Center for Strategic and International Studies

"The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen"

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International Rescue Committee

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KIMBERLY FLOWERS: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We're glad that you're here. Whether you are one of the hundreds here in the audience in Washington, D.C., or watching online, thank you for joining us. Some of you may know, today is actually opening day at Nationals Park. So if there are any Washingtonian baseball fans in the audience, go Nats. (Laughs.) Last I checked, it's top of the fourth and tied. I'm a baseball fan so I have to start with that and get that out of the way.

I'm Kimberly Flowers. And I'm the director of the Humanitarian Agenda here at CSIS, of which this program is a part of. My primary role here at CSIS is directing our work on global food security. Today's event is especially exciting for me because it's the first public event since the launch of the Humanitarian Agenda last fall. This new initiative at CSIS is possible through a partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. That's a mouthful. It's also known as OFDA.

The purpose of the Humanitarian Agenda is to shine a spotlight on humanitarian crises and link them to foreign policy priorities. At a time of unprecedented global needs, humanitarian assistance is more important than ever. It's a national security objective, as well as a moral imperative. Through events and publications, we at CSIS hope to spark some new conversations and articulate new policy solutions. The central aim of the CSIS Humanitarian Agenda moving forward will be helping practitioners and policymakers increase access for humanitarian actors across the globe. We'll be exploring how things like humanitarian diplomacy can be best used to reach the most vulnerable.

One of the unique attributes of the Humanitarian Agenda is that it's a Center-wide initiative, encompassing regional and topical programs here at CSIS. I want to bring the best thinkers that we have to the table to tackle some of the world's most complex issues. One of our top thought leaders here at CSIS is Jon Alterman. He's a senior vice president, Brzezinski chair, and director, Middle East Program. For today's event, Jon has taken the lead. I'd like to take a moment to thank him and his entire team for their leadership and work that's made today's event a success. Thank you, Jon.

Our program this afternoon is centered on the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen. It's easy to see why we focused on this country as our first event under the Humanitarian Agenda. Just this week, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the war in Yemen is now the world's worst humanitarian crisis. With more than 22 million people, or three-quarters of the population, in desperate need of aid and protection. It's been called the forgotten war, or the silent crisis. Yemen was on the brink of famine last year, and it remains on the famine watchlist for 2018. This level of food insecurity is completely manmade and completely unacceptable. We have the tools and the resources to prevent a famine in Yemen, but we need access, we need political will, we need bold leadership, and ultimately, of course, we need to end the conflict.

We have a very impressive lineup of speakers today who will help us unpack these issues. I'm sure they're going to discuss everything from the Saudi Arabian-led port blockades to the worst cholera outbreak we've seen in history. And to start our dialogue, we will hear from David Miliband, who's the president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee. He oversees the agency's relief and development operations in over 40 war-torn effected countries, as well as its refugee resettlement and assistance programs throughout the United States. The son of refugees himself, he is now one of the leading global advocates for the world's most vulnerable populations. Mr. Miliband has had a distinguished political career in the United Kingdom. From 2007 to 2010, he served as the youngest foreign secretary in three decades, driving advancements in human rights and representing the United

Kingdom throughout the world. His accomplishments have earned him a reputation, in former President Bill Clinton's words, as one of the ablest, most creative public servants of our time. In 2016, Mr. Miliband was named one of the world's greatest leaders by Forbes magazine.

I'm honored to welcome David to CSIS, and to invite him to the stage. David. (Applause.)

DAVID MILIBAND: Well, good evening, or good afternoon, everyone. It's very good to be here at CSIS. Kimberly, thank you very much for that introduction. I have to say that British modesty requires me to point out that the accolades that are sometimes given by magazines are not always meant in the reality compared to the cover of the magazine. But it's very nice to be reminded of it. And the media are not always nice about politicians or ex-politicians. So I should take – I should take what plaudits there are. It's very nice to be at CSIS today. It's very nice to be on a panel with my friend, John Alterman.

I think it's really singularly important that you should have created a program to try to look at the interplay of humanitarian intervention and politics, because it's a nexus that people are often nervous of. Humanitarians don't want to trespass into politics and politicians want to almost demarcate a political agenda from a Humanitarian Agenda. One of the things I've learned in the four years that I've been leading the International Rescue Committee, is that while it's obvious that political crisis begets humanitarian crisis, it's also the case that untended humanitarian crisis leads to political instability. In other words, the line of causation between political crisis and humanitarian crisis flows in both directions. And I think if your program can really target that nexus, you'll be doing a real public service in breaking down some of the barriers that prevent creative solution-building.

I also want to take the opportunity – I hadn't realized when I accepted Jon's invitation to come and speak here that this was a joint program with USAID, and especially with the OFDA. I deal with a lot of government agencies. And I have to say that OFDA, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, is a genuinely – I'm not just saying this because they give us money and they're probably represented in this room; it's actually true – they are genuinely an outcome-oriented, flexible partner of ours in responding to some of the real crises that exist around the world. And at a time when aid is often under question at best, or under attack at worst, I can always know that there will be programs happening that day where OFDA is a partner of us and our staff on the ground in really making a difference for some of the most vulnerable people in the world. So it's nice to be able to applaud the work that they do.

There's an extraordinary panel of speakers that are coming up later, so my job in the next 15 or 20 minutes is to try and frame the discussion. And I want to do so from the perspective of an NGO, a humanitarian organization that has about 430 staff working today in Yemen. They are mainly Yemenis. They're providing health care, nutrition, protection for women and kids, some cash support in nine locations around the country – north and south, government-held areas, rebel-held areas. Over the past three years, we've treated around 1.4 million patients in our health centers. And we are stretched, like every other humanitarian organization on the ground, by a really extraordinary and acute degree of need, of political crisis, and, frankly, of conflict.

The conflict is often described as a tragedy, but I want you to think that it's too easy to say that. Tragedy suggests something that just comes to pass. What I want to put to you is that the conflict is in fact notable for its crimes, as well as its tragedy. This is a manmade conflict, with very deep roots, but very, very acute consequences. It's emblematic of some of the darkest aspects of modern warfare that I think you will look at in a series of – in this series of events that you have. The parties to the conflict are spurning the laws of war. According to the Yemen data project, there have been at least 4 ½

thousand airstrikes that have hit gas, electric, transportation and other essential infrastructures, including 68 strikes on health clinics and hospitals, 342 on educational buildings.

It's a conflict in which the battle lines and the parties are fragmenting, are realigning, and are radicalizing at an alarming rate, with the danger that the country does the same thing – fragmentation, radicalization, realignment. Peter Salisbury is here. He's written an outstanding paper for Chatham House and elsewhere, has explained that it's important to try and understand the Yemen conflict as five different conflicts at the moment, not simply a two-sided, single conflict. ISIS alone reportedly has seven separate subgroups in Yemen. It's a conflict in which the handwringing of the U.N. Security Council and others is at best ignored and at worst a cover for further inhumanity. You mentioned the 22 million people in humanitarian need, 79 percent of the entire population, including nearly every child in the country.

The conflicts that are splitting the country are local, they are national, they are regional, and they are increasingly global in the parties who are engaging. The flow of arms and the war economy are themselves fueling the fighting, with the most vulnerable dragooned into service as child soldiers and the dominant military power – the Saudi-led coalition – has been promising for a long time to finish off what it sees as a ragtag army of opponents but has in the process boxed itself off from a political settlement that is ever more necessary. We know that syndrome. We've seen that movie before as well. And there's a final aspect. The war is sufficiently complex and far away to be off the radar of most governments, politicians, and the media. That's why I think it's particularly appropriate that CSIS should be having this event today.

