

EPISODE 496

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] AH: Welcome to the latest installment of SpyCast. To coincide with the 20th anniversary of 9/11, I would like to present to you a trilogy of interviews with intelligence officers who have found themselves on point as presidential daily briefers on the day. The President's Daily Brief has been called the most tightly controlled daily document and the world as a daily summary of high level, all sorts of information and analysis on national security issues produced for the president and key cabinet members and advisors.

We've got three presidential daily briefers for you. First up, Mike Morell. Mike at various points in time was Acting Director and Deputy Director of CIA. But on the morning of September 11 2001, he was with George W. Bush in Sarasota, Florida, then uniquely 10 years later, he's with President Barack Obama for the Abbottabad read.

I'm just going to read out a brief part of my conversation with Mike. "I believe that when we get to the end of the trail, we're going to find our Al Qaeda and we're going to find Osama bin Laden. I told him that I was so confident in that judgment, that I would bet my children's future honor." If you want to hear more about what Mike had to say. Please listen to the interview.

Next up is Dave Terry. Dave started the job on the same day as Mike Morell. But he was the presidential daily brief for Vice President Dick Cheney. After that, he went on to be the chief of the presidential daily brief. Now, in the morning of September 11th, Dave recollects, I think that for any intelligence officer, what you're doing is often overwhelming, whether you're in front of the President, or the vice president are an asset or your colleagues and the stakes are often life or death.

Next up, we have Kristin Wood. Now, Kristin was the presidential daily brief for the Vice President's National Security Adviser, Scooter Libby, and she often briefed the Vice President himself. She went on to hold a number of leadership roles at the CIA, but she recollects knowing that every day you had to deliver relevant information to the nation's leaders is a feeling of enormous responsibility. All of the thousands and thousands of intelligence officers who have

done amazing work, you want to represent that faithfully, ask questions so that you can go a little bit deeper, but also remain a neutral balanced party.

Joining Kristin was a special guest, Phil Mudd. He was part of a small diplomatic team that helped to piece together a new government for Afghanistan in late fall, early winter of 2001. He was second in command for counter terrorist analysis, in the Counterterrorism Center, and his most recent book is *Takedown: Inside the Hunt for Al Qaeda*. I'm sure you'll enjoy listening to Kristin and Phil bouncing off of each other, two former colleagues and friends as much as I did. Please consider the trilogy as a whole, listen to them, think about them, mold them over. This is history. These are three people that were actors in it, and we are proud to present them to you. Thanks. Take care. Bye.

[EPISODE]

[00:03:20] AH: I wonder if you could just take us back to where both of you were on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

[00:03:29] KW: So, at the time, I was a PDB briefer, or the presidential daily briefer, and I was one of the people who briefed at the White House. So that day was a Scooter Libby, who was the National Security Adviser to Vice President Cheney. For me, the atmosphere at the time, you just felt it coming because of all the intelligence reporting that had been coming over the summer. This now sense of we knew something was coming, we knew it, and you just couldn't put the pieces together.

That particular day, I've been doing the briefing in his office, and we started talking a little bit about why Al Qaeda would have assassinated a key Afghan leader. Now, what were they trying to curry favor with the Taliban for? It was a question that I was taking back to the analysts who were experts so that they could speculate.

[00:04:27] AH: This is Massoud, we're talking about?

[00:04:29] KW: It is Massoud. So, came back in the car, about 8:30 that morning. It's a very early morning in that job. I'm in my little tiny office that's more like a closet with the brooms have

been taken out and typing away madly and one of the other briefers walks in and has this very strange look on his face. He said, "You need to come look at the TV", which is something no one ever says at the agency. I'm like, "I'm busy. I'm busy." He said, "No, you really need to come look at the TV because it's like an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie." I can't still understand why this is relevant to what I'm doing. But I get up and go look at the TV and as we come into this area, were there five or six people around, the second plane hits the World Trade Center building. All of us looked at each other and said, "Al Qaeda." The answers to the question was self-evident.

We immediately went into, "Now, what?" The building had its own response. But in my case, my husband worked about 20 yards away from me in a totally different mission purpose. I got on the phone, I said, "Okay, which of us is going home?" Because we knew our building was a target and we wanted our kids to have one parent. It was really that sense of threat at the time, so I had worked my whole day. So literally, shut my computer down, walked out the door, and spent the rest of the day watching as everyone else did, just the horror unfold.

[00:04:29] AH: Where was this Kristin? Give us a sense of the location. This was at Langley?

[00:06:16] KW: At headquarters, yes. CIA, in Langley.

[00:06:19] AH: Where would you do the briefing? Would you travel into town to do the briefing?

[00:06:22] KW: Right. Down at the White House.

[00:06:24] AH: The White House, okay.

[00:06:26] KW: It was at the White House that morning.

[00:06:27] AH: That's interesting. So, for you, it wasn't so much that it came out of a clear blue sky, but rather, there were clouds that were gathering and when the thunder struck, that made sense to you, because it was something that you saw brewing over time?

[00:06:45] KW: Well, I'd say more like the hurricane is coming. You just don't know when it's going to hit land. It was much more violent than that in terms of what we saw on the threat

reporting. When you say out of the clear blue sky, it's such a good phrase to use for that day, because I remember walking into the building from the White House. It was gorgeous. In DC, we often have weather that's less than, but that particular day, stunning blue sky, that perfect crisp fall air, a fantastic Washington day, at least for the first few hours.

[00:07:22] AH: Phil, where were you that morning?

[00:07:23] PM: I have the same memory. Kristin, what a day. September's often, Washington's a swamp often. I remember being quite cool. I was at the National Security Council as a director for Middle East stuff. National Security Council is in a place called the Executive Office Building, which is part of the White House complex next to the West Wing of the White House and I came back into – it's a beautiful building. It looks like sort of a wedding cake if you walk around that area.

I came back into the building and someone said, "Look at the TV", and a plane had hit one building, I assume this is sort of a training Cessna, sort of like a two-seater and someone had had a tragic mistake. And then the second plane hit. Almost immediately, someone was walking down the broad hallways. The interior is as beautiful as the exterior. It's a lovely building, wide marble floors, walking along saying, "You need to get out." The sense was so urgent that I remember we all – I used to drive down there from Virginia, this is obviously downtown DC, the White House, I drive down there and park there. My car was there, but I left my keys and wallet in the office because the sense was that there are a lot of planes in the air. We didn't know how many and that one was headed for us.

I don't remember whether there was this any sense of the Pennsylvania, the Shanksville aircraft, which was inevitably headed for the Congress. But we thought if they were – we didn't know how many. So, I remember going out on the streets of Washington, DC. And obviously, I couldn't drive anywhere because I didn't have keys and just the sense of – it was a Maelstrom. The sense of Hollywood chaos, like this is a movie that you would run when there is a disaster in Washington. I walked back. I knew I could not go back into the Executive Office Building. There were with security, including, my vague memory, sort of SWAT paramilitary security around the building.

I found one of my coworkers who drove me across the bridge. We thought that at that point, there's a lot of like, in every event like this, a lot of bad information around. There was a report that there was an attack or a bomb at the State Department, which turned out to be inaccurate, but the State Department was near us. And then we cross the bridge and we saw smoke coming out of the Pentagon. As Kristin said, I spent the rest of day with a close friend watching and my recollection of that day is one of not vengeance, I don't remember. I'm sure we talked about who was responsible, but just sadness. I just remember thinking about the number of children who would not see a parent come home that night. It's still overwhelming. The overwhelming sense that this is going to change so many children's lives. Also, on day one, you knew that this would change our lives in Washington, we just didn't know how at that time.

[00:10:10] AH: One of the things that I find quite interesting is that period, very short period between the North Tower being struck and the South Tower being struck. We're talking a matter of minutes and for some people, their interpretation of the event shifted, when the second plane hit. I just wondered if you can remember the intervening period. You find out the North Tower has been struck, and then there's a moment where you're suspended and you don't know the full story and then the South Tower was struck. Can you recollect?

