



Harry Kreisler: Welcome to a “Conversation With History.” I’m Harry Kreisler of the Institute of International Studies. Our guest today is Samantha Power who is the Anna Lindh Professor of the Practice of Global Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her first book, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*. Her new book is *Chasing the Flame: Sergio de Mello and the Fight to Save the World*. Samantha, welcome back to Berkeley.

Samantha Power: Good to be back. A lot’s happened in the meantime.

HK: Yes, quite a bit. Who was Sergio de Mello and why is it important to know his story?

SP: Sergio was a person described to me as a cross between James Bond and Bobby Kennedy and whether that fits the man, I’m not so sure, but it certainly fits the myth of the man. He’s important because he was the UN and the international system’s best diplomat, best troubleshooter, best nation builder, best grappler with lesser evils. He worked in something like thirteen or fourteen conflict areas, violent places, over the course of his thirty-four-year career. He moved with the headlines, he was an aide worker in the early part of his career, when the wars of decolonization and independence were taking hold in the ‘70s. He was the person in Bangladesh, then in Sudan when the civil war started there, then in Cypress just after the Turkish invasion, then in Mozambique for the war of independence. Early ‘80s Israel is invading Lebanon, Palestinians are using the UN base from which to fire into Israel and stage raids into Israel, Israel tramples the UN base, Sergio’s the guy there. He’s in Beirut when the U.S. embassy is blown up by a suicide bomber for the first time. The Cold War ends, the wall falls, he’s the one sent to negotiate with the Khmer Rouge, he lives there for a couple years, then when ethnic and sectarian conflict take hold in the ‘90s he’s in Bosnia where I meet him in 1994. He’s there for just over a year and then he goes to Rwanda and to the Congo to deal with the genocide and the aftermath. Late ‘90s nation building is the thing everybody is talking about and he’s the so-called viceroy put in charge of first Kosovo and then East Timor, and then 9/11 happens and he’s named UN Human Rights Commissioner, so he has to figure out how to deal with George Bush and detention policies, and so forth. Then of course, everybody’s attention is on Iraq and he’s the person sent to Iraq to try to do damage control really on the U.S. occupation and try to speed the day in which Iraqis would govern themselves, and then of course, tragically he’s exactly

where the headlines are in that he's the first person – part of the first attack against a civilian target in Iraq, first suicide bomb attack, the first sign that al-Qaeda was, in fact, in Iraq when people who'd opposed the war for the most part thought it was and then that was just part of Bush's hype.

HK: So, I want to tell our audience that you've really written a powerful narrative in which he emerges as a figure, a very complex figure, who can learn, because as he's moving through all of these places, and you mentioned some of them, Lebanon, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, the world is changing and he's also having to adapt and change. So, the world was learning and he was learning at the same time, and he was in a position to, in some small way, adjust the world's response.

SP: Yeah. I think he was learning quicker than the world was learning. I think he was, as you suggest, very adaptive in a way that I think is quite unusual for somebody who was at his core, I guess, a bureaucrat. I mean, he hardly ever worked in the bureaucracy, very rarely worked at headquarters or in an office, he was usually in the field, but it's very rare to meet somebody who's in the world putting ideas into practice who then has a tiny store of their brain that they reserve for actually looking on themselves and being self-critical of their own mission or their own behavior, but he was somebody who self-scrutinized. He made a lot of mistakes, of course, over the course of his career but he was not somebody who stuck blindly to a particular path because he had chosen it at the outset. In terms of the world's learning from him, they weren't – "they" as if there's a world – but member states in the UN, or the powerful countries, governments, weren't hugely solicitous of his advice on very many things for most of his career, initially because he was seen as just a mere humanitarian and statecraft was left to the manly men and not to the little aide workers, then when they got into the political and the diplomatic side of the UN he was just a Brazilian, he was just a UN official. Again, statecraft was reserved for statesmen and to see a person who crossed borders like he did, and dealt with transnational challenges and threats as he did as a statesman, was not something we did in the 20th century, and I think we're actually too slow in the 21st century to orient our learning around a life like his. So, I think he had a huge amount to teach, so I think your question is dead on in that regard, and he began to learn about the world and adapt an ideology or a theory about how to order the world, but I'm not sure the member states kept up with him, and part of the challenge now with his death is to try to expedite the learning of powerful countries so they don't have to go to the bother to make all the mistakes that he made over the course of his career.

HK: I guess what I was trying to suggest was that this biography helps us see what he learned and from that we might...

SP: That would be the hope.

HK: Yeah, and from that we might learn. Now he was a very complicated man who essentially combined and felt many pressures and themes, and so on. I want to walk you through some of these because you point out, he was a philosopher, he was a UN official, he was a man of action, and he also was a man who had a very great sense of power and purpose. So, first a philosopher – he actually had a PhD, the highest PhD from French universities.

