

Washington Institute for Foreign Affairs Presentation

“Diplomacy and Development in a Transnational World”

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It is a pleasure to speak to such a experienced group. Most of my time nowadays is spent with young, very bright Brown University students who consider the 1970s ancient history.

There is an old Washington aphorism called Miles Law. It came from a guy named Rufus Miles who at the time, not surprisingly, worked at the old Bureau of the Budget (now OMB). He said “Where you stand depends on where you sit.”

I have the advantage—some would say disadvantage—of sitting in a number of different places during my government career. I spent a brief time in the intelligence community, was a Foreign Service Officer, a Senate staffer, an Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, an International NGO president, Under Secretary of State for Management, Administrator of USAID-- and now I’m a professor who pontificates about all of that!

That either gives me a very high degree of objectivity or a very conflicted perspective. I will let you decide that!

In the past week we have been exposed to unimaginable horror. Innocent civilians have been killed and kidnapped by terrorists, and the response and ongoing conflict has killed many more. It is a time for deep reflection on the state of our world.

We have come a long way since President George H. W. Bush proclaimed a “new world order” after the collapse of the Soviet Union! There are many causes of the disorder we are facing, not least of which is the explosive growth of the world’s population, particularly in the developing world.

And we are threatened as never before by transnational issues like terrorism, climate change, infectious disease and migration. These are issues that cannot be addressed by individual nations acting alone. They are global problems and their solution requires cooperation. Yet, sadly, the institutions created to advance international cooperation are overwhelmed and under attack as ineffective.

Your invitation today gives me an opportunity to reflect on these issues, and to reiterate the case for diplomacy and development cooperation. I know that I will be preaching to the choir, but there is an urgency today that is underscored by existential threats to the globe and the crises we face in Europe and the Middle East.

I want to offer some historical context and personal reflections on these crises. Like many of you in this room, my career has taken me to the Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe. Experiences teaches us that the tensions of today are tied to those of the past.

Most of us worked in government during a Golden Age of bipartisanship. When I worked at State on major issues like the Panama Canal Treaty, nuclear arms control treaties, and arms sales to the Middle East, a bipartisan coalition was essential. That is still true.

The foreign policy issues that dominate our attention today, Ukraine, the Hamas attack on Israel and relations with China are made all the more complicated by our divisive politics and the institutional failure in the Congress. The stakes could not be higher.

The Hamas attack on Israel and the ongoing tragedy in Gaza caused me to reflect on a conference the National Democratic Institute organized in Israel back in 1987. Our bipartisan delegation was headed by former Vice President Mondale and included prominent friends of Israel from both political parties. The Israeli delegation was headed by Prime Minister Shamir and Foreign Minister Peres, and it included the most prominent academics, journalists, generals and Knesset members in Israel at the time. Shamir and Peres had formed a unity government and they were alternating in the Prime Minister's position.

We worked closely with Professor Shlomo Aveneri and future Likud Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to assure that all sides of the Israeli leadership participated. Former Foreign Minister Abba Eban's eloquence was prominently displayed.

Our Ambassador, Sam Lewis, said after that he learned more at that conference than he had in his 6 years as Ambassador-- a bit of an exaggeration, but a nice compliment!

The issue we explored was how democracies in regions of conflict respond to external pressures. Two important concerns emerged: 1. That Israel was struggling mightily to reconcile its secular and its religious identity; and 2. There was open handwringing over how to justify its subordination of the people who lived in the occupied territories without compromising Israel's democratic values?

No clear answer to these questions came out of that conference, and now, some 36 years later, despite all the economic progress, these two issues continue to vex Israeli society. Now the country has been shocked by an horrendous surprise attack. The crisis has unified the country, but this won't last.

Now, another memory: I was the first high-level American official to meet with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat after his return from Tunisia in 1994. I was then the Administrator of USAID and it was our intention to help the Palestinian Authority to support its people and to begin to create democratic institutions.

I first met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to tell them what we were preparing to do. Peres was more enthusiastic than Rabin, but we had a green light.

So, with a security detail in tow, I went to Gaza and met with Arafat. We dedicated a construction site for an apartment complex. When we were leaving Arafat was surrounded by a group of enthusiastic young men. He told me that they were members of Hamas, his political opponents, but they were friendly and respectful. They made my security detail nervous and we left soon thereafter.

