

United Nations Oral History Project

**Jeane Kirkpatrick
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JEANE KIRKPATRICK
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JK: First I would like to thank you for participating in the Yale oral history study of the United Nations. Ambassador Kirkpatrick, would you explain exactly what your position was in the United Nations and when you began?

Kirkpatrick: I was US Permanent Representative to the United Nations from January, 1981, the beginning of the Reagan Administration, until April Fool's Day 1985. I served longer than any US Permanent Representative since Adlai Stevenson.

JK: What were your impressions of the United Nations at that time? Was the UN fulfilling its role according to the vision that the founders had had when they had written the Charter?

Kirkpatrick: Of course not. In my view the United Nations does what its member states desire it to do. I feel that the UN is less an actor than an arena in world events. Governments use the UN as an arena. The UN becomes an actor only after it has received decisions made by the member states. Since there was deep division among member states from the beginning of the Cold War almost at the inception of the UN until recently, the limits on action on a very wide range of areas were very great. And this prevented that arena from being useful in conflict resolution and the protection of human rights and development and in a variety of other major areas.

JK: In representing one of the five major powers you were immediately a member of the Security Council. What was your role at that time on the Security Council?

Kirkpatrick: I didn't have any specific role but as one of the five permanent members the United States had, of course, regular permanent membership and a veto. Beyond that the Security Council has only one formal role for its members, that of the Presidency of the Security Council. Beyond that, all the members simply participate in deliberation and decision on those issues with which the Council is seized and that is what I did.

JK: During that first year that you were on the Security Council the process for selecting a new Secretary-General was underway. Had that process already begun when you started?

Kirkpatrick: This is very amusing, in fact. There had been discussions of it, clearly there had been discussions. I remember the first discussion I had heard of it inside the US government. It was, by the way, at the White House. It was clear that there already had been some conversation among some of the key players on the US side before I was ever appointed, or at least before I was sworn in, or before the first conversation I heard.

JK: Who were some of the candidates they were discussing at that time?

Kirkpatrick: There were basically two contenders, you might say,

that the US supported. One was Kurt Waldheim and the other was Sadruddin, the Aga Khan. Kurt Waldheim was running for a third term. I was introduced to Sadruddin by the Vice President then, now our President, George Bush. George Bush was, of course, personally acquainted with Kurt Waldheim and Sadruddin Aga Khan, and Javier Perez de Cuellar. The fact that he had served with all of them and knew them well made him a central person in the decision process in the United States, more than on any other single issue while I was in politics.

JK: How would you describe the way the selection process works? Is it very precise?

Kirkpatrick: Like all other processes in the Security Council it is very political. Many people don't understand that the Security Council of the United Nations, like the General Assembly, is a political body. Much like the Congress and the British Parliament and the Cabinet are political bodies, so is the Security Council of the United Nations. It works very politically. The biggest problem at that stage was to find a candidate who was acceptable to the Western group, the United States, France, Britain, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. I don't think that there was as much focus on China in the beginning of this process as there perhaps should have been.

JK: Is there any kind of formal procedure, for example, how

does a person become a candidate?

Kirkpatrick: There is quite a bit of informal discussion before real formal nominations are made. Everyone knew who the candidates were going to be. They were going to be Salim Salim, Sadruddin Aga Khan, Kurt Waldheim, and Javier Perez de Cuellar. It was clear from the beginning that Perez de Cuellar was a compromise candidate. Everybody is a compromise candidate, though, because you have to find a compromise at least among the Permanent Members. Once you had found someone acceptable to all the Permanent Members, it was fairly certain that the candidate would be acceptable to the rest of the members of the Security Council.

JK: Who actually proposes a candidate? Does a member of the Security Council?

Kirkpatrick: I think so. As I recall a member of the Security Council formally nominates a candidate. But, you know, I wouldn't say this very clearly. The reason that I am as foggy on the formal procedures of nominating as I am is that it is not very important. The informal procedure is what is important. The informal discussions that go on in the search for a kind of consensus on a central candidate is what is really important and by the time formal nominations are made, the decisions about the nominees are all well known.

JK: During the initial balloting that was taking place what

was happening?

