CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Hillary S. Wiesner

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2013

# PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Hillary S. Wiesner conducted by George Gavrilis on April 11, 2012. This interview is part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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| 3PM | Session #1 |
| Interviewee: Hillary S. Wiesner | Location: New York, NY |
| Interviewer: George Gavrilis | Date: April 11, 2012 |

Q: This is George Gavrilis. It's April 11, 2012. I'm at Carnegie Corporation [of New York] headquarters here with Hillary Wiesner for her first session of the Columbia Center Oral History Project on the Carnegie Corporation. Good morning, Hillary, thank you for doing this.

Wiesner: Good morning.

Q: Before we hit record, we were chatting informally and one of the things that we decided is that one of the essential things here, before we get to the story of how you got Carnegie, is to learn a little bit about your background and your education, as that's part of the essential story. So please feel free to tell us about how you chose your studies, where you went to school and any details that you want go into.

Wiesner: So I'm originally from upstate New York and traveled a little bit overseas as a child and so I got interested in other countries and cultures and religions. And I did a B.A. at Harvard [University], graduating in 1985, I think, in the Committee on the Study of Religion and I had done ancient Mesopotamia, the ancient Mediterranean world, Greece, Greek civilization, early Christianity. But I think I had not done the Islamic period at that time.

And while at Harvard, I started working on an archaeological dig in western Turkey, the Harvard-Cornell [University] dig called the Sardis Expedition. And I ended up traveling over almost every inch of Turkey, all the way to Doğubeyazıt at the far eastern end of it. And I did an undergraduate thesis on Nemrut Dağ and going through the Black Sea in a ship and ancient Armenia, which I didn't know what it was at the time—I didn't know about Diyarbakir and Gaziantep and all of these places. I didn't know about Kurds although I was buying Kurdish clothes and things in the market.

So I had a wonderful exposure to Turkey. And I was particularly studying Greek neo-Platonism. For some reason I was very into that. And the languages that I was doing were Greek and Latin, a lot of Coptic, Syriac, because I was doing early Christianity. And then eventually I did about four years of old Babylonian Akkadian, which is a cuneiform language. As I was doing all that Greek philosophy, I discovered that it had been transformed—both translated but also transformed—through Syriac into Arabic. In particular, one book—one day I picked up an English translation of something called *The Fihrist of Ibn al Nadim*, which was translated by Bayard Dodge, one of the great Arabists. And that was sort of like discovering a catalog of the Library of Alexandria—you find all of these works that either do not survive anymore or strangely concocted works about Aristotle and his commentators—Plotinus, for example—translated into Arabic under the name of Aristotle. And it gets really interesting as it transforms on the other side of the language border. So Arabic became the sixth dead language that I started studying. And I did about eight years of classical Arabic, studied it as a dead language. To this day I'm not good at speaking it.

And I ended up doing a Ph.D. on the cosmology of [Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq] al-Kindi, ninth century philosopher of Baghdad. What I found is that there was a common conversation and a cultural participation in that period that was not segregated by religion. So these philosophers were talking about Aristotle, Galen and Ptolemy mainly—Aristotle for philosophy, natural philosophy, Galen medicine and Ptolemy astronomy and astrology, which was the big science of the day. And these were pagan, Christian, Jewish and then Muslim, starting from the eighth century.

To me, it's just a fallacy to believe that religion is the culture of the past. And that were the default cultural settings then were some kind of religious separatism. No, that's just not borne out in the historical record. So I was always a fan of people like Richard Bulliet, who wrote *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. It shows it's not so much about exchanges between cultural entities, it's really about continuities and that these cultures and ideas and practices are overlapping, are inextricable and are shared.

So cutting ahead to all of this, I left academia. I quit academia—I became post-academic and I moved to France in 1994 to work for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]. I ended up spending thirteen years there but I go into these roots because the coming to Carnegie was a return to those roots. I had left that all behind. I was doing contemporary social sciences for the U.N. [United Nations] in Paris—something called global ethics—and then wallowing in all of that. I used to call myself a pseudo-Euro-bureaucrat. So I was doing inter-agency and once, for example, got to go to a meeting on the decline of

metaphysics at Copa Cabana Beach in Rio. This is classic UNESCO. [Laughs] So we were fostering great ideas all over the world.

In the beginning of 2000 I had been there living in Paris, first in the Sixth Arrondissement and then later at the Montparnasse Cemetery, so just behind La Coupole restaurant. I had a great place overlooking Montparnasse Cemetery. But by about 2000, I had grown weary of the U.N. politics and the broken systems of the U.N. It's exhausting. You spend eighty percent of your energy just on office politics and tribalisms there. And it's also a personnel system where it's very hard to fire people. So we had people with paranoid schizophrenia and all kinds of personality disorders but they were tenured in, in effect. So it was not a pleasant working environment.

I had decided to quit and I was doing my final papers then in January 2000 when a brand new director general came into UNESCO. And they had a huge shortage of Americans because the U.S. had quit UNESCO back in 1983 due to corruption, mismanagement, spiraling budgets and politicization in the context of the Cold War. But anyway, the new head of the organization needed an American to be like the Avon lady and to try to sell the United States, first the [President William "Bill" J.] Clinton Administration and then the [President George W.] Bush Administration, on joining this kind of second-rate U.N. agency. And I said, oh, I think you have the wrong person. I don't know anything about that. I was a medievalist and really I don't know about that.

But anyway, this director general who was from Japan, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, just hired me and the next thing I knew I was flying off with him to meet with Richard [C.] Holbrooke and

other officials in the Clinton Administration at that time. And during the next seven years, I really learned Washington. I worked the Hill [Capitol Hill or U.S. Congress] for them. I worked NSC [National Security Council], State Department, a lot with Bureau of International Organization Affairs and the different agencies that had something to do with UNESCO, whether it was the International Office of Department of Education, whether it was USAID [United States Agency for International Development]. We romanced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. We thought that maybe we'd have some kind of contract connections or something useful. For them, they were very kind. We had a long list of supporters already among civil society organizations. We tried to keep them fed with positive bullet points, while eventually we ended up trying to talk the Bush Administration into rejoining UNESCO, which, with great fanfare, they did. They announced it in September 2002 and they joined in the fall a year later, 2003. And it was an amazing adventure and we even got [First Lady] Laura [L.W.] Bush as a goodwill ambassador to UNESCO.

After that, it was still fun but it became—it used to be just me. It was me and the director general of UNESCO. And it got more diversified. I got a promotion so I had to oversee four-hour meetings of directors of UNESCO and it just wasn't my cup of tea. And I guess I was looking for alternatives. I was looking to move on, even though I was totally tenured in to a [grade] P5 post. At UNESCO I had a lifetime job and a big tax-free salary and a great apartment in Montparnasse but sometimes even too much of a good thing. After thirteen years, through organizations associated with the Bushes—Laura Bush, [First Lady] Barbara [P.] Bush, George Bush and UNESCO, the United States National Commission for UNESCO, of which Vartan Gregorian was a member—

I met Vartan July 31, 2006. I was living in Paris this whole time. But we met next door to Carnegie Corporation of New York at the Istana Restaurant for one of Vartan's famous breakfast meetings. And he said: “I'm hiring you.” He was there giving me advice and I was seeking his advice on what I might do next after having done all of that with UNESCO. And at the time there was a war in Lebanon going on that summer of 2006. And some relatives of friends of mine had just been killed and it was a very difficult situation. We were both very discouraged about that, I recall.

And looking back at my notes from the time, I do see that the so-called clash of civilizations was really eating at me. I had a Ph.D. in religion and all the bad religion that we had seen unfolding since the September 11 attacks of 2001—bad religion on all sides. We would see the re-appearance of tropes about Islam that date to the twelfth century, about the prophet-hood of Muhammad or worshiping idols, worshiping a different god. But also a kind of convergence between what we call essentialist elements, essentialist interpretations of Islam and the anti-Muslim movement in America. So the core doctrine that would be shared by [Osama] bin Laden and one of the American anti-Muslim activists are things like: "The practice of the faith shall be jihad." That's bin Laden. That is a quote from bin Laden but that was also said by Daniel Pipes and other people in that movement.

The idea is you have separate and opposing civilizations. These cultures bounce off one another like billiard balls. They exist in a hierarchical relationship in that our civilization is not only separate but hierarchically superior to theirs. They are the photographic negative by which we define ourselves as their opposite and that there's an almost a no-coexistence model. So it's sort

of a kill or be killed relationship, which allegedly has been going on for 1,400 years. I would call this a pseudo social science. We know that this is not how cultural interaction actually takes place and to me it was also the successor to racial science. Back in the 1920s, learned people thought that the future of humanity was race war because races were separate, opposing and existed in hierarchy with one another. And now we find these doctrines reappearing in ideas of culture—culturism—and we call it the civilizational narrative. And it is sometimes associated with names like Samuel [P.] Huntington or Bernard Lewis, who actually originated the phrase "clash of civilizations." I discovered that Vartan had had a correspondence with Samuel Huntington that had been quite unfriendly. Huntington had asked him to "please stop saying that I am calling Islam a monolith." And Vartan wrote him back a four-page refutation, proving that in fact that is what Huntington asserted.

So all of that stems from Vartan Gregorian's book, *Islam: a Mosaic, Not a Monolith*, which became then—he sort of wanted to put that book into practice as a project program. Starting from 2004 at Carnegie, he had for five years structured Carnegie Scholars program uniquely to grant-make on the field of Muslim societies and, directed by [Patricia] Pat [L.] Rosenfield at Carnegie, he had made about 117 hundred thousand dollar book grants to leading scholars to study Muslim societies in all of their diversity. It is an enormous range. It's a great achievement and it actually built up the base of advisers and expertise that we then, from 2007 through 2011, did five years of Carnegie's Islam Initiative. And by the end of that we are definitely the number one foundation in this field. We have a vast network of experts and institutions. We started web publications and all kinds of outreach through alternative media platforms and also we had some projects that targeted mainstream media as well. It was about trying to popularize specialist

knowledge about Muslim societies and this is at a time obviously that coincided, most of this, with the post-September 11 period.

Q: It's a wonderful sweep that you just gave us of your education, of your work at UNESCO, how you came to Carnegie and then the first initiatives. There are so many different bits of that I want to pull out. So if you'll allow me, I'm going to go back to perhaps a very early chronological thing and that's one thing you didn't say. Why did you choose the field of studies you chose? What drew you to that specifically?

Wiesner: I was very interested in religion because my family was mixed. My father's side of the family was European Jewish from Russia and Budapest. His father was from Budapest, his mother from Russia. During the great pogrom that followed the Russian Revolution my father's mother was put on a train going west by her parents—she never saw them again. She took out just her younger brother. And they ended up in Brooklyn, New York. And likewise my father's father also ended up in Brooklyn out of Hungary. And so my father was born in a relatively secular household and grew up and went into commercial design and photography, married my mother, who was Protestant, born in West Helena, Arkansas and went to L.C. Humes High School, which is Elvis Presley's high school, in Memphis, Tennessee. She quit the Presbyterian Church at age eighteen because she found it a rather harsh message about damnation.

So this was the late 1960s and early '70s. They followed the Maharishi [Mahesh Yogi]. I consider them old hippies. They went to Woodstock and left us at home with a babysitter. So maybe it was unconventional. By the time I was in second grade and I was asked in school:

“What religion are you?” My father said: “Tell them you're a Hindu.” Because we were into all this meditation and they were following the Maharishi a bit—they were teachers of transcendental meditation.

Q: Is this then a modern day form of the syncretism that you studied?

Wiesner: [Laughs] Maybe so. Definitely confusion—so identity confusion and curiosity about religion. Probably I had at that time primitive beliefs about some shared essence of all religions. So I was very interested in religion. We did meditation and yoga. I swear I've never set foot in India, so I'm a pseudo- everything. But a mixed and rather confused religious background probably led me to major in religion as a freshman at Harvard.

Q: That's a neat story. Thank you for sharing that. You also mentioned six dead languages that you studied. So I wanted to ask you a little bit about that in terms of, are you good at languages? Do you like them? What's your approach to them?

