



The Targeter: How to Hunt Terrorists (11/25/19)

00:00:27 Harmony Barker: Good evening and welcome. My name is Harmony Barker, and I am the assistant manager of public programs at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. It's my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's program: "The Targeter: How to Hunt Terrorists." As always, I'd like to extend a special welcome to our museum members and to those tuning in to our live web broadcast at 911memorial.org/live.

00:00:50 Tonight, we are very pleased to be joined by Nada Bakos, author of "The Targeter: My Life in the C.I.A., Hunting Terrorists and Challenging the White House." Nada Bakos is a highly regarded national security and intelligence expert with 20 years of experience. As a C.I.A. analyst, she was a key member of the team charged with analyzing the relationship between Iraq, Al Qaeda, and the 9/11 attacks.

During the war in Iraq, she served as the chief targeting officer, tracking Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the founder of Al Qaeda in Iraq, which later became ISIS. Al Zarqawi was killed in a targeted strike in 2006. In "The Targeter," she takes us behind the scenes for a look inside the world of high-stakes foreign intelligence and her role in, within the campaign to stop top-tier targets inside Al Qaeda.

00:01:40 Nada has been featured in the PBS "Frontline" show "The Secret History of ISIS" and the Emmy Award-winning HBO documentary "Manhunt." She has also appeared as a guest commentator on CNN, ABC, Fox, and MSNBC, to name a few, and frequently serves as a resource for journalists at "The New York Times," "Wal Street Journal," "Washington Post," and other media outlets.

We'd like to thank Nada for sharing her time and insights with us. And without further ado, please join me in welcoming Nada Bakos in conversation with executive vice president and deputy director for museum programs Clifford Chanin.

(applause)

00:02:23

Clifford Chanin: Thank you, Harmony. Nada, welcome. I want to add a word to Harmony's introduction because we met, it was over two years ago, we were on the West Coast actually to do an Interview for the exhibition "Revealed: The Hunt for Bin Laden." And through the network of former colleagues, Nada agreed to sit with us. And, um, it was that conversation, like a number of others we had with former colleagues of yours, that really opened up the picture of what the work that you did and your colleagues did was, and allowed us to think very differently about what the exhibition might be able to present if we got the right cooperation, et cetera, et cetera.

00:03:07

But, you know, hearing you then speak about that work really was very important in the way we began to think about doing the exhibition. So I was particularly looking forward to your book and the opportunity to talk to you. And I will tell you, having finished the book this weekend, it does not disappoint. It really does get into...

(laughter)

00:03:27

Clifford Chanin: Well, you know, yes, I wasn't gonna lead all the way up to just drop it like that. But, you know, it, it really sort of brings you into the tensions, the stresses, but also the sense of accomplishment that went up and down for you, I don't think it's an exaggeration to state, during your time there. So we will talk about the different phases of your career at the C.I.A. But I think it's important to start, to ask you how you came to the C.I.A., because there is a 9/11 reason behind your work there.

00:03:57 Nada Bakos: Actually, I joined the C.I.A. before 9/11. I was very focused on working overseas, and there wasn't a lot of opportunity at the time when I first graduated from undergrad. And so as I spent, you know, part of my career working various, you know, professional jobs, I saw an ad in "The Economist," and ended up applying online in 1999.

Clifford Chanin: Right, but you were in HR at first at the C.I.A.

00:04:19 Nada Bakos: I was, I was hired as an analyst to do strategic development, essentially. So we were looking at how they were allocating resources in their operations side with, you know, human resources and finances, and trying to bring them out of that O.S.S.-World War II paradigm, and shift them into, like, a modern workforce.

Clifford Chanin: Right, right. So even the C.I.A. has an HR department, which... You know, you've got to, you've gotta have one. But you wanted to get into the action and you wanted to move. And it's interesting, again, from the outside, to think that, you know, the HR function is an entry point, but you can move elsewhere within the organization. So how did that proceed for you?

00:04:59 Nada Bakos: So, after 9/11, I was working-- basically volunteering part of my hours during the day and later in the evening within the Counterterrorism Center. And that work was what I was most interested in. I was really actually focused on wanting to work in what was then called the Directorate of Intelligence, and now I think it's Directorate of Analysis, but that's where all the analysts work. And so I ended up applying for a job that was in line with my academic background, which was in economics.

00:05:29 Clifford Chanin: You talk about analysis and becoming an analyst. One of the interesting things that we learned, and again, involving the exhibition, was, you know, the specific differences among the different jobs. I mean, it's kind of a continuum of work, and some of the work product gets handed off from one to the other. But in those early days as an analyst working on counterterrorism, what were you focusing on?

00:05:53 Nada Bakos: In the early days in the Counterterrorism Center, I was focused on answering the question of whether or not Al Qaeda and 9/11 were affiliated in any way with Iraq and Saddam Hussein's government. And, which is an odd way to go about answering an intelligence question. Typically, the way that teams are set up within the C.I.A. and the intelligence community is to answer an intel, national security objective. Whether it's through policy resources that they're... You know, policymakers are interested in something, or it's something that's predetermined through strategic planning that actually takes place.

00:06:32 Clifford Chanin: So the, the challenge that was put to you was to try to find a connection that, at least initially, was very hard to find. It turned out not to be findable because it didn't exist. But rather than coming to you and saying, "What does the intelligence show you about this question?", there were... there were... there were... There was a focus on trying to get a particular answer to a particular question. Is that... is that fair to say?

00:06:57 Nada Bakos: Right, yeah, that's... that is exactly what happened. And in fairness to the policymaker and to, you know, elements within the White House and the Pentagon who were interested in answering that question in a specific way, the agency didn't have a lot of really good collection about Al Qaeda and Iraq's support to terrorism. What kind of... you know, terrorist organizations was Iraq supporting at the time? So they, they did have a blind spot because it wasn't a pre-eminent question, because there hadn't been any indications that Iraq was supporting any significant terrorist organizations.

00:07:29 Clifford Chanin: Right, right. But it seemed to be driven by a broader purpose.

Nada Bakos: 100%, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And so how did that translate for you? At that point, you're more junior in your career. So whatever was coming in wouldn't have come directly to you, it would have come to some managers or supervisor, whoever it was. But what was that as they were experiencing it, to your knowledge, and how did it-- if it did-- translate to what you were doing?

00:07:56

Nada Bakos: So policymakers at that time had a way of asking analysts questions without going directly to the analysts. So it would be funneled through one specific office at the C.I.A., typically, and then passed down to the managers at the working level. For us, we had direct connectivity with the White House because of the question. So that was completely unusual. But my, my immediate boss also had been a briefer for Vice President Cheney at one point.

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So she had had a personal relationship with him, understood his mindset, and anticipated what he was gonna be looking for. So she structured it so that we were building all of the analysis-- and this is typical of C.I.A., where you put together an entire intelligence assessment and give it to them in one paper. And that's what we were compiling prior to the war.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And so, um, did it feel abnormal at that point? Or was this... as you were experienced it, within the realm of... expected?

Nada Bakos: It was abnormal.

Clifford Chanin: It was.

00:08:56

Nada Bakos: Because my immediate boss was not a senior-level executive, essentially, within the C.I.A. The connectivity that she had with the White House, that was completely unusual for her level. Not for nothing, the rest of the C.I.A. was focused on other things within the Counterterrorism Center. I mean, Al Qaeda and Afghanistan and Pakistan

at that point. (chuckling): So we were just kind of left to our own resources to go ahead and have that connectivity and manage it, which my boss actually did pretty well.