SP: Yeah, he had a couple. He started with the third cycle PhD and then got the PhD of the state, the doctorate of the state. He was an omnivore of knowledge, specifically intrigued by Kant and by Hegel, initially by Marx in his earlier years. He had gone to university at the Sorbonne and basically built a set of relationships with philosophers there that he would maintain while he was in the field. He wrote most of his first doctorate while on the Lebanese/Israeli border, and in fact, when the Israeli invasion occurred and the UN mission was kind of paralyzed by being just surrounded on all sides and by being unable to leave, it was the most fruitful time, chapter in his intellectual career, because he had all this time on his hands to be able to develop his ideas. I think one of his regrets later in life is that he never got to duck out of the system at a time he was quite literally bursting with recent experiences of applying theory in the world of practice. And I just – I don't know anybody else – I mean, I'm looking forward to hearing if such a person exists – but who lived so immersed in the world's worst places, or in violent places, where issues of life and death, and mortality, and idealism sort of bump up against the grittiness and the darkness, perhaps, of the human condition, that on the one hand, and then somebody who's so literate and really such a – could have been a great public intellectual had he not chosen this practitioner's life. So, the combination made him an intoxicating figure within the UN system, within the international order, and it certainly made it, for me, an unbelievably edifying journey to just walk in his footsteps for four years, to learn philosophy from him, political theory from him, but also to learn the mechanics of how things work in the field.

HK: And he was grappling with the big problem of international relations, that is combining idealism and realism, that is in his academic work. And you say at one point, "Only man will pull history toward a more just future" – I mean, you're drawing conclusions about his work.

SP: Yeah. Well, I think he started as a Marxist and a believer in the structural predetermined forces, and at a certain point he broke from that and tried to imbue in people around him, both in the international system and in his more theoretical – the more theoretical quarters of his life, but a regard for the degree to which individuals had to make a difference, if a difference was to be made. So, be the change you seek, as it were, and that was at a time when Parisian philosophy and salon talk was very jargon laden and entering a kind of postmodern phase, I suppose. His impatience with pure theory that didn't apply to practice was something that was not altogether welcome in those quarters. I mean, it's a little bit like what goes on on campuses today, the two quarters very rarely speak to each other, and here was a guy who was both things in one.

HK: Now as a UN official he told Philip Gourevitch later in his career – you quote him as saying, "This is a crazy system..." – that is, the UN system – "...that kills motivation and that kills the flame." That's where you got your title, I guess.

SP: Yeah, how did you know that?

HK: I just assumed it because the title is "Chasing the Flame."

SP: It is.

HK: But what intrigued me is, he starts as a more focused professional but in these series encounters he sees that protecting – making the UN the first priority sometimes doesn't work.

SP: Yeah. Well, he was drawn to the UN in his early twenties because he saw it as an antidote to state power. He saw it was the place that we, as a global community of citizens and states but parked our ideals, fundamental freedom, dignity, genocide prevention, rights of women, you name it, they're all there in a series of international instruments. He was not long in the UN system before he realized that, well, the UN was that, it is the place we part our ideals, it's also simply a building into which governments come to be themselves, I mean, to be self-interested, national interested, economically minded, national security minded entities. And so, I think that to the degree that he felt disillusionment with the UN system, it was more that he gained exposure to the habits of governments and to the difficulty he had over a lifetime convincing governments to invest resources in a sustainable and other regarding way to deal with the commons, or to deal with these kinds of humanitarian or human challenges. The "killing the flame" line which – and I also called the book "Killing the Flame..."

HK: And that is where you got it – I mean, I just figured it out.

SP: It is completely where I got it but nobody...

HK: That's what happens when you read every page. [laughs]

SP: You actually read every page. I can say it's official, you read every page. But I almost called the book "Killing the Flame" and felt that that was not, in fact, what I wanted to impart or signal the reader with, but for him the flame – I see the flame as a double entendre. On the one hand, it is this flame of idealism that he was talking about the UN system quietly quenching out, quietly killing. For Sergio that flame never died. He was still in pursuit of those ideals, it was always an elusive target, figuring out how to make those ideals real in practice, being a kind of Machiavellian idealist – that was his game, that was what he tried to do, I think, over the course of three decades. But the other flame is like moth to a flame, the fact that he was something of a – if not a war junky, or an adrenaline junky, at least somebody who had a strong internal craving to be where the action was. And by the end of his career, of course, it was with good reason. He was an empiricist and he recognized that he was the person in the international system most likely to bring about productive, constructive dividends in broken places. So, there was good reason to want himself to be there. If you cared about Iraqis, for instance, there're good, sound reasons to want Sergio to be the person there instead of some other UN official, but part of it was also that he never really all that good at sitting still, at just being kind of alone with himself. He needed to be surrounded by those colossal human stakes, and so chasing the flame of all kinds. And he's dealing with the fact that governments do find a way to convince you that your ideals will exist better in the textbook than they will in the

real world, and that was his struggle, to almost – you might have called it “stoking the flame,” or “kindling the flame.” He had to keep it going in order to continue to get out of bed in the morning.

HK: And as a man of action, you say at one point that “being in the field gave him room for creativity.”

