GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW #2 WITH EVAN A. FEIGENBAUM

November 30, 2020
Due to COVID-19 protocols, this interview was conducted securely online.

Participants

University of Virginia
Russell L. Riley, chair
Barbara A. Perry
Brantly Womack

© 2021 The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia and the George W. Bush Foundation

Publicly released transcripts of the George W. Bush Oral History Project are freely available for noncommercial use according to the Fair Use provisions of the United States Copyright Code and International Copyright Law. Advance written permission is required for reproduction, redistribution, and extensive quotation or excerpting. Permission requests should be made to the Miller Center, P.O. Box 400406, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4406.

To cite an interview, please use the following general format: [name of interviewee] Interview, [date of interview], George W. Bush Oral History Project, Miller Center, University of Virginia

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

GEORGE W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW #2 WITH EVAN A. FEIGENBAUM

November 30, 2020

Russell L. Riley: Good afternoon, everybody.

Evan A. Feigenbaum: Hi there.

Brantly Womack: Hi.

Barbara A. Perry: Good *morning* to Evan, if you're in Chicago.

Feigenbaum: I'm in Chicago.

Riley: Thank you for joining us this morning. It occurred to me that when we started last time we were so focused on the technology that I completely jumped past the usual operating procedures for what's going to happen with this. I ought to take a minute and remind everybody, and sort of refresh your memory, Evan, that the purpose of this is not even the audio. That's the main part we're interested in capturing, although because we're using this medium, we are recording the video, for historical purposes, but the ultimate purpose is to create a research document in the form of a transcript.

Once this is fully completed, we'll commit this to a transcriber who's operating under contract with us. They're accustomed to working with confidential material. Everything we talk about is conducted under a veil of confidentiality, so you should be assured that if we get into anything that is, to your mind, sensitive, you can trust that we'll not speak outside chambers to anybody about what goes on here. We've got an unblemished record of maintaining those confidences. You'll get a transcript back that will be lightly copyedited to take out the ahs and uhs and the false starts and make us all sound a little better. Then the transcript will come to you, and you have the right at that point to edit it for editorial purpose as well as content.

If there are things that you want to add, you can do that. If there are things that are in any way sensitive that you want to hold onto for some period of time, you'll have the opportunity at that point to tell us, "These three paragraphs I'd like to hold onto," until whatever your triggering mechanism is. That's to allow us to speak candidly to history about your experience. Do you have any questions for me about procedure?

Feigenbaum: No, that's all good. That makes sense.

Riley: OK. Terrific. When we stopped last time, my recollection is—I looked, and unfortunately I didn't make specific notes here. As Barbara will tell you, I have one of the world's worst memories, which is ironic, given the fact that I record other people's memories, but it's really

good for oral history because it means I can't tell anybody what happened in an interview. I just don't remember it. But I recall that we had just gotten into the second term, and I had posed a question to you that had prompted you to think about what sounded like a significant three-part answer to my question. I just can't remember what the question was. It may have been about China's Belt and Road initiative. I think we were headed there. Brantly, do you have any specific recollection about where we were headed from there?

Womack: Well, certainly we're into the second term, and we're into questions about the policy toward India. He covered [Nursultan] Nazarbayev, and getting into whatever that organization is that doesn't seem to make much difference after the '70s. [*laughs*] Let's see what else. Oh, and then beginning of the Belt and Road, the greater awareness of the significance of South Asia and Central Asia, and the reorganization of the State Department. I'm not sure if we finished with the institutional questions of that sort.

Perry: Yes. To follow up, that's right, Brantly, and then I wrote down at the very end we said we wanted to come to the interagency issues, and then Condi [Condoleezza Rice] versus [Colin L.] Powell and [Robert M.] Gates versus [Donald H.] Rumsfeld, those relationships, and the differences that they made in the transition.

Feigenbaum: Yes. Chronologically we were in 2006, the second term having started in 2005, but we covered [Robert] Zoellick and China. We were mid-2006 when I became the DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary] for Central Asia. From mid-2006 until the end of the administration, I was DAS for Central Asia, and then DAS for South Asia. I thought there were four things we might talk about that would be of interest to you. One is there are a few Central Asia issues that would allow us to talk about the interagency dynamic a little bit. One concerns Kazakhstan, another one Turkmenistan, and a third one Uzbekistan, because they pitted different players, sometimes pretty sharply against each other, and State was positioned interestingly on this. That's one.

Then second, I thought we could go back to the connectivity stuff, because we talked about the reorganization of State and the creation of the South and Central Asia Bureau, but we didn't talk about any of the American initiatives from the Bush years. There was no Chinese Belt and Road until 2013, but Brantly knows, because he just heard me give a talk about this at UVA [University of Virginia], where I described some of the American initiatives that predated the Belt and Road [Initiative]. So we could do that.

Then I thought we should pivot to India and do the civil-nuclear deal, since I was pretty centrally involved in the endgame of that.

Then last, to wrap up, there are a couple of assorted South Asia odds and ends—Nepalese Maoists coming off the terrorism lists during an administration that was all about fighting terrorism, interesting things like that—that also get us at the interagency dynamic. If that made sense to you, that's where we were chronologically.

Riley: Perfect. Thank you, Evan, for recalling that.

Feigenbaum: What I was going to say to you on Central Asia was that I became DAS for Central Asia in the middle of 2006. We talked about that a little bit last time. Condi had

reorganized the Department and created this new Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. They yanked the Central Asian countries out of a westward-looking bureau and put the "Asia" back in Central Asia by merging them into a bureau that focused on one of Asia's subregions. And one thing to note on that is that the Central Asians, of course, were not thrilled about it.

I may have this wrong, but it was when Vice President [Richard B.] Cheney made a trip to Kazakhstan. It was either when the Vice President went out there, or when President Nazarbayev came to Washington in the fall of 2006, and he met with the Vice President, who hosted a lunch. This whole South and Central Asia thing came up. I'm paraphrasing, but Nazarbayev said something like, "Come on, we're Europeans. What do you think we are? You think we're Bangladesh? That's how you see us?" [*laughter*]

They didn't like it, because their whole zeitgeist was not that they were "former Soviet," because they were moving away from that, but rather that they shared these kinds of Atlanticist fantasies. And that's because that was where they thought the growth opportunity and development were, although now, if you look more than a decade and a half down the road, the growth opportunities are sitting mostly to their Asian east, not their west.

I started giving speeches in late 2006, early 2007, to try to rationalize it and put a little bit of strategic meat on the reorganization by saying, This is a region that has been connected to the north and to the west, but the fastest-growing economies in the world now happen to be sitting to the east and to the south, in China, East Asia, India. That's where the accelerating economic, connectivity, and growth opportunities are. And I put Japan, Korea, India pretty firmly into the conception so that it wouldn't just be about Chinese growth. That's one reason, for example, that in my first few months in the job I pretty conspicuously flew off to Tokyo and Seoul. We'd always looked at the Europeans, and to a lesser extent maybe at the Turks, as actual or potential partners in that region, and that was partly because the United States was so focused on bringing Central Asian oil and gas west through pipelines.

But I wanted to get these nontraditional East Asian partners into the mix, and Japan, for example, hit all of the right buckets in Central Asia—It had a strategic interest, some commercial ties, a development assistance program, and an experienced project finance lender in the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, JBIC. So taken together, they could complement some of what we were trying to do. Same thing with the Koreans, who had their own history with Central Asia because of ethnic Koreans living in the region who had been deported there by Stalin—You had direct flights from Seoul to Kazakhstan, some commercial ties with companies like Daewoo, and the Koreans had an international development agency too.

So we were trying to broaden our partners to include more opportunities with Asian allies. And I had casually promised Rich Armitage, when he left the State Department, that I would do whatever I could to keep working with Japan—Rich had really close ties and a very long-standing and strong strategic interest in Japan and in strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance. So we held these multiagency consults in Tokyo, and then Seoul, where we had all of the relevant Japanese and Korean agencies on their sides—not just foreign ministries but the project finance players like JBIC and also the aid agencies like JICA [Japan International Cooperation Agency] and KOICA [Korea International Cooperation Agency]. And I think Bob Deutsch came with me

for those—he was the official in the bureau who had been tasked with dealing with some of the connectivity ideas.

But the point was, the Central Asians didn't love the new setup and they especially didn't love being lumped in with Afghanistan, which was a war zone and, to them, a source of things like extremism and narcotics. And that's important because it begins to flow us into the three sets of bilateral issues that were relevant on Central Asia in the [George W.] Bush administration in its last half that I thought would be useful because they shed some light on the interagency dynamic.

The first issue was that Kazakhstan wanted to be chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE, which was an organization founded in the 1970s. It had origins in the Helsinki Final Act and was a big element of what still linked the Central Asian countries, even Turkmenistan, to the transatlantic West. I don't believe there had ever been a former Soviet country or an Eastern bloc country that had been the OSCE chairman in office. That was one problem.

The second problem was that among its functions it did election monitoring through something called the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR. Kazakhstan had never had an election certified as meeting ODIHR standards, but wanted to be the chairman of the whole thing. Third problem: they had cozied up to the Russians, who had this intention to gut the mandate of ODIHR, and the Kazakhstanis had committed a tactical mistake without thinking it through by aligning themselves with a Russian effort to gut ODIHR by fiddling with the mandate.

When I got on the scene, the Kazakhs wanted to be the chairman in office. There was huge opposition around the U.S. government, particularly from the human rights and democracy people on one side, who were just flatly opposed, but also from some of the people on the European affairs side of the house at State and NSC who were responsible for the OSCE itself. Then, on the other end, you had the Rumsfeld team and the Cheney team, including the Vice President himself, who basically had a very strategic view of Central Asia and said, "This is an important country. It's a pivot country, and we have the reality of great power competition. Come on, there's got to be a way to work this out."

The Vice President and the Defense Secretary were pushing to get it done, and then on the other end you had the human rights and democracy community that was quite opposed to this. You also had the European bureau, people like Dan Fried, I think, who was then Assistant Secretary for Europe, and maybe Judy Ansley at NSC, who no longer had responsibility for Central Asia, but they did have responsibility for the OSCE, which was really a transatlantic institution. So the outcome on this was being pushed and pulled in a lot of different directions.

Condi, when she became Secretary of State, wanted to work it out in a way that would push along the cause of reform in Kazakhstan, in the first instance, and not blow up our relationship with them, because Nazarbayev had really thrown his prestige behind this thing; in the second instance, preserve the mandate of ODIHR and the integrity of the OSCE; and in the third, reach some kind of workable compromise in the interagency.

I became the negotiator on this—and how that happened is actually a long and complicated story—but I had never negotiated anything, quite frankly. I had no high-level negotiating experience whatsoever, so she asked Nick Burns, who was the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, to keep an eye on me to make sure I didn't embarrass the United States of America in the bargain. [*laughter*] But she wanted a deal, and she wanted a deal that we could live with. Part of the problem was that virtually all of the countries in the OSCE were prepared to make Kazakhstan the chairman without conditions or questions of any kind.

So in 2006 we went to Brussels, because the Belgians were then the chairman in office. Karel de Gucht was the Belgian Foreign Minister, so he was the OSCE chair that year. We couldn't work it out. We actually blocked it. Nick and I did some really intense meetings with Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who's now the President of Kazakhstan, but was then the Foreign Minister, and with President Nazarbayev's son-in-law, [*laughs*] Rakhat Aliyev, who was whispering in his father-in-law's ear but ended up in a lot of hot water and had a falling-out later on with his soon-to-be-*former* father-in-law. We couldn't work it out, so we blocked them. Between 2006 and the 2007 meeting, which was in Madrid, when the Spanish became the chairman in office, I was tasked by Condi, with Nick keeping an eye on me, to work something out that everybody could live with.

First, I worked with the Kazakh State Secretary, whose name was Kanat Saudabayev, a very interesting and colorful character, a former circus impresario and theatrical producer who later became a culture bureaucrat, then a Soviet diplomat, and then a Kazakhstani diplomat. In fact, Gorbachev had appointed him as the Soviet Ambassador to Turkey, but the Soviet Union collapsed when he was still on his way to take up his post, so he found himself, quite unexpectedly, as the first Ambassador to Ankara of an independent Kazakhstan that hadn't even existed when he was appointed to the job. He and I had worked well together when he was Ambassador to the United States, but by this time he had become the State Secretary of Kazakhstan. And with Saudabayev, I tried to set the parameters on at least what the issues were that we were going to be dealing on.

To get to the interagency dynamic: Condi got me to collect a wish list, both on the ODIHR mandate but also on what democracy and rights-related things we'd like to try to extract from Kazakhstan as part of the negotiating process. This subsequently became something called the Madrid Commitments, in which we got the Kazakhs to commit on paper to a series of domestic reforms: reforming their media law, reforming the way they treated NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] through their NGO law, and much more, and then also scripting some very specific commitments from them around the ODIHR mandate.

