gulf ambassadors, or there'd be different groups that they would like to meet with. I would organize that meeting for Wendy to do. Wendy also traveled to various capitals in the Arab world to have the conversations that she needed to have, particularly with the Saudis, for instance. The Saudis and the Israelis were adamantly opposed to the agreement.

I didn't travel with her for those meetings. The negotiating team traveled with her for those meetings, but I would be around either in Washington or traveling later to some of these capitals where I heard over and over again, that her briefings were absolutely the best, that the government officials with whom she spoke in Saudi Arabia or in the Gulf States had heard—I didn't hear it so much from these Israelis, but I did hear from the Arab country leadership—how much they appreciated the briefings, how clear they were, how much they understood better about what the goals were. They said they would invite her back any time to help them out with anything, because she had done such a fabulous job in explaining it to them in such detail.

Q: So the sanctions got the Iranians to the table. Yes? And the sanctions were to cut off their ability to sell much of their oil at the price that they needed it, because they probably were not even—

JONES: At any price. They couldn't sell their oil.

Q: At all?

JONES: No. There were some countries that wanted to be grandfathered a bit because Iran was their sole source. And so as soon as countries agreed not to buy oil from Iran, it was, “Where else are we going to buy it?” And so the price went up and for some, like India for example, had a very difficult time meeting the agreement. I think Japan had a hard time meeting the agreement. Some countries were grandfathered in. I don't remember all the details now. Eventually we said, “Okay, enough, stop.” There was also an effort to see where oil was being smuggled from Iran to other countries.

Q: Right. I guess that's what I was referring to. There's always going to be some smuggling, right?

JONES: Right, right. The Gulf States were involved in that actually. So I remember having a lot of conversations [Laughter].

Q: You never slept, I'm sure, in 2013. So the sanctions were enacted in the United States and other countries for all of those five things you mentioned. And then some sanctions were taken off as the result of the agreement. And so that's where Israel and Saudi Arabia and other countries might have felt this puts them in a difficult spot. Is that right?

JONES: I'm not sure it was because sanctions were taken off. It was because the agreement didn't deal with some of the other issues as well. So Israel was particularly concerned about the Israel issue. The Gulf States and Saudi Arabia were upset because they hated Iran. They didn't trust them. They didn't care which issue it was that we made an agreement on. They didn't want any agreement with the Iranians. They didn't want them to be in good order anywhere. So it wasn't so much the nuclear issue that bothered them. It was if there was any kind of agreement that made the Iranians look halfway decent. I'm afraid that's still the case.

Q: But after the agreement, the U.S. took sanctions off on a staged basis.

JONES: Yes, that's right. They took sanctions off on a staged basis. There were also agreements on returning some of the frozen funding that had been frozen at the time of the hostages that had been agreed to be repaid but then never were. There was some of that back and forth—I was involved in that a little bit—with the people who were working on sanctions at the time. Mostly just to make sure I understood what was going on. I didn't really have an action role in that.

Q: Then, if I understand it correctly, you didn't oppose the use of the sanctions, and it seemed to help on something that was an existential threat.

JONES: One of the reasons that I thought that the way that Secretary Clinton pursued the sanctions was so effective, was that I saw how sanctions had worked on Qaddafi. By isolating him and making it impossible for him to travel, making it impossible for him to get on an airplane, making it impossible for him to go anywhere to do anything with any other country was what brought him around to negotiating the end of his weapons of mass destruction program. So I could see that that worked when it was very focused on the isolation part and the getting at something that they cared about when the Iranian case arose. They didn't have a budget, they had no money coming in.

Q: And what do you remember about the interplay between the political government and the religious leaders? What do you remember about that?

JONES: The foreign minister and the negotiators—who were the ones who did all the work with Bill Burns and Wendy Sherman, and the EU, the Russians, Chinese—were considered the moderates in Iran by Iranians. The Revolutionary Guard and their leader were quite opposed to all of this. But Zarif, the foreign minister, was able to persuade the ayatollah to agree that this was a good thing for Iran and could get back a lot of the financing. It would end their economic and financial isolation, which was very important to him for his own popularity. But we knew that the battle between the foreign minister group that had negotiated this and the Revolutionary Guard force and that whole group was ongoing and was always going to be difficult. This was not a win forevermore. It was a win for now, and it was going to be difficult going forward in any case.

The way I thought about it kind of reminded me of the way Washington works. You can win today, but you still have to keep at it because you never know when something is going to happen, or somebody is going to say, “We don't like what was agreed last week, and we're going to fix that.” The other aspect to the Iran agreement of course, was the Congress. So my colleagues on the seventh floor, Secretary Kerry and Bill Burns and Wendy Sherman, spent a tremendous amount of time on the Hill as did Bob Einhorn and the experts and technical people who knew nuclear issues inside out. They could discuss all the details of the agreement and explain how they had closed off potential avenues of subterfuge, shall we say, on the part of the Iranians. They could explain that it just wasn't possible for the Iranians to do something that we wouldn't know about, or that the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] wouldn't know about. The IAEA was a critical element to the agreement, of course, as well.

Q: Well, what do you know about how the president and the secretary and the higher level came to the decision to do it right? Did they listen to Secretary Clinton's idea, or—?

JONES: You know, I'm not sure. I don't know. I haven't read Bill Burn's book yet.

Q: [Laughter] I haven't either though it is sitting right here.

JONES: [Laughter] The thing I particularly remember, as we were thinking about all of this, is that in his initial campaign, the president, before he was elected president the first time, had said that he would talk to anybody that it took to talk to if it could solve a problem, and Iran was one of the ones he named. I remember thinking at the time, “Okay, we can do this. We can because the idea of negotiating something to close down the Iran nuclear capability had been around for a long time.” I mean, I spent a lot of my career on that, thinking about that and how do we get there and how do we do this? What's the trick to engaging with the Iranians who were much more diffident about engaging with us than we were with them? For them to engage with the U.S. was a concession. And then we got the opportunity.

Q: Right, right. I guess it fits in a bit broader pattern because they started working with Burma, Myanmar, and Cuba. And so that administration kind of came in with an agenda for trying to make certain relationships more constructive.

JONES: Right. And the other aspect of this is that Secretary Clinton wasn't there for when there was a lot of personal engagement, once it became public. There was a lot of personal engagement by Secretary Kerry on the actual negotiations. But in the meantime, Jake Sullivan, who had been Secretary Clinton's head of policy planning and chief executive officer, moved to the office of the vice president or the NSC—I have forgotten which. He was at both, but I think he was in the office of the vice president at this point. He was very involved in this negotiation as well from the White House. So if there was any need for greater facilitation, it was there with Jake being at the White House.

Q: Okay. I think we've talked about how you weren't directly involved in the peace process, but under President Obama, there were difficulties with Israel over the settlements throughout the period. So is there anything of note on that?

JONES: There were, but that was much more toward the beginning of the administration when I wasn't in NEA. It wasn't a hot topic so much when I was there, other than talking to the Palestinians who hated the settlements being there. But my response was, “Okay, let's talk about the kinds of things we need to discuss.”

Q: And the final question on Iran before we move on for me is—so, we're speaking now in late 2020. The current Trump administration had decided to withdraw from the agreement some years ago. And now we are looking at a new administration coming in January. Was the agreement structured, to what you remember, in a way that—is there anything about the way the agreement was structured that might make a change of course for the new administration possible?

JONES: That's a good question. My understanding is that the way the Trump administration walked out of the agreement was problematic in some form that I'm not sure I can explain, but that it didn't foreclose the possibility of the U.S. saying, “Let's go back or let's talk about how we

might go back.” I have great confidence that the lawyers involved then and involved now will figure out a way to say, “Here's the clause that says what they did was not the end of the story.” And so there is still an opening that we can use to go back. I don't know what it is, but I have every confidence that my colleagues will figure that out without any difficulty. And what we're seeing now is enough hints even from the Iranian side, that they would be amenable to a discussion.

You know, whether they would change what the requirements would be, et cetera, nobody knows. I don't know. But certainly the other signatories would be quite happy for the U.S. to go back into it because the EU, for instance, was extremely unhappy that the U.S. had turned its back on it. The other thing I'd like to mention here is that I went to a briefing at one of the think tanks when Pompeo was still the head of the CIA in which he was talking about—it was an unclassified session, large group of people there—in which he said, among other things, he talked about the whole world. He said now on Iran—he said that agreement [the JCPOA] is “the worst agreement ever,” something like that. He said, “As soon as the agreement was signed, the Iranians started attacking Lebanon and started doing all these terrible things.” He insisted that it was obviously the agreement that permitted them the luxury of doing those awful things. And I thought, “You liar. There is no way that you've been briefed that that's the case.”

I was Lebanon desk officer twenty years ago when the Iranians were attacking in Lebanon and sending in weapons. It's been decades that they were screwing around in Yemen and in Bahrain, they didn't just start. And I just thought, “How can you stand up there as first in your class from West Point and utter such a bald faced lie?” That lie he has repeated. That's the nicest thing I've ever said about him [Laughter].

Q: Okay. [Laughter] All right. So the other thing that you didn't have as much day-to-day involvement with, but I wanted to get your perspectives on, was what was going on in Iraq during your time? Iraq, the Kurds, oil. During your time there, in 2013, ISIS had formed and was working in northern and western Iraq and terrorizing the capital as well. Maliki was very dismayed by what was going on. There were foreign fighters pouring into Iraq. From their point of view, they had their own problems on budget and control of oil with the Kurds. So I wonder if you could just give us your perspective.

JONES: So yes. We actually spent quite a bit of time on that whole set of issues, starting with the question of the budget, reforming the budget. As you mentioned, the oil issue was central to that. The oil issue and the issue with the Kurds and finding a way for the Kurds to participate in a form acceptable to them in the Maliki government. The holdup on that was largely due to the budget and the budget discrepancies, as I recall, as well as the export of the oil from the Kurdish areas. How much of that would redound to the Kurds' revenue and how much would they have to pay to Baghdad on the oil?

Q: So let me just interject here, since I happened to be working in Iraq in the second half of 2013. My understanding of what happened was that the Kurdish autonomous division was still getting 17 percent of the budget, though with deductions for certain kinds of expenses it would be about 13 percent, and they were funding their provincial government that way. In order to increase that amount, they had promised to increase their oil production in 2013 in order to get

the budget to be larger so that they could get the larger pie from which their piece would come. And they did start developing oil. These were new efforts, but they were smuggling it out through Turkey and not selling it through the Iraqi government. So they were getting some revenue there while not contributing to the budget, so that the problem was that the Iraqis were going through a huge budget deficit. For the first time in their modern history, they were fully executing their budget and they were overspending. And so that was the underlying issue, which then later right after your tenure, I think, then blew up when the Baghdad government finally decided to cut off their 13 percent or 17 percent revenues in order to force the Kurds to work with them.

JONES: That is absolutely right. Thank you for reminding me of that. The anomaly here for me was the role of Turkey in all of this, because forever, as far as I was concerned, Turkey and Baghdad had a good relationship and not with the Kurds. The Turks and the Kurds were at loggerheads. The Turks, of course, are very suspicious of the Kurds in terms of their own civil society. The Kurds in Turkey who were at times in different guises—the Turks considered a terrorist organization

Q: Separatists, right?

JONES: They were separatists and therefore terrorists, et cetera. So this turnaround happened pretty quickly, actually, between the Kurds and the Turks. Where the Turkish foreign minister arrived in the Kurdish areas without having first arrived in Baghdad and so entered what was considered Iraq by not really entering Iraq by not going through Baghdad, was a gigantic foreign affairs crisis that erupted between Baghdad and Turkey that, of course, the U.S. had to get in the middle of. I mean, not that we wanted to get in the middle of that. We were put in the middle of it to try to sort it out. Everybody was yelling at the top of their lungs about, “Oh my God, the Turks have to apologize for having landed in Kirkuk, not in Baghdad,” et cetera.

