

When it Mattered

Episode 17: William Murray

Chitra Ragavan: Hello everyone. I'm Chitra Ragavan and this is When it Mattered. When it Mattered is a podcast exploring how leaders are forged from critical moments and how they deal with and learn from adversity. My guest today is the legendary William Murray. He's a retired senior operations officer who spent nearly 38 years at the Central Intelligence Agency. During his tenure, Murray was posted to some of the most dangerous CIA stations in the world, often during war and civil unrest including Beirut, Tehran, Pakistan, Syria, and the Balkans. This episode is brought to you by Goodstory, an advisory firm helping technology startups find their narrative.

Chitra Ragavan: Murray also held senior management roles in Washington DC and was seconded in the US Senate to help create the intelligence reform and terrorism prevention act of 2004, which resulted in the largest change in US government structures since the end of World War II. Murray has received numerous awards including the Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal. He currently is founder of the Alphom group. A business intelligence and risk management consulting firm. Bill, welcome to the podcast.

William Murray: Hi Chitra, how are you this afternoon?

Chitra Ragavan: I'm good. How are you?

William Murray: I'm fine. Thank you.

Chitra Ragavan: You come from a humble working class, Irish Catholic family in Boston. In some ways, you were an unlikely candidate for the CIA.

William Murray: That's true. At the time I joined virtually everybody who had come in before me and the people were still coming in were all Ivy League, sort of East Coast big families, long established families, et cetera. I was a shot in the dark. I wasn't sure how it was going to work out.

Chitra Ragavan: What was your background?

William Murray: My father was in the Navy during World War II. And then used the GI bill after the war. Got an education as a design draftsman.

Worked on a lot of really interesting large engineering projects like the Polaris submarine and the B-58 Hustler and a whole host of missile systems for Raytheon and Honeywell and various other companies around the Boston area. I was always fascinated with what he did, the technology, et cetera. But he had a very large family. There were eight of us. I was the oldest. So trying to feed a family like that and house us et cetera. He wound up working a lot of times, two jobs.

William Murray: It was not particularly a struggle for us to exist. We weren't poor. We never thought of ourselves as poor. There was a struggle. I was very fortunate because when I started high school, my mother insisted that I compete for entrance to a regional Catholic high school that was just opening in the Southeastern Massachusetts area. I didn't think I'd ever pass the test, well I did. I got in and I was in the first graduating class. While I was in high school, I did a lot of oratory. I enjoyed that. So I did it. I wound up in my... almost the last few months of my senior year of high school winning the Massachusetts high school speech contest. Which gave me a four year free college education. The result of it. I was fortunate. I got into college and I was always interested in history. So I decided that I was going to study history and law as subjects.

Chitra Ragavan: How did you end up in the government?

William Murray: Well, it's kind of a complex story, but I was in the Marine Corps. I was in the Marine Corps Reserve. You have to understand, everybody in my generation or most people in my generation, the stories and the movies about the 60s, they sort of leave out the fact that many of us were inspired by Kennedy. The whole change in atmosphere in the United States during the Kennedy administration. We were struck by things like Kennedy's inaugural address as not what you can do. What your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. People have joined the Peace Corps, they signed up for the military, et cetera. They did all kinds of things. Would probably seem a little strange to today's generation. But for us, they were important.

William Murray: So I was in the Marine Corps Reserve and then I thought I was going to go to law school. In my senior year I started looking around at alternatives, but I wanted to go into the government in some form. I didn't want to stay in the military as a career. I wanted to do my duty and my obligation and et cetera. But I wanted some other form of career. I went to the guidance counselor who had just come to my university and he was a retired

FBI Special Agent. I went to talk to him about the FBI because I thought that might be a logical choice. Go to law school, then join the FBI. In those days, the FBI only took lawyers, CPAs, or people with significant law enforcement experience.

William Murray: As soon as I sat down with him, he talked me out of joining the FBI. He said I'd be bored out of my mind. He said he knew enough about me. He'd seen enough of me around the campus and et cetera, that he knew that I just wouldn't accept the incredible stifling atmosphere of the FBI. He encouraged me to go talk to the CIA.

