

UNCLASSIFIED

**Georgetown University School of Foreign Service
Trainor Award Ceremony IHO William J. Burns
February 2, 2023**

Ambassador Barbara Bodine: I'm going to do something really nice for you all and not sing.

Good afternoon, my colleagues, friends, guests, and especially all you students. As the man said, I'm Barbara Bodine. I'm the director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. It is my honor and my pleasure to welcome you all to the 2022 J. Raymond "Jit" Trainor Award Ceremony in honor of the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Ambassador William J. Burns.

I would like to thank Dean Hellman for the school's continued support for ISD and our programs, and to Frank Hogan, chair of the Trainor endowment and a member of our Board of Advisors and a friend, who has made this annual event possible. You'll hear from each of them a little bit later. I would also like to thank Annie Leuker and the entire ISD staff, and this was a whole of Institute effort, and all of those who work with Marie Harf in the Dean's Events office for their tireless work on today's arrangements. I need to give a very special shout out to all of our student volunteers, thank you for stepping forward and helping today.

And by the way I did not misspeak earlier, Director Burns was nominated for, and did accept, the Trainor Award in 2022. Circumstances beyond his control and ours, a small war in Ukraine, necessitated a deferral till today. This is the first Trainor Award presented in three years, the last one was to Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, who is with us today, so nice to see you again, thank you for joining us.

To describe Ambassador Burns' career of public service in diplomacy, and as the current director of the Central Intelligence Agency, as exceptional risks remarkable understatement. His 32 (year) career at the Department of State spanned every major policy issue the U.S. has confronted since 1980. With the Ambassador playing a major and direct, if sometimes quiet, role in the most senior and consequential positions in the department, the National Security Council, and abroad. He holds the personal rank of Ambassador, the highest rank conferred in the career of foreign service. He has served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at the time of 9/11 and in the early days of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

His tour as ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was something of a homecoming. Ambassador Burns began his career in Amman as a junior officer charged, among other junior officer level menial tasks, with escorting a truckload of classified communications equipment across the bleak Syrian desert to a very lonely diplomatic outpost in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War. He didn't make it as planned, although through no fault of his own and too much of the frustration of those of us at that lonely outpost. Despite piles of approvals and authorizations begrudgingly and glacially granted by the Iraqi government, and assurances without end, the truck, the equipment, and one junior officer were stopped at the Jordanian and Iraqi border.

For those of you who carry a map of the Middle East in your head, this is where the western panhandle of Iraq and the eastern panhandle of Jordan meet, and it brings a whole new meaning to the concept of nowhere. Bill, his truck, my equipment, and an embassy driver spent days stranded in nowhere, and please remember that this was well before cell phones or much of any other way to communicate in a place totally bereft of the most basic of amenities.

Stuck there as our Baghdad office pushed the Iraqis to abide by their promises, we did finally succeed and we got our truck, the equipment, and a young, somewhat hungry, sort of dusty diplomat to Baghdad. The equipment was compromised, but the junior officer seemed unfazed by the absurdity of the adventure evident in a classic picturesque reporting cable on his time spent in a small town called Rutba. Thus began the career of one William J. Burns, and my friendship with him.

As ambassador to Moscow in 2005 to 2008, he met and got the measure of a man named Vladimir Putin. I suspect he looked into Putin's eyes, and unlike some others, recognized that there was no soul.

Within the department, he has worked on the Policy Planning Staff, the Department's long-range think tank established by George Kennan, as Under Secretary of State, and one of only two career officers to serve as Deputy Secretary of State. Throughout his career, Bill Burns has not practiced diplomacy through swagger, but through a less bravo-based, but direct and candid, approach that earned him the respect and trust of five presidents from both parties and nine secretaries of state, each of whom came to rely on Ambassador Burns' intelligent, thoughtful, and measured advice and counsel.

The same can be said of many, many world leaders that director Burns has worked with, both friends and foes, who knew that he spoke with authority, but more important, he listened. An approach, a style he refined and polished to an art form, and a very appropriate title for his memoir, an art form of the role of the back channel.

This is the role he continues to play in many ways today, with Putin, with Zelensky, and most recently with Netanyahu and Abu Abbas. Director Burns' appointment as director of CIA was unprecedented and transformational to the agency, and to the relationship, the partnership, between intelligence and diplomacy. There has been a noticeable shift in how this partnership works, with intelligence used more directly as a tool of national security policy. Without compromising sources and methods, we have used intelligence, and remarkably detailed, to call out and blunt Putin's actions, troop movements, and false flags in the run-up and throughout the war with Ukraine. We have kept Putin on the back foot, as our British friends might say, and have also used it to craft a global coalition of friends and allies, which have blunted Putin's efforts and may inflict a sustained economic cost on Russia for years to come.

This is not the CIA on horseback in the mountains of Afghanistan, but information gathered painstakingly, analyzed professionally, into considered actionable insights that are then deployed in the corridors of power and in the media as a strategic tool. This is a game changer.

Secretary of State Kerry, with whom Ambassador Burns worked on some of the most significant achievements of the Obama Administration, once asked, where will we find the next Bill Burns? There there, many having worked with or for Bill over his career, and learn the lessons of effective diplomacy, true leadership, professional courage, and competent management. Some of them may well be in this room with us today. In the meantime, Ambassador Burns', Director Burns', exceptional expertise as a diplomat and as the head of intelligence continues to be in service to the nation today, and we thank you.

We look forward to your remarks, and I know this audience will have their own questions at the ready. I now turn the podium over to Dean Hellman.

Dean Joel Hellman: Thank you Barbara, let me just take a minute to thank Ambassador Barbara Bodine and her team and the board of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. Every day, they bring together top-notch practitioners with our students to teach them the power and craft of diplomacy, exemplifying one of the hallmarks of SFS that our students get to learn directly from people who have actually done the work inside the halls of power.

Today, we come together to celebrate the practice of diplomacy at a school that we are proud to say has produced more diplomats than any other school in the United States, and we do this at a critical time when the arts of diplomacy and intelligence have never been more critical. With an unprovoked war against the sovereign nation on the European continent, with a looming threat of a new Cold War in the midst of a realignment of great power competition, with the stirring of renewed extremism in the Middle East, and with the rise of truly existential global threats that require unprecedented global cooperation, this generation, your generation, must revitalize the arts of diplomacy and intelligence in the face of these risks, that's the mission that inspired the creation of this school a hundred years ago and it must continue to inspire us today.

