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POLITICS IN TOUGH PLACES:

UNITED NATIONS DIPLOMACY IN TODAY'S CRISES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good morning, everybody. I'm Strobe Talbott, and it's my honor to welcome you all here to the Brookings Institution this morning.

We're going to hear from a friend of this institution, a friend and a colleague of a number of us in the room, Jeff Feltman. He is, as you all know, the Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs at the United Nations. This is a post that he has held for a little over a year. Jeff, I suspect it feels like rather longer than that.

He has participated in quite a number of Brookings events over the years, including several of our Saban Forums and our U.S. and the Islamic World Forums.

Today, he is going to talk about diplomacy in some very tough, problem-ridden areas of the world that need the very best diplomacy there is -- both on the part of the United Nations and on the part of a number of countries represented here in this room today -- and I'm going to come to one of those in particular in a moment.

Jeff brings to his present job the experience of 26 years as a Foreign Service Officer. He has had many tours. I think it's safe to say none of them easy; all of them important. He has been posted in and working on Lebanon as the U.S. Ambassador. He's worked in and on Iraq, Tunisia, the issues around Jerusalem and its status, Gaza, and, as assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs under former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, he rode the tiger of what we're calling -- and Martin Indyk and his colleagues were one of the first to call -- the Arab Awakening -- and he did so with great skill.

At the United Nations, he's essentially the head of the organization's diplomatic arm, and he's going to give us a sense of the way in which the United Nations and his office is dealing with crises in a number of parts of the world, including what I

think we would all agree is the number one problem from hell in this period -- and that's Syria. But he'll also be touching on Somalia, and Mali, and some other issues, as well.

Jeff is going to begin the program with about 30 minutes of remarks, and then we're going to have a panel discussion.

That brings me to Ambassador Wegger Strommen of Norway. It's been almost a commonplace for me when I come to this lectern to recognize him in the front row.

After five years as Norway's ambassador here in Washington, he is now the outgoing ambassador -- but in two senses. One, he is going out of Washington, to go back to Oslo to be the political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but he's also been extraordinarily outgoing in the way he gets around this town -- including, very often, coming here to these events -- occasionally asking a question, but, basically, being part of the audience. And today, it's our great good fortune that he is going to be a part of the discussion.

And before I turn to the other members of the panel, I just want to say, Wegger, that you have also been an extraordinary friend/beneficiary/supporter to the Brookings Institution. You have enabled us to work on a number of the issues that you, and Jeff, and others will be talking about here today.

And on a particularly personal note, I want to say that you and Cecilia will be missed in this town, but both of you get around, and many of us get around, and we look forward to seeing a lot of you in the years to come.

Also on the panel, we have Bruce Jones, who is a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Program here at Brookings and the director of our Managing Global Order Project. He has, himself, served at the United Nations in a variety of roles, working on the Middle East peace process, Kosovo, and some other very tough issues. He was also

a particularly influential and trusted adviser to Secretary-General Koffi Annan.

The panel discussion will be moderated by Martin Indyk, who is the vice president and director of our Foreign Policy Program. But I think, for purposes of today's event, his real claim to fame is that he saw in Jeff Feltman the immense talent that I have already alluded to, and counted on Jeff's help as a colleague, particularly in working on the economic issues facing the Gaza Strip when he was the economics officer at the United States embassy in Tel Aviv, when Martin was an ambassador there in at least one of his two stints.

And Martin, after leading a brief discussion among the panelists, will throw the proceedings over to all of you. And you are allowed to keep your mobiles on, as long as they're in silent mode -- and particularly if you are prepared to tweet the proceedings -- #USdiplomacy.

Jeff, over to you.

I'm sorry, #UNdiplomacy. For some reason, it just -- right, right. I'm showing my own background, I guess. Okay.

MR. FELTMAN: Strobe, thank you.

Friends and colleagues, let me begin by thanking Strobe Talbott and thanking Brookings -- and I want to particularly thank Martin and Bruce for the invitation to speak about the UN's diplomacy in today's crises.

As Strobe alluded, I credit Martin, in fact, for how my own career evolved. When I worked for Martin as a Gaza watcher from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, I had not planned to spend the rest of my State Department career in the Middle East and North Africa. But Martin's passion and leadership inspired me to do just that.

Martin also had the good sense to encourage me to get to know Bruce Jones. Then, with the UN, as Strobe mentioned, with the idea that we were to explore

how the U.S. and the UN could work together to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace -- a goal that we still need to work on, Bruce.

And given the leadership role that Norway plays in promoting peaceful resolution of conflict through funding and organizing UN mediation efforts, I am particularly grateful for Ambassador Strommen's participation here today.

So, it's a pleasure to be here, to see some friends, and to see such interest in the United Nations.

It was exactly a year ago this month that I took up the position as the head of UN's Department of Political Affairs. And, believe me, it's been an interesting 12 months -- and, as Strobe says, it feels longer than 12 months.

For those of you that don't know it, the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations works at the center of UN preventative diplomacy and peacemaking, in overseas political missions and peace envoys abroad and the UN support for free elections worldwide. It monitors political developments around the globe, works hard to mobilize action at the international level to present and to resolve conflict.

You know, one could say that the Department of Political Affairs -- or DPA -- plays a similar role within the UN that the State Department plays within the U.S. government, in that we advise the secretary-general on peace and political issues, and manage the UN's political and diplomatic offices in the field. But, as I think my remarks will show, that parallel only goes so far.

Today, I'm delighted to be back in Washington -- familiar terrain. But my vantage point has changed. To illustrate my new UN perspective, I'm going to attempt to answer two questions: first, what are the main differences in working on peace and security issues in the multilateral setting versus UN bilateral diplomacy? And, second, what are some of the key challenges that the UN faces in doing this work?

So, in answering these questions, I'm going to open up with a few general comments about the UN's work, and then give a few very specific geographic examples to illustrate how we do that work.

On the first question -- the differences between multilateral and bilateral diplomacy -- I'll be honest. I underestimated the time and the effort I needed to adjust to what was a far greater change than I had anticipated, moving from Washington to New York.

You know, as an English native speaker, for example, I assumed I'd have no difficulty in reading comprehension at the United Nations. But that could not have been further from the truth. 193 nations are far more creative than a single one, and getting fully proficient in what's known as "UN-glish" or "Unglish" is enriching, even for those of us that grew up with *Webster's* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

But, more seriously, until you leave the U.S. government, you cannot fully grasp what it means to walk into a room backed at all times by the tangible powers of the presidency, the Pentagon, the dollar, the voting weight at the IMF and World Bank, the permanent membership on the UN Security Council -- those sorts of things. You know, these were assets that, almost without noticing, you know, I carried with me -- as U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, as U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs.

You know, of course, when you're working for the U.S. government, one is vaguely aware of the power that you carry with you, representing this country.

And I think one of my best educational experiences in the Foreign Service was watching real foreign policy professionals -- people like Strobe and Martin -- use those assets as real leverage in negotiations.

But if you've spent an entire diplomatic career with those assets as part of your package, as I did, it's something of a shock to suddenly be without them. You

know, initially, I felt almost a sense of diplomatic nakedness. You know, "you mean I have to rely, really, on just my own persuasive skills?"

But at the UN, I also have learned from watching my new colleagues that UN officials also wield important sources of power as they try to coax antagonists toward peace.

But the UN powers are quite different from what U.S. officials carry with them -- learning how to use intangibles, ideals, principles, values has been at the top of my own UN education. Placed on our own shoulders, for example, are the principles enshrined in the UN charter and the legitimacy derived from universal membership. The principles and ideals that gave birth to the UN, it's worth remembering, derive, in large part, from U.S. leadership and vision.