Saudabayev came to Washington and had a meeting with Condi. They decided that they would work toward a deal, so I collected the wish list from a few folks: from Dan Fried's team, which was mainly Kurt Volker as the point person on the OSCE issues; and then the Human Rights and Democracy Bureau [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor] at the State Department, Barry Lowenkron and Erica Barks-Ruggles; and then Mike Kozak and others from the NSC [National Security Council] on their "asks" in terms of domestic reforms. Then I went off to Astana in the dead of winter and had to negotiate all that with a government that had never been inclined to give much on any of it.

I flew off to Kazakhstan and worked with Nazarbayev's chief of staff, whose name was [Adilbek] Zhaksybekov, to try to get them to commit to these things. That took the better part of six months, working with Zhaksybekov, and also with Marat Tazhin, who was the Foreign Minister but had a lot of history with Nazarbayev as a security official and Presidential staffer. By the time we got to Madrid, we were still negotiating it, and it was down to me and Nick having some very tense meetings with, at that point, a new team from Kazakhstan: Erzhan Kazykhanov, who subsequently became Foreign Minister; and Tazhin. This led, in Madrid, to the so-called "Madrid Commitments," which Tazhin read to a plenary of all 56 countries once we closed the deal.

So, on behalf of an interagency, but with Condi trying to navigate among these contending folks, I negotiated this set of commitments. It was my first experience with multilateral negotiations, where you just had a lot of balls up in the air at once. And when we went into it, it was 53 on 3. There were only three countries of the 56 in the OSCE at that point that were willing to say a flat no to Kazakhstan's bid: the U.S., the British, and the Czechs. The U.S., obviously, had to make the deal since we had the strongest hand to play and, in any case, I had been negotiating specific domestic commitments with Zhaksybekov since the previous winter. In Madrid, it literally came down to Kazykhanov and me standing in the hallway, drinking coffee off in corners, and scripting the language on the ODIHR commitment with a pen and a pad. At the end of the day, Tazhin and Nick gave the sign-off and Tazhin read these commitments. The part on ODIHR, in particular, was in grammatically impeccable English because we worked out every word with Kazykhanov and Tazhin—and we were insistent on the wording because it touched the office's mandate. Tazhin made this speech, and the U.S. supported their chairmanship in office. And then I had a lot of explaining to do to some of the NGO groups back in Washington.

But that was an example of Condi, as Secretary of State, trying to navigate between the democracy and human rights side, which was very central to the second term, especially after the articulation of the democracy themes in the President's second inaugural address, and then the more strategic view that Rumsfeld and Cheney took. So there's that.

A second illustration I was going to give you is Turkmenistan, unless you want to talk about that some more.

Womack: Could I ask a quick question on that?

Riley: Go ahead, Brantly.

Womack: Sounds to me like you're doing a lot of work for Kazakhstan. Was there a quid pro quo from Kazakhstan for the U.S.? I would think that there would be one, but no?

Feigenbaum: No, there was none. Remember, it was 53 against 3, so the choice the U.S. was facing was basically whether to blow up the OSCE over it or not, because the Russians had made clear that if the U.S. blocked Kazakhstan, then they would block the election of any other country as chairman in office. So we were facing a situation in which the OSCE would have no chairman and we were going to blow it up, with us being the responsible party.

In the deal we made, one part of the resolution was the Madrid Commitments, but another part of it was that we elected three chairs in a row all at the same time; it was the first time that the

OSCE ever did that. I think 2009, 2010, and 2011 were the three years, so we bracketed them with the Greeks and the Lithuanians and we elected three years of chairs at once, with the Kazakhstanis in the middle. For people who were focused on the OSCE, it provided the stability of knowing that there were two chairs on either side of the Kazakhs that the United States was more comfortable with. For the Kazakhstanis, it put them in the middle of a troika that would pull everyone toward a continuous agenda. And they had made the commitment on ODIHR that the Greeks and the Lithuanians were, of course, going to uphold too.

It was the best solution possible under the circumstances without blowing up the organization. And we did have people who were prepared to blow things up in Madrid to block Kazakhstan, but Condi ultimately judged that that was not the right way to go.

Riley: Evan, my question was more on the domestic side here. Was it the case that once you had your marching orders, that the Vice President's office stepped back?

Feigenbaum: Yes.

Riley: OK. So you weren't getting—

Feigenbaum: They were not involved. It became a State thing. Condi basically said, "It's my ball and I'm keeping it." Then I became the point person on that. It's a long story of how I became the point person, but—

Riley: But the fundamental question is important for a broader audience, because there is forever this perception that Cheney was sort of the puppet master offstage, and if he had expressed an interest in this policy to begin with, it's important for us to know that you weren't feeling that kind of pressure once he stepped back.

Feigenbaum: No, not at all. He and Secretary Rumsfeld both made it known that they thought the United States had a strategic interest in Kazakhstan, and in a strong and productive relationship with Kazakhstan. The OSCE chairmanship was important to Nazarbayev personally, so they wanted it done. Condi felt strongly that it had to be done in a way that preserved the integrity of the OSCE, but also of the United States' commitment to democratic norms, so she and Nick said to me, "Go get a deal we can sell, that we can live with." So that was the deal.

I was the negotiator, but I was dealing mainly with Dan and Kurt in the European Bureau, and then with Barry and Erica and Mike Kozak, who was at the NSC, on the democracy and human rights side. It became, really, an internal State thing. I wasn't even coordinating with the NSC in the end. The President was generally aware of the issue and I remember that Nazarbayev brought it up with him at one point when he came to Washington the previous September, but Condi had fixed that too, so after a bit of a kerfuffle the President finally just said, "Condi's working on that." At the end in Madrid—I think it was at, or right before, some fancy reception—Nick just called Condi and told her what had been negotiated and she said, "Do it."

Riley: Right. We interrupted you. You were headed back to the second—

Feigenbaum: Yes, I was going to say the second issue was Turkmenistan.

In December 2006, the longtime dictator of Turkmenistan died. His name was Saparmurat Niyazov. He called himself the Türkmenbaşy and had a gold statue of himself built in the capital. You know this guy. He had renamed the months of the year after his mother, and so on. People used to refer to Turkmenistan as kind of the North Korea of Central Asia.

And it's *not* North Korea because, unlike North Korea, we had the Peace Corps there. We had Turkmen students in education programs in the United States. Unlike North Korea, we had an American presence and we ran programs there. We also had an Embassy there. But when he died, there was a debate about whether to try to turn a page with them and try to build toward something new. This was another kind of—I wouldn't call it an interagency intramural; it was more of a State Department intramural, again, between the democracy and human rights team and then us on the regional side.

The view that the democracy and human rights people had was, essentially, that we should set preconditions on a reset of the relationship and make clear that there were conditions that Turkmenistan had to satisfy to reset it. Richard Boucher and I thought this was ridiculous. Our view was that, in this part of the world, if you set that as a precondition you never do anything. It was better to embed the human rights and democracy issues in a framework and then see what progress you could get on specific concerns. What was more, as I told Chris Chivers of the *New York Times* after I got back from a trip there, Turkmenistan obviously wasn't going to turn into a Jeffersonian democracy by next Tuesday, so the question was could you leverage the opportunity of a change of leader to turn a page.

There was a huge fight about this. It started with whether to send somebody to the funeral. Again, Condi was the point person, and there was a lot of deference to Condi's judgment. I'll come back to that when I talk about my own trip. But in December, we got permission for Richard Boucher to go to the funeral. Richard was Assistant Secretary of State, so he was my direct boss. There was a lot of opposition to that. There was also opposition to what Richard would carry there, or say, in terms of a message. Finally, we—

Riley: Opposition because he was too high or too low?

Feigenbaum: No, opposition because people didn't want him to go, and then if he was going to go, they didn't want him to say anything. We got Condi to sign off on him going, which she thought made sense. Then we sent one of these split memos, argumentative memos, in which different bureaus pose different views to the Secretary and she has to decide, and we made the case from the SCA Bureau, the South and Central Asia Bureau, that Turkmenistan was important to the United States strategically and that we now had an opportunity that had not existed since the country's independence in '91.

We didn't know what the new leader was going to turn out to be like. He could be just as bad, or not, but it was a generational opportunity to at least see where the chips would fall. Condi was inclined that way, but we had some trouble negotiating a message for Richard to carry, so it got to the point where Richard walked one floor up to her office, handed her a piece of paper and a Sharpie, and Condi literally wrote the message by hand. It was very short, three or four sentences, but the catchphrase was that we saw an "opportunity to turn a page in the U.S.-Turkmenistan relationship."

So Richard went over there, hand-carrying this thing, and made the point about "turning a page." Then I went over a few weeks later, in January, to try to follow up on that in some very intensive and substantive meetings, the main one being with the Foreign Minister, Raşit Meredow, and I tried to begin to lay the groundwork for what it would mean to *actually* turn the page in the relationship. We discussed what each side, but especially theirs, would need to do.

Back to the interagency. There was a lot of opposition to my going to have these meetings after Richard attended the funeral, [*laughs*] again, and this mostly came from the democracy and human rights side. The NSC was involved here, too, and it was similar to the fight we'd had in December. Finally, I told Nick Burns that I was just going to book my tickets and go. I was then summoned to an interagency meeting over at the White House to give me dictation and script my message. I didn't want to do that. Neither did Richard, and we didn't think it fit with Condi's approach to it. Plus, I was out of town, so I think we sent my deputy, Pamela Spratlen, over there. She did the meeting and took a lot of incoming fire.

There was a lot of opposition to my going. There was a lot about setting preconditions again. What I recall about that is being in Texas on vacation and Nick calling me up—because the NSC was complaining about me—and Nick saying, "What's going on here? Why am I getting calls about you from J. D. Crouch? What's the deal?" I explained it to him, and then said something like, "We're the State Department. We shouldn't be taking dictation on how to conduct diplomacy. Here's what we're trying to do. Here's how Condi set the framework for that. I'm going, unless you guys order me not to go."

When the NSC people called me again after they'd held their meeting without me, I basically said, "I'm going. That's the way it is. If you've got a problem with that, have Steve [Hadley] call Condi," Steve Hadley being the National Security Advisor, on the presumption that Steve would not call Condi. Because—and this is the bigger point I wanted to make—once Condi became Secretary, the nature of her relationship with Hadley, which was close, the perception that where she was positioned was where the President would be positioned, and the fact that her team down the chain, even down to my level as a Deputy Assistant Secretary, was acting in a way that reflected where she was positioned. That carried a lot of weight around the interagency.

So in that instance, I felt very comfortable basically saying, "Up yours. I'm going. If you've got a problem with that, have Steve call Condi and order me off the plane," and knowing that wouldn't happen. Whereas if you rewind to the first term—that would have been almost inconceivable for me to do in the Powell days, where I would have said to Condi's NSC, "Up yours. I'm getting on a plane. If you've got a problem, have Condi call Secretary Powell." They would have called Secretary Powell.

I felt very confident being able to do that independently with Condi behind me, but also where we were positioned in the interagency and because Steve and Condi had a good understanding. It got better with DOD [Department of Defense] too because of Gates. It was just way easier with him than with Rumsfeld, and the word kind of came down, I think, to work better with State. I had some obscure issue, for example, with Kyrgyzstan and a $5 million radar at one point and DOD was being a real pain about it. We put it on John Negroponte's radar, he talked to Gordon England, who was Gates's deputy, and the problem was solved in something like four seconds. It's a mundane example, but in the Rumsfeld days it wasn't quite so easy.

I went over in January and had this three-hour meeting with the Foreign Minister. They were having kind of a sham election with the next dictator-to-be, with his five supposed “opposition” candidates, so I went with the six candidates and the entire diplomatic corps in Ashgabat, including our Chargé [d’Affaires], Jennifer Brush, to a big service and lunch at a mosque and hall.

That was interesting, because Meredow, the Foreign Minister, sent a signal to the Russians, among others, by walking over to me with one of his aides—And one of them grabs me by the arm, separates me from Jennifer, and then literally parades me very conspicuously past the Russians, past the Chinese, past the Turks, past the others, to the front of the mosque where the Acting President [Gurbanguly] Berdimuhamedow and the candidates were standing. Eventually he sits me down with a bunch of senior Turkmen and, I think, the Turkish Ambassador, to eat. And since I was not just at the front of the pack but they had literally paraded me around and made a big show of seating me there, everyone could just kind of gawp at the American from Washington and speculate about what he and the Turkmen government might be up to. It seemed like pretty clever signaling from them. I then did a series of meetings. The main one was with the Foreign Minister, Meredow, where I made this turn-the-page case.