Good diplomacy and intelligence are most often unseen. Indeed, diplomacy and intelligence are most needed when they seem most improbable. How do you conduct diplomacy with an adversary in an unconscionable war? How do you process and sift intelligence in a world literally flooded with information and disinformation? How do you exercise diplomacy in an ever more polarized world?

It's against this backdrop that we honor the arts of diplomacy and intelligence with this Trainor Award, and we could not have a more seasoned practitioner in today's honoree to do just that. It's our great privilege to honor Director Burns for his lifetime of service to this country, and as a model of the practice of diplomacy and intelligence at their best.

In attendance today, there are Pickering, Rangel, Payne, McHenry fellows, all of whom have committed to a life of service, and we're proud to host more than any other school in the nation of these fellows. In attendance today are students who fled war and violence in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere, and in attendance today are women engaged in the fight for basic human rights in Iran. I trust they will be inspired by your example, and Director Burns they will learn from your wisdom and experience. It's an honor for us to honor you. Thank you.

Bodine: Thank you, Dean, and thank you for the kind words. The Trainor Award is remarkable for many reasons. It provides a unique opportunity to publicly recognize leaders in diplomacy, in statecraft, across the U.S. government, not just the Department of State, and international diplomats as well. Each of whom has worked to shape events and thereby shape history for the benefit of all. It is also remarkable that it is an award named not for a world leader, a university president, an alum, as worthy of recognition and gratitude as they all are, but for a university administrator.

I would like to introduce the chair of the Trainor Endowment Trust, a member of the board, as I said, and a friend - Frank Hogan. Mr. Hogan has had his own remarkable career of public service. He is president of the Overseas Service Corporation, where he started in the mail room while he was still a student, so take a lesson from that. He is a proud Marine, who attended the School of Foreign Service on the GI Bill. The Marine Corps continues to be a family tradition, and Frank has dedicated his career, his time, in support of the military and their families, and to all of those who serve this government, and so Frank I would like to turn the podium to you.

Frank Hogan: Ambassador Burns, Dean Hellman, Ambassador Bodine, Ambassador Yovanovich, Ambassador Gallucci, we have a lot – I can't name them all but anyway, it's a delight to be here. warm greetings to all of you on this cold February day, I can say it's cold because I'm from Florida.

It is a great pleasure to speak with you today on behalf of the endowment that makes the Trainor Award possible. The Trainor Award and lecture series celebrates excellence in the conduct of diplomacy. It was established by the alumni of the School of Foreign Service as a living Memorial to J. Raymond 'Jet' Trainer. The trustees of the Trainor endowment could not be more delighted to celebrate and honor you today, Ambassador Burns, for your exemplary service to the United States of America. You and your illustrious career represent the very essence of what the Trainor Awards set out to recognize when it was established some 44 years ago. Crisis tested, widely known and respected, with decades of experience on the world stage, you now join an impressive list of other recipients, luminaries all in the pursuit of peace and understanding among nations, though none certainly more deserving than you. We look forward to your remarks today with great anticipation.

When Jit Trainor entered Georgetown as an eager young freshman in 1923, you can be sure that he had no inkling he would remain at this great institution for the next 33 years, let alone leave such an important legacy. Doubtless he did not anticipate either that he would pick up a nickname that would stay with them the rest of his life. From Jitney, an unregulated taxi in its day, perhaps comparable to Uber in these days. He drove it while he was a student to help make ends meet. Jit made his mark at the school of Foreign Service as secretary. In that capacity, he guided it with a steady hand and enjoyed the complete confidence of the school's founder, the renowned Edmund A. Walsh, Father Edmund A. Walsh.

However, what made Jit so special was his unwavering focus on his students. They were the family that he and his wife never had. But he had opportunities to be Dean, Jit declined them for fear it would lessen his contact with his beloved students. Ready listener, wise counselor, older friend, surrogate parent, father confessor, as well as born educator, probably all described Jit's

interaction with his charges, who included the returning veterans from World War I, later the financially strapped students of the Depression era, and still later returning veterans from Korea and World War II. Jit was the go-to person when a student needed some extra assistance, some encouragement, confidential advice, perhaps alone, and yes, even a gentle and not so gentle nudge. When Jit retired, a feature article in *The Courier*, the student magazine of its day, perhaps captured him best with the headline, “his door was always open.” He was ever approachable and ever giving of himself.

On a personal note, I arrived at Georgetown at the very end of Jit's tenure, but was privileged to get to know him quite well in his retirement years. I shall be eternally grateful for his invaluable counsel, wisdom, and support during the early stages of my career. Jit meant so much to an entire generation of students that there was a groundswell among the student alumni to recognize his legacy in a special way upon his death in 1976. What better way indeed to perpetuate his memory than an annual award and lecture series that honors excellence in the conduct of diplomacy. By establishing the Trainor endowment, the trustees and School of Foreign Service alumni hope that we have contributed to the spirit and traditions that help make up this great University. Thank you.

The citation says Georgetown University School of Foreign Service Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, the 2022 Raymond J. Trainor, “Jit” Trainor Award. Excellence in the conduct of diplomacy presented to Ambassador William J. Burns, director Central Intelligence Agency, in recognition of his four decades of extraordinary service as an American Diplomat and as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Ambassador William J. Burns has consistently exemplified the highest standards of professionalism, unflinching personal integrity, and an unswerving commitment to the advancement of U.S. national interests and American values and principles. Signed Barbara K. Bodine and Francis J. Hogan.

William J. Burns, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency: Well, good evening everyone, it really is great to be with all of you. Thanks so much Frank, and thanks to everyone associated with the Trainor Trust Fund and this wonderful award. And thanks to Joel and Barbara for your kind remarks. As a recovering diplomat, it's nice to have the chance to honor my old profession in which I took great pride for nearly three and a half decades.