SP: Well, partly it was, again, a little boring, really, to talk about the UN system as a whole, but by having all these governments –there’re now 192 countries who comprise the UN – they’ve put in place a whole series of rules to insure that the civil servants like Sergio, or like the Secretary General, there’re about 9,000 civil servants in New York, that they play by the rules, that they don’t spend money needlessly, that they adhere very closely to UN Security Council resolutions that are passed among the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China. And what Sergio found is that if he could get away from the member states, if he could get away from the governments, so he’d be sent off into the world but buy himself some distance, there was an awful lot that he could do using the ambiguity of specific mandates in order to push the boundaries of what he could achieve. And so, part of the reason to want to be in the field is to be a little more free of the paperwork, a little more free to contrive practical mandates on the heels of these legal mandates that he was given that often were written by people who’d never been to a country, who’d never conceived of living with this kind of violence that Sergio took as a matter of course.

HK: And he went from being a man in the UN at the bottom rung who helped refugees in places like Cambodia, all the way – in the end he was actually a viceroy. He was brought in by the UN and became actually the interim governor of East Timore.

SP: Yeah, he found it completely surreal to have walked the journey that he did, I mean, not only from an aide worker, or as he used to call it, a grocery deliver within the UN system, passing out humanitarian aid, but as somebody who would have strongly supported decolonization, strongly – as a Marxist, as an anti-imperialist, and so forth, in his youth, would have been hugely troubled by colonial adventurism. And yet, at the tail end of his UN career, Sergio was the person made – the kind of man with the pith hat, and the cane, and the – I mean, not quite, he didn’t wear these outfits, but he was the person in whom was vested absolute legislative, executive and judicial power, both in Kosovo and then in East Timore. And so, suddenly the person who’d railed against imperial overtures was, in a sense, running one, spearheading one, orchestrating one. And it’s different, of course, because the UN mandate in East Timore, which gave him those absolute powers, was one that was authorized by the united system as a whole, by the Security Council, and so in a sense, it had legitimacy in a way that, for instance, the U.S. occupation of Iraq was not seen to have legitimacy. But to the people of Timore that idea that the Security Council mandate preceded him only bought him about a one-month honeymoon. At that point then, after a month, they were saying, “You’re still an occupier, you’re still a viceroy,” and he quickly – relatively quickly, anyway – learned how to devolve power, that by devolving power he would actually more effectively exercise it.

HK: Now in his final journey he really confronted this question of power and purpose, and because of his personal life he didn't want to go to Iraq, the Secretary General wanted him to go, President Bush liked him in their personal interactions and wanted him to go there, but before he went to Iraq you quote him as telling a French journalist, "Iraq is a test for both the United States and the UN. The world has become too complex for only one country, whatever it might be, to determine the future or the destiny of humanity. The United States will realize that it is in its interest to exert its power through this multilateral filter that gives it credibility, acceptability and legitimacy. The era of empire is finished." So, he saw himself as hopefully bringing the UN to Iraq in the wake of the Iraq invasion which he opposed.

SP: Well, remember the context which he alludes to is President Bush going before the UN and taunting the member states, taunting Kofi Annan, "You're about to become like the League of Nations, you're about to become obsolete, you're irrelevant," and these kinds of charges stuck in the craw of Kofi Annan, the Secretary General, they stuck in Sergio's consciousness. There was this sense of, my goodness, if the United States is able to bypass the UN Security Council, to go to war on its own, or with the British and the Spanish, or whoever, and if it works for the United States, what will that mean for the future of the United Nations, what will it mean for the future of international law, for the future of the Security Council. And then in sort of – if the invasion occurs in March of '03, by June of '03 looting has already begun in Iraq, it's clear already there're the beginnings, the stirrings, of the recognition that the Americans don't know what they're doing, that they haven't prepared properly, they don't have language speakers, they haven't controlled the borders, they're making bad judgments about demobilization of the Army. Sergio is watching all of that from outside, and so at that point then, there's a dualism to what he's thinking about, because on the one hand, he's thinking, "Oh, my gosh, someone has to save the UN," but on the other hand, maybe someone has to save Iraq as well. And so, in both instances it seems that both those strands kind of come together and cause him, I think, largely to override his personal desire not to be anywhere near the place, and the reason he didn't want to be near the place is because he'd opposed the war, although never vocally because he didn't want to forfeit his relationship with the Americans because he knew they were going to war regardless of what he said, but he was quite sure the Americans in Iraq would not be ready to hear his advice. He had all this technical expertise to bring to bear on elections, on constitutions, on policing, transitional justice, reconstruction. He was a decathlete of nation building, you might think. There were probably ten, probably even twenty, skills that you would need to really think about transitional society from dictatorship to some more kind of stable post Saddam era. He had all those skills rearing to go but he had a sense that the Americans weren't ready to hear anything from the UN, that their ideological disposition against the UN was such that he was not going to have much success, so knowing that he thought, "Well, why would I just go, in effect be a stooge, be degraded by these interactions where Paul Bremer's never done nation building in his life, is going to tell me what the right approach to this is? Let me just stay home, let me deal with my personal life, let me deal with being Human Rights Commissioner, which is not an easy job." And yet, when Kofi Annan asked him, which is a phone call he did not want to get, but when he got the phone call he felt that this was something he couldn't refuse, both because he believed that serving within the UN was like serving in the military, that when your

commander calls you, you go, but also because he felt like if there was just even a small chance, even a 5% chance that he could salvage something for the Iraqis, that he could prevent this thing from unraveling, then that was a responsibility that he couldn't shirk, after everything that he'd done in the course of his career.