There's one other thing that we know about modern wars. They are more numerous and more long lasting than their predecessors. There are approximately 20 – approximately 20 intrastate conflicts – intrastate conflicts – have been in progress at any given moment since 1989. That's roughly 10 times the global average between 1816 and 1989. In other words, the post-Cold War world has been marked by a mushrooming in the number of civil wars. Moreover, intrastate conflicts today are lasting three times longer than they did in the first half of the 20th century. There's a really good book by Michael David Armitage called "Civil Wars." And he says the following: These conflicts, these civil wars, are much more prone to recur than others as the most likely legacy of a civil war is a further civil war. Indeed, almost every civil war in the last decade has been the resumption of an earlier one. This tells me that Yemen is more likely to be the Afghanistan of the 21st century, seemingly endless war, than the Lebanon of the 21st century, with its fragile peace.

As I say, there's an outstanding panel of experts coming up to discuss the conflict in a moment. Before they start, I want to look at, discuss three points, which I feel I have a real duty to get across to you on behalf of the staff we have working in Yemen, but also the people that we're trying to serve. The first is to convey to you just how hellish the humanitarian situation really is. My staff, and the people we serve, deserve their stories to be told in the corridors of power. I hope also to convey a sense of how humanitarian need – unmet humanitarian need – is driving division and radicalization in the country. Second, I'm going to venture a little bit beyond my humanitarian perspective and suggest that in Yemen we're not in a situation where strategic ends can be used to justify inhuman means. The conduct of the war, far from advancing a clear regional strategy, is, in my view, hindering the chances of success. And third, I want to suggest some steps that could at least arrest the descent of Yemen into hell and give its benighted people a chance of a decent future.

Each of the three points I want to go through yields a question. And the first is whether humanitarian relief needs to wait for a political settlement or whether humanitarian relief is a precursor

to such a settlement. You can hear the case that the alleviation of suffering is a quote/unquote, "prize" for concessions in negotiations. But to me, this misunderstands the dynamics of civil war today, where rebel groups are using and abusing civilians while claiming to speak for them. And it mistreats civilians who should not be pawns in the game. My view is that the relief needs to come now, but you all need to come to your own view on that question.

As we meet, the conflict is continuing unabated. Since December last year, with President Trump called for an end to the suffering, the coalition of which his administration is a part has conducted more than a thousand airstrikes – one strike every hundred minutes. Eighty thousand people have been displaced over the last three months. Following increased fighting in Taiz and Hodeidah governorates. This is on top of the 2 million already who are internally displaced within the country. The figures really do tell a harrowing story, a decimated health care system where 68 percent of the population have no access to basic health care. You'll have read too about the million cases of – suspected cases of cholera that have been widely reported. Every 10 minutes, a child under five dies of a preventable disease. The number of children suffering from acute severe malnutrition has tripled since the war began. More than 520,000 pregnant women have no access to reproductive services.

Third, major international medical suppliers have refused to make direct deliveries to Yemen, following the November 2017 blockage – blockade. Sorry. The average cost of a container of medical supplies has increased by 280 percent in that period.

The ability for commercial imports, fourthly, to enter the country hit an all-time low in February this year. Food imports dropped to 51 percent of national requirements. Where food is available, it's much more expensive. Fifty-eight percent higher prices than before the conflict. I just want to focus for a moment on fuel imports, which are especially important to us in getting our people and our goods and our medical equipment around. Fuel imports have dropped in half since the blockade began, and now meet just one-fifth of national requirements this has made trucking costs, including for essentials like water, that much higher. For us, I'll just give you the internal figure from my own organization. Instead of $50,000 of aid covering 90 days of transport, it covers 20 days of transport.

Every day, fifthly, our staff have to navigate a byzantine set of inspections and impediments as they try and go about their work to help communities in need. To travel from Aden to Sana'a, which many of you will know is a – (audio break) – checkpoints. That's an average of one checkpoint every 4.3 miles. It takes my teams three to six weeks of planning and permitting to get one truck on the road from Aden to Sana'a. Finally, the goods that do get in are subject to infuriating and unnecessary delays. There's duplication of the Saudi-led coalition and U.N. inspection procedures. Ships awaiting an average of 36 days for clearance, including 10 days after they receive clearance from UNVIM. Furthermore, the Saudi-led coalition issues clearance for humanitarian flights only hours before departure, with high cancellation rates of those flights. That's a key part of the reason why major international medical suppliers don't deliver directly to Yemen, and why we've seen three straight months with zero containerized cargo imports, rendering the much-discussed cranes at Hodeidah useless.

In other words, this humanitarian disaster is not an accident. People talk about, quote/unquote, "access problems," as if the problem is that people are hard to reach. No. The problem is that they are made hard to reach. The problem is strangulation, not access. And the people on the ground know it. They know about the bombing raids and they know who conducts them. And that's an important reason why the coalition isn't making political or diplomatic headway. With every strike, it weakens

support for their actions rather than building it. And this leads to the second point, but also the second question. Second point was about the strategic goals here. The question is, how to arrest the strategic quagmire that the conflict represents. It's not just a humanitarian quagmire.

It's evident, let's be honest amongst ourselves here, Iran's influence is growing not receding. This is Bruce Riedel, formerly of the CIA now of Brookings, quote, "The only clear winner is Iran. When the war began in Yemen, Iran had limited connections to the Houthis. It urged caution on the rebels but was ignored. Now it has a robust relationship. Iran has every reason to perpetuate a conflict that costs its rival some $5 billion a month and costs Iran a pittance." Close quote. In addition, Iranian assistance to the Houthis is nearly invisible and often deniable, while the consequences of the bombing raids are all too apparent. I'm running a humanitarian operation. It's not my job to take sides. We're independent. We're impartial. We're neutral in this. But we can bear witness to the strategic consequences of the decisions that are being made by those who are participating in the conflict.

This isn't just a, quote/unquote, "public relations disaster" for the Saudi-led coalition. It's actually a strategic one as well. It's completely legitimate, and must be legitimate, for Saudi Arabia to be worried and concerned about missiles directed at Riyadh, like those that were launched last week. But that does not absolve the coalition of the need to think strategically. In fact, every powerful country facing an asymmetric threat – whether it was Egypt in Yemen a few decades ago, or the Soviets or the U.S. in Afghanistan over the last 30 years. Any country in that position needs to think about how to avoid its overpowering military capacity becoming the enemy of strategic engagement. What Richard Holbrooke called the militarization of diplomacy is a snare and not an answer.

What our teams are seeing on the ground is no one is gaining meaningful ground. The concept of a central stable state is becoming more of a distant memory of the past, rather than a realistic prospect for the future. Separatists in the south are being emboldened by regional forces and allies. War is creating conditions for extremists, such as al-Qaida of the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS, to surge. Members of the Saudi-led coalition talk of the importance of ensuring that the Houthis do not turn into a Hezbollah in the Arabian Peninsula, an Iranian-backed state within a state that is a permanent threat to their interests.