Chitra Ragavan: Now when he talked about the stifling nature of the FBI, this was around the time of Hoover.

William Murray: Yeah. Hoover was still the Director and it was an incredibly different organization from what it is today. I mean, literally everybody bought their suits at the same tailor. Okay. Because Mr Hoover had to approve of every single Special Agent after they graduated from Quantico. They had to go in and shake his hand. He would stay in a little box and they were instructed not to look down because he was a short guy. You had to look at him directly in the eye. Everybody bought their suits. They were all exactly the same. He prescribed what they had to wear, white shirts, conservative tie, dark tie, a dark suit et cetera. He was just an incredible martinet.

Chitra Ragavan: Now, I just want to go back to the Kennedy anecdote you talked about because you actually indirectly crossed paths with the Kennedys.

William Murray: Yeah. I did.

Chitra Ragavan: ... and actually played a role in Ted Kennedy's election.

William Murray: Ted Kennedy was appointed to the Senate when Robert Kennedy was made Attorney General. But then a couple of years later, a year later, I guess 63, he had the run for the Senate on his own name. He was in an automobile accident and he broke his back. He was in traction on the hospital. He couldn't under Massachusetts law, present his own nomination papers. There was a provision under the law that if he could get so many thousand signatures then those would... the signatures would be accepted in lieu of a personal presentation. I was one of three guys who

organized a drive to get the signatures and we got them in about two or three days.

William Murray: By the way, the Kennedy family gave us a great party in downtown Boston. We took over a hotel for an evening. They brought in The Kingston Trio and they had an emcee from Hollywood. I mean, it was just an incredible evening. A lot of fun. But anyway, we got enough signatures. Got them on the ballot, and then he was elected to the Senate. I didn't have anything to do with him politically after that. But I didn't tell you the other story about Ted Kennedy picking me up off the sidewalk.

Chitra Ragavan: You didn't?

William Murray: No. I broke my... I didn't break. I fractured something in my ankle while I was in college. I was on crutches for a while. So I was at Suffolk, which is on top of Beacon Hill. It's right behind State House. Okay. I'm going down, I think Joy street, which is a fairly steep street down Beacon Hill toward Beacon street and the Boston Common and it's icy and everything else. I'm on crutches and bam, I go down. Slip on the ice, fall down. There's a guy who's coming along behind me. I didn't really see him. He's trying to bend over to help pick me up. It was Ted Kennedy. He was in the brace from the hospital and he couldn't bend down. Between me on the ground with the crutches and him trying to bend down. It was Ted Kennedy.

Chitra Ragavan: It's a great story.

William Murray: I never forgot. I can just picture the scene in a movie or something like a comedy. Because the poor guy couldn't bend with that brace on. I couldn't get up because every time I tried to get my foot solidly planted somewhere would just slip on the ice. I finally had this sort of move over to an area where there was less ice or something like that. I could prop myself up on the crutches.

Chitra Ragavan: This was after the petition drive?

William Murray: Yeah. He was out of the hospital by then. But he was in a brace for a long time.

Chitra Ragavan: So you ended up in the CIA. What was it like when you walked into the building?

William Murray: Well, I felt like a kid in a candy store. First of all, I felt like I didn't really belong there. Everybody that I met seemed to be better educated, better traveled, better understanding of the world than me. I'd sit in the cafeteria and listen to people around me speaking in half a dozen languages. We had a huge number of Greek speakers in those days. We had a lot of people from Eastern Europe, obviously Albanians, various Germans, Russians, et cetera. So you'd hear all of these languages being spoken around you. Talk about diversity. It was an incredibly diverse environment. You got to meet incredibly interesting people. People whose backstories you wouldn't believe.