Public service has shaped my whole life. When I was a graduate student many years ago, trying to figure out what to do with my life, I got a letter that proved inspiring. It was from my father, a remarkable career army officer and a fine man who died recently. Nothing will make you prouder, my dad wrote, than to serve your country with honor. I have spent the last four decades learning the truth in those words.

I was deeply fortunate to serve as a foreign service officer, and to represent my country in complicated places and fascinating times. At every step along the way, good fortune and good colleagues sustained me, although I often did a pretty fair job of concealing whatever professional promise I had.

In my first post in Jordan, and Barbara has already blown my cover on this story, I did manage to get detained while driving a truck across the desert from Amman to the U.S. diplomatic outpost

in Baghdad, which is where I first met Barbara, who was serving there at the middle of the craziness and brutality of the Saddam Hussein regime and the Iran-Iraq war. My detainees were a particularly humorless and un sentimental group of Saddam's security personnel. Unmoved by my best Foreign Service Institute Arabic, they confiscated my truck and the unclassified communications equipment I was supposed to deliver. The U.S. government never got it back, but thankfully my pay was never docked to make up the cost. After that ignominious start, you can imagine the look of horror and disbelief on the faces of the local Jordanian staff when I somehow returned to Jordan as ambassador 14 years later.

At every step along the way, I had a chance to contribute in a small way to events which shaped our nation's journey through an endlessly complex world. I got some things right and some things wrong, but I always tried my best to uphold the standards of service and duty of those remarkable American diplomats whose impossibly large footsteps I sought to follow.

At every step along the way, I had not only extraordinary luck, but extraordinary mentors, colleagues, and friends, people who showed me the value of honesty, loyalty, compassion, and good humor alongside professional skill, people who enriched my life professionally and personally, people who made me look far better than I ever had any right to look.

At every step along the way, I learned something new. Sometimes, it was about classic diplomatic challenges, as history was accelerating, like supporting Secretary of State Baker as the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union disintegrated, Germany was reunified, the first Gulf War was won, and a Middle East peace conference was convened in Madrid.

Sometimes, it was slightly bizarre, like spending hours in a darkened desert tent with Muammar Gaddafi, trying to persuade him to abandon terrorism and nuclear weapons, or trying to navigate war-torn Chechnya in the mid-1990s in search of a missing American humanitarian worker, or leading back channel negotiations with the Iranians, or watching Vladimir Putin expand his appetite for risk and deepen his brutish sense of destiny as his grip on power tightened and his circle of advisors narrowed.

At every step along the way, I learned not only from those hard experiences and hard people, but also from colleagues who taught me to share credit and take responsibility, people who taught me that you have to pick yourself up after you make mistakes, learn from them, and move on. People who taught me that staying in the arena, in good moments and bad, is the only way to make a real and enduring difference.

So today, I'm still in the arena, very proud to have been a career diplomat, and equally proud now to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency, leading another incredibly dedicated group of women and men at a moment of profound transformation on the international landscape. My job today is not to be a policy maker, but to support policy makers and diplomats, to help them navigate some pretty unforgiving terrain, to understand its threats and its opportunities, to help them make good policy choices.

I take intense pride in the work CIA officers are doing at headquarters, and in tough places around the world as we meet here this evening. Along with our partners in the intelligence

community, we provided strong early warning of Putin's plans to invade Ukraine, shared intelligence which helped the Ukrainians defend themselves with such courage and tenacity, and helped President Biden and our diplomats build a strong coalition. In some cases, we declassified intelligence to deny Putin the false narratives he has so often employed in the past.

We're focusing more of our resources and our attention at CIA on Xi Jinping's China, the biggest geopolitical challenge that the United States faces in the decades ahead, and the biggest priority for our agency. We're working hard to understand, and master new technologies, the main arena for competition with China, and the main determinant of our future as an intelligent service.

As the successful U.S strike against Ayman al-Zawahiri demonstrated last summer, we remain intent upon helping to keep Americans safe from terrorism. And as my recent trips to Africa and the Middle East reminded me, we also have to continue to help policy makers cope with some very turbulent parts of the world.

I also understand my profound obligation to take care of people at CIA, which is crucial to taking care of our mission. We've set in motion a number of new initiatives to support our officers and their families, with expanded resources for health care and well-being, along with a much-accelerated onboarding process, and significant progress on diversity and inclusion.

Through all those years at State, and now at CIA, the one constant for me has been an abiding belief in the importance of public service, and an enduring appreciation for what it has meant for me. Both diplomacy and intelligence have their share of professional and personal challenges, but I would not trade my experiences for anything. My father turned out to be exactly right all those years ago, nothing has ever given me greater pride than to serve my country with honor. It's a lesson that I've learned and relearned over the past four decades, and I hope all the students in this audience will explore its promise.

So thanks so much for honoring me, and more importantly, for honoring the diplomatic profession and the rich tradition of American service, of American public service with this award. I will always treasure it. Thank you all so much.

Burns: Hi.

Bodine: Hi.

Burns: Nice to see you.

Bodine: How are you?

Burns: Good.

Bodine: You look much better than the first time I saw you.

[Laughter]

Bodine: Thank you for accepting this award and for those remarks. We're going to have kind of a moderated conversation for a little while, drawing on the themes that you've already touched on, and then we will open it up to questions from the audience, from the students. We have a mic there, we will get to that a little later, but you will also have a chance to ask your particular question of the Director. Your time in Russia, both in the political section and then obviously as Ambassador, equipped you with a very deep and nuanced understanding of Mr. Putin, the Russian State, and the Russian people. Are there any particular insights from those times that have really guided your decisions and your thoughts over the last year?

Burns: Well, I mean the first thing I'd say is an awful lot of the gray hair that you see here is the result of interactions with Vladimir Putin's Russia over the last 20 years. I mean, I was Ambassador there as Barbara mentioned about 15 years ago now, and then certainly over the couple years that I've been director at CIA, Putin's aggression in Ukraine and the threats that he poses to all of us have occupied a lot of the agency's time and attention. Over all those years, over those two decades, you know I've watched, we've all watched, as Putin has stewed in a very combustible mix of grievance and ambition and insecurity. It seems to me anyway that there are two things that have animated his thinking more than anything else. The first is a determination to restore Russia in his eyes as a great power, after what he saw to be a time of troubles and humiliation in the 1990s, and the second is to establish himself as a great Russian leader.