But my point is, that a Lebanon-like outcome would actually be on the optimistic end of where things in Yemen might end up. Widespread suffering and turmoil is not only fostering warlordism and extremism, but it's destroying the fabric of any potential Yemeni state to arise in its place. Saudi Arabia and its allies have legitimate interests regarding Yemen. But they threaten to undermine those interests by using tactics that push out the prospect of real solutions. And this leads to the third point and the third question. If you accept my diagnosis, my description of the current trends, how are they to be reversed? From our point of view, improvements in the humanitarian situation are the starting point for progress. We see three components that are vital if we're to move forward.

First, and I think obviously, there needs to be a permanent opening of all ports, including Hodeidah and Salief, to humanitarian and commercial traffic. The 30-day humanitarian renewal policy imposed by the coalition creates too much uncertainty to improve humanitarian – the humanitarian situation. No time limits would allow organizations like mine to have predictability in our supply chain efforts. The commercial trade of food, fuel and medicine is critical to ensure that the Yemeni people are able to meet their daily requirements. The coalition and the U.N. need to work together to streamline the clearance process for commercial vessels into the port. One process for verification should be sufficient. And they need to open Sana'a airport to commercial and humanitarian flights as soon as possible.

Second, there is a desperate need to pay public-sector salaries to address the collapse of state services. Humanitarians, we, the NGOs, we can't replace a functioning state of economy. Saudi Arabia is paying the Yemeni army. It should be paying the doctors, the nurses, the sanitation workers as well. And third and finally, the appointment of a new special envoy, Martin Griffiths, is an opening. Just last week he was in Yemen. He's already going to great lengths to convene a Yemeni-driven process, where all sides are engaged. He needs full support from the U.N. Security Council, starting with the U.S., U.K., and France, in order to help create pauses of fighting and provide a comprehensive framework for negotiations that is more inclusive, including bringing in southern voices, community groups, women's organizations.

But a reversal of the current trends will need more than wishing Martin Griffiths good luck in his work. As the outgoing special envoy said in his valedictory report to the Security Council, zero-sum politics, in which concession are seen are weakness and aggression as strength, have taken the country to destruction – figurative destruction and in some ways literal. However, last week Defense Secretary Mattis here called for a political settlement. That's right, but it will remain words if it's dependent on military victory coming first. The old rule is right, rebel groups win just by not losing. And it's well-past time to recognize that.

I want to point your attention towards the Security Council presidential statement of March the 15th of this year. It's different from the original U.N. Security Council Resolution 2216 from three years ago. It's much more balanced. It's much more forward-looking. And it's more people-centered. I think that is the path to serving the interests of U.N. member states in Yemen, and it's the path to serving the interests of the Yemeni people. A new U.N. Security Council resolution that followed the approach of that presidential statement would – could help us lead out of the dead-ends into which we've been led. It could set out new parameters for finding common ground and for meeting a wide range of needs in Yemen. And by that, I mean the needs of people as well as states. What we know is that more of the same is a recipe for humanitarian as well as political disaster. Not only are thousands of people dying, but the country is changing in ways that will sap its security and prosperity of itself and its neighbors for many, many years to come.

Let me just finish by making the following point: Yemen's crisis obviously has deep roots. The country has been on its knees before – well-before 2015. Before the current war, the country had more than its fair share of problems. After all, Sana'a was going to be the first capital city to run out of water in the modern world. But there are alternatives to the current dynamics. We owe it to the Yemeni people, and to ourselves, frankly, to pursue them vigorously. After all, the darkest aspect of modern warfare, which is where I started, is the absence of diplomacy. And that, at least, is in our hands. Thank you very much indeed. (Applause.)

JON B. ALTERMAN: David, thank you very much for that very thoughtful framing introduction. Just to go back even further, as you think about the world that you're trying to make a better place, and you think of all the things that IRC is doing, there's a lot going on. But I look at the IRC website today, and everything on the front page is about Yemen. And you had –

MR. MILIBAND: In your honor.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you. But, I mean, and you've had the ABC report and there are fact sheets. As you think about the world, where does Yemen rank? And what's really unique about the Yemen conflict that requires more attention, a different approach?

MR. MILIBAND: Well, we know that in sheer numbers what's unique is the number of people involved. So the 22.6 million people in humanitarian need projects it to the top of the agenda. I think, secondly, the potential regional flashpoint that it represents also pushes it up the agenda. Thirdly, it's got bad, but it could get worse. And it's important that in the humanitarian world we don't only work on the things that have got really, really bad, we're working on things that could get worse. So I think that fits into it.

And just to give people a sense of perspective, we have about – as I said, about 400 staff working in Yemen. We have about 15,000 employees globally. So you can get a sense of where it fits in financial terms. We're a $760 million organization now, and our Yemeni operation is less than $10 million. So it's not a – it's not a major financial part of our effort. But I do think it's emblematic of what happens when people are lost in the midst of a conflict. And it's emblematic of the worst abuses that exist in the modern world. it's got a stagnant diplomatic process around it at the moment. And so I think the stakes are very, very high. And I suppose that's why we are wanting to ensure it doesn't become a forgotten crisis.

DR. ALTERMAN: And in terms of U.S. government response, the U.K. government response, there's a statement on the website attributed to you that talks about how the U.K. and U.S. governments are complicit in what's happening in Yemen. What do you think the role of the United States and the U.K. needs to be in moving this to a different place?

MR. MILIBAND: Well, I think that's, in a way, clear. The U.S. and the U.K. have signed on with the rest of the Security Council to Resolution to 2216. So it's party to the conflict because of that. And I think it's very, very important, secondly, that the U.K. is supposed to be the penholder at the U.N. on this process. I think that the – for reasons of head as well as heart, the suffering that's going on there needs to be higher up the agenda. Now, I think it is significant that President Trump should have called for an end to the suffering, but then effectively be ignored.

We know that that is not a good – that there are very bad precedents for that. And the fact that the Security Council is at the moment in balk, there's a danger that the Russians will come in with their own set of vetoes to start blocking a Western set of vetoes. That makes me fear that this is going to move to becoming a global flashpoint as well as a regional flashpoint. And the troublemaking that's going on has consequences for the Yemeni people. And that's why I feel that, as a humanitarian organization, we have a responsibility to speak up about the trauma that is being suffered on the ground there.

DR. ALTERMAN: Is there a compassion fatigue? I mean, certainly with Middle East conflicts – as we think about Syria, as we think about Libya. I mean, like almost anywhere you look, you think about Iraq. And I've seen the wonderful work IRC's doing in Iraq and in Jordan and other places. Is the United States, the world, getting tired of humanitarian problems in the Middle East?

MR. MILIBAND: Well, the pope said in 2015 that we were all suffering – 2014 – that we were all suffering from the globalization of indifference, which is a very powerful phrase. And so that allegation is one of the – his allegation is that there isn't – it's sort of the compassion fatigue. I think that – my view is slightly different. My view is that there's complexity fatigue. Each and every one of these conflicts is extremely complicated. And that is fatiguing. I think there is financial fatigue in some of the donor countries. A lot of – I mean, if there's someone here from the World Food Program,

there may be someone in the audience, they'll be able to tell you about how they are struggling to make ends meet, even for delivering basic levels of food support.