William Murray: One of the guys I got to know was one of the two Americans who was allowed into the funeral. Into the actual chapel when Charles de Gaulle was buried because he was a member of the Ordre de la Libération. He and Omar Bradley were the only Americans allowed into the chapel. Because he'd been a Lieutenant in the Senegalese Rifles before the war. He had fought against the Germans and he had led all of these African troops. Many of his sergeants were now the heads of state or various African countries. He'd been shot on the job. A German machine gun attacking a German machine gun nest in Syria and somewhere in that area. He talked kind of funny. He talked like Popeye, but he was a great guy and he knew everybody. Okay. There was just all kinds of characters around like that. I just lapped up. Just soaked up whatever information I could from them and started to learn.

Chitra Ragavan: Some of the recruits who are with you didn't even bother to cash their paychecks.

William Murray: Yeah. They actually made an announcement that if you weren't going to cash your paycheck, please don't just put it in a drawer somewhere, return it to the Treasury so they can take it off the books. We had a fairly large number of people who came from very wealthy, old, established American families who we call them the dollar a year men. They didn't cash their paychecks, then they didn't really care about the money.

Chitra Ragavan: They weren't just rich, but you also were rubbing shoulders with some of the people who are fairly famous.

William Murray: Yeah. One of the first Division Chiefs that I worked for, chief of African division on those years, was Archie Roosevelt, who was the grandson of Teddy Roosevelt. He looked a little bit like Teddy too. He was a very wonderful man. Spoke half a dozen languages

including Arabic, Greek, ancient Greek and modern Greek. His brother was Jonathan Roosevelt, Kim Roosevelt excuse me, who was the guy who worked on. He was in charge of operation Ajax, which overthrew Mosaddegh in Iran. He and his son both worked there. I knew a whole group of guys like that. And just one guy that I met who -- his father had worked with Herbert Hoover in the Congo back in the twenties and thirties. As a mining engineer.

William Murray: He had an incredible background and just . . . it was a great experience. In addition to the people there were the resources. The historical intelligence collection in the library, the library itself, which was one of the best probably libraries in the world, the map collection. We had some of the best cartographers in the world. We won competitions every year, all over the world for cartography. It was an incredible experience working there.

Chitra Ragavan: So you were like a kid in a candy store. Did you ever get to tell your dad where you were and the thrill of doing what you were doing?

William Murray: No. Most of my career I didn't tell anybody where I was working. I mean, my wife knew. Obviously my children didn't. Our children didn't until they were just about teenagers. I think my father probably figured it out fairly early since he's a pretty smart guy, but I didn't tell them until considerably later. Matter of fact, the first time I ever admitted it to them as when I invited them to a award ceremony at headquarters when I got promoted to the Senior Executive Service. That was the first time I actually admitted to my parents where I worked.

Chitra Ragavan: You worked your way to the top. I mean, you are posted to a series of tours overseas in some key locations, Africa, Europe, eventually the Mideast where you spent the bulk of your career. And then the Balkans during the last 15. You wound up getting posted to stations that were pretty dangerous. Give us some examples of those.

William Murray: Yeah. Well, I can never figure out if they were just trying to get rid of me and hoping I wouldn't come back. I don't know. I didn't fill the right niches or something. I got a reputation for being what we call the gun fighter. Okay. Or what some of us call the gun fighter. A guy who was sent into difficult conditions when there was some kind of a mess to be cleaned up. I don't know how I got that reputation, but I got that reputation. They kept sending me to places like that. The only one I ever asked to go to really was

Beirut because I felt an obligation to go there. I knew Bill Buckley, had been kidnapped by Hezbollah. Something called Islamic Jihad, which was a branch of Hezbollah. He'd been tortured and killed.

William Murray: I knew Bill. Bill came from Massachusetts like I did. I just felt I should go there and try to do something. We didn't know where his body was. We got his body back later. We had 17 Americans as hostages at that time. Or 17 foreign hostages. They weren't all Americans. Most of them were American though. I felt an obligation. I felt like I had a really good background earlier in my career as somebody who could recruit sources of information, what we call agents. By the way, we don't call CIA people agents. They're not agents. They're intelligence officers, but the people we recruit are the agents.

William Murray: I had a good track record early in my career for my ability to recruit, including Soviet recruitments. What we call hard target recruitments, Soviets, Eastern Europeans, et cetera. I was pretty well established by that time. I did go to Beirut as the first Chief of Station after Bill Buckley's death was announced.