00:09:28 Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And I wonder what it looked like from the seventh floor of the executive headquarters of the C.I.A. to have had this direct connection elsewhere in the building from the White House.

Nada Bakos: Yeah, I mean, they did get to see, obviously, the information that we were sending out and the questions that were coming in. But the vice president—and this actually was in the news-- had actually visited C.I.A. headquarters directly to meet with us, which, that's very unusual.

00:09:56 Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. So this is in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, but also, of course, after the war in Iraq is underway. And there are a couple of, of focuses for the intelligence gathering: the connection you mentioned-- real or not-- between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, but also the search for weapons of mass destruction. But those were two separate tracks. Was there, did that emerge naturally as two separate tracks? Would there have been a thought that those might have been two related subjects, or how did that go?

00:10:32 Nada Bakos: So they're related in the sense that there were sources that actually had information on both tracks. There's, substantively, we were different analysts. The weapons of mass destruction analysts had typically a science background, something in weapons systems, so that they understood all the science behind this and how to analyze it.

00:10:50 The rest of us had more of a background, either geographic or something on terrorism, so that we were able to make those... Answer those questions. But we had similar... Where we had the same sources that we were pulling from for information. And one of the sources didn't seem to line up on our side. The information they were giving on terrorist organizations and Al Qaeda, we had seen... we had not seen anywhere else. We couldn't verify it through any other means.

Clifford Chanin: And was that... was that making a connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda, or what...

Nada Bakos: Trying to make a connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda.

Clifford Chanin: Okay, so he was—or he or she-- was telling you that this was a connection to explore further.

Nada Bakos: Yes.

00:11:30

Clifford Chanin: And was that source the same who was talking about weapons of mass...

Nada Bakos: He was also talking about weapons of mass destruction.

Clifford Chanin: Okay, okay.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And so providing favorably disposed information that the administration might have wanted to you, but not something that you could support with other information.

Nada Bakos: Correct. And so we spell all of that out for the policymaker. Um., essentially called the paper "the Bible" at the time because it was so large, what we had actually delivered to the White House and to the Pentagon and to the senior Cabinet policymakers. And we talk about the veracity of the information in there, we talk about the fact that we can't vet this information anywhere else.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

00:12:08

Nada Bakos: And that this is a stand-alone item and we are unable to corroborate this.

Clifford Chanin: So I'm curious as to how you are trained to do this, because, as you say, this wasn't particularly your background, and, in any case, going to the C.I.A. requires training to become whatever your function is in the C.I.A. So what was the means by which you were given the ultimate responsibility that you were given to be an analyst on this stuff?

00:12:36

Nada Bakos: So the C.I.A. has two jobs that are kind of the pointy end of the spear. One of them's a case officer, which you typically see in movies like James Bond. They recruit someone to spy on behalf of the United States. They recruit somebody that's called an asset or an agent. And then the other one is the analyst, which you don't hear about as often. (laughs) Because evidently it doesn't make for a great movie, but I disagree.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: Oh, by the way, yes.

(laughter)

00:13:01

Nada Bakos: So, we go... the case officers go through the farm, which is, you know, you've typically heard of that even in Hollywood, and then the analysts go through what's... Something called the Career Analyst Program. And we are... (chuckling): We're writing constantly, constantly being tested. But first, before we even join the organization, or that side

of the organization, we have to pass a battery of tests to be able to qualify as an analyst.

So it has to be a certain mindset. Somebody who's... has capability in certain areas-- not just substantively, but they're testing you for logical sequencing and see what... You have executive function skills that they're looking for.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

00:13:42 Nada Bakos: But the Career Analyst Program itself, it's not like we get to get, you know, learn how to shoot a gun. We did... (laughs) Nerdy things, like, you know, we got to do exercises. One of them, actually, that was the most impactful for me was an exercise on the Rwandan genocide. And it was looking at all the information as it was coming in, as if it was real time, that when it was happening for the analysts that were working the accounts when the genocide was occurring.

00:14:13 And you're supposed to be, just from the information you were getting, figuring out, what do I tell the policymaker is happening on the ground? And how do I assess this with the dynamics within the region? So it's actually... I mean, it's really, really interesting training, and I think it's probably some of the most interesting training within the intelligence community. But that's just my... nerdy take on it.

00:14:39 Clifford Chanin: But, I mean, just to take the Rwanda case study a little further, I mean, I assume that there was a range of conclusions that was drawn, that were drawn by the different analysts.

Nada Bakos: Absolutely, yes.

Clifford Chanin: But I guess the point is, it's not clear in the moment what is going to happen.

Nada Bakos: Right, correct. Correct.

Clifford Chanin: And yet, I mean, these momentous things happen.

Nada Bakos: Mm-hmm.

00:15:00

Clifford Chanin: Yeah. So you become an analyst in this, in this question of Iraq, and at some point relatively soon, you volunteer to go overseas and to serve with the other intelligence agencies, with the military, so that the intelligence analysis and a link back to the C.I.A. can be quicker and stronger, because someone is going to be-- not just you alone-- but some team of C.I.A. officers is going to be on the ground, available to the military.

Nada Bakos: Right.

Clifford Chanin: First off, you know, what was your thinking in deciding to go over there?

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Nada Bakos (chuckling): That's a good question. Um, retrospectively, I know now, I had absolutely zero idea what I was getting into. I got off the airplane, I hadn't... Didn't even know where to go. I was volunteering because, at the time, I was still trying to prove myself as an analyst. And run up the ladder as fast as I can, which was my personality.

And I was the second person from our branch to go into Iraq after the invasion. And we were exactly as you described, we were the link back to headquarters, especially to our team, to deal with any other unanswered questions or other information that might come up about Iraq's support for terrorism.

00:16:16 Clifford Chanin: So we explored a bit in the exhibition-- you certainly do in your book-- this idea of having to break the silos between the agencies, the various intelligence agencies. But even in this case, more importantly, between the intelligence community and the military. So you get over there in the early phases of this, and I wonder if you could describe the, the transformation that you saw or didn't see at that point in time. How was that better integration, which I think eventually did happen to a much larger degree than existed initially...

00:16:47 Nada Bakos: Right.

Clifford Chanin: How did that look to you at that early point?

Nada Bakos: At the early point, it was total chaos, and we were in charge of our own operations, our own daily tasks, essentially. But... (chuckles) I called him-- we had a local SEAL that was living with us, not the animal, but the guys that were in Special Forces.

(laughter)

00:17:11 Nada Bakos: Basically living on, like, the same compound that we were living on, essentially just to be available at a moment's notice and get the rest of DEVGRU ready to go once we had a target. So it was actually kind of interesting in the sense of, I don't really think that had been done before, especially at that level.

I mean, so much planning typically goes into all of those types of raids. The initial reaction right after the invasion is pretty much chaos, for better or worse. So, you know, it was left to us underlings to figure out, what do we do with our day and how do we contribute to this mission?

00:17:49 Clifford Chanin: So that, I mean... I take your point, that there's a lot going on, and how you get organized is going to take time. But it also

seems at the same point that you sort of knew you needed each other in a way that maybe wasn't institutionalized until later. So can you tell us about, you know, an example of a particular mission or moment where the benefit of working more closely together-- which again, seems logical today but at that point was not really the standard practice-- you know, at... is there a particular moment that you remember or a story you could tell us that indicates to you all, "Ah, this is really something we really need to do more of"?