Another of the UN's strengths that one carries is the UN's perceived impartiality -- which allows us to talk to all sizes and play the honest broker role that others often cannot. And here, again, that universal membership helps. In crises, we can deploy negotiators and missions that are diverse -- that come from all over the world, with regional and substantive experience. This can help win quick respect of the parties involved.

Moreover, our goal is to resolve conflicts, period. We do not pick winners and losers. While our reports can be -- and often are -- criticized, the UN has an ability to shape international perception of an issue that's different, say, than when the U.S. government talks about an issue in which the U.S. has a vested interest in how that problem is viewed.

So, this UN leverage that I'm describing, you might say, is certainly less tangible than some of the assets that U.S. diplomats have. But the legitimacy that the UN can convey to decisions on peace and security cannot be replicated by any single

nation, no matter how powerful.

A further difference for me, of course, was trying to master, after all the years working in the Middle East and North Africa, a conflict portfolio that is global, as opposed to simply regional. You know, my geographic experience at the State Department was of little use as I walked the quarters of the African Union for the first time, as I struggled to grasp the challenges we faced in the Central African Republic or Mali, or during the visits I've made to places like Ashgabat and Katmandu.

But what does remain the same, whether viewed from Foggy Bottom or viewed from Turtle Bay, is the political nature of most conflicts -- and thus, the centrality of political solutions to conflicts. Yes, the UN can use troops -- and often needs to, to stabilize and provide security on the ground. There's something like 110,000 UN peacekeepers working globally. And, yes, humanitarian actors can help diminish the suffering of victims of manmade or natural disasters, but lasting solutions to conflicts require working the politics in tough places.

The day I took office, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, you know, sat down with me in my first call in that capacity, and he said that my job was to help the UN do better on early warning, preventative diplomacy, and conflict mediation. The secretary-general, in fact, has made prevention -- whether we're talking about prevention of childhood disease or prevention of conflict -- the centerpiece of his tenure at the UN

And this early warning, preventative diplomacy, conflict mediation is what we're trying to do, with varying degrees of success, in numerous arenas today.

Often, we're working in evolving and complex environments in which problems of state failure and internal conflict have been magnified by cross border threats, such as terrorism, the rise of organized crime, by military coups, by changing patterns of violence. And in doing this, we're trying to use established tools as effectively

as possible, while also developing new approaches.

It's worth remembering that the UN was established as the result of a world war between states. But more often than not today, conflicts arise from within states -- meaning that our tools and our engagement need to evolve, as well.

Let me now focus on a few of these cases, and highlight on what the UN brings to the table in doing politics in tough places -- Syria, Somalia, the Great Lakes region of Africa and Afghanistan.

I'll begin with Syria. Nothing has been more painful than to watch the Syrian crisis unfolding ever more tragically every day, and sowing instability across the entire region. The Syria crisis is an example of the challenges that the UN faces when sharp divergences of perspective paralyze the Security Council.

UN tools that some might consider as potentially useful -- an arms embargo, sanctions, perhaps even reference of the Syria file to the ICC -- simply aren't available, given the Security Council is deadlocked. So, what do we do?

I mean, first, one important aspect, without question, is the UN's work regarding mobilizing support for humanitarian relief and delivering humanitarian assistance to those affected by the fighting in Syria. The humanitarian actors in the UN system lead these efforts, but there are political aspects, as well.

The Damascus office, for example, of the UN Legion of Arab States Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi has drawn on the impartiality of the UN in order to broker with government and opposition forces, localized ceasefires, and various ways to deliver assistance across constantly changing frontlines.

Second, we're working as best we can, despite the Security Council divisions, to limit the damage to Syria's neighbors of the spillover from the Syria conflict. We promote ways to support host communities and government institutions, particularly

in Jordan and Lebanon, to help mitigate what could easily become destabilizing factors stemming from the inflow of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees.

Drawing on the fact that, while divided on Syria, the Security Council remains united on Lebanon, we've also sought to strengthen political support for Lebanon.

Third, the UN's also organized post-conflict planning.

These efforts do not presume one sort of result or the other, in terms of the political outcome, but they do assume that, when the guns fall silent, the UN will be expected to be playing a role in rebuilding a shattered country. We have prepared a number of scenarios for UN action in Syria that will develop on the circumstances and on what the Syrian people themselves ultimately ask of the U.N.

But our primary political role when we talk about Syria, of course, is promoting a political solution. We could not have more capable mediators than, first, Kofi Annan and, now, Lakhdar Brahimi. And only the UN can offer the broad umbrella of impartiality under which parties and their supporters can arrive at an internationally legitimized settlement, in confidence that their interests could be protected.

But it's been an uphill struggle, from the outset. All of our bleakest predictions seem to be coming true. Whenever a slight opening appears for advancing a political solution, dynamics, either on the ground or among international and regional actors, interfere.

Neither side in Syria has been ready to talk peace seriously. The government has continued to depict what is a full-blown civil war, rooted in real grievances, as the work of a handful of foreign-backed terrorists. The opposition has remained mired in conflicts and fragmentation.

Still, we remain convinced that there is no military solution. The belief by

some that there is a military solution seems to be leading to Syria's destruction. We stand ready to host a peace conference as soon as possible, in support of the Kerry-Lavrov initiative that was announced on May 7. And I participated in two U.S., Russia, U.N. trilateral preparatory meetings chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi. But with current developments on the ground, the conference dates keep slipping.

In the end, there is a need for new politics in Syria -- and urgently -- as with every additional day of fighting, lives are lost, hatreds rise, and the united, multicultural, peaceful Syria becomes an ever more distant reality. If the key powers can help deliver the parties to the table, there is still a chance, based on the Geneva communique from last year, for a negotiated transition in Syria.

Let me turn down to Somalia, where we've reached a potential turning point. I was in Mogadishu just two weeks ago for the second time this year. For the UN, Somalia represents the challenge of how, in the face of so many crises demanding attention, the UN can help to sustain regional and international focus on a process that has the promise of real success, but that still, today, needs to be nurtured.

Since the early 1990s, it has been, perhaps, convenient to look away from Somalian despair. But clearly, one of the lessons of the past decade, from Kabul, to Mogadishu, to Bamako, is that failed and failing states pose an unacceptable danger -- not only to their own people, but to the region around them and the world at large.

And so the task of ending anarchy and building security and a stable government in Somalia took on great strategic, as well as humanitarian, significance. The UN has invested heavily with partners, including the African Union and key governments, such as the United States, to help turn the tide in that country.

The UN helped mediate the 2008 Djibouti Agreement, which laid out a roadmap for transition that was completed last year, when Somalis elected a new

government.

Today, the country has, for the first time in decades, a leadership that is committed to building the state. The archetypical failed state has before it now the best chance in a generation to build a stable government and bring a measure of peace and prosperity to its people.

But diplomacy's only one side of the story. It was a major security intervention by the African Union that fundamentally turned the side against Al-Shabaab. The United States helped get that A.U. mission, AMISOM, off the ground and secure UN support for it.

Part of our task today is to make sure AMISOM continues to receive financial and political support -- for the Somali security services are not yet ready, not yet able to extend authority across the entire state. Somalia still needs AMISOM, and AMISOM still needs financial and logistic support from the international community.

The very real security gains provided already by AMISOM have helped pry open space for Syria's political work. For the first time since the 1990s, the UN's political mission for Somalia operates in Mogadishu, not from Nairobi.

