

Secretary-General's Q&A at the Council on Foreign Relations, 16 March 2004

HAASS: Thank you. Let me, if I might, begin and just try to dig down a little bit on some of the themes you mentioned, sir. Let me quote from a recent speech of yours. You said, "I believe the main reason why some countries resort to unilateral action is that they do not have confidence that a collective response would be timely or effective. That, above all, is what we have to change. The answer, or part of the answer, may be some kind of new compact between the United States and the rest of the world, comparable to that forged by the great powers in 1945." Could you please elaborate a little bit?

ANNAN: Yeah. What I have in mind--and let's go back to 1945. At the end of the [second] World War, the leaders came together to ensure that we don't live through the kind of wars and experiences that disfigured our world. [They] came up with an approach based on the U.N. Charter, which defined the circumstances under which force could be used. And that was generally accepted. I think it had worked reasonably well for 58 years, even though imperfectly. It has more or less generally been accepted.

We now live in a situation where we are no longer facing major possible confrontation between the superpowers. There's only one superpower. We do not have [the] possibility of major wars and confrontations between big countries and powers. We are facing different kinds of threats: terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and the indirect ones of poverty, disease, and environmental degradation that I have discussed.

The U.S. has made it clear in its own policies that there are certain threats that it will--it may have to act and act alone if the council doesn't move fast enough. Everybody argues that we are facing new types of threats, threats that had not been anticipated when the charter was written. And if that is the case, I think it is essential that we come to an understanding as to what these threats are and how we face them collectively.

If, indeed, the instruments we have today are inadequate, how do we adapt them and bring them in line with the challenges that we are facing today? And when I talk of a new compact and a new consensus, I'm really here dealing with--I'm talking about an agreement and understanding that will be accepted by the weak and the powerful, each side knowing that some adjustments will have to be made. I would expect the panel to deal with issues like, when is intervention legitimate, under what circumstances, what criteria, how do we move ahead, and how do we organize ourselves to respond to these new threats.

And I would hope that the U.S. would engage seriously with the work of the panel because we cannot have a consensus with the U.S. outside it. We cannot have an approach where other countries are seen as trying to tie down Gulliver. That won't work either. I don't think we can--it could also work if we have a situation where the U.S. only uses the U.N. as and when it [sees fit]: that also provokes other countries and divides other countries. So we need to come up with a new compact or consensus as to how we are going to deal with these threats and hope that it will be generally acceptable, just as the 1945 compact was generally accepted. So let's develop international[ly]. Let's adapt. Let's be realistic and see what we can come up [with]. As I say, it's a big challenge I've given the panel and I hope that the member states will be open when the proposals come forward.

HAASS: In your own tentative thinking, do you anticipate that there would be legitimate uses of military force that would go beyond self-defense?

ANNAN: I think we have--the U.N. has not been a pacifist organization; we have authorized use of force before. It was the United Nations that authorized the use of force to get Iraq out of Kuwait, and it was unanimous; there was no question. And so the fact that the U.N. and the Security Council did not vote for the last Gulf war should not be misinterpreted to mean that [the] U.N. is adverse to [the] use of force under any circumstances.

HAASS: But again--well, the 1990-1991 case was a classic case of self-defense.

ANNAN: It was a classic case.

HAASS: Can you imagine cases where we would have a broader definition of legitimate use of force than is now found, for example, in Article 51 [the section of the U.N. Charter that addresses states' rights to self-defense]?

ANNAN: No, that is possible, and this is one of the reasons why I think this panel's work is important. I think most of us agree that in today's world you can have situations where--take weapons of mass destruction. It can get into the wrong hands, into [the] hands of terrorists--and a terrorist group that may not hesitate to use it. And if one knows that this is the case, you're not going to wait for them to [act] today. But it has to be real--imminent and real for one to react. And I think not only should one react but also act--often [the] collective interest is also the national interest.

I've been following what happened in Madrid a few days ago [when bombs on commuter trains on March 11 killed 201 civilians] and I find it very interesting that that attack has brought the European countries together in their decision to cooperate in their fight against terrorists. I mean, the agenda of the whole series of meetings--all the Europeans' interior ministers are going to meet. The foreign ministers are going to meet. And the European Council is going to meet on terrorism and how they can work together to fight it and to contain it. And that, I believe, is one of the most important approaches in fighting terrorism.