The Turks would have nothing of it. They just said, “We're going to do what we're going to do, and you lay off and we're just—you know, forget it.” But the problem was exactly that, as you pointed out, they were smuggling—smuggling in quotes, the oil out through Turkey rather than having it go through the lira counter, we can put it that way, of Baghdad. My recollection is of the number of times that either I went there or I went there with Kerry when we were trying to get the Kurds and Baghdad on the phone with each other. We couldn't get them to meet with each other, but could we even get them on the phone to talk to each other about solving some of this budget problem so that we could get on with the existential issues, which as you mentioned, were all of these foreign fighters pouring in and using Iraq as a base to get into Syria and doing other things that Maliki thought was dangerous. In the meantime, Maliki was no longer so very popular. And there was—I have forgotten how it all developed—but there was a move afoot to have him removed or to remove him. Or—I can't remember, were there elections coming up, Robin?

Q: And there were parliamentary elections, a little later, in spring 2014. But he won. Or rather, his party won.

JONES: Right. But then there were a lot of questions about who else would be in the cabinet. Is that what it was? Sitting in a Baghdad meeting with political leader after political leader, after

political leader, talking about the election, talking about how you reconcile, talking about how you participate—that it's better to participate, to be part of the action than to just boycott. I felt like it was hundreds of meetings. Always with a box of Kleenex on the table.

Q: But I think that was before,

JONES: That was probably early in 2013.

Q: Right. So you had one of your DASes in charge of Iraq policy.

JONES: Yes, Brett McGurk came in. He came in part way through my time there. He had been potentially named as ambassador to Iraq. There was a bit of a scandal and his name was withdrawn. And then the White House, it seems to me, called me and said, “We've got a great job for him with you.” I said, “Okay.” I didn't know him at all, but we had a good talk. He was very good. He was an extremely good colleague. He was very dedicated to the work. He was good at coordinating on Syria because that was such an important issue. The important thing there is that Robert Ford, who was my DAS for Syria, had, of course, spent a lot of time in Iraq. He knew Iraq as well as anybody. So he could be very helpful to Brett on making sure he was talking to all the right people and making the case in a way that would actually get somewhere. So Robert was very good at that.

Q: Okay. So Robert and Brett worked together and then Brett went to Iraq a lot and worked closely with Ambassador Steve Beecroft when he visited.

JONES: Right. And Ambassador Beecroft was there for part of the time I was there. I remember he baked cookies for the visiting team. Chocolate chip cookies.

Q: He is an interesting man. He was an interesting manager. He was very effective with the Iraqis. And he also loves poetry and film. And surfing.

JONES: One of the issues we had there, too, was what to do about the consulate in Basra, because there were very serious security issues. As I mentioned last time, I spent a tremendous amount of time on security issues for all of our people in our buildings. So I had to really work hard at sorting out, do we keep them there? Do we reduce their staff? You know, what kind of security should there be, et cetera. And eventually we did decide to close Basra. We just couldn't support what it needed in order to stay open. It was very, very expensive to keep these places open, because of the food preparation and of course the security was expensive, but then it also involved providing food for everybody.

Q: Okay. Things were starting to get a little more dangerous. In late 2013, I think we did decide to augment military equipment for Iraq. If I recall correctly, Maliki came to DC in October or November 2013 at the very end of your time. And when he returned, there was an agreement to sell them equipment. Right?

JONES: That's right. That's right. And they actually could pay for it. Yes.

Q: Well, they could and they couldn't. Because I had to go in and ask the finance minister for the money as he was yelling at me [Laughter].

JONES: [Laughter] My goodness, you were in the middle of it.

Q: But that was because the Kurds had stolen all their money, he said. He was from the Shia south where most of the oil was produced and they were very resentful of the Kurds. All right. Anything else that you wanted to talk about on oil or Iraq or the Kurds? Or this period?

JONES: Yes, there was one effort that we had underway during this period of time for the last part of 2013. That was to work with particularly the Gulf Arabs and Saudi Arabia to find ways to bring Maliki and Iraq into the fold, not to consider them to be the enemy. We worked very hard at that. Starting with, how about exchanging ambassadors finally? Eventually, the Saudis finally did agree to exchange ambassadors. The others were later. But, that was one of the things that we really advocated. I spent a lot of time advocating to the GCC and the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia separately. The more they could bring Iraq into the fold, the more the Iraqis would understand what being a good neighbor meant, what that involved, and how they could model good practices that the Iraqis could then adopt. It was a tough sell. It was a tough sell, because the Ba'athis [under Saddam] had been so completely horrible to the Gulf States and Maliki was not so eager for those relationships. But we really pushed it hard.

Q: Yeah. He and the deputy prime ministers in Iraq were very angry in particular about Qatar. They felt like they were funding all these foreign fighters coming in.

JONES: Yeah. So that was another part of my big discussion with the Qataris always, either there or in New York at USUN [United States Mission to the United Nations] or during the UN debates or when they came to Washington. It was mostly out there, talking through, "Okay, what are you really doing and why are you really doing this?" In the meantime, the Qatari emir had died. And so the son was now there. Secretary Kerry was really keen on establishing a good personal relationship with him, which he did. He worked hard at it and he did do it. We just kept plugging away on it. There were also a lot of questions about what the Kuwaitis were really doing in terms of who they were funding or what they were permitting to happen, even though they said they weren't. So I spent a lot of time in Kuwait as well, working again on those kinds of issues, as well as the whole issue of people who weren't originally Kuwaitis and couldn't get Kuwaiti passports. There was a lot, a lot, of the Kuwaiti population who was stateless. That was a big human rights issue that we spent time on.

Q: And that had happened before the war?

JONES: Yes. It was a longstanding issue.

Q: And did you know the Barzanis or the Talabanis? Is there anything you wanted to say about how the Kurds were? One thing they did to make peace with Turkey was to not support terrorist Kurds from being able to cross the border.

JONES: Yes. I had gotten to know a lot of the Iraqis and Iraqi Kurds from when I was PDAS in NEA and was responsible for Iraq, Iran, and Libya. I flew into the Kurdish areas from Turkey. I got to know the Talibanis and the Barzanis and various of the people who were very involved. Hoshyar Zebari, for example, who became foreign minister during the period of time I was there in NEA, was not so senior when I first knew him. During the very first trip I was on with Secretary Clinton, when I first started in NEA, one of the meetings was in Geneva with the Arab League on Syria. Hoshyar Zebari was there representing Iraq, and it was old home week for us. We knew each other quite well. I was introducing him to Secretary Clinton and he said some very nice things about me. And so Secretary Clinton said, "Okay, Beth, you're in charge of Iraq now." It was part of my portfolio anyway, but she said, "You're to do Iraq to get all this sorted out." And of course, Barham Saleh I had known well during that earlier time. Jalal Talabani I'd known well, but in the meantime—he hadn't died yet—but he was ill. He did not live long enough for me to be able to work with him again.

Q: He had been the president of Iraq. The original president was Kurdish, as a way of uniting the three parts of Iraq. They tried to give a few posts to Sunnis as well. But among the Kurds, the Talibanis and the Barzanis sort of split a little bit.

JONES: They were competing families, should we say. They were very much competing families. The Talibanis were very much with Iran and the Barzanis were a little bit more with Turkey. And when I was working on it before in the late nineties, when I was PDAS, that may have carried on a little bit. But one interesting thing is one of my colleagues who'd been on the Iraq/Iran desk when I was a PDAS ended up marrying one of the Talabanis. And so I saw them in Kirkuk, I think, for coffee at one point, which was very fun.

Q: So, Sheri's a distant cousin of mine.

JONES: Oh, is she really?

Q: Yes, through my father's cousin so I met her in DC through my cousin Florie. I got to see them too in Erbil. I did one trip up to the North while I was in Iraq and got to see them. She had already had two kids, I think, at that point.

JONES: Because when I saw them, she was just pregnant with the first, I think it was.

Q: Right. Before that, once she got married but before they went back to live in Kurdistan—I guess she moved over from State to work in the Millennium Challenge Corporation. And so I also knew her and worked with her there. Well, so that's Iraq and that's 2013.

JONES: There's one issue in 2013, when I was still in NEA that I worked a lot on that I'd completely forgotten about but I wanted to mention. That is the negotiations that we undertook with the UAE for there to be pre-clearance by TSA in the UAE for direct flights coming to the United States. We'd negotiated TSA pre-clearances with Ireland when I was in EUR. So I knew about it. I knew that it existed and there was a negotiation involved, but the Emiratis and their airlines were very, very interested in getting a pre-clearance authorization for Abu Dhabi as well. The initial negotiations were undertaken by DHS, as I remember, with our office in the State

Department that does flight clearances in the Economic Bureau. Am I right about that, Robin? I think that's where it was.

Q: I think so.

JONES: The desk knew about it. And so the initial negotiations were happening. I wasn't involved in them at all until there got to be a big problem. The big problem came up through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor because one of the requirements that the U.S. government has for this pre-clearance to be approved is that the country agree not to return people who are asking for asylum. That's called refoulement, I think it's called. It's the French word. The country must agree to accept and process anyone who arrives asking for refuge and the Emiratis had not been doing that. They'd been sending people away. If they thought they might ask for refuge or if they did ask for refuge, they got returned. So it was up to us in NEA, and me in the end, to negotiate with the Emiratis about this, so that they could get the agreement with TSA for pre-clearance. I was under instructions from Bill Burns, the deputy secretary of state, to get this agreement done so that when the Emirati emir came to Washington at the end of the year, that could be a deliverable.

So I had a lot of discussions with Elizabeth Richard, who was the assistant secretary for democracy, human rights, and labor and with Rand Beers, who was the deputy secretary of DHS and then was acting secretary of DHS, on the shape of the agreement and what would we accept in terms of the assurances on the part of the Emiratis that they would abide by an agreement that they signed saying that they would not undertake this refoulement.

Q: So for a lot of countries, like Aruba and the Bahamas, they have so much tourism to the U.S. that it's really useful to them to have these agreements which are very expensive. They have to put up all these customs officials and immigration officials. So it's really expensive. It's a little surprising that for little UAE, that this would be so important to them.

JONES: Of course their airline is very lucrative. They had a lot of flights to the U.S. and they're rich. They could certainly pay for it, that wasn't a question. And they saw it as a prestige factor.

Q: I see. Because it was a benefit that was going to UAE folks. It wasn't going to be for people from all over the Middle East.

JONES: It would be for anybody. Anybody getting on the plane would be pre-cleared there, or not. I mean, they would be pre-cleared or they couldn't get on the flight basically. But what it meant was that when you arrived in Dulles, you arrived as though you were on a domestic flight. So it took quite a long time to reach an agreement. I chaired meetings in my office with Rand Beers and with Elizabeth Richard because it was basically between them. I was in touch regularly with the Emirati ambassador who was getting the kinds of assurances that were necessary. But part of it was time. They had to demonstrate over a period of time that they weren't returning people. That was one of Anne Richard's requirements and which they fulfilled. It was a year we were negotiating this. So, the six months that it took for them to be able to demonstrate that they weren't returning people who were asking for refuge worked. We

eventually were able to get the agreement made to the point that I was able to use it. I had my TSA pre-clearance in Abu Dhabi a couple of times in my travels the next year.

Q: [Laughter] That must have felt very good. And Rand Beers must have been a good colleague on that because he knew the State Department pretty well.

JONES: He knew the State Department really well. He was an excellent colleague. He stood up for what his organization wanted to stand up for, which was we want to put TSA there and they're ready to pay for it. This eases admission into the United States by quite a bit. And we rightly wanted to be sure that there wouldn't be some awful case brought by human rights organizations that we were aiding and abetting what they call refoulement.