00:18:31

Nada Bakos: So my expertise was the Iraqi Intelligence Service, and the Iraqi Intelligence Service had many different directorates within the service itself. Some were responsible for assassinations, some were responsible for, basically, terrorist types of activities, and others were responsible for collecting information just like any other intelligence organization. And because I knew who all the main players were, and I understand sort of their M.O., who worked for them, I had, like, an entire org chart scoped out as to who was in the organization and who we thought actually would still be influential after the invasion and still be inside of Iraq.

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So when they would pick up guys who were part of the Iraqi Intelligence Service, I would go along on the raids, on some of these operations. And then I would be the substantive person who would ask the questions through the translator to figure out, is this person a bomb maker? Is this person higher within one of the directorates we're most interested in? You know, these weren't people that you were seeing on the deck of cards. I don't know if you remember that.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah.

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Nada Bakos: After the invasion, where it was, like, everybody from Saddam's government was on a card, a deck of cards. It was like their wanted posters, so that all the Marines that had this deck of cards supposedly should be able to recognize these people. But these guys weren't on those deck of cards, but they were actually, a lot of these people ended up joining Al Qaeda in Iraq. I mean, these are the people that really we should have been focusing on.

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Clifford Chanin: Mm, mm. And so you would go out with them, and would you interrogate people at the scene of the raid, or would you all come back and, and work it at a headquarters setting?

Nada Bakos: Depends.

Clifford Chanin: Really?

Nada Bakos: In both. And I would use the word "headquarters" very roughly. It was more like a blown-out airport hangar. You know, a plywood shack thing inside. (laughs) So, it would just depend on the objective, on the raid.

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Clifford Chanin: So you, you describe as sort of a way of bringing life to the kind of networking analysis you're doing, there is-- I mean, if you've seen the "Homeland" series, you know Carrie Mathison has filled an entire apartment at one point in the series with this incredible network of maps. But that's not a completely fictionalized version of how you all worked at that point.

Nada Bakos: I mean, that's true that we did use network analysis, but not like Crazy Carrie.

(laughter)

00:20:57

Clifford Chanin: I'm a little disappointed, I have to say.

Nada Bakos: Sorry. Because that can be overworked. That was actually part of the problem. So it's, like, if you were not trained in, in some of this intelligence analysis and how you would structure your intel and vet the information, you can literally network your way to everyone being tied to

Kevin Bacon. I mean, that was the joke at the time. It's, like, "Oh, that's another network chart," and I'll say, "From the military," that was that... "We'll find Kevin Bacon in that one somewhere," because it was just, like, this entire network of all of Iraq, you know, so that's what it would look like eventually, but...

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Clifford Chanin: So you describe it as, these charts as "representing the very height of the U.S. "modern intelligence- gathering capabilities and simultaneously reminded me of an elaborate Old West wanted poster." (chuckling): So it had, you know, a very focused dimension, but also it was the product of an incredible intelligence-gathering effort.

Nada Bakos: Right, yes.

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Clifford Chanin: So, um, you begin to do these interrogations, and it seems like, at a certain point-- I can't recall how long your tour was-- but you are feeling frustrated with just how things are being organized and whether or not there's sort of a strategic purpose for a lot of the things you're doing.

Nada Bakos: Oh, from the first day. I mean, I knew, A) before the invasion, this doesn't make a lot of sense. What is the point in this when we have all these resources that we need to throw at Al Qaeda and dealing with Afghanistan now that we've done an entire land invasion? But, um, that was easy for me to think at the time. I didn't fully understand the WMD case because I wasn't a weapons analyst. I didn't see all of the inside baseball information.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

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Nada Bakos: Um, but it was probably, like, the second or third day that I was there, I was thinking, "Nobody knows what to do. There's no plan, there's no..." I mean, our... we had leadership, and the C.I.A. has an objective, and we knew all of that. But other than that, it was just, the

country was just in shambles, and shortly after, they had... With their "de-Ba'athification"-- the Ba'ath party was what was under Saddam-- they fired everybody, essentially, from all of their jobs. So you have, like, an entire country who is now unemployed. (laughing): And with no money, very little... You know, they're not getting access to food. What do you have left to do?

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Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. Um... some of the interrogations that you saw there, and, uh, some of it, I think, also continued after you had returned to Washington in a different role-- which we'll talk about-- but this was also a separation between some of the military handling of the detainees and, at least in your part of this, the C.I.A. handling of how this should be done. So tell us about that, that sort of split.

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Nada Bakos: Right, so, within Afghanistan and other pursuits of Al Qaeda Central, quite often, the C.I.A.-- especially at that time-- had primacy over those operations. In Iraq-- this was an actual war where Congress voted to go to war against Iraq. So military actually had primacy inside of Iraq, which... So they handled the detainees and everything within, you know, that whole structure. So it wasn't like these guys were going to black sites being waterboarded. They were staying in the country.

00:24:14

Clifford Chanin: But they were kept under very difficult conditions. And there were some questionable tactics used that were under a different aegis. This isn't, we're not really talking about the enhanced interrogation program at this point.

Nada Bakos: Right, no.

Clifford Chanin: I think we're talking about a much larger number of people, some of whom are simply just kept in detention for no particular reason, it would appear. But it seems from reading your book that you found this was counterproductive to the kind of intelligence gathering that you were there to do.

00:24:43 Nada Bakos: It definitely was counter... It was alienating people who may have been working with the United States, whether it's, you know, working with the C.I.A. to help spy or if it was working with the United States to help rebuild the country. We weren't making friends, that's for sure.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. So you go back to Washington. I can't recall how long your tour was, it was...

Nada Bakos: My first one was just a couple of months.

00:25:07 Clifford Chanin: Right, and you go back, and you're back in the office, you're still working on these issues. What has changed in your sense of what you're doing, what you're contributing to this, how the operation within the C.I.A. is, is being directed after you get back from Iraq?

Nada Bakos: When I get back, I realize-- and I mean, I knew it then, because I was the one on the receiving end of some of these questions-- we were still getting so many questions from the White House on the historic, you know, backward-looking, whether or not we had found a connection yet between Iraq and Al Qaeda.

00:25:39 And at this point, the country is starting to ignite. When I had returned, a couple of bombings... The U.N. bombing and a major mosque in the southern part of Iraq were bombed by what we now know was Al Qaeda in Iraq. And I wrote what's called a presidential daily brief on one of those bombings. And all I could think at the time was, "This is what we should be paying attention to." It's not like we didn't know Zarqawi was there.

00:26:10 We knew he was there in the run-up to the war. That's who ends up leading Al Qaeda in Iraq. He was stationed in Northern Iraq, in Khormal, with another native terrorist organization called Ansar al-Islam. And I was able to make a connection to him on that bombing. And I'm thinking, "Why are we still asking all of these, you know, historic questions?"

00:26:32 Clifford Chanin: So, um, the, the focus of where the threat to the U.S. is coming from at this point-- the U.S. troops and so on-- obviously, it's a concern, but it's not yet really directing the main focus or the full focus of the agency and the intelligence community. But, um, you then latch on to Abu Musab al Zarqawi-- who, Zarqawi, who you mentioned-- who has a history that had already drawn the attention of U.S. intelligence, but not with any real focus until much later. So give us the background on him, because he became the, the full focus of what you would then turn to do.

00:27:15 Nada Bakos: Yeah, so he was actually Jordanian, who had just grown up on the streets of Jordan. He had grown up in, um, Zarqa, which, when it was first settled, was a Palestinian refugee area. And it was largely lower, middle income, if not poverty level, throughout the city. And his family was not wealthy. He spent a lot of time dealing drugs. He was a pimp at one point. He was in and out of jail. And in one of his stints in jail, he ended up meeting who became his spiritual adviser.