Wiesner: I kind of have a sticky memory so things just stick in my head. I wouldn’t say I am great at languages but I am drawn to obscure topics of interest, let's say. I think I started doing Greek just because my sister was doing Greek but I had also been interested in Greek religion, world religions, meaning Classical and Hellenistic Period. And Latin, they started us on that in high school. I liked that. I liked the history of Rome. And then the Nag Hammadi Library and the study of Gnosticism was really peaking in the early '80s when I went to Harvard. The great Elaine [H.] Pagels had graduated out of Harvard Divinity School and we were just all reading the

Gospel of Thomas from freshman year. I took a course with Robert Nozick, a famous philosopher who had us reading, strangely, the Gospel of Thomas and other gnostic texts just to analyze them from a universal philosophical perspective.

And so that Nag Hammadi will really get you thinking. It's quite intriguing. And everyone was doing Coptic. And then Syriac, I got interested in Bar Daysan and in early—the range of Syriac literature but not particularly on the Christian side. And I can't remember exactly why but I did a few years of Syriac. But that turned out to be a lot more useful than the Akkadian. Akkadian, I regret that a little bit, although I am relieved that I did not do Egyptology or ancient Egyptian, which I don't consider a Semitic language. At least Akkadian was a Semitic language and it turned out to be a little bit useful.

Q: Explain that a little bit if you can because somebody that's listening to this transcript, years down the road, may be unfamiliar with some of these languages and the regions and the times that they apply to.

Wiesner: Okay. So we consider the beginning of history around 3000 BC in Mesopotamia, just slightly ahead of Egypt. And why do we call that the beginning of the historical period? It's the beginning of writing. And only with writing do we get a memory as a species. And so the first—there's a non-Semitic language called Sumerian, which is coming out of South Iraq. And then Iraq, Mesopotamia and the cradle of civilization, goes through several stages of Akkadian.

And old Babylonian is the version in which the Code of Hammurabi was written. That was one of the key things that we used to read. I ended up spending years reading liver omens. Liver omens are clay models of livers with Akkadian writing on them saying things like: “If there is a hole here, the king will die,” or “If there is a fold here, there will be a revolt in the country.” And they would cut open animals and they would use them to predict the future, look at their internal organs. So it was a form of divination. It's part of the history of divination.

This turned out to be not very useful for my future career path. But at least it was a Semitic language so there are cognates between—there are similar words and certainly similar word structure. Semitic languages usually have a tri-consonantal root structure to them and Akkadian has a lot of that. A lot of the verb forms, anyway, it shares with other Semitic languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic—Syriac is a late form of Aramaic—and then ultimately we get to Arabic.

Q: Arabic with the tri-literal roots.

Wiesner: Exactly, yes.

Q: Wonderful. Thank you for that as well. And here's the other question that I have. So in light of your very substantive immersion into the languages, texts and archaeological digs, how was it that you were able to make the leap into a UNESCO job? Because I understand what you did in terms of your day to day there but I'm trying to figure out how you made the transition from

something that was much more administrative and directorial and that probably didn't allow you to get into the substance as much.

Wiesner: That was a big culture clash but I wanted something new. I had begun growing disillusioned with academic life. It seemed narrow, really kind of limited. But it was really for personal reasons. I decided to just leave the field. And I actually ended up writing my dissertation knowing I was leaving the field and I was residing in east Jerusalem, in the Old City of Jerusalem, during that time and I was working at Hebrew University in their libraries, both the Givat Ram and the Mount Scopus campuses—this is where I wrote my dissertation—in consulting with the world's leading experts on Arabic musicology and history of philosophy who were largely associated with Hebrew University.

So I did all that and I really, really didn't want to do that anymore, and I thought I would go live in France. And I contacted a little office in the State Department that places Americans in the U.N. system. I think it still exists. It was 1993, Bill Clinton was president and they said: “Hey, we're going to rejoin UNESCO. That's a cultural and educational organization that might be a fit with your background and we will put in a good word for you.” But actually, in parallel, my sainted dissertation adviser, the great Muhsin Mahdi, who died a few years ago, was friends with the director of the philosophy division at UNESCO and so he also contacted that man, Mohammed [Allal] Sinaceur. And between these two things, I got to UNESCO and I got rapidly kind of internalized there. I hadn't thought I would really stay that long but I became permanent.

Q: There's something I don't understand, though. If the U.S. wasn't a member of UNESCO at the time, how was it that they had the capacity to place Americans in it?

Wiesner: Right, UNESCO was always trying to work deals with the Americans and offer them carrots. And so the then-director general, this sort of free speech crusader named Federico Mayor [Zaragoza] from Spain, he would, in an ad hoc way—he did a lot of favors and he would like to do favors for the Americans. And I had backing from the State Department. I went in on consultancy contracts and the U.S. government said we'd love to see her get an actual post when that possibility came open. But most people hired at UNESCO, at least at the time, had backing from their member states. So yes, it was an exchange of favors with the U.S.

Q: And you also mentioned that you were in east Jerusalem, studying in Mount Scopus, living down in the Old City?

Wiesner: I was living in the Old City, yes, first closer to Damascus Gate and later near Jaffa Gate. And I used to take the bus over to the two campuses there of Hebrew University and that's where I wrote my dissertation, *The Cosmology of al-Kindi*.

Q: And this is in the early or mid-'90s.

Wiesner: Yes, early '90s, '92, '93.

Q: Incredibly important years in the history of the peace process too—so you were observing that.

Wiesner: Oh, I learned a lot.

Q: Tell us a little bit about that, just whatever memories come to mind.

Wiesner: I remember one incident at the time was when, I think, four hundred Palestinian activists were dropped on the north side of the border, on the border with Lebanon, and that caused all kinds of strikes and shutdowns. That was one of the larger events that happened when I was there. But it was very interesting to live there and see how the society works. Kind of a long story in itself. Maybe I shouldn't go onto that tangent.

Q: Well, we can always come back to it at some point down the road. Thank you very much for going into more detail on all of these things. The one other thing that I want to ask you about before we get deeper into Carnegie is the following. You told us about the story of meeting Vartan and then him bringing you into the Carnegie Corporation. But by the same token, you had probably done way more administrative work than you had wanted at UNESCO, I take it, so what assurances did you have that you weren't going to fall into the same kind of pattern?

Wiesner: I had no idea how intellectually stimulating this would be. In the meantime I had an intellectual life on my own, traveling. I would read Russian novels every evening, living in France. It was quite a relaxing lifestyle. I was really fine. I wanted to be—I was proudly post-

academic. I called myself post-intellectual. And I loved it. I would go to Rhodes for vacation. I would go to Chamonix. So I really wasn't too concerned about that. And then I got here and I did things like I unpacked my library of books that had been shelved about fourteen years before, fifteen years before. And I found all of this Greco-Arabic, all the things that I had studied. And I was kind of shaking my head to see that I was now director of something called Islam Initiative and that this was going to be the most intellectually stimulating thing I had ever done.

Q: I have to say that for the record I'm looking at two shelves of very eclectic books, to say the least, and that it's quite neat. What did it feel like unpacking them and coming back to them?

Wiesner: It felt like reincarnation. It was very strange. You'll see there's also a big mix of French Enlightenment books in there. There's my Pierre Bayle and my Voltaire. And I ended up getting quite a passion for Voltaire and his predecessors while living in France. This is an utterly faith-destroying phase of my life, I must say—all of that French Enlightenment reading from eighteenth century France. Yes, it was very strange. It was as if another person had lived this life and I unpacked it and I put it on these shelves and I was plunged into meeting hundreds and hundreds of top scholars in this field, sitting, first of all, with Pat Rosenfield's Carnegie Scholars program. We had one-yard high piles of print proposals, as many as two hundred book proposals by top people in the field of Islamic studies and also area studies and actually a lot of political scientists as well. We had to read them all—actually, twice—because of Pat. She would have us read first a five-page version of all of them and then a twelve-page version of all of them and it was really heavy lifting, literally.

And so it also turns out when you're working at a foundation, you are extremely popular. I told Vartan, at UNESCO I used to say, I haven't been this unpopular since high school because I was the American face in a fairly anti-American and French U.N. organization, although it was survivable—though by the end, with Bush and the Iraq War, that was a very rough period to be at UNESCO and I used to talk about sandbagging my office.

And then I got to Carnegie and here are all these Americans. It felt really weird to be in an office full of Americans and they're all incredibly nice, like effusively nice. And then there's a joke that my southern, Tennessee uncle used to tell. He'd say, "When I was a baby, I was so ugly my parents had to tie a steak around my neck to get the dog to play with me." And I came and told this to Vartan. I said: "Wow, I've got a hundred million dollar steak around my neck now. I feel like the most popular person in New York." He's like: "First of all, you're not ugly. I know you'll get used to it." And he said: "I know. It's like drinking from a fire hose when you come here."

Meanwhile he has such an intellectual life at the Corporation. He was having these soirees where I got to meet people like Victor [S.] Navasky or Lewis [H.] Lapham. And all kinds of—he would do book parties and launches. And I got to meet all of my favorite magazine writers that I'd been reading for thirteen years over there in Paris. And I got to meet all the top people in the field of Islamic studies and history and there's always this idea—I said hundred million dollar steak because that was roughly the amount the Carnegie Corporation gives away every year—and so people at least have some kind of vain hope that "maybe she could give me a grant or help me get a grant." And so you're just invited to everything. It was overwhelming. It was like drinking from a fire hose.

Q: Well, tell me more about that, let's say for the first year at Carnegie. You just gave a really interesting take on the atmospherics of it all. What were your duties and responsibilities like that year?

Wiesner: I had to design the program. And I thought that Vartan would be a lot more directive about it but he said: "No, brainstorm this thing very widely." I ended up making a big chart two feet wide on pieces of paper taped together with different columns. One of the obvious things that I wanted to support, given that Carnegie had an exclusion on funding arts and cultures and museums, and a lot of people were already using Islamic art as their dual way for trying to reach Americans—I liked a lot of the new voices.

We have an incredible star generation of Muslim Americans in this country since the 1965 immigration laws changed. And on the one hand, this means that if you're age twenty in America, the large majority of you know someone who is Muslim, believe it or not. And if that number surprises you, you're probably an older person. If you're sixty-five and older, maybe three percent of you know someone who is Muslim—because of immigration patterns. And of course, thirty-five percent of Muslim Americans are African Americans—there's a real gap in familiarity.

And we have this amazing generation of people like Reza Aslan or you see them as comedians on television. There's Dean Obeidallah who does the *Arabs Gone Wild* comedy tour. And he's bringing out a film, a documentary, now, called *The Muslims Are Coming* about his comedy tour

across the Bible Belt. So young writers, novelists. A lot of them were grouped at that time under something called Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow, which was a program of the American Society for Muslim Advancement, ASMA, which was Daisy Khan and Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf—who was later to be known as the Ground Zero Imam.

Carnegie did give one grant to Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow although we ended up going a much more academic route because after all that brainstorming, VG [Vartan Gregorian] was ultimately a lot more comfortable with university grants and we can go through some of the most interesting grants. We did give three hundred thousand dollars, thanks to [Geraldine] Geri [P.] Mannion, to the American Society for Muslim Advancement. So when there was a big manufactured controversy in the spring and summer of 2010, called the Ground Zero mosque controversy, yes, we were a donor to a sort of parallel but somewhat connected program.

Q: We can come back to that because ultimately it speaks to, I suppose, some of the perils of grantmaking as well. But tell me a little bit about some of the grants that you were most involved with in your first year. They don't necessarily have to be highlights. They can also be grants that taught you something or grants that presented some interesting challenge as far as you're concerned. It's a completely open question.

Wiesner: In the first year, I think we started one of our signature and actually largest programs based at the Social Science Research Council [SSRC] called Academia in the Public Sphere: Islam and Muslims in World Contexts—that was its original name. And that was a re-granting program. We would give big block grants of one million, two million and maybe even three

million dollars we did once. But that would go into fifty thousand to hundred thousand dollar grants to university centers. It was restricted to American university centers that were going to try to reach out beyond campuses, sometimes using new technologies or other means, partnerships, to try to bring to bear on their communities what we call academic-caliber knowledge about Muslim societies. This approach, a knowledge-about approach, is kind of distinctive because nowadays, it is common sense to say: "You need to meet a Muslim. You need to meet somebody of the religion." And it's more the programs that are flourishing now are things like Interfaith Youth Core, joint service programs, which kind of got adopted by the White House. Also we invested a little bit as well in youth leadership. So we call that capacity-building for Muslim American next generation leaders, writers.