To accomplish both of those goals, it seemed to me over the years that, you know, he's been focused on a couple of things. The first is to establish a secure, deeply repressive authoritarian regime in Russia to control the Russian political lead and the Russian people, for whom he has a great deal of mistrust, and the second is to restore a sphere of influence in Russia's neighborhood in the old space occupied by the Soviet Union, or at least in large parts of it as well.

And I think he has seen, as I look back over the last 20 years, the progress that Ukraine has made toward democratic institutions with all of its ups and downs, and no one knows that better than Ambassador Yovanovitch, for whom I have enormous respect, and its increasing ties with the West. Putin has seen that as a direct threat to his goals, and that has made him even more determined to try to control Ukraine and his choices.

So you get to the fall of 2021, and my sense is that Putin perceived that his strategic window was closing to accomplish that, and he also saw a tactical opportunity to achieve what he expected to be a quick and decisive victory as well. That turned out to be a fatally flawed set of assumptions. Putin had always said privately, and he said it more publicly recently, that he doesn't think Ukraine is a real country. Real countries fight back, and that's just what the Ukrainians have done with strong support from our country and from the West more broadly as well.

So, you know, I just had watched, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, as in in more recent years, you know, as Putin's grip on power grew even tighter, as a circle of advisors narrowed, especially during Covid, and you could see his sense of destiny, what I was describing before, deepened and his appetite for risk grew as well.

So by the time President Biden sent me to talk to him in November of 2021, several months before the war, to lay out for him in an unusual amount of detail what we knew about his plans

for a major new invasion of Ukraine, and to emphasize to him what the consequences would be if he chose to execute that plan, I came away with the impression that he had just about made up his mind. He was someone who had just about made up his mind to go to war as well.

As I said before, I am very proud of the work that the CIA and the entire U.S. intelligence community has done to provide strong warning before the war, to help Ukrainians defend themselves, to help President Biden mobilize such a strong coalition. I'm very proud of what we continue to do. I'm a relatively frequent visitor to Kyiv, and deeply committed to providing our policy makers with the best insights we can, and to supporting our Ukrainian partners. The last thing I'd say, and I apologize for going on so long about Putin and Russia, but with me you just push the button and it all comes rushing back.

Bodine: It's okay.

Burns: I think the next six months, it seems to me and it's our assessment at CIA, are going to be critical. You know, Putin I think is betting right now that he can make time work for him, he's betting that he can grind down Ukrainians, that political fatigue is going to set in in Europe. Putin's view of us as Americans is always that we have attention deficit disorder and we'll move on to some other problem. I think, and I said this to, you know, one of my Russian counterparts Sergey Naryshkin when I was asked by the President to go see him in Turkey a couple of months ago, I think that that Russian calculation is as deeply flawed as the original decision to go to war last February 24th was as well.

I think what's going to be the key, it seems to me, because we do not assess that Putin is serious about negotiations for all that you hear sometimes about that, and as I said before as a recovering diplomat, I'd love to be persuaded that there's an opportunity. The key is going to be on the battlefield in the next six months it seems to us, puncturing Putin's hubris, making clear that he's not only not going to be able to advance further in Ukraine, but as every month goes by, he runs a greater and greater risk of losing the territory that is illegally seized from Ukraine so far.

So this next period I think is going to be absolutely crucial. I have no doubt at all about Ukrainian determination, I've heard that from my Ukrainian counterparts, from President Zelensky, and I think as President Biden has made clear we're going to provide all the support we possibly can.

Bodine: Thank you. I think that one of Putin's miscalculations was not understanding that you were going to be in the government and knew who he was going to be.

Burns: I doubt that made a big impact.

Bodine: I think it did. To maybe, hopefully not, look like I am an American with attention deficit, to shift to another topic, not to downplay it at all, you started your career in the Middle East, you are the assistant secretary. In your memoir, you reflect on your misgivings about the Iraq War, as well as the difficulties that we've faced in understanding the speed with which the Arab Spring would spread. Contrary to the way it's portrayed, we never were going to pivot away from the Middle East. We can't, the challenges are too great and our interests are too

myriad, and current events have certainly demanded our attention again as the Middle East tends to do. Looking back again on your career, and from your current vantage point, what do policy makers need to either relearn or rethink about the Middle East and the U.S.?

Burns: Well, I mean, I think humility is probably the biggest lesson that I learned in dealing with the Middle East over many years. We've, you know, too often, and the Iraq War in 2003 and my view is, you know, a particularly damaging illustration of that, we've engaged in magical thinking about our ability to transform a part of the world that we haven't always understood very well. None of that's an argument against the United States using our influence sometimes decisively in the Middle East, because while it's fashionable to think we can disengage from the Middle East as a country and policy terms, it has a bad habit of staying engaged with us.

I do think as we look ahead at 2023, and in my most recent trip this was reinforced, the Middle East is going to re-emerge as a particularly complicated set of challenges for American policy makers as well. Part of that is about Iran, it's about an Iranian regime that I think is increasingly unsettled by what's going on inside Iran, the remarkable courage of demonstrators over the course of the last few months, especially young Iranian women, who I think in many respects are fed up, you know, they're fed up with economic decay, they're fed up with corruption, they're fed up with political oppression, they're fed up with the social restrictions that especially affect Iranian women, they're fed up with a lack of dignity. And none of this is about us, it's not about Americans, it's about Iranians and their future. This is an Iranian regime that I think is capable in the short term of suppressing people. Their habits of repression are pretty well practiced, but I don't think they have good answers for what's on the mind of a very young population, 70 percent of which is under the age of 30 as well. So I think that unsettled view of, you know, what's going on internally in Iran is leading to more aggressive behavior externally by this Iranian regime.

We see it across the Middle East right now. Especially concerning is the deepening of an Iranian-Russian military connection as well. Many of the UAVs, last time I was in Kyiv a couple of weeks ago, I spent, of the 30 hours or so I was in Ukraine, I spent six of them in bomb shelters because there were two separate strikes by the Russians against Ukrainian civilian facilities, many of them by Shahed-136 Ukrainian UAVs, or Iranian UAVs, that have been supplied to the Russians, which they've been using to kill innocent Ukrainian civilians as well, so that's obviously very troubling as well.