Chitra Ragavan: Tehran was another example.

William Murray: Tehran was quieter when I was there than it was later. I was there before the overthrow of the Shah. But even while I was there, there was an organization called the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq which was killing Americans. They killed seven Americans while I was there. I was sent there because they had tried to assassinate my predecessor. They actually made a mistake and they shot the guy that he worked with who had set him up. But there was a fluke and my predecessor hadn't gone to work that day. The terrorists, the people who did the killing, the assassins, mistook the man in the car for my predecessor and they shot him in the back of the head. He was actually the guy who had set my predecessor up. I went there to replace him. Slightly different working arrangement, but that's what I did.

Chitra Ragavan: At that time Mujahadeen-e-Khalq was considered our enemies.

William Murray: Oh, yeah. They were a terrorist organization. Congress has now decided, the State Department has now decided that they're not a terrorist organization. But that's largely because the luminaries in our Congress have forgotten how many Americans they killed over the years. They're still a terrorist organization.

Chitra Ragavan: Were you ever afraid of being in these-

William Murray: Let me explain something about Tehran. I went there with my family. I don't want you to think I'd put my family into harm's way. I didn't. At that time, there were actually some rules that people were following. The terrorists in Iran would not try to kill you if you were with your family. They wouldn't target your families. They wouldn't target like your car if you had your family in the car. They tried to get you alone. My family was never really in danger there. As strange as it sounds. Today, the same rules don't apply. The terrorist movement today they'll kill as many people as they can and they don't care about... They don't have any rules at all.

Chitra Ragavan: Were you ever worried about being in these crazy dangerous places?

William Murray: Well, you can't say you're not worried. I mean, Beirut was the middle of a civil war. I mean, there's no point in time while I was in Beirut for a little over two years, were the area around you was silent. There was always shelling machine gun fire, 20 millimeter and 40 millimeter cannon fire, fire from one side of Beirut to the other. The Beirut was a divided city with the Shia on the Southern suburbs and the Christians on the East in various enclaves. You can't ignore the danger. But what you have to do is you have to manage risk. You have to get into an attitude where you have to accept that there is risk, there's always going to be risk, and you have to figure out a way to manage it for yourself and for others.

William Murray: So you're armed of course, but that just protects you if somebody comes at you directly. But you just hope you don't get a stray round. Okay. Or that you don't get a mortar shell landing on your head. Sounds strange, but it's a way to live. Believe it. Actually it leads to some strange physical manifestations. You wind up with what I used to call a pilot light always burning. It's basically adrenaline. You feel it when you leave a place like that. I remember once coming back to Dulles, I came straight back from Beirut to Washington. I got in the car and my wife and kids picked me up at the airport. I get in the car and before I know it, Penny said, my wife, a wonderful person said, "Bill, you're doing over a hundred miles an hour."

William Murray: I was doing a hundred leaving the airport. Because that's the way I was used to driving in Beirut. Weaving and everything else. After that, when I came home I used to stop in Germany for a couple of

days and just decelerate a little bit. Just try to calm down a little bit.

Chitra Ragavan: So in all of these assignments you were taking a lot of risks as were your confidential informants, the agents you are recruiting and you were reporting back to Headquarters on all of these events and developments that you were seeing on the ground. Do you feel like those reports are acted on?

William Murray: No. Washington hears what Washington wants to hear. I used to say the only thing that gets to the President's attention is on what's on the front page of the Washington Post or the New York Times and the politicians. That's what they have to deal with because that's what the newsmen are going to ask them about and et cetera. We're now in the fortunate era when the White House is no longer going to take, according to what I read two days ago, the White House is no longer going to take the New York Times or the Washington Post. So I guess that we won't have to worry about that anymore. But it's just a reflection on our political system that so much is driven by what the newspapers think is important.

William Murray: When you're out gathering intelligence and working on things and you see something particularly a long range trend coming along, if you try to get through to Washington, they don't pay any attention. I tried very hard, both in 1988 in Beirut and 1991 in Islamabad about to warn about the dangers of Hezbollah in Beirut. Which I saw as an increasingly worldwide ranging organization that we were going to have to deal with at some point in time. I got nowhere. Nobody paid any attention.