All of this and many more visits to the area has led me to conclude that Arafat had the standing to risk reaching an agreement on a two-state solution. He was offered that chance at the end of the Clinton Administration by then Prime Minister Ehud Barak. It was a complex plan that included security enclaves for Israel, but it created a clear path to Palestinian sovereignty.

Arafat turned it down. Who knows what pressure Arafat was under? He had agreed to the Oslo Accords a few years earlier and celebrated that on the White House lawn, shaking hands with Prime Minister Rabin. That may have activated the strong opposition of an increasingly extreme Hamas. They eventually came to govern Gaza with the acquiescence of Israel, though they never accepted the right of Israel to exist.

Now the people of Gaza are suffering more than ever. One hopes for a discriminating Israeli response and President Biden has wisely counseled restraint. But after having suffered through 9/11, we know how difficult it is to forego revenge.

The hospital bombing has magnified the risks for Israel. The perception that Israel was responsible will prevail in the Arab world though the evidence points elsewhere.

President Biden has managed to convince Egypt to allow humanitarian assistance and to open the border crossing to innocent civilians. One hopes that the Israelis have a plan based on good intelligence and that there is a solid exit strategy.

The US is active diplomatically and its carrier task force is present as a deterrent to a wider war.

But then what happens when the crisis passes? As Churchill once said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Allow me to present an optimistic scenario:

When this security crisis is over it will be time for Israel to address the two issues we discussed at that conference 36 years ago. It will be time

for Israel to come to grips with the character of the Israeli democracy and the status of the occupied territories.

The right-wing government of Bibi Netanyahu will undoubtedly be held accountable for an intelligence failure and more. A new unity government will be needed.

That government could start by resolving the internal dispute that has weakened Israel. The Supreme Court should step up and decide that the law passed by the Knesset restricting the Court's authority is itself "unreasonable" and undemocratic. In the absence of a constitution this institutional balance is essential.

The international community can play a role in helping encourage a strengthened Palestinian Authority that has the standing and legitimacy to govern and negotiate to assume sovereign responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian people deserve better than having to choose between terrorists and ineffective and corrupt leaders.

A new Israeli government will have to commit itself to a peace process. That means no new settlements and a genuine commitment to achieve security through peace.

The US Government, having supported Israel through the current crisis, can be influential, including reopening negotiations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. As unlikely as that appears now, diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel will send a message to extremist forces and their state sponsors that terrorism will not stand.

OK, I know, this sounds like pie in the sky. But in these dark moments, we need a positive self fulfilling prophecy!

In the case of Ukraine, the center has thus far held despite critics on the right and left. If only the House and Senate could vote on the issue, I believe we would see strong support for Ukraine.

I don't have much to say about the position of MAGA Republicans who seem to want to isolate the US from the rest of the world. But that is a minority view.

I cannot so easily ignore those internationalists who blame the Ukraine conflict on the expansion of NATO. I believe that a careful read of history refutes that "realist" theory propounded by academics like John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt. That position, also heard frequently in Russian propaganda, deserves a response.

There should be little doubt that NATO enlargement was frustrating for Russian nationalists back in the 1990s. Russia was weak and feeling insecure. I recall visiting in the mid-90s and asking a group of academics whether they regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union. I will never forget the look on their faces and their stumbling effort to respond.

That conversation happened in 1994, at about the same time the Russian Government signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In exchange for that guarantee, Ukraine eliminated its nuclear weapons.

The Clinton Administration, of which I was a part, didn't take lightly the decision to expand NATO. We were well aware that it would be highly controversial in Russia. Diplomatic steps were taken to accentuate the defensive nature of NATO and to temper Russia's reaction. Tom Pickering, then our Ambassador in Moscow, can attest to that.

A Partnership for Peace was created that brought Russia into a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council. NATO and Russia even conducted joint training exercises.

A full decade after NATO had expanded into Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Baltic states, the Russian Federation, in 2009, reaffirmed its commitment to the Budapest agreement on Ukraine.

That reaffirmation came even after the W. Bush Administration had pushed the envelope quite provocatively. In 2002 the ABM treaty was abrogated and anti-ballistic systems were deployed in Poland and the Czech Republic. Then Georgia and Ukraine were invited to apply for

NATO membership. The Russians responded by saying they would no longer abide by the START II Treaty, a serious setback for arms control.

Russia then tested its capacity to expand its control over its near-abroad, attacking Georgia's Abkazia and South Osetia regions in 2008. Its actions were condemned as violating UN and the collective security provisions of the Organization for Security and Economic Cooperation (OSCE).