Q: Okay. So congratulations. That's quite an accomplishment.

JONES: One thing accomplished. Yes [Laughter].

Q: All right. Do you want to talk about your move back to SRAP? Or do you want to save that for the next time?

JONES: Why don't we save it for the next time, and then I'll be sure to remember everything.

Q: All right. Let me pause the recording now.

Q: Okay, good morning. It's December 28, 2020 and we're continuing our conversation with Beth Jones. Beth, at the beginning of 2014, you said you went back to SRAP and you said that you worked primarily on Pakistan during that period, but maybe you can tell us a little bit about the transfer. I know that you had mentioned earlier that you had been waiting for your successor in NEA to get confirmed. And she finally was in December of 2013.

JONES: That's right. So Anne Patterson was finally confirmed in December. It took several days, almost a week, I think, for the papers to actually be signed by the White House, which is always a delay we forget about. She became assistant secretary on December 23. So that was my last day as assistant secretary. In the meantime, Jim Dobbins had taken over SRAP from Marc Grossman the year before. In the summer when I was still in NEA, it was known that Anne Patterson was coming to NEA, although it was unclear when she would have a hearing and be confirmed. Dobbins asked if I would come back to SRAP as his senior deputy. I agreed to do that thinking—well, you know, there are times when you shouldn't do the same job over again, but this was different enough, so I thought, “Why not? This would be great.” Plus, the other aspect of it, which my family knew, was that my daughter at this point was assigned to Embassy Pakistan.

And, the other thing that Jim Dobbins had said is that I would be replacing Dan Feldman, who was mostly working on Pakistan as opposed to what I'd done before, which was mostly working on Afghanistan, although I ended up doing both.

Q: Okay. So let's just pause there for a second. So you have three daughters, is that right?

JONES: I have a daughter and a son.

Q: Oh, okay. And your daughter was now in the Foreign Service?

JONES: Yes. She was in Embassy Islamabad. She had started in Beijing, then went to Islamabad as she needed to do a hardship/danger post. She especially thought it would be fun to go to Islamabad since she had been there as a kid and remembered well enough what it was like to live there. Of course, it was very different by the time she got there, as opposed to what it was like when she and her brother would be able to ride their little bicycles to all of the local markets from our house and on the edge of the Margalla Hills.

What was interesting is she had a vision in her head, pictures in her head, of what it was like in and around Islamabad. What was like in the Margalla Hills, what it was like to go hiking, what it was like to go biking, what it was like to visit the salt mines, what it was like to visit Lahore and the Red Fort, what it was like to go rafting on the rivers, that kind of thing. So she had a bigger sense of where she was and had a happier time, I think more than anybody else, because she knew more about the country and had a good vision of what the countryside was like. And, she had a very good attitude about Pakistanis and living in Pakistan and the kind of work that one could do there.

In any case, I started in January of 2014 back in SRAP with Jim Dobbins. I was the principal deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I did some work still with Embassy Kabul on what to do about the various consulates, the consulates general—which we talked about before—but that work was still continuing. And, of course, there were still negotiations to be undertaken with the Afghans, although I did less of that. The couple of times I visited Kabul during the period of time I was in SRAP, the second time mostly related to the upcoming elections. For the first time, there were going to be elections in Afghanistan that Hamid Karzai, the president, would not participate in because he was term limited. So there was a big effort, not only to assure that there were plenty of voting sites around the country, but that those voting stations would be secure. There was a tremendous amount of discussion with the NATO forces and the U.S. military about doing that. But also one of the things I did every time I went, I think I went two or three times, was to speak with the Afghan election commission, to meet with them, to understand the process that they had underway to assure the election, to assure ballot boxes, to get ballot boxes out to the right places, to collect ballot boxes after the election and to assure that people who wish to become candidates for president had equal access to campaign capability. The other thing I did is I met with various of the candidates, principally Abdullah Abdullah, and Ashraf Ghani. They were the two most prominent, and of course they were the ones who ended up as the lead candidates in the election and had to go to a runoff.

Q: When was the election? Do you remember?

JONES: I think the election was in April of 2014. And the runoff was slated for June.

Q: Okay. So they had to go to a runoff.

JONES: They had to go to a runoff. I ended up not being very much involved in the runoff aspects of it. I was involved up to the election and then speaking with both of the candidates after the election to try to get them to understand that they had to play fair with each other, which was very difficult. But in the meantime, I spent a tremendous amount of time on issues related to Pakistan. In the meantime in Pakistan, we had a new ambassador. He'd been there for probably a year and half by the time I got there. That was Rick Olson. I will humbly take full credit for his being the ambassador there. He was a colleague, one of the deputy ambassadors in Kabul when I was going in and out of Kabul so often when Ryan Crocker was ambassador.

Before I left for NEA, we were looking for a new ambassador because the one then was leaving a bit early. We wanted somebody who we knew could speak truth to power to the Pakistani officials, to the intelligence services, to the military, et cetera. And the people who had put themselves forward weren't exactly what we were looking for. I started thinking about, with encouragement from Marc Grossman—who was the SRAP at the time—as to who else might be an appropriate candidate. The person I thought of almost right away was Rick Olson, who was as I say, one of the deputy ambassadors who seemed very capable, very experienced and self-assured. He was able to speak easily with any level of government.

He had been an ambassador in the Gulf already. So I called him up. I don't think I had to work too hard to talk him into becoming a candidate, but he was a little skeptical at first as to why I would come to him. I explained why. I said, “These are the things we're looking for. These are the skills and the capabilities we're looking for. And we think you have that. Would you please become a candidate?” I, of course, had done that only after talking with Marc Grossman, Bill Burns and Wendy Sherman to make sure I had support for this idea, before I talked to him about it so that there wouldn't be any bad direction on my part.

So Rick Olson was there as the ambassador. Dan Feldman, who I was replacing, had spent a lot of time on economic issues and assistance issues on Pakistan. That was a big issue with the U.S. Congress in terms of the funding levels, what the funding would be for, et cetera. The big asset that I had is that my primary counterpart at USAID, the assistant administrator for the region, was Anne Aarnes. She was brought in not long before I started in SRAP into that job. She had been in USAID Pakistan when I was in Pakistan as DCM. Our families had been close friends. Our kids were the same age, et cetera. We had done a lot of hiking, camping and biking together.

So we had an immediate ability to collaborate and coordinate and essentially improve the relationship between State and USAID, which had faltered a bit previously. One of the things I did is I went over to USAID for meetings rather than insist that they all come to me. I always find that that helps a lot when you're trying to forge some compromises and to gain support for the kinds of things that I thought we needed to do.

Q: What kind of differences were there on the policy side as far as assistance? Where to put the money?

JONES: It was a little bit less about where to put the money. There seemed to be some skepticism on the part of my predecessors in the job about how USAID was implementing the programs. So my goal was to understand better how the implementation was going. Where were

the problems in implementation? Where were the holdups? Could we find ways to fix the hold ups by advocating with the government? One of the anomalies with Pakistan on assistance is that for the kind of assistance that we were focused on, the responsibility for certain economic sectors had devolved to the provinces. The federal government was no longer primarily responsible for health, no longer primarily responsible for education, and a large segment of USAID money was going into health and education, particularly maternal and infant health. There was a big problem with stunting in terms of nutrition, that kind of thing, but all of that was driven at the province level.

So on the visits that I made to Pakistan while I was in SRAP the second time, I spent a lot of time in each of the provincial capitals to speak with the chief ministers and with their leaders in education and health. I worked in particular to promote the programs, to promote the way that the programs needed to be run. I worked on the way the money needed to be spent in order for improvements in health, improvements in maternal health, improvements in hospital care, et cetera, in order for those changes to actually register so we could demonstrate that something good was actually happening as a result of U.S. assistance.

Several times, Anne Aarnes and I went together to Pakistan to have these meetings together. Sometimes, we didn't end up both in Lahore at the same time, but we certainly ended up in Karachi at the same time. I went to Peshawar as well. I can't remember if Anne was with me that time, but in any case it was a very, very positive relationship. It was one that I thought resulted in good progress on the kinds of assistance that we thought were very, very important for Pakistan.

Q: In the case of Pakistan, were there AID missions or sub-missions in each of the provinces, or were there just programs, as was my experience in Latin America?

JONES: There were AID officials attached to each of the consulates general. One of the difficulties we had, however, was because the security situation in Lahore had deteriorated so much, we were having to draw down the staffing in Lahore and move everyone remaining from their houses into the consulate building itself. So there was a big consulate renovation going on, which made it difficult to get a lot of work done. As the consulate renovation was going on in order to make it more secure, even the reduced staffing for Lahore was based out of Islamabad. So they had to do things remotely—seems easy now during COVID, but then it wasn't so easy to think about. But the times that I did go to Lahore, the consul general was there, several of the USAID people were there, the regional security officer was there, people like that.

So there were actually people at the consulate that I could speak to. Then we could go together to meet with civil society leaders, whether it was on human rights or education or health or whatever it might be. I remember visiting several projects, going to several schools speaking with local leaders about these kinds of things. And they were all very impressive, which I knew from my time before in Pakistan, that Pakistani officials or civil society leaders have it together to a great degree. They have frustrations as well in implementation. They have difficulties with more conservative elements of the society trying to get some of the work done. But for example, in one of the Lahore schools that USAID sponsored and promoted, there was tremendous, terrific work that was going on, and the kids were obviously getting a good education.

There was a lot of energy and innovation involved. It was always a very uplifting experience for me to go to any of these places. One of the programs I particularly remember in Karachi had to do with community involvement, generating support among, often, high school kids on integration of different religions, different ethnicities in a particular community, to try to get a handle on the gangs that otherwise terrorized people in the various communities in little sections of town in Karachi. I remember Anne and I visited one of them. We talked to a lot of the kids who were involved, their teachers, their mentors, the police chief, who was very involved in trying to make all this work. It was, again, very uplifting and very positive. That said, it was one of those programs that is not cheap to do. It was hard to do it in more than just a few places in Karachi, which is a gigantic city. So, it had limited effect, but it was an effect that we hoped would be contagious, and then would work in other places as well.

Q: Was there still a problem there with girls going to school at all?

JONES: That seemed to be less of a problem. It didn't seem to be that big an issue. It was not nearly the issue that it was in Afghanistan, where with the Taliban, the girls had been forbidden from going to school, but in Pakistan they did go to school. They were separated after a certain age. So boys went to one school and girls the other, but that's fine, so long as they go to school. The biggest difficulty in Pakistan in the schools was teachers. There weren't enough teachers. They weren't being paid that well. So the kids would go to school, but there might not be a teacher there, especially out in the provinces. So that was one of the big issues that we tried hard to work on, but it was hard to figure out exactly how to make the case because we could talk to the provincial leadership all we wanted and they would all say the right things and they would, for all we knew, try very hard, but they couldn't always make it work in more than a couple of places.

Q: I think you see that in a lot of places. As the money, especially if it comes from the federal government, in this case, the provinces—the money just doesn't stretch to paying them very well. And then for teachers to go and live in very remote places makes it difficult to get them to show up. I saw this in Central America a lot.

Can you talk a little bit about the security situation in Pakistan? I was looking at what was happening in 2014 and there were mentions of a Pakistani Taliban. Was there a lot of that?

JONES: Yes. That was definitely a very big issue. That was one of the issues that I would spend quite a bit of time on in my meetings with the federal government and with the provincial chief ministers. In particular with the federal government, one of the issues that we had was not only the Pakistani Taliban, but also the Haqqani network in western Pakistan that was basically safe havened there in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that used Pakistan as a safe haven for attacks into Afghanistan. So one of the very big issues that we had with Pakistan and particularly with the military and with the intelligence services was shutting down the ability of the Haqqanis to gain safe haven there.