HAASS: Just today, sir, you had a column in *The Wall Street Journal* making the case for an extensive--that the international community has to be prepared to make an extensive long-term commitment to Haiti. Could you imagine that one thing the United Nations would do is enshrine some sort of a new concept--what some people have called humanitarian intervention--with [the] idea of the legitimacy of involvement in countries, such as Haiti, which can't sort themselves out, to help them essentially get back on their feet?

ANNAN: Yeah, that is a real question, but also a difficult one, in the sense that in recent decades we have had several failed states. We have also come to realize that we cannot ignore these failed states. Failed states are not the problems of the citizens of that country alone; they eventually create problems for the whole world. A good example is

Afghanistan. It came back to bite us. And we cannot sit back and see more and more failed states created. In the case of these failed states, including Haiti, there has been some suggestion that maybe the U.N. should go back into the business of trusteeship.

HAASS: Right.

ANNAN: I'm not sure that is going to fly. Most of the members of the U.N. were ex-colonies, and they'll be very, very nervous about reintroduction of trusteeship. If you are not going to be able to introduce trusteeship, it means we have to try and have effective early-warning systems to be able to avert the crisis--the kind of crisis that we are seeing in Haiti. I think Haiti is an unfortunate experience, because it's about the third time we are going in to try and do something. But it also may mean that we were not patient enough to stay in for the long haul. This--the sort of bandage approach, going in for a year or two to set up a weak police force, have elections and think that's it, is not going to work.

This is why I feel this time we should be prepared to stay in for the long haul, for 10 years or so, to help the people of Haiti establish a really stable and--democratic institutions [and] strengthen the institutions to be able to stand on their own.

The real question is, what do you do when the preventive action fails? You have early warning systems, you try to prevent it, and you fail. And we, as the international community, accept that we have a responsibility to protect the individual.

The Canadians had a very good report titled "The Responsibility to Protect," basically arguing that it is the responsibility of each government to protect [its] citizens and [that] they should see sovereignty in that sense: that they have the responsibility to protect the individual. In situations where the nation is either incapable [or] unwilling, or if in fact the government is perpetrating these crimes, whether it's going to lead to genocide, ethnic cleansing, or gross and systematic abuse of human rights, what does the international community do? And if you are going to intervene to reverse these abuses, what [are] the criteria? Who decides? How do you determine it? And I hope the panel will give us some ideas building on the work that has already been done.

HAASS: That same report cited what it considered to be a real conundrum, where on the one hand, they said there's the duty to protect. On the other hand, they said, "We're not sure it's legitimate to exercise the duty to protect if the United Nations has not endorsed the intervention." And they basically said, "We're not sure what's more important." I'll be honest with you, I didn't think it was that close of a call. I would have thought the duty to protect took primacy over the other. And I didn't know where you came out on that.

ANNAN: No, I've made it quite clear--I mean I've indicated that governments should not be allowed to use sovereignty to brutalize their own people. And when you have this sort of gross and systematic abuse of human rights, the international community does have a responsibility. But I think the report shouldn't be left there. They have posed the issue, and I think the member states should look at it and say, "Yes, if we have to do it, under what circumstances, under what criteria?" and set up guidelines that will facilitate transactions and decisions in the [Security] Council for them to reach conclusions one way or the other, but, hopefully, in a positive sense to go in and protect those whose rights are being grossly and systematically abused.

HAASS: I only have two other short, easy questions, and then we'll open it up here, if I might. I read the speech you recently gave in Japan. And the question--even tonight you talked again about the possible need of changing the U.N. as an institution. Where do you see the entire debate over Security Council reform right now? Your favorite subject, I'm sure! [Laughter.]

ANNAN: [Chuckles.] I think that there's a lot of interest in Security Council reform in certain countries. Others--[laughter]--[laughs]. Others are a bit more relaxed about it. But I think given what we went through last year, there is lots of--there's lots more support, I believe, for Security Council reform than had been manifested recently. I think it is not just the Japanese, the Germans and others who want to see Security Council reform. I notice there are some regional powers, regional countries, countries with influence in their own regions that also believe that they should have a say on global issues.