[00:10:44] PM: One quick comment before I turn it back to Kristin. I don't remember a moment of suspension. I remember looking at it and saying, "Well, two people in this small aircraft will be dead because there's a training aircraft mistake. Somebody was training down in Manhattan made a mistake, and there'll be a few people in an office." I don't remember thinking that this is some sort of major event. I mean, you compare it to what we see every week, every month in America in terms of mass killings, and I just thought it was, this is going to be a relatively small tragedy. And then when you see two hit, you realize that this is no coincidence.

But in the intervening period, I remember thinking we had a day to work here. I don't remember feeling any sense of, that this is not only not life changing, but significant beyond the tragedy of it.

[00:11:26] KW: I agree. I think by the time I got to the TV, it was a minute or two before the second plane hit and I saw the second plane was not a little tiny Cessna. So, it's not an accident, just because two hit. But to see such a giant passenger aircraft disintegrate and to

watch it and just imagine the horror that all those people are going through. This is obviously before the towers came down, which was yet another horrific, horrific development in that day.

But I think, to echo what Phil was saying, it's going to change everything in a profound way, but not the House.

[00:12:09] AH: It's really interesting to hear some of your recollections and to hear how you experienced that as human beings and as Americans. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how you experienced that as officers in the Central Intelligence Agency?

[00:12:27] PM: As a lot of us were, I was on details to the White House. One of the dirty secrets to the White House is they don't like to have personnel on the books, that is personnel they're paying for because they like to pretend that the staff is relatively small. So, they have a lot of people like me from state departments, CIA, the Pentagon, et cetera. On detail, meaning we're alone to them and our home agency is paying the bill. It's an advantage to the home agency, in my case, CIA, because the home agency gets someone who comes back, and has the experience of working with what we would call a client or customer, that is the White House.

I remember thinking that I did not have much going into, probably for the first few weeks and the sense of time is lost for me. But I remember thinking I don't have much of a role here at the White House. I wasn't working on counterterrorism. I called back to the CIA. I don't remember how long this took. Days, a week, two weeks? My recollection is that I talked to the Deputy Director, John McLaughlin. I'm not sure that's true – a lot of this is untrue, what I'll be telling you. But the conversation, it was at the executive level, the CI was I want in. This is going to be, at that point, relatively soon after you knew this is going to be the event of a career and event for America that was profound.

So, anybody, whether again, whether you're at the State Department, Pentagon, CIA, I think most people would have said, "I want in." So, I called and said I could stay here but if you've got something, I'll do it. Very shortly thereafter, it might have been days or a week or something. I was part of the CIA person on the small diplomatic team to put together the new government for Afghanistan. So, one of the tiny examples of how rapidly things changed after 9/11, people wanted in the fight, and then we went from a government that I would say, did not care that

much about Afghanistan, to assigning a senior ambassador to oversee the transition to a new government. And to fast forward, I was there for the inauguration of Hamid Karzai, three months later. Absolutely incredible speed of change. But rapid recognition that this was my generations issue, and that anybody like me would want in. So, I said, "Let me in."

[00:14:39] KW: I think that really is a characteristic of the agency and probably National Security Agency and Defense Department folks, as well, as there's something that is going on that's such a profound risk to the country. I want in is the common refrain and so as an organization, we expanded significantly the number of people working counterterrorism. There are all these people who were suddenly counterterrorism analysts who had had jobs doing all sorts of other things before. But in some ways, that kind of doesn't matter, because it's the tradecraft, right? The tradecraft of how do you do the rigorous strategic all sorts of analysis needed to provide answers to the nation's leadership.

So, I think in some ways, the counterterrorism mission really benefited from that, because there was a sense of what's happening. But all of a sudden, you have people who aren't identified with the analytic bottom lines coming in, to take a fresh look, and additional look and a deeper look. I think that was really an excellent development for the counterterrorism mission is to suddenly have all that talent available, focused on that.

I think the other thing is, and I have goosebumps even talking about this is how instantly and profoundly our allies came in, to say, "We're in. What do you need?" Reading the cables and hearing about the phone calls that came through, with this profound message of support and grief was just – I'll never forget it. One of the things that also came in, I think, for me, as an intelligence officer, was seeing around the world, people, individuals, churches, schools, sending messages of support.

I remember, in Australia, they had a big American flag, and messages from thousands of thousands of people, and it just felt really needed at that time when a lot of what we believe the world would be had changed. Those are my real big memories as an intelligence officer at that point in time.

[00:16:56] AH: So, there's the morning, you find out what's happening, and just walk us through to the close of that day.

[00:17:04] KW: So, for me, I walked out of the building it was a really quick conversation with my husband. We'd already talked about this. It was just, "This is what we're doing." Because he worked for the agency's executive director at the time, and they had the mission of figuring out how do we keep people safe, how do we do all the things we do. So, his day was just starting.

I went home, and I think I struggled with the thing that parents, whether involved in national security or not struggle with, which is like, get my kids out of school. I mean, they were in elementary school at the time. Because that's what I wanted. I wanted them to be safe with me. But it also would freak them out to see how emotional I was, and ultimately, I left them there and watched. As events unfolded, we saw what happened to the plane coming after the Congress, we watched the Pentagon, and just seeing the towers come down. I mean, just a new level of horror.

So, what also I knew from kind of a continuity of operations perspective is the President and Vice President are very rarely in the same place at the same time, anyway. But now it was going to be very purposeful. So, the Vice President, as from lots of things, the public went to the undisclosed location. We had to make changes on our briefing team, to make sure we can provide support to them wherever they were. So, it really changed how the principles operated themselves. We, I mean, not only the content of what we were providing changed or shifted significantly to focus on this fight, but where we did it, how we did it, and then the level of tactical information they wanted changed significantly.

You would think strategic issues, preparation for meeting with foreign leaders, big intelligence developments, but now we went down to specific local commanders, maybe for Afghanistan, or specific, what was the structure of Al Qaeda's leadership team, all of those things. I think one of the things I felt out of that was just a sense of gratitude that I got to be involved in fighting back, and to contribute in whatever way possible to enable our policymakers to do what needed to be done and make sure this never happened again.

[00:19:32] PM: I have sort of fuzzy memories. I don't remember how people in my office found each other. It certainly wasn't back in the office. But one of my colleagues had a car parked in a garage and we were, as I recollect, one of the last cars out of the garage because they were shutting down garages in my memory in DC. People were milling around like it was a Hollywood set. It was just incredible seeing snippets of what was happening on TVs, at restaurants and bars walking around downtown DC.

So, I mentioned earlier, we were driving across the bridge and seeing the smoke out of the Pentagon/ I got dropped off and went to a friend's house. I did not do not have a TV and I didn't want to be alone. I didn't know what was going on. So, I stayed at a friend's house, maybe a mile or two from my house just watching through the downing of the towers. At that point, I said, "I'm going home."

My only other memories are realizing I couldn't go to the White House the next day. Again, I was not involved in these kinds of issues. I think we're advised that except for essential personnel, the National Security Council staff weren't going in. But the last thing I'd say is I read a lot of World War II history and hearing how people enlisted on December 8, I just remember thinking the job I have at the NSA. I mean, this is an NSA job at the White House, this job isn't significant because it's not the fight. So, I'll go back, but I feel useless thinking that at some point, I got to get out of here. It's a job that people fight for and I wanted to fight it out to get out of it. Because I thought I would be on the periphery if I didn't go back and find something to do.

But that day was just watching and feeling – the Americans are known for Iraq, Afghanistan for being aggressive. Just sadness. That's all I remember feeling, just sadness, not only for the day, but realizing this is going to be really unpleasant. I didn't think it would be 20 years. But this is going to be a very unpleasant time for America. Not domestically, but in terms of what's going to be done overseas. I didn't know what. I didn't have an initial sense of Al Qaeda. Obviously, I thought about it, but whatever it was, whoever had done it, knowing the American psyche, this is not going to go well. So, I went back and said, "Let me in."