Our political engagement inside the country includes helping to address the relationship between the federal government and Mogadishu and the regions, including Somaliland and Puntland. Our special representative of Mogadishu is also helping to manage in the evolving relationship between Mogadishu and its neighbors, whose support remains essential to Somalia's success.

Security is still a concern. A UN compound was attacked by terrorists just last month, and we do not underestimate the obstacles ahead in Somalia, but we remain committed and determined to stay. Others need to remain focused on Somalia, as well.

In the Great Lakes region of Africa, we can see how the UN has addressed a longstanding challenge, a problem that seems almost immune to solutions -- which is instability in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo -- with a new expanded approach that offers a ray of hope.

Monusco, the UN's peacekeeping force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the UN's largest. It remains an essential tool for the protection of civilians and to promote stability.

But, recognizing that security tools alone were insufficient to solve the problem of the Eastern DRC, the secretary-general, at the beginning of this year, concluded a political agreement among eleven countries -- the DRC and its neighbors and four organizations, including the UN and the African Union -- dubbed the Eleven Plus Four Agreement. This framework codified commitments from the DRC, the other national signatories, and the four organizations.

And, in addition, the Secretary-General appointed Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region -- to use the framework to end the recurring cycles of violence, including horrific sexual violence.

Besides working at the senior leadership level, Senior Envoy Robinson's also drawing in grassroots civil society and women's organizations toward a comprehensive political approach.

We also recognize and welcome the recent appointment of the U.S. envoy for the Great Lakes region of Africa and the U.S. commitment to work closely with Special Envoy Robinson in support for the Eleven Plus Four framework agreement.

But to add economic incentives and underline the linkage between security and development, the secretary-general and Jim Yong Kim, the president of the

World Bank, recently traveled to the region, as well, in what was the first joint mission of this kind ever.

Moreover, the Security Council's authorized a new intervention brigade within the UN peacekeeping operation in the DRC. This is intended to establish a deterrent that should give some breathing space for the renewed political and diplomatic efforts.

So, in summary, we are bringing our convening power and our diplomatic peacekeeping and other assets into play, to encourage a comprehensive approach to the challenges in the Great Lakes. We cannot afford to let this opportunity fade away.

Regarding Afghanistan -- the UN is viewing our engagement, in light of the significant changes that will take place with the withdrawal of ISAF troops and the presidential elections in 2014. My colleagues in the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations have the lead in Afghanistan, but DPA is now heavily involved in the strategic thinking, as well -- about, what is the UN's role, going forward.

Among other challenges, Afghanistan is a good example of how even the United Nations, with its universal membership, needs to be sensitive to concerns of national sovereignty.

In March, the Security Council renewed the mandate of the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, for an additional year, without any major changes. This signals a desire for continuity in the mission's role, including good offices on elections, reconciliation, and regional cooperation. Many of our member states see a similar role for the UN beyond 2014.

However, some of the actors in the current Afghan government have indicated skepticism regarding a continued political role for the UN. They argue that this role could interfere with Afghan sovereignty. So, UN diplomacy will require finding

compromise and consensus among different actors, on different interests, to allow the organization to continue to assist Afghans in the most effective way, without being seen as compromising the nation's sovereignty.

One way for the UN to engage, of course, is to work regionally, where Afghanistan is one of several partners. The UN's regional center in Central Asia, based in Ashgabat, which is another one of the overseas missions that reports to DPA -- my department -- is actively involved in the Istanbul process and working with the governments of the region to identify common projects and approaches to build trust -- and, thereby, prevent conflict and instability in the long term.

Now, to illustrate our work in more classic good offices setting, I want to touch briefly on Yemen and relations between Iraq and Kuwait -- two issues in which the U.S. has played a significant role in supporting the UN.

Yemen, in my view, is an excellent example of how the UN complements the work of other partners. It's the only country in that region to emerge from the so-called Arab Spring or Arab Awakening with a consensus blueprint for negotiated peaceful transition.

The GCC countries and bilateral partners, such as the United States, deserve our applause in promoting the power-sharing and transition roadmap known as the GCC Initiative, finally signed by former Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in November 2011.

I believe that the leverage in terms of real power politics by certain GCC countries and the U.S. was essential in persuading Ali Abdullah Saleh to step aside.

But Saleh's signature was only one step in a long and complicated process. A national dialogue had to be organized, with the secretariat set up and committees established to draw up the principles on which a constitution would be

drafted. Various understandings had to be brokered, less the nascent dialogue process collapse. Powerful parties and individuals had to be persuaded to put their trust in these processes.

All of these complicated aspects of implementation of that GCC initiative have been overseen by the UN, through the secretary-general's special envoy, and backed strongly by the United States and other parties.

While considerable work remains before elections can be organized as scheduled in 2014, let us remember that Yemen has one of the most heavily armed and severely tribalized societies in the world -- not to mention economic and social challenges. The fact that the Yemenis, themselves, remain, by and large, inside the political process speaks volumes about the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and partnerships.

On Iraq and Kuwait -- the Security Council passed a resolution on June 27 that praised the relationship between the two countries, that lifted some of the Chapter 7 obligations on Iraq regarding Kuwait -- and that was drafted with the full cooperation of both Iraq and Kuwait.

Moreover, those two countries have been, this year, demarcating their border together. For those of us that remember 1991, this is a remarkable turnaround.

But this is an area in which I believe UN diplomacy, complemented and brokered by U.S. efforts in both Kuwait and Baghdad, made a real difference.

Both Yemen and Iraq -- and Kuwait -- demonstrate the importance of complementary action, of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy working in hand. When we combine our strengths, lasting solutions can be found.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we deal with tough politics in all of these arenas -- and others that might come up in the discussions afterwards -- a number of

challenges emerge across the board.

First, going from early warning to early response -- although we in the United Nations and probably in Washington still are occasionally caught off-guard, our single biggest challenge is not really to improve early warning, but to find ways to mobilize early action -- rapid and unified diplomatic action as soon as opportunities open up, as soon as one identifies a problem on the horizon. This is particularly important when we need to prevent mass loss of life. Successful early interventions, obviously, are far less costly in terms of blood and treasure than conflicts, peacekeeping, reconstruction.

But political space for early interventions is often extremely limited -- due to concerns over sovereignty, due to concerns over perceived interference in internal affairs. The UN cannot simply force itself upon parties to a conflict; it can only mediate when there's a willingness and consent.

Sovereignty issues and other questions that affect our ability to broker peace and prevent atrocities are currently at the heart of a major internal process at the United Nations -- a process of learning from the lessons of failure to prevent atrocities in Sri Lanka.

Second, professionalizing the service -- yes, there's an art to diplomacy; there will always be an art to diplomacy. But in today's complex peace processes, even the most skilled diplomat needs access to a broad range of technical expertise through relatively new instruments, including a standby team of mediation experts who can be deployed anywhere around the world within 72 hours. We are adding more than a dose of science to the art.

This kind of mobile assistance on issues such as power-sharing, constitution-making, mediation process design is in such demand that we can barely

keep up. And let me hear Norway again -- as Norwegian financial, intellectual, and logistics support has made the standby team on mediation possible.

My third point relates to security, which is a subject quite familiar to U.S. diplomats, as well. Our work is becoming more and more dangerous. Mogadishu is only the most recent reminder. When our mobility is restricted due to security, our ability to deliver on our mandates is seriously compromised.

In short, we, too, face the dilemma of trying to do effective political outreach while hemmed in behind T-walls, razor wire, and sandbags.

Finally, let me end where I started -- which is with leverage. Equipped with neither fancy battalions nor billions of available dollars, what leverage does the UN really have, beyond that broad legitimacy I spoke of earlier?