Kirkpatrick: Well, what happened was that the Chinese blocked Kurt Waldheim. The only reason that Kurt Waldheim was not elected to an unprecedented third term by the Security Council was that he was blocked by the Chinese. This was really rather amusing. He was blocked by the Chinese because they thought he was unacceptable to the Africans. The interesting thing about this is that he wasn't unacceptable to the Africans. I remember the Soviet Ambassador and I having a large laugh together afterwards because the Chinese didn't really understand the politics of the issue very well. They believed that the nonaligned movement was in back of Salim Salim. They like to think of themselves as the representatives of the nonaligned of the Third World on the Security Council. In fact, the nonaligned were split, as the Africans were split, on this because the Francophones preferred Sadruddin Aga Khan to Salim Salim because he was Francophone basically. There was a fairly important split on many issues at the UN between the Anglophone and Francophone Africans. But the Chinese were not really much aware of this and that split got carried into the nonaligned on a number of issues, too. They blocked Kurt Waldheim's reelection. The Americans and the Soviets and the British and the French were all ready to support Waldeim for another term.

JK: But, Salim was also being blocked. Do you recall who was opposing his candidacy?

Kirkpatrick: Well, I don't think it was so much that people were blocking Salim Salim as they just weren't supporting him. It's different to be blocked than to be not supported. He didn't get enough votes. Waldheim, on the other hand, got plenty of votes from the first. He had enough votes to be elected on the first ballot. Sadruddin also got enough votes to be elected but the Soviets blocked him. As I recall Salim never got enough votes to be elected. And I don't think it was so much that people were hostile to him as they had a preferred candidate.

JK: Oloro Otunu of Uganda became the President of the Security Council during that phase. Did his role as President have an effect on the process?

Kirkpatrick: I don't think so. I really don't think so.

JK: Eventually, as I understand it, Waldheim and Salim withdrew their candidacies. Do you recall why or how they did that?

Kirkpatrick: It just became clear that they were not going to be elected. It was clear that the Chinese were going to block Kurt Waldheim and it was clear that Salim was not going to have a majority.

JK: Had anyone tried to talk to them?

Kirkpatrick: I don't remember. Sadruddin then emerged as the strongest of the candidates. We only had one ballot as

I recall. He got a large number of votes but the Soviets vetoed and they indicated that they would continue to vote no from then until Christmas or New Years if necessary. As often as we voted on Sadruddin they would vote no.

JK: So, that was clear at that point.

Kirkpatrick: So, that became clear. Sadruddin afterward said to me that he felt we should have forced some additional ballots. But we didn't. And that's when Javier emerged as a candidate who was basically acceptable to everyone.

JK: How was his candidacy proposed?

Kirkpatrick: I don't remember.

JK: That's interesting.

Kirkpatrick: I remember that one of my colleagues on the Security Council said to me that he was probably the best man that we had considered, that he would make a better Secretary-General than anyone else we had considered. And there was quite a lot of positive feeling about him. And I remember the British saying that they knew him well and the French knew him well. Were the Peruvians on the Council then? Maybe not. But, anyway, a lot of people knew him. George Bush knew him. A lot of people knew Javier Perez de Cuellar. Once he emerged, once the other candidates had been eliminated, he suddenly emerged as the man acceptable to everyone.

JK: In considering the candidates was there much discussion on their qualifications to be a leader?

Kirkpatrick: Frankly, I think there was a general feeling that all the people considered were qualified. They were all people with a lot of experience in the UN system with broad diplomatic experience.

JK: So, they were known entities.

Kirkpatrick: They were known entities. There was no unknown entity.

JK: How did the voting process proceed at that point?

Kirkpatrick: I might also say that it is a fact, as I'm sure you're aware, that Salim had no objections in reference to the entry of the Republic of China in the United Nations. At the time that that vote was lost, when the PRC won that seat in a very tight vote, Salim -- it was very well known and it was frequently cited afterwards -- had danced in the aisles at the US defeat. Now, you may recall, the US Permanent Representative at the time was George Bush. I wouldn't say that George Bush or the United States would have blocked Salim had he had enough support otherwise, but I do not think that was irrelevant to the US position. I don't think we voted no on Salim. My own personal opinion of Salim was very positive. That incident is a background factor. I wouldn't say it was important, but, it was a factor. As a political scientist, I would want to file that in my file.