[00:21:43] AH: One of the things that I find interesting about both of your stories, as that day was a very emotive there, lots of emotions, some of which we've spoke about. But then for your profession, you are, as an analyst thinking about evidence and rationality and so forth. Just as a

human being, how do you make sure that you can still do your job unclouded by emotion? Or is emotion also part of trying to make sense of it?

[00:22:15] KW: I feel like that is something that we do by training. How I feel about a piece of intelligence doesn't matter, in any analytic issue I'm working, whether I like the answer that is coming up and the intelligence or not, it's my job to report it. So, I think in some ways, that helped that objective eye on just what what does the data say? What does the intelligence say? What does the information say? And being really rigorous about that was huge. It wasn't my job as a PDB briefer to do the analytic work. It was my job to represent it, which means I had to understand it. What here's what the analysts have written, ask questions, make sure I understood what it said.

But actually, being busy involved in supporting the leadership team of the United States government, the White House, the President, the Vice President, supporting their team and making decisions was exactly what I needed to stay focused. I think if I had been on vacation or out somewhere else, it would have been a lot harder, and a lot easier to be involved in the emotions of the day. I really think I put it, I parked it for so long that it was a year later, when they had the first anniversary, and there were church services and all sorts of other things that happened. It was then that I grieved, and just that let it all go away. It did not feel like I could take the time after the first day to do that.

[00:23:52] PM: My retrospective view is not that positive. There are two perspectives. One, I would agree with Kristin. I mean, I still find it odd recollecting the difference between nighttime and daytime, working during the day and I agree with Kristin, you look at stuff and say, "How are we doing on terror financing against Al Qaeda? How are we doing with the Pakistanis or the Saudis? How we doing with Al Qaeda leadership transitioning?" Into the questions Kristin was involved with about going into Iraq, and then driving home at night. And back then, for me, it was seeing the faces of the fallen and the New York Times and reflecting on that every day especially with three sisters, and thinking what would happen if my nieces came home to a home without my sister? It's hard for me to explain.

But I agree. I just remember, bifurcation, the day between what you thought about at 8 PM and what you thought about at 8 AM. In terms of leadership, I thought, at least I was mediocre and I

don't want to speak for all my colleagues, but I didn't – I think we could have done better. In terms of naivete, the fact that we're untested, the fact that we were untrained, the ability to have perspective and I'll give you one question any leader should ask, the ability to have perspective, I did not have. I don't think I ask good questions all the time. I don't think I withstood pressure, some of the time. The question you need to ask day in and day out is not only what are you doing today? But amidst a lot of chaos and other people who are naive and untrained, what perspective will people have in 5 years or 10 years? America was so focused on the target and so focused, for better for worse on saying anything goes, anything goes, that the ability to step back and say, "Let's make sure we have balanced perspective. Let's make sure that we realize how profound some of our decisions are, how they might be perceived years down the road." For example, some of the decisions on detainees. I think I performed, I'm going to give myself a pass, at a mediocre level. But we could have done better there.

But in terms of what Kristin is talking about day in and day out, I don't remember people sitting around crying in the office. You got a target, let's go chase them, and chase them relentlessly. And then you drive home at night and think about the faces of the fall in the New York Times and say, "Man, another series of pictures of parents who will never go home." If we make one more mistake, there's going to be more pictures.

I'll finish by saying Mike Hayden, the former CIA director, a great person and a great CIA director, one of the best I've ever worked with, said something I'll never forget. "They'll forgive us. That is the American people from for the first one. They will not forgive us for the second." We knew that then.

[00:26:33] KW: I think we all had this profound sense of responsibility, right? Whether we were a counterterrorism analyst or analyst or operations officer involved directly in the fight. It's our job to keep the American people safe and we failed. And I think while there are extenuating circumstances, while there are others who also failed, we took it all of us, very personally. So, brought all of that to the fight we were not going to fail again. We're going to do everything we could in our power to prevent that.

[00:27:04] AH: It's moving to hear you speak so frankly. I was wondering if I could just ask a little bit more of this –

[00:27:12] PM: No. Go ahead.

[00:27:14] AH: Could you just clarify what you're talking about, when you say naivety and we didn't do a good job. Were you speaking about the lead up to the event or what happened after the event?

[00:27:26] PM: Let me give you two two broad areas that I would think about. One is how we handled some of that after Al Qaeda, how we handled some of the prewar Iraq intelligence in the sort of furor that the sense of peril that we faced at that time. I don't think, and this is partly on me, that we handle the prewar Iraq intelligence that well, because we got caught up in the moment.

I mentioned perspective earlier, sitting back and saying, "How might you be perceived 10 years down the road?" You can't train for that. I don't ever want to go back in government. But if I went back, I think the ability to say, "Hold on guys. To the men and women of the workforce. What are we doing here? Why?" Even at the expense of irritating people. You can't replicate going through that 10 years of that cauldron. None of us had that experience. So, I think things like prewar Iraq intelligence, we got caught up in the moment, we could have done much better.

I don't regret my role in the detainee program. But in terms of sitting back and saying, "How can we have a conversation with Congress, for example, more broadly about this? How this will be perceived years down the road?" I think we could have handled that better. I'm not apologizing for it. Nor will I ever do that. I think the American people have been misled on this issue about the utility of detainee intelligence. That said, we went in very quickly, because the CIA says we can do things other people don't want to do. We went into a detainee program without experience in detainees, and without understanding obviously how this might – how the optics might change over time.

I think more perspective would have been better then, but let me be clear. I think many are most of the decisions would have remained the same. I am not apologizing.

[00:29:10] AH: I remember a few years ago, I interviewed someone that was on the Afghan desk during the 1980s, at the State Department, and they said, “No one was more surprised than me when all of a sudden I found myself being at the center of all of these events, because the Afghan desk was the place where your career went the hiking of thing.” I mean, that made me think about the way that institutions hover. Sorry?

[00:29:36] PM: Yeah, if I could give you a semi-humorous example. I quit in '19. It was about 1991 and moved to Paris on what we call government LWOP, leave without pay. So, I was still on the roll so I could reenroll at CIA without going through the security process. But I just moved to Paris. I grew my hair shoulder length and just drank wine and I just wanted to learn to speak French. I moved over with a girlfriend who disappeared after a week which is another story, sadly.

But I came back looking like a hippie in the office, I was in the near east office, analytic office at CIA that time was required to donate people to counterterrorism. This was viewed as not only a backwater, it's the land of broken toys. And they looked at me saying, “Let me get this straight, you quit for a year to move to Paris and came back. Now people would have a man bun.” I just had hair to my shoulders, you're going to counterterrorism. So, it gives you a snapshot of how counterterrorism work. They need people, and so we're going to donate the people that we don't have a place for and who are misfits. That's how my 1992, how my career in counterterrorism started as a mistake.

[00:30:39] AH: I mean, that's another great example. So, we've spoke about how counterterrorism became important. Just in terms of your own careers, just to clarify, can you tell us what your official title was the day of 9/11, and then how long you continued that position, and then what your transition to next?

[00:31:01] KW: As I mentioned, I was a presidential daily briefer for the Vice President's National Security Adviser, Scooter Libby. It was, whatever, nine months into their administration, and we had started together. At that point, I had a very good understanding of what his priorities were. So, when we present the book, it's what the president needs to know. And then there was something called behind the fold, still the book the time, and then that was the things that that

particular principal cared about. For example, maybe more China or Asia or the economy or whatever it was for whichever leader.

So, that continued, but then the Vice President and Scooter started taking their briefings together, completely after 9/11. The Vice President's briefer and I alternated, so that we could each hub breaks, and we could do what needed to be done for both people. I continue to do that almost for another two years. I think for all of us, we were not going to leave the relationship between a briefer and their principal is close, because you're the conduit for them to get the information that is their priority from the intelligence community.