The real challenge is finding ways to build consensus, and to get the international community to speak with one voice. When the international community is united, the leverage the UN has is high. On Yemen, we have a united council. On Syria, we do not. It is hard to overstate the difference that that makes.

Doing politics in tough places is not easy, but it is my strong belief that we have no alternative but to maintain the momentum around diplomacy, and ensure that we stay focused in every engagement on finding political solutions -- and that we pool our efforts for peace, for while bilateral and multilateral diplomacy may work differently, when they combine their clout, the results can be powerful.

We need the best of both multilateral efforts and bilateral diplomacy to succeed in today's tough places.

Thank you very much.

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, Jeff. I think it was a very clear and fascinating tour of the horizon of your work and the leverage that you have. And for us in

Washington, it's rare that we get this kind of insight, so we're very grateful to you.

Ambassador Strommen, you were up there. You witnessed this. You played an important role when you were there, in trying to develop the diplomatic tools for the United Nations. And, as Jeff pointed out, Norway continues to play a very important part.

So, let's get your reaction to what Jeff had to say.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: Well, thank you very much, Martin, for giving me the opportunity to come to Brookings, and to say a few words about Norway's attitudes and role in these things.

And I've been there almost six years. It's almost an embarrassment. So, Strobe, and Martin, and the others -- I feel like sort of I'm part of the household here -- and you will get rid of me, finally. But this has been a kind of whole new Washington, and I'm deeply thankful for all the insights and all the doors that you have opened for me and for Norway during my tenure.

Well, I should make a confession first. I think my own thinking on some of these issues goes back to two things.

One, I worked for the UN back in the mid '90s, in the former Yugoslavia -- '93 to '95, terrible years -- before any of these things were institutionalized.

MR. FELTMAN: And before I met Bruce Jones.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: And we were in then something called the International Conference for the Former Yugoslavia, which was a kind of an *ad hoc* thing that was established by the UN and the EU together -- very sort of clandestine. But we ran around in the world, and tried to do a little bit of the same that DPA does now.

The other thing was that when I was in New York, as Martin said -- when Norway was on the Security Council -- 2001, 2002, where I met Bruce -- and we quickly

figured out that the UN was slightly in the same -- those were activist years. I mean, the Cold War was still -- I mean, the wall had come down 10 years before, and we had a huge belief in the diplomatic capacity of the UN

And, in a way, Jeff, the feeling was that, "Hey, the UN is kind of in a Norwegian position." We never had the Pentagon. We never had the might of the dollar or the presidency. So, you know, welcome to our world. I mean, I always -- any room I walk into, nobody will associate me with a Pentagon or other institutions.

So, in a way, the UN was a natural sort of extension of our way of thinking.

And you come to realize, then, that even if you try to do some good in the world by getting active in solving, you know, violent conflicts -- or at least make an effort for peace and reconciliation -- you really need to draw on a different pool of people, of backgrounds, than only those that grew up by the North Pole. And the UN, then, was the perfect place to take that.

But it really needed to be institutionalized. I mean, really needed to be institutionalized -- and that's how I spoke a lot in those days to Bruce about it. And DPA started to take form and shape.

Now I'm not going to say that intellectual leadership is overrated, but sometimes you end up thinking that it almost is -- because I thought it was an obvious thing for the UN to take over. There have been many setbacks, but there's nothing that can replace the UN. There's nothing within the UN that can replace something like the DPA.

But it needs resources, and this is my sort of main point. It really needs resources. I'm sorry that the Norwegians always come in and talk about money, but if -- no matter how shiny your intellectual exercise is, and how you should do this and you

should do that, all of that is fine, but, you know, it gets complicated if you're constantly talking about other people's money.

So, the fact that, to get as many as possible to show not only that you believe in the UN but show support with coming up with the resources -- not necessarily only money -- with the personnel, with the support systems, with the structures -- you will, like Jeff has told us, you will see that there are comparative advantages within the UN system.

Now the UN will play a number -- in politics and tough places -- will play a number of roles -- anything from scapegoat to -- well, you know, to keeper of the Holy Grail. I mean, any role you can think of -- if you don't have anyone else to blame or anyone else to put there, you'll put the UN -- which is, in a way, also important -- and sometimes, it's the right thing to do.

So, we will continue to support it. We think that your efforts around the world and in the places that you have mentioned are laudable. I mean, we know it's tough. We know it's hard. We would like more states to come up with commitments on resources, but all I can promise you is that we will keep our part for the future.

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: When you talk about resources, Wegger -- I mean, we're not talking about peacekeeping resources; that's a different account.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: Absolutely.

MR. INDYK: So, what do you mean? What are the resources that are necessary for Jeff's work?

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: Well, I'm fascinated by what Jeff said -- that you, in a matter of a few days, are able to draw on experts from around the world. As I said, diversification is very, very important.

And one thing I really learned in Yugoslavia -- and I had a boss who was Hindu. I had never had a boss before that was -- I'd probably never had a boss before that wasn't Lutheran -- but at least I got a Hindu, right -- which was kind of a new experience for me -- and for him.

But you actually understand, after a little while, that the ability to draw on a pool that only, in a way, the UN can build up -- but you've got to have systems in place. You've got to have these people -- like, everybody needs salaries. They need travel.

And one of the frustrations in the mid '90s, when I worked for the UN, was that the administrative burden and routines just before you could start talking to the warmongers were so heavy and so difficult that, when you got there, you were almost exhausted. And to get these things -- which I think you've been much better at -- that's part of my resourcing -- not only that you come up with a big fund for it.

MR. INDYK: Did you want to just respond on that point?

MR. FELTMAN: Just to put things in perspective, the sort of scale we're talking about -- all these tools that we have -- the rapid response standby mediation team, roster of people like constitution experts -- it's funded out of voluntary contributions. This does not come out of the regular budget. So, we're not being appropriated by member states' dues anything for these conflict-prevention activities, such as the rapid deployment that I described.

We're talking a total voluntary contribution budget for DPA per year of roughly between $16 and $20 million -- whereas, if you look at Monusco, the peacekeeping operation in DRC that I mentioned, that's from the regular budget -- peacekeeping assessment -- and that's over $1 billion a year.

MR. INDYK: And in Somalia?

MR. FELTMAN: In Somalia -- our political missions overseas are funded

out of the regular budget.

MR. INDYK: Bruce, one of the points that Jeff made very strongly -- and is so obvious in the case of Syria -- is that when the permanent members -- the Security Council united in action -- the life of DPA becomes much easier and much more effective. And when they divided, the opposite is the case.

What's your reflection on that kind of conundrum?

MR. JONES: Yeah. And for me, it goes to a central issue that I take from Jeff's talk -- about the relationship between power and principle. And it seems to me the kind of core strength of the UN as an organization is that it has both -- that it blends concept and principle with realities of power.

You have the P5. They have permanent seats. They have vetoes. They are able to flow their power through that institution when they choose to do so -- and yet, you also have the universal membership, and the charter, and the principles that Jeff talked about.

I think what's interesting, looking at the UN, is how differently those two things get arrayed, depending on the kind of conflict that we're involved in. And a kind of over-simplistic way of thinking about that is sort of, you know, the degree of great power/interest in the conflict -- sort of first tier, second tier, or third tier conflict, right?

So, when you're in, you know, a small civil war in Central Africa, where the great powers have no fundamental stakes, it seems to me that the kind of diplomacy that Jeff was talking about -- of persuasion, of reference to principle, the ability to manage networks, and those sorts of tools -- become extremely important -- and much more important than people, I think, realize.