And I think there is, most tragically, diplomatic fatigue. And most tragically because there's no excuse for it. Where are the all-night sittings of the Security Council? Where are the intensive processes? And my real frustration in the last four years has been the growing diplomatic fatigue. Syria has suffered from a diplomatic fatigue. Yemen is suffering from a diplomatic fatigue. South Sudan is suffering from a diplomatic fatigue. In some ways the Rohingya crisis is suffering from a diplomatic fatigue. And that's why I ended my remarks where I did. There's really no excuse for that, because it's actually in our – it's in the hands of diplomats to make sure that they don't become fatigued. And obviously that is a political decision.

And as I sit at my desk, I see a world that is becoming more lawless, that is creating more vacuums into which bad actors are moving, because there is that diplomatic fatigue. And the growing number of civil wars that are spiraling if not out of control than into more extreme levels, is testimony to that. And I think it's really important to call it out.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you. Thank you very much. Why don't I bring up the panel, and you can relax for a bit? Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. MILIBAND: Yeah. I'll just sit here.

DR. ALTERMAN: No, I think they have to sit there.

MR. MILIBAND: Am I going off?

DR. ALTERMAN: I'm going to have the panel come up. Wherever you would like, Madam Ambassador.

BARBARA BODINE: To make it logistically easy, I will go to this end.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you. Thank you very much, David.

We now have a really remarkable panel of people I've known and respected for some time, who I think can give us very different but very complementary perspectives to flesh out some of the things that David mentioned. I've known Barbara Bodine since I was an intern in Washington. And I looked up to her. And I've looked up to her ever since. Barbara is currently the head of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown. She was the ambassador to Yemen. She has a(n) extraordinarily distinguished diplomatic career for the United States, where she has done all kinds of really hard things really well. And Barbara was the ambassador at the time of the USS Cole bombing. And has worked on U.S.-Yemeni relations for many, many years. When I first met her, she was the director of the Office of Arabian Peninsula Affairs working on Yemen. So she has a lot of first-hand experience.

Peter Salisbury just write another short piece on Chatham House, but the length of work he's been doing at Chatham House for the last several years on Yemen has really been extraordinary. And Yemen is often a place where people who don't really know it write about it, or people who are great writers but don't really know Yemen. Peter's work is amazing because it takes sometimes that's very complicated and makes it tangible and real, and actually helps you think about what you might do about it. He came down from New York. As I said, he's affiliated with Chatham House in London.

Abdulrahman Al-Eryani is an economist, a Yemeni, from one of the families that has made really decades-worth of contributions to Yemeni public life. He's extraordinarily thoughtful. We have been talking about Yemen for many, many years. He is appearing in his personal capacity, although he also works for the Yemeni Embassy in Washington.

Barbara, we think about all the problems in the Middle East. Where do we rank Yemen? Where should we rank Yemen, in the United States?

AMB. BODINE: Ah, those are two very different questions. First of all, let me say I did work for the U.S. government for many years. I do not work for the U.S. government now. So speaking very much in a personal capacity, not on behalf of.

Where does Yemen fit in U.S. priorities right now? I'm afraid, very low. David made the very good case that the president made a very strong statement, but nothing has come from it. And there is definitely the diplomatic fatigue. Where should Yemen rank? Much higher, partially because it is a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions. But separate from that, geostrategically if Yemen is allowed to continue to be destroyed and becomes not just a failed state but almost a vacuum, this is going to have significant geostrategic implications for us and our neighbors and our friends. Personally, I would like the priorities to be shaped by the humanitarian issues. If I could shape policy using the geostrategic, I would use that. But it needs to be much higher. It is important on all levels. It must be higher. But it is not.

DR. ALTERMAN: And it's in our model. Partly it's the complexity fatigue. I hesitate to ask you because you know the answer, who are all these people fighting in Yemen? I mean help us understand the battle lines, because we think about battle lines and we think about, OK, there's this side against that side. And the Security Council 2216 talks about, right, essentially two sides.

PETER SALISBURY: Hmm. And this is – this is really sort of the critique that I've developed of the existing U.N. approach, which hopefully we'll see some changes in in the coming months.

DR. ALTERMAN: If they listened to David's speech.

MR. SALISBURY: And 2216 certainly created a certain path dependency. And it told this story that we were hearing a lot at the beginning of the conflict, which is this is a war between two sides. On the one side you have the Houthis. This is a Shia political movement that turned into a militia. In effect, took over the capital, with the help of former President Saleh. And on the other side, we just had coalition-backed forces defending loyalists of President Hadi. Whereas sort of the first big paper we work at Chatham House on this, that came out in 2016, one of the first really interesting things that came out of the research process for that was the extent to which no one working on Yemen really knew who was doing the fighting on the ground in the first six months, including the coalition and the Hadi government.

So when you look into it, what you've got in many cases is local groups defending their local areas against the Houthis for a really wide variety of reasons, and with a really different set of agendas. Now, over the past couple of years you've seen things coalesce. So we can broadly say that there is a tribal military faction in the north of the country between Al Jawf, Ma'rib and northern Hadramaut, which is broadly aligned with Islah, Yemen's main Islamist party, sometimes and incorrectly described as the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood.

In the south of the country, the dominant force on the ground, but not the force on the ground, are a series of militias, military groups known as the elite forces, security belts and various other groups, who are broadly backed by the United Arab Emirates, and are strongly opposed not just to the Houthis, but to Islah, who are the coalition partner in the north of the country. You've then got President Hadi himself, who has some loyalists on the ground, but in pockets across the country.

And all of this really comes into sharp focus and relief in Taiz city, where you've got the Houthis sitting on the northeast edge and down near the east and to an extent in the west, cutting off access to the city. And inside the city you've got pockets of control of Salafi groups. And there are Salafi groups across the country fighting against the Houthis. You've got Islahi militias and you've got even Nasserists fighting on the ground. But the thing is, every once in a while the Salahis and the Islahis take a break from fighting the Houthis to get stick into one another – assassination campaigns, fights over control of markets, so on and so forth.

So you've got these two coalition-backed forces in one city fighting against one another, and really undermining the ability of the coalition to push back against the Houthis. And even the Houthis themselves – obviously President Saleh was killed in December of last year after splitting from the marriage of convenience he'd entered three years before. But the Houthis themselves actually have their own internal politics, internal divisions. And their political wing has been significantly weakened, as happens in political military movements since the beginning of the war. And the military guys are ascendant. They're very powerful and they're very wealthy. And they're the main decisionmakers. But the people we seen negotiating to end the conflict are the political guys, who have no executive power.

I'm not sure if that's speaking too long, but I'm trying to sum a lot up.

DR. ALTERMAN: It does. No, and it leads perfectly to Abdulrahman, because you describe on the one hand the sort of military conflict, and a political conflict. And there's an economic crisis and a humanitarian crisis.

ABDULRAHMAN AL-ERYANI: Correct, yes.

DR. ALTERMAN: And they're all interlinked. So you have economic training and you understand the situation on the ground. How should we think about the linkages between the different aspects, especially sort of the economic and the humanitarian as we look forward to try to – as we look toward trying to create a pathway for a political-military solution?

MR. AL-ERYANI: Well, what made Yemen's humanitarian crisis uniquely worse, and famously known as the world's worst crisis, is the existence of multidimensional factors that made it the perfect storm. That you had systemic weaknesses in public institutions before the conflict. And then you had reliance on donor aid. And that kind of exposed Yemen to many vulnerabilities. But that's – you know, Yemen's humanitarian crisis, the magnitude is just overwhelming, taking into account that you're dealing with a country that is in state of conflict. You know, you have the civil war, you have the military intervention. And that challenges any country's capability, let alone Yemen with its development deficiencies.