You get a pretty good understanding of them. In some cases, we travel with them, or we meet their families and things like that. So, the idea of stepping away from that, and having them have to start new, when the world has changed just wasn't something any of us were willing to do. I continued in that for two and a half years. And after that, I had a brief period of working on our seventh floor, our C suite, kind of equivalent. And then I went to work in the Counterterrorism Center for Phil, running the Iraq terrorism branch, looking at Iraq's role and 9/11.

[00:32:56] PM: I was at the White House, I mentioned, very shortly after 9/11, I was designated on the team and about half a dozen of us on the team under Ambassador Dobbins who was the ambassador responsible for helping to install or design the Karzai government with him until December. We flew back on December 23, or 24th of 2001 from the Karzai inauguration, and I remember getting into New York and going up to my brother's house on the train after about 30 hours of travel, thinking, "This is too weird."

But I went back to CIA in January of 2002 to be Deputy Director of Counterterrorism Analysis, and then I think in 2003, maybe Deputy Director of Counterterrorism. In 2005, Deputy Director of National Security at the FBI, which is roughly half of the FBI operation and the FBI Director, Director Muller's intelligence advisor. And then in 2010, I had to get sideways with the Senate of the United States and quit and eventually ended up oddly as a CNN commentator. So, life changing for me. Interesting, but a lot of different optics in the course of the 10 years after 9/11.

[00:34:01] AH: It would be interesting to hear a little bit more about that period between 9/11 and the Iraq war. I mean, your position, Kristin, being a PDB briefer for Scooter Libby and the

Vice President. I mean, for listeners that have never been in that position, it sounds like a lot of pressure. You're the person that's giving the intelligence picture to the Vice President of the United States. As a person as a human being, as an analyst, how do you juggle that sense of responsibility that you spoke about? And then you also find yourself caught up in these quite momentous events. We're not talking about we're changing one coffee out and going with a different roster. We're talking about war and peace and life and death. So, help us understand what it was like to be you in that period.

[00:34:54] KW: For me, being a briefer was alternating between existential fear and exhaustion. The existential fear part was if a principal, if the person your briefing didn't like the job you were doing, you would be out of it probably before the time your car got back to CIA headquarters. So, knowing that every day, you had to deliver relevant information to the nation's leaders. It is a feeling of enormous responsibility that all of the thousands and thousands and thousands of intelligence officers who have done amazing work, you want to represent it faithfully, ask questions so that you can go a little bit deeper into what the intelligence piece says. But also remain a neutral, balanced party.

You can't adopt the principles worldview on intelligence. You can't have an oppositional viewpoint to it either. It's understanding where they're coming from, and being able to relay that back to the building, so that if they're going to write a piece on something that a senior leader has a very opposite view about, they want to make sure they're providing more evidence, for example. You're going to give the same bottom line, but you might actually weigh a lot heavier on the evidence if you know someone's skeptical about it.

I think the existential fear part was not providing the right information on the right time. What if we don't give him this piece of something today, especially after 9/11, and something blows up? That was the piece of it that we can all understand is it's very stressful. But the exhaustion part is it's a very early morning, I used to get up about 2:30 in the morning for a 7 AM briefing, prior to 9/11. Because you have to read all the intelligence that has come in overnight, stacks and stacks in the old days. Now, it's not that way. And then be familiar with what's in the book.

After 9/11, I came in at 11 at night, because it took that much extra time based on all the great information, we're getting from all over the world, to make sure we've gotten through it. I'm a

famously not a morning person. So, the alarm would go off. I would think, "Okay, what's the worst thing that will happen if I don't get up?" And the worst thing was always so bad. It was like, "I'm out." But also, what a great job to have, to have the perspective of senior leaders. I think it was just a privilege to be able to serve in that way. And then to go on to work the counterterrorism mission with Phil afterwards as well.

[00:37:44] AH: When would you sleep? You had to start work at 11 o'clock at night. So, you effectively work night shift?

[00:37:51] KW: Kind of. We had to do all of that. Do the briefing, come back, provide feedback so that the next days, the rule was if a principal had a question, they get an answer within 24 hours. So, we had to set that into motion, and brief all the senior leadership teams, "This is what happened. Here's the questions on the piece", et cetera. And then usually about 11 in the morning, I would leave, go home, pick up my younger son from daycare, feed him lunch. He and I would crawl into my bed and we would take like a two-hour nap. And then my other son would get off the bus, and then we would hang out together and get them dinner. As soon as my husband came home, I go to bed for three or four hours. It all worked.

At that point, and I think Phil, you would agree, my personal convenience or life was absolutely relevant. The job was really the most important thing and we all just collectively, I think, did what we had to do in our personal lives to make the professional life work.

[00:38:48] PM: My recollection of the years after 9/11 is a great sense of unease, because I mean, I'm going to forget the timeframe. But until I'm going to guess, '05, '06, I thought we were losing. You can think of this world in terms of plots and people. Plots is defense, trying to ensure that a plot doesn't succeed, for example, against a train and aircraft, a subway station. If you think about the plots in places like Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, going into Europe, and North America, we were persuaded there will be a second major event, what we refer to as the second wave.

That persuasion, that sense of ominous doom, I would say lasted for years. That, on Friday night, if we don't do something tonight or Thursday night or Saturday, that this might happen tomorrow, and that will regret whatever it is we didn't do. As George Tenet, the former CIA

director said, "Do not end up if the second wave happens saying I wish I would have done X, Y or Z. Do it today", which contributed to the sense of urgency.

The people part was the part that started to change, that is you cannot stop plots playing defense. That's what most Americans see on the front page is there's a plot against X, Y and Z unless you stop people. Most of the people we stopped would have been unknown to Americans. It's a second or third tier of Al Qaeda. But these are people who are the operational core, not ideological commanders. But the operational core of training people to come back into Europe and United States.

The capture of Abu Zubaydah in the spring of '02 I thought was a watershed. The first major capture of an Al Qaeda player. We didn't really understand are kind of that well. And going into the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed the next year. The next few years, the rate of elimination of Al Qaeda leadership through killing or capture was greater than the rate of replacement. Think of it as shark's teeth. You got to get the tooth before the tooth behind it comes up.

By about '05 or '06, my sense was that we were making such a dent in the Al Qaeda architecture that their ability to plot successfully was declining. And then the game started all over with ISIS. But the sense of doom contributing, I think, the hardest thing for Americans looking back will be why did those guys do what they did, partly recollecting on the detention program? They will not be able to replicate the sense of doom that this will happen again tomorrow in the American people. And I used to brief Congress on the detention program. The American people will be tomorrow like the Congress is today. Basically, I don't care what you do, except for John McCain. He was a little different. I don't care what you do. You better fix it. And if you don't fix it, and I had one White House official tell me this once, if you don't fix it, as in if you don't help us save America, it's on you. The sense of responsibility and urgency was years long and slowly dissipating, I would say.

[00:41:33] AH: And we don't have to unwrap this question if it's uncomfortable. But I guess for our listeners, some of the stuff that you have spoke about sounds like, for me anyway, it sounds like that something that would have a significant impact on my mental health. Physically or

mentally, how do you keep your head above water with an impending sense of doom, with exhaustion, with stress and pressure?

[00:42:01] PW: I didn't have the same issue Kristin was, because I didn't have the same sort of morning briefing process. My colleagues, a lot of them made the mistake of thinking that they were being paid for hours. When you move up into a leadership level, you're being paid for leadership and judgment. An hour start to dull your ability to make good judgments. So come in at seven. I was out at probably six, unless there's a disaster, or seven. I didn't exhaust myself. We switched on and off weekend. So every other weekend I would have off. I have a form. I went to my form, which is not easily accessible.

I remember the New York Times found my number there one morning. I'm like, "Don't ever call your again. We'll put you in a detention." No. We wouldn't do that. And I took some ridicule for that. But my sense was this is going to be years long. And that if I stay too long here, first of all, I'm not delegating. And second, I'm not going to be able to bring a sense of perspective. I mentioned earlier, I think I'd failed that perspective. But it would have been even worse had I had been in for 14 hours a day.