There's a program called AMCLI, American Muslim Civic Leadership Initiative, run by Nadia Roumani at USC [University of Southern California] that we fortunately had been able to get some funding for. But we know knowledge about Muslim societies was haunted by a kind of ghost of what we call Orientalism and so it's controversial. Orientalism is usually taken to mean a form of hegemonic study of foreign societies, whether it is Westerners studying India and grouping the people there into Hindus and Muslims or as a project of colonialism, studying North Africa and creating categories of Islam in North Africa for the purposes of French colonization in the nineteenth century. Or everything that dates back to the 1979 book by Edward [W.] Said, *Orientalism*, which is a kind of landmark in the field. Middle East studies today is sort of in the Edward Said paradigm, which means a critique of Orientalism because it was knowledge to define and to rule. It tends to be polemical knowledge with a frame of "what went wrong?"

Well, if you're going to ask, “Islam, what went wrong,” you might as well ask, “Christianity, what went wrong.” Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. Christianity broke in half twice with the Great Schism, but then again, the wars of religion, so the Protestant Reformation. So Christianity split again and again and now it's at a point where many of its adherents—and I do love it—but they question its core tenets. So it would actually be an easier polemical question to pose—Christianity, what went wrong?—than Islam. But this is a frame and it's an in-group out-group frame. So in-group out-group is a term from anthropology, which means who do we define as “we” and who is going to be “they.” And since September 11 there have been a lot of cultural relations programs that have been about getting to “we” and extending beyond an idea we call Judeo-Christian, a term which was largely created in the mid-twentieth century by the National Council of Christians and Jews in America—to extending that to concepts of Abrahamic or even broader, more universal, embracing questions of and definitions of the religions of America. We are in our fifth century of Islam in America. In many ways there's indigenous Islam here but I don't think most Americans are aware of that.

Q: But you came in while the Islam Initiative had already been started, right? How many years before had this been going on?

Wiesner: I think in 2004. So first of all, in 2004 Vartan did the five years of Carnegie Scholars just on Islam, ‘04 to ‘09. Likewise in ‘04, I believe he put David [C.] Speedie [III] on the case. David Speedie had headed up a work, I think, on former Soviet states or international peace and security. I'm afraid I don't know the history that well. I think he was a Russian studies and

security studies expert. Vartan had him travel to a lot of the leading institutions in the field globally and do research on possibly forming an Islam Initiative. I inherited some of his papers on that when I came and I was largely in agreement with his recommendations.

Q: How did you try to shape the initiative in your first year?

Wiesner: Well, we started this re-granting thing. And I took that in the direction of what we call Title VI National Resource Centers, which are about 125 university centers that receive some federal funding to teach international affairs and languages at core U.S. universities and particularly public universities. It used to be that Oriental studies was a phenomenon of the Ivy Leagues and fortunately, through Title VI funding, it really went across America so that we have things like University of Texas at Austin. We have other really leading institutions now at public universities. All of them are gravely threatened now by budget cuts. They suffered a forty-seven percent budget cut last year. And some people think that within a few years there won't be Title VI funding like this anymore. So we really don't know what's going to happen.

But those centers have a whole monitoring mechanism around them. They were trying to log the number of people they reached out to. They had outreach directors. They had an infrastructure in place but didn't really have money for outreach beyond K-12 school content materials, which actually those centers had been greatly improving since interest on this topic rose following the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

So we said let's not fund K-12 because the government's done a good job with that but let's use these centers. It's almost like a gas tank and we can pour some gas into a pre-existing tank, which even has monitoring mechanisms, like something called the EELIAS Database that would clock, did our professor get an op-ed placed? And how many people showed up at a public event that we had. And so there was a structure in place and we also wanted to give a boost to Title VI in general, which was approaching its fiftieth anniversary and is always in danger of cuts.

Q: The other question that I wanted to ask you regarding the first year was about the book projects that you had mentioned that, I think, were already being pursued at some point. Could you tell us a little bit more about that program and maybe some of the books that came out of it as you remember them?

Wiesner: Yes, so that was run by Pat Rosenfield—she did it ten years total. I believe one of the best-selling books that came out of it was by Robert [A.] Pape at University of Chicago. It was called *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. It was a hundred thousand dollar book grant that caused quite a sensation because he crunches the numbers on suicide terrorism and finds that it actually started with the sort of Marxist Hindu Tamils who used it in their war in Sri Lanka. That's where we see it taking off in the early '80s. And I mean, in a country like Iraq, seven thousand-year history, there had never been an act of suicide terrorism recorded until 2003, when the United States invaded.

Q: I remember that book and it was preceded by an article in—

Wiesner: *Foreign Affairs*?

Q: In either *Foreign Affairs* or the *APSR* [*American Political Science Review*]. Do you remember when that book came out, roughly?

Wiesner: No, it was in Pat's program, but in what we call the pre-Islamic period. It was the five years up to 2000—so 1999 to 2004. She had maybe fifteen books within all of those five years that were Islam-related.

Q: Well, tell me about the reaction to that book as you saw it—mind you, you're speaking to a political scientist by the way. [Laughs]

Wiesner: I'm fully aware of the anti-Pape school. We're definitely up on all the criticisms of the method. He points to levels of correlation between suicide terrorism and religion, suicide terrorism and whether there is an organized group or a freelance group. And he found that in ninety-five percent of cases, it correlates with what he calls occupation or perceived occupation and particularly by a religious out-group. If there's an entity of foreign religion and culture that is occupying land that is perceived to be or held dear by a set of people who become terrorists, that is what correlates ninety-five percent of the time with actual suicide terrorism. So there are all kinds of critiques of it and also others who agree with the numbers. Pape later diversified, with further Carnegie funding from the Islam Initiative, to crunch numbers about women in suicide terrorism, about what happens when you decapitate or kill off the head of a terrorist organization. Does that have impact? Does it mutate like a hydra into many? Does it die? What is it that causes

terrorist movements to deflate? Studying cases like Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka, nationalist movements, the Basques, the separatists—the history of those but trying to bring social science data to bear on questions of security and terrorism.

Q: Were you part of the discussions on following up funding for his next projects?

Wiesner: Yes, we actually brought Pape to address the board. At a certain point we didn't know whether to continue funding Pape because I thought he should be doing better with other donors. He would say: "Well, you know [John D. and Catherine T.] MacArthur [Foundation]—it's right there in Chicago but my university wants to approach MacArthur Foundation with its own order of priorities. And I can't go and really freelance it with MacArthur." Although we strongly encouraged him to do so. Following the Carnegie book, *Dying to Win*, he got a big grant from the DOD, the U.S. Department of Defense. And he created and enlarged for them an authoritative database of suicide attacks globally with translations and a lot of this is online now.

At one point we couldn't decide whether to fund him anymore. We thought: "Hey, he should swim. He should raise money on his own." We brought him in to address our board and I'll probably have to X this out but we said: "Look, you've got twenty minutes to talk." He went for at least an hour and it was like that ride in Disneyland, Space Mountain, where you're falling through darkness with deafening sounds—because the air conditioning system broke and the room with our trustees got very, very hot. And also it was dark because he was showing us jihadi videos and the jihadis were testifying in all their—he has the biggest library of suicide videos, suicide terrorism videos—and they were all explaining their motivations in attacking the United

States and it was really harrowing because each one of these people was dead and they were sitting with their Kalashnikovs [rifles] and their flags and giving their parting messages and he was doing his data on everything. I can't remember if he was PowerPoint-ing us—yes, he was PowerPoint-ing us too. And it was almost unbearable. He just wouldn't stop—he's so focused on this topic. But the chairman of our board, [Thomas] Tom [H.] Kean, was the co-chair of the 9/11 Commission and he gave Pape a green light to continue and he was rather positive with Pape in the discussion.

Q: That's such an interesting story and I'm glad you shared it with us. And as we discussed before, you have flexibility with the audio transcript. The thing that I wanted to ask you about a case like Pape's: was that typical? That for potentially high-impact projects, the person that was going to be doing the project would be brought before the board to talk about the project?

Wiesner: If there was something that was emblematic of the program or something where we're putting a lot of money into it. By the end of our time with Pape—and we still have an active grant—if you totaled everything up it would be $1.1 million Carnegie put. And midway through that we were going to make another large grant but I truly was not itching to do that. I felt he should diversify his funding as he could get some funding in Turkey where he's quite popular. However, here, they said, “Well, let's have him talk to the board.” And so we just did that. After that board meeting, we did make the next grant renewal.

Q: Were there missed opportunities that you couldn't pursue because you continue to give money to a project like that, for example?

Wiesner: Well, there's always "what might have been" in grantmaking. I'm trying to remember. There were a few things that I was really hot to do that I was not able to do, but largely because, at a certain point, they really said let's make this very, very university focused. Vartan also wanted to fund the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey and they don't do outreach. So for all of our grants, we were trying to build public outreach as an obligation for higher education in this field. And so we made our five hundred thousand dollar grant to Institute for Advanced Study. We tried to get them to do something other than their own newsletter, which is in a PDF format and not searchable on Google, or to get them to do more of any kind of public outreach. But once you have been yelled at by [Patricia] Pat Crone—the famous Pat Crone of the Institute for Advanced Study—you know not to try that anymore. Another one, there was a project that we did at Harvard on Islam in Central Asia that just didn't work well. The project director had personal problems and it kind of fell apart, although others stepped in, including a man named [Timothy] Tim [J.] Colton at Harvard. He tried to pick it up and re-launch it with the remaining grant funds.

Q: What were some of the specifics of that project?

Wiesner: It was going to be research teams very actively integrating scholars at universities in Central Asian countries and then mix them with Americans and there was a great launch meeting for it that took place at Harvard. I can send you the info because there were good speakers there. And they were going to—as well as the usual conferences and books—they would produce five policy papers and they would partner with a D.C. think tank in order to roll those out.

We were hearing from our Carnegie Scholars, people like Devin Deweese of Indiana University and Kathleen [A.] Collins of University of Minnesota. And they were talking about briefings that they'd been asked to give to the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. They said that the things they witnessed there, a lot of it was cartoonish and it showed little figures of militants popping up on screens and didn't seem—the usual question: can we use the Sufis against the Salafis? Can we make the good Muslims fight the bad Muslims in chat rooms? Rather rudimentary questions and these scholars were encouraging us to try to find something that would bring actual academic expertise more into the policy-making community on that topic. That one did not really work out.

As I mentioned at the beginning, a thing that I never really got to fund was this promising generation of Muslim American writers and arts figures, although they're doing just fine without us, and we did manage to do a couple of grants, which I mentioned earlier on. That was one area I felt strongly about.

Q: Well, paths not taken are often interesting for many reasons. Tell me a little bit about where you got the idea for that and how you conceived it and what ultimately happened.

Wiesner: When I arrived back in the United States in 2007 to work here, I gradually noticed I was in sort of a wind tunnel of Islamophobia. And I would never use that word. I thought that word was ridiculous. It implied it was a pathology to criticize things about a major world religion. I was steeped in the French Enlightenment by then and I definitely believed in

criticizing all religions. So I wouldn't touch the word Islamophobia—I'd say anti-Muslim activism or something, if that's what it looks like.

Well, I started thinking, gee, does anyone notice it's kind of windy in here? And they were like, just keep your head down and just make grants to universities. Go ahead. We're saving the world one professor at a time. And then there would be a big anti-Muslim demonstration or we noticed the politicization of the movement so that it began peaking in even-numbered years. The election year of 2008, Obama is a Muslim; 2010, Ground Zero mosque; 2012, Sharia bans coming, twenty-four states being debated starting with the Oklahoma ban.

Now we have a whole other set of issues around the Arab Spring, where we want people to have concerns—but legitimate—not distorting something real into caricature. As one of our scholars put it: "I want Americans to dislike the Muslim Brotherhood but I want them to dislike them for the right reasons, not because they are confused that this is Al Qaeda or that Muslim Brotherhood equals Hamas, equals Hezbollah, equals Al Qaeda and that all of them are in a zero-sum kill-or-be-killed relation with the United States." This is not a winning formula after ten years of the War on Terror.