I then went back in June and met with the new President, to have “The Conversation,” with a capital T, capital C. What I negotiated with Berdimuhamedow and Meredow was access for a series of functional delegations—one on foreign assistance, one on economics, one on defense, one on human rights and democracy, one on gas and energy investment, one on education, and maybe one on health care—to come over and explore what was possible. So we did that, even for human rights, and that was really unprecedented to have so much focused engagement in so many areas by visiting Americans in such a short time frame, with a lot of ideas and options put onto the table. We’d never had that intensity of engagement with Turkmenistan in that way. We’d never expected them to host so many functional delegations in quick succession in this way. I got President Berdimuhamedow to sign off on that.

In the years since then—It’s, what, 13 years later?—he’s become much more like his predecessor, but back then he wasn’t like that at all. He was quite normal and straightforward and easy to talk to, and we really did think it was going to be different. It’s an example of how we can try to reset a relationship. And that did continue with him through that first year in office. We had a gap at the Embassy in Ashgabat and sent Dick Hoagland, a very experienced Foreign Service officer with a lot of background in the region—he’d been Ambassador in Tajikistan—to be the interim Chargé.

There was some renewed focus on Turkmenistan at that point among people who had never taken much interest in the place. For example, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which has a lot of very politically well-connected commissioners, decided that it wanted some of the commissioners to make a visit there. Not surprisingly, and quite deservedly, the Commission had been incredibly critical of Turkmenistan’s track record, so you can imagine that Turkmenistan would have zero interest in letting them anywhere near the country. But with the leadership change, it felt like there was at least an opportunity to explore some movement.

The Commission had a lot of politically hefty conservative members, including Leonard Leo and Michael Cromartie, who were very close to the White House. Both of those guys could call all

sorts of people in the White House. At some point, the Vice President's office got interested in this and basically told me, invoking Vice President Cheney, not just to get them in the country but to get them a meeting with Berdimuhamedow himself, which was basically an impossible bar to ask us to clear in a country like Turkmenistan.

Leonard Leo called me up to reinforce that in no uncertain terms—I was pacing around on the street outside my house in Washington talking to him on my cellphone and we talked about how Turkmenistan was not exactly the easiest place to operate, which he completely understood, but I said we'd see what we could do. Cromartie was a major figure in the world of Christian political engagement, and he was quite sensitive to the moment. He and I had some excellent exchanges about whether and how, if we did manage to get him and some of the other commissioners into Turkmenistan, he could use the meetings to try to push on the door rather than just blasting them for their track record.

I called Dick up and said, "We've just got to figure this one out." Dick worked some kind of magic and got them the meeting, which was pretty astonishing. I'm not sure that any head of state in *any* country had actually given the commissioners a meeting before. Cromartie and two others were able to have a dialogue on an incredibly hard area for the United States to push on with a government that had a terrible track record and no interest at all in being pushed. But back in those days, at least, Berdimuhamedow not only gave them the meeting but actually played it pretty smoothly.

The only other example I was going to give you was Uzbekistan, because there the fights were a little bit different, and genuinely interagency. I inherited a horrible relationship with Uzbekistan, because in the year before I became Deputy Assistant Secretary there had been a Tiananmen Square–like massacre in a city called Andijan in the Fergana Valley. After that, the United States had spoken out quite forcefully about the massacre, but also about human rights conditions in Uzbekistan.

The response of the Uzbeks was to throw the Americans out of one of just two air bases that we had in Central Asia. One was in Kyrgyzstan, in a place, Manas, which is the airfield in Bishkek; the other was at Karshi-Khanabad in southern Uzbekistan. It was a logistics and mobility hub for the Afghan war. The Uzbeks tossed us out, and, what's more, curtailed virtually all cooperation with the United States. The relationship went into the deep freeze.

This was really upsetting to the Defense Department, to Secretary Rumsfeld, who has a strong interest in Central Asia, which he maintains to this day. He believed that the relationship with Uzbekistan, which had culminated after 9/11 in a pretty sweeping framework agreement in 2002 for a strategic partnership that he had played a role in—He believed very deeply in U.S. relationships in Central Asia, so he was quite upset about the trajectory of the relationship. It was also upsetting to CENTCOM, Central Command, which wanted access for logistics and mobility in Central Asia.

The Defense side of the house really wanted to get past Andijan and not necessarily get back into the base but at least renormalize the relationship. Remember, this was only about a year after Andijan. So imagine, Brantly, 1990, just a year since Tiananmen, trying to go back and normalize things with China. You've got Defense pushing for a kind of normalization of the

relationship with Uzbekistan, and State was completely uninterested in that. Condi was not interested in that. Nick Burns was especially uninterested in that. Dan Fried no longer had responsibility for Central Asia but had strong views on human rights, democratic norms and forms in the former Soviet space.

I had a lot of respect for both Dan's views and Nick's views. I wasn't nearly as experienced as they were with the Uzbeks, and Nick felt very strongly about it, so we had a lot of arguments with Defense, including with CENTCOM, because Admiral [William J.] Fallon, who was then the CENTCOM commander, still wanted to fly off to Tashkent and try to negotiate with them a normalization.

There were a lot of State versus Defense fights over Uzbekistan, and in my kind of mini Central Asia policy informals, which consisted of three people—me; the NSC Director for Central Asia, who was a guy named David Merkel; and then the OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] guy, Jim McDougall, who was the DASD, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, for that region—we had huge drag-outs about this, basically between me and Jim.

I held off going to Uzbekistan for a long time. It was the last country I visited in Central Asia, and that was on purpose. I didn't go until March of 2007. When I finally did, we did lay down a set of conditions, but what I told them was that the United States didn't have the luxury of a one-dimensional foreign policy, of a value-free foreign policy, and therefore, while I was realistic about what was possible in terms of the pace and scope of a rebuild on the democracy and human rights interests that the United States had when compared to the defense interests, we couldn't just opt out of that entire basket.

When I got back from Tashkent, what ensued was another one of these interagency and intramural debates at the State Department about what it would mean to reset things. I think I said to Richard [Boucher] that I wanted to give them a "Chinese restaurant menu" of options. On a Chinese menu, you have chicken, pork, beef, fish, and vegetables. There would be multiple sections to the menu, and then there would be a series of bullet points with proposed American initiatives that could begin to normalize the relationship under each. What I wanted to be able to tell the Uzbeks was that they didn't necessarily have to pick five things under each section of the menu, but they couldn't opt out of an entire basket—They couldn't have all fish and no duck, right? They had to have at least one poultry dish; they could pick five fish dishes, but they couldn't opt out of an entire bucket.

Instead of chicken, pork, beef, fish, and vegetables, we had economics, security, democracy and human rights, education, health care, and so on. But my problem was getting this thing cleared around the interagency, because it would be very hard to get people to sign off on that. So Richard [Boucher] creatively suggested, from his vast experience, [*laughs*] that we do it as a kind of informal letter, from me to the Foreign Minister and the Ambassador in Washington, talking about my visit and laying out a vision. I harvested ideas from around the interagency in a very informal way, from Defense, from the Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau at the State Department, on the human rights side. But the way we presented it to the Uzbeks was not in the form of a formal cable or paper; it was more of an informal letter on stationery, where I wrote, "Dear Mr. Ambassador, I just got back from Tashkent. Let me tell you about my visit. I've been reflecting on some ways—" And we essentially gave them a Chinese menu.

Now that I think about it, this actually happened *before* my visit. Sorry, I have the chronology backward. This is before my visit to Tashkent, so it was to set the stage for it and to try to make the meetings I would hold there more productive. So the letter was more like "Dear Mr. Ambassador, I'm thinking about my upcoming trip to Tashkent and on some ways that we can—"

And this is one thing I learned from watching Rumsfeld operate, even though I had worked for Powell and the two of them were often at odds: no matter what the issue under debate was, make sure, come hell or high water, that *you* hold the pen. I saw so many meetings in the first term especially where, even when DOD didn't have the action, Rumsfeld or people who worked for him would just turn around and table a paper anyway, which annoyed others around the table and sometimes violated the supposed process but, quite frankly, forced everyone else to react to *his* approach and often let him drive the action. So when I got into operational jobs in the second term, I had learned from that experience and was determined to always make sure that I and my team held the pen, drove the agenda, were the ones pushing others to react. I'm pretty sure "always hold the pen" wasn't actually one of Rumsfeld's old chestnuts from his aphorisms in "Rumsfeld's Rules" but it was something I absolutely took away from watching him operate.

When I went to Tashkent, they were still sitting on this menu. I went to see the Foreign Minister, Vladimir Norov, and I laid it out to him. He made clear to us that they were completely uninterested in that kind of a rebuild. He essentially said to me, "Here's the deal. We do health; we don't do education. We do economics, but only *this* kind of economics that involves you investing here, not the one where you demand reforms. We'll do defense cooperation on Afghanistan, but we're not going to do that democracy and human rights stuff." It became clear that they were not much interested in a reset. And even on investment, which they claimed to be interested in, they were putting all sorts of pressure on the very few U.S. companies that were still there and had basically expropriated the largest U.S. joint venture in the country, which was a gold mining operation that actually earned them a lot of foreign currency.

To me, that's interesting. First, because of the way the interagency dynamic was, Defense versus State, with the CENTCOM commander, Admiral Fallon, hovering in the background with his four stars and pushing everything. And then the way we dealt with it, which is through this menu concept rather than letting one agency freelance or try to pick it apart by trying to separate *their* issues from the totality of the relationship.

I used to say in public that the United States didn't have a one- or two-dimensional policy, like a "defense" policy or a "human rights" policy, in Central Asia because we had a *foreign* policy of which all of these had to be important elements. Otherwise, you find that agencies, or people who are focused on their own issues, run freelance policies that don't take account of broader equities or the totality of American interests. And of course we were making the same argument to the Uzbeks: you don't get to have just a defense relationship with the United States while opting out of these other areas where the United States also happens to have national interests. You don't get to say, "Well, we'll do health, but you can forget about education." American foreign policy doesn't have to weight every element equally, but if you have a one- or two-dimensional approach, you lose sight of some American interests and you invite foreign governments to play Americans off against each other in the bargain.

Second, no matter how much Defense wanted the reset, the Uzbeks were uninterested in taking the bait.

Then third, what's interesting is, if you fast-forward to the [Barack] Obama administration—When they came in, they were very interested in a reset with the Uzbeks too as part of their Afghanistan strategy. That involved something they called the Northern Distribution Network, where they were going to reinvigorate a northern route of supply for operations in Afghanistan.

They did reset the table with the Uzbeks in ways that were *far* less conditional than anything we had in mind, and even maybe than Rumsfeld himself had in mind. You could argue there was some distance from the Andijan events by the time you get to 2009 and 2010, but not much, just four or five years. I was stunned; they were doing stuff with the Uzbeks that would have been unthinkable for us.

From Central Asia, those are a few examples of how the interagency worked, but the main theme is that when Condi came over from NSC to State, things became possible vis-à-vis both the democracy and human rights side of the house, but also vis-à-vis the Defense team.

Riley: I want to ask a probably uninformed question. I have lodged in the back of my memory that there may have been a black site somewhere in the region. Am I misrecalling that? And if not, was that something that you had to work around or with?

Feigenbaum: I know nothing about that, but we had human rights violations galore by the governments themselves. I'll give an example to illustrate it. This is different than what you're talking about, which I have no knowledge of. What I was going to say is, I remember going to Tajikistan on one of my trips there in 2006 or 2007 and having a meeting with a very tough-looking head of the former KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti], the head of the Tajik security service, or maybe it was the Interior Minister. We had a discussion about foreign NGOs, because they were cracking down on foreign NGOs operating in Tajikistan, and I'm pushing for them to let them do their work and leave them alone.

He looked at me and he said something like—and remember, this is after the "color revolution" next door in Kyrgyzstan, so they were very suspicious—"All right, *I've* got a question for *you.* If they're so '*non*governmental,' then how come *you're* here talking to me about them when you're from the government?" [*laughter*] And I said, "Mister Minister, I'm talking to you about it because I care about American organizations of *all* kinds." But they just didn't buy it. Their security services had a very negative view of foreign NGOs in general. That's different from your question about human rights, but it shows something about their attitude toward civil society and civic organizing generally.

Riley: Of course. Any other questions about the interagency or those three countries? All right. Do you want to go to connectivity?

Feigenbaum: Yes. On that, there was no Belt and Road in the Bush years. The Chinese Belt and Road didn't happen until 2013—I just gave a talk for Brantly at UVA on that. People talk about connectivity in Eurasia as if China invented it, as if it started only in 2013, and it popped out of the head of Xi Jinping like Athena being born from Zeus's head. The reality is that there were

two decades of connectivity initiatives in Eurasia, including with China, before there was a Belt and Road, before Xi, before any of that.

The core of it was the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, who were working on power lines and roads, respectively, in the region, and something called the CAREC program, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program. CAREC was an alliance of six multilateral development banks: the World Bank; the ADB [Asian Development Bank]; the EBRD, which is the European Bank for Reconstruction Development; the Islamic Development Bank; the IMF [International Monetary Fund]; and the United Nations Development Program. There were six banks and then ten member countries, including four Central Asians—plus China, Azerbaijan, I think Afghanistan, and so on.