I would say that the final thing on this is you need to maintain contact with friends, family, children of family. Play with kids. I'm a Cabernet guy. Have a glass of wine. If you lose – I'm not talking about the initial weeks or months, but going into '02, '03, '04, if you lose your ability to have a life unless there is like that thread at night where you're really required to be there, you're doing a disservice to the staff by not delegating responsibility to them, and you're going to show up in the office irritable. It is not a good way to make decisions in a war that's now gone on for 20 years. That is not a good way to do business. So I was out of there at six every night.

[00:43:37] KW: Yeah. So I think I probably was the poster child for how not to do it. Particularly, so after the briefer assignment, leaving that group looking at had Saddam Hussein also had a role in it? I had several dozen people working for me directly. It was my first management assignment. And we were getting constant questions from the White House and the Defense Department. And, again, remember, there's 24 hours to respond. And there were tons of developments that were happening. And so it was just a constant push.

So I'd get my kids on the school bus, and then come home six or seven, have dinner with them, get them to bed. And then at the time, we could have classified fax machines at home. And so the OP center would send me all the drafts of all the pieces that needed to move forward. And I write and edit until midnight or later and then send them back so that when my analyst came in the morning, they could pick them up. And that went on for a very, very long time.

And my story, Phil's story, I think we both agree, isn't the most difficult by any stretch of the imagination. There are all these people who flew into Afghanistan to try to figure out how to do things on the ground. There were so many people on the frontlines, in harm's way, in the national security and in the military, that, I mean, no complaints at all. But one of the most profound moments for me was in 2002. And my doctor's office called me. And for about a year and a half, she had been trying to get me to have a mole removed on my foot. And I kept canceling because the vice president this or canceling, because the PDB this, or canceling da-da-da-. So I finally went and did it.

And she called me and she said, "Kristin is melanoma." And I'm staring at my computer screen and that thing of like your vision going down to a pinprick, it's exactly what happened. And I just thought, "Did I just kill myself?" because I was too busy. And I looked down at the bottle of extra strength migraine, Excedrin Migraine, and it's a 250 tablet bottle, and it was almost empty, because I had a migraine almost every day. And I existed on Diet Coke and whatever anyone brought me, because it was just so busy. And it really created a profound rethinking of what I did in my life.

But I think so many people had tragic stories. Some of my officers had miscarriages. A lot of us ended up in divorce. And there're just things that happened. So I think now there's a much greater sense of we have to manage crisis, and then the PTSD that follows, which is profound throughout the national security community and the defense community and military community. It's not a thing for wusses. It's a thing that many humans who are confronted with great evil, or great tragedy. It's a thing that happens naturally. And we need to make sure we're preparing people for it. Inoculating them against it as much as you can, before they're put in that environment, and then making sure they're taken care of afterwards. And that just was not understood at that level at that time.

[00:47:03] AH: Well, thanks for sharing. With SpyCast, I want to try to make this an issue that's not taboo anymore. There's something that can be discussed. I was thinking as well, did both of you know each other before you both like worked with each other in the Counterterrorism Center or –

[00:47:21] KW: In the Counterterrorism Center. Yes. But I don't think we knew each other before.

[00:47:25] PW: It's amazing how much of a blur it is because of how much was going on. I agree with you. I don't think so. But I wouldn't swear to that.

[00:47:33] KW: It really was a blur. But I think also, we all had our little areas of things that we did, and I was aware of Phil had his area. And then when I went to work for him, I was very grateful. I mean, you could describe yourself as mediocre. But I thought it was a lifeline. That someone who had the perspective of George Tenet, who was then the director in the seventh floor and in the White House, you're having this profound challenge. I could ask him and he'd bring that perspective in it.

I mean, even some things I remember we were on 24/7 operations. So it was the one manager for that. We need a refrigerator. And you might think that's actually pretty easy for a big organization like the CIA to get. It's not. And so I was like, “Look, people are working all night. There's no cafeteria.” And so he had someone actually take the refrigerator out of the big front office and drive it down the hallway of CIA headquarters and plug it in there. And I was like, “Oh my God! That's a miracle.”

[00:48:30] PW: I think that's a lie. But I'd be happy to say it happened. I'll tell, you just a quick comment on this one. N, w when I do TV, and various presidents nominate people that people always look at resumes, and my first question having gone through that is what is the temperament and judgment of this person and perspective as opposed to just looking at a resume and experience? I learned to value judgment, perspective, maturity so much more than whether someone had 17 years in counterterrorism, because you can't replicate a cool head and calmness in a circumstance like that. You can come up with a great resume, but you can't come up with that mindset. And we had mixed results there.

[00:49:11] AH: One of the things both of your interventions there is, basically, to me anyway, it's saying don't confuse inputs with outputs. Don't confuse the amount of hours you work with what comes out on the other side. Don't confuse what you can see on paper and a CV with what's going to come out on the other side. It's not going to necessarily lead to mature, or wise, or opposite judgments. But maybe that's something we can come back to. I just want to go back to what you were saying, Kristin. So working in the position that you were in the run up to Iraq. That's obviously a very interesting period. And Phil spoke about being on a team with Ambassador Dobbins and so forth. So I guess the question is, that transition from 9/11 happens. It was planned from Afghanistan. We go into Afghanistan, and then the pivot over to Iraq. Can you walk us through your professional or personal kind of judgment on that pivot? Because there're a whole variety of perspectives, right? Some people say that Iraq was the right thing to do. And other people say if Osama bin Laden was Public Enemy number one, why the hell were we hunting? I mean, there's a lot that we can chew on there, but just help us understand how you view that kind of pivot.

[00:50:33] KW: And it funny, because I don't – And, Phil, I'm really interested to hear your perspective, because you came at it from a different place. I don't feel like it was a pivot. The first time I heard a policymaker asked did Iraq do this was 9/12. So it was a constant thread that a lot of us felt was a distraction from the major part of the mission. And I think even my perspective and the Office of Terrorism analysis, it was a distraction, because there are so much to do to build the networks, and the teams, and the partnerships to do this whole global war on terror at speed and scale. And then there was this question about, “Well, Saddam, Saddam, Saddam.” Bob Woodward has written extensively on this, as have others. And it's clear that when the Bush Administration came in, there were leaders in the administration who had a viewpoint that Saddam Hussein was a risk, a risk to our national security. And as 9/11 happened, I think they convinced the president, his own words in the Woodward book, that the risk was unacceptable now.

And I felt like there were two reasons that they were looking to – Justification to go with war with Iraq. One was the WMD story. And we all know how that played out. And the other one was had they had a role in 9/11. And I felt blessed to have several dozen officers of incredible talent experience to kind of take a red team look at this, because they hadn't seen the data before.

They weren't attached to what the party line was. And they came, I think, did some fantastic work. And saying we didn't have evidence of that. And really, evidence-based approach so in terms of a high-order strategic intelligence piece that wasn't what we did. But that's not what was called for at the time.

So I think, for me, it wasn't a pivot. It was just a constant – Just speaking personally, a little bit of an annoyance and nuisance, until it became very, very clear that we really had to address it regardless – Again, my opinion didn't matter. We had to look at it to say, “What if? Is this possible? What does the data tell us?” And we did that. And it told us there wasn't any evidence that they had had a role in 9/11. It had some contexts. There were some bits and pieces. But on the margins, tiny, tiny pieces and not related to 9/11.

And I think, really, my perspective is, there were a lot of people cherry picking the information. What I mean is, if you get in, I don't know, 10,000 intelligence reports, three or four of them might have had some allegation in some way, shape or form that some contact happened. And the problem was, I think, there were people feeding those two or three to the Vice President's office, and those were the ones were getting sent. They were getting the whole balance of it. Policymakers are allowed to have a worldview. Their views are informed by the experience of all the jobs they've had before. And the responsibility to the nation, which, oh, by the way, they had just failed and felt profoundly.