HK: And after he was there briefly and realized a lot of what you just described in terms of what he saw going on and how it was inconsistent with all that he knew, he was at his office at the Canal Hotel and a bomber came and he was killed, although he remained alive for several hours, but the U.S. had no equipment available to actually save his life. And you write, "He died under the Canal Hotel's rubble, buried beneath the weight of the United Nations," in a way, and it sort of struck me that he fell into a chasm, also, in the sense that on one side was all that the U.S. knew – the UN knew about post conflict stabilization, and on the other hand, American military power, which had no sense of purpose once the conflict, the initial invasion, was won. So, in a way, he was trying to bridge that chasm.

SP: He was. I mean, there were plenty of people of good faith who were part of the U.S. military occupation force, plenty people even in Bremer's inner circle, who were trying to do this in the way that – I mean, I don't think Bremer, or Ricardo Sanchez, the general there at the time, were setting out to bungle the occupation. I think they just had a very parochial and insulated view, both because of their prior ideological dispositions but also because of how they were located in the Green Zone and not really in touch with just how badly things were going. But they had a view of how this would be done that was not at all compatible with transitional societies with large – with dignity concerns, which were ones that Sergio had really started to focus on later in his life. He started to see dignity as a kind of cornerstone of what causes interstate relations to break down – sounds like a very quaint concept but if you actually found a way to put it at the heart of one's dealings with other individuals, or bilaterally in one's dealings with other governments, it could be usually powerful. And he saw the occupation as being an affront to dignity. When the bomber went off, of course – I mean, you alluded to this, but it is just an unspeakable tragedy and travesty that Sergio Vieira de Mello, who worked for thirty-four years to help the stateless people of the world, or the people who'd been left behind either because their governments were abusive or because their governments were negligent or failing – but that this man who, for all of his faults, could have given his life to that task, to that agenda, could then in his dying hours – and it was not obvious he was going to die – but in the last three hours of his life, that he could be left effectively stateless, un-owned under the rubble, that his life and really the future of the UN, at least in the short term, would be rendered contingent on the heroic instincts of Americans who were near the Canal Hotel who did their best to rescue him, but that those Americans would have none of the cutting equipment, none of the cranes, none of the stretchers, none of the shoring wood, the plywood that they would have needed to kind of shore up the shaft where Sergio was struggling for his life. I mean, they were reduced to rescuing Sergio with a lady's handbag, literally a basket handbag that one of the Americans in one of the offices, a curtain rope that they pulled off one of the office windows, and they tied the curtain rope to the handbag and turned that into kind of an amateur pulley system so that the soldier, the EMT, who was down trying to stabilize Sergio would just take rubble with his bare hands, put it in the

handbag, and some other soldier would kind of haul it up, and then a curtain which was the stretcher ultimately used to – curtain which was converted into a stretcher that could pull Sergio and whoever else out of the rubble. I mean, this is pathetic. Right? I mean, there's so much about the Iraqi war effort – the U.S. effort in Iraq that is pathetic, but this, to me, humanizes the degree to which ideology obstructed just basic preparation, pragmatic regard for human life – I mean, for American life. Obviously we know about the equipment shortages for Americans and here, we have somebody who was trying to act as an intermediary between the occupiers and the Iraqis who were so skeptical about the Americans and that he could be left reliant on a lady's handbag is an eternal embarrassment and shame for our country.

HK: So, what are the lessons of his career? You take us through that: legitimacy matters; you have to talk even to the bad guys; fearful people must be more secure; and as you just said, dignity is the cornerstone of order, and you're here talking about the dignity of peoples but also of individuals in these places. I mean, give us a short statement of how it all came together in his career.