There's a long debate about how much states matter versus institutions. And, I mean, there's changes in contexts, but there are parts of the world where Jeff and

his colleagues really are the main source of diplomatic action in a given context, and drawing on elite networks within reason, drawing on the tools of the charter, and drawing on their own persuasive skills, et cetera, really make a critical difference in those conflicts.

Syria is the opposite end of the spectrum -- I think, you know, no matter what the skill of Kofi Annan, or Lakhdar Brahimi, or et cetera. The very best that that could do would be to facilitate some sort of P5 *rapprochement* -- absent P5 *rapprochement*, it doesn't matter how skillful Lakhdar Brahimi, or Kofi Annan, or Jeff Feltman is. It's just nothing's going to change in the Syrian context, so long as this is the function of the divisions amongst the P5.

I think the most interesting places are the ones you've talked about, like Somalia, where there are -- great powers have skin in the game. The United States has Special Forces in Somalia; there's a terrorist threat in there. There's kind of real stakes – it borders the Indian Ocean, and $1 trillion in shipping flows through there.

But they're not fundamental stakes -- so such that the United States is sort of dictating the play on a day-to-day basis or et cetera. And there, you have an awful lot of room for maneuver by middle powers, and the regions are involved -- the Turks, the Brits, et cetera.

And there, it seems to me, you get this very interesting blend of sufficient power and leverage to be able to move pieces around the chessboard, but still really requiring kind of diplomatic talents of Jeff and his colleagues to orchestrate those pieces, and to be able to corral people into a common direction -- because you find very frequently that when you have a number of players in a given game, their interests may overlap, but it actually takes the skill of UN diplomats or something similar to pull people into a kind of common position, and sort of push the pieces of the chessboard in the

same direction. And that seems to be where the UN makes its sort of fundamental differences -- in those kind of second-tier conflicts where the UN has a really important role, and sort of arraying the resources of middle powers and the kind of modest engagements of great powers in shaping outcomes.

And that, for me, is where the real test lies. And I have to think it's worth saying. It's worth giving credit to Jeff that one of the things that Jeff has already accomplished at the UN is building much deeper ties to Turkey, India, Brazil -- some of the emerging powers who are players in this game in a way that I think even the United States hasn't yet fully recognized how much those actors are diplomatic players in a lot of these games -- and Jeff is sort out, ahead of the curve on that issue.

MR. INDYK: Do you want to just respond to that, in terms of the difficulty of concerting so many different players, with their different interests?

MR. FELTMAN: Well, let me respond to that last point -- because it also gets at Wegger's point about trying to broaden the funding base for these type of early warning preventative diplomacy conflict mediation efforts.

Norway's been extremely generous in helping us set up these mechanisms. They're one of our primary funders of this voluntary contribution pool by $16 to $20 million a year. But if you look at the traditional donors, it's Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany, U.K. There's a certain pattern there.

And that pattern is useful, because it's somewhat predictable for us. We know that Norway will continue to support us.

MR. INDYK: The pattern is all European.

MR. FELTMAN: But it's all Western European. And so if there's a conflict emerging somewhere, there may be a perception that we have a certain Western European agenda in trying to do our preventative diplomacy.

So, I've been trying to expand, basically, our friends of DPA base, you know, group. And we've managed to get, now, funding from Japan, from Turkey, from India, from Morocco. In some cases, they're relatively modest sums, but it starts to change the perception of what DPA is -- that we're not simply a Western European beachhead in the UN that happens to be headed by an American -- that we actually do represent the membership base of the organization.

MR. INDYK: Jeff, one of the things that struck me about what you said of the difference between being a U.S. diplomat and the UN diplomat is the issue of legitimacy -- something that Washington doesn't always take very seriously. And there was some extreme cases where we just dismissed it completely.

And it seems that the UN has all legitimacy in the world, and the United States often doesn't. And so I wonder if you can just address that issue -- what the role that the UN can play, in terms of legitimizing interventions, and how important that is.

MR. FELTMAN: You know, of course, I've worked in both places, as I said. And there is a pride in the UN that I certainly hadn't fully grasped, about the type of legitimacy that a universally-based organization can offer. You know, when I worked in Washington, I don't think I had a full appreciation for how much that means inside the UN and how much it means to many member states.

Certainly, there will remain places where the U.S. is going to act unilaterally based on U.S. calculations of its own interests, but there are many places in the world where we are able to play an effective role because there is a legitimacy conveyed by the consensus that the U.N. has by the universal membership. It's sort of maybe the second-tier conflict areas that Bruce said.

And there are some P5 members, as you know, who are extremely focused on legitimacy in a way of trying to define, what is the scope for international

action? It's a different aspect of the legitimacy question when you have a P5 member looking very strictly at what legitimacy means, in terms of any type of international action. But it's also important to keep that in mind.

So, those are the two aspects of legitimacy I would raise.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: So, can I say one thing about legitimacy? You know, a man I think we all know -- and I admire a lot -- Sir Brian Urquhart -- who now must be in his mid '90s, and was -- I think he was the employee number two or so in the -- had number two in the U.N. system.

MR. FELTMAN: Yeah, that's right.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: And he was present in San Francisco when the charter was written, as a young British diplomat at the time.

But Sir Brian told me that -- because I was speaking to him -- and we were in the UN We were accused of -- you know, the UN has lost all legitimacy in this conflict -- which is something you will hear every day. I mean, people will come and say that now the UN has lost all legitimacy.

And I remember he said that, you know, "We heard that in 1945; it's been that way ever since, and it's going to be that way forever."

But the truth is, actually, as Jeff was saying, it exists. It does exist, you know. And if you don't feel it in Turtle Bay, or in New York, or in Washington, you will when you get to the field. You will.

MR. INDYK: Let's talk about Syria for a minute, because there, not only is the UN really challenged in terms of its ability to operate, but the legitimacy of the UN institution is being questioned as a result of its inability to operate.

And so let me start with you, Wegger. What do you think can be done about this situation?

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: Well, I think I agree with what Jeff was saying -- and Strobe was alluding to a problem from hell in the beginning.

You know, it's such a -- first of all, the sheer numbers -- I mean, the horrors of the sheer numbers -- that you feel, in a way, overwhelmed by, if there's 100,000 people or so being killed. It's almost hard to start, not only to -- and, you know, make a proper analysis of it.

But, you know, for us, that was -- when I was at UN, worked so much with Central Africa, and other figures were, you know, were even higher -- even, I think, in Bosnia, by the end of the day, 100,000 people.

So, the UN ends up with these absolutely sort of horrible, horrible situations.

What can be done? You know, to be honest, I really don't know. What I know as, in a way, regional containment, where you -- I will give, absolutely, some credit to what Jeff and the UN is doing. Not a lot of that comes out in the media, and because you tend to focus, of course, on the horrors of the conflicts, as such -- it's obvious from what I'm saying that I'm not offering any brilliant insight -- what you can do about the core part of the conflict at the moment, but I think that some reasonable, sensible things have been done in a regional context, for it not to get seriously worse -- including some of the refugees, stabilizing the neighboring countries -- which I think, you know, is holding fairly well, given the pressure that they're under -- that the international support for them is at least not disastrous, but maybe even reasonable at the moment. But that is probably the maximum we can do at the moment.

MR. INDYK: Bruce?

MR. JONES: I don't want to take -- I don't want anything I'm about to say to be taken as, in any way, diminishing the significance in both political or human terms of

Syria, but let me make one broader point, of putting in context.