So I found myself doing grantmaking that really I was supposed to—and we did, we stood for social science knowledge about Islam in Muslim societies. We stood with Middle East studies—sometimes a beleaguered field—so we funded Middle East studies but we didn't call it that. But all the time in the back of my mind was how similar some of these anti-Muslim tropes are to things that were said about Jews in the 1930s. I think you can go through and look at the list of

tropes, and now there's a whole controversy around Halal, measures against Halal and kosher food. This is particularly in Europe.

But we noticed the rise of the far right in Europe and its intimate connections with the anti-Muslim movement in the United States. After the 2010 Ground Zero mosque controversy, for example, George Soros, a New York City philanthropist, was really very angry that this had happened in his town and that the people driving it had links to the far right in Europe, which is now driving about thirty-five percent of the vote in many European countries as part of an anti-immigrant movement. And he, George Soros, became the number one funder in America on what I now will call, reluctantly, Islamophobia, because I eventually kind of succumbed.

Although that's not the field in which Carnegie was working, one almost felt that it was one's duty to reach out to people because both—actually because a lot of the Carnegie scholars were very much maligned. They would have death threats after postings against them were made on something called Campus Watch. One of our scholars, Fawaz [A.] Gerges, lost a contract with ABC News and a Manhattan apartment that he was trying to buy after there were hate materials against him posted online. He was told, we don't want terrorists in our building. And now he's left the country. He teaches at London School of Economics. Another one is Omid Safi. The anti-Muslim movement was kind of hitting experts in the field and Muslim Americans.

Q: I was in academia during a lot of these times and so I remember some of these debates and also a lot of the utter hysteria. This is interesting. I'd like you to go into this a little bit more if you can, not so much about broad Islamophobia but what that means for an institution like

Carnegie that is trying to educate people but at the same time trying to do also projects that may be useful not only to the public but even to the government—the Pape project is a good example. How difficult was it to push this project ahead with potential pushback from the public or from the media on this stuff? How much of your day-to-day did it occupy?

Wiesner: Admittedly, we were cautious. I won't say too much but I will say I think we had a preference for funding very established universities and think tanks. We never funded an up-and-coming Muslim American think tank, which is quite good, and which hosts a number of Carnegie Scholars. It's called ISPU, Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. I would have liked to make them a grant. I'm very pleased that my colleague at Luce Foundation has made them a grant and is working with them. So when I first arrived, people told me there had been a controversy around Ford Foundation in 2001, that they had funded Palestinian types of things that were controversial—I'm not an expert on that topic—but that they ended up having to do a number of things and to change their grant letters and to take out a lot of ads. And Carnegie obviously didn't want to be drawn into any of that.

We were trying to create a generation of post-Orientalist scholarship. But you know Vartan Gregorian—really it was about being right. It was about trying to bring—actually, he used to say what we actually know about Muslim societies differs very much from our public conversations on that topic. So you say diplomatic things like that and then in various contexts—the other part of this was these wars. So there's the Afghan War that was very close to his heart. He wrote the book on nineteenth to early-twentieth century Afghanistan. And then the Iraq War was a watershed for everyone, probably for you as well, for everyone in our field. Certainly for the

field of Middle Eastern studies, a lot of them after years of public outreach just wanted to give up at that point. We witnessed the destruction of Iraq and its cultural heritage and its archaeological sites. Most of those in southern Iraq are obliterated now, from during the sanctions period of the '90s and then the last decade of war. It looks like a lunar surface down there. It's gone.

I lived some of that at UNESCO. In the spring that the U.S. invaded Iraq, we were very much involved. A man named McGuire Gibson, under whom I had studied but who is one of the world's leading archaeologists on Iraq, showed up at UNESCO and between us we were making calls that April following the March 2003 invasion. So April 2003 we were making many calls both to the State Department but also to a lot of members in the U.S. military, contacts from UNESCO because he had been consulted before the war on what not to bomb. And he was pretty much in tears, in anguish, because apparently they had disregarded most of what he said. He didn't know where it got routed but we were talking to people who were in military installations in Iraq. And so I had lived that—and also, dealing with [U.S. Secretary of State] Colin Powell and his State Department at the time, trying to protect Iraqi cultural heritage—so all that was utterly devastating to me as well, having done some Mesopotamian archaeology.

Anyway, the work we're doing, it's not just that the anti-Muslim movement was a background. It was these ten years of war as well. And in fact next spring, March 2013, we will have the tenth anniversary of the invasion and we're in touch with different universities like the Center for Iraqi Studies at Boston University, Augustus Richard Norton and the Iraqi American writer Sinan Antoon at New York University, who's trying to start an Iraqi studies center down there. We're

looking at a possible grant to the field of Middle East studies so that the narratives for next spring are not just about Iraq as the war but also Iraq as the country.

Q: I really appreciate the way you wove all of that together. You also mentioned Vartan and his work on Afghanistan. And I've also registered in my mind just now that you joined in 2007, which was a year that the war in Afghanistan was getting worse and worse, the insurgency was rising, a lot of development projects were failing. Was Afghanistan part of the agenda here as well?

Wiesner: It's always on Vartan's mind. He continues to write about it to this day. And he, last week, was down at the State Department with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. He was giving a million dollars as fifty $20,000 scholarships to Afghan women at a variety of Afghan universities. I think Afghanistan is on his mind every day. For me it was Iraq and then Lebanon, where I have friends and where I travel. And I've been very pleased to be funding both American University of Beirut and Carnegie Endowment [for International Peace]'s Middle East office in Beirut in this program. In Afghanistan, I think it's the plight of women and intellectuals and universities that touches him and I think we see some of those same themes emerging in what he'd like to do in the Arab region now. He stands for really neutral, academic scholarship and sort of secular institutions and advancing universities as pillars of civil society—but upholding universal standards of inquiry and academic freedom.

And Afghanistan, he's written again and again on it—on the Pashtun situation. If you've got forty million Pashtuns, twenty million on the Pakistan side of the border, twenty million on the

Afghan side of the border, this is not going to work out well. And we do think that the civil war will just restart as the U.S. scales down and you have something that'll look like the Northern Alliance because Tajiks don't want to be ruled by Pashtuns. The other thing is the program was supposed to be mainly about Muslim societies overseas.

Q: You mentioned that there was a debate here about how much to focus on internally versus abroad. Tell us about that debate and how it unfolded.

Wiesner: So before my time, in the spring of 2001, meaning five months before the September 11 attacks, the first meeting of the Carnegie Islam program had happened here at the Corporation but it was only Muslim Americans. And there were some of the leading African American Muslims and some professors. I think Muqtader Kahn was there. I think Aminah McCloud was there, I believe. And they had very interesting debates among themselves. But the other part of Vartan's original idea, when he came to the Corporation as president, he said Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. Americans don't really have a clue about this and they're really going to need to know, both in terms of religious accommodation at home—what is that about—and secondly, in international affairs and its role in international affairs.

But I'll just say that Muslim Americans turned out to be such a big issue that the first year that the SSRC sent out its call for proposals to all of the 125 national resource centers—these are only area study centers that don't do anything domestic, believe it or not—every single grant proposal that came to them had to do with studying Muslim Americans: the Somali community of Minnesota, Muslims of the greater Chicago area, Muslims of North Carolina, every proposal.

So I don't know quite how SSRC wrangled this one way or another but I think because the pool was entirely that, maybe in some cases they capitalized on international connections. So we went looking for expertise about Muslims abroad and very often it turned out to be about us, about Muslims at home.

Q: And did that kind of pool of applications eventually feed back to change the way you did things?

Wiesner: Well, we did, yes. We ended up being kind of borderless, especially when we found out that the online resources and materials that our money was producing at all these university centers—things like Muslim Voices and top one hundred U.S.-based experts on Islam—were having their web usage from overseas. Likewise, there's a site called Euro-Islam run by Jocelyne Cesari—we funded a different component of it called Islamopedia—but she started that out to be just a polling and data-crunching site for use by scholars. It turned out to be a site that was used by young Muslims of Europe in their search for self-definition and identity issues, and where can I find a Halal restaurant in this part of Amsterdam? So we discovered that we were in an age of borderless knowledge production and borderless communication capacity and finally borderless audiences.

And our Carnegie Scholars like Nathan [J.] Brown were having articles that they wrote translated into Arabic and published in Cairo during the revolution of the spring of 2011. There's no more domestic and international, it looks like. Lately we've written that into our programming using language like: “Knowledge about regions can never exclude knowledge <u>from</u> regions.” “The full

integration of knowledge production and its dissemination." Domestic, international. Looking again, I would say the preponderance of the grants that we made were about foreign cultures and countries but when I look at each of them, we had Muslim Americans often as experts, as grantees or as participants in the majority of them, the large majority of them.

Q: This is great. I think this is a natural place to end this session. And in session two, we will pick up on where we left off. We can certainly go into more depth about some of the specific grants, talk about the organization more and how it functions, talk about your work but also talk about the transition—we'll get to that—between the Islam Initiative and the initiative now that largely resonates with the Arab Spring, the Arab Transitions.

Wiesner: Which we're provisionally calling Arab Awakening.

Q: Arab Awakening.

Wiesner: Great, thank you, George.

Q: Thank you, thank you.

[END OF SESSION]

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| 3PM | Session #2 |
| Interviewee: Hillary Wiesner | Location: New York, NY |
| Interviewer: George Gavrilis | Date: April 11, 2012 |

Q: This is George Gavrilis. I'm here with Hillary Wiesner for her second session for the Carnegie Corporation's oral history project, which is being implemented by the Columbia Center for Oral History. Good afternoon Hillary, thank you.

Wiesner: Great to be here.

Q: So, in our previous session, we covered a number of topics—everything from your education, to your early professional career, to how you came to be at the Carnegie Corporation. And one of the individuals that came up a number of times was Vartan Gregorian. And so I wanted to start this session by asking you about him and what it was like to work with him? What the everyday atmospherics are of the organization in that respect.

Wiesner: Yes, he has been quite an unusual boss. I remember the first couple years I kept saying he's like a character written by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinean story writer, because he is this great librarian with his office full of books.

They sometimes say about intellectuals, “For an intellectual, nothing is more than fifty-one percent true.” So he's always weighing the different sides of things. Because you look at a statement—for any statement of assertion there would be a set of proof data of that. And then

there would be a set of points that would contradict that. And so we're always weighing those things to try to assess. And he is like that, always seeing two sides of things.

He is famous for being a very compassionate person and very generous. And as a manager, he is almost too sympathetic. We've had a recession since 2008. And we really have a no-layoff kind of policy and just humane to the very end. Any kind of difficulties, he really just bears with it. He was very generous to me. He got me out of my old U.N. job and put me in a real dream job here. And then I didn't know much about grantmaking. I hadn't worked in philanthropy before. We had done various projects in the U.N. system and lots of meetings and events but nothing like this.

And so, the first year, I would walk in from my Columbus Circle rental apartment six days a week. I came in on Saturdays trying to learn the field. And VG was always here on the weekends. He goes through big piles of international papers in his office every Saturday and does other work and occasionally has meetings. And he would so patiently sit with me, literally, hour after hour, going over the hundred different areas that I wanted funding on. Which is really kind of strange because I think it could have been so much more cut and dry—if he had given more direction and said, “Look, just university grants”—but he really wanted me to be creative and brainstorm about it. He would very often meet with me for hours, either in the morning or afternoon. And in the middle he'd go to some kind of lunch across the way at the Palace Hotel, across our street.

This was how I got to meet the last Queen of Iran. One day I was coming or going. I was down by the elevators. And I heard his voice. I was down on the ground floor of our building. And he said, “Hillary, I have someone I want you to meet.” I turned and there was a very tall woman with a beautiful white, wool coat and white shoes, kind of Audrey Hepburn-style outfit from 1965. And she had her hair up in a twist and she was wearing high-heeled shoes. And next to her, a young, American-looking college student with straight brown hair, a shorter, plump, young woman. And this was Farah, the wife of the last Shah of Iran. And the young girl was her daughter—I guess her youngest daughter who was perhaps a student at Brown [University] or was, rather, looking at colleges in the United States. And VG was recommending Brown and, I think, serving as one of her recommenders. I got to shake her hand and chatted a little bit. But I actually had no idea who she was. I didn't know. But by the end of our conversation, I had figured it out. It was really great.

Q: That's a neat story. And it really speaks to, I suppose, the first interactions that you had when you came here. You said that you would spend hours with Vartan. Did that change over time? Is it still like that?