Condi had reorganized the Department around a connectivity concept in 2005, which was eight years before the Belt and Road, and she wanted, as I said, to put the "Asia" back into our conception of Central Asia. And for the United States, a lot of that was linked to Afghanistan.

The issue you had in Afghanistan was that we were there. And if you wanted to transition this country from a military problem to a country that could be stable, have some economic growth and development, and be connected to its neighbors for trade, electricity, and markets, you needed to break Afghanistan out of the problems of being landlocked, and, while you're at it, you had a neighboring region to the north, Central Asia, that was itself landlocked. Central Asia is landlocked. And Uzbekistan is a country that's double landlocked—landlocked by landlocked countries. It's one of only two countries in the whole world that's double landlocked.

The motivation of the U.S. government on this was to help Afghanistan by connecting it to the wider region. But in terms of Central Asia there was a subsidiary concern: how to help Central Asia get more options and opportunities beyond being so dependent on Russia. That dependence was a threat to their sovereignty, because having one market, one infrastructure link, one customer for your gas, was a source of Russian coercive leverage on these countries, particularly given the U.S.-Russia relationship at that point. This was before the Georgia invasion, but U.S.-Russia relations weren't smooth. The U.S. had always had an interest, all through the [William J.] Clinton administration, in bolstering Central Asian sovereignty and independence.

The economic dimension of this was to promote connectivity, and the economic dimension for Afghanistan was to promote its own connectivity. We didn't have a lot of money to support this. The Chinese, as Brantly knows, are throwing billions of dollars at them. And nobody really thought about Eurasian connectivity especially deeply at that point. This was a faraway region of the world. There weren't a lot of American companies invested except in Kazakhstan's oil sector. At one point we thought of maybe a $50 million infrastructure initiative, and we couldn't sell even that. But the U.S. did have some programs. For example, USAID, the Agency for International Development, had spent about $40 million on transboundary water projects in Central Asia, all the way from independence, a long period of time, from 1991 to 2006–07.

Our thought in the South and Central Asia Bureau was, if we don't have the money, and we can't create an initiative without money, how do we piggyback on *existing* initiatives? For us, this meant leveraging those efforts of the World Bank and the ADB. The United States had the preponderant voting weight in the World Bank; our Japanese ally had the preponderant voting

weight in the Asian Development Bank. So our thought was that we could lever the CAREC program in the first instance, because we had a lot of the right countries, and because the money was there from the banks, but then, in the second, we and the Japanese and the Europeans could use our combined voting weight in the three major banks—World Bank, ADB, and EBRD—to shape the rules, standards, and norms in a way that would be market friendly.

Toward the first part of 2007, we cooked up something we called CAREC Plus Three. The idea was to piggyback on the CAREC program. The Plus Three would be the three major market economies: the United States, Japan, and the EU [European Union]. And the idea was that the three of us could use the CAREC platform, but our shared interest was in promoting market-based solutions to connectivity and infrastructure, to give market ideas a push in the region. Also in our thinking was how to harness nontraditional partners in Central Asia like Japan—Remember, I had an East Asia background, so I had worked for Rich Armitage when he was Deputy Secretary of State. Rich, of course, had a long-standing interest in Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance. And as I said to you earlier, I had promised Rich informally, when he walked out the door in January 2005, that since I was sticking around and he and his team were not, I would try to look for things to do with Japan. Plus Japan was the number one shareholder in the ADB, and that was actually where CAREC was headquartered.

So we cooked up this CAREC Plus Three idea, and I got the Japanese to buy off on it. Then I tried to get the Europeans to buy off on it. European policy on Central Asia was extremely uneven and unpredictable, which is partly why I went to the Japanese first. And that's because within the EU context there were too many players, most of whom didn't have an interest in that part of the world. When the Germans were in the EU Presidency they were extremely interested in Central Asia, and made it a priority. They were succeeded, either immediately or in the next cycle, by the Portuguese, who had no interest in Central Asia, probably couldn't have found it on a map. They were much more interested in Africa because they had Lusophone countries like Angola.

You couldn't do anything with the EU, because every six months it would pivot toward a different set of interests. But they did have Special Envoys, or people that were responsible for the Central Asia region, both in the European Commission and in the European Council. One was a French diplomat named Pierre Morel, and another may have been French, also. He was either French or Italian, but his name was [Hugues] Mingarelli. They were responsible for European policy for Central Asia.

I tried to get them interested in the CAREC Plus Three idea, and Morel was quite interested, but Mingarelli not at all. So the Europeans, ironically enough, torpedoed this whole idea. They torpedoed it, in retrospect, because they were worried about the Russians. They thought it was the Americans trying to be hostile to the Russians by working in a context where the Russians were not present. The Russians were not members of the ADB. The Russians were not part of the CAREC program. The Russians were hypersensitive about any connectivity initiative that looked like it was trying to reorient a region that they had had a basically colonial relationship with away from its long-standing orientation toward Russia.

In fact, the United States had a lot of very difficult meetings with Russia about that. I remember being in one consultation with the Russians on Central Asia where I think it was Mikhail

Alexeev—one of the Deputy Foreign Ministers—who said something like, "Central Asians aren't speaking Russian anymore; they're speaking Uzbek and Tajik and local languages. These aren't global languages like Russian. Don't you understand that you're disconnecting them from a global language, a global kind of Weltanschauung? What are you doing? Oh, and by the way, it's an invitation to the Chinese to come in. What are you doing with that?"

The Europeans viewed this CAREC idea as complicating their life with the Russians. I thought that was silly, because the Russians wanted to be in the ADB at that point, so I saw it as a way to maybe get the Russians on board with a broader connectivity scheme. But the point is, the Europeans killed it, which is ironic because now, fast-forward to today and the Europeans are all up in a tizzy about the Belt and Road and how China's dominating infrastructure in the region, and "Why don't we have a presence?" and "Where is the U.S.?" and "Why aren't the U.S. and Europe working together?"

They now have a very proactive Special Envoy named Peter Burian. I think he's Slovak; he's a former Slovak diplomat. He's in the Morel job—Special Envoy for Central Asia. He's very proactive on connectivity. It's kind of the counter–Belt and Road. And it's ironic, because if you go back to that pre–Belt and Road time, when we had an opportunity to shape it, they were just flatly opposed, and they killed it, and the Japanese and I thought it was a head-scratcher at the time.

That was an example, quite apart from reorganizing the Department, of what Condi and her team were trying to do *before* there was a Belt and Road, *before* there was a Xi Jinping. We had a conception of Eurasia, of connectivity, of Central Asia as an integral part of the region. And props to Condi; she really was ahead of her time on that.

Richard Boucher was also very enthused about this. He and I were trying to sell American companies, like AES [Applied Energy Services], on road and power line projects in the region, including as contractors. Corporate investors didn't like the risk profile. Market investors didn't love the yield curve in these countries. It was hard to sell American firms on infrastructure and on connectivity, which remains a problem to this day. But my point is that the vision was there, and it was very much a State Department–centric vision, where State was driving it, and, as I put it in this talk I gave with Brantly at UVA, it's the forgotten American history of connectivity in the region.

So, to everybody who's woken up since then, because we're strategic competitors with China now, and said, "Oh my God, the Belt and Road! What are we going to do about connectivity?"—Actually before there was a Belt and Road, we *knew* what to do about connectivity, and the United States could learn something from that period about how to leverage international financial institutions, how to leverage best-in-class companies, how to leverage partnerships, including with countries like Japan that are not the classic, traditional American partners in Central Asia. The more traditional ones were Europe and Turkey. We were pushing the Japanese, the Koreans, nontraditional partners. That has some lessons for today; it's just a little late now.

Riley: Brantly, do you have anything?

Womack: Yes. I have a couple of questions. One: How did this relate to the on-again/off-again plans for a Russian pipeline to either Japan or China? It seems to me that there's connectivity within Russia going on that's parallel to any connectivity plans in the newly independent states.

Feigenbaum: Yes, there were a lot of trans-Russia plans in a lot of sectors, going back a long time. I don't remember the chronology on Power of Siberia, which is the main Gazprom pipeline. But the main U.S. interest in pipelines, going back to the Clinton years, had been a trans-Caspian pipeline that would bring Kazakh oil across the Caspian, or some way to get Turkmen gas into the European mix. There were a whole succession of people—Matt Bryza was one; Steve Mann was another—who'd been working on that forever. Those trans-Caspian pipelines were mostly pipe dreams at that point.

The other area that's worth mentioning, though, is there was also this Paris to Busan railway concept—We used to call Busan "Pusan," because it was P and P, "Paris to Pusan." It was kind of a trans-Korea railway that was supposed to be connected to the normalization of North Korea and some of the big pipe dream ideas for Korean normalization. Those never took either, so I always viewed those as pipe dreams.

Our main energy agenda was actually the trans-Caspian agenda, which is interesting because at that time the Russians had a hammerlock on Turkmen gas, for example. They were largely importing Turkmen gas for use domestically while selling Russian gas at higher prices to Europeans. The Turkmen were very dependent on Russian monopsony, essentially, so they had a hammerlock on the Turkmen. Our pitch to the Turkmen had always been, you want to get your gas to Europe. The Russians were paying them something like $130 per thousand cubic meters for the gas, and our view was that we could help give the Turkmen bargaining leverage—back to that theme of independence and sovereignty.

Ironically enough, it was the Chinese that ended up playing that role. The Chinese eventually were the ones that broke the Russian monopsony. The only onshore production-sharing agreement in Turkmenistan was Chinese at that point. The first Turkmen pipeline that took, that wasn't Russia-focused, was the China gas pipeline that they built to bring Turkmen gas to—It was the Chinese that did it. Now the Turkmen have swapped dependence on Russia for dependence on China, so they have the same problem they had, but with the Chinese as the problem.

But all the energy debate—It shows you we were still very much in this European, transatlantic, trans-Caspian mindset, with the energy space being such a driver of that, and nobody had anticipated the degree to which the Chinese would be the ones that reshaped the region.

Womack: Well, it also would seem to me that our efforts—Even if the Europeans had been more cooperative, it was zero-sum to the Russians, and what the Chinese are doing with the Belt and Road Initiative is not as directly centered on countering Russia, so that, and everybody being in SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization], also helps. I'm not sure if we were not a little too antagonistic, as well as unsuccessful, with the Europeans.

Feigenbaum: Yes. The Russians have always seen us in Central Asia through a geopolitical prism, so even when we tried to work in the economic space, but particularly the energy space,

they've seen that as a threat to Russian security interests—in my view wrongly—and they view all the American talk about Central Asian independence and sovereignty as directly focused on countering them. They've always had not just a hostile view of that but a view that almost was incredulous.

In the stories that I was telling you earlier, I went to Turkmenistan to try to reset the relationship. The Russian Prime Minister, [Mikhail] Fradkov, who subsequently became the head of their foreign intelligence service, the SVR [Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki], went down there shortly thereafter and, among other things, apparently put a lot of heat on them over the reset with the Americans.

Either I or Boucher or somebody had a meeting with the Russians in our regular consultative mechanism to talk about Central Asia, and their view of what we were doing in Turkmenistan was essentially, "How dare you?" It was almost in those words. "How dare you? What do you think you're doing? That's ours, that space." That was always their view, and with the exception of the Kazakhs, who had a lot more flexibility because they had the oil revenue as the base, they had a very smart and wily operator as their founding president in President Nazarbayev. He'd been a top leader even in Soviet days. [Mikhail] Gorbachev had relied heavily on him. He's now seen as what Central Asians call the *aksakal*, the elder. Even [Vladimir] Putin has a lot of respect for Nazarbayev personally, clearly, and shows him some deference.

Kazakhstan had the ability to maneuver in a way that the other countries did not, so they called their foreign policy a "multivector" foreign policy, meaning Russia, China, U.S.—multiple vectors. The other countries didn't have that luxury, and they were always under a lot of Russian pressure. And then there was Uzbekistan, which was kind of the un-Kazakhstan—Instead of "multivector," Islam Karimov, who was kind of the un-Nazarbayev, would swing wildly from appearing to favor one outside power to another depending on the year and maybe on his mood. The Russian mentality was essentially postcolonial, and their view of us was, *how dare we?* That played out all over the place. What we saw with them in Turkmenistan also played out in Kyrgyzstan. I mentioned we had an air base there. The Russians were constantly trying to get us pushed out of that place, and there was a lot of Russian disinformation in the Kyrgyz press, in the media.

Russian-language media was horribly anti-American in the Central Asian space. I remember having meetings both in Kyrgyzstan and in Kazakhstan with the opposition—essentially what passed for the opposition parties in Kazakhstan. I was talking to them about American democracy-related training programs—political party training, for instance—that the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute conduct. One member of the opposition said, "If I were you, I wouldn't put so much of your assistance money into that. You really ought to put it all in broadcasting, because, *boy*, the Russians are just cleaning your clock here. If you knew what was in the Russian-language media here—They're killing you here."