I lived through a very interesting experience during the debates leading up to the Iraq war, where prominent countries who were not in the Security Council were really frustrated and restless in the sense that they wanted to make an input. They were not on the Council, and therefore they couldn't really make an input and influence things. In fact, one of them even suggested to me and said, "Secretary-General, why don't you organize a summit with a select group of leaders like us for us to discuss Iraq and see how we can make a contribution?" And you would all recall the division that already existed among the membership at that time. And if you had convened a meeting of that kind, that would have--it would have seemed I was setting up a competitive Security Council, and that would have added to the division. But these are countries that we often tend to--countries who play a very important role in their own regions, countries from Brazil to South Africa to India and others who would also want to see their voices heard. And I think these countries are very interested in seeing Security Council reform.

Even though we are a nation of sovereign states, I think populations count. To have India, with one fifth of the world's population, not on the council, it's a bit difficult. And in fact, when you look at the statistics or demographics, the four permanent members, leaving China aside, [the] U.S., United Kingdom, and France represent 8.6 percent of the world's population and they have four permanent seats on the Council. India is absent. Brazil is absent. South Africa, Nigeria and all these. So there is a real debate as to whether the council's structure can be retained the way it currently is or [whether] it has to be reformed and brought into the realities of today and to reform it to make it more democratic, more representative, and thus gain in its greater legitimacy for its decisions to be much more easily accepted around the world.

HAASS: Let me stop there with my questions. As you know--you know better than anyone--we started a little bit late tonight. The secretary-general has graciously agreed to extend what was going to be our end time. What I ask with your questions, if you could make them particularly succinct tonight, that would give more people a chance to engage. And again, raise your hand, I'll recognize you, wait for the microphone and just identify yourselves. We'll try to cover as many people as we can. Yes, ma'am. It's coming to you. QUESTIONER: Hi. Claudia Rosett. Question about--as someone well informed, you know much in the news right now is [about] the oil-for-food program. It's a two-part

question. Do you think that the placement of Saddam's business via oil-for-food influenced the Security Council debate? And your--

ANNAN: You mean the placement of--if it influenced the Security Council debate?

QUESTIONER: Yes, exactly. The discussion over France, Russia, the heavily tilted contracts that way, did that influence the Security Council debate over Iraq? And also, there's evidence that [Executive Director of the United Nations Iraq Program] Benon Sevan was taking favors from the Saddam Hussein regime. Could you tell us what you think he was being paid for? Thanks.

ANNAN: OK. First of all, you see what a leader he is [referring to Richard Haass]. I never suggested I would go beyond time, but I agree with him. [Laughter.] He did it very nicely. I will stay for as long as you need me! [Laughter.]

On your question, I'm not sure that the oil-for-food scheme influenced the debate in the council. And I think your question is if it influenced a decision whether to go to war or not.

During that period, I had the opportunity of speaking to lots of leaders around the world, those who were for the war and those who were against the war. And I will tell you, they all held their views with conviction, and they were--both sides were convinced that their position was the right one. The U.S. and those who wanted action [were] saying, "We cannot allow this to continue; Saddam has to go, and we have to go and disarm him." The others [were] saying, "Give the inspectors a bit more time; it's going to be very dangerous." Some leaders who were not on the council, like [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak, told me, "If you do, there will be terrorists everywhere; you won't be able to stop them."

So there were genuine policy differences, in my judgment, during that period. It wasn't for economic or other reasons that sometimes one impugns. It may have been involved, but that was not my experience in my discussions with them. The discussions were so detailed and so sincere, that I didn't think anybody would wave his oil interest as the reason to hold back this issue.

The oil-for-food scheme, as some of you may know, was a very complex process. You had a normal commercial transaction, and the U.N. simply imposed on it administrative and legislative structures. The Iraqi government was allowed to offer contracts, negotiate contracts with companies both for sale of oil and imports of goods. The contracts had to come to the 661 Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Security Council, [for] review, sometimes with the inspectors also looking at it to make sure that they were not importing items that could be used for weapons. The dual-use items were checked very carefully and some items were put on hold for months.

Ones that had been cleared went forward and the payment was made through the escrow account that the U.N. held. All the revenues from Iraqi oil sales went into an escrow account which was controlled by the U.N., and the contracts were charged against the escrow account. So it was a very sort of a complex thing that sometimes was difficult to explain in a very simple manner.