So if you're looking at risk, that's where they were coming from. Is this an unacceptable risk to us? They are allowed to have that. They're elected. And every four years, American people elect a leadership. And we've signed up to their worldview until four years later. We aren't. And so when they have that worldview, what we have to do is go look at it from an intelligence perspective. It's not to support it or to oppose it, but to say this is what the intelligence says. This is what the reporting is. This is the context of the reporting. These are our confidence levels in the reporting. These are the gaps in our reporting. And it's not always as sexy as some folks would like it to be, because that's not our job. Our job is to stick close to the truth. Now, Phil, you've done so much of this. What's your perspective on that?

[00:54:48] PM: We made a mistake. And the mistake – In my career, looking at mistakes, they typically aren't tactical ankle level mistakes. They're mistakes in retrospect that are complex at

the time and simple in rearview. The mistake is what we called first customer. A customer gets what they want. A client does not. A legal counselor tells a client sometimes that's not going to work in a court. The first customer was a term we used. That was the reference to the White House in the PDB. The President is the first customer. We spent too much time, I think, in retrospect, again, a reflection of naivete and lack of experience, saying, "Kristin's dead on."

If the White House had a thing for Saddam, whether we were there or not, I think that the White House would have found a way to go after Saddam with or without us, which is a different question. But we spent too much time saying, "If you want to look at it that way, you could see Saddam as a threat, if you want to." He was a declining threat, partly because his inability to access military material. I used to work on the Iraq problem, inability to train heavy equipment transports. I'm not a military expert, but really important if you want to get tanks to the border. They had a problem with everything, from heavy equipment transports, to getting spare parts. Their ability to project power in the wake of the Kuwait war was declining. But the question again and again and again and the way we were beat down by the White House was, "If you look at it this way, could you see Saddam as a threat?" And I think in treating the White House and others as a customer instead of a client, we said, "You could. You could." And that was the genesis in some ways of the Powell speech. I went up with him to New York. What a turning point that was. But the White House, Kristin's right, they get elected. We don't. They have a right to do what they want. If the president chooses to intervene in Iraq, he can choose to do that. We should have been better at asking it was very complicated then. We got cherry picked, but of ensuring that we respected the difference between client and customer. And I would say we two generally decided on being customer support and not client support.

[00:56:57] KW: Well, if I could ask a question.

[00:56:59] AH: Yeah. Go for it.

[00:57:00] KW: So in that vein, what do you see as the victories of the 9/11 era?

[00:57:06] PW: On 9/12, you would have said there would be a second wave. If you had told people is there going to be another strategic attack on America of significance? And you had said not only will there not be another attack of this magnitude. There will not be anything that

Americans would say is even close to this magnitude. You'd say you're living on that stream world. I look back and say we won. The question for the American people was can you eliminate a threat to a family in Peoria? And the answer is, with a lot of mistakes along the way, we can. If you had told people that the day after nobody would have believed that. I'd captured this in two words. We won. They lost.

[00:57:50] KW: We got some optimism.

[00:57:53] PM: Let's take this down again, if you can.

[00:57:55] AH: Okay. I mean, just in terms of your own careers, this could be optimistic, or pessimistic, or something in between. But just for your own careers, do you think that 9/11, in terms of your own career, was an accelerant? Or was it something that derailed your career? Or did it take off in a direction you didn't see it going? Or does it kind of put you in a funk? Or help us understand the trajectory of your career and the role that 9/11 played?

[00:58:30] PM: Holy Toledo. I was on the National Intelligence Council, and then on working at the National Security Council, and an interesting job before 911, but not transformational. To go from that to be sitting and talking to senators, I must have done I don't know how many senate briefings. I talked to the senators every time they want on TV on Sundays. I talked to the director probably almost every day, deciding what Kristin would get in terms of PDB product. Going over to the FBI to see how they dealt not only with cases, but talking to the FBI Director, Director Muller, as often as three times a day about things like how do we train people for intelligence?

If you're going to do this for a living, looking back and saying there was the fight of a generation, and I got to see it from both mid to senior level of both the CIA and the FBI, how do you replicate it? Sometimes I wish I had been a teacher to inspire a kid to read. My first job applications were to be a high school teacher. I sent out 38 applications as a graduate student and got 38 rejections, which is how I ended up at the CIA. I mean, it's such an inspirational thing to teach a kid to read. But if you can't get that, if you're sitting around 20 years after 9/11 saying, "I had a front row seat to maybe influenced decisions about the fight of the generations." I didn't think of it then like ever. You look back, and I do events like this and a lot of speeches and a little

bit of teaching, and you look back once in a blue moon and say, “That was kind of weird. Remarkable. It just kind of weird.”

[01:00:03] KW: Yeah, I think I have the same kind of sense of awe, that how fortunate are we that we got to have a front row to history unfolding for the duration of our careers. So I worked the first Persian Gulf War. I worked the Balkans War. I worked the second Iraq War. I worked war on terror. And so these moments, and then just to see these punctuation points really of world history as a political science major in college. I mean, how cool is that to actually have the inside information? But I don't think any of us thought about it in terms of whether it was good for our career. It was just I have to do this. I have to do – And wherever that took us, there was a great work to be done.

And so it's not – I remember my first job, I was 27, my first agency assignment. They told me I needed to do a five-year plan. And that sounded very important to me. And, “Oh, I don't know how to do this.” And so I dutifully did it, and then got reassigned in six months. And I dutifully redid it. And I got reassigned to six months. And then I thought that is just howie! There's no five-year plan possible.

But I do think in terms of opportunity to see history being made and contribute to helping the United States make the best decisions for its national security, epically, wonderfully incredible to felt like I got the opportunity to do that for 20 years.

[01:01:39] PW: I think to add an asterisk, there's just one thing to go back for the 100th time to perspective and what people going into this need to remember. I've talked to one of my sisters every day. She's a she's a teacher of kids who are 10 and 11. And for her to bring someone from a second to a fourth grade reading level, that's transformational for that child. That child went from below average to competing with their peers. I say that because I remember thinking then, as I do now, even probably even more now, often success for us was whether someone would die in a drone strike. You have to remember every day that even though you have a front seat to history, that when success is the destruction of human life, you better think every day about what you're doing. I'm not saying you don't do that. I'm saying you don't celebrate it.

I remember the day after I was on TV, the day after Bin Laden was killed, and people were celebrating and getting drunk in Washington. The risk of offending the listeners, I thought it was completely offensive. Yes, that was a huge success. He was responsible for the deaths of 1000s of people, but you never, never celebrate the loss of life. And if you're an officer and a front row seat saying, "I love this, and we should keep pushing and kill as many as we can." And we had a few colleagues like that. That is not the right perspective to have. This is a profound business. It's important, but I often remember my sister. Important for her is bringing someone up to a fourth grade reading level. That's something to honor and respect. You have to remember what business we're in and make sure you don't lose perspective that the other person has a life too. Be careful.

[01:03:21] KW: Yeah. I think of it through my children's eyes. So my sons were four and six at the time. And, I mean, they spent months and months and months traumatized about planes going into buildings, and not wanting to fly, and are planes going to crash into a building? I mean, it's not just mine, right? It's played out over millions of families around the world. And over the course of time, and they knew what their parents did. And I had the chance to bring them in when I was done with my tour to see the Vice President and Scooter Libby and shake hands and take a photo op with them. And my son, my four year old stuttered terribly. And like his face is red and he's trying really, really hard to get this question out to the Vice President, who's really was very kind to him. And he said, "When are you going to find Osama Bin Bobbin?" And I was just astonished that he knew the name and that he could ask that question. And the vice president said to him, "Well, your mother's people are working on it, and our people are working on it. And we are going to try to do everything we can do to bring him to justice." And Phil says it's not something to celebrate. But being able, 10 years later, to wake them up in the middle of the night to hear President Obama announce that the boogeyman for them was no longer around was just the sense of relief maybe. And it didn't mean the threats were over. And it didn't mean Al Qaeda ended. But it meant this one chapter, we could move on to the next piece. And ISIS is a whole different podcast. But I felt that so much as a parent and as a national security officer just sense of, "Oh, thank God."