We pushed them very hard on this, in particular, using the example of the Pakistani Taliban that were killing people all over the country—killing kids at schools, killing people in villages, killing judges, bomb blasts would go off all over the place, even in a garden in Lahore during the

what's called Nowruz, the springtime celebration. We said, "How can you countenance the Haqqanis, who are supporting the Pakistani Taliban, who are killing countless Pakistanis? They're killing way more Pakistanis than they are foreigners. How can you countenance that?"

During the time I was there, the second time, the Pakistani military finally did get tough on the Pakistani Taliban and started moving troops up into the northwest territories in order to try to get them under control. And they did that with some success. But it was not really sufficient. We knew that the Haqqanis still had a favored position, even though they were moved out of that area and moved to a different area. At the same time, the drone strikes were still underway, undertaken by the U.S. The drone strikes were to eliminate the leadership of the Haqqani network, the al-Qa'ida, and to some degree the Pakistani Taliban, if we thought they were operating crossborder into Afghanistan. The purpose of the drone strikes was to kill leadership who were staging attacks into Afghanistan. It wasn't to stop the terrorism in Pakistan. It might've had that as a side effect. But the drone strikes were, of course, extremely unpopular in Pakistan. It got to be a very negative issue in the bilateral relationship because of the collateral damage. By collateral damage, I mean other lives lost when a particular leader was targeted for killing and all the people around him were killed as well.

One of the things that we believed to be the case was that the military and the intelligence services were hiding from Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister, what they were doing. Nawaz Sharif would constantly tell us, "We're not doing these things. We're not safe havening the Haqqanis. We've done this, this, this, and this to prevent the Haqqani activity you're talking about." One of the jobs that Rick Olson had, and that I had when I visited, was to explain to Nawaz and explain to people around him that he was being lied to. We would say that to the military too. "You're lying to the prime minister. We know that you're doing X and Y and X and Y."

The other person who was very involved in helping us persuade the Pakistani elite, the influencers around Nawaz Sharif, was Robin Raphel. She was an advisor in SRAP. She started the same day I did when I started with Marc Grossman. She had a particular ability to reach all kinds of very influential Pakistanis, because she had been there as the assistance coordinator with Anne Patterson, and had developed a very good relationship with an awful lot of very senior Pakistanis. These included people like the finance minister, Dar, who's also deputy prime minister—Ishaq Dar with Melia Lodhi, who had been the ambassador in Washington. But her family was very plugged into the military leadership. She was a journalist, civil society leader and was, as I say, very influential with the Pakistani military. So one of Robin's jobs—she traveled occasionally to Pakistan, but she could also do this from Washington by phone—was to double track the advocacy points. She would call or meet with her various very senior contacts using the talking points that we were giving Rick Olson to use, and that I would use, or Jim Dobbins would use with the Pakistani leadership. The points involved what we knew was really going on, to see if we couldn't get some understanding on the part of the senior Pakistani leadership that they really needed to stop permitting the Haqqanis to operate out of Pakistan which just enabled the Pakistani Taliban.

One of the most influential political leaders around Nawaz Sharif was his brother Shahbaz Sharif, who was chief minister in Punjab. I would have an opportunity to meet with him

whenever I went to Lahore. One time, I think, I met him in Islamabad actually, because he happened to be there. He's somebody I had known quite well when I was there as DCM as well. So I was able to have some very good meetings with him at the time. We had lots of human rights cases that I would have to bring up with him as well. Many were Pakistanis who were imprisoned for religious reasons as they were considered to be anti-Islamic and so were basically on death row as a result. In fact, in most cases they were accused only because they had gotten crosswise with some political Poo-Bah who used apostasy as an excuse to get this person jailed. I say that just as a sideline, because that was one of the issues that I was constantly having to discuss with Shahbaz Sharif.

Q: Were you able to get them help once in a while?

JONES: Sometimes. Sometimes we could.. What was interesting to me, whenever I met with Shahbaz, it was always with a group of his ministers, his senior cabinet. I always had been asked to tell them in advance the issues that I wanted to discuss. I always gave the whole list. I thought, there's no point in trying to hide what I wanted to talk about. So, he would have the people there who were responsible for those issues. As I discussed something, he would turn to so-and-so and say, "What's going on with this, or what's going on with that?"

Q: It sure makes it a lot more productive, doesn't it? Then they come prepared. When you don't surprise them, they come prepared.

JONES: Yes. Or you say, you know, "I know this is what you're hearing about such and such. This is, in fact, what we believe is actually happening. Could you please look into that because we think maybe you don't have the full story?" That kind of talk was on the list sometimes too. I remember one meeting in particular after I'd been to Lahore a couple of times. I had been in Islamabad speaking with his brother, with the prime minister, with ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence], with the military leadership, et cetera. As I was leaving, Shahbaz walked me out to the car. It's a long walk because those are gigantic buildings and very, very ornate. He said, "So what's really going on with the military? And these drone strikes? What's really going on with Haqqanis? I know you're telling my brother he's being lied to. Are we being lied to?" I said, "Yes, you are. You are being absolutely lied to," and went through chapter and verse of what we knew. I said, "If there's anything you can do to get your brother and get the military to stop doing these things with and for the Haqqanis, for instance, certain parts of these organizations, not all of them were in on it, then you'll be in much better shape with internal security." We knew for instance that the Sharif family was very concerned about security in Punjab, which is their base. They were particularly concerned about Lahore. There'd been some terrible terrorist attacks in Lahore. I said, "How can you permit this to go on? Because it's your people here in Punjab who are being hurt, just as badly as people in Sindh and Baluchistan." I don't know what he did with that, but I was impressed that he knew that it could be a problem.

Q: I know that with ISI, years before, we had realized they were being radicalized. But was the military not listening at all to its civilian government? Was there a power struggle and they had a lot of power over them to get what they wanted? What was going on? Why was the military doing what they were doing?

JONES: The military has always been the strongest institution in Pakistan. That's a generalization, but I think it's actually quite true. There've been only a few times where the political leadership and the military leadership were as one, in terms of the kinds of things that they thought were important to do. But the Pakistani military has been quite powerful, not only in military terms, but in military-industrial terms. I mean, the military owned a lot of industries. It was wealthy because of the control they exerted over a variety of industries in Pakistan. The military decided what it wanted to do. Its primary goal has always been the confrontation with India. It was only during this period that they realized that they were in trouble on their Western border, as well as on their Eastern border. They were in trouble in the sense that they wanted to be able to control what was going on in Afghanistan as well. They had this, I believe, false sense that if they permitted the Haqqanis to stay involved even in this very negative way in Afghanistan, that they could assure that India couldn't take Afghanistan over somehow and become more influential in Afghanistan than Pakistan was comfortable with. Because the Indians were interested. They were involved in Afghanistan, not necessarily in a negative way. I wouldn't say that, but they certainly were interested.

All of the advocacy that we ever did about how important it was to come to some kind of agreement with India on Pakistan's eastern border, how important it was not to permit terrorist organizations to work in Kashmir, not to permit terrorist organizations to do attacks like they did in Mumbai, those kinds of things. The Pakistani military, basically, outsourced their foreign policy to these organizations, by letting them do whatever they wanted. The argument we used to make to them was, there are times when you work to make an agreement, or try to negotiate an agreement with India and try to assure a quieter border, because you don't want your soldiers killed up on the Siachen glacier at the border there. If these terrorist groups that you're supporting, without your approval, launch an attack in India, you've just undercut all of the work that you're doing on negotiating. So you've outsourced your foreign policy to them. Same thing with the Haqqanis. You want to have a role in an Afghanistan that isn't going to be a threat, but the Haqqanis are undercutting you there.

At the same time, we were trying to get the Pakistanis to be a positive force for influence on the Taliban. Some of the Taliban leaders lived in Quetta and we knew that the Pakistanis had quite a bit of control over them. We wanted them to exercise positive control, since we couldn't make sure that they had no control. They did have control. We knew that, but wanted them to become a force for positive influence.

So we had the drone issue. The other big issue that I spent quite a bit of time on was fertilizer. Not because of fertilizing fields, but because elements of fertilizer are used in bomb-making. There was a system there that fertilizer that was sold legitimately by legitimate organizations or companies to farmers for their crops had a particular color tag on the bale. Ones that did not have that stamp are going to bad guys. We knew who the big fertilizer producers were. I spent a lot of time talking about fertilizer with those guys as well as with some of the senior military people, who, in fact, were quite eager, genuinely eager, to get control of the fertilizer industry and fertilizer sales and fertilizer distribution because they could see that this was dangerous for their own citizens. And it was. It was much more dangerous for their own citizens than it was for anybody else.

Q: So you worked on Pakistan for six months, eight months?

JONES: So I was in SRAP until the 1st of August. So 1st of January to 1st of August, so seven months.

Q: And so did you see any change in how the government was viewing what they were doing? I guess, by becoming aware that they were being lied to?

JONES: Honestly, not really. I mean, we thought we had made a little bit of headway in getting the political leadership to understand that there was a problem that they needed to deal with, but at that point, you know, Nawaz was still awfully weak and wasn't inclined to do very much. He had political problems as well, which we, of course, know about from later when he was actually thrown out of office, but that didn't happen for another year or so.

One other big issue that we worked on in Pakistan was an assistance issue that had to do with one of the main hydro dams. The whole hydro system had a variety of different kinds of technology and technical structures for a variety of dams. The ones that were more free flowing didn't stop people's livelihood along the waterways. Then there was a gigantic dam that the U.S. had built in the fifties, I think it was. There was another one that Pakistan really wanted to build. We thought it was actually a good idea. It was called the Diamer Bhasha Dam.

The Pakistanis finally had figured out the design that they wanted. They had negotiated as much as they could with India over provision of the water, because some of the water came out of rivers from India. The issue was getting the financing that was needed in order to start the construction of this Diamer Bhasha Dam. I spent a lot of time with USAID on that, talking with their water hydrology people. There was an interagency group that was chaired by the under secretary for economic affairs, Cathy Novelli, on this because there was a lot of interagency interest in the dam and the effects of the dam. Was it or wasn't it really a good thing? What about the financing? So OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation] was involved. EXIM Bank was involved and there were any number of meetings chaired at the National Security Council and at other fancy buildings around Washington. That's what I particularly remember on that.

I'm not sure I can remember where they all were now. But we worked very, very, very hard with the Pakistanis and with the interagency to make sure we knew all of the aspects of the dam, what it would do, what it would harm, to balance out the right thing, to try to get the funding for it. We ended up getting a lot of the funding that we needed from Congress. But I actually don't know any more of what happened to that dam.

Q: Well, it would have involved the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank too, right? Be a big infrastructure project.

JONES: Exactly. A lot of work was done on that. Plus we had some of the private sector companies who were interested in hydro power. We talked to them about how would you use this? What are the kinds of issues that you would like to see in something like this, if you were to use this hydro-power?

Q: So speaking of infrastructure, was there discussion of the gas pipeline, the TAPI pipeline from Turkmenistan?

JONES: Yes. Yes there was. It seemed a little fanciful still at that stage. It wasn't until later that there was more movement on it. But there were negotiations, some quite successful actually between the Pakistanis, the Afghans, and the Turkmen about what the prices would be along the way, what would each country charge for transit of the energy? It was still gas. Gas. So then Tajikistan got involved as well, because some of the gas was going to come from there and they were actually one of the most responsible of the participants.