So that's just one looming challenge, I'm sorry to be so uplifting today about the international landscape, and I also have to say that, you know, in the conversations I had with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, you know, I think it left me quite concerned about the prospects for even greater fragility and even greater violence between Israelis and Palestinians as well. You know, I was, as Barbara mentioned, a senior U.S. Diplomat 20 years ago during the Second Intifada, and I'm concerned, as are my colleagues in the intelligence community, the lot of what we're seeing today has a very unhappy resemblance to some of those realities that we saw then too. Part of the responsibility of my agency of CIA is to work as closely as we can with both the Palestinian Security Services and the Israeli Security Services to prevent the kind of explosions of violence that, you know, we've seen in recent weeks as well. That's going to be a big challenge as well, so I'm concerned about that dimension of the landscape in the Middle East as well.

Bodine: I was going over my notes on my questions and trying to find one that was going to be a happy question, and unfortunately I didn't obviously write one of those, but you talk about the, you know, the younger generation in Iran just being absolutely fed up with the way their country's run, their own prospects, and a lot of that was what drove the Arab Spring as well. It's just, you know, we've had enough. Another part of the world that we don't talk about as much, we tend to get stuck on kind of a trilateral world with sometimes the Middle East, you know, elbowing its way into our conversations, but there's this big part of the world called Africa, and a very young population, resources misallocated, governments which are aged, corrupt, and at least I look at a lot of those basic characteristics that you see in too many African countries, and it looks to me like the two years before the Arab Spring. But this is a rich continent, it's an important continent, one we don't as I said talk about very much, but how are we seeing, and what kind of resources are we putting to understanding Africa before it blows up the way the Middle East did, or before other countries have blown up.

Burns: It's a really good question, and another of my recent travels was in Africa as well, and, you know, just as you said it's a continent whose population is going to double by the middle of the century. It's a continent that has, you know, some, you know, genuine examples of real possibility, but where you also see problems of everything from, you know, water, health insecurities, the impact of climate change, and large parts of Africa as well you know, economies that are struggling in many parts of Africa right now, unresolved regional conflicts, corruption, poor governance in some places as well.

So as an agency, we try hard to focus on those kind of issues that policy makers need to think about looking ahead in Africa, and I think, you know, it's fashionable sometimes to think about oh we all need an American national security policy to pivot to major power competition, China and Russia, and the truth is that a, you know, a lot of the global competition with China is going to take place in parts of the world like Africa, the Middle East, or South Asia. Our ability, both as an intelligence agency but also the wider U.S. government, to navigate those parts of the world better than our Chinese counterparts is absolutely critical, so we want to build on the habits of cooperation we've built up at CIA over the last two decades on counterterrorism issues, to try to compete more effectively as well, but also to highlight for policy makers the underlying challenges which are going to have an enormous impact on the rest of the world, because anybody who thinks that you know the challenges that we were just talking about are going to stay contained in Africa wasn't paying attention when, you know, we watched the migration challenge that Europeans faced a few years ago as well, so it's a really important part of our job to stay focused even as we shift resources and attention to China and Russia, to stay focused on that set of issues as well.

You know, terrorist threats have not gone away, a couple of my stops were in the Sahel, you know, some of the poorest parts of the world as well which is fertile soil sometimes for a whole variety of terrorist groups as well, not to mention the Wagner group, a particularly creepy Russian organization, that's a technical intelligence term, you know, which is expanding its influence in, you know, in Mali and Burkina Faso and in other places, and that is a deeply unhealthy development and we're working very hard to counter it because that's threatening to Africans across the continent right now, I think.

Bodine: Yeah, the Wagner group is truly frightening. You mentioned two issues that are not what we think of as conventional threats, which are drones and tanks, to a certain extent cyber, but two kind of transnational or not almost non-national threats that affect everybody, but particularly the developing world, both our neighbors in this hemisphere, Africa, and actually throughout Asia, and that's both climate change and kleptocracy. And when you can kind of get out because it has people, but what is the agency focus on these kinds of issues that are not directly political but will have fundamental political and strategic implications?

Burns: Yeah, one of the things we did, a little about a year and a half ago, not long after I began this role as director, was to create a new mission center. It's kind of like bureaus in the State Department, it's how we organize ourselves in regional and functional terms, focused on transnational and technology issues, to try to devote, and we're stretched in a lot of different directions, but devote more collection and analytical resources on those big issues that you mentioned from, you know, pandemics, and global health challenges, to climate change as well as corruption issues and kleptocracy as well. On an issue like climate change, you know, our role is basically focused on trying to understand what the impact of climate change is on stability and some very fragile parts of the world, and help policy makers look ahead a little bit at that, and then also obviously to help policy makers understand the approach that other governments, whether it's friends or adversaries, are taking on climate change issues. So, you know, we try to focus, you know, as much attention and resources we can on those issues because they matter enormously in terms of the stability of lots of parts of the world.

Bodine: You've also undertaken some other structural changes at CIA to reorient it to the kinds of issues going forward and not the issues of the past, even if some of them are still with us, and, you know, one of the I think the major one is the China Mission Center, which is a structure that other parts of the government and the Hill have now emulated. How do we, the China threat is different, the Chinese probably aren't going to roll tank, you can't roll a tank into Taiwan anyway, but it's challenging us in Africa, in the South Pacific, in Latin America, it's a different kind of threat. How does this difference pose a challenge to how the agency and the U.S. government seek to confront it?

Burns: I think, just as you said, I mean I think China is, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, is the biggest geopolitical challenge that, you know, our government faces far out into the 21st century as I can see. It's different than, in my view, than the challenge posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which was mainly, you know, something that was fought in the kind of military and ideological realms. Competition with China is unique in its scale and did it really, you know, unfolds over just about every domain, not just military and ideological, but economic, technological, everything from cyberspace to space itself as well. It's a global competition in ways that are even, could be even more intense than competition with the Soviets was, so that's incumbent upon us as an agency to stay focused in different parts of the world.