William Murray: Then I tried again in 91 and while I was in Islamabad, I was Chief in Islamabad, to try to warn of the dangers of walking away from the Afghans. We had a huge army that we'd been supporting for 10 years. Not only were we supporting them, we were supporting their families. We were educating their children. We supplied maternal and health care clinics and hospitals. We provided facilities for the wounded, et cetera. We basically did everything because the do-gooder agencies, the NGOs, that were there, they were over 400 of them. Decided they weren't going to help the families of fighters.

William Murray: I looked at this and I said, "We were going to walk away from them." Basically State Department had decided that we were going to have something called "negative symmetry." Where we and the Soviets would both stop supporting our various sides in

the war. Soviets have already left Afghanistan. I knew very well. The intelligence was very clear. The Soviets weren't going to stop supplying Najibullah and the Afghan regime that they had put in place. The Muj were going to keep fighting them. The only people that weren't going to get any assistance, were going to be our side. That's exactly what happened. We cut off all aid to our side, to the Mujahideen and the Soviets kept supplying the Najibullah regime. It was viewed as a betrayal by the Afghans.

William Murray: It's. The incredible part about it is like families with children in our schools, the schools we were funding, suddenly then had to find a place for those kids to go to school. So where did they go but the madrassas and what did they learn at the madrassas? Hate America. That's what we're dealing with. The Persian for a student is Talib. What we're dealing with today is Taliban, the students. Basically that's what they are. They're the younger generation who came up during that time period. I wrote memos back to Washington and we tried to do things, but George HW Bush was then the president and he didn't care about it.

William Murray: I came back to Washington in September of 91. I'd only been in Afghanistan a couple of months. In Pakistan, a couple of months then. I was part of a group that was going to meet with the President to talk about the results of the of the Gulf war in 1990 - 1991 Gulf War. I intended to talk to him about Afghanistan. I was warned beforehand, do not mention Afghanistan to the president. He doesn't want to hear about it, period. You will not discuss it. Well, okay. So I didn't discuss it. That's Washington.

William Murray: I'll tell you an interesting story. I came back at one point in time and met with the then Acting Director, Bob Gates and who I admire very much by the way. I started to talk to him and he said, "Who is the guy with the red beard? The Afghan with the red beard that visited Bush when Bush was Vice President. And I said, "How the hell do I know." Don't they keep records at the White House who they have over there as visitors? He said, "Don't be a smart guy. They want to know who the guy with a red beard is." He said he was an older Afghan but in a bright red beard. I said, "That's because they put henna in their beards when they take a young wife or when they do the hajj to Mecca or they celebrate some events."

William Murray: It doesn't mean his beard was really red. It was henna. I said, "I have no idea who it was." Well, give me a name. I said it was probably Khalis. Muhammad Yunis Khalis One of the one of the

seven leaders. "Oh, okay. That's great." They didn't want to hear what I had to say. They just had to fill this request from the White House to figure out who the guy in the red beard was.

Chitra Ragavan: You probably weren't the only CIA operations officer who had that experience that Washington wasn't giving heed to the information you were sending.

William Murray: We're not seers. It's not as though any of us regard ourselves as geniuses or seers. But yeah. It was a common frustration that you were reporting on things that you thought might be a real significance, particularly those things that weren't of current interest that you thought people ought to look at. What we found is you just couldn't get an audience. For one thing, Congress loves to do what they call a fencing of the budget. In other words, they will give you money for counter-intelligence because Congress thinks counter-intelligence is important. Or they'll give you money for counter terrorism because they think that's important. They won't give you money for other things. So they give you no scope to report on issues that you think are important because they want the money spent a certain way.

William Murray: So what you wind up with is everything you wind up doing gets put into the bucket of counterintelligence. Whatever the fad of the moment is and our system just doesn't really give flexibility and credit to the people who actually do the work to do the work the way they know what needs to be done and do it well. They are constantly trying to drive it all from Washington.