In addition to that, you have this fragmentation that Mr. Miliband discussed. And it occurred, you know, when the Houthis took over the capital, Sana'a. And then subsequently, the intensification

of the conflict led to the fragmentation of the public sector along deep fault lines, reflecting the division of areas controlled by the government and areas controlled by the Houthis. And that kind of constrained the ability of the public sector to contribute to the economy the way it used to. I mean, the public-sector involvement in the economy, or its role in the economy, is very important and critical. We're talking about, you know, public sector contributes to Yemen GDP by almost 50 percent, right? Employees, 1.2 million public workers. And it is the main driver of the private sector economy.

So when you had that fragmentation, what does it mean? It means you cannot really implement a nationwide public budget. You know, without a public budget, it means that, you know, you cannot really collect revenues. Our revenue base has shrunk by almost 60 percent. Collection of taxes is minimal. It constitutes about 35 percent of Yemen's public revenue. And there's no centralized fund because of that fragmentation. You know, there are – under the control of different sides. So you don't have a centralized fund for getting these taxes in. And then you have, you know, low production of oil. And it constitutes about 45 percent of our revenue.

So without these resources, and plus the fragmentation, there hasn't been really an effort – or, there hasn't been an ability for the state to pay salaries nationwide, including, you know, pensions and so on. And that fragmentation of the public sector had a spillover effect to the banking sector, where the trust of the public in the banking sector kind of collapsed or diminished. And so people stopped putting cash in the banking sector. And that instigated a liquidity crisis within the banking sector, which means, you know – you know, without trust you can't have a normal functioning of any banking system.

And that really instigated and created problems within the foreign exchange market. You know, Yemen relies on food imports. It relies on 90 percent for its food from abroad. And so with that fluctuation in the exchange market, it means, you know, food prices out of reach for many people. And you see, our main problem really is the purchasing power. Without purchasing power – if you go to local grocery stores in Yemen, you'll find food. But the issue is it's really unaffordable for many people. They haven't received their salaries, their pensions. And you have a segment of the population that do not really have, you know, adequate income. And these are the most vulnerable who rely on cash transfers.

So you end up having a difficulty in implementing fiscal policy, because there's this lack of national – nationwide budgets. And you do not really have a monetary policy tool in place to implement a monetary intervention. So this is what's creating a problem now. Without having these tools together, you cannot really fix the economic distortions that are undermining the humanitarian situation.

DR. ALTERMAN: So you have 2.2 million public sector employees out of a population of about 29 million. Presumably each one has a family that they're supporting with the public-sector salary. That strikes me as – and, you know, partly that was, of course, because Saudi Arabia was paying lots of money into Yemen that helped support the economy in years before, when – that strikes me as the kind of problem you can solve with money, that the international community could relatively easily get together and support the government paying public sector salaries. Is that – is that a simplistic and hopelessly optimistic beginning for how we might address some of the political and economic problems?

MR. AL-ERYANI: So the first job is restoring purchasing power, right? And this means we need to assess the budget – the state budget to have the resources to have the salaries. And we've

already seen the decision by Saudi Arabia to deposit 2 billion (dollars) into the central bank account. And I think this will help the state to kind of pay salaries, and at the same time use the 2 billion (dollars) to ensure that there is a stable foreign exchange in the market, in order to limit any sort of hyper-inflation or inflationary effects when issuing new bank notes into the markets. So this is – of course, so this relies on external support. And Saudi Arabia, of course, is a strategic economic partner of Yemen. And they have been traditionally assisting Yemen over the past decades.

DR. ALTERMAN: And one of the problems with that approach is the problem that the state has challenged legitimacy in the current environment. President Hadi is a transitional leader. He's unpopular. He seems to be one of the less influential actors on the ground in Yemen. As the United States looks towards having an effective policy solving the humanitarian and political and diplomatic challenges in Yemen, how should we think about the current legitimate government of Yemen, as I think you call it? How do we think about recognizing other people, other parties, moving toward a government in Yemen that more Yemenis feel is genuinely legitimate? I mean, diplomatically, how do we think about that?

AMB. BODINE: Yeah. I think one small point on what Abdulrahman said is while the Saudis have given $2 million to the central bank to pay salaries –

DR. ALTERMAN: Billion. Billion, with a B.

AMB. BODINE: Billion, sorry. Sorry about that. That's going into the central bank in Aden. And most of the civil servants are in Sana'a and outside of control. So even that money coming in isn't really going to take anything – take care of the purchasing power issue, which is primarily in the highlands.

Diplomatically, 2216 did talk about restoring the Hadi government by name as the legitimate government. And I think to a certain extent diplomatically that has become something of an obstacle, because any government that comes out of the political process, out of the diplomatic process, is going to have to bring in a lot of other parties. There isn't a strong enough Hadi government, to be perfectly blunt. Hadi sits in Riyadh. Even some of the ministers who are sitting in Aden recently were driven out by the Southern Transitional Council, which is supported by the Emiratis, which gets back to the incredible complexity of this conflict.

And so it would be almost – we need to sort of walk back and define what would be a government that is legitimate in the eyes of the broadest range of Yemeni players and people, and work that as the political process rather than trying to restore a government that existed in March 1st of '15, but has been badly fragmented and dispersed since then.

DR. ALTERMAN: So how do we –

AMB. BODINE: How do you do that?

DR. ALTERMAN: How do we – I mean, program – because you're a genuine, real diplomat.

AMB. BODINE: Yeah, OK. (Laughter.)

DR. ALTERMAN: How do – how do you do that? You go from the legitimate government to a bunch of people meeting in a conference room and say: Now we're the government.

AMB. BODINE: Yeah, that's what diplomats get paid the big bucks to figure out. Is – that's what a peace process is, is bringing elements of the Hadi government, but also these other elements in the Yemeni body politic, social, civil politic, together to create a new government. It will be a new legitimate government. Hadi is technically legitimate, but he's also transitional. And so the process of the diplomatic solution would be crafting a government or a process that leads to an election that is representative and brings in a legitimate government. But the problem with the diplomatic process – and David mentioned this and thank you – is that it has to be more than the guys with guns. It has to bring in women. It has to bring in women. It has to bring in elements of civil society. It has to bring in representatives – a lot of Yemenis who are not part of the guys with guns.

There's enough of them, and they're fragmented, and they're all over the place. But there's large bodies of Yemenis who are trying to hold onto a state, who are working in local councils, who are developing local governance, who are managing to actually keep things going remarkably well considering the catastrophe that is around them. And that is going to be the real role of the new U.N. envoy – I think there's a lot of hope; he has a very strong reputation – of how do you start having meetings in Muscat or Kuwait or Oman or wherever, that brings in a truly representative group of Yemenis to create a new legitimate government? Whether and how Hadi himself or Hadi's government ministers are a part of that is going to be part of the process. But there isn't going to be the government of March 1st coming back and taking over the country. that's not possible.

DR. ALTERMAN: Now, one of the distressing things in Peter's long report for Chatham House in December was how many of the guys with guns have business models that are predicated on the conflict enduring. So could you just sort of describe briefly how that works, and how you think, based on Barbara's model for moving forward, how we might think about overcoming that?