My claim to fame as director of Central Intelligence Agency is likely to be that I was the first director to visit the Pacific Island countries when I went to Fiji, but, you know, that's just an example of the way in which we have to, you know, be in a position to collect intelligence, to analyze it, in a lot of different parts of the world given that broader competition with China.

I mean, I think what it's going to require for us as a country is a long-term, comprehensive, bipartisan strategy. We have to buckle up for the long term, and the key elements of that, it seems to me, are going to be domestic renewal, easier said than done, an ability to increase our technological competitiveness, which steps like the CHIPS Act on semiconductors I think, you know, will help significantly to do, it's going to continue to require, and this is about my old profession and diplomacy, building alliances and coalition, deepening alliances and coalitions, whether it's the quad which brings together, you know, the United States, Australia, and Japan, you know in competition with China as well. The kind of alliances and partnerships that, you know, set us apart from lonelier powers like China and Russia today as well, good intelligence has to underpin all of that and that's what our obligation is at CIA as well.

As I said before, technology is going to be the main arena for competition with China, so, you know, we've stepped up our efforts for the first time, appointed a chief technology officer, stepped up partnerships in the tech sector and the private sector, because we can't understand the pace of innovation, the patterns of innovation, and technology, unless we work more closely with the private sector as well.

So we have our work cut out for us on all of those fronts, but it always seemed to me we have to approach that competition with both urgency but also a sense of confidence, I mean as an intelligence agency but also as a society and as a government. You know, Xi Jinping doesn't lack for ambition, but he's not 10 feet tall, he's got a lot of challenges at home, you know whether it's a zero-covid policy, which hasn't gone as planned, economic growth figures, which could improve over the next few years but have been historically low in recent years as well, so you know, we have a good hand to play but we just have to play it systematically and thoughtfully.

Bodine: This is the most remarkable opening line that I ever thought that I would use with somebody in the intelligence community, but in your interview for the CIA podcast, those are not words that I had ever imagined would be out there, but in your interview with the CIA podcast, you talked about how intelligence, kind of contrary to James Bond or even, as I was mentioning, guys on horseback, is a team sport, and that's also true of public service more broadly. We need to work in our agency, as you said, we also need to work public partner, public private partners. What is your recipe for, we'll just bring it down to intelligence and intelligence officers and diplomats, how can we work best as partners on this myriad of challenges that you and I have just reviewed?

Burns: Sure, well, I mean I think you know in a lot of ways as I've learned over the course of my career, especially serving overseas where, you know, I worked very closely with you know a lot of intelligence officers when I was a diplomat as well, and you know developed enormous respect for that profession, the sacrifices they made, and you know what they contributed to and continue to contribute to U.S. national security policy, so while the roles are complementary, they're different in some fundamental respects. I mean, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, you know we're not policy makers. We support policy makers, and that's a fundamental difference as well.

There are some similarities though, especially in terms of navigating foreign landscapes as well, you know in the sense that, you know, I think diplomats, as well as intelligence officers, have to understand that it's not all about us. I mean, Americans have a temptation that I've noticed over the years and, probably you know fell prey to myself too many times, of thinking that the world revolves around us, and you know our insights, our analysis, and the truth is that, you know, as I've learned sometimes the hard way, other societies and other peoples have their own realities, not always hospitable to ours. It doesn't mean that we have to accept them or indulge them, but it does mean we have to understand them as the starting point for either sensible diplomacy or, I think, good intelligence work as well.

And I think, so I think there's, you know, there's an important partnership that I see in all my travels around the world, you know between diplomats and intelligence officers, however distinct the two roles are as well. And again, you know, I mean I think a lot of the, I remember when I retired from the State Department a while ago, I remember writing something, I think it was in Foreign Policy Magazine, about 10 parting thoughts.

You know, retirees are always free with their advice about things, and so you know one of them was that it's not all about us. Another was, you know, don't just admire the problem, take the initiative and, you know, offer solutions, something I learned, Masha and I did many years ago, working for Tom Pickering, the best diplomat, you know, I ever served. He never wanted to get an instruction from Washington that he hadn't first shaped himself, and he was always willing because he figured he was paid the big bucks to be the President's representative on the ground, to take a few risks and kind of ask for forgiveness later, and I, you know, there's that same strong sense amongst CIA officers as well. I mean, our officers are asked to take on some really tough challenges, so they have to be agile.

And then a third point, they understand very well, just as diplomats do, there's no such thing as zero risk, you know, we're reminded of that, we have on our memorial wall at the entrance to CIA, the most profoundly important part of our agency physically at headquarters, there are 139 stars on that wall right now. They're officers who gave their lives in the line of duty. At the State Department, they're the names of our former colleagues who lost their lives in the line of duty, so you have to mitigate risk, you have to manage it, but you can't make it disappear as well.

Trying to remember those other pearls of wisdom that I shared then too, I mean another one, which is probably an overused term, but it's extremely important especially in my current role too, speaking truth to power. It's true for diplomats, it's certainly true for intelligence officers. We are at CIA an apolitical institution. What we owe the President, and he's been very clear with me this is what he expects, is our straight, honest analysis and insights without a whiff of politics or partisan agenda to it as well, and you know, we've learned over the years not just at CIA but at State, we get ourselves in a lot of trouble as agencies and as a country if we don't pay attention to that basic fact, so that's something we take very seriously as well.

And taking care of people, I mentioned before, which is I think crucial in both professions, diplomacy and intelligence, and you know, the dirty secret is sometimes people can get to very senior positions of leadership and be much better at managing up than they are at actually leading and taking care of people, and I feel that profoundly.

And then last on my unsolicited words of advice for diplomats and intelligence officers is something I learned from Secretary of State Baker many years ago, three decades ago, when I was a very young diplomat I worked for him, and that was the importance of preparation. I never saw Baker go into a meeting with a foreign leader, whether it was a friend or an adversary or a meeting on Capitol Hill, where he was not at least as well prepared as anybody else in that room. I did an armchair conversation with him just like this one at CIA headquarters with our workforce about a week ago. He's 93 years old right now, as sharp as ever, and he had prepared for that meeting at least as well as I had as well. So that's something that I've never forgotten as well, and I think cuts right to the core of what makes for effective diplomats or effective intelligence officers.