SP: Well, you know, I – at the end of – I spent nine months with him, not literally but metaphorically, with him and the people who tried to rescue him in the shaft of the Canal Hotel, interviewing 70 or 80 people who were around the Canal Hotel or involved in the rescue effort, spent three plus years trying to explore and interrogate the rest of his life, and in the end Sergio never got a chance to write that third PhD. He never got a chance to write Sergio's own chasing the flame. And so, part of the challenge was to divine from his many, many speeches, and from his oral interactions with people who were willing to share their reflections, what would he say if he was saying, "Here's my doctorate and here're the Sergio principles going forward," and I settled on a few. One, I think what one can take away from his life is just a basic instinct around service, that is that each of us have some role to play in this experiment that is American democracy or that is the effort of, for instance, restoring our credibility abroad and enhancing our security. Sergio was a joiner, and I think when you read the book – or my impression from readers is that they want to go and do something, and I think that's great. I think that impulse can be satiated locally or in one's own community, as easily as it can by trying to join the Peace Corps or be part of nation building in Afghanistan. Second, I think that he brought an immense humility to his dealings with other cultures. He spoke seven languages, he lived all over the world. If anyone was going to be arrogant in going into someone else's society and to think that maybe they had the answers, it could've been this guy, but the very stores of knowledge that he had are what I think caused him to become more and not less humble as he got older. I mean, as a kid he was prone to finger wagging, and to denunciation, and to a little bit of self-righteousness, but by the end of his career he was solicitous of local people's opinions and perspectives, and not always deferential to them but hugely aware of how little he knew. And yet he wasn't paralyzed by that awareness of the complexity. I think we're all tempted, in the United States these days, especially progressives, to say, "Oh, god, we don't know what we're doing out there, let's just stay home, let's just watch Sports Center." And what was amazing was that Sergio managed to both absorb the complexity and yet still go chase the flame. And then I think the third thing I would say just briefly is his understanding that, as one of the chapters is called, fear is a bad advisor, the degree to which people who lived insecure, whether in

Congo, or in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, or in the United States, stoked into fear, or even absorbing genuine fears, we tend to make worse decisions than we would if we were able somehow to calibrate our understanding of the challenges. So, this has a concrete policy implication, which is that he did not feel the international system was good at dealing with policing, or with courts, or with jails, or with magistrates. In so many societies there was just lawlessness – was the problem. And in those climates non-state actors would come in and be able to create the allure of stability because they had guns, they were extremists, sometimes they could supply social services, and those entities were stronger than they would have been if the international community had an answer. So, when he talked about freedom from fear it was not simply, don't be blinded by hyped visions of scary monsters that exist around the corner, but it was also, we as a system actually have to meet people's fears where they're at, I mean, real fears exist out there and we don't know – at least I don't feel like I've had an experience, growing up in this country, of fearing the police, I mean, where you see a policeman on the street and you just assume that they're going to do something. They're plenty of people in this country who have that fear and much of that fear can be warranted in certain communities, but around the world police, more often than not, in developing societies can be – in many, many developing societies are a tool less of rights enforcement than of repression. So, what Sergio was playing into was something deeply important, which is, we've got to deal with law, and we talk so much about democracy, occasionally about human rights, a lot about liberty. We really rarely talk about law, I think in part because we're afraid that it will have bearing on our own relationship to international law, which we're ambivalent about, of course, as a culture.

HK: So, what does this book and your work here teach us about the kind of leadership we need to lead us to a new foreign policy agenda that sort of looks at the real problems out there, on one hand, but also is respectful of American character and national culture with all its strengths and weaknesses?

SP: Well, that's a big question. I think that Sergio believed that you had to be in every room, so the idea of kind of blindly turning your back on regimes that are unsavory, or evil in the parlance of today, was just untenable. So, American foreign policy has to orient itself, has to get back in the room, not because it's always going to achieve something in the room with, for instance, Ahmadinejad of Iran, but by being in the room it will get to know who it is that it's actually talking about – we have no real intimate knowledge of the Iranian regime – and moreover, it will – maybe there'll be a sliver of overlapping interest here or there on some small issue, like Iraqi refugees, for instance. But thirdly, by being in the room you will also signal to the international community that you're back, that you're part of the international system, and if there is obstructionism in these negotiations then let it be the obstructionism of Iran and not that of the United States. I think the other thing – I mean, this is such a global figure – is that in walking in his footsteps one sees the impossibility of a single country dealing with the kinds of challenges that exist on the horizon. Now this – people say all the time, every politician says this, the point of cliché, “No single country can handle the transnational threats and challenges, global warming, and public health, and counterterrorism, and proliferation,” and so forth. We say that – we've been saying that now for five years at least, and yet we're not orienting our foreign policy in a way that is reflective of that

recognition. That is, if we're going to acknowledge that these threats are bigger than single countries can handle, then there has to be a whole lot more back work, diplomacy, relentless giving here so you can take here, and yet we still show up in international institutions and expect to be able to snap our fingers and get what we want, which if it worked you could say, well, it's Darwinian, if it's working, the fact that it might be a little offensive, so what. And that, I think, is what it was like in the '90s. I think you could get away with that in a unipolar world, but as the world's economic resources, oil resources, political heft, even military power, becomes more diffused, it's much, much harder to just go and snap your fingers and get what you want in an international situation, which – again, that may not be so bad in and of itself, if not for the fact that we've already acknowledged that the central challenges are ones that require these multilateral solutions. So, I think embracing not the UN as such – I mean, that's sort of trivial in the larger scheme of things – what's important is to embrace the recognition that you need others by your side in order to get anything done. And whether you're getting anything done through the UN or you create some new organization to do with global warming, or new organization to deal with peacekeeping, the organizations are going to prosper or fail on the basis of how the states and the governments within them are getting along, and on the basis of how political priorities are established in domestic politics within those governments, or within those member states. So, the fact that Sergio was at the UN, to me, is interesting because it opens up the UN system in a way that I hope is useful, but what's more important are the kinds of challenges he's dealing with, failing states, under-governed states, broken states, repressive states. These are the kinds of phenomenon that we're going to have to be dealing with well into the 21st century and we're utterly under-equipped.