Wiesner: No, it's not like that. It's just, as we were building the project, it was his personal thing. And also I felt pressured about it. Finally, Deana Arsenian said, “Hillary, it's not brain surgery. This is not a life and death thing.” But I had a hard time getting going on the grantmaking. And VG, Vartan, is just not that directive. There's just nothing authoritarian in him. And he wants people to find their own way.

When I first got here, there was also a sort of faculty club atmosphere to this place, which I really like. It's become kind of more corporate now but a very positive environment. But no, VG was extremely engaged during the first years of shaping the project. But then once it was running and we were doing the major grants, then we didn't have to do this poring over all of these possibilities and trying to explain how we might get impact and where was the complementarity. I was overwhelmed with needing to map the entire field, who's funding what, which potential projects are good ones, all the people and institutions in the field that you might potentially fund. And then identifying levers of impact that would then fit our unique niche, the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding, particularly in the United States.

Q: How does one go about mapping this? I mean, what did this mean logistically or in terms of your every day?

Wiesner: Being low-tech, piles of paper, which I would tape together and have many columns to explain the different categories. Is this a university type of grant? At the time, I didn't even know that arts institutions could not be included. So there would be a pile on arts. There would be a thing about what could we do about journalists and journalist education? We ended up doing a lot on that. So all of these different potential fields of endeavor. It could have been easier to restrict all that from the beginning but I think he wants to give every idea its day in court.

Let me think if we talked a lot. When you see Vartan, you always spend a certain amount of the time talking about the news and about world events. He's been reading them from every angle. And he's always monitoring Iran, what is happening there in this kind of Orwellian—it reminds

me of *Animal Farm* frankly, the way the different factions are fighting each other in Iran now. Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Lebanon, where he lived for a while. These are high on his agenda.

I had just moved from France. So we would talk a lot about different French intellectuals. I was following a lot more closely news from France. So we would talk about all that and then Islam-related things. And this is actually how I encountered, I think, what was his main driver on this entire project, and that was his friendship with Ismail Serageldin, the director of the Library of Alexandria, who is both a Renaissance man and a man of the Enlightenment. He is a scientist. He is a former World Bank culture officer. He has a Ph.D. from Harvard. And he is a leading Egyptian intellectual. And they, I learned, had shared a vision about the modernist period, roughly 1840 to 1940. In Arabic speaking countries, when you had reformist and modernist movements, these were social thinkers who ended up driving legal reforms on areas like reforming the education system, human rights and the rights of women, all kinds of social progress legislation and changes. And there is a literature. And there were journals like *al-Manār*—with hundreds of pages. And they had worked out all of these questions about the role of religion in society and the great thinkers of this. They call it, sometimes, the al-Afghani School or the Muhammad Abduh School of reformist and modernist thought.

I believe that Vartan and Ismail Serageldin shared a belief that this was a forgotten age—you know, like, 1840 to 1940. And that the young generation, because these works were out of print, not only didn't know about them—had an amnesia about this period—but they were reliving and reopening all these questions and kind of starting from scratch. In the constitutional movements of the early twentieth century, they had defined what the role of, say, Islamic law or principles

should be. But it was all just getting approached fresh. And they felt that there was an amnesia dimension to this. And on the streets in Egypt, you could buy Salafist texts—they were funded by the Saudis. But you couldn't get these so-called modernist classics. So we ended up giving a few million dollars to the Library of Alexandria for, they call it, classics of Nahda, Islamic thought. Revival, Nahda is like a spring, a renaissance, awakening—

Q: Like the party in Tunisia.

Wiesner: Yes, Nahda party. This is kind of an open-ended project. It also got some funding from the Swiss government and other sources. But they've been cranking out these books and putting them free online. They managed to take them out of copyright by reworking the books a little bit. And so they'll have them free online and distribute them to libraries.

Q: That's interesting for so many different reasons. The copyright issue is a fascinating one. How in the world did they get copyright released so they could do this?

Wiesner: Things that were written before 1923, both in the region and more globally, tend to fall out of modern copyright law. And in other cases, they would re-edit the text and bring out a new edition of it. Or they would make their own fresh translation of it and have that translation out there. Sometimes they would buy the rights. But they found, I think, it's a little bit easier to do in Egypt. Often it was by just making a new edition and then translations in English and French.

Q: Tell us more about the library projects. It sounds really neat.

Wiesner: The Library of Alexandria?

Q: Yes.

Wiesner: It's a kind of visionary institution. It has seven museums inside of it. It does the whole history of Alexandria. Of course, it has a Mediterranean studies center inside. It has a planetarium. It has big concert spaces. It has its own symphony orchestra. It has an enormous reading room. And it has the largest digitization facilities in the Arabic speaking world. So it trains in digitization. And it trains librarians from all over Africa. It was founded very near the spot of the ancient Library of Alexandria, which pretty much fell into the harbor in a famous earthquake. This modern Library is near the palace of the Ptolemies and their ancient library. And it is an inspiring place. As we speak, it is going through major jolts and transformations in this year following the Egyptian uprising of 2011. We don't know how things will fall out because it was associated with the Mubarak regime. So they have, still, some rough waters to navigate there.

Q: How so? What was the association?

Wiesner: Suzanne [S.] Mubarak [nee Thabet] was the chair of the board of the Library. And the Mubaraks apparently kept some bank accounts where money that they raised for the library, or that should have gone to the library, was siphoned off. And the people at the library didn't even know about the accounts. No one's ever charged any of the people at the library with making off

with money. And as of now, this spring 2011, Serageldin has been completely cleared of all legal charges. So he has nothing legal hanging over him. But he faced a big staff strike, which said they wanted—they all respected him but for even symbolic purposes, they would like a new face at the library.

In the past, he has faced off with, sort of, Islamists of Alexandria on two counts. They wanted a mosque inside the library. He won't allow that in the complex. He says there are plenty of mosques. There is one right across the street. And then he was very outspoken on free speech issues. So when you have some groups that are trying to intimidate intellectuals, he would be very upfront. He started his own television show. And he's just not reticent about getting into some topics of controversy as a public intellectual in Egypt.

Q: What kind of support do you have lined up for the future of the library?

Wiesner: That is a really good question. For the next phase of our funding and from just talking with Vartan this week, I am optimistic that we can continue and perhaps even diversify our funding to the library.

There is a brand new foundation called the Alexandria Trust, which may be working in tandem with us. This is money from a young Egyptian entrepreneur who used to work at the Westminster Foundation in Britain, which is like their national endowment for democracy. And he started up a foundation to advance social sciences and higher education reform in Egypt and

in the region. And it coincides nicely with what we're doing. So we may work with them on a number of things including on what we can do next for the Library of Alexandria.

Q: A broader question about libraries, since this is kind of where Carnegie Corporation got its start—well, not going back that far but—before this, there were many projects in South Africa, for example, about building libraries. Could you put the Alexandria project in that context of Carnegie's philanthropy and whether it signals continuity, change, how it may be different from previous library projects and so on?

Wiesner: We did see a big difference with this one, with our libraries in South Africa and African universities. That program in particular, headed by Rookaya Bawa, was often focused on building buildings—on construction and lots and lots of fund leveraging. We would leverage a good-sized grant to get much more from the government and then rebuilding, equipping, digitizing these large libraries like in Cape Town. With Alexandria it was program support. The Alexandria Library is many, many things other than a library. They also had something called an Arab Reform Initiative. They were a bastion for [U.S.] President [Barack H.] Obama's New Beginning Initiative, which I was involved in as well. So, this was quite different from the South Africa Carnegie work. It was support to this modernist classics program, a television science series, a broad set of other types of publications made by the library—so it was specific program funding.

Q: The political climate, the current one that you mentioned earlier, must weigh heavily on the library and the things that you're doing. I'm wondering what kinds of concerns you float around here about the future of the library given Egypt's very protracted transition?

Wiesner: That's a good point. Frankly, someone at the U.S. Institute of Peace [USIP] told me during the Egyptian revolution, when things were looking very shaky and actually, we thought that the library might get burned or looted—I mean, really, at the height of the conflict in Alexandria, we didn't know. Actually, hundreds of people came out and formed a human chain around the library in Alexandria to protect it. And it was fine. But someone from USIP said, "Oh, we are so glad we didn't just make that grant we were going to make to the Library of Alexandria. It might go down this week." And I said: "Yes, it might go down this week." But I felt no twinge of worry about the risk that we had taken because I knew it was totally in line with our mandate. And it's exactly the kind of risk that Andrew Carnegie would have wanted us to take.

Q: An interesting project. And I want to ask you about another project that I've read a little bit about but I was hoping you could, for the sake of the record, give some meat to the bones. And that's the one taking place at AUB, the American University of Beirut—the project on Arab world think tanks.

Wiesner: Yes, there are more than two hundred think tanks in the Arab region. And if you add other countries like Iran and Israel into the mix, over three hundred think tanks. The number one rated think tank is actually Carnegie Endowment Middle East [Center]. But most people don't

know that there are all these think tanks. And like most aspects of civil society development in the region, there's very little transparency. The American University of Beirut has an Issam Fares Institute that created a database by contacting 116 of these Arab think tanks. Fifty-five percent of them would not even discuss where their funding came from, even to say "we won't say." They would not even discuss it.

You would think that it would be the publicly funded think tanks that would be more of a concern regarding slant. But actually some of the public money funded ones like Dubai School of Government are some of the better ones and have transparency. You also have these franchises like Brookings Doha [Center] and, of course, Carnegie Middle East. But you have a number of local indigenous think tanks like a Tunisian one called Zaytouna. And there's Palestine Studies Center [Institute for Palestine Studies] that's very active as an Arab region think tank. And in general, Lebanon is also a really good place to charter NGOs because they have good nonprofit laws, which Egypt and other countries don't have.

So Rami [G.] Khouri at American University of Beirut decided that think tanks could better serve a role of agenda-setting on issues like air pollution, domestic issues or even domestic and foreign policy, and also in transparency and in connecting people with their governments—and governments with people, that there needed to be more glue there because, as we saw in 2011, we saw the depth of alienation between citizens in these societies and governance—and so trying to strengthen that. But we would love it to be more capacity building. But what Rami is also really passionate about is researching how policy is made in these countries. Who makes the

decisions? In so many countries there are many basic things that are just unknown. And so what are the mechanisms?

We see, in the United States, pretty well how a bill becomes a law or the role of who writes the legislation and then how it's debated. We have certain levels of transparency, our different branches of government. Often this is lacking and contested. So we have started with a half-million dollar grant to AUB to fund what we think of as a consortium of Arab region think tanks. And they say they will do some capacity building—like Carnegie Endowment's Beirut office has a very good communications team and what if they could do some mentoring of communication departments and web departments of the other think tanks? And they want to do that.

At the organizational meeting that I went to, it was an extremely collegial relationship among different think tanks. And they were really looking for ways to help each other. And there were a number of U.N. agencies present there as well because they do a lot of data collection and analysis in the region. And so they have, kind of, think tank aspects to them.

They all complained about companies like McKinsey. All of the researchers there, whether at think tanks or in universities in the region, they get called up by a McKinsey-like company saying we're doing a report on university reform in your region or whatever, K-12. And we need you to talk to us and give us all the information that you have. And our deadline is three days from now. And then the company does it. It's a for-profit company and they get paid tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. And as you can see, universities in the region and the experts get nothing.

Q: What do you hope happens as a result of the project? I mean, I see what the long-term goal is but what's the short-term goal or the medium-term goal as a funder of that project?

Wiesner: Because our mandate is really U.S. public knowledge, we actually would like to hear their voices a little bit better. I've never seen an article on foreignpolicy.com, the number one site for international relations in America, on top ten Arab think tanks you should know about, or you should subscribe to their e-list, or what are positions that they are taking. So again, it is about indigenous knowledge production, as we call it.

And then the issue areas that they want to work on, usually we go to the region and we say, "It's got to be on human rights and women and now entrepreneurship." And what Rami hears is, "We want to do human dignity and what that means." It's actually a good question. Because even though human dignity is in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, it's never been really defined—not by the U.N., not by anybody. There's no real definition of it. But there are concepts like justice, transparency, corruption issues, that are really urgent to people in the region. So, part of it is that kind of local agenda-setting. We would love to hear more about that.