JK: How did the final balloting go? Did Perez de Cuellar emerge through one single ballot?

Kirkpatrick: My memory is that it was in a single ballot. It emerged that he was broadly accepted, and acceptable to all of the five permanent members.

JK: Also, during that time in the early eighties, the Falklands/Malvinas War took place. You had done quite a bit of research on Argentina.

Kirkpatrick: That was a long time ago, a long time ago.

JK: Were you acquainted with any of the people who were involved in the crisis on the Argentine side?

Kirkpatrick: Sure, though acquainted is the right word. I didn't know them well. But, I had met them, not from the research I had done. Let me just say, I had done a PhD dissertation in a book on the Peronist movement after Peron, but I had done that a long time before. I had an interest in Latin America, broadly. In other words, I had an interest in Europe. I didn't have an exclusive interest in Latin America. I was interested in Latin America, above all, as a place where Mediterranean style politics was transplanted, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese. I am a professor of comparative politics. President Reagan asked me to make two trips to Latin America in 1981. I visited most of the countries.

JK: Your Spanish is very good. I heard you speaking on the phone.

Kirkpatrick: My Spanish is all right. It's passable. It was better when I was at the UN because I was using it a lot more. I met on that trip most of the top level officials in the Argentine government. That was really the only way I knew them, as a US official.

JK: Had you met one of the members of the Junta? I understand that you had met General Lami Dozo.

Kirkpatrick: No, to the best of my knowledge I never did. Whoever told you that was wrong. I had met General Galtieri. He was the head of the government. My only contact with them was as a Presidential representative on an official visit. I didn't meet any military leaders except those occupying prominent roles in the government. And I had met Galtieri.

JK: What were your impressions of him?

Kirkpatrick: I thought that he was -- and I wrote this, too -- I thought he was a populous style Latin military dictator. He was interesting as a type, I thought. His aspirations, I think, were to be a kind of latter day Peron. It was clear to me that he was using some standard populous style approaches, tactics, including alot of appeals to emotionalism and to popular things, but he was fundamentally a military dictator. Like Peron he hoped to be in the Latin style of a populous military figure. That is what he wanted to be. That was my impression.

JK: That was his image of who he was.

Kirkpatrick: Well, I think so. I was very surprised by the Argentine occupation of the Falklands. I was wholly surprised. It never would have occurred to me they would do such a thing. I was aware of the long-standing Argentine claim to the Falklands as everybody who knows anything about Argentina, but I regarded the occupation as a complete surprise.

JK: What is your explanation for why they decided to do that?

Kirkpatrick: I said that to Peter Carrington once, and he regarded it as a surprise, too. I think everybody was stunned by it. I think that the Argentines had been isolated from the rest of the world for a very long time and I frankly don't think they had -- a little bit like Saddam Hussein right now -- I don't think they had any idea what the reaction of the British or the United States or rest of the world or anybody else was likely to be. I think they thought about their claim and they wanted to make it. When I made the trip to Argentina, Roger Fontain made the trip with me and we were both briefed in the White House before we went. And we were explicitly told to carry instructions to really warn Galtieri and the Argentine government what a dim view the United States would take of any effort on their part to solve the Beagle Channel dispute by force. We thought they might do that. We talked about what a terrible thing it would be to try to

solve the Beagle Channel dispute by force. It was so far from our minds that they might try to solve the Falkland Islands dispute by force that it was literally not part of our briefing.

JK: Did they think that the British cared enough about the Falkland Islands to defend them?

Kirkpatrick: I don't know. I don't think they thought the British would care very much. And they had some reason. I don't know if you have read Michael Charlton's book.

JK: No, I have just finished reading Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse and Lawrence Freedman's new book. It's just out as a matter of fact it may not be available here yet, but I work with her so I got an advanced copy.

Kirkpatrick: I haven't seen it.

JK: It's very good.

Kirkpatrick: Well, Michael Charlton's book is very good. It was out about six months ago. I did a review of it for the National Interest magazine called "My Falkland's War and Theirs," and it reviews some of the records at that time. But, the fact is that the British government had two times in the decade preceding indicated some wavering on its position on the Falklands and what kind of settlement they might accept. Of course, it wouldn't have taken much knowledge of Great Britain or of the world to understand that the worst possible way for the Argentine's to seek to advance their cause was by a

unilateral occupation. But I don't think they had much knowledge of either Great Britain or the world.