Chitra Ragavan: Now you served in Syria during the Gulf War too. What was your objective at the time you were assigned there?

William Murray: Well, the Syrians had joined us in the Coalition and then I went there to try to make sure that they stayed on our side and try to get them to cooperate with us on certain issues. One of the issues that we were concerned about frankly, was if a pilot got into trouble in the Western part of Iraq and had to bail out. We wanted them to be able to bail out inside Syria. Literally the first night I was in Syria. I got to Syria that day the shelling started. Which was an interesting story because I had to bribe my way onto the plane. I had to pay 1000 bucks to the Syrian air guy just to get on the flight. And then when I got to flight, there was only half a seatbelt.

William Murray: I thought, "Here I am." You can see the rivets in this plane sort of bouncing up and down as you're flying. Here I am with half a seat

belt and I said, "I actually paid a bribe to get onto a flight where I'm not even sure the planes going to make it." To get through into a war. With a bunch of guys who don't trust me and I don't know if I trust them. Anyway, it all worked out. I did get there that night. Landed in Syria and started the meetings that night at three o'clock in the morning. The next morning we made an agreement with the Syrians so that they would... They didn't have electricity along the border with Iraq, but they had these border posts.

William Murray: So what we agreed that they would do is they put up these big outside lanterns outside the border posts and then they flared some gas fields up in the Northern part of Syria though they had some small gas fields up there. And they flared those fields so that the pilots had a beacon. Sure enough, we had the people... We never had an airplane go cross into Syria and ditch into Syria. The Syrians wanted to make sure that if a plane came in, they ditched within five miles of the border because they had given anti-aircraft materials and weapons to all of the tribes along the border. It's all bedouin out there. There's no cities or villages. They were afraid that these guys would shoot at any airplane that came over.

William Murray: But we did have within two or three days, a British group come through the border. They were on a special operation in Iraq and they were stuck in Iraq and they were stuck. They came across the Syrian border and we repatriated the one guy who lived out of that group.

Chitra Ragavan: As you know with what's happening in Syria today, with president Trump confronting massive criticism, even from many in his own party for abandoning the Kurds, our allies, and withdrawing US troops. Do you see the parallels that you saw in Beirut, in Afghanistan, here in Syria?

William Murray: Yeah. But in the Syrian case, Trump was faced with trying to deal with a thousand Americans who were there in Syria fighting. The real tragedy of Syria. The American position in the Middle East was when Obama failed to do anything after the Syrians used chemical weapons. He set that out as a red line. He was very forceful in what he said we would do if they used chemical weapons. Then they did it and we didn't do anything. And that, to me, that was the end of our influence in the Middle East. Once your bluff is called and you failed to perform in the Middle East, we lost our moral influence basically. We had already lost our influence in Israel, Palestine. Obama just gave away whatever was left. Yeah.

William Murray: I see incredible parallels in Syria, but the parallel I see is in the language that I hear in Washington. "Oh, it's 7,000 miles away. What do we care? Doesn't impact on us." Yeah, it does. We've got hundreds of thousands of people, millions of people from that part of the world who live in the United States, who have families in those countries. We have incredible security interests. We have incredible energy interests in that part of the world. We can't just walk away from the Middle East, whether we would like to or not, we can't do it.

Chitra Ragavan: But the chemical weapons issue also had to do with our position on the use of chemical weapons.

William Murray: Yeah. I mean, the first treaty on the banning the use of chemical weapons was actually signed in 1889 while before the first World War. During the first World War, every side used chemical weapons, including us. But it has been a tenant of American foreign policy since the early 20th century banning the use of chemical weapons. We had worked very hard to try to enforce that treaty around the world. We in the agency did a lot of collecting on who was experimenting with chemical weapons around the world. Including I remember collecting intelligence from Lebanon while I was in Lebanon, recruiting people and collecting intelligence on the Syrian experimentation with chemical weapons at that time. It was something I collected on all my life. To see us just walk away and let the Syrians get away with doing. It was a tragedy.