Q: Now, the human dignity issue is an interesting one. You just put a couple concepts next to that, like corruption for example, that could be potentially part and parcel of it. Are there, from your view and from the work that you do, countries that you deal with or in which you make grants that you think do better on this than others in the Arab world?

Wiesner: Better on human rights?

Q: In terms of the dignity issue, the human rights issue. Or in terms of the thing that you said before—it was a nice expression—the glue between citizens and government.

Wiesner: Yes, this is exactly what's being contested all over the region now, the relationship between the governed and those who govern them. And we see different sets of countries moving in a different direction. At the moment it looks like countries like Yemen and Syria are in very serious crisis. Also Libya. And then countries like Tunisia and Egypt have varying degrees of risk associated with them. But they've shown themselves to be capable of very robust national dialogue. I think our danger in looking at the countries is to quickly imagine that something is an end-state scenario. Any given election, any given administration or parliamentary configuration, or even the policies held by any particular political party, none of these are fixed. So I think we're going to have some decades of the rainbow spectrum, the ups and downs of Islamist political parties in politics and changing faces of these countries with regards to human rights.

Q: We'll talk a little bit more about the transitions in the Arab world, I think, a little bit later because it's such an interesting topic and it must weigh so heavily on what you do. First though, I wanted to ask you something that's in the context of the Alexandria Library project or the AUB project. There are necessarily opportunity costs when you're a grantmaker. Do you remember what some of the projects were when you were awarding those projects, meaning candidates that didn't make it, that didn't get funding?

Wiesner: Sometimes. I was surprised that we would fund something that, in my opinion, was going to happen anyway. Carnegie funding was not need-determined. But to me, that's highly relevant as an impact measure. And that the trump criterion in making a greant was the Carnegie niche. You could say that our whole strategy should have been about indigenous knowledge. Or even in America: let us hear from Muslim knowledge producers. Let's have them as interlocutors with the American public, which, we have found through polling and studies that having an interaction with someone who is Muslim lowers fear and hostile sentiments by about fifteen percent—so it is actually a better correlate than knowing something about the religion or cultures. But we're a knowledge organization and we go in that direction and that would be the deciding issue in making a grant.

Also, as years have gone on, I see that there is a comfort with funding institutions that they have funded before, that they're familiar with—so not too many new institutions. It is a high bar to get across. But actually it's not impossible. It does happen on a fairly regular basis.

I would also mention that we did one large public-private partnership in the course of our program. It was called National Endowment for the Humanities [NEH] Bridging Cultures [Initiative] and I was something of an adviser. They took the program that I described. We had done it at SSRC. They took our largest program, Academia in the Public Sphere, and working with me and Tom Asher, who ran that program, they created a scaled-up version of it that was the structured Bridging Cultures RFP, request for proposals. And they gave much larger grants, $250,000 and more, to projects where, usually, a university center would have academic

colloquium and brainstorm how they could do outreach to wider publics and then have a workshop where they tried that out and then follow on grants to that.

In addition to our Bridging Cultures partnership, we funded with $1.2 million something called Bridging Cultures Bookshelf, which will probably be titled Muslim Journeys. And that is on the diversity of Muslim cultures. There's a Muslim Americans component to it. They worked with a lot of Carnegie Scholars to do it. One of the features that I like most is what we call trans-regional world history. It turns out that the periods of history that we associate with Europe actually happened globally. But if you only collect the information from Europe it looks like they were European phenomena. They were talking about global Renaissance, global Early Modern period, seventeenth century. The Age of Exploration included the Ottoman Age of Exploration, which has just been seen through the enemy image frame for us, but it was another major hemispheric age of exploration. For example, the Taj Mahal, which is a Renaissance building, was back-dated by centuries in art history textbooks in order to make it a medieval building because there was the idea that Islam itself was fixed and medieval. And so therefore it had to fall in that chapter of the book.

Learning about all of the global periods of history, the NEH people were really moved by that. And they said, “We went into this project thinking that this was about Muslims. But it turns out this is about us. This is about our own history, our own country and the culture that we identify as ours. We've only had half the story for all this time.” So this is what the World History Association does. And it's a part of what we did with NEH. And it's a part of what we did with

the British Council—a set of projects called Our Shared Europe, Our Shared Future, Our Shared Past.

Q: You mentioned the Carnegie Scholars program as you were talking about some of these. Could we switch gears just a little bit and talk about that. As I understand it, the Carnegie Scholars program is not particular to the Islam Initiative. It crosscuts a lot of the programs or the initiatives here at Carnegie. But there have been a number of very interesting and prominent scholars associated with the program. So I would love it if you would talk about its evolution as you experienced it and some of the memorable moments, memorable scholars and its current state.

Wiesner: Yes. This program was run for—it was a ten-year program and it has ended now. The first half was on the general topics of the Corporation. And then from 2005 through 2009 it was on Muslim societies. Unlike most of our programs here it had a deadline and a structure and it had an external jury or selection committee: four professors, slightly different each year, and one member of staff, which would be either Pat Rosenfield or Neil [R.] Grabois before her. They would fight it out. We would do a first cut here on proposals. It was like sausage-making.

Q: What do you mean by that?

Wiesner: It was not pretty. Well, all of us go in with incomplete knowledge about these scholars and proposals and with very differing opinions. Everyone knows everybody in the field and has

just a different view of things. And they would fight it out and get down to a list of twenty-five winners every spring, of hundred thousand dollar book grants.

When I came into this job, I came midway into that. And Vartan had me reading all of it and kind of giving him lots of opinions on what should make the final cuts. And then I was in all the jury meetings. But it made walking into the job difficult because most of the field had applied for Carnegie Scholars grants and they can't all win—so very top people in the field wouldn't speak to me because they felt that they had been rejected. Professors take this very personally. One who yelled at me: “Oh, that project that you wouldn't fund, [John Simon] Guggenheim [Memorial Foundation] gave me five hundred thousand dollars for that. I'm not going to apply again to you people.” So, they take things really personally.

There's the saying of Immanuel Kant, "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made." And to me, that's the model of philanthropy. If you're a grantmaker, you're operating under real world conditions. It's not strategic philanthropy—it is about who is out there and what can they do. Things always get better when we connect people together.

Q: I want to talk to you more about the scholars because it seems like such a fascinating program. But first, I have a personal question regarding your experience. In many respects it is a thankless task to do what you're doing, so I'm wondering if you could perhaps tell us some stories about the highs and lows such as the one that you did now of getting yelled at. There must have been many of those instances.

Wiesner: There were great moments. Like, a few years into it, being at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting and we've been making grants through three avenues, Carnegie Scholars, the SSRC re-granting program to forty-nine different projects—each of which had a dozen or more people associated with it, working on it, podcasting, lecturing—and then our own other institutional grants, Duke [University] Islamic Studies Center, another great resource place. And anyway, being there and Tom Asher and I kind of looking at each other and saying, in one way or another, we funded everyone in this room. And the same thing at NEH—even if we only offered moral support or even if they didn't get a grant from us, all of them were speakers at some kind of event that we did. Tom thinks that the journalist who was most shipped around America by us to talk to U.S. audiences was Anthony Shadid because he was such a generous person. Anthony Shadid of the *New York Times*, who—

Q: He died recently.

Wiesner: He died in the spring of 2012 while working in Syria. He was really a saintly, incredibly generous person. And he would go all around, talking at our campus events, our off-campus events. So a whole lot of Americans got to meet him, got to hear him, got to learn about him before his death.

Our networks are kind of everywhere. Most recently there's a project that I love with the World Affairs Councils of America [WACA]. These are ninety-four centers in every U.S. state and they bring speakers to talk to Americans. Often they happen in public libraries. It's not restricted to

members only getting to listen. We've taken twenty of our best speakers. These are people like Marc Lynch. We have a great list of them.

Q: This is the Understanding Muslim Societies project with—

Wiesner: WACA.

Q: WACA, that's right.

Wiesner: World Affairs Council of America. This one's unusual because in this case we restricted the speakers' list to just Carnegie grantees. And this has hugely paid off. Because from the beginning they were saying, "Oh, you know, Hillary, we have the ex-ambassador of so and so. Can we slide him in as a speaker?" "No, no, it's got to be the best of our own [Carnegie] grantee speakers, our best communicators." And amazingly they said yes. We have this woman named Ellen Lust, who heads Middle East studies at Yale. She wrote the textbook that's used in most colleges on the Middle East. She immediately said, "Yes, I'll go on tour to talk to World Affairs Council." So this is kind of bringing Middle East studies to America. It's happening in the course of 2012.

Q: What input do you have in who speaks where at the WACAs? Because a lot of these people are academics. I mean, Anthony Shadid is an exception but Marc Lynch and Ellen Lust. And not all academics have the ability to convey their knowledge in a digestible, understandable way. So tell us a little bit about—

Wiesner: This was one of the steep learning curves. We had to find out who, among our hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of grantees, were good speakers. I have been on iTunes, on YouTube, on webcasts, on the phone with people. I felt like a talent scout throughout these five years. And I kept a list of which were good speakers. We had all kinds of events. We had a Carnegie Scholar speakers' event in Washington. When somebody's not good—I'm sorry if it was a bad day—they're off the list. And there are others that are just excellent. Vali [R.] Nasr, Noah Feldman. These are Carnegie Scholars. [Bernard] Bernie Haykel. We have an Iraq scholar––I wonder if you know him—Eric Davis.

Q: Yes, I've heard of him.

Wiesner: He could give a really good picture, like, a high-resolution photograph of Iraq and its political parties and social movements. We had Ebrahim Moosa. We had the great Khaled Abou El Fadl, who's one of the top people in the field. Saba Mahmood, Ussama Makdisi, Charles Hirschkind. It ranged from senior scholars like the great George Saliba, one of the greatest leading historians of Islamic science, and Bruce Lawrence, one of the great mentors of the field, to a young person like Hishaam Aidi, who specializes in rap, Muslim American rap. It turns out rap is also one of the great drivers of the so-called Arab Spring.

On the topic of the War on Terror, we funded people like Aziz Huq, Darius Rejali, the torture expert, and the brilliant Laura Donohue, who studies surveillance technologies and speaks beautifully on that topic. We had people, experts on law, like the great [Samuel] Sam [J.] Rascoff

of NYU Law School, formerly with NYPD, New York City Police Department. And I think he was also a Rhodes Scholar. He is utterly brilliant and he said he wanted to write a book on how the U.S. government defines Islam. What is its working concept? Is it ideology? Is it a religion? What is it? And we funded that. *The New York Times* called it "Uncle Sam is no Imam." And the next generation, the youngest person that got one of our grants had not even finished a dissertation. Her name is Intisar [A.] Rabb and she's currently between Boston College and Harvard Law School—did her Ph.D. at Princeton [University]. And she recently started a SCOTUS blog for Islamic law—the SCOTUS blog, the Supreme Court of the United States. It is a blog where all the constitutional law folks go and they debate Supreme Court type topics. And she said we really need that in Islamic law. And people like her who are law professors but also Muslim and maybe scholars of Islamic law as well can talk about some of these rulings and fatwas around the world and kind of shed some light onto where these are coming from and the fact that a fatwa is a non-binding opinion and how they are conceived and how they change over time.

On Carnegie Scholars, the biggest category of winners that we had, which was, again, an artifact of our jury—we had IR, International Relations, folks on this jury—and they had a prejudice that they wanted to fund on Islamic politics, Islamic political parties. How they evolve and how their policies change as they enter government with the alliances that they build and what they can deliver to constituents and how they coalesce. And our pool of scholars hugely over-represented this topic—sometimes we'd have, like, six of them just on Islamic political parties.

Well, this paid off hugely because when the revolutions began in Tunisia, in Egypt and now we're moving toward these decades of Arab democracy—Islamic democracies—these people became superstars. We got used to seeing Tarek Masoud of Harvard—we had just paid for all of his work on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. He came back. Egypt exploded. And he would be on the PBS News Hour, like, more than David Brooks. He became a fixture with his nice little tie and glasses on there every night. Likewise, I mean, Nathan Brown had already been one of the top people in that field. He was a Carnegie Scholar. Samer Shehata is another breakthrough voice in that field. Carrie [R.] Wickham from Emory [University]—she also studies political parties of Egypt—finds herself on the cover of *Foreign Affairs* in the midst of all of this. And then one of the best lectures I've ever heard on the Egyptian Revolution is a woman named Mona El Ghobashy, who is a specialist on union movements and strikes in Cairo. And she's now up at Barnard College, Columbia. And this woman is a virtuoso. And she was a Carnegie Scholar. And one night I turned on MSNBC, "The Rachel Maddow Show," and there she was.