JK: From your impressions of Galtieri, was he interested in promoting this as a means of nationalism?

Kirkpatrick: Well, I don't know, of course, this had not happened when I met him. I never saw him again to this day. I don't think I ever met Lami Dozo. It is possible that I might have. When I was in Argentina on that trip I spoke at the War College to a group of senior officers of colonels and above and he may have been there. But to say that I knew him is totally inaccurate. To the best of my knowledge I have never personally met him in my life.

JK: Did the Junta appear to have political problems at home in Argentina that might have contributed to their decision?

Kirkpatrick: I wasn't aware of any, but I wasn't following Argentina particularly closely at that time. I was there only three days, maybe two days, so I wasn't there long enough to get any special knowledge.

JK: At the time that the crisis broke out did you offer your services at all to mediate the crisis?

Kirkpatrick: Not to mediate the crisis. I said I would be happy to be of help with it and I would have. I had some conversations with Javier Perez de Cuellar about it. You know, I found it hard to believe that there would

actually be a war. I usually find it hard to believe that there will be a war over issues. Frankly, I was surprised. I find it hard to believe there will be a Gulf war though that is getting more familiar. I found it hard to believe there would be a war in the Falkland Islands. I thought that it would get settled somehow. And I thought it should and I was happy to help if I could.

JK: I understand that the State Department didn't really think there would actually be a war.

Kirkpatrick: I don't think any of us thought so.

JK: Secretary Haig then offered to mediate.

Kirkpatrick: I never offered to mediate in the sense that Haig did. I just offered to help.

JK: Then his offer was accepted. Was he considered neutral by the parties?

Kirkpatrick: No, I don't think so. Certainly the Argentines didn't think so. By the time he finished, of course, he was *persona non grata*.

JK: Why did his mediation not succeed, do you think?

Kirkpatrick: I don't know. Walters was along and I wasn't. He accompanied Haig.

JK: Vernon Walters?

Kirkpatrick: Yes, Vernon Walters accompanied Haig to Argentina on the Falkland issue and served as his interpreter and aid. Walters was then an Ambassador At Large.

JK: If you had mediated would you have done anything differently than Haig had done?

Kirkpatrick: I don't really know enough about Haig's shuttle to comment about that. I think that he was inspired by Henry Kissinger and his famous Middle Eastern shuttle diplomacy. You know, this may have been a very difficult conflict to mediate. It may have been impossible to mediate. He was certainly never perceived as neutral, but I don't think he probably did a particularly good job of it, frankly. I think, personally, somebody like Javier would have done a much better job than anybody in the initial talks. I don't think the United States was in a very good role to mediate. I'm not sure that was slated to succeed no matter who was the mediator. I think that is a good example of a conflict where a foreign Secretary General might have done a very good job of it if either party had desired him to, which neither did. Nor did anybody else, but even in retrospect I think of all the people I can imagine taking that initiative, he would have had the best chance of success.

JK: The stalemate seems to have been the issue of sovereignty, Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the Islands.

Kirkpatrick: Let me just explain, I did have an extraordinary experience which I described in the article.

JK: Excuse me, but what is the article you are referring to?

Kirkpatrick: It's called "My Falkland's War and Theirs" and it's in the National Interest magazine about a year ago, fall 1989 or winter 1990.

I had an extraordinary experience near the very end after the Haig mediation had ended and after the Secretary-General had tried. There was the so called Belaunde initiative and then there was the Secretary-General's so called initiative. I say "so called Secretary-General's initiative" because I think that it was too short. I had never known how much of the Belaunde initiative had come from the Secretary-General or how much had come from Washington. Anyway there was a pure Secretary-General's initiative. It became clear that they were coming down to the edges of war. The Argentine Foreign Minister, Nicanor Costa Mendez, and his principal aid, Enrique Ros, who was, I guess, the Director General of the Foreign Service then, came to the UN with their Ambassador, Eduardo Roca. And they came to my apartment for dinner or perhaps it was after dinner. At any rate they were there. Mrs. Thatcher at that stage had made her final offer. And I thought it was a very generous offer. I had confirmed all the terms with Tony Parsons, who was the British Permanent Representative, and I tried a hand -- this was in no sense mediation -- at persuading them to take another look at this offer. I tried very hard to persuade them of the terrible