Q: So it was just kind of moving along, then maybe got a little more momentum later? It had a long history, you know, even, even during Taliban time. There was a U.S. company, Unocal that would, I think that was—

JONES: My goodness yes. I remember when Unocal came to see me in Almaty about this. That was when Afghanistan was completely a mess, which I knew perfectly well from all my time there. Unocal was explaining to us how they had it all wired, that it was going to go from Turkmenistan, which was sort of impossible to imagine, across into Afghanistan—they had all the warlords, they said, all the warlords were in line. That never happened, on any issue, ever.

Q: So two things on that one. In 2008 or 2009, I met the chairman of Unocal in Montevideo at a cocktail party, a small one at the ambassador's house. And I asked him about TAPI and he said, "Oh yeah, those people were crazy. We got rid of that project." But then when I was in EB in the spring of 2013, I think I was asked to go to an NSC meeting on the TAPI project. And I got to see many of my old friends from the pipeline days in the 1990s. They were all mad at each other over the TAPI pipeline. It had become quite a hot button item within different parts of the U.S. government, I guess.

JONES: I was so skeptical frankly, but you know, whatever it was that the countries wanted to negotiate with each other, we thought, "Okay, fine. But we're not going to spend time and effort on this. If they can do it, fine. If not, it's no big deal."

Q: Okay. So the government was a democratically elected government at that time in Pakistan?

JONES: Yes. It was a free and fair election. It was considered to have been done very well. Nawaz was now—let's see—he started in June of the previous year, and this was his third time, at least as prime minister. But each time, in each of his stints as prime minister, he seemed to be less and less interested in governing. There wasn't much energy around him. Where there was energy was on the part of the finance minister. Ishaq Dar was quite energetic and some of the other ministers around him were quite energetic about trying to get the finances of the country under control in a way that seemed to make sense. I mean, they were really working hard. There were a lot of things that they needed to do in order to boost revenues and they were trying to do some of those things. So a lot of us spent a lot of time with Dar and with the people around him and, of course, so did Rick Olson.

Q: Okay. So was SRAP very different under Ambassador Dobbins?

JONES: Not really. It wasn't that different. It was probably less intense. That had nothing to do with Dobbins. It was just that there wasn't quite the intensity out of the White House about Afghanistan and therefore Pakistan. But it was also the period of time where we were working out how to reduce our staffing in Afghanistan, in particular. So if there was any particular issue, that was the issue. So it wasn't as intense in terms of how do we expand? How do we do more? How do we do this? It was more as we reduce, let's make sure to close out the programs that should be closed out or to turn them over to local control in a way that makes sense. But turn nothing over to the military. That was a lesson learned from Iraq, where all kinds of programs were still in process. In Iraq, development programs were turned over to the military and then didn't really work out, that didn't work out very well, not least because then the military ended up leaving very suddenly in Iraq. We wanted to be sure to close things out in Afghanistan in a sensible way.

Q: So the first time you were in SRAP, it was Secretary Clinton and now it was Secretary Kerry, but the path was the same of evolving the governance to Afghanistan, to Afghans.

JONES: That's right. To Afghans. Right.

Q: But bringing—I know that you didn't work on it as much—but bringing the Taliban to the table.

JONES: Yes. Yes. There was still an effort underway for that. When I was in NEA, I happened to be in Abu Dhabi when Jim Dobbins was there. It was just after the meeting in Doha that was meant to be the opening of the Taliban office there. That had turned into a bust, because they had—contrary to what they had agreed—they had a big sign saying “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” or something like that. I can't remember exactly, but whatever the name was that they used was exactly what they weren't supposed to use, as had been agreed with Karzai. So that was a bust. There was an effort while I was doing all the Pakistan stuff to try to restart that, but I can't remember that we got very far.

Q: And SRAP continued after that for some time?

JONES: There was a lot of discussion about at what point should SRAP go back into the South and Central Asia Bureau. Nisha Biswal was the assistant secretary. She was eager for it to go back in. She and I talked about it several times. It was a little daunting for SCA, I think, because that bureau wasn't prepared to do the almost daily deputies committee meetings and principals committee meetings. The papers that were necessary for that and negotiations necessary for that were very difficult and intense. So that actually didn't happen during the time that I was there. It didn't happen for another year or so, I think.

Q: It's now closed out?

JONES: Yes. Now Pakistan and Afghanistan are all part of South and Central Asia.

Q: So the course that Marc Grossman took did still continue.

JONES: It did, it did. There was still a big effort to get the Pakistanis to be supportive of the Taliban negotiating process, to figure out which of the Taliban leaders could actually deliver the Taliban. That was one of the big issues in the Afghan election—how would Ghani or Abdullah relate to the Taliban and Taliban negotiations? Karzai had been absolutely insistent that the Afghan government had to be involved in the negotiations. That makes sense obviously, and that was certainly the U.S. position. The Taliban didn't want the Afghan government involved. They didn't consider it legitimate. So the question then was—with Abdullah and Ghani—one of the campaign issues was, how were they going to relate to potential Taliban negotiations? And another issue with the Taliban negotiations was participation from women. That was a very big issue that we tried to push in the right way, to get the Afghans to understand that Afghan women who were adamant about this had to have a place at the table.

Q: And you mentioned Robin Raphel. So she was on the staff or was she acting as a consultant?

JONES: She was on the staff. She was a full fledged member of SRAP. The special advisor. Her primary function was, as I say, to help us influence by making the case to all the people that she knew who had influence around Nawaz on the various issues that we were trying to get done.

Oh—another issue that we worked very hard on with the Pakistanis, which we did not succeed on, was Dr. Afridi, the doctor who had been the one who had figured out where Osama bin Laden was staying in Pakistan. He fingered the compound, which was then attacked and was where bin Laden was killed. Dr. Afridi had been arrested and we were trying very hard to get him freed. That was another issue that was constantly on the agenda of every conversation that any of us had with the Pakistani leadership. And of course, on Robin's conversations too.

Q: You might remind us when Osama bin Laden had been killed. A couple of years before?

JONES: He was killed in May, 2011.

Q: Okay. So it had been awhile, but when you came back to SRAP, it had been awhile, but he was still in jail, that's after.

JONES: Yes. And he didn't get released. No, I'm not sure. What is that status now? I didn't look it up.

Q: Yes. Okay. Right. So what happened in July and August?

JONES: So July was very busy there. A lot of my colleagues were very intensively involved in negotiating some sort of agreement between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah about the runoff election—how would the voting be done, et cetera. So those who were more involved in Afghanistan than I was spent a lot of time traveling. Kerry went a couple of times to see if he couldn't help negotiate some sort of agreement as opposed to the standoff that they had at the time. Then Dobbins decided he was going to leave government. He left the 31st of July. I left the 1st of August and Dan Feldman took over SRAP. I was still on the books at the State Department and I talked to Pat Kennedy about, was there anything else that I could be doing that would be helpful, or should I just go back to the private sector? Should I go back to my second retirement?

He called a couple of weeks later and said that Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, was missing a deputy. It was meant to be Michele Sison who was coming out of Sri Lanka, where she was ambassador. She hadn't been able to get a hearing and couldn't get confirmed. Could I please go temporarily and be Samantha's senior deputy as the deputy permanent representative to the UN for the U.S.? So I did that. I went up in late September and stayed until Michelle Sison was confirmed. We overlapped for a little bit about a week or ten days, so that I could show her the ropes and introduce her to all the people that I was dealing with. So I was there from late September until late December, until just before Christmas.

Q: Late September is right after the UN General Assembly.

JONES: After the General Assembly, I was not there for the General Assembly. I escaped it that year.

Q: That was the year that ISIS had taken over northern Iraq. Is that right? 2014. So a big ramp up in Iraq was happening right?

JONES: Yes, a big ramp up in Iraq. There were considerable issues in Libya. We spent a lot of time because the UN had the lead in negotiations and Libya. So we have regular briefings on Libya. North Africa was not in flames exactly, but it was a mess, because of how many terrorist organizations were roaming back and forth across North Africa. Western Sahara was a big issue. I spent a lot of time on Western Sahara, again, just as I had in NEA, meeting with the Moroccan ambassador, the Algerian ambassador, trying to sort out some of the UN language relating to Western Sahara to allow for the renewal of the UN mandate there. There were issues with the Palestinians and the Israelis. I spent a lot of time with the Saudi ambassador to the UN who was the lead for the Arabs. He was a really good ambassador who spent a lot of time negotiating over language that everybody could accept. Those are the primary issues that I remember spending a lot of time on.

We, of course, had special representatives, American special representatives, on particular issues. So if it was something very esoteric with ECOSOC [United Nations Economic and Social Council] or with one of the specialized UN organizations, there was somebody else who could deal with that. So I had the issues that went to the Security Council, basically. Samantha, at the time, was very, very busy with the Ebola response. She had really taken a deep interest in the fact that there was not a big Ebola response internationally, and she thought there should be. So she worked hard with the UN, with other agencies and with the U.S. government. She traveled to Africa, at least once, if not twice on Ebola missions. She was a member of the principals committee, of course, and so she was often in those meetings which meant that I spent a lot of time in the Security Council, which was great for me. I loved it.

Q: What was it like to be in the Security Council?

JONES: Two things. First, there are a lot of meetings not in the Security Council room. There's a private conference room that's still set up by country. So I, as the U.S., was next to the UK and not too far from the Russians. But one of the things that was really great was, Luxembourg for example, was on the Security Council that year, at that time, and the Luxembourg ambassador

to the UN was somebody I had known when I was assistant secretary for Europe. She had been the national security advisor. So there were those kinds of serendipitous relationships to be renewed. And for me, it made a big difference. First of all, it made it very fun. And secondly, it meant that I could call her up and say, “Okay, here's why we're doing X and Y on Libya. Here's the kind of language that we think would make the most sense. We've discussed it with the UN special rapporteur for these reasons. What do you think, would you like to meet with them as well? Should you and I meet with them together?”

The Russian was someone that I had known through the years, the Russian ambassador. He was tough, but he was congenial. I mean, you can have a good conversation with him, but he would blast us in the formal meetings. But there were a lot of these closed door meetings and I would go, I would sit at the table and I would always have the specialist, the political officer who knew the issue best, there with me to consult. One of the questions we need to ask—because a lot of those closed door meetings would be with the UN rapporteur on Libya or the UN rapporteur on Syria, or UN negotiator. Sometimes the High Commissioner for Human Rights would come and speak or the High Commissioner for Refugees. A lot of those would be in the open session, the public session in the big Security Council room, the one that you see on television. And it was super fun to sit at that table in the U.S. chair.

Q: So how often were meetings?

JONES: Every day, almost every day, sometimes a couple of times a day. The closed door meetings would be almost every day and the other meetings several times a week, for sure. Because any member could say, “We want a discussion on X,” and the chairman, the president of the month, could say yes or no, or would say, “We're going to schedule it for this and schedule it for that.”

Q: And my sense was that USUN, our mission in the UN, needed very specific instructions for every meeting. Is that the case?

JONES: Yes, it is. It is to some degree. So for example, if we're negotiating a Security Council resolution, we had to be sure that Washington was on board with whatever the language was. And we would work that through the International Organizations Bureau at the State Department. Also there's a UN Washington office, UN/W, that was our liaison with the rest of the building or with the National Security Council, the NSC. One of the people there was one of my Syria guys. He'd been on the Syria desk when I was in NEA, Wael Zayat, who was very good. So, you know, whenever there was a Syria issue, I always knew that Wael was giving us the best possible information. He was one of the ones who was constantly on Skype with people in Syria.

Q: So UN/Washington was part of IO, the International Organizations Bureau?

JONES: It's part of USUN but it's in Washington to be the liaison for USUN in meetings in Washington that we couldn't necessarily attend. It's not part of IO.

Q: I see. And so are there Security Council resolutions every week, or is a resolution a big deal?