Chitra Ragavan: So looking at Syria today, what would you say are the true consequences in terms of our own credibility in the Middle East and as well as the balance of power?

William Murray: We have no credibility. One of the tenets of Russian foreign policy since the time of Peter the Great has been warm water ports and a presence on the Mediterranean. Breaking out of the Black Sea and a presence on the Mediterranean. Everybody around Russia has been smart enough to make sure that didn't happen. Because they're an aggressive people. Now we have not only a Russian military Air Force base, but we have a Russian Naval base in Latakia in Syria on the Eastern edge of the Mediterranean. A bigger base than anything we've got anywhere around it.

William Murray: We've seen in the last few days Russian soldiers going in, taking selfies of themselves inside the former American bases. Okay. They know what the message is and the people around them know what the message is. Deal with the Russians, not the Americans.

That's not going to help world peace because the Russians are not really terribly interested in the kind of stable world that we've been working for the last seventy years to build. That's not what they're interested in.

Chitra Ragavan: Probably even reading all of this news about the impeachment proceedings against President Trump, and it was triggered by a CIA officer whistleblowing about what the President was attempting to do in the Ukraine. How do you feel as a former CIA Operations Officer to see all of this unfolds?

William Murray: Well, I remember when president Clinton directed all of us, and it was very firm direction. That if you become aware of the violation of federal law, you must report it. It was somewhat controversial with us at the time because we're not police. We're not law enforcement. We didn't feel like we should be doing law enforcement work and most of us do not want to do law enforcement stuff. We also felt we're the ones who get the intelligence first. So if there is going to be something where some American is doing something wrong somewhere, it's likely to come to our attention first. So that's what's happened. Whistleblow laws are very explicit. That person had no choice other than to do what they did. It's just unfortunate in terms of... it's not unfortunate that the person reported it.

William Murray: It's going to hurt that it was somebody from the Agency because this president obviously does not like the Agency to begin with. He doesn't trust these... Made it very clear that he doesn't trust the Bureau or the Agency or just about anybody else. There was actually a member of the Senate the other day who said, "I don't trust the FBI and CIA." I don't know why, but that's his attitude. I just think it was very unfortunate, but I also understand the position that the person was in. They saw what thought was a violation of law. They felt they had to report it.

Chitra Ragavan: You'd served almost four decades in the agency and you've watched US foreign policy flip flop and friends become enemies, enemies become friends. As you've kind of described in some of these examples, memos being ignored and Washington taking a short term view of a lot of things while our adversaries often take a very long term view. Looking back, do you think it was all worth it to ... risking your life and learn and making all of the necessary sacrifices to a normal family life?

William Murray: Yeah, certainly. I don't regret anything, frankly. When the French paratroopers were leaving Algeria they sang and Edith Piaf song, Je ne regret rien. Do you regret? I don't regret a thing. Which I don't mean it that way, okay? The way they meant it, because they had done some horrible things in Algeria. But no, I don't have any regrets about my career. I have regrets for the strains that it has put on my family. The strains that are put on my marriage and eventually helped destroy my marriage at this... certainly probably affected my kids negatively in some ways. Although they seem to have been enriched by the experience of having grown up and studied all over the world.

William Murray: They have no hesitation about traveling today. One of my sons just finished working for three years as a lawyer in Saudi Arabia. No, I don't regret anything. As far as the flip-flops in American foreign policy, I don't mind the flip flops. What I mind is what we're getting into today, which is denying basic principles. There have always been certain basic principles underlying American foreign policy, which we've been careful to follow. Freedom of the seas, strength of alliances, things like that. We're now in this strange world where we're denying that the alliances are even important. We're walking away from things like NATO and all of these other relationships we have around the world.

William Murray: It will create a very uncertain world. Certainly if I was in Japan or South Korea today and I was a leader, I would be thinking seriously about nuclear armaments. About re-arming the country. About having a stronger military force because I would be doubting American desire to remain steadfast on what has been a clear American policy that we're not going to allow aggression to succeed.

Chitra Ragavan: You said when you walked through the doors of the agency, you felt like you didn't quite belong. Almost like an imposter syndrome. Looking back 38 years later, do you feel like you ever fit into the agency?