That was the problem we had with them, and I think particularly after the so-called "color revolution" in 2005, in Kyrgyzstan. When I took the job in 2006, it was post–color revolution, so the Russians saw potential color revolutions everywhere as a bogeyman and a threat, and that's what they thought we were doing, fomenting them, which was ridiculous, but that was their prism on it. They didn't have to worry about that with the Chinese.

So on the one hand, they can't match the Chinese on everything the Chinese are doing—The Russians don't have the money. They can't do the project finance. They can't do the infrastructure. They can't offer anything to Central Asia that the Chinese do in the economic space. But then, unlike the Americans, the Chinese didn't have the same baggage in Russian eyes that the Americans did. Nobody in Moscow thinks the Chinese are fomenting color revolutions in Central Asia. Nobody hears the Chinese doing democracy talk.

Boucher had a great line about the SCO, since you mention it, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It was in testimony to Congress that he was asked about it, and he said, "They view the SCO as a 'safe space,' where they can all get together and nobody's lecturing them about human rights. When they sit with the Americans by contrast, we're talking to them about democracy, human rights, and reform." Because, as I said earlier, we don't have the luxury of a value-free foreign policy, even in a Turkmenistan, or an Uzbekistan.

But in the SCO context—maybe now with the Indians in, but I don't think the Indians do that—back in those days, when it was the Shanghai Five and then a group of six, with the Uzbeks joining, nobody talked about that stuff.

The Russians view the Chinese through that prism. They're a competitor, but not at all in the same way as us. We're not just a "competitor"; they think we're a threat in that space, so they have a very zero-sum view of what Americans do there.

Womack: Thanks. That's a good explanation.

Riley: Evan, let me pose one more question about the connectivity piece, and that is about interagency here. Was there any substantial Commerce Department or Treasury Department engagement on these issues, and is there a story worth teasing out there?

Feigenbaum: There's one story that implicates Commerce. The Obama administration claims an innovation with Central Asia. Secretary [John] Kerry organized a forum called the C5+1, the five being the five Central Asian countries plus the United States, and they claim it was the first ever multilateral forum where the U.S. wasn't just bilateralizing it. I admire and congratulate them for the C5+1, but it is not true that the United States had never had a multilateral mechanism with countries in Central Asia before. In the Bush years, we had two. Well, we had one, and then we used it in a way that then flows to two.

We had something called a TIFA, a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which is a USTR, U.S. Trade Representative, -led vehicle that functions like a forum. It's a vehicle that you can use to discuss anything: market access concerns, trade issues, investor settlement disputes. The United States had a bunch of these TIFAs, but it had only one that was a regional TIFA as opposed to a bilateral TIFA, and that was the U.S.-Central Asia TIFA. So the United States already had a C5+1, albeit not in name; it was called the Central Asia-United States Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, and USTR would get together with the five as a *group* of five.

When I became DAS, we appreciated the need to deal with the countries regionally, because we were talking about connectivity, and if you're talking about connectivity, you're intrinsically into

crossborder dynamics. If you go back to what I said about the CAREC program, it's always easier to piggyback off an existing framework than it is to create a new one from scratch.

We already had the TIFA, so the question we had was whether we could use the existing TIFA to move beyond trade issues and also have it focus on infrastructure and connectivity. So that's what we did. I held an interagency process where we agreed to do that, and we tried to transform the TIFA into a connectivity forum where we bumped up the level to make it a Ministerial. We invited trade ministers, not just working-level people, to Washington for basically a C5+1 Ministerial, but unlike the Obama version, which was Foreign Ministers, ours was trade ministers.

We plussed up the TIFA from one into three parts. In one, the ministers did the classic trade and investment framework discussion that USTR led. In a second one, the State Department now also led a six-way—five plus one—interagency conversation around connectivity, where we talked about roads, power lines, and infrastructure, but we were also focused on soft connectivity rather than the Chinese thing, which is hard connectivity. By "soft," I mean customs procedures and border regulations and not just the Chinese thing of building roads and bridges and power plants, although we did actually build a bridge connecting Tajikistan to Afghanistan that Secretary [Carlos] Gutierrez cut the ribbon and opened with [Hamid] Karzai and the Tajik president [Emomali] Rahmon. We were focused on this "soft" element because we thought it was a U.S. strength, and because, as I said earlier, we didn't have the money to plow a hundred billion bucks into hard infrastructure projects the way the Chinese do.

Actually, if you look at what creates the biggest obstacles to growth in regions like that, the World Bank had done a study that showed that if you were landlocked, transaction costs alone could knock as much as a point and a half off your growth potential. A survey had been done by the bank of what the obstacles were to connectivity, and it showed 13-hour delays at border crossing points, where truck drivers would be lined up for miles. That was a number one or number two complaint, along with corruption problems.

So we tried to focus this around soft connectivity. What could we do—the United States—to help ease customs and border procedures or help the five adopt common customs standards, which is something they had not had since the Soviet days, because in the Soviet days they never had to work any of that out. Moscow would just decide by administrative fiat, but now you had five independent countries suddenly having to negotiate crossborder arrangements that they never had to do before, amid an atmosphere of a lot of hostility among them.

We transformed the TIFA into that, and we had an interagency component—USTR, Commerce, and NSC. Then we asked Commerce to go to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and ask if the U.S. Chamber would jointly host a business forum with Commerce, where we'd have the five ministers plus Commerce senior officials, the U.S. Chamber, and a coalition of U.S. businesses in infrastructure financing all of the things that went into connectivity; they would get together and explore investment opportunities.

David Bohigian, who was then Assistant Secretary of Commerce for whatever the international piece of Commerce was that dealt with this, became my counterpart for that. That's interesting because David, in the [Donald] Trump administration, became the head of OPIC [Overseas

Private Investment Corporation] and then presided over things like the BUILD Act and the effort to establish the new Development Finance Corporation, which is the U.S. counter–Belt and Road structure that they overlaid on top of Ex-Im [U.S. Export-Import Bank] and OPIC. That was an early test of some of the ability of the United States to leverage its interagency. We took an existing trade forum, raised the level to a Ministerial, then turned it into a multidimensional three-part forum that had a trade component, an infrastructure component, and an investment and business component, and Commerce was pretty central to that. David was my partner in crime on that.

Riley: Terrific, and thank you. Barbara, do you have anything on this?

Perry: No. I'm ready to move.

Riley: India?

Feigenbaum: OK, so South Asia. At the end of 2007 I changed jobs. I was the C in SCA, the Central in South and Central Asia. Then Richard Boucher and Nick Burns asked me to switch over and take on the South Asia portfolio, minus Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Bush administration had an approach to India that it called "dehyphenation." The idea behind dehyphenation—Phil Zelikow may have talked to you about this in his oral history with you—was that the U.S. had never looked at India really seriously as a prospective global power or regional player, because everything was always hyphenated with Pakistan. Everything was Indo-Pak this, Indo-Pak that. The idea of dehyphenation was to look at India and Pakistan separately, to take India seriously as a prospective regional and global power in its own right, and not to deal with India or interact with India solely through the prism of the hyphen. That was dehyphenation.

I didn't become involved with India until the end of 2007, but the Bush administration transformed the U.S.-India relationship. President Bush came in committed to that. Bob Blackwill, as Ambassador to India, really played an absolutely seminal role on this, and Condi, Steve Hadley, and various others, including Secretary Rumsfeld through something called the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership in 2004, which was kind of a seminal framework for defense cooperation that foreshadowed a lot of the transformation that would happen over the next several administrations.

In the decades prior, there had been three major obstacles to closer U.S.-India relations: One was the Cold War, which created real disruptions, not just because India was nonaligned in a world that was divided into blocs but because India signed a friendship and cooperation treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971. The second was India's utter lack of integration into the global economy, its protectionism, and bars to investment in many sectors. But the third, which was the thorniest, was India's nuclear weapons program. After India's first test in 1974, the U.S. imposed sanctions that sought to curtail its access to technology and fuel supplies. And it did even more after the 1998 test, restricting foreign assistance and export credits.

The Soviet collapse cleared away the first obstacle because the end of the Cold War allowed India to begin reassessing its strategic priorities and relationships. The second began to fall away

because a balance of payments crisis in 1991 led to a first wave of Indian economic reforms. But the third obstacle was especially thorny, both substantively and psychologically.

So there was this real transformation of the U.S.-India partnership over the two Bush terms, which stood on the merits, but also had the U.S.-China strategic competition and the rise of Chinese power absolutely in the rearview for everybody, and in the front view for some people who viewed the rise of India as another large-scale, continental-sized Asian power, as an existential counterweight to the rise of Chinese power.

That's a view that was closely associated with Blackwill, with Ashley Tellis, who was his senior advisor, and with Condi and others around the administration.

Now, if you fast-forward to the second term, the really transformational event that is probably, in many ways, the most important thing the U.S. and India have done together since Indian independence, was the U.S.-India civil-nuclear deal. That had its origin in 2005, was expressed in a hugely important joint statement between President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, had the imprimatur of President Bush personally, and Condi and others were very central to it.

The core of the problem, of course, was that the United States sought a strategic partnership with India, but India was, to be blunt about it, the number one target of American nonproliferation sanctions. In fact, the Nuclear Suppliers Group had been founded, in part, because of India's nuclear breakout in '74. The nuclear issue, therefore, had been extremely contentious, and had been a very fundamental obstacle to the improvement of U.S.-India relations. The United States had cut off fuel supply to the Indian nuclear reactor at Tarapur, and this was extremely contentious. The view in India was, How can you be strategic partners with us while this stands in the way?

Others—Condi, Nick, Philip, Bob [Blackwill], Steve Hadley, Ashley Tellis—can speak to all of that, but the United States and India reached this civil-nuclear agreement. The idea was to separate India's military and civilian nuclear programs through a separation plan, have India declare the civilian facilities to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], take a decision to voluntarily place its civilian facilities under IAEA safeguards, continue its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, and much more—and then, partly on that basis, get India an exception to the IAEA and NSG [Nuclear Suppliers Group] requirements for full-scope safeguards to be able, again on that basis, to both conduct civil nuclear business and normalize the U.S.-India relationship. India still kept its nuclear weapons program, obviously, which it would not give up, and was not a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. That was the idea and it was supposed to be backed by the U.S. seeking an international consensus and then amending its own domestic law.

There was a nuclear agreement, of which Nick Burns was the principal negotiator, the so-called 123 Agreement, and then Congress got involved through the [Henry J.] Hyde Act, which laid down a lot of conditions and set them into law, through which the United States could provide exceptions to the requirements of the Atomic Energy Act.

By the time I got on the scene in December 2007, the United States and India had this deal in place, the Hyde Act requirements were in place, so the vision and the framework were there. The 123 Agreement had been negotiated by Nick with Dick Stratford, and completed, but nothing was happening. The U.S. and India were not moving forward on it. And the main reason for that was India, which at that point had a government under Manmohan Singh, the so-called United Progressive Alliance government, that had not been able to sort out the internal politics of moving forward on some of this. They were kept in office by 59 votes of Indian Communists and so-called Left Front parties, who were extremely hostile to the United States, so the agreement was stalled.

I took on this job in December for a variety of reasons. As I'd mentioned before, Nick Burns had supervised me in negotiating that Madrid arrangement with Kazakhstan. Nick owned a lot of India policy, because he was the negotiator of the 123 Agreement, and at some point Nick and Richard said to me something like, "What are you doing there? You should move over and work on India," Nick said, "with me." Richard was very supportive of it and wanted to switch me over. I said, "Well, I don't know anything about India. It's not really my subject area." I think it was Nick who said, "Well, that's not what I'm looking for. I want somebody who can knock heads together, because this civil-nuclear deal at some point may move forward, and that's what we're going to need."

Between my taking that job in December and the Indians finally deciding to move forward in July, Nick resigned, was replaced by [Joseph] Bill Burns, another Burns, as Under Secretary of State, and I twiddled my thumbs on South Asia, working on various things with India, like trying to get a bunch of structured regional dialogues going with Shivshankar Menon, the Foreign Secretary, on East Asia, the Gulf, and Africa, but not getting a lot of traction on any of them. But Bill was another relationship that became really seminal for me—another boss who played a mentoring role, pushed me, taught me, challenged me, and then became my boss again a couple of years ago when he brought me to the Carnegie Endowment, where I work now.

Around July of 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh put his foot down, and if I understand the history correctly, essentially said that he would resign if the government of India did not move forward on the nuclear deal. He kind of threw down the gauntlet to Mrs. [Sonia] Gandhi and others in the Congress Party, but also to the 59 Communists and Left Front members that kept the coalition in power from the outside—They were not part of the coalition—that they were going to move forward on the deal. India moved toward what they called a "trust vote," in their parlance, which was essentially a vote of no confidence in the government, and the government survived. At that point the government basically came to us and said, "Let's move forward."