I was just finishing a chapter of a book about order and disorder. And I start the chapter by talking about a situation, right? About half of the population displaced, tens of thousands dead, a deadlock in the Council, an effort to deploy a civilian monitoring team, which is then sort of chased out by force, continuing search for a great power solution, frustrated, Russian vetoes in the Council -- Kosovo 1999, right?

So, it's simply worth remembering that the fact that we're deadlocked in the Council now doesn't mean we'll be deadlocked forever -- doesn't mean the situation won't change in real terms on the ground -- and it doesn't mean that this is what defines the Security Council in all sorts of other places.

So, while we're deadlocked in the Council on Syria, the Council is being unified and mounting a pretty effective response in Mali, in Congo, in a lot of other places where millions of lives are at stake.

So, I'd simply -- it's just always worth remembering, that this is one of several places that the Council's working. And it's always the case that deadlock attracts more attention than unity, and failure attracts more attention than success.

One other quick point, just given that -- we don't focus on these issues much in this town. And over the last decade, we've been focusing on two wars that we were heavily involved in -- Iraq and Afghanistan. During that same period -- and if you go slightly farther back -- from the mid '90s until the end of the last decade, about 2010 -- a combination of UN diplomacy, bilateral diplomacy, mediation, and peacekeeping saw the number of wars in the world go from a peak of about 30 in 1992 to 6 in 2010 -- and from an average of roughly a million people a year killed in civil wars to about 10,000 in 2010.

Now Syria will spike those numbers back up again this year, but, overall, you look at this globally in a post-Cold War period, and this huge reduction in the number

and levels of war in the world for which UN diplomacy and peacekeeping play a central role -- not an exclusive role, but a central role. And I just think it's always worth bearing that in mind. A lot of the attention goes to big failures, but they're only part of the story.

MR. FELTMAN: I could only choose a few topics to address in the remarks today, but I looked at things like where the UN has had real success, that I believe prevented what could have been violent, violent outcomes and conflict.

You know, the Cameroon/Nigerian border -- who thinks about that? It was under serious dispute. The UN has almost finished the process of working with the two governments to demarcate the entire border. We'll probably have a ceremony in September to note this. This was something that, you know, 10 years ago, looked like it was a danger spot for conflict.

Legislative elections in Guinea -- Conakry was on the verge of what looked to be approaching a very serious civil conflict a couple of months ago. We had a facilitator from the UN who was able to broker an understanding between opposition parties in the government, to allow legislative elections to take place in September -- various compromises made.

Now these are not headline-grabbing things, but had Guinea descended into civil war, had Cameroon and Nigeria fought over their border, those would have been headline things. So, I look at the lack of headlines as sometimes a mark of UN success.

MR. INDYK: And on Syria? Is there something more that can be done?

MR. FELTMAN: On Syria, there is a real dilemma. I feel like working with the neighbor states, working to do what we can to broker, as I said, localized ceasefire, to humanitarian deliveries across frontlines, working on post-conflict planning scenarios so that we're prepared to go, depending on what happens -- these are the sorts of things that we are and can do.

But they don't get at the issue that you have two sides in Syria and backers on each side that are unable to come up with a way forward. Even the post-conflict planning, I have to say, was somewhat controversial.

In fact, I had to meet last year on the margin of the General Assembly with Walid Muallem, to explain to him -- being the foreign minister of Syria -- that he will probably hear -- since the UN can't keep secrets -- he will probably hear that the UN is going through a post-conflict planning scenario that will be setting up teams to be looking at the sectors, and what the UN response could be. So, I wanted to make sure that the government of Syria knew. He was a little bit taken aback, but, in the end, concurred that a UN role, whenever the fighting would stop, would probably be necessary; he just wanted to make sure we weren't calling it post-Assad planning.

MR. INDYK: Which, of course, you weren't.

MR. FELTMAN: No.

MR. INDYK: Let's go to your questions. Please wait for the microphone, identify yourself, and make sure you ask a question.

Here -- further.

MR. DUFFY: Hi -- Tom Duffy. I'm the director of UN political affairs at the Department of State. Jeff, quite brief -- thank you very much.

MR. FELTMAN: Hi, Tom.

MR. DUFFY: Just a question -- getting back to the original hashtag of #USdiplomacy -- how can the United States most effectively support the United Nations, based on your experiences over the last year -- financially, politically, rhetorically? What can we best do to help the organization achieve both your goals and our goals for the organization?

MR. FELTMAN: Well, I mean, you do provide 22 percent of the general

budget and something like 28 percent of the peacekeeping budget, so there's a fairly significant role that the U.S. plays financially in the United Nations.

There are some structural issues that I don't think it's worth boring this audience with, where I think the U.S. could be taking a different role -- and that's primarily, how do you do the funding for the special political missions? But that's sort of a very arcane topic for this type of group.

But to the extent that the U.S. is able to help explain to the American population why the U.N. is important is what I think we need more than anything else. You know, things like 60 percent of the world's children are vaccinated from childhood diseases through UN programs.

There are a lot of things that, in this era where threats to the United States are cross-border -- be they pandemic, be they terrorist, be they criminal -- a multilateral organization like the UN, you know, I think can play a very effective role in being a force multiplier, in many cases, for U.S. interests. And to the extent that U.S. officials are able to help us make that case to the American public, I'd be grateful.

MR. INDYK: Do you see something that the U.S. should do, from your perspective?

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: You know, every now and then, there is -- with the most powerful country, there is an interesting sort of diplomatic political dynamic, but sometimes you can let the UN run with the ball -- or maybe some smaller actor in another, smaller state, and then you can take it back for a while. There's room for a lot of creativity, and the U.S. has been good at that over the years, should they keep it up.

The UN is much more useful to the U.S. than what meets the eye.

MR. INDYK: Okay, back there, on the side.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you. Will Davis, with the United Nations Development Program -- Mr. Undersecretary-General, thanks for your great remarks today. I think DPA often suffers from being the dog that doesn't bark, but today, a little bit of woofing about your accomplishments is very welcome.

My question gets to a little bit more this question of, you can walk not too far outside of our wonderful surroundings here today, and find folks in Washington that think the UN is hopelessly anti-American -- but then you go to any of the 192 other member states, and the first thing you'll hear is that the UN is a tool of the United States.

As the senior American in the secretariat, how do you reconcile these two views? And flowing from that, the fact that the UN is increasingly becoming a target -- that the security environment is more and more challenging -- is that a function of the UN being too closely associated with U.S. interests, or is this just the world that we live in today?

Thank you.

MR. FELTMAN: Will, thanks, and good to see you.

One of the most partnerships that I think we have inside the UN family in DPA is with UNDP. We work together on election support. We cochair the Syria Interagency Taskforce. So, UNDP is a really important partner of DPA inside the system.

You're absolutely right. If you ask 192 member states which country exercises the most influence on what the UN does, the answer will be unanimous -- it's the United States. Which country influences the direction of the organization? It's going to be the United States. Everyone says that.

So, the perception in the United States of the UN being anti-American, you know, is based on some of the General Assembly debates, based on what some of the member states themselves are able to use the U.N. platform to express.

But the tenor of the organization, I think, broadly overlaps -- not 100 percent, but broadly overlaps with U.S. interests and foreign policy goals.

I think about the fact that, no matter how talented all of us may be as individuals -- no matter what our experience, what our strengths are as individuals -- we can do more by joining with family members, by having community groups, you know, church groups. You can achieve more than an individual.

As an American, I look at the UN like that -- that we may not always agree with 193 member states -- we certainly don't -- but we can achieve more by working in the organization -- and I believe we do achieve more by working in the organization than we, as the United States alone, could do.