MR. SALISBURY: I feel like I'm getting all the easy questions here.

AMB. BODINE: (Laughs.) Yeah, we all are. (Laughter.)

MR. SALISBURY: Yeah.

DR. ALTERMAN: We're going to solve Yemen by 3:30.

AMB. BODINE: Yeah.

MR. SALISBURY: Amazing. (Laughter.) I mean, this really isn't a Yemen-specific issue. But part of what we did in sort of the last phase of our Chatham House work was we started the process of mapping out the war economy. And one of the big questions that I had going into that project was a lot of things are getting into Sana'a that aren't just coming in on ships. So famously, among some people at least, until not long ago you could still buy Baskin and Robbins ice cream in Sana'a, which was trucked in a refrigerated truck from Dubai, right? Which raised a few questions for me.

DR. ALTERMAN: Wall Street Journal had a story about this.

AMB. BODINE: Yeah.

MR. SALISBURY: Yeah. The Economist did a piece about it. And that's sort of, like, the biggest example of things are still moving, things are still happening. You can still move across certain

areas. And as we dug in and dug in, you start looking at how arms are moving across the country. And it turns out, lo and behold, a lot of things that are being smuggled, that the coalition doesn't want to make into the hands of the Houthis, are coming through areas controlled, technically, by the coalition – by coalition-affiliated forces. And even passing between zones of control of coalition-affiliated forces who don't like each other very much.

And the common defining factor here is you're seeing a sort of jigsaw puzzle of players who are all making money. And this is being handed off from person to person to person. It's changing from boat to truck. It's being smuggled by this group and then handed off to this group. And everyone's making money. And the reason that you're seeing things making their way through checkpoints is no one really knows who owns this truck. And they might stop this truck, and it turns out it belongs to this smuggler in, say, Mukalla, then I've actually lost my job. And with my job, as the head of this checkpoint, goes my income and my ability to feed my family.

So the better thing to do is to take the money and let the truck go through. And every once in a while something gets stopped. And there's really a bigger picture version of this involving fuel – a lot of people making a lot of money from fuel imports right now and making money on both sides of the front lines. And there are a lot of allegations that I don't think I can really go into there because you're filming this and there are legal issues. (Laughter.) But basically, a lot of people benefitting, profiting hugely. And when you think about the incentives for participating in or ending the conflict, you've got a lot of people who at the beginning of the war didn't have much power and didn't have much of a say in the way things were done. The Houthis 14 years ago started off as a bunch of really, when you look at the leadership today, teenagers who had no money and were hiding out in mountains or their caves with bottles of water and with bread.

Now, we could have a conversation about how they got to where they are today, but they're pretty powerful. They're very wealthy. And the control tens of thousands of men. And they've got all sorts of toys with which to kill and attack various different people. And what they're being told is: You've lost. And in fact, what they're being told is: Not only have you lost, we want you to sign this deal where you give up your guns, your source of power, and, by the way, your revenue stream's going to go away. Those terms don't seem very attractive when you don't think that you're losing.

So when you take the incentives and you look at the benefits that people are earning from this conflict, and you look at the fact that no one's found the right kind of stick with which to throw at people. And it turns out that air strikes aren't actually that great of a stick against groups like the Houthis, who've been fighting for 14 continuous years. Then we really have to think – rethink the economic disincentives for the conflict. And I don't think that starts with just stopping things going into certain ports. I don't think it involves cutting off certain ports by taking them over militarily. I think that there are more complex and nuanced ways of approaching these things, but they involve hard work. And they involve once again embracing the complexity that Yemen presents, rather than hoping that it will simplify itself to your benefit.

DR. ALTERMAN: And let me ask Abdulrahman, just about the economy in the north. I mean, as Barbara pointed out, the economy in the south is different. And the Emiratis have largely secured the area – not entirely, but it's much more secure. There is a feeling – and if you look at the IRC map on the webpage, a lot of the areas of food insecurity are toward the north, around Sana'a and then down – as we think about what Peter said, and the war economy rewards the smugglers who are maintaining the situation in the North, there's a perception among the Saudi-led coalition that you have to starve out

the Houthis – and maybe that'll start working soon. How do you deal with the economy of the north, when there's also a desire to make the government in the north fall?

MR. AL-ERYANI: Right. So let me use a quote that was written in the last U.N. – the last report of the U.N. panel of experts on Yemen. It says: War profiteers are gradually changing the business community in Sana'a and Taiz. And this is creating new spoilers and challenges. So what's really, you know, important to highlight here, in the north you have – the economy is mostly centralized in the north. You have the big cities that are under the control of the Houthis. As you know, we have Sana'a. And the issue now – I mean, I'd like to differentiate two segments of the business community. You have the traditional powerhouses, the traditional big businesses owned by a few. And then the second segment are the SMEs. These are a source of important – a source for job growth.

So for the first segment, I think there were winners and losers over the past years. Those who were able to sort of forge this new understanding reflecting the political economy changes on the ground, they were able to stay and operate. Some of them have some sort of alliances with the Houthis. And what's important to highlight is that many of these businesses in Sana'a are the main importers of food that Yemen – that the entire Yemen relies on. And you have roughly seven importers. And they are mostly based in Sana'a.

And what makes things a bit, you know, difficult, is that how can these food importers just make sure that they do not get, you know, involved in Houthis embezzling their businesses? How can we ensure that food being transported are transported to the most needy? And so I this is creating a lot of challenges really on the ground. You know, most of these businesses, really they don't have the chance or the ability to kind of confront the Houthis, but they're left really to deal with this sort of business mess by themselves.

I think the second issue that I wanted to add on are the SMEs. So the SMEs, they employ 80 percent of Yemen's private sector workforce. And they lack funding. And this is the segment of the business community that really needs help and financing from the donor community. And I'd like to touch on what Ambassador Bodine had mentioned about the central bank. You know, you cannot really have a monetary – a coherent monetary policy in place for the entire country with that sort of fragmentation happening on the ground. All branches of the central bank, they need to be unified under a single leadership. You cannot have opposing monetary policies for the same single currency.

And this is something that maybe the new CBY governor will have to work on. And this is where, you know, it depends on that to ensure that salaries are being paid nationwide, we adhere back to the 2014 budget, ensure that the beneficiaries are the legitimate beneficiaries, and there are no add-ons from wherever. And I hope that – I do hope that I kind of touched on what you were kind of asking about. Is there something that I might have missed?

DR. ALTERMAN: Yeah, no, no. So let me just – before I go to the audience, I want to ask Peter one last question. And you wrote that this National Dialogue process in Yemen that came out of the Arab Spring period dealt – was sort of led by an international community that was preoccupied with sort of the elites and counterterrorism and didn't really deal with the things that Yemenis really cared about. So I guess the question is partly what do a broader group of Yemenis care about? How much has that changed, and how much will that change, as we look toward the kind of process that Barbara was talking about?

MR. SALISBURY: Hmm. Yeah, I mean, so I was based in Sana'a between – on and off between 2012 and the end of 2014. So I saw the NDC, the National Dialogue Conference, play out in real time. And one of the criticisms you hear of the idea of a more inclusive peace process here in D.C. at times is, well, we had the National Dialogue Conference and that didn't work. Look, we had a civil war – which I find quite simplistic. The issue for me with the National Dialogue Conference was that you had a really broad variety of Yemenis taking part in this really wonderful conversation about what should Yemen look like, where's the consensus, where are the disagreements, how do we hash all this stuff out?