consequences that were going to ensue from the failure at this stage to accept a peaceful settlement of this dispute. I think that Mrs. Thatcher's final offer of May 17th was exceedingly generous. I was very struck by what I would call a failure of realism in the Argentine Foreign Office as well as the Foreign Secretary. I don't think they understood what war was like. They didn't understand they were going to be defeated. They didn't understand they were going to be humiliated and they didn't really understand that young Argentines and young Brits were going to die in this effort. There was a real Don Quixotesque sense of unreality about their attitude as I experienced it. There was another Argentine present there who had brought them to the apartment and he was Wenses Bunge. I don't know if you know Wenses Bunge but Wenses Bunge, who does know Lami Dozo by the way, is an Argentine businessman and is active in their Council on Foreign Relations. He's been a prime mover in the Argentine-American Forum. The Bunge family are major industrial/agricultural Argentine international businessmen. Anyway, Wenses had brought them to my home. Wenses really became involved in this and Jose Rosana was there, too. We gave it a very hard try to communicate a higher sense of reality to the Argentine foreign office about what was going to happen to them and their country. The conversations continued until two in the morning and

we just failed.

JK: What is it that they wanted specifically?

Kirkpatrick: One thing I think, they were enjoying being the center stage. I hate to say it, but I really do believe that. The leaders in Argentina who had played no role in the world, no one had paid attention to them for a century if ever, were now center stage in the global arena. That's one thing they enjoyed. I don't think that was what the government was enjoying but I think that was what the foreign office was enjoying. I think they simply didn't understand there would be real world consequences from their behavior. I heard an Ambassador from a Gulf state describe the '67 War from the Arab side only last weekend. And, as he described it, Nasser and other leading Arab states on the eve of the '67 War, didn't really understand that there were going to be real world consequences. They had a kind of expectation that they were in full control of the situation. Events would only move as they permitted them to move. I also heard it suggested that Saddam Hussein suffers just as we speak from the same dillusion. This makes a certain amount of sense. This is what we saw in the Argentine Foreign Minister at that time. They thought they had a kind of total control and they didn't understand they had set in motion a good many other forces besides themselves which they could not control and which could have very serious

consequences for them and their country. There was a very strange failure of realism even to the point that the British were landing on that island.

JK: From your understanding of Latin political thinking was there a lack of understanding about the difference between acting in the "interest" of the people living on the Falkland Islands and acting according to their "wishes"? That language seemed to have been a problem within the agreements that kept coming forward.

Kirkpatrick: Sure, they were not a democracy. Why should they find the wishes of citizens of some other place like the Falklands more compelling than they found the preferences of the Argentines? It is also the case that they thought, as nondemocrats often do, that as long as they looked after their subjects' interests, made sure that they had good roads and access to good hospitals, schools, and mail, that that is what was important. They could guarantee that. Also, they felt that the British had restricted the immigration policy and had manipulated that population.

It occurred to me now why you thought I knew Lami Doso. I did meet General Mire. General Mire was an assistant to Lami Doso in the Air Force. And he made several trips to New York.

JK: And did you meet with him?

Kirkpatrick: I did. He asked to meet with me and I did. Needless

to say I made complete reports to my government on these meetings, to the White House. The White House was very much aware of it.

JK: What were the issues that he wanted to discuss with you?

Kirkpatrick: Peace and war. I think the fact that he came to the UN was characteristic of the fragmentation of the government. They didn't trust the foreign office with good reason. So, they were going to have their own representative.

JK: The military?

Kirkpatrick: Not even the military, the Air Force. I heard that a representative from the Navy came to the United States during that period, too. I don't know, but I heard it. I heard there was a time when each of the services had their own representative out in the world working on these problems.

JK: Sometime during the Haig mediation, The Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, made a kind of intervention by suggesting to the parties including the United States that the UN could provide its services. How was that received by the US?

Kirkpatrick: Well, I think Haig was extremely interested in trying to maintain something that he imagined was full control of everything while he was conducting the mediation and was not interested in any good offices from anybody at that stage. I don't think he welcomed the UN. He wanted

to do this himself. It is fair to say.