00:27:49 His last name was Maqdisi. He ended up radicalizing him in jail, which is, like, such a common... You know, we hear about this over and over and over again, but we don't do anything differently. (chuckles) He was radicalized, and he just became this, you know, major ideological, ideological extremist.

Clifford Chanin: And he begins to develop a following. Now, he goes to Afghanistan...

00:28:13 Nada Bakos: Yes, so he goes to Afghanistan. He's in Afghanistan, he's colocated with Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda doesn't really see him as a major player. He doesn't really fit the mold of Al Qaeda, and he's not really interested in Al Qaeda's primary objective. He just wants to attack the Jordanian kingdom at that point.

Clifford Chanin: And how do you describe Al Qaeda's primary objective at that point?

Nada Bakos: Al Qaeda's focused on the United States.

Clifford Chanin: Okay, okay.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: So he wants to take the fight back to Jordan.

Nada Bakos: Correct.

Clifford Chanin: Okay, so please continue with...

00:28:38

Nada Bakos: So then after, after 9/11, and we've, we've invaded Afghanistan, he flees, you know, he... he spends a little bit of time in Northern Iran, and then eventually ends up in Northern Iraq. And he's colocated with this, this organization Ansar al-Islam. And largely because he had other connections back to that organization-- he had recruited people out of the Caucasus, some out of the Levants-- and so he had people that were also in Ansar al-Islam as contacts. So he built this, like, really rudimentary poisons laboratory in Northern Iraq prior to the invasion.

00:29:14

Clifford Chanin: And so he is on the C.I.A. radar, but maybe not a prime focus. The U.S. comes into Afghanistan, drives him out, now the U.S. turns to the invasion of Iraq. How does his activity and profile begin to mount?

Nada Bakos: His profile rises when Colin Powell mentions him at the U.N. speech. So, prior to that speech, my team was charged with making sure that everything within that speech was accurate from the perspective of whatever the ties were to terrorism, between Iraq and terrorism, that we

knew at the time. That speech had many iterations that went back and forth, and after it left us, it had more iterations, and was changed again within the White House.

00:29:56 So by the time it was delivered, we were scratching our heads, you know, wondering what version this is, because it certainly went off track. We were sitting there with a version of the speech that we had given them, and it wasn't the same.

00:30:08 Clifford Chanin: So, Secretary of State, then, Colin Powell, says that Zarqawi, on behalf of Al Qaeda, is linked with the Saddam Hussein government therefore making the connection to 9/11. Now, none of that is accurate.

00:30:22 Nada Bakos: No, and he doesn't explicitly say it. He just talks about the fact that he was colocated with Al Qaeda. He's a sympathizer of Al Qaeda. We talked... talks about his network, a little bit. And on the chart, you know, that you have some Al Qaeda members that they're showing on the slide. So it makes it appear as if he has this really strong link to Al Qaeda.

Clifford Chanin: Did you ever find out how those changes were made and those assertions were put forward?

Nada Bakos: Yeah, actually. (chuckling): I had a very interesting conversation. I recorded a podcast with one of my old senior bosses, Mike Morrell. So we had a... we had a interesting discussion after, after we hit "stop" on the recording.

00:31:03 Clifford Chanin: I see.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: And, and which of that... which part of that conversation can you tell us here?

Nada Bakos: Not the part when we hit "stop."

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: Ah, okay.

Nada Bakos: But I did-- I mean, the iterations really happened within the Pentagon and the White House.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um... you then are going to leave the C.I.A.

Nada Bakos: Eventually.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah. And, and you turn to a, to a different job in this process, the job of targeter.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

00:31:33

Clifford Chanin: So you're not gonna be an analyst. A targeter does something else, and your principal target is going to be Zarqawi himself. So describe first the targeter's job. I believe it was sort of newly developed, because of the need to focus on particular folks or particular networks, and how different that is from being an analyst.

00:31:54

Nada Bakos: So in... So let's, we'll go back a little bit. Before 9/11, there's a group of women analysts. Not... it's not Alec Station that you hear

about so often within the Counterterrorism Center within C.I.A. There's a group of women analysts, some of which appear in your video on the "Reveal" exhibit, that had the expertise on Al Qaeda and were writing presidential daily briefs warning the U.S. government about possible impending attacks. Just don't know when and where.

00:32:24

And those women loosely worked at the time as a targeting officer providing strategic and tactical intelligence to any kind of action arm-- whether it's another government, or it's U.S. military, or whoever has primacy over that target-- for them to be able to either... Most of the time at that time was to capture.

Clifford Chanin: Right, so I think it's important to say, targeting is simply bringing focused attention onto a person. It doesn't necessarily involve literally targeting with weapons, although it may come to that.

Nada Bakos: Right.

Clifford Chanin: Okay, just to clarify. So that's a function that exists. But it seems like, at a later point, when the shooting is underway in both Afghanistan and Iraq, it takes on a much greater importance within the operation of the agency.

00:33:15

Nada Bakos: Yeah, so I moved to... to the operation side to become a targeting officer. So you use the same skill set as an analyst, but you're using it in a much more tactical way. So that you need to understand the landscape and the overarching issue with any... or the structure of the organization. And, but at the same time, you're now drilling down into specific people, or groups, or places. And your, your objective then is to, like you said, where it's, you know, smash-and-grab. Or sometimes it is a kill mission.

00:33:49

Clifford Chanin: And but, but the most important thing in many of these cases is to actually be able to find the person.

Nada Bakos: Absolutely.

Clifford Chanin: And so the hunt for Zarqawi becomes increasingly important as his organization becomes more and more deadly, targeting not just American troops and foreign troops, but normal Iraqis. He had very specific goals for why a campaign of spreading violence was critical to his strategy. So let's talk about those goals.

00:34:18

Nada Bakos: He killed tens of thousands of Iraqis. He saw anybody who was not an adherent specifically to their extremist ideology as an infidel, whether they were Muslim or not. And his way of trying to control the population, of course, was through fear. And it was to murder and slaughter people who were not abiding by what he was wanting them to do.

And he didn't have territorial control like you saw with ISIS and a caliphate at this point. He is literally just trying to add chaos so that the U.S. government is having to deal with a lot more than just some of the insurgency from the former Saddam regime members, in addition to trying to control the local population.

00:35:01

Clifford Chanin: So violence is his method of terror and control, and most of it is targeted on Iraqis. Now, this involves suicide bombings, and various kinds of I.E.D. attacks, and so on and so forth.

Nada Bakos: He was the first terrorist, and this just seems like such an obvious thing to do now, but he was the first terrorist to do what's called the multiple V.B.I.E.Ds. So, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. So he had two, basically, delivery trucks wired with a large amount of explosives. And that's actually how they ended up attacking the U.N. building. And that was the first time that tactic had been used.

00:35:39

Clifford Chanin: So he would send one in...

Nada Bakos: One in right after the other. First one would kill typically guards and any of that for, you know, frontline security. And the second one would go in and take out the building.

Clifford Chanin: I see, I see. At this point, though, he's not clearly affiliated with Al Qaeda. How does that emerge?

Nada Bakos: So because now he's become so prominent, Al Qaeda has lost resources, drawn down. My colleagues in the other part of the building are just doing their job very well. I mean, they've, they've strangled Al Qaeda at this point and they're taking a lot of the oxygen out of the organization.