But that was completely separate from the actual process of governing the country, which was left to the pre-2011 elite. And what they did was they squabbled among themselves and they fought each other and they assassinated each other and they played political games with each other and destabilized the country day in, day out, and governance got worse and worse and worse. And people were very, very unhappy, not just one party or the other. People were unhappy with the system as it was. But at the same time, the messaging from a lot of international players was: Well, just wait, because the NDC's happening and that's going to give you this wonderful new constitution. And that will solve many of Yemen's problems.

Whereas if you went and sat – as I did with a lot of diplomats during that period – and you said: Well, the economy is just collapsing. There's no electricity. There are no jobs. Security is disappearing. Justice outside of the cities is nonexistent. Courts are shutting down. AQ are taking over in these areas – et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. They'd say, yeah, well, but we need to keep Hadi on side and we need to keep this guy on side and this guy on side. And there was this feeling of we need to balance out the elites. And then when it came down to it, a lot of that conversation really came around to we also need to combat al-Qaida, because that's our core concern here.

And there wasn't that ability to think holistically about what's really going to do al-Qaida in might be a well-governed country in which there's an effective, functioning justice system. There was sort of this militarization of if not diplomacy, a militarization of security. And you ended up with all these conflicting factors and priorities, really ending up in this place where a lot of people did welcome some of what the Houthis were doing in 2014, because it was a kick up the bottom for – (laughter) – the elite, for the existing system. And then people came to realize what the Houthis were and what they really represented.

I can't speak to what Yemenis, quote/unquote, "want." And every group has a different set of agendas and priorities. But I think ultimately most people want to live in a secure and stable environment, they want to know that the rules apply equally to them and everyone else around them, they want to be able to eat, and they want to be able to imagine a better future for their children, which tends to involve health care and education. Maybe Abdulrahman can speak sort of more to what sort of a Yemeni wants, but I don't think that particular aspect of it is particularly complex.

What I do think people tend to end up doing is becoming incredibly disenfranchised with the central government which doesn't seem to be giving them any benefit and only seems to be working with a country that, say, sends drones to blow people up in villages. And if that's your own experience of the outside world and your government, you're going to have a pretty dim view of them. And it's going to be easy for, quote/unquote, "bad actors," like al-Qaida, like the Houthis, whoever you care to mention, to come and an offer an alternate version of governance and society and life in which you have a much better life and you have a much better place in things.

And I think that people are still struggling to square that circle. I know I've spoken about this for too long, but this also comes back to this idea of what's a diplomatic solution to the problem of Yemen right now? I think there is still this conversation ongoing of who is the right leader for Yemen who will serve the interests of all Yemenis, who will serve the international community's interests, and also somehow bring back stability to the entire country? And what, to my mind, that often translates to is who's going to take Yemen off our hands and make sure that we don't have to deal with all this complexity, so we can put it on their shoulders and we have a single interlocutor.

And the fact is that to create a long-term process for Yemen, it has to be Yemeni led. And that involves listening to and dealing with a multiplicity of voices, not just for the next six months or 18 months, but years and decades. And I really don't see sort of a model working if it's this side wins, this guy gets to be the president, and we hope for the best. Abdulrahman, am I –

AMB. BODINE: Yeah, well, if I could –

MR. SALISBURY: Sorry.

AMB. BODINE: Oh, I was going to say, I just want to kind of echo some of that from something I heard. I think my last trip to Yemen was in 2013. And I was supposed to go back in the fall of 2014 and was advised that it probably is a little unstable. I think you're right that there were too many external players, diplomats, in Yemen or working on Yemen at the time, particularly the U.S., that had a very securitized view of Yemen. And basically, you know, we would support anybody who let us drop drones. And that was about it.

A Yemeni who I have a great deal of respect for told me at the time, he said: Look, it's not that we disagree that al-Qaida's an issue. More Yemenis have died from AQAP than Americans. And we have other security problems in the country. So we don't disagree with the security aspect. But he said: If you all, the international community, only look at the security issue, and you only look at your short-term immediate issue – and of the five mini-wars going in Yemen, one of them in the CT war, which is also a proxy war.

But he said: It isn't that you need to take your focus off of security, but you need to open your aperture and you need to look at the economic issues, and you need to look at the development issues, and you need to look at the governance issues. Because he said, if you're not helping us with these the security issue will never be solved. It will – it will continue to feed. But if you would look at these medium and longer-term issues and help us with those, that will ultimately contain – maybe not eliminate but contain – the security issue.

And that one conversation has stayed with me for years, because I think it does encapsulate where we, the international community, lost our focus on Yemen and where we run the risk of losing our focus again on the peace process. Because there is this risk that we will look for just, in a sense, the next Saleh, to be honest. And I think too many outside players will look for who will control the country enough so that we can do what we want to do, rather than looking at how do you build a Yemen that is stable and viable enough that it actually operates. And I think Yemen could do that, with the right assistance.

MR. AL-ERYANI: Just last word – quick point. There was a poll that was recently done in Yemen. And within that poll there was a series of questions. And one of the questions that was posed nationwide to the public was – they asked the public: What is the greatest issue that concerns you the

most? And the majority of respondents did not mention how they are concerned about the peace talks, or improving the political situation, or improving the security situation. Understandably, their biggest concern is improving their economic living conditions. And I strongly believe that if we find a way to address these short-term needs – the economic ones – I think it will pave the way for a – you know, a political – eventually a political deal.

You see, most Yemenis now realize that reaching a political agreement will take some time. And so, sadly, they've sort of normalized the state of conflict into their daily lives. They've – but we need to know here that they're running – they're actually exhausting their coping mechanisms. And so they're demanding now a quick solution to this economic mess that has impacted over 22 million. And so that's where we can work on. Maybe start with the economy, and then hopefully this will pave the way for a political settlement.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you. I would like to turn to you. So we have microphones in the audience. We can start right there on the aisle, sir.

Q: Sorry. Steve Winters. Independent consultant.

I've heard that, of course, at one point the country was split, right, into a South Yemen and whatever – North. And I've heard recently that – from some of the people on the ground there – are floating the idea of splitting the state again. Now, you didn't bring that up. And of course, that seems to add another complexity. But can you tell us anything about that idea being re-floated?

MR. SALISBURY: You should read the new Chatham House paper, "Yemen: The Southern Powder Keg," which deals with all the historical complexity involved. I'm sorry, Ambassador, you were going to speak.

AMB. BODINE: Yeah. Yes, there were two Yemens up until 1990. The question of Yemen fragmenting floats – has been floating for a long time. And there are certainly elements in the south, particularly I think in Aden, who talk about either autonomy, succession. Like everything else in Yemen, they tend to be very fragmented and internally contradictory. There has been, unfortunately, in the part controlled by the Emirates, a Southern Transitional Council created, which has, I think, the goal – it says transitional, but I think many of them are thinking of transitioning to some sort of autonomy. To be honest, the boundary between the old North-South is not a – it was very artificial. It doesn't really follow any real logical line. It isn't even geographic.

And so one problem – you know, one – if you want to play parlor games, you know, what is a southerner – is, you know, where you do you define a southerner is a very complex question. This isn't Yugoslavia, where you had the former kingdoms of Croatia, Serbia, everything else. You kind of knew where those lines were going to be. You don't have those in Yemen.