There were three main steps that the U.S. needed to get through. The first was, we needed to go to the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors to get an exception to full-scope safeguards for India, because India was not party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Then we needed to go to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There are 35 members of the IAEA Board of Governors, 45 members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. And then, if we could pull off those two holes-in-one, we needed to amend the Atomic Energy Act to provide an exception for India. The Indians wanted that amended through legislation that would place no additional requirements or conditions on India, and they were worried about termination clauses too. So they wanted a clean exception in the NSG and they wanted a clean piece of legislation in the United States.

Obviously the first was not to the liking of many countries, and the second was not to the liking of many Members of Congress. And under the Hyde Act, we also had to certify that the Indians had satisfied about a half dozen conditions that the law laid out, which meant that they would also have to take additional steps on things like harmonizing their export controls with Missile Technology Control Regime guidelines; adopting an IAEA Additional Protocol; and committing to join something called the Convention on Supplementary Compensation, CSC, which is a nuclear liability regime for accidents. And those were just some of the things that they had to do and that we had to certify. Every one of these things was like a hole in one in golf—almost impossible, inconceivable, especially on the compressed timeframe of the President's last six months in office.

Shortly after the Indians decided to move forward in July, I essentially went to my bosses and said, "I really want the ball," basically, "give me the ball," and they did. A decision was made that State would have the lead, and within State, Boucher proposed that we stand up a team of all of the relevant bureaus, plus our interagency colleagues, to work through all the things that had to be done for the negotiating process at each phase, and I would chair it as the day-to-day chair.

Our colleagues on the nonproliferation side of the Department didn't like that. They liked the idea of the coordination group. They just didn't like the idea that I would chair it alone. They insisted on a cochair, which we agreed to, so my cochair was Mary Alice Hayward, who is a good friend of mine and was a fellow Deputy Assistant Secretary, but on the nonproliferation side. In practice, I did most of the chairing, but the nonproliferation side was integral to the group, and then came back in a big way during the negotiating phase in the multilateral, when John Rood, who was acting Under Secretary of State for that side of the house, had succeeded John Bolton and Bob Joseph in that role. He became the principal negotiator in the NSG.

We had a group that I was the cochair of that included all of the major players with stakes in this, the South Asia and India side, but also the nonproliferation and the legal side, and the NSC and the Department of Energy. We had Dick Stratford, who was the principal negotiator of the 123 Agreements, our guru on all of this stuff. He had been Nick's key guy in negotiating the 123. From the legal advisor, we had Newell Highsmith and others; he was the rep [representative] there. Newell was our lawyer. We had all kinds of people from the nonproliferation side of the Department. We had our colleagues from NSC, Mark Webber and Anish Goel, who were the South Asia side, but also Mike Allen, who was from the nonproliferation side. We had Rich Goorevich, from the Department of Energy. We gathered everybody together and I chaired this group.

We met every single day between July and October around the conference table in the front office of the South and Central Asia Bureau, and we would go around and discuss what had to be done. What did we need the Indians to do? What did we need to do with all of the multinational players? What were the legal hurdles? And we tried to plan ahead throughout so that we were always two to three steps ahead of where we needed to be the following week. We went through this at every phase: the IAEA phase, the NSG phase, and then the congressional phase. We'd sit around the table. I was in the chair, and I would hand out taskings that were agreed. Every day I would send around an email to this group of 25 or 30 people that had the homework and a summary of conclusions assignments for action, and would say, "Legal Advisor, we need language for the Indians on their commitments to X." "Nonproliferation, Stratford's got to give

us the language that Bill Burns can give Shivshankar Menon," who was then the Foreign Secretary, "on X, Y, and Z." And so on.

And we spent a lot of time gaming out who would be onside and who would be the real problem countries in the IAEA and the NSG. I worked with Tom West, who was a young special assistant to Bill, to work up something that literally read like a battle plan; it was a diplomatic campaign plan that we were constantly honing and refining as we worked through it, mapping out how to deal with each country, what to do about the Irish, how to deal with the New Zealanders, things with which to push the Dutch or the Austrians or the Brazilians, and so on.

My first role was to chair that team, and then my second role was to be the day-to-day point of contact with the Indian side on all of the things that the Indians needed to do, and sharing with the Indians our visibility and their visibility into where the 34 other members of the IAEA Board of Governors, and then the 44 non-American members of the NSG, sat on this.

My counterpart in India was Naveen Srivastava, who was chief of staff to the Foreign Secretary and he and I talked all the time. The key people on the Indian side were the Foreign Secretary, Shivshankar Menon, a future National Security Advisor; their National Security Advisor, Steve Hadley would talk to him, [Mayankodu Kelath] M. K. Narayanan. Ronen Sen was their Ambassador in Washington. Shyam Saran was Special Envoy, who had negotiated with Nick, and then had kept a hand in all of this; and then their Department of Atomic Energy, who were very obstreperous. They had a long history with the Americans; we had cut off the fuel supply at Tarapur, so they were quite hardline in terms of negotiating with the U.S.—Anil Kakodkar, the DAE [Department of Atomic Energy] head, and Ravi Grover, who was the DAE chief scientist. And then other people came in and out. That's what we were dealing with—the Indian piece and then the interagency and State Department piece.

For the IAEA phase, essentially what we had to do was get the 34 other members of the IAEA Board of Governors, including China and Pakistan, [*laughs*] to sign off on this, so that required some nifty diplomacy. Bill and John led that and David Mulford, our Ambassador in New Delhi, flew into Vienna to work with us. It was just remarkable, the way the United States and India worked as one team. I would call up Naveen, and Naveen would say, "We want you to know here's what we're hearing about the Irish. Here's what we're hearing about the New Zealanders. We talked to the French; here's what we're hearing about the French. What are you hearing about the French?" We would be comparing notes with India on third parties and third players and coordinating the diplomacy all throughout this multimonth period.

We really created a whole of U.S. government approach to working other countries bilaterally, but in a multilateral context, and the Indians were doing the same. We'd say, "Hey, we're not hearing good things about where the Irish are positioned. Maybe you ought to send your Ambassador in Dublin in to talk to them, or you ought to haul their Ambassador in Delhi in." It developed habits of cooperation between the United States and India diplomatically that I don't think had ever really existed before.

The civil-nuclear deal was a remarkable thing, but it was a bilateral U.S.-India deal. In the multilateral context of the IAEA and the NSG, I personally don't think the U.S. and India had ever worked in such a coordinated way before, so you had me and Naveen, Bill Burns, and

Shankar [Shivshankar Menon], and subsequently, me, Bill, John Rood, as our negotiator, and then David Mulford, who was the Ambassador in New Delhi, and Steve talking to Narayanan and Condi to Pranab Mukherjee and occasionally with the Prime Minister. So really everyone was working it. David was constantly talking to the Indians, and constantly talking to and, if I may say so, threatening some of his counterparts from the more obstreperous countries. I remember David musing to me with stuff like, "How about you tell the Austrians that we're going to advise the Indians to cut off all Austrian Airlines flights to India if they don't come on board?"

Long story short, it was pretty remarkable that we got it through the IAEA. It was like a hole in one.

We then had to go to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which was much more challenging. There was a lot of opposition, frankly, in the NSG, because in the NSG you had countries that did not share our equities with India, countries like Ireland, like the Netherlands, like Switzerland, like Norway. And in an early round, there were questions from the Brazils, the Argentinas. They didn't have the big power strategic competition equities with India. And secondly, some of them, like New Zealand, had a sense of themselves that was very much tied to their nuclear nonproliferation credentials.

You remember in New Zealand with David Lange, the Labour government in the 1980s that had been very antinuclear. These governments were either opposed or they wanted to put a lot of conditions on the exception. You remember what I said earlier about India wanting a so-called "clean exception"? These countries did not want a clean exception.

There were ten really obstreperous countries in the first round of this, in August of 2008, and Bill and I and John Rood went out there with a team. Bill had to leave after the first day, and John became a junkyard dog of a negotiator. The countries that were the last six holdouts were Switzerland, Austria, Norway, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. I'm forgetting somebody. Then China, which is a story I'll come back to, and Argentina and Brazil and even Japan and a few others in that group of ten. We disposed of most of them at that first round, but we had trouble fighting off the idea of a clean exception. And everybody is working this.

At one point, I called Tom Shannon, the Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, and he immediately turns around and calls the President of Argentina's chief of staff in Buenos Aires. We didn't succeed in getting consensus and had to come back in the first week of September 2008 for another round. At that point we were down to six, so I'm going to do this again and see if I get them right: Austria, Switzerland, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Ireland. Those six.

Those six were really the obstreperous six. And there are four things that are interesting there. One, is that in the last half of his second term this was a huge priority for President Bush. It was meant to be transformational diplomacy. It was a legacy item. The U.S.-India relationship was hugely important to him. So for us, the team on the ground—Bill Burns, John Rood, me, and some of our other colleagues, Geoff Pyatt, the others—the word from the President and Condi and Steve Hadley was basically, "You get this done, come hell or high water. Don't come back

until this is done." That's important, because the entire interagency, the President himself, they were all behind it.

We essentially put the full weight of the United States government behind this. For several days in the month of September 2008 my job was to direct traffic as we bullied small European countries into submission by deploying the full power of the United States—cajoling, threatening, in various ways—and everybody was behind that. That's the first piece of the story.

The second piece of that is the coordinated diplomacy between the four countries that were pushing this the hardest: the U.S., the U.K., France, and Russia. And the reason that's important is that by September of 2008 the Russians had invaded Georgia, and the United States and Russia had a horrible relationship, *horrible*. But our instructions in Vienna from Condi and Steve were to do what we had to do, essentially.

We worked with the Russians almost as one team. The Russian interest in this was that they wanted to sell nuclear reactors to India, but the point is that, notwithstanding the difficult relationship between the United States and Russia, we had very productive coordination with the Russians, who would say, "The Chinese are going to be a problem. We'll go work on the Chinese. How about you go work on these guys?" Same thing with the British and the French. David Miliband, who was the British Foreign Secretary at that point, and Bernard Kouchner, who was the French Foreign Minister—they and Condi, and Bill's counterparts and we, along with the Russians and the British and the French were like one team. Because so many of the holdouts were European, the British and French really went to work on them.

I have a great story for you, which was there was an EU Ministerial meeting. It was called a Gymnich, if I remember that correctly, G-Y-M-N-I-C-H. The Ministers were on a train going somewhere, and the Austrians had tried to not be under pressure from Miliband and Kouchner by seating their Foreign Minister, whose name was [Ursula] Plassnik, in another car of the train to literally get her away from the two of them. So the British and French were trying to play with the seating arrangement. At one point the Foreign Ministers were all at an opera performance, and Miliband and Kouchner tried to corner the Dutch and the Austrians. These countries were all opposed for one reason or another. The Austrians were literally weeks away from an election because the coalition government had collapsed and the Social Democrats and the Chancellor had a wary eye on the Greens, who were antinuclear and polling pretty strongly. The Irish had antinuclear cred, and the same with the Kiwis outside the EU.

So, first, the whole weight of the U.S. government was behind this. Second, there was the strange phenomenon of working with the Russians and the others.

The third piece was how the diplomacy actually went down. John's basic job was to be in the room, and John put his foot down and would not budge. John Rood. Remarkable negotiator. He just beat back every attempt to put conditions on this. One conditionality battle was around what would happen if the Indians ever tested a nuclear weapon again, because the Indian view was, if the Chinese test, we might have to test; if we test, you'd better not do what you did after '74 and cut off the fuel supply. So there was that.

A second piece of it had to do with their separation plan. And another had to do with the safeguards. So John was in one room fighting off these conditionality clauses, and my role was—I was the guy with the phone. As the guy with the phone, John would come say to me, “The Austrians are a real problem. We’ve got to get somebody on it.” John was this incredible, tough negotiator; he just dug in and stayed there.

My role was to get Steve Hadley, Condi Rice, President Bush, John Negroponte, Bill Burns, and others to persuade or coerce other countries. I had this remarkable experience where—not to put too fine a point on it, because it was the President’s high priority—for a couple of days it felt like everybody kind of worked for me, in an entirely metaphorical sense of course, because I could call up Joe Macmanus or Brian Gunderson, who were Condi’s exec and chief of staff, and say, “I need Condi in the next 30 minutes to call Foreign Minister X, and she’d better do it because if she doesn’t do it, they’re walking out of the room and they’ll never come back,” and she would do it. I was kind of directing traffic. Bill was working on the Swiss and the Austrians. It was a remarkable team effort, but also for me, as a young Deputy Assistant Secretary–level diplomat, you could mobilize the principals in support of this.