JONES: Not every day and I don't think they were every week. I mean, there were meetings to discuss particular issues, but it wouldn't necessarily result in a resolution. One of the things that I had to really pay attention to is that Samantha had a very big interest, of course, in human rights issues and in promotion of women. It was very clear that she wanted any resolution that came out of the General Assembly—voted on by all the members—to have something in it about women and promotion of women and promotion of human rights. Some language like that, which was often very, very hard to negotiate because it wasn't always particularly relevant to the issue. We found ways to make it relevant to the issue, so that we could be responsive to Samantha, but there were times that I'd have to say, "We need this resolution." The Saudi ambassador was sympathetic, but sometimes it would be a resolution that had been under negotiation for months and it would come to me and I would say, "Oh, we're missing these two things that Samantha always wants." They said, "You know, we just can't get it in." I'd call the Saudi ambassador and say, "Is there any chance you could include—"and I'd come up with some very innocuous language just to have it in there. And he said, "I have worked so hard on this, please don't do this to me." So I'd go to Samantha and say, "We can't get it this time, but we'll work on it for the next one."

Q: Was there anything particular going on in Syria during that period?

JONES: I don't remember Syria being an issue that I had to spend a lot of time on, because a lot of it didn't always involve the UN, whatever was going on. Sometimes, the negotiators would come to us and the Algerian lead would come and speak to us, but we didn't really need to do very much in terms of a resolution or some particular decision that I can remember at that time.

Q: Okay. And you said there were issues in Iraq about South Africa, Western Sahara, so there's a lot going on, but does anything stand out?

JONES: With Libya, the issue was how to get any kind of political agreement underway with all the competing factions. And so the UN representative would come and tell us what was going on. There wasn't too much that we could do or say other than keep at it.

Q: Were all the ambassadors plugged in with their home countries on the Security Council? Sometimes, when we are out in the field in smaller countries, you get a host government to agree to support you on a vote, but then the people in their missions of New York don't listen. But I would assume that the Security Council is different.

JONES: I didn't experience that when I was there. I knew that this had been a big issue previously, which I mentioned previously when we knew that the German government was issuing a different instruction than what the German ambassador was actually voting on in New York. We knew that there was a gigantic disconnect, but I didn't experience that in the time that I was there. There were any number of esoteric type issues that I dealt with. And there would be various meetings. So at one point I actually had to make a speech from the big lectern, where you see all the leaders speak for the UN General Assembly, to basically an empty hall, frankly. But there were a couple dozen of my colleagues there, you know, sort of my level. And then there would be other meetings where the senior U.S. government person had to speak. Often I was the

only one around. So I would give the speech on something that I might not know much about. But we had a great staff at USUN who always wrote me a sensible speech for those occasions.

One of the other big assets that I had there was Jeff Feltman. Jeff Feltman had been my predecessor as assistant secretary for NEA and had left suddenly to go to be the UN under secretary for political affairs, replacing Lynn Pascoe. This was usually an American government position and Jeff was in it. We had been good friends. We stayed good friends after. He was my go-to person. When I took over from him in NEA, I'd call him and say, "Oh my God, what's this about?" And in New York, he was also an extremely good colleague. He had to be very careful not to be America-centric in the kinds of things that he did and the positions that the UN secretariat would take on particular issues. But I could call him and get a sense for directions that they might be going. Or I'd say, "Washington wants to do this on a particular issue. How do you think that will go over with the UN secretary general?" And he was very helpful that way.

The other very, very helpful thing was that the president of the General Assembly was a Swedish diplomat who had been the Swedish ambassador to Washington when I was assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia. So I knew him very well as well, and could go to him on General Assembly type issues which came up every so often. A lot of them were very esoteric, like I said. We had ambassadors at the UN, U.S. ambassadors at the UN, that handled those particular issues. But occasionally there would be one that I needed to go talk to him about. And I was always glad to do that.

Q: Okay. So tell us the difference between a UN General Assembly issue and a Security Council issue.

JONES: So, the General Assembly makes resolutions all year long. Anytime that it likes. But the primary period for the General Assembly resolutions is in the fall when the General Assembly is in session. So, for example, the "Zionism is racism" issue. That resolution would be a General Assembly resolution. There would be General Assembly resolutions on settlements. Those are the ones that were the problematic ones that I particularly remember, but it could be on any issue and it would require the vote of the full General Assembly, all 192 members or whatever the number is for it to be passed. So those would be the occasions at which I would go to make a speech to a group of the General Assembly or to the General Assembly in general, on one of these issues.

The speech would be basically to put on the record as the U.S. position. I could go and have meetings with all these people and discuss the issue. Or more importantly to point out is that the State Department every fall would assign a regional specialist to USUN to handle all of these various esoteric issues. So we had one person for NEA, one person for Europe, another person for Asia, another person for South America, another for Africa, et cetera. They would go meet with all the ambassadors in their region on particular issues that we needed to get their vote on in the General Assembly on General Assembly issues. They would come to our daily staff meeting. Lots of times I thought they were speaking Greek, because the issues were so specialized and esoteric I can't remember what they were, but it would be very detailed and very specific about some issue that somebody wanted to put forward before the UN.

Q: So, for resolutions like “Zionism is racism.” Are these more important in the UN world than for instance, a sense of Congress resolution in the U.S. Congress? Sometimes you have resolutions where Congress says, “This is how we feel,” even though it has no legal import. In the UN context, if a resolution succeeds, is that a little more important?

JONES: Not for the General Assembly. No. But for the Security Council, yes. So for instance, countries would bring issues to the Security Council where they needed a specific decision, including in order to take action themselves. So for instance, we saw this in the Balkans a lot. Countries who wanted to participate with NATO or with the European force had to have a UN resolution to support their joining that force. This was Germany in particular, for instance. So, those countries would take to the UN, to the Security Council, a resolution in favor of NATO members' military participation in a security force in Bosnia, let's say.

Q: Okay.

JONES: So the Security Council resolution was considered to have way much more force and not necessarily international law force, but a lot more force. Countries could use a Security Council resolution to underpin a decision that they wished to make, or a policy that they wished to pursue. They would do that much more than a General Assembly resolution.

Q: Okay. I think that that makes it clear, those examples make it pretty clear. So it seems like the UN always has management issues, UN budget reform, things like that. Did you have to get involved in that as the deputy?

JONES: I did not. Not that I remember. A very good friend of mine who is an excellent management officer, Don Hays, was brought on as a special advisor to USUN to manage exactly that whole set of issues. He did that extremely well. He would come and brief me every week or so on what it was that had come up. Some of it had to do with selling UN buildings around town, or moving people from one building to another, or consolidating offices in one building or another, things like that. I'd completely forgotten about it until you asked about it, but I should've mentioned that Don Hays was asked to do that and was up in New York about the same time I was, doing exactly that kind of thing during the General Assembly, which is when most of that activity took place.

Q: Okay. So is that the only time that you worked in a multilateral setting in your career?

JONES: Only time. The only time. I can't say I'd stayed away from it. I tried a couple of times, at least once anyway, to work in multilateral diplomacy. I applied for a job in the International Organizations Bureau and didn't get it because I had no experience in international organizations. I said, “Oh, but, you know, I'd like to get that experience!” So this was my very, very first time in a multilateral forum and I was concerned about it. But then I realized that I'd done multilateral work in the sense that when I was assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, I was constantly working with the EU in all of its various manifestations, or with NATO and that was multilateral too.

Q: That happened to me recently, too. I was interviewing for a job and I acknowledged that I didn't have that experience directly. And then I went through the trade work and the European energy charter and all kinds of things over the years, and preparing Nick Burns for discussions on Colombia in the UN Friends of Colombia and UN meetings, and G-20 Development Working Group and OECD, et cetera. And, you know, I realized that you can do a whole bilateral career for thirty years and have more multilateral experience than you know, like all the things you probably did with NATO.

JONES: And just for example, in NEA, when we pulled together the Friends of Syria, or the London 11, you know, all these different groups that we would forge in order to amplify our position internationally, that was exactly what we were doing.

Q: That's right. So what do you think? Are there any particular tricks to being effective in a multilateral setting besides having worked in the field and knowing everybody?

JONES: [Laughter] That helps! But let's say you didn't have that advantage that I did. The key thing is to make a big effort to go meet everybody and to take the initiative to do it, especially as an American diplomat. Because with some countries, it's an honor to be called on by the American ambassador or the American representative or whatever it is, because it doesn't happen that often. So I thought that was a particularly, very important thing to do, which I did. I did it with all the members of the Security Council. And the cool thing is, you get to see the great places they live in New York, all these places, because they're all within walking distance.

Q: Where did you stay when you were in New York?

JONES: Luckily, the State Department rented a tiny one bedroom apartment for me on First Avenue, 51st and First. So I could walk—it was about a twenty minute walk to work every day. There was a bus but I never actually used the bus. So I walked everywhere. I knew my way around pretty well. It was nice.

Q: Anything else that you thought was important about this period?

JONES: Yes. I've got one thing. Partway through my time in New York in mid-November, I had a call from Robin Raphel. The FBI had just been to her house. They had just taken her computers. They had told her that she was in a lot of trouble. They had gone into her office in SRAP, had barred her from returning to her office. She couldn't find out what the problem was. She called me to say that she knew it had to do with Pakistan. And so she called me knowing that she and I had worked together on Pakistan. She didn't know any of what was going on. It was a horrifying, horrifying thing that happened to her. I was contacted pretty quickly in New York by the FBI and they set up an interview in New York, in my office in New York.

I asked the RSO to participate, because I wanted to have a witness on my side. In the interview with the FBI, it was clear to me that the FBI had no idea what Robin's job was. I didn't know what the issues were. But I explained to them what her job was, which was to double track all of the representations that we were making to the Pakistani government because she was so well-placed with so many people of influence around the prime minister that she would regularly talk

to them. She didn't do it in person, if it was an urgent matter, she would do it on the phone. "She would call Dar," I said. "He's the finance minister, but he was also very close to the prime minister. Their children were married to each other. She would call the Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif," I said. "You know, you ordinarily wouldn't think that the chief minister of Punjab would have anything to do with the kinds of issues we're talking to the prime minister about, but he was his brother. So yes, she was calling him. You wouldn't think she'd be calling Maleeha Lodhi, a journalist. Now a journalist, former ambassador to Washington, but also extremely influential with the Pakistani military. So she was calling Maleeha on all sorts of issues."

"Well, what were the issues?" they asked. I said, "Well, you know, Dr. Afridi, drones, fertilizer, Pakistani Taliban, any issue that was a key issue for us." I said she didn't know anything that was secret that she shouldn't know in terms of drone strikes. But obviously the talking points she had to work with were classified "releasable to Pakistan"—Rel Pakistan. They said, "Well, what's that?" So I explained that we constantly are doing talking points that are classified "releasable to Russia," "releasable to—," you know, "Uganda," who knows.

Q: There is no sense having talking points, if you can't deliver them—use them.

JONES: Yes. So yes they're classified, but they're releasable to the people you're supposed to be talking to. And they're classified and labeled that way. And they say, "Well, who classifies them?" [Laughter] "The drafter classifies it. And then it's approved up the line. And if somebody wants to change the level of classification they can, but usually the drafter knows perfectly well that it's secret. It's usually 'SECRET REL Pakistan,' 'SECRET REL Pakistan/Afghanistan,' 'SECRET REL Pakistan/UN,' et cetera."

They had no idea, absolutely no idea. I talked to them for about two hours and I explained that, because I figured they'd overheard her on the phone somehow. So I explained all the issues that she would be discussing on the phone and that it was authorized. And, they said, "Well, how was it authorized?" I said, "In meetings with me and with others in the SRAP office." [They said] "Oh, well, where is this written down?" I said, "Well it's written down in the Foreign Affairs Manuals that detail how you classify things." "Well, what are those?" they said.