Then the Obama administration made an effort to "reset" relations with Russia. An arms control agreement was signed in 2010. This happened a full 11 years after NATO enlargement had taken place. The passage of that time may not have fully erased the grievance felt, but Russian interests in a stable nuclear relationship prevailed.

Despite the provocations of the early 2000s, the passage of time seems to me in large part to refute the claim Russia uses today to justify its invasion of a sovereign nation. When Russia, using semi-clandestine means, occupied Crimea in 2014, I believe its motive was far removed from a worry about NATO expansion.

Putin was far more concerned about developments inside Ukraine. His proxy, Victor Yanukovich, elected president of Ukraine in a questionable election in 2010, was sent packing to Russia in another color revolution by people anxious to partner with Europe and fed up with corruption. Later in 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected with the promise of bringing Ukraine closer to the West. Meanwhile, Putin fumed and blamed the West, not about NATO expansion, but for deposing his puppet in Ukraine.

It wasn't NATO that motivated Putin. It was the threat of the "Color Revolutions" and the evolutionary movement toward open democracy on his border. That in turn was encouraging the growing anti-corruption drive inside Russia led by patriots like Boris Nemtsov and Alexei Navalny.

In the end, what matters is that Putin violated the UN Charter, the OSCE collective security provisions and the Budapest Memorandum. To suggest that Putin was in any way justified because a defensive alliance

expanded back in the 1990s, is to rewrite history in support of today's Russian propaganda. The "realists" are seeing the world through the lens of an academic theory, useful in the classroom, but less so in the real world.

As for the future, I found Tom Pickering's March 2023 Foreign Affairs article compelling. We need to prepare diplomatic options for the moment when the legitimately elected leaders of Ukraine believe it is time to negotiate. And I don't believe that their options will include giving up sovereign territory. That issue will have to be smartly finessed depending on the state of Ukraine's defensive efforts.

Now let me conclude with a discussion that relates a bit more to my topic: "Diplomacy and Development in a Transnational World."

A few years back in the W. Bush Administration, the National Security Strategy described the contribution made by the 3-Ds—Defense, Diplomacy and Development. That may have been the first time all three of these missions were described as explicitly important in achieving our national security objectives. The Obama Administration embraced the concept as well, so a rare bipartisan consensus evolved.

Many of you know that I fought to keep USAID an independent agency under the managerial leadership of an Administrator who reports to the Secretary of State, an agency that follows the guidelines of US foreign policy set by the Secretary and the President. A key part of that foreign policy is the development and humanitarian relief mission. That is why the Administrator of USAID now sits on the National Security Council as a principal.

Where there is great global stress on matters of security, economic relations, trade and international political issues, there is opportunity for cooperation in the development sphere. The transnational challenges of climate change, infectious disease-- and poverty and conflict-induced migration-- are impacting on the national interests of all societies. Whatever ideological differences exist, there should be a

powerful motivation to cooperate. That is where both diplomacy and development need to be in sync.

The US has a vital leadership role to play. The diplomacy and development missions need to work together as never before. Managing these two related but separate missions well is essential.

The diplomatic mission is fast-paced and crisis oriented. It increasingly requires expert knowledge on very technical subjects. Development professionals working within sectors from the environment-- to agriculture-- to democracy/governance-- to micro-economic systems-- to education--are hired for their professional expertise.

The two missions are related but not the same. Their time horizons and partner relationships are very different.

When I was Administrator, having come from a State Department background, USAID was reconfigured to respond better to the needs of diplomacy. We created an Office of Transitions Initiatives to move more quickly into post-conflict situations. We reduced the time it took to get into the field with our longer-term programs. And we created a new personnel category of democracy- governance officers to focus on building institutions in transitional societies.

Perhaps most importantly, I pushed the global donor community to adopt strategic goals against which we and our partners could be measured. Those goals, initially adopted by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, became the UN Millennium Development Goals.

There is an urgent need today for effective development diplomacy carried out by both State and USAID. Effective statecraft can overcome the tensions that exist in other parts of a bilateral relationship-- to find common ground around development objectives. And USAID, as the world's largest bilateral aid agency can work across political boundaries to cooperate with North-South and even South-South partners to address transnational issues.

The State Department needs resources to advance the diplomatic mission by influencing the behavior of both friend and foe. It needs the