[01:05:19] PW: That is so right. The contrast between what I saw out. I was literally looking outside the window in a TV studio, the sense of celebration versus the sense of relief. That's what I felt. Another chapter is over. Human being with a soul, that is Osama bin Laden, is gone.

He had to go. That's an imminent threat, which is okay in terms of the action that was taken against him, but celebrating with a flag around your shoulders and getting drunk on beers, that was really disturbing.

[01:05:47] KW: But you know what? I've kind of feel like the people who are out there were the kids, why my son's age and five or 10 years older. And to me, it just felt like the sense of relief, the way they were conveying their relief because of – I mean, that's the specter they grew up with. And junior high and high school and college, that was how they let it out as an intelligence professional. We can't do that, right? But if you think that's how they grew up, and so many military families lost their loved ones, and so many children lost their parents. I mean, I think it's this this feeling of relief and how it was expressed to my viewpoint.

[01:06:25] PW: I would disagree with that. I mean, I think one of the challenges of American culture is the sense that we kick ass overseas. Let's go into Iraq and kick ass. As opposed to a sense that says, "This is a profound choice. We don't celebrate this choice." Afghanistan was a war of necessity. In retrospect, Iraq was a war of choice. We typically don't do wars of choice. That was a mistake, and supported it then. That was a mistake. But I think we give American kids in this country a sense that America kicks ass.

I do not think that that's a healthy way to raise a child. But you should give a sense that these are profound decisions to send a man or woman overseas potentially to die. In the culture we have, this culture of men are badass as they go overseas and kick some ass. This is not good. And this is not universal around the world. I've lived in Europe a couple of times. I'm more comfortable in some ways with telling a kid, "Be very careful about how you use the force that you're given."

[01:07:23] AH: I think one of the things that I always think about just hearing you speak there was when I used to work at the 9/11 Museum, it was a scene that a woman in Brooklyn had her front yard. And every day after 9/11, she flipped the thing over, and it was counting up the years, days, and months.

[01:07:46] PW: And I have a humorous story about that. That was really frustrating. As someone who used to spend a lot of time, especially with the US Senate and House of

Representatives. The questions about Bin Laden I thought were so misplaced. The question we had was can you prevent the next threat? And instead, the question we got was where's Osama bin Laden? The number of times Bin Laden's name came up when I was Deputy Director of Counterterrorism was relatively low. The names that came up were the people who were the architects of the next 9/11. That typically wasn't Bin Laden. American people want to know where Bin Laden was. We want to know how to stop the next plot. Those were very different. And I'm glad we didn't spend more time on Bin Laden, because if we had let the operators go and chase Bin Laden – Now, just to close with a quick story. The funniest boss I ever had was a guy named Jose Rodriguez, who was infamous for – World famous. I love the guy. But for that he was the tape destruction guy, the guy who ordered the destruction of the CIA interrogation tapes. And he came in my office one day. We shared a wall when I was Deputy Director for Counterterrorism. He says – You know what he says? If one more person asked me where Bin Laden is, I'm going to kick their ass. I'm eliminating some words. Jose was quite colorful in his language.

So he comes in the next day and he says, “I came home last night and my wife looked at me and said, “Jos.” She used to call them Jos. His wife is very funny hoes. “Jos, I was at some meeting today and somebody wanted to know where Bin Laden was.” So I said, “Did you kick your wife's ass? I mean, seriously. You told me yesterday. So anyway, a little humor, and counterterrorism goes a long way. That was a very humorous moment.

[01:09:16] AH: And I was quite interested in a phrase that you use there just now, Kristin, a front row seat to history unfolding. And both of you have your own stories about that. Just give us a sense of some of those major moments that you've found yourself a part of that you sometimes pinch yourself about.

[01:09:37] PW: I tell you, I mean, there's – I don't really think about this that much anymore. But you talked about Powell. I have a couple memories of that. I went out for donuts because I couldn't watch him speak. We had spent so much time on that speech. But one of the memorable things for me, it must have been, I'm going to guess, late October, maybe early November of 2001. Ambassador Dobbins knew that Afghanistan – Kandahar had not fallen yet. And the word quagmire was being used. People forget this. As in we're going to face the same

result in Afghanistan that the Soviets faced. We're going to be bled dry for years. So there's a great sense of unease not just on the counterterrorism front, but on the counterinsurgency front.

We flew into see Burhanuddin Rabbani, that the putative president of Afghanistan in an airport just north of Kabul, Bagram Airport. We got off the plane. We had a military aircraft. There are probably five or six of us with Ambassador Dobbins. And standing on the tarmac were part of the Northern Alliance. That was the Alliance before led by Massoud until he was murdered, or assassinated. And all these guys had sort of uniforms on and basketball shoes. And they were in a row saluting us. We went into a room – And this isn't a place where the entirety of America has its attention focused. And we're meeting the semi, sort of, kind of president of the country. And there were no windows and no lights in the room. No light bulb, because the whole area at that airfield was blown out.

And I remember sitting there, and this probably less than 60 days after 9/11 thinking that I had followed the – Worked on the issue of CIA support to the rebels against the Soviets thinking we're going to be like the Soviets. We're going to be at this forever. And I'm going to remember this meeting as the beginning of a quagmire for America. My analytic capabilities as you've noticed over the last hour and a half were consistently wrong. But I remember that.

And then looking back years later, even months later after Kandahar fell and the inauguration of Karzai, I think it was on December 23. We went into watch him being inaugurated. I was of course thinking as a negative guy there would be a car bomb there. We went to watch him be inaugurated thinking, “Holy Toledo! The Northern Alliance rolled through. The CIA special ops and the military, the US Army rolled through. After that meeting 60 days ago. This actually worked out okay. I couldn't believe it. Flew home through Central Asia through Uzbekistan, like this is awesome. We actually did it. Went home and celebrated Christmas. It was great.

[01:12:08] KW: From my perspective, I don't have – There're these snapshots in time, right? I didn't look at all of those parts and pieces until really my career was done, because you're just so busy on what the mission is in front of you, whatever part and piece that you're working on now. But I think understanding that projection of power is such an incredible responsibility. And whether that's to get involved or not get involved in the Balkans War, where there was a

genocide taking place, and there're horrific, horrific murders of 1000s and 1000s of people, or Iraq rolling into Kuwait. And the question is they're going to continue to go after Saudi Arabia.

And so there's these things I remember reading as a student. And you think about these moments in time related to Vietnam or whatever the crises were. I didn't understand as a student what I would become much more familiar with as a national security officer, which is that isn't just writing on a piece of paper and an outcome that was preordained. When this is vibrant, changing all the time, and there's an opportunity influence things for the United States government, there's an opportunity to inform people that you can shape what that outcome is, hopefully, for what's best for the United States by providing the right information at the right time. And so to have a role in contributing to that was really just a tremendous honor. And as a political science major, I can't imagine having had a better experience in living political science live.

So one thing for anyone listening who might be a student, and, Phil, you focus on this a lot, is oftentimes people ask what does it take, and they're thinking of foreign languages, or degrees, or whatever specific school they need to go to. But Phil is really right. The resume is a piece of it. But it's what experience are you getting at it? Are you a critical thinker? Are you a great writer? Are you a student of history? Meaning not I took this class and I read these four books. But you're reading it in your spare time and you're trying to understand it at a deeper level. And those kinds of skills are so important.

Some of the greatest intelligence officers we had didn't have degrees related to political science. I think, Sue Gordon, the former PD DNI, the Principal Deputy Director for Intelligence, was a microbiology, focused on Zoology major. I think, Andy Liebman, the former Deputy Director of NCTC, wasn't he music and forestry?

[01:14:55] PM: Forestry, yeah.

[01:14:56] KW: Forestry, right? So it's not actually the major. It's what are your thinking abilities, and your writing abilities, and your intellectual curiosity from my perspective.