00:36:13

While, at the same time, they also lose some visibility into Al Qaeda, because Al Qaeda has very much gone to ground. Zarqawi is the opposite. He's garnering all this world-stage attention. And so now Al Qaeda's paying attention.

Clifford Chanin: What years are we talking about, roughly?

Nada Bakos: So this is around 2004.

Clifford Chanin: Okay.

00:36:33

Nada Bakos: Yeah. And he's having these conversations back and forth with Al Qaeda Central and Al Qaeda leadership, and they're, they're approaching him to hopefully convince him to join the organization. At the same time, they want to control him. And he's interested in joining the organization, because that just gives him even more legitimacy and more money and more recruits. And he's really the only one doing anything on the world stage at that point, as far as the jihadists.

00:36:59 But Al Qaeda has lots of conditions. They want him to stop killing Muslims. They see that as an issue. That's not part of their "charter." But he doesn't. He argues about this point, and basically says, "I'm going to do it my, my way." And it was, like, the first time in my life. I'm reading this as we first see this first letter, this exchange, and I'm thinking, "How is it that I could possibly sitting here thinking, 'Bin Laden's right'?" Like, that's, that's how bad this guy is. When Bin Laden seems to be the rational person in the conversation.

(laughter)

00:37:34 Clifford Chanin: And so he... But he's... he is really having an extraordinary impact on what is going on in Iraq. So your job, then, with colleagues, of course, is to figure out how to track him...

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: ...by virtue of what means? How do you go about looking for someone like that?

00:37:54 Nada Bakos: You're vacuuming up all the intelligence you can get from the sources that you're really super-interested in. So it was everything—technical collection, you know, SIGINT, all of that stuff. In addition to as much human as you can possibly get, and working with allies, and the coalition. You know, at that point, we are really building their pattern of life and what this organization looks like and what motivates them.

00:38:22 And we, thankfully, had some of my colleagues who had worked on this issue in the '90s, had scoped out some of his closer contacts. We had a pretty good idea of, like, who his shura council would be, who his possible successor might be, and those kinds of things.

Clifford Chanin: And so you're not just looking for him at that point. You're looking for the network around him.

Nada Bakos: Absolutely, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And how do you begin to break into that network and find some of the key allies that he has?

00:38:50 Nada Bakos: Initially, I just kind of took over this operations group when I moved into the operations side as a targeting officer. And I just started assigning people other leadership members and then logistical nodes. So, like, you take this logistical node, you take, you know, where are they getting the funnel... Where are they funneling the money from? I want to be able to find people that are impacting this.

00:39:12 And we were just trying to find vulnerabilities within all these insertion points. And thankfully, I had some really experienced analysts working on the team that were able to find... put together the, you know, pattern-of-life pieces on some of the leadership. And we took out some of the leadership kind of early on. Perhaps you're... I don't know if you remember Nicholas Berg. He was, um... an American that was caught by Zarqawi's organization. And then... they killed him on video, and it was one of the first sort of graphic videos that was, that was passed around.

00:39:47 Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm.

Nada Bakos: But... yeah... it takes some, you know... (chuckles) Oh... an effort that's community-wide, for sure, to be able to collect all of that.

Clifford Chanin: So is it that then you turn to the military and say, you know, "Here's a place where this person could be."

Nada Bakos: Right.

00:40:07

Clifford Chanin: "Let's focus on that." Or is it that they happen to sweep some of these people up and bring them to your attention? How does that work?

Nada Bakos: Right, so, initially, so the action arm is the military and inside of Iraq. So initially, we would go to big military and give them this information, but the machine within that at the time, they hadn't... We hadn't quite figured out this, like, really simpatico way to work together. It was, it was slow. And by the time it would come back around to targeting that place, they're gone. So I started actually having somebody go to Iraq and embed with General McChrystal's team.

00:40:45

Clifford Chanin; So General McChrystal is running this special operations group, and that's the group that is dealing with speed as the key element in turning this stuff over.

Nada Bakos: Exactly, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: So you send someone who is now part of McChrystal's team, thinking about the, or the purpose of one raid after another. And what impact do you see from that exchange?

00:41:08

Nada Bakos: Initially we had... I mean, it was an interest... It was really interesting, because this was kind of one of the first times that we really... had this sort of collaboration in real time, right? Within the two bureaucratic structures, there's usually all these agreements that have to be made, and everybody's gotta be on board, and there's all this decision-making. This is the first time where, at the working level, we were able to work really together.

00:41:30 And we, you know, we had an exception so that we could give them raw intelligence, which is unusual from that perspective, also. And our, our analysts knew how to deliver information that wasn't yet released that we could actually verbally talk through in a legal sense. So we were working around some of the legal hurdles, but at the same time trying to figure out how to plug into that and, and be able to give them that information real time.

00:42:00 Clifford Chanin: And you and they were seeing better results from their missions as a result of this kind of collaboration.

Nada Bakos: Yes, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: So you're beginning to pick off some of the key people.

Nada Bakos: Yes.

Clifford Chanin: And what sort of leads does that give you toward Zarqawi? Because there are a couple of close calls with Zarqawi.

Nada Bakos: There were, yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And I think they're fascinating. I mean, the book really tracks them very well, but tell us about how that... how that evolved.

Nada Bakos: When you, when you end up finding patterns of life and just, like, a glimpse to where somebody like Zarqawi might be, or, or where he's currently staying, you have to act on that very quickly or that will be gone, that opportunity...

00:42:38 Clifford Chanin: Because they're very conscious of their security, as well.

Nada Bakos: Absolutely. His... he is all... he's very concerned with his operational security. And we knew at the time he was traveling, not with a big entourage, right? He was traveling with, like, one or two other people. Sometimes he had one of his wives with him. They were largely staying in, in, I think, mostly the Fallujah area or Anbar province. But we had some information that he would be traveling, and so we didn't have drones like you hear about now, where they're armed. They were... They just had cameras, essentially.

00:43:12

Clifford Chanin: Right, the early drones were not weapons, they were surveillance.

Nada Bakos: Well, at least in Iraq. We did not have armed drones. Because, again, we were not the primacy for taking action. So we, we ended up being able to get what's called ISR. We're following this white pickup for a while, and eventually figure out this, you know, there's two individuals in there, this looks plausible, this seems like his signature, that it's probably him.

00:43:40

At that point, Special Forces ends up being able to catch up, and then they try to, you know, side the vehicle, so that they're able to pull him over while he figures out who was following him, even though they're in, essentially, another white Toyota. And speeds off, and he starts outrunning them, but they weren't, I mean, they weren't super-close, but they pulled into a grove of trees.

Clifford Chanin: He did.

00:44:06

Nada Bakos: He did. He pulled into a grove of trees with a driver, and they got out and ran. And at the time, the ISR, for whatever the visibility coverage was that day, we couldn't see. They couldn't even see, like, a heat signature of the person.

Clifford Chanin: And you're watching this as it's happening?

Nada Bakos: So we don't know where he went-- yes.

Clifford Chanin: So you're watching this back in Washington?

Nada Bakos: Yes, yes.

Clifford Chanin: And...

Nada Bakos: Screaming.

(laughter)

00:44:27

Clifford Chanin: I was about to ask, yeah, yeah. So okay, so, so he's in the woods or in the trees...

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: And he's now lost to your view.

Nada Bakos: Yeah, he's lost to our view. By the time they pull up, they can't find...

Clifford Chanin: He's gone.