HK: And in a way, the Bush administration has aggravated our sense of how to deal with those problems because – and of course, they were confronted by a terrorist attack on the homeland, so we have to realize that they were dealing with something that had never happened before. So, how do we bring these things together? I mean, in the '90s we were moving toward humanitarian intervention in some half-hearted way, and it's as if all of that got turned around be a misinterpretation of what was happening in the world because we were attacked by a faction within an Islamic terrorist group.

SP: Yeah. I mean, there's a lot, again, in that question. I think that there're a couple of things that have gone on over the last six or seven years. One, concepts, basic terminology, has been misappropriated and thus stands in 2008, 2009, in dire need of rehabilitation. So...

HK: Such as...?

SP: Democracy promotion. I mean, we talk about promoting democracy for the last six or seven years, and yet most people around the world think one of several things when they hear the United States talking about democracy. They think, oh, the war in Iraq and doing it with a barrel of the gun, they think of our tendency to push for elections and yet only recognize those victors who are pro-American or who we think are compatible with American interests, they think of Guantanamo and torture, and rendition, and couple that with the rhetoric about democracy. You know, there's a

do-not-compute problem, and there're always gaps between American promise, or the promise of any democracy, and actual practice, but this degree of a gap is more like a canyon. And so, it just means that when people talk about democracy, when people in the United States talk about democracy promotion abroad, most international audiences will be hugely skeptical. And many democrats and moderates, for instance, in the Islamic world want nothing to do with U.S. initiatives because they know it will taint them in their own societies. So, that's one offshoot, I think, of the Bush years. Another, of course, which you alluded to, is the humanitarian intervention debate, and because the Bush administration went to war in Iraq for a whole series of reasons, alleged weapons of mass destruction, alleged links to terrorism, neither true, probably tying down oil resources, Bush's sense that his father's work had not been completed, whatever the set of reasons were, on that list somewhere near the bottom was, in the eyes of some administration officials, a regard for the Iraqi people, very low on the list but something that was on somebody's mind here or there, not enough on the mind of where any planning was done on behalf of the Iraqi people but nonetheless it was on the list. And yet because weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, oil, are not things that sell well domestically or internationally, a lot of the rhetoric about why we were going to war was that this was a man who'd gassed his own people, that this was a savage, all of which was true, but as a result a lot of people, domestically and internationally, conflated the Bush administration's war for national security on behalf of its own national security or ideological objectives with the spin, and with the rhetoric that accompanied the war. And so, now when you think about how to respond to a Darfur, or to a Congo, that debate – or even frankly, about what you will do if Iraq continues to spiral downwards, or what to do with refugees who spill out of Iraq – all of that is tied up in this sense of [non-verbal sound of disgust], I mean, if that's a humanitarian intervention, let's just stay away from refugees, let's just stay away from broken places, that stuff's dangerous. So, instead of drawing the narrow and case specific lesson from Iraq, which is certainly don't go to war with no international legitimacy on behalf of trumped up reasons when you've done no planning and when you send people who've never been to the region, you don't seal the borders, you demobilize the army – I mean, in other words, there were a whole series of things that were done that one can learn from that are very Iraq specific, but instead, I think to a dangerous extent, a lot of people are just saying, "Ah, that's what happens when you try to help people – look," which is just such a misreading, of course, of what was motivating Bush and such a convenient alibi, I think, for countries and governments who really wouldn't want to do anything about Darfur, regardless. I mean, Iraq or no Iraq, they were never going to help Darfur, but now they're able to point to Iraq, to the disaster there and say, "Well, you wouldn't want me to go end up in Iraq, would you?" Now that isn't – I don't mean to understate the genuine risks of getting involved in other people's societies. Again, I think those are the risks that Sergio grapples with, but I just think it's important, just as it's important to calibrate our fears around real fears, so too, I think the risks that exist, which are country specific, culture specific, whatever, timing, geopolitics specific, instead of conflating everything that's gone wrong the last seven years and projecting it onto the kinds of broken places that are sorely in need of international attention.

HK: What concretely does the next president do? Because in addition to this error in conceptualization, and in competence in action, that we've witnessed in Iraq, we're confronting a

situation where on the one hand, we see that we don't have the competencies to do certain things, on the other hand, we do have military power, but this is all happening in a world where American power is in relative decline and other parts of the world, such as China, are rising and have very different views about what global action might be required in particular situations.