Q: They were FBI contractors, right? Because the FBI knows about classification.

JONES: No, they were from the FBI office in New York and one of them had come up from Washington.

Q: And they didn't know anything about anything, even though the FBI should know about how you classify things?

JONES: They didn't know. It was horrifying. It was horrifying.

Q: But they didn't listen, right? They kept pursuing her?

JONES: And they kept pursuing it. I, of course, told Robin about it. The RSO who was there—I knew him just because I'd been at USUN for several weeks. And after the meeting, he said, "If your goal was to help your friend, you did a really good job." Okay. "Well, thank you. And thank you for being a witness."

I wrote up my conversation. So I have a record of it, because I know better than not to do that. But they kept on harassing her. She ended up having to hire lawyers because the FBI was leaking stories in the press about her that were not complimentary. She couldn't work. She couldn't, nobody would hire her--

Q: Well, she no longer was a State Department employee at this point?

JONES: No, she was let go that day, the day the FBI raided her house and her office. Her contract ended that day. The State Department didn't help her. Kerry didn't help her. I finally talked her into establishing a legal defense fund that I actually managed. I figured out how to do that. She had a friend who had done one before and she shared with me how to do it. So, I did that and wrote lots and lots of emails to lots and lots of people saying, "Okay, we have a fund for Robin. Here's how you can contribute if you'd like to support Robin in her huge legal expenses."

There are huge legal expenses. She was embarrassed to do it. She didn't want to do it right away because she said, "It makes it look like I'm guilty." I said, "First of all, everybody knows you're not guilty. Number one. And number two, everybody wants to help. I'm getting constant calls. 'How can I help? How can I help?' So, let us help you." This was in November when it started. So finally by April or May, she finally said, "Okay, the legal bills are too high. Can you start it now?" And we ended up collecting over a hundred thousand dollars, all of which went to the legal bills. But finally the Justice Department after, I don't know, a year and a half—maybe it was two years—dropped the case. They said there's nothing here. We could have told you that immediately. We did tell you that immediately.

Q: And that was it? There was no recourse for the damage done? They didn't pay for it?

JONES: Yes. Her lawyer issued a statement saying that the Justice Department had dropped the case because there was no evidence of wrongdoing. But the Justice Department never said anything. People who contributed to her legal fund and others—the comment I got from a lot of people was "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Robin had a huge number of very sympathetic and supportive friends.

Q: Right. I just heard this story recently because we were talking about some other people who are in security clearance limbo. It was in the context that even some of the highest level, most professional, most treasured employees can get caught up in these crazy situations because people don't understand our jobs. Are you ready to talk about summing up on your State Department career over these many years?

JONES: I would. I thought I would mention a couple things. First, I thought that the way Secretary Powell led the State Department was a model for how it is best led. What he did was he empowered everyone at every level to be their best, to make decisions, to collaborate and

cooperate in ways that were very energizing for absolutely everybody. I'd like to think that after the four years that he was there with us and embodied that philosophy, that we tried to pass it on. We implemented it and tried to pass it on to all of our colleagues. It has stayed for at least a while, I think. It did stay for a while. And, maybe can come back. It was certainly there when Bill Burns was deputy secretary. He certainly brought it back.

I thought George Shultz was also an excellent secretary. I don't have quite as many details as to why I think that, but he seemed to pay attention to the issues. When we needed help with something he was there to lend his weight to the set of issues. And he protected the State Department—all of us—from the White House move to have us all take lie detector tests. The other secretary that I thought was particularly good was Hillary Clinton. She worked extremely hard on every issue, big and small. So if we had human rights issues or some kind of legal issue or a hostage issue or something that nobody else wanted to touch, she would. And it often made a big difference to have somebody at her level mention a particular case to a counterpart or to a president or prime minister to find a way to solve a problem. When she was running for president, people came to all of us to say, "What are the big issues? What are the big things she accomplished?" It wasn't so easy to name big issues, but it was very easy to name a lot of issues. They weren't necessarily big ones, but there were ones that she didn't hesitate to take up, to make something better for a lot of people or for one person or one family. And I thought that counted for a lot. And it really demonstrated what I thought the American way is. That you care about your fellow citizens and you use your position to do your best to help them.

Q: Shultz and Powell are often talked about a lot for investing in the Foreign Service or the State Department as an institution. But I think it's also, as you pointed out, it's really important that the secretaries care about helping them with the issues when you escalate to them that they are able to achieve, to carry water.

JONES: Rich Armitage, the deputy secretary under Colin Powell was one of the ones. He would say to us constantly, "Our job is to use our position to solve a problem. That's why we're here. We don't necessarily have our own issues. We don't have separate issues. We have the issues that you bring to us. So let us help. Let us use our positions to solve these problems. But don't leave it too late. Give us time to actually solve the problem before the deadline."

Q: And I guess from that point of view, there are also a lot of secretaries of state that do come in with an agenda, what they want to achieve or what their president has asked them to achieve. And then they do have their own agenda. And then it's all about whether or not the department is lining up to help them achieve their agenda, too.

JONES: Yes. That's true. That's true. You know, to a degree, I was overseas for such a long time that I don't have direct experience with a lot of the secretaries of State. I'm about to read the book about Jim Baker. I'm sure he was a great secretary of state too, but I was overseas the whole time. And my only experience with him was once in Georgia, where he was terrific. It was after he was secretary and we needed somebody who was close to Shevardnadze [Former President of Georgia] to speak truth to power when he was failing.

Q: Another thing about Hillary Clinton, I found, is that she helped the State Department have more influence in the interagency. I thought that in those years that she was there, you had more ability to win an argument with other agencies.

JONES: The other power that Secretary Clinton had was her ability to persuade. First of all, she liked to be briefed. We would do a written briefing for her. And then she always had a pre-brief in person with the relevant two or three of us who were relevant to the issue or to the meeting or whatever. And we would go through the key points, what the other person was likely to argue and how to argue back. She would take it all in, ask questions, go into the meeting, do exactly as we had suggested, but then take it to three other levels, five other different directions that were wonderful, because of her broad experience with this whole set of issues. She was such a contrast to another secretary I worked for who hated these kinds of meetings. With Secretary Clinton, we would come out of a meeting in which she participated, with nine other things to do that were terrific. It really moved things along very fast. It was really great. She would have made such a good president.

Q: And then on your own career, I think if I recall correctly, you started off not sure if this was what you wanted to do, if this would be your lifelong career. Right? You were trying it out.

JONES: That's right. My dad said, "Just try it out for two years. Then you can treat it like the Peace Corps. Try it out for two years." I stayed thirty-eight years! I loved this career. I felt very, very fortunate to have had it, to have had the experiences. I felt privileged to be able to represent the American people. That was always in the back of my mind that my client is the American people. My clients are the American people. It was a line I used to use with my political appointee ambassadors too. They would say, "Oh, I bonded with the prime minister," and I would say, "Well, what have you done for the American people with all that bonding today?" But, you know, it means something to people when you say that. It does mean something, right?

Q: For sure. It is important to explain what we're doing and why. So when you think about the keys to success—because not that many people get to those high level positions in their careers, even if they do a couple of extra years. Right?

JONES: I think one thing was, I didn't start out thinking that I was going to get to be so senior. I've learned that along the way, that people who work hard at their current job to do the best job they can right now, are the ones that get ahead. I proselytize that to younger officers, including when I was a mentor to an A-100 class. I remember one young person raising his or her hand—this was in A-100—"how do I get to be a DCM?" I said, "You get to be a DCM by not wondering how to get to be a DCM. You get to be a DCM by doing your current job really well. Because if all you're thinking about is becoming DCM, you're going to do a terrible job and you're not going to be a DCM."

Q: Maybe it is a little generational. With my own millennials, my two sons, I find that I'm not very good at the hard work proselytizing part. They see that they have a lot of special skills or talents or knowledge, or they think they do. And then they think work-life balance is really important.

JONES: I like work-life balance too. But I will say that one of the things that I internalized early came from the other women who were in the Foreign Service, who were friends of mine. They were constantly saying, "We have to work a lot harder than the guys do in order to get ahead." I internalized that. I don't know that I wouldn't have worked as hard as I did anyway. But I believed it. I can't honestly say that it's necessarily true. I can't point to any facts that demonstrate that that's the case. But I did believe it. At the same time, I was very fortunate, because I came in at the time that a lot of other women came in, in 1970, just as the Foreign Service law changed. There was a new attitude about women in the Foreign Service to not throw them out the minute they got married, that kind of thing.

Q: And they let you go to Arab posts right away. Right?

JONES: Yes.

Q: Before, they always thought that women couldn't do well in that environment.

JONES: That's right. And April Glaspie was the one who proved them wrong. And so I said, "I wanted Arabic training." They said, "Oh, you must know April." I didn't know April then. We're now extremely good friends, but we did not know each other at the time. But because she had paved the way, as soon as I said, "I want to learn Arabic," they said, "Okay, fine."

Q: So you didn't really feel any discrimination through your career?

JONES: I didn't feel that I did. But I also found the NEA that I joined was an NEA that was extremely open to anybody who wanted to work in NEA, because it was so difficult. It was dangerous. Anybody who wants to be here with us, you're welcome to be here. That's what I got from it.

Q: Right, right.

JONES: I have to thank April for that, because she had already demonstrated it. She had already won the reporting award for being able to get a tremendous amount of information right after the '67 war when she was posted from Jordan to Kuwait. She rode horseback with all the shaykhs out in the desert. She had nice chats with them along the way and did fabulous reporting as a result. She won the reporting award and, you know, after that, we women were in.

Q: So the State Department as an institution can come down for a lot of criticism. But what do you think are its strengths, weaknesses, and areas in which it needs to improve?

JONES: So I think the focus on diversity is a very good focus. I believe I tried hard on diversity. But I felt, since we only have names of people when we are looking at job applicants, it wasn't easy to find African-Americans necessarily to fill the jobs, unless I knew them. I found that hard and frustrating. And, you know, there are plenty of people I didn't know. So I think the current effort on that is very well placed. I've participated in a few seminars with Linda Thomas Greenfield and others on how to do that, which I think is a very good thing.

Some people complain about the hierarchy of the Foreign Service or hierarchy of the State Department. Obviously that can be overdone in a way that isn't helpful where the ambassador is "God" if nobody dares to question the ambassador and all that kind of thing. But if you run a good mission or a good embassy, a good bureau or a good office, you don't behave like God, you collaborate with your colleagues, you have meetings with them so that they can say their piece, you listen and you are then decisive about what you're going to do. That way, nobody's flailing around wondering, "What does she think, what does she think? What's my assignment? What's my assignment?" You don't want that either. But it's very important for people to feel that they've been heard, that they had input into whatever the set of issues is, the roadmap or the rollout or whatever it is that we're working on. And they are then much more inclined to implement it gladly, if they feel they've had input, even if it doesn't come out the way they want it. And, I always felt that it was very important to say, "Okay, thanks for this conversation. Either, let me think about it and I'll come back to you, or it seems to me that the best course of action is X, Y, X, Y X, Y. Person A, please do this part, B, do this part, and C do this part. Here are the deadlines. How does this sound to everybody? And have I left something out? Any questions? I don't want any confusion. If there's any confusion, you need to come back to me and tell me we don't understand what you're talking about. Or if you find that you've hit a huge roadblock with the human rights people, or with the NSC or the Pentagon, tell me early, tell me right away so I can help fix it." And I found that even when people didn't agree at all with what the policy was, if you could just have a discussion about it and say, "Okay, well, this is what I'm hearing from Bill Burns. This is why this is what his position is on it. This is the argument that I've made to him. We didn't win the argument. Let's see how we can make this work in the best way possible for the American people."