Nada Bakos: Yeah, he's gone. Took dogs, took... you know, but he's gone. So ended up getting... stuff that he left behind in the pickup.

Clifford Chanin: So he left, if I remember...

Nada Bakos: A laptop.

Clifford Chanin: A laptop and... So you, you now have more to go on.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: What does the laptop do for you in terms of building a picture?

00:44:56

Nada Bakos: Well, that particular laptop, I mean, when we get stuff like that, that's typically... it's... it's gold. Because if you take that information in, and you do it within the first hours of capturing that information, you can usually beat those guys ahead of them trying to either destroy what it is that you've come upon-- whether it's phone numbers, those kinds of things that you can geolocate-- or if it's information about some of their contacts and where they are, and then you can go in and arrest those guys. (laughing): But this particular laptop in this particular instance ended up not going to some of the elements within the government who could actually pull the information off very quickly. There's some of the bureaucratic infighting that started.

00:45:43

Clifford Chanin: So there was some resistance from the military in handing it over for quicker intelligence analysis.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: So that...

Nada Bakos: Two weeks later we got it.

Clifford Chanin: Two weeks later, which means...

Nada Bakos: Pretty much.

Clifford Chanin: ...that's gone. That's gone.

Nada Bakos: Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: So that was moment number one. Were there other times where you thought you had him and he slipped away?

Nada Bakos: There was one other time that was a near-miss. Yeah.

00:46:06

Clifford Chanin: And then... but you're picking apart the network at the same time. Did you find it was able to regenerate in a way that kept it viable all this time?

Nada Bakos: So not necessarily at the, like, core leadership level or even that second-tier ring right away. But almost everywhere else, those nodes would, would pop back up. Yeah.

Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And was this spontaneous, do you think, or was the network deeply entrenched enough so that it could regenerate through efforts of recruiters or whoever it would be?

00:46:41

Nada Bakos: So Zarqawi was... he was really into not having a very hierarchical structure like Al Qaeda. His, his organization was flat. (laughs) And he would empower his people to go ahead and make decisions. So if

there was a node that was taken out somewhere in Anbar province that was essential to either security or logistics or whatever it was-- moving people in and out of the border-- the network itself would take care of that.

00:47:07 Clifford Chanin: Hm. So, um, now, Zarqawi does meet his end through U.S. efforts. But at that point, you have moved out of this work into sort of domestic liaison with JTTF and other sort of domestic law enforcement agencies. So tell us how you learned of the successful finding of Zarqawi and tell us about how he was found, and then how you learned about it.

00:47:34 Nada Bakos: So about three months before Zarqawi was found-- I think it was three or four months-- I moved on to another job. I had... I had stayed probably the longest on this team of anybody, and it was burnout, in addition to, I was just getting disgruntled with how we were conducting the operations. And it was just like this daisy chaining our way through Iraq, hitting all these different targets constantly. To me, that just didn't seem to be a very effective way to go about doing this.

00:48:04 So when I moved to the other job, I actually found out... I was with other colleagues, and I was in a hotel lobby, and they told me, when I walked off the elevator, what had happened. They're, like, "Look at the chyron, look at the chyron on CNN!"

Clifford Chanin: And he had... so how did that... How did that mission unfold?

Nada Bakos: So the U.S. military actually captured an individual that they obviously interrogated and broke down that gave them the information to, to find him, through his spiritual adviser, also. Not the one I had referred to earlier.

00:48:41 Clifford Chanin: Right, and they're tracking him. I mean, it's a long convoluted chase.

Nada Bakos: It is, yes.

Clifford Chanin: Or, or they're not chasing him, but they're tracking him.

Nada Bakos: They're tracking him for a while.

Clifford Chanin: And then there's a couple of bombs dropped on the location where they had found him.

Nada Bakos: Yeah, so they don't... they don't send in personnel. They go ahead and drop bombs.

00:48:58

Clifford Chanin: And he is then pulled out of the rubble?

Nada Bakos: And he is killed, yep.

Clifford Chanin: And he's not even dead at that point.

Nada Bakos: No.

Clifford Chanin: And he is identified. And so he is confirmed dead.

Nada Bakos: Yes.

Clifford Chanin: At that point. And your reaction to this, far away from that?

Nada Bakos: I was relieved. I mean, they're... Just to have that, uh... You know, he was a murderer of tens of thousands of people. Let alone all the coalition forces he killed, he killed tens of thousands of Iraqis.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. You know, it's, it's... I mean, I guess it's extraordinary to see that happen, and yet... And we saw this with the bin Laden raid, as well, it's not over when an individual is killed.

00:49:35

Nada Bakos: Nope, not even close.

Clifford Chanin: And so, you know, we had this conversation, actually, here last week with some other folks who were involved in helping advise us with the exhibition who were part of the intelligence community.

Nada Bakos: Peter and Bruce?

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, Peter and Bruce among them. And, you know, the question becomes, are we seeing this... in seeing this as a war, are we actually mis-seeing what it is? The analogy to the Cold War of, "You're not necessarily gonna have an ending to this. You're just gonna have to maintain over a period of time. Because the threat is there, and how you react is a different question. But you can't turn a blind eye to it."

00:50:11

But on the other hand, if you call it a war, well, our understanding of war is that it ends with a treaty, or a settlement, or whatever it is, and then it's over. This is not that kind of situation, is it?

Nada Bakos: No, it is not. And I talk about that a little bit of the end of my book, and I also wrote a paper on that about two years ago. I'm a senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and we did a product called "After the Caliphate." So when ISIS had lost their territory.

00:50:39 And, ultimately, extremism, whether it's from white nationalists or it's from Islamic extremists, it grows, and it, and it, you know, flourishes within certain environments. When it's permissible for them to grow and flourish, they, they will. You will find attractors to those ideologies, and this is no exception. When people are... it's not...

00:51:04 And it's not always the same, you know, profile of a person who is attracted to this. But typically, it's somebody who wants to blame someone else for their problems. When you boil it down to that, that's ultimately what it is.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah.

Nada Bakos: From really simplistic terms. So it's really the conditions around all of this that we have to start paying attention to, but those are not immediate, as accessible, and we don't have ultimate control over all of those.

Clifford Chanin: Nor do we really know how to affect those circumstances in the right way.

00:51:34 Nada Bakos: Very well, right? I mean, look at even the issue of climate change. When you look at scarcity of resources, that's... that we know can cause people to lean on extremist tendencies and join extremist organizations. Iraq was a, you know, perfect test plot for that, because we took all of those resources away, and then all of a sudden, there was an insurgency. I mean, it's not, really not rocket science in some aspects.

00:51:59 Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. The other point that you come back to a number of times, which is interesting. And again, we had spoken to several of the people you mention in the book, is the role of women in the early days of all of this, and the Al Qaeda research and analysis before 9/11, post-9/11.

The role of women in, particularly, the analytic side of the C.I.A., and I think more broadly within the intelligence community, it is not well known that many, if not most, of the key players within the intelligence community were women. And, and, you know, that's something that I think needs better understanding out there.

00:52:36 Nada Bakos: Yeah. So Harmony had mentioned the HBO documentary that I was interviewed in. And the director, Greg Barker, actually goes through and showcases a couple of those women who were there prior to 9/11, in the '90s, building the picture of who Al Qaeda is, and looking at terrorism as an issue of an extremist ideology.

00:52:59 Clifford Chanin: So when you're on the... within the C.I.A., within the directorate of analysis, there's a lot of women and fairly equally distributed through the hierarchy, I think you write. When you move over to the directorate of operations, which is out there, that is not the same.