You know, I'm in my position because I am an American, and the United States plays an important role in the UN. And I expected to be looked at with more suspicion from my colleagues than I think I am; they may mask it quite well, but we'll see.

MR. INDYK: Bruce, you're a Canadian. What's your perspective on how the U.S. is treated at the UN?

MR. JONES: I'll tell you -- we're not off the record, but fine -- but just, you know, when I was chief of staff in the UN's peace process team for the Middle East, I got a phone call every single day, every single day, for an American diplomat -- who is not one of these two gentleman -- telling me what the secretary-general thought about the Middle East peace process that day.

And I confess that, most days, the secretary-general thought pretty much that about the Middle East peace process. The U.S. does wield a huge amount of influence in the organization.

So, to the question about the concerns about -- from an American perspective, the concern that the UN is anti-American is just kind of nonsense. I mean,

anybody who's working in and around the organization knows perfectly well that the United States occupies just a vast amount of space in the organization -- much more than a permanent seat would suggest.

But I think that, actually, the United States is -- in my experience, the United States is relatively good at playing this well, in the sense that the United States isn't dumb enough to think that if it's visible that the U.S. does this, that that's a good thing. I mean, obviously, it's good for the UN that the UN is able to work with an awful lot of actors and find common ground -- and that does take, at times, a willingness to stand up and say no to the United States.

And I think the kind of key talent of UN diplomats is to know exactly when and how to say no to the United States -- which you have to do very carefully, but you can do.

And so that's striking that balance between using and carrying the weight of the United States behind you to some degree, but knowing when to break from the United States and when to say no really matters in U.N. diplomacy.

MR. FELTMAN: If I may add one more thing -- the U.S. mission to the UN doesn't call me any more than other key missions do. So, I don't feel that I'm being watched, you know, as an American. In fact, other missions call me more than the Americans do.

But there was one meeting where I had a very strong point of view, and the Americans had a very different point of view. So, we had a very tough meeting with one of the members of the U.S. mission and the team that was with that representative -- very tough meeting -- where I made it absolutely clear that I disagreed 100 percent, and why, and I simply wasn't accepting the U.S. position as being the appropriate response to a particular issue.

Once the meeting was -- and it was a tough, tough meeting -- in fact, a bit tense. And when the American delegation finally left, my team looked at me and said, "But, sir, those were the Americans. You talked to them like that?"

MR. INDYK: But because you're an American, you can't.

MR. FELTMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: You know, it can be a good thing. I mean, this is advanced diplomacy -- how you play the UN/U.S. relationship. I remember once, when we were on the Security Council, we were going on a mission to somewhere in Africa. And everybody thought that the missions were too big, because all 15 members wanted to go. So, we had a discussion that we should make a little group, and only a small part of it would go.

Now none of the smaller countries will ever volunteer not to go, because you want to go. I mean, we're only here for two years. Nobody has offered us a permanent seat. So, I was not going to throw in the towel.

But then, finally, the Americans said, "Okay, to get this thing going, you know, we will volunteer not to go," you know. So, the U.S. will not go to this place, since everybody else is so very interested and has so much to contribute.

So, then we thought that a little bit strange, but we told the parties that, you know, there's going to be a smaller mission, and so far the U.S. is not going to come. The Russians also, I think, then said, well, then they didn't need to go if the Americans didn't go. And the Chinese were sort of starting to drag their feet a little bit.

And then, immediately, the parties to the conflict came to us and said that, "We don't want you alone. We're not going to come here unless you bring the Americans, and the Russians, and the others."

So, you know, then it's not serious. So, you have that side to it, but that, you will only hear in such a situation. So, in the end, we all, 15 of us, went. I didn't give in.

MR. INDYK: You know, Bruce introduced some words about the Middle East peace process -- that there was a certain absence of reference to the question of Palestine in your remarks, Jeff.

So, tell us, what is it that DPA can and can't do, when it comes to that hot potato issue?

MR. FELTMAN: I actually had it in an earlier draft, and took it out. What can I say?

MR. INDYK: Now you have an opportunity to put it back in.

MR. FELTMAN: Let me be honest: The UN can play a supportive role. The UN cannot play a leadership role on this particular issue.

Yes, we can play a leadership role in terms of the fact that we can talk to people the U.S. might not talk to. We can do certain things on humanitarian relief and trying to raise the profile for fundraising, for certain programs. But the fundamental political issues on which the Israelis and Palestinians are going to have to take decisions are ones in which we're going to have to play a supportive role, not a leadership role.

The secretary-general has been on the record; he's absolutely delighted at the role that Secretary Kerry has played. In the meetings he's had with Secretary Kerry, he's made it clear that the UN is there to do what it can to support him.

We're a member of the Quartet. We would be interested in having a revitalized Quartet if it truly is going to play some kind of role. We're not interested in having a Quartet just for Quartet's sake.

But I have to say that this is an issue on which we would like to support

strong U.S. leadership -- and not be in the lead ourselves.

MR. INDYK: Now, not withstanding Secretary Kerry's efforts, there could well be a situation come September in the UN General Assembly, where the question of Palestine is front and center again, in the UNGA. Does DPA have any role, then, when it's back on the UN agenda?

MR. FELTMAN: Well, I mean, you know, we are the ones -- sometimes people will tease us that we're the talking points machine, because we're the ones that were preparing the secretary-general for his own engagement, with -- you know, whether it's Mahmoud Abbas or whoever it happens to be.

But in terms of questions of accessions to conventions, accessions to other parts of the UN -- if the Palestinians would choose to go that way, there's different governing bodies, depending on what the particular issue is.

The secretary-general has, I think, great empathy for the Palestinians. He's also forged a very close relationship with the Israelis. And the secretary-general would far prefer that we come up with a way to help provide a political solution, rather than have one of the other parties moving in ways that could damage the organization -- because there's -- the secretary-general has made it clear to the Palestinians that there are implications to us as an organization that we would like the Palestinians to keep in mind as they consider their own next steps.

MR. INDYK: Interesting. Another question -- yes, please.

MR. DE ROSSI: Thank you. My name is Alex de Rossi.

Mr. Undersecretary-General, you spoke very clearly of consensus as being, really, the key to the UN's ability to exercise power on behalf of its mission. And when consensus doesn't exist, the UN struggles.

I wonder if you could shed some light on the issue of Libya within the UN

-- what the perspective is on that now, given that's a place where consensus seems almost to have moved in the opposite direction, where consensus existed and multiple Security Council resolutions were passed. And subsequently, there seems to be more divergence among, you know, nations in the international scene.

Thanks.

MR. FELTMAN: Alex, thanks.

You're right that the debate over Libya continues. You know, there's a discussion over what those resolutions that were passed actually authorized, and this plays into the Syria discussion, it plays into the Mali discussions, it plays into the strategy of what you do about cross-border issues in the Sahel, from arms smuggling to terrorism. So, the Libya example looms very, very large.

However, there still is Security Council support for the UN mission in Libya -- for the U.N. playing a role in Libya.

So, the debate about Libya has affected the discussions on other issues more than what is actually needed in Libya today, whether -- there hasn't been any Security Council member who's blocked the ideas of UN political engagement, UN work on security sector reform, DDR -- things like that.

MR. INDYK: Over here.

SPEAKER: Hi. My name is (inaudible), and I'm a medical student with the American Medical Association.

And my question -- well, we all know that in times of civil unrest and international conflict, physicians, and hospitals, and medical services are often targets of a lot of the violence that goes on.