So the, you know, the two professions are quite different in many respects, but a lot of those, you know, sort of basic elements of wisdom I think matter to both.

Bodine: That was great, this is going to be my last question, and so if any of you students have some questions of your own start getting ready to come up to the mic. You mentioned in your own remarks, and you have it in your memoir, your father's, you know, there's nothing can make you prouder than service, and certainly your service over four decades and, as we've all heard, the many places, many issues, many times. Is there one thing that makes you the most proud of your 40 years of service?

Burns: Yeah, I mean, you know, there are different issues, you know, I mentioned Russia, Ukraine in my current role where I'm deeply proud of the work that our officers are doing, sometimes at great risk. You know, there are many other things I'm very proud of during the course of my diplomatic career as well, and I think if I had to pick one thing it would be less tangible, I mean when I go around the world today in this role I see lots of what I always thought to be very young diplomats who worked for me who are now ambassadors or assistant secretaries. I see that, you know, chiefs of station whom I first met when they were very junior intelligence officers, and I think there's an obligation, you know, as leaders in national security to not just take care of people, but mentor them as well, recruit carefully but then pay a lot of attention once you've recruited good people because I've just seen too many instances, I used to see it at state where we lose good people because we don't pay attention, as much attention as we should as well.

So when I see, you know, officers whose promise I could see a very long time ago, even as they put up with working for me as Masha did, and then see them excel, and again I'm sorry to single out Masha but I was so deeply proud of the work she did in Ukraine and the way she conducted herself in the face of what were some deeply unfair, you know, criticisms in 2019 as well, that's what makes me proud.

Bodine: Thank you, that was beautiful. That was lovely. As some of you may have noted, he didn't talk about anything that he did specifically, this wasn't a hero talk, so thank you for that.

Burns: Sure.

Bodine: Any students with any questions please come to the mic.

Burns: It's usually the point where I've stunned you into silence.

Bodine: One young woman who is elbowing her way past everyone else, very well, oh you're oh you're you okay, you're part of the job, I thought you were just the most aggressive question answer.

Burns: There was a reason she was doing that.

Bodine: Yeah, okay, all right. Please identify yourself and your program and year.

Student: Sure. My name is Frank.

Burns: Hi.

Student: And I'm a first year student at the School of Foreign Service.

Burns: Nice to see you.

Student: And also I'm from China, so I will ask a question related to China.

Burns: Sure.

Student: So we talked about how China internally faces a lot of problems, no matter whether it's economics or politics, so do you think it would provoke China to do some aggressive stuff in the recent years, including probably attacking Taiwan with military. Do you think it's a possibility? And another more broad question is, do you think China itself is more dangerous in the short term or in the long term? Thank you.

Burns: Nice easy questions, no but thank you very much, it's nice to meet you. I mean, on Taiwan, I guess what I would say, our assessment at CIA is that I wouldn't underestimate President Xi's ambitions with regard to Taiwan. He's been pretty clear about that over the years. I think he's watched very carefully, it seems to us, Putin's experience in Ukraine, and been a little bit unsettled and sobered by that as well. We know, as a matter of intelligence, that he's instructed the People's Liberation Army to be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion.

Now that does not mean that he's decided to conduct an invasion in 2027, or any other year, but it's a reminder of the seriousness of his focus and his ambition, and so, you know, therefore I think it's very much in our interest as a policy matter in the United States to make clear our commitment to the status quo, to make clear that, you know, we're not interested as a country in changing that status quo, that we're deeply opposed to anyone trying to change that unilaterally, especially by the use of force, and to continuing to do all we can to help Taiwan defend itself and sort of think through how best to do that to deter, you know, what would be a sort of a deeply unfortunate conflict for everyone involved, including China as well. And so, as an agency, we

have an important role to play in supplying intelligence, you know, about that issue and doing everything we can to support policy makers as well.

Student: Thank you so much for talking to us.

Burns: Sure.

Bodine: Thank you.

Student: Hello Mr. Ambassador.

Burns: Hi.

Student: My name is Robert Moore and I'm a first year in the SFS. Let me start out by saying it's an honor to have the opportunity to hear you speak today. My question concerns the issue of counter-terrorism. As we've seen since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, it's been very hard to enforce the terms of the 2020 Doha Agreement and ensure that the Taliban government is not harboring extremist elements, so I guess I'm wondering, from the CIA's perspective, what is the future of U.S. counterterrorism efforts now that we have withdrawn from Afghanistan and are tackling the issue with what has been called an over-the-horizon type strategy.

Burns: It's a really good question, and I promise to get to it quickly. There's one thing though that the last questioner reminded me of that I just wanted to mention, and that is that I think one of the things we have to be careful of as a government is not to conflate our competition with an increasingly adversarial People's Republic of China with the Chinese people, with Asian Americans because there's a real risk in that, I think, in our society, and so we try really hard at CIA. I talk to our workforce about this all the time, to be able to distinguish between those two things too. And for us as a society, just as an American citizen, I think that's really important as well.

So counterterrorism, which remains a very important priority for the CIA, I think you asked about Afghanistan, I think the successful U.S. strike against Ayman al-Zawahiri, co-founder of al-Qaeda, directly responsible along with bin Laden for the deaths of more than three thousand, you know, innocent people on 9/11, and many other acts of terrorism, was a demonstration of our continuing commitment as an agency, and as a government, and of our continuing capability as well. In many respects, the challenge of terrorism and threat of terrorism has become more fragmented, more diffuse as well.

We've had a lot of successes over the years against al-Qaeda, but ISIS, you know, remains a serious threat in different parts of the world, even though there, too, we've made a great deal of progress in recent years in Syria and Iraq against ISIS. But the threat has not gone away, so we need to stay very focused on it as an agency as well, working, you know, with partners across the intelligence community, working with the Defense Department, and then working also with a lot of foreign partners in whom we've invested, and whose capabilities are vastly stronger now than they were 20 years ago at the time of 9/11 too, so, you know we're going to have to continue to focus on that challenge. It's not going away and we can't afford, and we won't, neglect it.

Student: Thank you for your time, Mr. Ambassador.

Burns: Thank you.