After the first day it didn’t look like we were going to get anywhere on this. I remember at three o’clock in the morning sitting in a van. Bill had flown off to Turkey or somewhere at this point, so it was just me and John and a few others. I don’t know if I’m droning on too long, but we called Condi. “Condi,” John said, “I don’t think it’s happening.” Condi basically said, “Get back in there, and don’t show your face in Washington again until you have a deal.” [*laughter*] John looked at me and said, “OK, here we go.” The strategy was to peel off a couple of them so that the last few would be isolated. The Norwegians and the Dutch went first. Then we somehow got the Irish. Hadley, I think, got President Bush to call Prime Minister [Brian B.] Cowen, who was the Taoiseach, and the Irish came aboard.

Long story short, the Austrians and the Kiwis were the last. The New Zealand story is interesting. There’s a huge time difference with New Zealand, and the New Zealand representative at one point said she was going home, she was going to leave, so she walked out. You need, in the NSG, a full consensus of all 45 to get an exception. If I recall this correctly—Bill Burns told this story at my farewell party—I tried to get Condi to call up the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, who I found out from the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] in Wellington was out on the campaign trail somewhere in the middle of New Zealand. Condi was not available. She was actually in Libya, with [Muammar] Gaddafi, I think maybe even in his tent. I called Macmanus and tried to pull her out of the tent. She was either in the tent or she was in a meeting, but she wasn’t available. So then I called Bill Burns, pretty desperate to stop the New Zealand walkout at that point, and tried to see if maybe *he* could pull her out of the tent or wherever she was. But that didn’t work either.

So then I called up the NSC, Mark Webber, and said, “Steve’s got to do it!” He said something to me like, “Well, why does Steve always have to do it? Why can’t Condi do it?” But Mark calls me back and says, OK, Steve will try to call Helen Clark, and then while Steve was trying to reach Helen Clark—I think I’m remembering this correctly—I get a call back from Joe Macmanus through the Ops Center, saying, “Condi can call.” They were both trying to call Helen Clark at the same time. That’s what it was like. It was this incredibly frenetic period of diplomacy.

The fourth and last thing that's interesting is the Chinese. When we pretty much had the consensus, at the last minute the Chinese walked out, because the Chinese didn't want to look like the obstreperous party, but they never thought that we would get consensus. Never. When it finally looked like we were going to get consensus, the Chinese instructed their guy to leave, and he basically walked out. As I said, you can't get consensus unless you have all 45, so at that point we had an all-hands-on-deck panic, where we called the NSC and John Negroponte. Negroponte chaired a regular dialogue with his Chinese counterpart, Dai Bingguo, a strategic dialogue. He knew them well.

Negroponte's idea—maybe it came from Steve Hadley—was to get President Bush to send President Hu Jintao an urgent personal letter. John told me later it was the fastest Presidential letter he ever saw ginned up; it was a half an hour or maybe an hour from the decision to a Presidential letter to Hu. Then I was instructed to call Chris Hill, because Chris Hill, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, was in Beijing for a round of the Six-Party Talks on North Korea. I may have actually woken Chris up, I don't remember, but we were sending this letter from President Bush from Washington, which the NSC had the conn on, and then I basically said to Chris, "You find anybody. You find any Foreign Ministry official you can, and you get them to order their guy back into the room." Long story short, they did.

The other piece of that story involves the Indians, who are not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, So I went in a coat closet off the main hall and I called Naveen, Menon's chief of staff, and I said, "The Chinese just walked out. Now would be a good time for you to put the heat on the Chinese."

There had been a border incident or something between China and India where the Chinese had hauled in the Indian Ambassador at something like three o'clock in the morning, and it was perceived in New Delhi as an insult. I remember standing in a coat closet and reminding Naveen of this. The Indians were in Vienna, but since they weren't an NSG member they weren't in the room, but they had sent a delegation to town to work on other countries in bilateral meetings on the sidelines, so I said to Naveen, "Now would be a good time. Didn't they haul your Ambassador in at three o'clock in the morning? Maybe you ought to wake up their Ambassador in Delhi and haul *them* in at three o'clock in the morning."

The Indians did their own work on the Chinese and on others. As I said earlier, we worked with the Indians in a way that built these habits of multilateral coordination that hadn't existed. It wasn't so much multilateral; it was more coordinated bilaterals in the multilateral context.

So that was the NSG. We got the exception, and it was a clean exception, which was pretty remarkable. And I took a dazed walk around the Ringstrasse afterward, just kind of incredulous that it was done. And I called my friend Ashley Tellis, who had played such a huge role in this from the very inception, as I'm wandering in this daze around the streets of Vienna, and said, "You won't believe this, but we just did it."

At that point, after that second hole in one, we had to go amend the Atomic Energy Act. I can pause, if you want, and then go on to that story, but that one is amazing, too. I don't know if any of this is interesting to you—

Perry: I have a question, Evan. I'm intrigued by the way you started this story. You said it sort of as an aside, that this had President Bush's imprimatur, but by the end of the story you were telling us more details of his direct involvement.

Part of the reasoning that I understand you're saying is that it's a legacy; he's coming to the end of his two terms. But I'm wondering, since you spanned both terms—I realize in the first term in a much different role than you had in the second term. It's a macro question about the Presidency, since that's what we're covering in these oral histories. To your knowledge, are there other instances like that, in the foreign policy realm, where President Bush was as involved, or even just giving his imprimatur at the beginning, and therefore people carried it out?

Feigenbaum: Well, I think PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) Relief], certainly, the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS relief. That was something the President was passionate about, and was very much a legacy thing for him, and everything from him meeting Bono [Paul Hewson] to the way he talks about it subsequently, to the way—I'm not an Africa specialist, but the way people in Africa talk about the legacy of PEPFAR, and the President's engagement with it, they actually often contrast the Bush administration favorably with the Obama administration on that.

India, PEPFAR, the MCC [Millennium Challenge Corporation]—I don't know how much the Millennium Challenge involved President Bush personally, because I didn't work on it, but it's another one of these legacy items—and there were others, too. But with India he was a transformational figure in the U.S.-India relationship, and he'd had a lot of bipartisan support. You could argue that in 1999 the Clinton administration began this kind of reshaping of the relationship. There was a military crisis with Pakistan, and they were perceived as essentially siding with India. Strobe Talbott had conducted a pretty intensive series of talks with Jaswant Singh, who was the Foreign Minister in the NDA [National Democratic Alliance] government. But President Bush took this to a cosmic level with the nuclear deal.

If you think about what he inherited, there were three obstacles to the U.S.-India relationship. One was the Cold War, right? After '71, the Indians essentially leaned to one side, and it was the Soviet side. So '91 had removed that obstacle. The second was there was no economic relationship whatsoever, unlike with, say, China, but the balance of payments crisis and the beginning of reforms in '91 in India created the opportunity to have at least some economic intercourse. But the third, which was the biggest, as I said earlier, was the way the nuclear issue was an obstacle. The President and Bob Blackwill and Condi Rice and Steve Hadley, all of them, understood this, and Secretary Rumsfeld. All of them did.

The reset to really be transformational began at the very beginning, even during the campaign. When Blackwill was in Delhi, which was 2001–03, there was the beginning of a real transformation that took it to another level. Then there was the NSSP [Next Steps in Strategic Partnership] in 2004, and some missile defense things that Doug Feith was working on. It was the whole of government, despite the rivalries within the team. Everybody was pushing in the same direction on India, and the President viewed it as a priority and a legacy item. But with the nuclear deal in the second term, it became literally a legacy item, because you were clearing away the number one obstacle in a way that was transformational.

Philip Zelikow could really speak to this, because he was sitting at Condi's right hand on this, and he and Condi and the President—I don't know the story of how they cooked up the initial two statements, because it came during Bush-Singh summit meetings. Condi and Philip and the President and Steve were central to that. But once the President bought off on the idea of clearing away the nuclear obstacle, it was transformational in a way that had a profound legacy. It's why I said earlier that up to that point it was the most important thing the United States and India had ever done together, because they'd never coordinated that way diplomatically. It was a recognition by the United States that a strategic relationship with India required hard decisions that were politically going to be extremely difficult.

We took on a lot of transatlantic partners. As I said, we pushed around a lot of countries. Mulford, at one point, said about me, "You're like a junkyard dog, because of the way you and Condi and Bill and John and Steve and Mark Webber and Mike are pushing these countries around." It gives you a sense of what the President was willing—and his team—to risk with third countries for that. That's apropos when we get to Congress, because it was not popular to tell Congress, "You don't get to put any amendments on this," [*laughter*] which is what we essentially did. Also, the Democrats controlled Congress at that point, both houses.

Riley: I'm mindful of the clock, so let's go ahead and get to that part of the story.

Feigenbaum: Yes. Number one, we had to amend the Atomic Energy Act. Number two, the Indians wanted no amendments; they wanted just a clean bill without conditions or the possibility of reversal. Number three, they wanted something we called "fuel supply assurances," which was in the event of certain things the United States would never again cut off their fuel supply the way it had with their experience at Tarapur. That's a story, also, because the U.S. had to push the French. It's a long, separate history. Fourth, this was, again, the back half of September and early October, so the very end of the President's term. There was a Presidential election underway. President Bush was not popular because of Iraq, particularly with Democrats, and the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress. Harry Reid was the majority leader, and Nancy Pelosi was the Speaker. There were a lot of Democrats who had strong views about nonproliferation, starting with Howard Berman in the House, but including Russ Feingold in the Senate, and others.

Our task was threefold: one, to get legislation through with no amendments and get the Dems to buy off on that; second, to get India to move on these requirements for certification under the Hyde Act; and third, to do all this on an unbelievably fast clock. At this point Condi and NSC, Steve, are walking point, and the Leg [Legislative] Affairs teams become important—Heather Hopkins at NSC, Deb Fiddelke at White House Leg [Legislative] Affairs, and Matt Reynolds at the State Department. There's a whole series of things where Bill Burns has to go up and testify. Bill and I and Stratford have to go up and do a lot of staff-level meetings with very skeptical Members of Congress, where Stratford had to answer a lot of technical concerns. There were political concerns too. I wrote some testimony for Bill at one point, trying to frame this in strategic terms. So that was the challenge.

The reason that worked out was because India had become a very bipartisan issue. I think it was Joe Biden, who was then the Vice Presidential nominee, who Condi called up. Condi was talking to Harry Reid. She was talking to Joe Biden. She may even have called up Obama at one point.

She was talking to Speaker Pelosi. I think it was Biden who said something like, "Whatever people may think of the deal, just remember they're doing it for India, and for the U.S.-India relationship." My theory on that was partly cynical, which was the Indian American community was viewed as up for grabs politically in the United States; they didn't trend overwhelmingly Republican or overwhelmingly Democratic. But second, India was a democracy. It was popular on the Hill.

It became very bipartisan, and I remember Condi having one conversation with Harry Reid where she may have said something like, "Well, you know, Harry, I talked to Joe," or "I'm going to talk to Joe about this," and he said, "What are you talking to Joe for? *I'm* the majority leader. I'm going to get this. I know how to get this done," because he was very supportive of it. And Ed Royce on the House side—All of these people became very instrumental in moving this legislation.

The India bill won pretty overwhelmingly in the House. It was 298 to 117, something like that. In the Senate it was 86 to 13. The key challenge we had was the amendments, because Berman and Feingold and a lot of others wanted to Christmas tree a lot of amendments on there. And there was a lot of concern on the Hill that the administration should not undermine the Hyde Act in any way. The amendments were things like, if India tests nuclear weapons again, there'll be an automatic termination. There were a lot of technicalities.

We had a brilliant guy on the legal staff at the State Department named Newell Highsmith who found a way to split the difference between the Indian concern and the congressional concern by collapsing a lot of things into a single sentence that was very vague. It said something like, "In the event of X, whatever undertakings the executive branch has given to the legislative branch in broad terms will apply." So it didn't get the Indians upset by stating explicitly anything that crossed their red lines about cutoffs, but it satisfied Congress that what would be operative would be "whatever undertakings" had been made to them. That had become a problem, because in the past there had been a series of questions for the record that the administration had submitted to Congress that said some things that implied a fuel supply cutoff. They were leaked and the Indians were upset about it.

We got the bill through, which was remarkable. A lot of credit goes to Harry Reid for that. Harry Reid essentially said to Condi and to Steve, "Trust me. I know how to work my chamber." He allowed debate on the floor, which made us nervous because of the potential for amendments, but in a way that allowed people to say their piece without introducing amendments that Reid wouldn't be able to quash. Reid was quite masterful on this. Anyway, the bill passed.

After the bill passed, we had to work with the Indians on the certifications, which was very complicated. There was a lot of back-and-forth around specific language, technicalities, ways to frame things. The Indians would say, "We can't do it that way." Stratford would say to me, "Well, we have to do it that way. Go tell them," so there was a lot of that negotiation. But a second problem was that the Indians didn't like the very clever legal language that we had used in the bill.