William Murray: Not really. No. I carved out my niche and I worked there. I lived there. It was fine and I really enjoyed it. But I always felt a little bit out of place in the sense that I always... I just felt I was dealing with a lot of really brilliant people and I'm not that brilliant. I mean I've felt I made my contribution and I'm not ashamed of anything that I accomplished or did or anything else. But I always felt a little bit out of place and that's probably a good thing because that probably keeps you... I always figured somebody didn't need to

come along and tell me I'm a shit bird. I could figure that out myself. Excuse my language. But it's a term we used to use. Blame yourself first before anybody else gets a chance to do it.

William Murray: So no. I always felt a little bit out of place. Although I've also felt very comfortable working there. I felt very comfortable as a manager. I never felt like I was going to succeed to the top management levels because so much of that is political and I am politically incorrect. I knew I was never going to succeed in the Washington arena because it's all about political correctness. Much of it is just complete hypocrisy. I've often noticed that the people who start talking about political correctness and implementing political correctness frequently do so when they've gotten to the top. But I knew them when they were struggling up the greasy pole to get to the top and they didn't care much about it then.

William Murray: They care about it afterwards when they realize it will get them in a better position with Congress or whatever. I think a lot of it is hypocrisy frankly. I don't have any problem at all with diversity or rewarding people for their... for good work. I don't care who they are or what their background is or anything else, their gender, any of that stuff. I mean to me, doing the intelligence work requires a certain type of person and provided we get the right kind of person on the person works hard. I want to reward them.

Chitra Ragavan: Do you have any closing thoughts on the future of the Agency given all of this friction between the White House and Congress and the Agency today?

William Murray: The agency is America's only civilian organization dedicated to intelligence that is not part of a policy bureau. Whatever the Agency reports in terms of intelligence reporting has no policy implications for the Agency. By that I mean, if we find that the Soviets are building so many missile systems or whatever, then our reporting of the Russians are building, excuse me. That reporting doesn't reflect later on our budget. If you're in the Air Force, you want to inflate what the Soviets, what the Russians are doing or with the Chinese are doing or whatever. Because you have a policy imperative to build your own service. To build your own weapons systems et cetera. We don't have that. That's very almost unique in the world. The only real country with a similar system is Britain where it's totally separate from any of the other parts of government.

William Murray: I think that that's something that America should maintain. It doesn't cost as much as people like to think it does. I think it's very dangerous to get into a system, for example, where 85... and we're already there. Where 85% of the total collection capability of the government is owned by the Pentagon. I mean, they own them. They own the satellites. They own virtually all of the electronics stuff and all the platforms that do all of that. They view those agencies that do that work as combat support arms. Not national intelligence structures. They term them combat support arms. They really let us down in World War II at Pearl Harbor because of their own hierarchical structures and their own infighting and everything else. I'm afraid of the same thing could happen in the future. I don't think that the intelligence work should be left just to the military.

Chitra Ragavan: You're also vice president and co founder of the council on intelligence issues. Which is a nonprofit organization designed to help intelligence officials. What kinds of things do you do?

William Murray: We have two missions. One is educational. To help the public understand what real intelligence issues are and what they're about. That's one of the reasons I'm doing this podcast today. The other part is to help intelligence people who get into trouble as a result of their jobs. Our motto is nobody should suffer from a good faith service to government. I'm not talking about somebody who engages in criminal activity or whatever, but people who are actually investigated or find themselves with huge legal bills or whatever as a result of their work for the government. Those are the people we try to help.

Chitra Ragavan: Great. Bill, thanks so much for this fascinating conversation and for joining me today.

William Murray: Thank you Chitra.

Chitra Ragavan: William Murray is a retired senior CIA Operations Officer and long a legendary figure at the agency. He is Founder of the Alphom Group of business intelligence and risk management consulting firm based in Washington DC. Murray also is Vice President and Co-founder of the Council on Intelligence Issues, a nonprofit established to help intelligence officials and to promote understanding of the importance of intelligence in the formulation of national policy.