There will have to be, I think, in any peace resolution, some sort of balance between enough of a central government to give some shape and continuity to economic policy, social policy, all of that, and enough regional, local decentralization so that not just the Adenis, the Hadramis, others feel they have some control over their resources and their lives. But a – the idea of just simply breaking it apart along the 1990 line isn't really – I don't think is workable. But some greater decentralization with a centralized government is going to have to be worked out.

MR. SALISBURY: But at the same time, if I could just in there really, really quickly, there is a long history of southern secessionist voices in Yemen. And South Yemen sort of as was – was never one coherent structure. It was lots of different things bundled together by the Brits, and then taken over by the socialists who never really actually controlled the whole thing as one thing, in the same way that the North was never under really the control of one state any given moment. The issue you have right now though is a history of diplomats, foreign officials, Yemeni officials in Sana'a being very Sana'a-centric and paying very little attention to groups like the secessionists in the south, calling them a rabble, saying you're not organized. They were largely peaceful until 2015.

What you do see in the south now is the most coherent articulation of secessionist voices in terms of a political structure, the STC, the Southern Transitional Council, which is by no means universally popular in the south, but it is the closest thing to a unified secessionist structure, and has an armed movement underneath it which does control the bulk of the territory of what we call the south. There's a real danger here that people mistake historical views of the south for the reality of what's happening. And if you just ignore it, then you end up with a problem not dissimilar to what ends up happening with the Houthis in 2014, where you are saying they're not important, this is where the focus should be. And then goodness gracious, who are these guys and what have they just done?

DR. ALTERMAN: To be fair, most of the population, most of the economy is in the north.

AMB. BODINE: In the north, yeah.

DR. ALTERMAN: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Netra Halperin with Peace Films.

I'm happy to hear that the topic of a war economy is being discussed here, because it's so often left out. And this gentleman spoke about the pope in his quote. He also talked about the blood-soaked arms traders. And he also mentioned that President Trump said: I would like to have the suffering stop. But also, about a year ago, President Trump sold $350 billion of arms to Saudi Arabia. And he actually touted it as a jobs program.

I was over at the Senate the other day and a Senator was alone in chambers, anyway, but speaking about this crisis in Yemen. And saying that there was a bill to stop collaborating with Saudi Arabia. And he was saying that some of his colleagues say, oh, but they're such good business partners. We can't stop that. And he said, yes, but we also have to have a moral conscience. And since the White House is within walking distance from here, so we, I would hope, have more influence on them than anything over in Yemen – us in this room – what can we do so those words of I want the suffering to stop in Yemen turn into actual action from our own government?

AMB. BODINE: Everyone just turned and looked at me. Great. (Laughter.) As I said, I do not work for this government. Where to start on that. There – one thing that has struck me on the Yemen conflict, which unfortunately just had its third anniversary – was that it used to be called the forgotten war – something I objected to, because you forget something you knew about. And for a very long time, nobody ever knew about this war. And it had no traction in Washington – in the United States – but in Washington at all. Had a lot more public discussion in the U.K. than it did here.

There has been increasing attention on the Hill. There was a bill recently sponsored by Mike Lee and Bernie Sanders – which politically about as far apart as you can get – which would have just

cut off everything. It got 44 votes. It was defeated. But that's actually a respectable number, far more than we would have had two years ago. There's another bill in Congress with I believe it's Corker and Jeanne Shaheen, which is a little bit more of a moderate approach, but still questioning our support – the role our military support plays in continuing the conflict and feeding something of a war economy, as you say.

I don't know how these are going to go, but there is a lot more discussion. Just the size of this audience is something that we would not have probably had two years ago. There – I think, to my sense, even if we were to cut off all military support to the Saudis – which we're not going to do – but even if we were, there are still very deep grievances and issues within Yemen that would still have to be resolved. It would not necessarily end the civil war. It might peel off one level of one of these other external wars. And I personally think it would allow the Yemeni political process to go forward.

What my understanding that we are trying to do – that was "we" the government, and I'm not part of the government, sorry. What I understand our government is trying to do is to try to advise the Saudis to use the military equipment more humanely. Now, I will let you decide, you know, the logic of that statement. And one of the talking points from the administration is if we were not working with the Saudis, it would somehow be so much worse, which may be true but it's not to me a very viable policy.

What can you do I think was your question. I think some of it is, you know, as citizens you decide what you want to convey to your representatives. Just pulling out is not going to solve the problem. I do think that if we were going to recalibrate the government's policy, it should be one that is focused much more on how do you bring a peaceful resolution, how do you answer the humanitarian access issues, how do you answer the purchasing power problems, and how do you get into the solution by working from this outside-in, rather than focusing on do the Saudis have precision-guided missiles or not. That is a critical issue. But I think there are other ways to get at what is going at Yemen rather than that. Combination of everything.

DR. ALTERMAN: I think we have time for one more question quickly. OK.

Q: I'd actually, if I may, like to ask a question of you, Mr. Miliband, specifically about the work of International Rescue on the ground. Can you tell me what the most urgent humanitarian need is? And have you personally seen anything on the scale of Yemen?

DR. ALTERMAN: Come stand up here.

MR. MILIBAND: That's OK. The – look, the most urgent of obviously the lifesaving work. So you've got children dying at such an alarming rate. That has to be the priority. We have mobile health teams who try and address those kind of issues. You're then into, well, what's driving that? The water and sanitation situation is very, very important, supported by the food situation. Those are immediate priorities. You're then into broader health infrastructure. And I gave the figure of the 68 percent health facilities.

So I think you've got to privilege the lifesaving as being the absolute first priority. In terms of whether there are other crises, I mean, in a way, it's a – it would be wrong to say that the situation of the people in Ghouta is somehow less acute than the position of the Yemenis, just because there are fewer people in Ghouta than there are in the whole of Yemen. We have five hospitals – we were

supporting five hospitals in Ghouta. Three of – two of them were bombed last month by the Assad regime.

So I think that the acute level of suffering that is suffered by some Yemenis is not unique. What is unusual is the fact that it encompasses nearly 80 percent of the whole country – 22 million out of 27 million. And certainly Yemen is not our largest program, but it's dealing with some of the most acute circumstances. And the fact that in Yemen you have state fragility, layered with conflict, layered with long-term climate resource stress, layered with poverty, makes it very, very difficult.

One of the things that we didn't have time to talk about is that there are – I mentioned in passing – there are 2 million internally displaced in Yemen. If you want to know how Yemen could get worse, is if you had 4 or 6 million displaced by the fighting. So watch out for that.

MR. AL-ERYANI: If you don't mind me, just very quickly. So what Yemen – what Yemen really needs at the moment is to have transitional plans for key sectors, like the health, water. These need to be led by, you know, the public institutions and other stakeholders. What I see for aid organizations, I think they will continue – or the humanitarian organizations – they will continue operating in Yemen for a while. So they need to see themselves invested in Yemen's long-term development goals. And this might require some humanitarian organizations to reorient their intervention in a way to include the development components in their programs, so.

DR. ALTERMAN: Thank you. I'm afraid we are out of time. I want to thank USAID for its partnership on this program. I want to thank David Miliband for his excellent comments. And please join me in thanking David and the panelists. (Applause.)

(END)