There was a point in late September where the Indians essentially threatened to walk away from the whole deal, and wanted us to, not quite in these words, but essentially reopen the legislation

that Congress had already passed, and that the President was going to sign into law. We said, "No can do."

There was a group of senior Indians in the United States because they were, I recall, accompanying the Prime Minister to the UN [United Nations] General Assembly in New York. So we invited the senior officials who were with there with Manmohan Singh to come down to Washington for a productive but really tough meeting at the White House. Steve Hadley took the lead and held what I would describe as a therapy session in a room near the White House Mess for the key people on the Indian side, M. K. Narayanan, Shyam Saran, Shivshankar Menon, and Ronen Sen, where Steve essentially talked India off the ledge. I was there. So was John Rood, my colleague from State, and then Mark Webber, Mike Allen, and Heather Hopkins from the NSC. We're all packed around a table in a small room, and Steve said something to Narayanan like, "M. K., listen to me. You're missing the big picture. We've got nuclear trade!" This is transformational.

They proposed all sorts of things, but were particularly focused on seeing if the President might issue some kind of signing statement on the legislation, which the White House counsel absolutely would not support. Eventually, Steve in particular managed to give them reassurances that there would be some way for the President to make American undertakings clear, maybe by just doing it orally. But between Steve talking to M. K. Narayanan, and Condi working with Pranab Mukherjee, and Bill working with Shankar and Shyam, and then occasional calls to the Prime Minister, we worked all that out. And the solution, ultimately, was for President Bush to reiterate assurances by delivering them orally from the podium when he signed the bill into law in the East Room.

If you check the transcript or watch the video, you'll see that he offers these about midway through his remarks, saying, among other things, explicitly and directly that the legislation did not change the fuel assurance commitments that the United States had made to India, as recorded in the 123 Agreement. And he dealt with other issues too, including how he would bring the agreement into force, and the fact that the U.S. had granted India advance consent to reprocessing, subject to arrangements and procedures around a dedicated reprocessing facility under IAEA safeguards.

The Hyde Act certifications worked out as well. I had to help negotiate a commercial letter of intent where the Indians committed to two nuclear reactors for American vendors, with a generating capacity of 10,000 megawatts electrical as the floor. This was very hard to do. I learned how to negotiate with India, which was not an easy thing. [*laughter*]

Condi wanted me to try to get them to specify the locations of the sites so that the American vendors would be in investment-friendly states, rather than in, let's say, a state led by Communists, who had been hostile both to the deal itself and to the United States. I'd had a meeting in Kolkata the previous spring, back when the deal was still stuck in India because of the Left Front threatening to bring down the government, and one of the top Communist officials in West Bengal said something to me like, "well, we're not opposed to nuclear reactors, just nuclear reactors from *you*." So that was the concern.

But the Indian negotiators didn't want to specify the locations of the two sites. So when we sat down on the letter of intent and to plan next steps on the Hyde Act certifications at a meeting after the NSG exception was granted, I would say, "Let's name the sites," and the people across the table, like Dr. Grover from DAE and Venkat Verma, who was the Indian rep in Geneva, would say, "Can't do it," and I'd say, "Why not?" They'd say something like, "Well, because we would have to do the seismic surveys." I'd turn to Newell [Highsmith] and Dick [Stratford] and say, "What do we do about that?" We'd say to them, "OK, fine, then let's write it this way: We'll name the sites, subject to completion of the seismic surveys." Then Grover would say, "No, no, can't do that either." I'd say, "Why not?" And he'd say, "Because then there's a regulatory process." So we'd say, "No problem. How about this language? 'Name the two sites, subject to completion of the seismic surveys, and in accordance with the regulatory process.'" And Grover would say, "No, no, no." Anyway, we never got it done. We signed a commercial letter of intent, but one that did not specify the sites.

Anyway, it got done. President Bush signed it in the East Room. Condi then also hosted Pranab Mukherjee in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the State Department for the signing of the 123. I have the red lines in a frame in my office. The other amazing thing was how bipartisan it was, how whole of government it was—the President's role, Obama, Reid, [John] McCain, Biden, Chris Dodd, Ed Royce, everybody, and the business community, and frankly also the way the business community mobilized to push Congress, the U.S.-India Business Council, and others.

But the other thing that's remarkable is the Indian American community, which had never acted, at least not in a political sense, as a single community around a common policy agenda. It really came together, particularly on the lobbying of Congress.

Karl Rove had a guy named Brian McCormack working for him who came from the political side, and Brian and I did this roadshow to Indian American groups like the Asian American Hotel Owners Association, and the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, where we would go and I'd say, "This is the most amazing thing the U.S. and India have ever done together, and you need to support this!" Brian would get up and say, "President Bush needs you!" And they would kind of do the wave. There was a series of people who've become very active in both parties, people like Swadesh Chatterjee, who's a big Democratic political donor from North Carolina, who I'd talk to as one of the Indian American community leaders, and I'd say, "What are you hearing? Here's what I'm hearing." And he'd say, "Oh, as usual, Evan, I'm way ahead of you. I've already talked to Joe Biden. I've already talked to Obama and Pelosi."

It was a remarkable display of multilateral heft, Presidential leadership, bipartisanship, business, ethnic communities, and what American power can do when you marry power to purpose. What's amazing about it is that it should have been impossible. If you rewound the clock to July, it never should have happened, to get those exceptions, to get the Chinese onto their back foot, to get Congress to do this with no amendments. It was pretty remarkable, and transformational. People look back on it and they say, "There are still no American reactors in India, by the way, so it was a failure." But if you ask President Bush or Condi or Blackwill or Steve Hadley, I'll bet they'd say it was never about the reactors; it was about the U.S.-India relationship, and this was a piece, symbolically and substantively, of getting to a place that made the kind of relationship the U.S. and India have today much more possible. But for me, it was really an education as well.

Riley: Well, it's terrific to get this on the record, because we don't collect a lot of stories of impossible things being accomplished from Presidential leadership, but I'm a big advocate for that. John Dickerson has just written a book about how impossible the job of the Presidency is, and I think it's a plausible argument. It's a fairly standard argument in political science, and it's exactly the wrong time for that kind of book, because it gives people in the current administration too much comfort that if you don't succeed it's because of the system, rather than the competency of the people there. So I like to point out episodes of leadership like this. In fact, I've written a piece that the *Wall Street Journal* provisionally accepted on President Bush and PEPFAR, which is something we spent a lot of time hearing about, but not about India, so it's terrific to have this story encapsulated.

We've about reached the end of our time, and I want to do two things. One is to give you an opportunity to reflect back, and if there are another two or three pieces of this that you want to at least introduce in your spoken record so that people would think to look for these things if they come to your interview; and then also to throw this out there as an invitation so that once you get your transcript, it's perfectly appropriate if you want to put a written appendix in of a page or two on things that we haven't had an opportunity to discuss fully. You should certainly feel free to do that. Let me open it up for a couple of minutes and see if there's anything else.

Feigenbaum: There are other issues, odds and ends, that I worked on that are illustrative and interesting. A 30-second one would be Nepal. Nepal's interesting just because they had a Maoist guerrilla war, and sometime in 2006 the Maoists came out of the hills, signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the government, laid down their weapons, and joined a political process. They obviously had been guerrillas; they'd never been elected to anything. Long story short is that in 2008 they actually won the election, [*laughter*] and we not only weren't authorized to meet with them but had them on, I think, three separate terrorism lists, which in a post-9/11 context, when fighting terrorism was an organizing principle for the Bush administration, you can imagine what it was like to have to need to deal with people who'd won a democratic election but were sitting on three terrorism lists: the Executive order Special Designation List, the terrorism exclusion list, and the assets freeze. We managed to get them off of at least one of the lists and get Nancy Powell authorized as the Ambassador in Kathmandu to meet with them. I then went out and met with [Pushpa Kamal Dahal] Prachanda, the guerrilla leader with one nom de guerre of the Maoists, and told him they needed to get their Youth League out of the violence business, and so on. That was an interesting story in the Bush antiterrorism context, but we had the interagency on board.

The last thing is to circle back to China, which is where we started, and to say that now, the Trump people talk like they invented strategic competition. They point to their National Security Strategy and say, "Oh, big power competition's the core of it."

I saw [Herbert Raymond] H. R. McMaster gave an interview the other day where he said, "This is the biggest shift in American policy since the end of the Cold War, and all credit to us." It's just silly. President Bush called China a strategic competitor when he was running for President in 2000, and took an incredible amount of grief for it, as you may recall.

Brantly may remember that he did an interview with CNN [Cable News Network]. He called them a strategic competitor, and people were clutching their pearls, and said, "Oh my God, I

can’t believe he called them that.” The administration came in with a view that China was a strategic competitor, and a challenge to the United States. And you had people who had a harder-line view on that, like Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld than, say, Secretary Powell did, but they all had the view that China was a strategic competitor.

In a post-9/11 context, things became possible with China that we talked about earlier in the oral history that reset the context of it, but not the basic analysis of it. Nobody ever came to the idea that China was going to be our buddy, pal, and lover.

When we came to the end of the administration in January 2009, the United States and China had done some pretty amazing things together that had not happened previously, and in the context of the current moment, that’s hard to imagine. We’re in the worst public health crisis in over a hundred years. It’s potentially the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and these two countries not only are not coordinating with each other, they’re actively obstructing one another. But at the end of the Bush administration it was not because of naïveté, because we always regarded—and the President did—China as a strategic competitor.

The U.S. had figured out how to coordinate with China, whether it was on the financial crisis in 2008 or it was on North Korea, with limited success, but at one point with some success. Or it was on Darfur, in Africa, where there was a genocide ongoing; or on debt relief, where Secretary Jim Baker led the negotiations on Iraqi debt relief, and it was getting the Chinese to step up on some debt relief, or to make some contributions for Afghanistan.

President Bush’s administration showed how you could coordinate not through common policies but complementary ones, even with a strategic competitor— not because you were in love, not because you were naïve, but because you had a self-interested case to make for coordinating with that power. And with a new [Biden] administration taking office, and with the U.S.-China relationship in free fall, where the floor has fallen out from under us, we’re never going to be in love with China, but we don’t have to be. And there’s probably a lesson in that, even though China has changed a lot for the worse, even though we’re much more actively competitive, and even though this is more like enmity than competition now.

The Biden people could take a lesson out of President Bush’s book about how at least to pursue complementary, if not necessarily joint, policies in service to American self-interest. That ends us where we started. I don’t know if that makes sense to you, but I—

Riley: It certainly does. Thank you.

Brantly, I should give you an opportunity to see if there’s anything we’ve missed that you really wanted to check into, or do you feel like we’ve covered everything?

Womack: Well, Evan’s final point was really well taken, and to underline it with the India case, I talked to the top South Asia people in Beijing a week or two after the agreement was signed, and I said, “Are you worried about India’s nuclear situation now, and the U.S.-India relationship?” She said, “No, its whole foreign policy mentality is independent, and we’re confident that that independence will remain there.” But the thing is, why was China the dog that didn’t bark in this? And why was a letter from President Bush to Hu Jintao effective? A letter

from Trump, Trump especially, [*laughter*] a letter from Trump's Secretary of State, [Mike] Pompeo, to Xi Jinping would not be effective, because—

Feigenbaum: They'd flip him the bird. [*laughter*]

Womack: So we've lost leverage by being zero-sum. With zero-sum, you lose leverage, and decoupling, you lose even more leverage. Those are the things that we can hope that Biden will reverse.

Feigenbaum: Yes. That's a good point, because, to be honest, China was the last one standing, because they staged this last-minute walkout, and we basically bludgeoned them into submission, but they didn't have to do it. The U.S.-China relationship was very different in 2008 than it is today, and people now argue that the U.S. could just bludgeon them, but you couldn't in the NSG if you had the same situation today, because you need consensus, and they're one of the 45, so—

Womack: If we had bludgeoned them, and they had suspected it was going to be a U.S.-India alliance against China, the bludgeon would have proved that suspicion.

Feigenbaum: It's an excellent point.

Riley: Well, we thank you all. This has been enormously enlightening. Evan, you've been a champ to let us put you on the hot seat for more than just a couple of hours. This is a terrific addition to the collection on President Bush. Particularly this stuff on India is not something we spent a lot of time talking about, but when you put it in the same category as PEPFAR, it's an unsung story for people outside the field, as the two of you are, and we're delighted to have it on the record. So thanks a lot. We'll be seeing you around as colleagues, but we appreciate your being a specimen for a few hours for this. Thank you for your service.

Feigenbaum: Thanks for this.

Perry: Thank you for your service, and thank you, Brantly, too, for your expertise.

Riley: Thanks, Brantly, and Barbara, also.

Feigenbaum: All right. We're all going to get vaccinated and then I'm going to see you. [*laughter*]