Nada Bakos: No, the gender equity was lacking at the time. It's much better now, from my understanding. But it was still this, this sort of O.S.S., you know, Cold War mentality of, you know, you have to be a man to be able to do that job and then... Because those jobs were set up and structured so that they're overseas a lot. And if your family is living with you, it's really hard for your spouse to be able to work. So it has that, you know...

00:53:41 Clifford Chanin: It has that character to it. But, I mean, I mean, the director of the agency now is a woman, and some significant number of her senior deputies are, as well.

Nada Bakos: So is the directorate of operations is a woman. That's significant.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah.

Nada Bakos: I did not think I would see that in my lifetime.

Clifford Chanin: All right, well... And so, you know, how do you think the C.I.A. has come through all of this? You know, you mentioned before the burnout factor, and it is... I mean, having met a number of people there, it is something that comes up in conversation.

00:54:11 The C.I.A. has gone through, you know, the extraordinary issue of the enhanced interrogation program and the rendition program, which have tainted, to some degree, the agency's reputation. You know, where do you see the agency now having come through, let's face it, an extraordinary set of demands over years on a war footing, essentially, for these 18 years.

00:54:36 Nada Bakos: Yeah, and not a lot of self-awareness and acknowledgement around the impact that that has on people. So when I, by the time I left, there was no conversation of... You'd have to do a check-in with the Office of Medical Services, but it was a literal check-in to see if, you know, you were a problem. It wasn't to actually be helpful.

00:54:56 But now there's some mechanisms in place to help. People would either develop PTSD or just, you know, went through traumatic experiences doing the work. I think the agency is gonna have a self-reckoning. I mean, there is probably a... Right now, they're going through challenges that are not related to, you know, counterterrorism, but challenges nonetheless.

Clifford Chanin: I mean, we can talk about that a little bit, you know, in terms of the president and his disparagement of the intelligence community-- C.I.A. included. What do you see as the impact of that on the folks who work in these agencies?

00:55:37 Nada Bakos: It has... it ultimately has an impact, because not only is it... I can't say that it's, you know, what he says personally hurts their feelings. (chuckling): That's not necessarily the case. But the problem is, is, he

dismisses the information. He changes the priorities that they're focusing on, which is extremely dangerous if it's only self-serving and not really focused on what the national security objectives are. And undermines largely what they're trying to do sometimes with allies, and props up adversaries like Russia.

00:56:14

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, you know, you, you go in a little bit at the end of the book to this idea of the search for-- in the case of the war in Iraq-- you know, the government or the White House looking for a false narrative that it could get behind to justify a policy.

And in reading that, you know, it's kind of a foreshadowing of where we are today, because, you know, again, you're looking for something that isn't borne out by the information that you have, but a political priority overtakes what the information can provide to you.

00:56:47

Nada Bakos: Yes, I mean, politicizing intelligence, which is what... what's happening.

Clifford Chanin: That's what this is.

Nada Bakos: Yes, and that's what's happening now. Whenever you take the analysis and/or raw intelligence and you turn it to just support your point, that's... I mean, you can do that as a child. It's, you know, as, as an adult and someone running the country, that's not very justifiable. I mean, my, you know, my daughter can say that my son did something to her and convince me of it. But is it necessarily true?

(laughter)

00:57:20

Nada Bakos: Ellie?

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: Perhaps not the best analogy given the audience here, but, um...

(Bakos laughing)

Clifford Chanin: And it's maybe too late to... too soon to know in relation to the current events, but what's the impact on the agency of the events involving the manipulation of intelligence from the war in Iraq? Is it lasting?

00:57:46 Nada Bakos: Yeah, it was. So I know... I mean, my boss left, I left. I can think of four other people that were on that team that left. I mean, we had significant knowledge that should have probably stayed in the building, especially around Al Qaeda in Iraq, that developed into ISIS. You know, after I had left, I was thinking, "I wish I could just go download my brain." You know, for my colleagues that are there still and give them... There's probably lots of information that I... Just reading on a daily basis I could have helped weigh in on, but it definitely had an impact.

00:58:18 Clifford Chanin: So it's, it's people's departures.

Nada Bakos: People's departures.

Clifford Chanin: And then does the culture become more timid in some way, do you think?

Nada Bakos: I think it can, depending on the leadership. I think it also changes the... it changed the structure, I think, of some of the intel products that were delivered. So a lot of it ended up funneling now through the DNI, whereas before...

00:58:38 Clifford Chanin: Director of National Intelligence.

Nada Bakos: Director of National Intelligence, which, we don't have one at the moment, but... Instead of being C.I.A. primary products, then they started to get... they moved into just being absorbed with the D.I.A. with some other ones-- DNI.

Clifford Chanin: Yeah, so you don't always know what the consequences of this sort of thing are going to be.

Nada Bakos: Correct, yeah.

00:58:58 Clifford Chanin: Yeah, yeah. Let's see if we have a question or two from the audience. And there's the light—hello out there. And I would ask you... well, first to have a question, but then to wait for the microphone. Right there, please, hang on one second.

Audience Member: Hi, and thank you. There were a couple of names I was expecting to hear here tonight. One was Mick Ware, and the other is Chalabi. Chalabi? Shalabi?

Clifford Chanin: Ahmed Chalabi.

Nada Bakos: Ahmed Chalabi.

00:59:27 Audience Member: Ahmed Chalabi. Maybe you alluded to him and didn't name him earlier when you spoke about the source of the bad yellowcake and other intelligence.

Nada Bakos: He's one of them.

Audience Member: One of them, and it's Chalabi and his, his C.I.A. handler I wanted to talk about. Is there any veracity to the rumor that Maya was his handler in Kurdistan in 2002? No, no veracity to that.

Nada Bakos: No.

Audience Member: So thank you for that... My other question was about...

Nada Bakos: I mean, Maya did a lot of stuff, but not that.

00:59:57

Audience Member: And then Mick Ware had, the journalist, who at the time in 2002 was working for "Time" magazine, and then he became CNN correspondent. He had a notorious personal relationship with Zarqawi. Did you use Mick Ware and that relationship in, in tracking him? Was that helpful to the team?

Nada Bakos: I mean, we have... we cannot... work with a U.S. citizen or task a U.S. citizen to do... And, but we also can't work with a journalist and put them in harm's way in that way. So we would be prohibited by our own charter of being able to do that. Nonprofits, journalists, yeah.

01:00:39

Clifford Chanin: Anyone else? Gentleman back there.

Audience Member: Hi, first of all, the questions were great. And thank you for answering the questions. I thought it was really excellent, but my question is, why do you think the president wants to discredit the intelligence community? What's in it for the president?

Nada Bakos: So-- I mean, this is just my opinion, and I'm not a psychologist, nor have I ever played one on TV.

(laughter)

01:01:09 Clifford Chanin: You can play one here, however.

Nada Bakos (laughing): I will. Armchair. Honestly, I think it's because-- and this is, you know, I can say this was my experience with some elements within the vice president's office, and the Pentagon, and Doug Feith's job. When you contradict someone at that level of leadership who is interested in one answer, they want to minimize you, and make sure that the optic is, you are lesser than and that you don't understand what you're talking about. And that's how we were treated by the vice president's office at times, and Doug Feith's within the Pentagon. And I think Trump does it for the same reason.

01:01:47 Clifford Chanin: There was one more, gentleman here in the middle, and then we'll go over there.

Audience Member: Hi, thank you so much.