Q: I saw that.

Wiesner: You saw that?

Q: I saw that.

Wiesner: So it was raining grantees. We were really in heaven. Between that—the fact that the Carnegie Scholars had been weirdly skewed in that direction—and secondly, there was one other cause that we had so many grantees in the news. It was because we started something called

POMEPS, Project on Middle East Political Science. Most of the fields of political science, it's more theoretical. It is not focused on the Arab region. But you have a subset of political scientists who do their field work and their expertise on the Arab region. In the past, they found it very hard to get a job. Economists of the Middle East, likewise. The regional specialization made them kind of fringe. But Marc Lynch, who blogged his way to fame as something called the Abu Aardvark Blogger back in his days at Williams College moved to George Washington University where he now heads their Elliott School Institute for Middle East Studies. He had never gotten a grant before because, he said, "If I wanted to do anything, Williams would just pay for it." Williams is a rich, little school.

Q: But isolated, in his case.

Wiesner: Yes, that is why he became a famous blogger. And so, we said, look, what do you want to do? We'll give you some money. And he said, well, I could revive Middle East Political Science and have a network of the top people. I could do it in partnership with my mentors Shibley Telhami and Lisa Anderson, who is currently president of American University in Cairo. And we could nurture the next generation and mentor them. And we could connect them with policymakers. I actually didn't know that his George Washington University was behind the State Department and contained the Starbucks of the State Department. So all of his events were just packed with U.S. government people, and he started one of the best brands in the business now. And if you consider that he built all that—and then in spring 2010 he launched Middle East Channel of foreignpolicy.com, which was recently nominated for one of the Webby Emmys competing against *Sports Illustrated.* It did not win.

But he set all of this mechanism up and these networks of people and then the Arab Spring hit. He had a young guy named Chris [H.] Alexander in the network. And that guy had done only one thing, Tunisia. And nobody cared until the Arab Revolution started in Tunisia. And that guy, Chris Alexander, he was an unknown associate professor at Davidson College. He wrote us, "I got completely avalanched by media requests after that first foreign policy piece appeared. For two weeks straight I did nothing but prepare for and conduct media interviews: Al Jazeera, BBC, Australian Radio, Jamaican Radio, NPR stations in Chicago, California, Houston, Chinese News agencies, *Bloomberg News*, *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and workshops at NED [National Endowment for Democracy] and Stanford [University] and discussions with twenty U.S. government officials who needed a lot of information on Tunisia quickly."

This happened in many cases. There's also a famous sociologist of Egypt named Diane Singerman, who was at American University. And she had given up on the media, on the press. She just couldn't be bothered anymore. And they twisted her arm. And she ended up having very, very good media contacts throughout these Arab Revolutions.

Q: That's quite a list of people. The thing that I wanted to ask you about are, I suppose, the names that aren't on the list, some of the people that aren't your to-go people if you want to send out—or somebody that may have not lived up to the grant, for example, because we all have those when we're in your position. What are those moments like?

Wiesner: Let me think. They don't tend to be in touch as much. I think, really, a sign that something is wrong is that we don't hear from them. As I mentioned, we had a couple of grants that kind of went south. We had people that didn't write their Carnegie Scholars books, plenty of them. Some of them are famous. Some put it out—

Q: For example?

Wiesner: No, I won't name them here. That is Pat's program, not mine. We didn't mind if they changed their topic. And we had people who were really wildcard with us. There's somebody named Finbarr Barry Flood who does iconoclasm and Islamic art. We didn't know him from Adam. And we give them a Carnegie Scholars grant, although, thinking we have no clue who this guy is. And he's turned into an enormous star. And lately I've been hanging out with Helen [C.] Evans, the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] curator. Do you know her?

Q: I know her.

Wiesner: And what is she doing, she's just raving to me about Finbarr Barry Flood and how he's doing sections of her "Byz to Is," Byzantium to Islam, exhibit but that he keeps complaining that some foundation is bugging him about a grant deadline. She says: "Is that your fault?" I said: "Yes, that's Carnegie."

Another weird artifact is that we pulled so many people out of the field, out of teaching I should say, for two years because they took our money and bought out their salaries to go do research,

they went off to Turkey. So at certain points, the rate of sabbaticals in the field went up. And I started to actually worry about that.

Q: Tell me about the downsides of that? Because certainly there must be some cost relative to the benefit of leaving your university for two years, leaving your colleagues and what that does to your chances for tenure, your collegial relations and so on.

Wiesner: On tenure, they've told us that the exact kind of public outreach op-eds and public appearances that we ask for are a tenure risk for them. These things are dis-incentivized through the tenure system because they are seen as being unprofessional. They fall outside of peer review. And I think they also set some personal dynamics in play. I don't understand why universities do not do more. We see them starting to scale up, what a university communications office will do, to backstop somebody. Like Dartmouth has this guy who knows everything about Libya.

Q: Dirk [J.] Vandewalle.

Wiesner: Exactly. And when Libya blew up, that guy was everywhere in the news. I regretted he was not one of our Carnegie Scholars. He was wonderful. He was just the type. And his university immediately put a think tank style web page, head shot, links to articles, video clips and they gave him the backing that a public intellectual, public scholar needs, like, overnight. Good for them. Good for Dartmouth.

I remember at one point, when I first got this job, sitting down with people in the Office of the President of Georgetown [University] and asking what kind of backstopping do you give to your star faculty on this? What else could you do? Would you do more? And would a grant make a difference? These were the sorts of exploratory conversations I was having the first year. They tell us it is risky. And also some of the topics are controversial. But fundamentally I don't get it because I see bidding wars break out for star professors like NYU versus Harvard on this guy Niall [C. D.] Ferguson, who's a sort of—I don't want to say celebrity chef. He's a celebrity apprentice, I'm sorry, a celebrity intellectual now.

Q: The historian of empires.

Wiesner: Yes.

Q: Okay, yes.

Wiesner: So look at the attention and students and visibility that are attracted by professors like that to universities. You tell me why universities will not do more to help their professors be more prominent with public outreach. You tell me.

Q: Well I could tell you, having been through the system. But we'll save that for another time because this is your story.

Here's another tension though and one that I'd like you to speak to a little bit. On the one hand, you mention the op-eds and the outreach that you want the scholars to do. On the other hand, you mention that this is very much a book-driven endeavor where there should be a wonderful, great book at the end. And the two, in many ways, pull people in fundamentally different directions. How do you conceive of that here or think about it?

Wiesner: That was a hard one for me. That's really why I established SSRC Academia in the Public Sphere [grants program] because I wanted the component of really short format public scholarship and trying to push university centers to provide the backstopping for it. To me, they don't have to be opposites. I have had professors repeatedly point out to me, hey, we wouldn't have anything to say on *PBS NewsHour* if you had not funded us to go and do the research. So for them it's essential. I learned hard lessons like they really want to do their research. That is their passion.

Vartan would have loved to do this as just a research-driven program, I believe, because that's what he values above all else is individual research. For me, this was always about the gap between the wealth of knowledge about Muslim societies and what we know from polling numbers about what Americans know about Islam and Muslims and about those countries and regions. So to me it was about always trying to find ways to bridge that gap.

Q: This is a natural place, I suppose, for me to ask you a question then about outcomes and influence. Or maybe influence isn't the right word but certainly something more than resonance. How do you measure if you are having the effect out there that you wanted between increasing

public knowledge and policy or simply improving the level of the discussions out there on Islam or Arab states and so on? How do we know that the grants that we are giving are having the desired effect?

Wiesner: We realize we are never going to reach unengaged publics. There are other projects like interfaith and grassroots that we hope will—ours, we wanted it to hit, kind of, at this part of the knowledge food chain, you could call it, that is editors of book reviews that are journalists. We did so much that was targeting and working with journalists, journalists and academics giving each other pointers on how to work better together and getting to know each other better. We did this again and again and again all over the country.

We do various things. At one point, my assistant, Terry Welch, collected 448 media appearances by core grantees just over a three-week period of mainly the Egyptian Spring. And we looked at patterns like, wow, media appearances cause media appearances. If someone did one interview, they ended up doing several. So we could see that the media were watching the media and they were mainstreaming people. Also, I would meet with a woman who handles the database of sixty thousand talking heads for CNN. And she told me what they needed. They need YouTube-style clips. They need the basics that think tankers have on their websites. We found that we have to ride the news cycle. We can't fight it anymore. We cannot get people to think about Uzbekistan unless it's burning down. And so we just have to resign ourselves to that. Because the kind of public education, the education that Americans went through when Egypt blew up—and that was a regime that was very much supported and was an ally of the United States but had a huge democracy deficit—the U.S. pretty much switched sides on that. Suzanne Mubarak is still

holding a severe grudge. And the U.S. government had to have Americans relatively on board with that in order to change its policies.

We count congressional hearings and who testifies at them. There was a particularly memorable hearing in the spring in April of 2011 when—it was called the House Intelligence Subcommittee on Terrorism, Human Intelligence, Analysis and Counterintelligence—met to talk about the Muslim Brotherhood. They had five speakers, three of whom didn't know much. And then the other two were two Carnegie scholars, Nathan Brown and Tarek Masoud, who basically wiped the floor with them. There was a one hundred point IQ gap between these Carnegie scholars and the other people who had been called as witnesses who, I'd say their main qualification was they don't like the Muslim Brotherhood. But they're not experts in anything and they didn't have any facts and they don't meet with the Muslim Brotherhood—and there's some basic gaps there. So we would see who's being called to testify. And there were frustrations, like most of our scholars' books would get published by university presses. That in itself, to me, it's like defeat. That's defeat.

One of our greatest books, brilliant, by a young scholar, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America [From the New World to the New World Order]*, spanned five centuries. Well, it has been influential because of when it came out. But it's Cambridge University Press and it's heavily researched and academic. So not a lot of—it is kind of a bestseller among academic press books. But I think it will be used as a base source for more popularizing books that will follow. We know a number of community leaders who are writing books about this and he's going to be a kind of resource.

Q: What presses, if not academic ones, do you have more in mind as the outlets?

Wiesner: We like it when it is a commercial press. But this is very hard. That means no footnotes. And scholars don't want that. And they also want their degree of detail in their topic areas. There are others, as I mentioned, Noah Feldman or Vali Nasr, who will do very commercial books. And we were always fine with that. But I feel like in the back of their minds, it's just considered inferior.

Q: The other issue that came up in the back of my head when you were talking about the Carnegie-sponsored people that appeared before Congress and so on or other media appearances, the issue that came up in my mind is who are your competitors?

Wiesner: Competitors. You mean among foundations?

Q: That's right. Meaning if you have two or three Carnegie people in front of a congressional committee or making appearances on the Rachel Maddow [Show], what other organizations are vying for those positions?

Wiesner: Think tanks. Think tanks. And you know, we're just for knowledge. Most think tanks in America today are representatives of particular political positions. We really do stand for knowledge. As Vartan says, “We are not for it or against it. We are just for research and we're for facts.” And, on the one hand, it used to be think tanks that would dominate those slots on op-eds

or on informed radio and television shows. Nowadays if you look at cable news, it's actually just paid contributors. So they'll bring out someone who is a professional journalist and they'll ask them about Afghanistan. It's an echo chamber. And it certainly locks out voices from the region, as well as locking out voices of expertise—it is just part of the American echo chamber.

Our former Carnegie Director of External Affairs, Susan [R.] King, used to say, because she would see how angry this all made me, "The world would be a better place if Hillary Wiesner watched less cable television." Sort of a zen statement, like I was just sort of poisoning everything by watching that and projecting that.

Q: Well, you joined Carnegie Corporation—we talked about this before—in 2007 and we're now in April of 2012. This type of dynamic that you're talking about now, the echo chambers, was it different in 2007?

Wiesner: Well, I personally think so and some of our trustees thought so. And by the end of our initiative, our outgoing trustee [Thomas] Tom [R.] Pickering, said, "We think you've played a major role in pluralizing the discourse in American news and media." We certainly gave it our all. To us, Arab Spring was a turning point. It is when we learned this lesson that the teaching moments are the news cycle peaks and that you have to be ready and that new media, online media and the diversification of news sources represents an opportunity and in some ways a leveling of the playing field in terms of informing U.S. publics. Look at these top bloggers like Juan [John Ricardo I.] Cole or Lynch or many others—[Joshua] Josh [M.] Landis on Syria—they ended up getting called to testify and working closely with the government.