Q: One of the criticisms that comes up a lot lately is that we don't get enough training that way. And sometimes that's from old timers too, saying that people coming in, they don't know anything about the countries that they're working on, or that they don't know the culture and they should be getting a lot more training. But the problem with that is that we do so much. And how do you keep a group of generalists knowledgeable, even if you're able to expand training by having more people, so you have more room for training like the military does. How do you fall? That at the end of the day, we learn by doing and combine our experiences, or that we do need more training?

JONES: Well, I think we should go back to the training float that Colin Powell initiated. I think that was a very good idea that gets at some of that problem. But I also argue—and I feel very strongly about this actually—that it's much more important to train in leadership and management than it is in a particular country. Because people who are good at leadership and management are extremely necessary in order to make it possible for everybody else to do their jobs and do their jobs effectively. I always argued, I can teach somebody about Poland much more quickly than I can teach them about leadership and management. And certainly yes, Foreign Service officers are generalists. But in many, many, many cases, we are actually specialists in a particular region because of the requirements that we have and the language requirements I think are critical to that. And the minute you have a language, right away, I think you've got a lot of the culture because a lot of the language is on cultural issues that flows from all these hundreds of millions of conversations with your colleagues and with your instructors

about everything under the sun while you're in language training. And that includes a lot about restaurants or culture, cultural things, or holidays, or, you know, whatever it is.

Q: I took all the leadership training from the time that Secretary Powell was there. They instituted a system in which you have to do a certain level every time you got promoted. And I took the DCM class once fully and twice, I took separate pieces of it to remind myself. But I don't know that I really felt like going out as a deputy chief of mission. I don't know that I really felt prepared with training on the management part of it, to be ready for things like the statements of assurances on management controls. I think leadership training was maybe done better. I don't know what you think.

JONES: One of the things I learned the hard way is that if I had people working for me, that I really was a stickler for deadlines on submitting work requirement statements and submitting EERs [Employee Evaluation Report]. I mean, to the point that I didn't permit somebody to go on R&R because he hadn't done an EER on somebody else. And this guy was a very good friend of mine. And I said, "You can't go, I'm not giving you the tickets until you've done the EER." He was really mad. But you have to be able to do that and not give in just because so-and-so is your friend. But the other thing that I found too, and also learned the hard way, is at the end of whatever the period is, the desk will come to you with the human rights report or with the religious freedom report or the trafficking-in-persons report, and there'll be all kinds of things that didn't get done. And the trafficking-in-persons people are saying, "Oh, well, you know, the countries haven't done this change or done that change or reform." And the desk is coming to me at the end of this time saying, "You need to fight this."

I said, "Wait a second. You didn't even tell me eight months ago that this was a problem. I've been to Pakistan three times and never once did you give me this set of talking points about this being a problem. And so, you know I'll try, but this is on you, whether it's human rights or trafficking or whatever." And I learned that really the hard way then. So I'd start out each January, or whenever the reporting period started and say, "I want to know from every country—I want to know exactly what the talking point is on human rights, trafficking-in-persons and religious freedom. I do not want to go to the end of the period and not be able to say that I personally advocated hard on each of these issues and with the following nineteen results."

That comes with experience, but also, when I mentor people or speak at DCM classes or whatever, I say, "You've got to know what the deadlines are and tell people way ahead of time." That management thing [statement of assurance of management controls]—I remember the first time I had to send a management thing. I thought, "I don't even know what they're talking about. You know, you didn't tell me about any of this stuff? You didn't brief me on this along the way. So, you know, why should I, why should I sign this?"

Q: After the first one, I had the management staff and the consular staff come in and give me presentations because I learned that they may tell you in these documents that there are no problems. And they don't mean to lie. They just are hopeful that they will solve the problem going forward.

JONES: Or they haven't done their job with their locally engaged staff.

Q: Or they just really don't want to admit deficiencies and they try to present it positively. So I learned that the hard way, when I had signed. So then I learned that you have to work closer with the management section. You have to make them come and defend every assertion, so I understood the situation.

JONES: Yes. Well, I'm sure you did the same thing, but that was when I got with my management team to say, "Your job is to keep me out of jail, because if I go to jail, you're going to jail."

Q: Oh my [Laughter].

JONES: Because there's nothing—I mean, if you don't tell me what's going on, I'm going to point right at you.

Q: [Laughter] Well, since it's just between us chickens, what is your best advice for young people starting out to become an ambassador, to be a success, or to have a wonderful achievement that they are proud of at the end. What advice do you give new officers?

JONES: What I tell them is like I said already, do a really good job in every job. And the minute you do a really good job as the first tour consular officer in your first post, they're going to see that you're really good. The ambassador's going to ask you to come up and be his or her staff assistant for part of your first tour. Or they're going to say, "We'd really like to put you on rotation. Wouldn't you like to be part of the political section for part of your tour?" So don't sneer at being a consular officer. Think of it as the way to have the best cocktail party stories ever. That's number one.

And then number two is—I tell people to think about what makes them happy. Why do they get up in the morning? Do they get up in the morning because they have good friends at work? Because they have great meetings planned for the day? Do they get up in the morning because they can't wait to write about this "Oh my God" scandal that just broke and you can't wait to tell everybody about it? Think about those things as you think about your next job. I tell people, as you think about your next job, think about the issues you're going to deal with, much more than the place you're going to live. The reason I say that is I have countless friends who desperately wanted to serve in Paris. But they absolutely hated it because they had very little of any significance to do, whether it was Paris or Rome or wherever. Yes. They had good restaurants that they couldn't afford to go to. But all my friends that served in Pakistan loved it and would like to go back, or India, or Kazakhstan or any of the hardship posts, because they had incredibly significant work to do. They were smaller embassies so they had lots more to do, and much greater variety, much greater responsibility at a younger or more junior stage, a junior position. And they learned a lot more and therefore advanced more quickly. I said, there's nothing like being in a war zone to get a promotion, or all of a sudden you're in a heavy duty negotiation. So I said, for example, I went to Cairo because I asked for Arabic training and they said, "Oh, we can't give you a slot right away. But we do need somebody in Cairo, the consular officers just quit. And would you go in a couple of weeks?" I said, "Sure". It was an Interests Section, not even an embassy. It was nothing. It was nowhere. But I thought, "Cairo, why not? I want to learn Arabic. So, maybe I can do something there". Well, what happens? Three weeks after I get there,

or four weeks, the October War breaks out and we have Kissinger shuttle diplomacy. You can't plan for things like that. You can put yourself in a position to have a really interesting tour and you never know what's going to come out of that tour.

Q: That's right. That's absolutely right.

JONES: It was the same thing when I went to Kazakhstan. They said, "Do you want to go to Pakistan or Kazakhstan?" And I sat down with the family and I said, "Okay, we have all been in Pakistan. We had a wonderful time there. We absolutely loved it. Or we can go to Kazakhstan," which has just opened up. I mean, I would be the second ambassador. And as a family, the kids were nine and eleven or maybe ten and twelve, maybe a tiny bit older. And so we sat down and they said, "Kazakhstan, you haven't been there." [Laughter] They had the right idea. They loved our adventures. That's great. And they're both now in the Foreign Service. My son joined the Foreign Service. He's an IT specialist. He joined—let's see—three years ago. So he's had a tour in Tashkent, and he and his wife and kids absolutely loved it. And now they're in Prague, which they love.

Q: And I guess that brings us to one more point which is, the Foreign Service can be very hard on families and it can also be very good for families. And some who grow up in the Foreign Service never move again, and some never stay put again. So what was your experience and the experience of people working for you? Did you see a lot of people that had a hard time with all the moving and the change?

JONES: Yes there were. There were families that had some kids who had a hard time moving. Todd and Courtney always had a hard time moving because they hated to leave where they were, they hated to leave their friends behind. They got to the new place and they hated the new place. "We don't have any friends, we don't have any friends." Then they'd be there for a while and they would hate to leave that place. One of my favorite stories is when Todd, my son—when I was going to go to Kazakhstan, there wasn't really a very good school there. So he went to a boarding school and I went up to see him just before I left. It was in October. I said, "So Todd, you always hated the new place. You loved the last place. So how's it going?" He said, "You know, I thought I'd skip the hating part this time."

I thought he was the one who was going to stay put. I thought he was the one who didn't want to move. He was in Washington for a very long time, but he kept getting upgrades in his IT certifications and all that kind of thing and then joined the Foreign Service as soon as he had the right IT certifications. I was so excited for him! My daughter started her Foreign Service work almost right out of college, like I did. Her first posting was with Beijing, then Islamabad, then Taiwan, then New Delhi. I was able to visit her multiple times at each posting. And both Todd and Courtney have invited me to meet with their colleagues to talk about Foreign Service careers when I have visited, which is very fun for me—and a great honor to be invited to do that.

Q: That's great. That's great.

JONES: The timing was interesting because he passed everything just as Trump was elected and Tillerson came in and then cut all the entering classes. And so he was worried that he wouldn't

get in, that he would be on the registry and nothing would happen. Well, it turned out, of course, that they decided they desperately needed the specialists, they needed the IT experts, the nurses, the medical people and the office management specialists. And so he had a class—he was in the first class after Tillerson came in. And I think it convened in February just after Trump's inauguration, when they told us he finally came around and permitted it.

Q: I guess since we spoke about women in the Foreign Service, maybe I'll end with this question. I participated in a meeting with a group of women in Mexico City. We had a bunch of us who were consul generals who were females. So the Federal Women's group in Mexico City asked us to address them. One of the questions they asked me was how do we avoid this trap where so many women leave at the O2 level [mid-level]. And I think that has a lot to do with family pressures. Not only raising children when you're working, but the pressure on the family to be moving and juggling dual careers. I explained that my husband and I just got resigned to being apart during my overseas tours, but I knew that that solution doesn't work for many. What advice do you have for women who are trying to navigate this? Men have a very important other side to it but for female officers, what advice do you have?

JONES: Well, what I tell them is to give it a try. Don't not start because it might be a problem. You don't know that it's going to be a problem necessarily. I mean, there are all kinds of things that can happen. My first husband was an A-100 colleague, for example, something I didn't predict. I had no expectation whatsoever of getting married. I thought I wouldn't marry. I thought that would be perfectly fine. And then, I was in the Foreign Service ten years before I had children. So my career was well-established by the time I had children. I don't think it necessarily would have gotten in the way though, because particularly in the posts that I had, it was easy to have children there. It was easy to get good care for the kids. There were really nice communities. The schools were good, everywhere we went except Kazakhstan. But even then the solutions were relatively good solutions. What we did with our kids is we just tried to make everything fun and tried to make everything normal. We would consider that—even things that were clearly different from what would have been in the States—became part of what we did.

One of the things that I thought was particularly successful, and I'm glad we did it that way, is whenever we went on a trip, especially if we went with our own friends, we would have each of the kids bring a friend so that each of them had a pal on the trip, whether it was a train trip to India or a river boat ride or whatever it was. They each had a friend so that they didn't have to just hang out with mom and dad and be bored by us. They had a pal. I thought that was a good idea. And that worked. It worked very well for us.

We tell people that I found having kids to be an asset because I met a lot of different people as a result and a lot of different people in the community. So, you know, my son had great Pakistani friends at school. I met all their parents. We got to be good friends. We're still friends. One of the boys at the school in Kazakhstan was the prime minister's son. So I'd pick him up when I'd take the kids up skiing. I would pick him up from the prime minister's house and drop him off and then have a glass of vodka with the prime minister at the end. I mean, nothing wrong with that!

Q: As we end, I want to thank you so much for taking the time, wonderful. Add on to your oral history. Thank you again. I'm going to pause here. Thank you so much.

End of interview