[01:15:07] PM: I used to interview a bunch of people. And it's hard to train what we really needed. And that is how to think critically and not be close-minded. How to write? How to speak? And how to get along with other people? The fifth I would say is to have a passion for the business. Don't do it as a business. Do it as Kristin says. It's something you're interested in, you read about. So you look at a resume and you realize a resume doesn't give you any of that. It gives you, "I got a three-four from the University of Virginia, and I have my degrees in political science. I need you to think critically and have humility in your thinking. Speak, write, get along with people and have passion." That's 0 for five on a resume. So I learned that the overlap between a resume and somebody who would perform well wasn't as – That Venn diagram wasn't as clear as I would have thought going into the business. Trying to understand especially whether someone can think creatively, critically and with humility is really hard.

[01:16:00] AH: For anybody that's listening that's thinking, I would like to have those five things going into an interview. How do we develop them?

[01:16:08] PW: Speak anytime you can for 30 seconds about anything. If you can't capture what you're going to say in one sentence or less, you're not ready to speak. Write at your writing center in college. If you can't capture what you're going to write in a theme paper in one sentence, you're not ready to write. In terms of critical thinking, if you can't make the counter argument to what you're saying in one sentence, that means you're not thinking about the other side, clearly enough. In terms of getting along with other people, speak everyday with somebody you don't like. And in terms of understanding passion for the business, if you go home and say, "Thank God, I don't have to think about that again," you got a problem. So that's my five steps to incredible success in government.

[01:16:45] AH: I think that's –

[01:16:48] KW: I have nothing to add.

[01:16:48] PM: And then quit after 25 years.

[01:16:53] AH: We've done a pretty good job of covering a lot of the things that I wanted to speak about. But I guess, coming towards the end now, what are your views now 20 years on?

To me, as a historian, it's fascinating, the longest war in the history of the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, the three Anglo-Afghan wars, none of which ended particularly well for Britain. And then Afghanistan has now overtook Vietnam, as long as one American history. What are your thoughts looking by 20 years on on everything that's transpired in between?

[01:17:33] PW: Very simply, the mission that we were given the day after succeeded. The destruction, not the elimination, but the destruction of the threat to American cities in American families, but the opportunity to think about what happened 60, 70 years ago in terms of the Marshall Plan for America to build on that and to build an international respect. The inability to focus on Iraq for an extended period of time, and the distraction of Afghanistan were strategic tragedies, strategic tragedy, so that the initial mission that we were given succeeded. How America pivoted from that to build what we could have built, like what we did after World War Two, I think was an epic failure, epic. And it was our choice.

[01:18:18] KW: I think Secretary Powell in some of those early days, especially related to Iraq said, and I don't have the quote exactly right. But if you break it, you own it. We broke it. We own it. And look all the things that have happened as a result. And so Phil's distinction between the mission to provide safety and security to American people being successful, and the vast tragedy that are the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for civilians in both places for the military, the US military, and on that of our allies. Really, I'm not a historian. But I think having clearly defined views of what success looked like and how we're going to contribute to that society not allowing that kind of thing to happen again. I don't think there was enough time focused on what successful endgame was and what we needed to bring to it to make sure it didn't become an even more dangerous space for us, which it is in both places.

[01:19:25] AH: And what's your analysis of what role 9/11 Afghanistan, the war on terror, has played on the history of the agency?

[01:19:35] PW: This was not classic intelligence. And my take is we're coming out of 20 years focusing on very tactical questions. How can I find John Doe halfway around the world so that we can find, fix and finish him tomorrow? Whether that's a raid or some other kind of operation? That's vastly different than the traditional post World War II questions of what's going on in the Kremlin? How do we think about Kremlin attitudes toward Europe and military action in Europe?

What's going on in China with the South China Sea? How do we think about North Korea and strategic perspectives in North Korea on developing a missile program that can reach further into the continent of United States? How do we think about Iran's nuclear program and how to blunt that going forward years? Those are classic strategic planning problems. How to understand what we say in intelligence is plans an intention of a foreign adversary?

But we spent 20 years for good reason developing very tactical capabilities among 27, 28, 30 year olds to look at tactical information to find, fix and finish one person halfway around the world. I think that will stay in the agency because there are going to be future questions, whether it's drug traffickers, human traffickers, cartels. But I see a shift back to the kinds of questions you would have faced 25 years ago. How do you think about the plans and intentions and countries that are developing nuclear weapons or the threatened Western Europe and United States? That is the bread and butter of what intelligence is? And I think the question for the agency is how do you balance that tactical kind of counterterrorism stuff with ensuring we do the mission that we've had since the National Security Act of 1947?

[01:21:09] KW: I would just add something we haven't talked about yet today, which is the complexity of things like pandemics, right? Most profound loss of life. I try not to look every day because it's too painful. But 600,000 Americans died. 3000 died on 9/11. And it profoundly shifted our nation. 600,000 Americans are dead, hundreds of thousands, if not, a billion. I think I don't know what the number is internationally, but significant loss of life worldwide. How will that shape our mission going forward I think is a huge question not only for the Central Intelligence Agency, but for the US national security community and all of the national security communities of the world that we face climate change, where we're seeing profound shifts in the drought, and flooding cycles for nations that are already very poor and at risk of extremism, or already have extremists have footholds or strongholds in important areas. How does that shift migration patterns? What does that do to poverty around the world?

And some people can say, "Why does that matter?" Well, that matters because we don't want to see people go through that. And we don't want to have them find Suqour in the hands of these extremist groups. And so I think these profound multinational international challenges are going to reach to shape and reshape what has become the post-9/11 era and what's next. I don't have a label for it. I don't know how to define it. But it isn't boundary issues of the boundaries of the

United States of America, the boundaries ever of other countries. Climate change doesn't care. And neither does cyber, and certainly pandemics. And so I think we're at another – We've turned a chapter in a long one, and an important one, to something that is actually even more complex to address from my perspective.

[01:23:23] AH: If there was one artifact, because we're in a museum, and museums are in the artifact business. If there was one artifact that you could use to reflect on your journey or on the period that you've lived on since 911, what would it be? Is there something that you have at home or something that you're like, "Wow! This is really powerful."

[01:23:49] PW: Yes. It's a tape. The first time I met a mother whose son had been working in one of the World Trade Centers as a trader, and she had maintained the tape of him calling saying, "Don't worry, I'll be home." I heard that 15 years ago, maybe, and I'll never forget it. Her son never came home. I mentioned the difficulty of history replicating the sense of loss and pain and sadness, and then trying to understand why America reacted like it did, which I think history will struggle to understand, understanding the psyche of those days. The tape of her son's voice, and the taping played by a mother speaking to an audience who had replayed that tape at that point, no doubt, 100 times is just – "Don't worry, Mom, I'll be home." Unbelievable. He never came home.

[01:24:46] KW: Yeah, and for me, it's a photo. When I entered on duty at the agency, it was in January of 1989. And there were three other women who also entered on duty the same day, and we all ended up sitting together. Back in that day, you went from one building, to the next building, to the next building and you were subdivided by groups. So you get on this bus, you get on this bus. And so every subdivision, we were all still together.

We ended up in an assignment together at the National Photographic Interpretation Center and becoming imagery analysts. And we all became the best of friends. And we're all – I mean, if you saw all four of us, you could tell the agency had a style of people who they hired, because we all looked very similar. And thankfully that's evolved. But got married, had kids, debated with each other about everything. And one of them is Jennifer Matthews, who died at coast when a suicide bomber blew up a number of people at our base. And the picture is of the four of us at one of the weddings. And the happy look that we had on our faces. And when we started that

day, we were so full of optimism and excitement to be involved in this mission. And she died in the service of the nation. And going to the funeral and hearing her daughter, 13 year old daughter sing an acapella version of Do You Hear the People Sing? from Les Mis. To have the presence of mind to do that is amazing. And so that picture reminds me of the cost of war in a very personal way. And I have to say there are four chairs in this room. One of them has her name on it, because I don't want people to forget. Thank you for having us.

[01:26:43] AH: Thank you. Yeah, absolutely.

[01:26:44] PM: Thank you. Especially great podcast now that it's over. But thank you for having us.

[END]