Student: Hello there, good evening.

Burns: Hi.

Student: My name is Max, I'm a second year in the SFS.

Burns: Hi, Max.

Student: My question is a little bit similar to Frank's, but it also has some ties in regards to Putin's actions in the last year or so. So Putin has clearly displayed a keenness on direct military invasion and even attempts at annexation, and I was wondering how this can affect the Russian Federation's alliance with China, and I was wondering what does Xi Jinping see in the conflict in Eastern Europe, does he see it as an inhibitor of his own agenda of national rejuvenation, or as a promoter?

Burns: Well, I'd say a couple of things. I mean, first, I think there's probably no foreign leader is paying more, is looking more intently about Putin's experience in Ukraine over the last 11 and a half months than Xi Jinping. I think he was surprised and unsettled, to some extent, by the very poor performance of the Russian military, of many Russian, you know, sophisticated weapon systems as well, and trying to draw the lessons from that about his own military modernization and on specific issues like Taiwan, as we discussed before.

The second thing I'd say is that I think President Xi and President Putin remain committed to a very strong partnership between the People's Republic of China and Russia. Just before the war, you know at the beginning of the Beijing Winter Olympics, when Putin and Xi met in Beijing, they proclaimed a, you know, partnership without limits. I think they're both very committed to that partnership, but the truth is there are actually some limits to it as well, simply because I think as far as we can tell today anyway, Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership have been very reluctant to provide the kind of lethal weapons to Russia to use in Ukraine that we know the Russians are very much interested in as well. So that's obviously something we pay very careful attention to as well, but, you know, so it's a mistake to underestimate the mutual commitment to that partnership, but it's not a friendship totally without limits.

Student: Thank you so much.

Burns: Thanks.

Student: Madam Ambassador, Director, thank you so much for your insights, good afternoon.

Burns: Sure.

Student: My name is Joseph and I'm a student here at the Security Studies Program at Georgetown.

Burns: Hi.

Student: I'm from Paris, France, and as a European, I'm particularly concerned about the outcome of the Ukrainian conflict, and I was wondering, how do we balance our support for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, particularly giving tanks and a lot of material support, with the risk of nuclear escalation?

Burns: Well, I mean, it's obviously something we need to take seriously, and we do as a government, given the nuclear sabre rattling that Vladimir Putin and some of the senior advisors have engaged in from time to time. One of the reasons that the President sent me to meet with Mr. Naryshkin, the head of Russia's external intelligence service, a couple of months ago in Türkiye was to make very clear the serious consequences of any use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, or any place else as well, so it's a risk we can't afford to take lightly.

On the other hand, the purpose of the saber-rattling is to intimidate us and our European allies, as well as the Ukrainians themselves, and so I think we have to stay on an even keel in weighing those kind of threads carefully, but also not being intimidated by them as well in our support for the Ukrainians.

And the only other thing I'd say on Ukraine, which you understand very well, is that there's a lot at stake here. As deeply important as it is to help Ukrainians defend themselves against an extraordinarily brutal aggression, there's a lot at stake in terms of the lessons that the rest of the world draws from this, and I know it's easy to sometimes, you know, exaggerate those kind of lessons and connections, but this is a pretty big challenge to the basic role that big countries don't get to swallow up parts of smaller countries just because they can, and so that's why I think there's a great deal at stake here, certainly for Ukrainians to help them defend themselves, to demonstrate that Putin's going to fail. And I think in many ways in strategic terms, he's already failed in Ukraine.

You know, he said he wanted to prevent NATO expansion, well he's got two Scandinavian countries that are at least lined up – we'll watch how the Turks handle this – but you know, lined up for membership as well, too. You know, the weaknesses of his own military have been exposed, he's going to suffer long-term economic damage to Russia. The middle class that I saw when I was Ambassador there 15 years ago is being gutted right now, you know, as a result of not just export controls and sanctions, but the exodus of more than a thousand Western firms from Russia, most, if not all, of whom are not going back, so the long-term strategic damage to Russia that Putin has done to himself and to his own people.

Bodine: Thank you, Director.

Burns: Thanks.

Bodine: I am going to be, congratulations you are going to be the last question, and I am so sorry, we could be here till about eight o'clock I know, so I have to call the line someplace. Make it a good one.

Student: No pressure, thank you for your talk. My name is Alex, I'm a junior in the SFS. Whilst the EU may have placed a price cap on the price of Russian oil to combat financing, it appears that not only the PRC, but India, democratic U.S. ally, is now importing record amounts of Russian oil, potentially harming that effort. If the U.S. wants to engage in strategic competition with Russia now and China in the future, does the U.S. need to deepen its strategic and diplomatic partnership with India, and how can it persuade states like India to forgo potentially attractive opportunities, whether economic or political like cheap oil?

Burns: That's a really good question, I mean the last decade or so, I was at the State Department, especially, you know, when I held the number three and number two positions there, I spent a lot of time on the U.S.-India partnership, helped complete the negotiations on the Civil Nuclear Agreement, which we reached with India and finalized in 2008, so I'm a big believer in the importance of that partnership, you know, with my eyes wide open about a lot of the challenges that India itself faces.

So I think it's something we need to continue to work at, I think there's obviously a shared concern about the threat posed by the People's Republic of China. I think India has, you know, a long-standing, you know, military relationship, military equipment relationship with first the Soviet Union, then Russia which, you know, I think they're well aware of the importance of weaning them off of that over time as well, and so certainly, you know, Ukraine and Russia are subjects we spend a lot of time, I spend a lot of time talking about my intelligence counterparts in India about as well too, so you know, we'll stay sharply focused on that as well. But to answer your question, I think that partnership between the U.S. and India is going to remain, you know, a very important one for the United States strategically, and for India strategically, as we look out, you know, over the next few decades as well.

Student: Thank you.

Burns: Thanks.

Bodine: Okay well, as I said, we could all sit here, you know, for a very long time and chat about too many issues. I'd like to thank Director Burns for accepting our award.

Burns: Thank you.

Bodine: For the time you've given us this afternoon, and for your direct and candid, measured, and thoughtful responses to all the students' questions. So we all thank Ambassador Burns for his time. Thank you.

###