And likewise, there was one other government initiative that people almost forget about now. It was called President Obama's [Partners for a] New Beginning initiative. Then May of 2011 it shifted, really, to a new topic of Arab democracy and trying to say that the U.S. was okay with it, that that would be the message. But when the New Beginning first started, the beginning of Obama's term, he did this charm offensive. He went and gave speeches. And a lot of our grantees were involved in that, Shibley Telhami, Vali Nasr, Marc Lynch, all advised the New Beginning. The leader of the interagency process, Pradeep Ramamurthy in the National Security Council, who did the New Beginning, called me and convened my funder affinity group. We went to D.C. We met with all of them. They were looking to see what we would fund, what they would fund and what the terrain was like on this topic. So they reached out to us.

We started all these funder affinity groups. And another time, we were called down by Janet [A.] Napolitano, Department of Homeland Security—we considered this a mutual listening—and we were accompanied by foundations like Open Society, which is a bunch of lawyers. They're a bunch of constitutional lawyers. So it was an interesting dialogue.

Q: And what was that like?

Wiesner: Well, in particular, they had some Muslim American organizations that they wondered would we fund something like this. They were progressive voices. Or they kind of worked with them in counterterrorism areas. Maybe something like Proteus Fund might fund them. But if they don't have a Ph.D. Carnegie is not likely to fund them. We have our niche. But it was also kind

of a good moment because we got to discuss. At one point they showed us Jihadi videos. And there's [Anwar] al-Awlaki and he's saying Muslim is the opposite of American. It's the basic, same points. The content of it is the same content that comes from the anti-Muslim movement. The anti-Muslim movement will say if you're a Muslim, you can never be American. You are antimatter to our matter. Your religion is the opposite of the U.S. Constitution. I mean, al-Awlaki was basically saying this stuff as terrorist radicalization. And we got to discuss with Janet Napolitano that coinciding of the anti-Muslim talking points with the radicalization talking points.

And I was pleased on that occasion to get to talk with Michael [E.] Leiter, the famous former director of the National Counterterrorism Center. And he praised the Carnegie grantees, including Lynch. And he said it really makes a difference that they have genuine region expertise, genuine really deep knowledge of the countries. That's something that security officers don't always necessarily have.

Q: The other issue that inevitably comes up, and it's related to everything we've talked about, is the so-called Arab Spring, the Arab Transitions, the Arab Awakening, whatever your preferred term for it is. Before we get into the depths of the programming changes or the retooling that happened here as a result of that, I'd like to get your response on what it was like for you personally to witness that, all the changes, given that you had studied the region in many different respects for so long?

Wiesner: Yes, it was very moving. I lost a lot of sleep. I didn't make it to the health club for two months. I remember sitting on my couch in a kind of tremendous fear because I'm an archaeology person. And, as you know, the National Museum of Egypt sits right on Tahrir Square. And I had just been there. I was in Egypt three times in the year before the blow up, including by accident. I was in there on the decisive parliamentary election of November 28, 2010, which was one of the immediate triggers of the Egyptian revolution. And every time I go, I go to the Archaeological Museum of Ancient Egypt there in Tahrir Square.

I remember crying here the day that—well, there was this particular Thursday when everyone thought that Mubarak was going to resign and he didn't. And I remember yelling out my door. I was watching Al Jazeera live. I was yelling at Terry, "He's not resigning. He's not resigning. He's giving them all the finger." And she said, "What's going to happen now?" I said, "They're going to burn it. They're going to burn Tahrir."

And then they had that day of the Battle of the Camel and its security forces who threw Molotov cocktails into the museum, destroying some of the objects in the museum. I was just weeping. I couldn't sleep. I was very excited about it. I was having a lot of trouble reaching people in Egypt. Finally I got through to our main contact in the Alexandria Library. She was barricaded inside her home, which was surrounded by men who lived in the building who were trying to protect it from looters. There were no police. But she was elated. She was elated. She said, "Thank God for this young generation—they are saving us. And this is, you know, thank God." As I mentioned, we didn't know if the Alexandria Library would physically survive it.

Then, in the time since, there have been some troubles for NGOs and civil society organizations working in and with Egypt. I will actually be back in Egypt for the first time since the revolution the week before the disputed presidential election of May 23, 2012. So that'll be great. They've been having massive demonstrations there as each candidate kind of goes in and goes off the ballot. So I'm not worried about going there but I have a strong feeling that I'd like to be engaged.

Q: What's the purpose of that trip?

Wiesner: Creation of the new *Arab Journal of Higher Education* with about fifty experts from that field and with the American *Chronicle of Higher Education* being a partner. I believe that Carnegie is going to get involved in funding and maybe in the U.S. arm of this, the *Arab Journal of Higher Education*. [It was later named *Al Fanar*.]

Q: Now, regarding all the events of the Arab Spring, it hit you immediately, obviously, because you were observing it. But how long between the start of the events in Tunisia and Egypt, between that time and the time that it started to affect how you did programming here?

Wiesner: Let's see, when was it that Vartan sort of discussed it with me? “Look,” he said to me one day. “How long have you been here? Five years, right?” I said, “No, it's not even four years. It just seems like longer. I'm sure it feels like longer, Vartan.” He was thinking an initiative is usually five years, even three to five years. So I was thinking of bringing it to an end. And he really wanted me to work on individual research grants and to try to do that component of what

the Corporation does. But, you know, by then, I had really caught the bug for developments in the region. This young generation there, who make up seventy percent of the population, the future is in their hands and they're amazing, idealistic people. And I just really wanted to work on that.

So, how did this evolve? None of us felt like we could walk away from it but we definitely wanted to shift. We all wanted to shift from the religion frame, which in some ways was needed but in some ways, it's always seen as a post September 11 decade. And most foundations are trying to move on from that religion frame—although it is unfinished business for sure—and do a regional frame. Rockefeller Brothers Fund is doing the same. I think Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation will start funding individuals in the Middle East for the first time. We're putting together a funder affinity group. MacArthur won't fund Middle East but they keep kind of participating. So we think maybe eventually they will. And of course, Open Society Foundations, which has been doing this for a long, long time. So, in touch with other funders, we realized that there was a niche for us.

I'm trying to think, now, how this all gelled. We did a couple of board presentations—one on Arab Spring and the role of our experts—that were really well received. And then we did another one just in March 2012, where we brought in Paul Salem, who heads the Carnegie Beirut Center, which is the number one think tank in the Middle East. He was so good. It was like he must be professionally trained in doing policy briefings. He used mnemonic devices and was beautifully organized. And he placed things in their categories of analysis. And he even did some very convincing predicting, prognostication, which, really, you're not supposed to do. Because are

people really that predictable, inherently predictable? How come Americans couldn't predict their own election of 2008? What makes Arabs more predictable than Americans? But he did a great job. And it was a great discussion with our board. And I think all of us just got spring fever. I don't know how it gelled.

But the next thing I knew, it had morphed into something we call States in Transition, Arab Awakening. And now just these weeks we've been building something that might, in the future, resemble the work that we did in former Soviet states after the fall of communism with university centers, social sciences and trying to help the intelligentsia of those countries during a transition period.

Q: I know a fair amount about the CASEs [Centers for Advanced Study and Education] that were set up in the—not so much former Soviet Union as much as former Soviet Russia. So to what extent is there synergy or a discussion, a transmission of knowledge or lessons learned from other parts of Carnegie Corporation? For example, the ones involved with Eurasia.

Wiesner: Strangely, I just had a meeting about that this morning, before you arrived, with Deana Arsenian. And we're going to—she has already told me how she started all that—consultative meetings and then site visits to a few institutions that we're considering partnering with. But she's telling me what made the CASEs really roll was the commitments that she got from governments and the ministries that would work with them and give them sustainability.

Within America, that's one reason we really like working with universities. Our projects with universities tend to continue after the grant period. If you find an NGO, you're paying all the staff costs and it ends the minute you stop funding it, unless, of course, they can get other donors. But we've been having knowledge transmission, even this very day, between CASEs and me, who will be working on the Arab region, even to try to follow some of those same patterns that they did.

Q: The one difference I'm noticing is that the CASEs started, I believe, in 1999 or 2000, after quite a bit of settling in Russia—

Wiesner: Okay, I can believe that.

Q: —it's quite interesting that now Carnegie's considering something potentially similar, while we still have pretty turbulent transitions in the Middle East. So I'm looking forward to keeping up on that and to hearing more as it unfolds. What do you see happening in the next five years? I'm putting you on the spot here.

Wiesner: Here you mean?

Q: Yes, here, in the next five years in terms of the kinds of initiatives and programs that you're likely to be dealing with.

Wiesner: Well, they are proposing to me a five-year Arab region knowledge sector initiative program. And I'm excited about it. We're just starting to hash that out now. I'm not surprised about the delay, you say, on CASEs because Carnegie tends to be very deliberative. If you look at the timeframe on Islam Initiative as well, I think there were ten years between Vartan coming in and saying he was going to work on Islam and the point where I was hired. Now, they did a lot of things before I arrived but usually with three, four, five-year gaps. As I said, he's deliberative. He looks at something from every angle and talks to many, many people before he does something. He is cautious as well.

So, for the foundation, we expect that within the five-year period, we will be in transition to a new leadership here, to a new president. I understand that's a one or two-year process. As I said, unlike my colleagues, I'm more new to philanthropy. And I don't know much about it. But that they would do a search and bring in someone and work out new programs, which could be entirely different, could be anything in our mandate.

We never know about the future of anything that we do. The Africa work. The fact that sixty or at least fifty percent of Carnegie's grantmaking is now really falling on K-12, trying to fix the very steep challenges of American K-12 education, which is a large task. I think we've scaled down a lot in higher education.

So a new president of Carnegie Corporation—and if I speculated, I'd say that they will, after one hundred years, capitulate to history and have a female president. I think the pressure will be on. I lived that at UNESCO when we got our first female director general of UNESCO a few years

back from Bulgaria. So I think it'll be a woman. And will tend to have a link to higher education. And I think it's likely to continue.

We see leadership changes happening at many of our peer foundations. The search is underway for the next president of [Andrew W.] Mellon Foundation, which is a great leader in the field of higher education in humanities. And they've just named [Christopher] Chris Stone to head Open Society Foundations. That's an exciting one. Apparently it's a very interesting period when there's a leadership change at a foundation and new strategy development.

And sometimes, because I spent most of my career overseas, it's always in the back of my mind, gosh, I'd love to work in the [Persian] Gulf like everyone else. Everyone I know is going to either Qatar or U.A.E. [United Arab Emirates] and taking jobs there now. Or I also look at Morocco and Tunisia as exciting places. Or there are various things happening in Geneva. So I still look at the possibility that I'm not one of the lifers here at Carnegie. Not long ago we had a farewell for a woman who had worked here forty years in our education department. So the average is really around twenty years. And I've only been here five years. So I never know where the fates will carry me. Maybe I will end up overseas one of these days.

Q: Or your own initiative if it's a five-year plan.

Wiesner: Yes, we'll see.

Q: Well, I've asked you many questions over the past two sessions. So, rather than asking you a question, I will give you an opportunity, since we've come to the end of the session, to speak on any point that you would like to end on. So I leave it at that.

Wiesner: Let me think. Was there anything else?

I do feel a sense of accomplishment about it. On the one hand, if your foundation has spent forty million dollars over twelve years trying to inform U.S. publics about this topic and in 2010 you're facing “Islam is of the devil” and people shouting at Muslims saying “terrorists go home,” at certain moments in the Ground Zero mosque controversy, I felt despair and I felt like we had mis-aimed, misfired, and that we needed to fire lower or take different strategies. So I'm very open to the idea that well, maybe we didn't do anything. But when I look at the hundreds and hundreds of people that we supported and that we networked and that we encouraged during difficult times and the international connections between institutions and people that we've built up and the strength of the voices of leading people in the field of Middle East studies in the way that they are appearing in new places, I feel yes, we accomplished something.

Q: Thank you very much. I think that's an appropriate end.

[END OF INTERVIEW]