Clifford Chanin: We'll do it the other way around. Okay, you go first.

Audience Member: I'm sorry. You came in to the C.I.A. in 1999, is that right?

Nada Bakos: I applied in '99 and I... By the time you got through all the battery of tests and the polygraph, I joined in 2000.

01:02:08 Audience Member: 2000. My God, what... what a beginning for you. At that time, even though it was not your focus, were you aware of the noise that John O'Neill was making?

Clifford Chanin: Oh, yeah.

Audience Member: And ignored?

Nada Bakos: I mean, it wasn't just John O'Neill. Like I said, there were all these women that were analysts at the C.I.A., they were writing presidential daily briefs explaining to the president and key Cabinet makers that Al Qaeda was interested in attacking the United States. There's a, like, a PDB entered into record that you can actually see.

01:02:38 Clifford Chanin: Presidential Daily Brief.

Nada Bakos: Presidential-- yes, that was written by one of the premier Al Qaeda analysts from the agency that is in the Senate intelligence report, and you can find it online.

Clifford Chanin: But what is your-- we'll, we'll take your question in a minute-- what is your thought about the pre-9/11 separation of information between the FBI and the C.I.A., which has been so widely commented on, that C.I.A. did not share? I mean, we've discussed this here with other guests before. What's, what's your take on that?

01:03:06 Nada Bakos: So that's interesting, because I've asked... Because I wasn't working in CTC prior to 9/11-- the Counterterrorism Center-- I've asked those questions now that I've had the luxury to sit back and think about it. And, you know, every single optic in every little story is just like a pinhole, right? So I watched "Looming Tower" and that...

01:03:25 They didn't even address the fact that there were all these women who were analysts that were in the D.I. talking about Al Qaeda. Like it wasn't even... it was like they didn't exist when you watched "Looming Tower." And I think largely because Lawrence Wright didn't know about them

when he wrote the book, which, by the time you get around to the TV show, they had, you know, it's... they'd been known. But there... I also have a friend who was a female FBI analyst that was sitting at C.I.A. headquarters prior to 9/11 reading this information. Not at Alec Station, like you see, you know, depicted.

Clifford Chanin: In "Looming Tower," yeah.

01:04:00

Nada Bakos: Right, so she was talking back and forth to the FBI about the information that they were... the analysts were, were seeing. So it wasn't like... it wasn't this blind eye like you see in, you know, some of the TV shows, essentially. If you read through the Senate intelligence report, the postmortem of 9/11, they actually go through and tell you who had access to what and what some of the problems were. I mean, there were certainly problems. There were things that were missed and not passed.

Clifford Chanin: Gentleman there, I think, is our next... Yes, if you-- do you have the mic? You do.

01:04:38

Audience Member: I do. This is a little bit of a... this is a pretty big question. I was wondering-- not difficult, just big-- how you saw the intelligence community and the C.I.A. change over the time that you were aware and what were-- how did it change? What were the triggers? Things like that.

Nada Bakos: Yeah, I mean, the C.I.A. changed dramatically. So when I joined, Bill Clinton's administration was still not... there was a hiring freeze. So when I joined, they were hiring so very few people at that time.

01:05:10

And then after 9/11, I mean, one of my first volunteer jobs was calling people who had submitted resumes that could speak Arabic or Urdu and Pashto, and see what their availability is. I remember, I called a guy who, it was, like, five minutes before the bell rang on the trading floor in New

York, and he's, like, "I've got five minutes, what do you need?" It was odd that I'm... "Hi, I'm so and so from the C.I.A. I've got your resume."
(laughs) But it also changed it, I think, in the sense of, it's hardened, I think, the C.I.A. in a way that you wouldn't have seen.

01:05:49

Clifford Chanin: How do you mean that?

Nada Bakos: Um... It was... you know, as we've all seen in the public sphere, the blame stuff that happened after, after 9/11 of who missed what? And so it was just, uh—excuse my French-- balls to the wall after that. I mean, it was, like, everything you could do to dismantle and get rid of Al Qaeda.

Clifford Chanin: Is that, do you think, part of what led into the enhanced interrogation and rendition program?

Nada Bakos: 100%, 100%.

01:06:16

Clifford Chanin: You know, you write, at one point, you write about someone who was then subjected to this, who, you were not involved in deciding that that would happen to him. But your contemporaneous thought, and even in retrospect, is, you know, "I don't know what I would have done had I been in that position." So explain the position to us, and, you know, how you weigh those kinds of factors, because you obviously know what you're doing to this person.

01:06:41

Nada Bakos: Yeah, so, at the time, I didn't have a ton of... So this is, like, a restricted handling program, it's an RH program, that only so many people had access to, as far as the detail of what was happening inside this program. So I myself didn't know exactly how this was being... I think "utilized" is a wrong word, you know.

Clifford Chanin: Well, carried out.

01:07:05 Nada Bakos: Carried out. So at the time, I thought they have this, like, really specific, structured way of extracting information. I didn't think it all involved, naively, torture. I thought it was, like, around some of the things that we were doing in Iraq where it was, like, you'd get enough information on somebody, and then you would... You know, you would either try to trip them up, or you would, you would play to the... Like you do with the case officer.

01:07:33 You try to recruit somebody and elicit the information out of them after they trust you-- that kind of stuff. I assumed we were using some of the skill sets that we use in our daily intelligence collection life, but that wasn't the case, naively. Did I think they were, it was all sunshine and rainbows? No, I didn't. But I wasn't really super- concerned about their well-being always in the sense of... (exhales) You know, if you see those guys take responsibility for all of those attacks, it's hard to have a lot of empathy.

01:08:06 Clifford Chanin: And, you know, looking back at that moment, then, there's an ambiguity in, in what you would have decided if it had been up to you. That's a question, I'm not asking it the right way.

Nada Bakos: If I, if I would have known then what I know now, I just think the guys who were in charge of that program were crazy, for lack of a better... You know, way to put this. But I can't imagine it being useful. What's the utility of it? I wouldn't trust the information.

01:08:37 Clifford Chanin: Mm-hmm. One more, in the back. Your daughter.

(laughter)

Clifford Chanin: You can ask your mom questions at home, too, you know.

Nada Bakos: You sure you want to take up?

Clifford Chanin: Here we go.

Ellie: Hi, Mom.

Nada Bakos: Hi, Ellie.

(laughter)

Ellie: Um, what was the hardest thing you had to do? Um, what was harder, being a targeter or an analyst?

01:09:04

Nada Bakos: Oh, that's a good question. No one's asked me that.

Ellie: I know.

(laughter)

Ellie: I'm brilliant.

(laughter)

Nada Bakos: Give the microphone back.

(laughter)

Nada Bakos: Oh, you know, I actually think, um... It was... I think it was harder being an analyst.

Clifford Chanin: Huh.

01:09:24

Nada Bakos: Making those daily calls, being a targeting officer, I mean, that's, that's tough. But being an analyst and... Especially the analysts, the, the experience that I had in the run-up to the Iraq war, and delivering this information to the policy maker to make this decision, it was so, you know, I don't know. That's just... that was big.

Clifford Chanin: Huh-- huh. Well, we're gonna let you have the last question. And I do want to thank everybody. I want to remind those of you who are not members, there's a membership table out there. We do encourage people to become members because it helps support these programs.

01:10:01

And for those of you who are members, thank you. But really, the most important thing now is for us to all and join thanking Nada Bakos.

(applause)

Nada Bakos: Thank you.

(applause)

Nada Bakos: Thank you, thank you.