SP: Well, I think you're completely right about the relative erosion of U.S. influence, if only measured by our ability to get what we want around the world. I mean, on Darfur, on Iran, even on Burma, we were stymied again and again, unable to put in place the kind of multinational, multilateral measures that might have pressured regimes into changing their behavior. So, it is a more multipolar world, but I think perhaps the helpful way to think about American power – there's no easy way to think about it in this kind of multidimensional chessboard – but would be to think about the components of U.S. influence, which are, in fact, military and economic power, of course, hard power, but also the concepts you mentioned, legitimacy, competence. So, if one is thinking about the restoration of U.S. influence, there're all kinds of thoughts one can have about containing China and curbing Chinese power, but it might be more constructive to just think in terms of getting our own house in order and imagining moving away from the era of Iraq and Katrina and trying to come up with real deliverables that reveal us at our best, at our most competent. I mean, I think in some measure Bush's HIV AIDS initiative has had some of that effect in certain quarters, and one of the reasons – when he went to Africa, last week and the week before, he was widely hailed. It's the one place on earth that he's quite popular still. Why is that? It's because there was something very concrete, very technical, not all that ideological with the exception arguably of the abstinence programs, but that was delivered, that has kept people alive. So, if we think about restoring that sense of ourselves, we've got to think across the board about things like that, that can actually bring about concrete changes that don't bump up against the gaps between American promise and practice, and then in terms of legitimacy adhering, again, to international law, going back to the Geneva Conventions, renouncing torture, ending rendition, closing Guantanamo, a whole series of things we can do. They don't erase history, and you don't get to go back to the year 2000, as I think some people who are very down on George Bush believe, you just get rid of George Bush and suddenly the world will be so delighted with us for not having him that they're going to give us this grace period. They won't. The tectonic plates have shifted in the meantime. But you know – and then in terms of hard power the military's over-stretched, people are on their fourth and fifth tours, they're broken in terms of the care they're getting when they come home, they're broken in terms of the families that have been divided and torn apart, the National Guard, the reserves – I mean, there's so much – leave aside the fact of whether we should have this big military budget and what it's – all the obsolete weaponry that that budget ends up paying for, and the special interests, and so forth – even leaving that aside, just focusing on the need to train the military to deal with 21st century threats. I mean, that's a huge part of what the next president's going to have to do, and then you go over to the economic piece of hard power, you've got to deal with the deficit and you've got to stop making China our ATM effectively, and of course start dealing with education and healthcare, and what ails us domestically. But I think if one gets overwhelmed by the sort of loss of influence – some people, of course, relish it in the United States, think that it's better that the U.S. doesn't have more influence abroad, some people lament it, a lot of people don't know how to think

about it, but I think what's important is all of us will be better off if we act more legitimately, if we act more competently, if we're more economically stable and secure at home, and if our young men and women aren't suffering in the way that they are and being forced to shoulder the national security burden for our entire society. So, if we just go bit by bit by bit, it seems to me that's more constructive an approach to rehabilitation than, again, watching Sports Center or believing that you have to go abroad in search of foreign monsters to slay, which is how some people think about retrieving our standing.

HK: What theme that emerges in your work – also Ambassador Jim Dobbins was a guest on our program, and some of the things that Jim Fallows has written on the entry of the war – and that is the failure to institutionalize competence in dealing with problems. I know you're a person who wanted to bring genocide to the attention of the American people and the foreign policy establishment, and I think you looked to non-government organizing to do this. So, talk a little about that. Do we have to look more and more to institutionalize competencies in the non-governmental sector, or can we rejuvenate government to create a memory bank with skills, with people who can actually go out in the world and do things?

SP: Well, the answer, I think, is both. I don't think – I mean, if you take mass atrocity, or if you take really the bigger issue at stake, I think, in both A Problem from Hell and the Sergio book, which is the failure to pay sufficient heed to human consequences in our decision making. So, let's make that the operative thing that we want to fix, because the failure to consider human consequences brings you both a Rwanda and a sin of omission, and an Iraq and a colossal sin of commission, both causing enormous human harm. So, if the answer is that non-governmental organizers are the ones who will enhance their competence, it seems to me that what they're doing – and if you take Darfur today – is they're getting all ginned up, they're making phone calls to their congress people, they're forcing the Bush administration to take seriously an issue that it would sooner forget – it's hugely useful. They're forcing the Bush administration to spend money on refugee camps, to denounce the horrors, to use the genocide word for the first time, absolutely important measures that they've extracted from the administration, but if you don't make the administration more competent, if you sort of leave it to the outsiders, I mean, ultimately as **Faber** [?] said, government controls the monopoly on force but also on economic leverage of the kind that we're talking about, if we're serious about changing abusive states' behavior, you're going to need the force of state power. So, while I'm blown away by the sophistication of the advocates in the Darfur context, I'm hugely demoralized by the degree to which those advocates can be met by – it's not even just that they're by competent counterparts but by people who really own the issue as if their credibility's at stake. That's not yet what's happened. So, you've got a lot of pressure from the outside, an incredible amount of professionalism being sort of staffed up in a hurry, a remarkable amount of learning and, I think, a fair amount of self-criticism, far more self-criticism outside than in the current administration, on this issue. But what we've got to think about, whether it's an Obama presidency or a Hillary Clinton presidency or a McCain presidency, is how the government itself, how a president signals to his bureaucracy what matters to him, and the signal of putting Brownie in charge of FEMA, that doesn't just signal FEMA, that signals the whole bureaucracy of