JK: Were there any face-to-face talks between the Argentines and the British at the UN?

Kirkpatrick: Not to my knowledge but there may have been.

JK: Would that have been helpful?

Kirkpatrick: I don't know, but I sort of doubt it. It could have worked with the help of a skillful, persuasive diplomat.

JK: As a Latin American, was the Secretary-General considered useful to the parties?

Kirkpatrick: I don't think he was considered useful by either party. I think he was greatly underused in that crisis, personally. I felt that at the time and I said as much to my government. I may have said as much to Javier.

JK: Did you have discussions with the Secretary-General about the crisis at the time?

Kirkpatrick: Oh sure.

JK: What was the nature of those discussions?

Kirkpatrick: One aspect was simply the nature of all my discussions with the Secretary-General, that is keeping him informed and bringing him up to date on the efforts of the US government. The Secretary-General and I both shared a helpless sense of anguish at the thought of a war actually emerging out of this conflict and a strong commitment to the notion that there ought to be a peaceful settlement. I still think there should have been a peaceful settlement to this conflict even in

retrospect.

JK: Were there any opportunities or moments that were lost in the negotiations, some kind of miscommunication or missed opportunity?

Kirkpatrick: I would have to look in my files. I don't remember in that kind of detail. I think there were two things: the unrealism of the Argentine government and the Argentine foreign office; that was very important, very deep; and then there was the determination of Mrs. Thatcher. Put these two things together plus the initial aggression of the Argentines and I think you have a recipe for catastrophe.

JK: Did the US provide any intelligence to the British?

Kirkpatrick: Yes, of course. The United States has regular intelligence sharing arrangements with the British. We do have a kind of special relationship with the British. We have a special relationship with the British in NATO, on agreement, which provides that the US will make up short falls in British contributions to NATO. This assisted the British in refocusing their efforts.

JK: In your various discussions with the Argentines did they express any concern for nuclear weapons that had been on board the British ships?

Kirkpatrick: My impression was that there was never any serious consideration of them. I heard later that there was, but I was very much unaware of it at the time. In retrospect

I doubt if it was a very serious consideration.

JK: Did they have any reaction or comments to make about the use of British nuclear submarines?

Kirkpatrick: Probably, but I don't recall.

JK: Were they upset about the US providing intelligence to the British?

Kirkpatrick: I don't think they were really aware of the extent to which the US was providing intelligence. Most people weren't. One of the reasons that I advocated inside the US government that we maintain neutrality in the struggle was that I thought it was intrinsically appropriate. We are a Western Hemisphere power and also very close to the British. But, I also knew that the British were already getting from us the kind of help that would be the most useful to them. Nothing much would be gained by a public declaration of US support for the British. I was fully aware of the US intelligence sharing and other special provisions relating to our relationship with the British. I don't think the Argentines would have appreciated it.

JK: Do you have any other comments to add about the Falklands?

Kirkpatrick: Well, one of the most interesting things about the Falklands to me was the powerful Latin response to this crisis -- with the single exception of Chile. All the countries of Latin America responded with incredible enthusiasm and solidarity toward Argentina and

Argentina's demands. They treated it as a colonial issue.

There was a hangover from this that was rather interesting. For the following year, for example, I was the only member of the US administration who was welcome in Caracas. I was entertained in Caracas for dinner in a place where they told me no foreigner had ever been -- it was some presidential room off of the speaker's room in their parliament -- because they wanted to distinguish between what they took to be my solidarity with Latin America and the attitude of the rest of the US government. This was very interesting. My sentiments in this regard, by the way, were both distorted and exaggerated in their public. I think Alexander Haig was probably responsible for that. Who knows who is responsible for the media misunderstanding things, but I was depicted as having strong pro-Argentine sentiments which I never did. Then Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez wrote a very nice letter once making that clear. What I wanted was the US to remain neutral. This was then presented as a very strong pro-Latin position. In the long months that followed, a year or year and a half or two years, it helped a lot in dealing with Latin America in the UN context. It solidified my personal relations a lot with the Latin Americans including the Venezuelans, the Ecuadorans, the Peruvians, those Latin

countries that had responded so strongly to this. I 'm
sorry but I really do have to go.

JK: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to do this.

Kirkpatrick: You're welcome.



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