I was wondering if the panel could offer a few comments or information about any goals or acts -- activities that the UN and the U.S. are taking or have taken to

make sure that medical neutrality is kept as a foreign policy priority? As we know, it's stated and maintained by documents such as the Geneva Convention -- you know, things like that. So, any comments on that situation?

MR. FELTMAN: The humanitarian actors of the United Nations -- and I'll highlight, you know, people like António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Valerie Amos, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance -- have really tried to use their voices to raise exactly this issue, particularly when it comes to Syria.

They had an appeal a couple of months ago. You may have seen it. It was quite a high-profile appeal -- about the need to protect the neutrality of medical personnel and other humanitarian actors. And there'll be a Security Council debate on -- when this is going to come up -- I believe it's this week, where the same key humanitarian actors, you know, are raising the profile on this.

But, of course, the sad fact of the matter is, if you look at someplace like Syria, there has been significant damage. Something like 1/3 of the hospitals are not useable now, because of damage that's been done from the fighting -- and there is targeting.

So, without having forces on the ground to actually separate the antagonists, what we try and do is to use the voices the UN has to raise awareness of this, and, also, to have discussions with those countries that have influence on those inside Syria.

So, publicly, we talk about this quite loudly, to raise attention to the issue. Privately, we're talking to those countries that are in touch with the fighters on either side, to try to build some humanitarian space.

MR. INDYK: Wegger?

AMBASSADOR STROMMEN: Actually, you know, most of the issues

that you're raising, they are, in a way, in general terms, solved in the Geneva Conventions. We have international humanitarian law, and it's a question of having it respected.

One of the sad things about being a diplomat, you know, in our areas, in these times, is probably the inability to have new international norms or obligations. I mean, I don't think the Geneva Conventions, unfortunately -- it's my personal view -- I don't think we could have, today, negotiated the Geneva Conventions. I don't think we could have negotiated the UN Charter, for that matter.

So, we are stuck in a situation where we really have to look after the heritage that we had from previous generations.

Now the Geneva Conventions are not bad at all, and the ICRC actually does a pretty good job of disseminating it. But this should be the job, in a way, of all of us. If there ever was a common cause for everyone who's engaged -- not only humanitarian work, but, also, in political -- it would be to make sure that we are -- this is all what we have, but there is clear regulations there, and any violation to international humanitarian law is unacceptable. And it's a task of all of us to look after this.

MR. INDYK: I'm afraid we're going to have to cut this to the last question, and take it from young lady here.

MS. LOWE: Hi. My name's Emma Lowe, and I'm with the Institute for Policy Studies.

And I had a question about the U.S.'s influence with specific regards to issues of sovereignty that you were discussing -- and how would -- how could changes in the distribution of influence between a diversity of nations affect the willingness of a nation in conflict to embrace UN intervention?

MR. FELTMAN: The sovereignty question is one that, certainly, I've

been thinking a lot about for the year I've been at the UN.

Bruce and I have had several discussions about this, because, you know, if you look at a conflict between (inaudible), as often as not, one of the other countries may ask for UN support. They tend to be the one that feels they have the more legitimate claim, and, in the conflict between states, might be the weaker state.

But if you have a conflict between states, it's, in general, I think, fairly easy for the UN to find an entry point to get involved.

Where it's a real problem is where conflicts today are emerging -- which is not between states, for the large part, but it's inside states. And so you have -- so, you know, we may all be able to look out and see, okay, country X is having a little ethnic problem in one corner of the country that seems to start to be spreading. So, we start to get, you know, a warning.

Well, that government, that member state of this organization, which I serve, may not think it has a problem -- or may think it has the solution to its problem -- may not want to "internationalize" the issue.

So, it takes a lot of work to try to find the entry point for the UN, because we are an organization that's based on membership, so there is a sovereignty reality that we have to accept as a member state-based organization.

So, what do you do? You try to find mediators -- intermediaries who have some legitimacy on their own. So, you might send out somebody who you knew was close to certain government leaders, from another country, who can just sort of talk quietly behind closed doors without a big deal.

Maybe there's a very good UNDP graduate resident coordinator on the ground, who's there, who you can work with to use sort of the UN existing country team programs to try to get an entry point.

You just have to always be looking at this. But I think that one of the reasons why I want to make sure that we have a broad financial backing for our mediation tools is so that people can say, "Okay, if this many countries of this many different political persuasions are behind using these mediation tools, then it must not be some Western imperialist agenda; it must be truly what they're saying," which is, "We have no objective, other than trying to address a conflict. We're not trying to pick winners and losers."

And that's why having a country like India come on board with DPA -- which is, you know, very sensitive to its own sovereignty, but yet sees a role for these sorts of tools -- having them part of our funding base is a good selling point in some parts of the world.

MR. INDYK: Bruce?

MR. JONES: It is an extremely important question. I think we're in a phase where there are new actors on the international stage -- India, Brazil, Turkey, China, et cetera, right?

One of the dominant parts of the narrative is that these new players on the international stage are going to challenge some of the core principles of international order.

Well, what's the most important principle of international order? Sovereignty -- we're challenging it, right? It's the United States and the West who are saying, "Maybe not so much with the sovereignty, and maybe more on humanitarian prevention," and et cetera, right?

That's profoundly destabilizing in the mindset of countries like India, and Brazil, and Turkey, et cetera, who, for most of their history as independent states, were the subject of a variety of forms of intervention or sanctions, et cetera.

So, it's an incredibly sensitive topic. We saw in Libya that countries like Brazil and India could kind of get halfway there. They voted for the application of the concept of the responsibility to protect, in the case of Libya.

When it came time to actually use force to implement the concept, they had to abstain. They're sort of halfway there.

I want to go to the question about sort of what the U.S. can do about the UN diplomacy. It seems to me that this is a place where the United States has not actually played its cards very well -- where the United States needs to do a lot more work -- with Brazil, with India, with Turkey, with these powers who are sort of on the fence about which way these issues are going.

Sometimes, they're going to side with Syria, with China, and Russia on a kind of anti-sovereign -- anti-interventionist/pro-sovereignty stance -- but who, as Jeff said, have interests -- have energy interests, and natural resource interests, and development interests, and a range of interests that mean they have to get engaged in places.

And they were kind of on the fence. I don't think we've done nearly enough to work with them, to bring them on, and bring them aboard on these kinds of concepts -- which are going to be central to what we do in the near future -- especially at a time when, in other -- something we didn't talk about; there are regions where great power relations are getting very tense.

Asia is a zone of great tension and great power relations, and the United Nations isn't really engaged in that at this stage, and I don't know if it will be. And I think the more likely scenario is that those tensions will start to deepen tensions and divisions within the Council, and sort of start to limit these things.

But there are counter-issues, right? So, as we said before, divisions in

Syria, unified action on Mali -- because they have core interests -- some energy issues, right?

So, we really have to pay a lot of attention to this question, and build up consensus with the Brazils, the Indias, the Turkeys -- these kind of swing states around this question of sovereignty.

MR. JONES: And there's this perception among some of the member states, some of the smaller member states more sensitive about this, who have been subject to colonialism, et cetera -- they say, "Okay, look at the P5. The P5 says, 'Don't you dare touch my sovereignty, but we, the P5, will touch yours.'" And we have to somehow transcend that feeling, and, as Bruce said, the P5 members, themselves, have a certain responsibility to help us overcome that perception.

MR. INDYK: Well, Jeff, you've got a hell of a job. I, for one -- I think I speak on behalf of everybody on the panel and in the audience -- are very glad that you are where you are, doing such a great job, and thank you for --

MR. FELTMAN: Thank you, Martin.

MR. INDYK: -- sharing your dilemmas with us.

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