what is valued. The signal of removing Eric Shinseki who says that it's going to take four or five hundred thousand troops to stabilize Iraq – that just doesn't chill people in the U.S. military from making accurate forecasts, or at least good faith forecasts, about what's going to be required, that has a chilling effect throughout the entire system. So, there's a huge amount of signaling that needs to go on from up top. There's also, I think, a huge amount of skills acquisition that needs to go on in – I mean, some of the skills that Sergio had that people in our foreign service don't have, that people in our military are now scrambling to acquire. We've got to get back – we've got to have a sort of – I was going to call it a refresher course, but International Engagement 101, but written for the 21st century, not let's take our 19th century and our 20th century tools and see if we can just sort of stick the square peg in the round hole. No. Let's actually ask, on the basis of our strategic objectives, what kind of skills we want the next generation of policy makers or civil servants to be able to bring to bear, and then construct training, retention plans, some inducements for recruitment, and so forth, because I think we're not getting our best in the governmental sector, we're getting them in the non-governmental sector. Now how would a Sergio be drawn into either the UN or any government today? How would he be kept? How would someone of his gifts be kept? We've got to have an answer to that, and I don't think any of the institutions we're talking about really do.

HK: I have the sense, from listening to you and reading your books, that political education and political mobilization domestically are going to be very important, because the American people are going to have to be educated about the kinds of things that you're talking about. Strangely enough, I went back and read your previous interview...

SP: **For** [?] you.

HK: Yeah,...

SP: **For** [?] me.

HK: ...when you were here – well, where we know you've been misquoted about certain things, but you said we've got to build – this was in 2002 – we've got to build a way of connecting grassroots to grass tops, to elite centers of power. So, talk a little about that, and I guess it's going on now.

SP: Well, here's what's amazing. Probably when I sat here I would have thought, okay, take genocide, that there are two way – I mean, I'm sure I said this in the interview, that there're two ways this can happen. One is a president will come into power and he or she will signal a bureaucracy in the way I've just mentioned and say, "I don't want genocide anymore, I don't want to be like Bill Clinton and say Rwanda's the greatest stain on my presidency, I don't want to be like George Bush, let's say, going forward, and look at Darfur as an embarrassment." Bush takes some solace in the fact that he's in kind of first place in the international system, no other country's done more than the United States, but again, when the history is written no one's going to really care who was in first place. They're just going to care about the fact that four or five hundred thousand people in Darfur died in a three-year period. In any event, I would have thought back then that this

top down model for a president, and owning this issue, signaling the bureaucracy, was so – that the transaction costs associated with that were so small, and that it could be done, and that given the disproportionate American power that existed at that time, mere diplomacy, economic sanctions, mobilization of international police, and so forth – that that was the far more likely scenario. And the amazing thing, when you read that quote, is what actually happened is not that.

HK: Yeah, but it's what you...

SP: But it's this bottom up scenario, and it's people not just reading A Problem From Hell but reading Philip Gourevitch's book on Rwanda, or seeing "Hotel Rwanda," the film by director Terry George, and seeing a genocide in color instead of black and white and saying – and I should say wanting to do something post 9/11, wanting to be a part of something bigger than themselves, wanting to be a part of something moral in the international order, and "moral" is now a dirty word as well, but something humane, and channeling that energy not sadly against torture that Americans may be carrying out, or not against Guantanamo – I think the ambiguities around that worry people – I think they don't know quite where to place themselves in that whole debate – but believing that somehow genocide is clean, that we're not as tainted, that we haven't already kind of blown it. And so, what you have are student chapters on college campuses across the country, including Berkeley, you have a massive divestment movement that's caused, I think, fifty-five universities to divest from companies doing business in Sudan, twenty-two states, you have a protest of 70,000 people on the mall in Washington – 70,000 doesn't sound like a lot next to immigration marches, and so forth, but not one of those 70,000 people had ever met anybody from Darfur. I mean, the extent of the moral imagination that has taken hold in the last three or four years around the issue of genocide prevention is staggering. And for me, as somebody who wrote it, hoped it, I never dreamed it. So, I think that's something to point to not just because of what it will mean for Darfur when we have a credible administration again, and once we're responsibly out of Iraq, and if the day comes when we can rehabilitate of foreign policy. That's all important but I also think the movement is reflective of this yearning that Obama has also tapped in his campaign, that the next president will have to make use of as we set about the business of getting our house in order. There's something happening in the United States and with a little leadership I think it can be channeled in very constructive ways. It's not without its dangers, messianism and the perils of believing that your intentions are so good that you don't need accountability, and so forth – I mean, one has to be very careful, but it is a post 9/11 desire to be part of the solution and not merely the lament.

HK: Samantha, on that note, I want to thank you very much for spending this hour with us from your, I know, very busy schedule, and I want to show our audience your book again, and I recommend it highly. It's a great read that on one level is telling an important story about a distinguished UN figure but also pointing us in the direction of trying to understand the problems that the world confronts. Thank you very much for being here.

SP: Thank you, Harry.

HK: And thank you very much for joining us for this "Conversation With History."

[End of Interview]