And there was a period when the council felt that there were games being played with the oil prices and tried to do something about it. In fact, they came up with an approach

where companies bidding for oil from Iraq got their contract, got their oil, didn't know how much it was going to cost, and then they found out after the deal had been made. The idea was to prevent them from making deals and pricing and getting kickbacks. That created its own problems.

So anyway, we are investigating the allegations against the U.N. staff. The name of Benon Sevan has been mentioned. It's an allegation that we are looking into. Our inspector general is looking at it. We are in touch with the coalition, the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] and the Iraqi Governing Council to get whatever evidence they have for us to be able to pursue it.

HAASS: Ambassador Gardner?

QUESTIONER: Mr. Secretary-General, the United States was the subject of an armed attack on 9/11. Under the U.N. Charter, do we not have the right, since we're at war with al Qaeda, to take preventive action against them wherever they're located where the nation state is unwilling or unable to suppress them?

ANNAN: That's an interesting question. I think the fact that the U.S. was attacked and you were a victim was recognized by all the member states. And you will recall the spontaneous reaction of solidarity and sympathy not just here, [but] around the world [with] candlelight vigils in cities around the world. And the Security Council and the General Assembly acted promptly in solidarity with the U.S. [and] passed a very strong resolution in the council insisting that governments should not give financial support, refuge, or logistical support to any of these terrorists. They must share information; they must cooperate across national lines [with] police work and all that. And when it came to attacking Afghanistan and the al Qaeda in Afghanistan, there was no debate. In fact, nobody criticized the U.S. for doing that, because it was recognized that [that] was a legitimate act of self-defense. And not only did no one criticize, [but] the council passed resolutions allowing ISAF [International Security Assistance Force], the European troops and others there to go in.

The problem one has had with Iraq, or one has had with the larger membership, is [that] the whole debate about Iraq was to rid Saddam of weapons of mass destruction. The debate in the council was that Saddam had defied the council; there were many resolutions that he should disarm and had not disarmed and so one was going to go in there to disarm [Iraq]. The argument before the council was never to go in and eliminate terrorists in Iraq. It was never to go in and liberate Iraq. These are arguments which came up later. But it was not the basis of council action, nor the basis of the divisions between the council members. And so, on the basic principle of a nation defending itself, I think I agree with you, and other member states would share that.

Having said that, let me say that we are dealing with an unusual organization. We are dealing with terrorists who are nowhere and everywhere. And my own view is that to defeat them we need to really get the member states to understand that it is in everyone's interest to work together to root out and contain these terrorists and that we need to work across borders and pool our efforts to root them out. I don't think it is going to be possible for one country to move from country to country, looking to attack terrorists. It is going to be extremely difficult, and it can lead to other problems, in fact, with the countries

where they are hiding and others. And so, I think force cannot be ruled out. There are moments when force has to be used, but the other instruments should also be brought to play.

HAASS: You've got a microphone coming, just behind you.

QUESTIONER: Mr. Secretary-General, I'd like to ask you to reflect on the office of secretary-general. The politicians and press of all the world are quick to ask you for a solution to every problem in the world and to blame you for every omission and error of the United Nations, but the charter does not give you authority equal to that responsibility.

ANNAN: Yeah.

QUESTIONER: Will you ask the high-level experts panel that you have established to include in their recommendations increased authority for the secretary-general?
[Laughter.]

ANNAN: [Laughs.] I think that will be the fastest way to kill their recommendations. [Laughs.] [Laughter.] But I agree with you that I do get a lot thrown on my plate, particularly with those difficult and intransigent problems--those difficult and intransigent problems where governments feel we must do something, which is [a] natural instinct, but often we are not sure how and what and with whom. Then it's referred to the secretary-general.

I think the secretary-general has also had to--I've had to use my own initiative and judgment as to when I should take certain initiatives and actions [and] engage the council and the members at large on a particular issue or the other. And so far it has worked reasonably well. I see some members of the council in the room. I see Ambassador [and Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations James B.] Cunningham and others are here. I've been able to take initiatives and go to them, and I think perhaps it's best to keep it this way. If we try to define it and ask for more power, they'll probably try and tie the secretary-general up much more--more than [would] be wise.

I think what is important is that the secretary-general should find a way of working effectively with the council, key members, permanent members of the council, and key constituencies in the organization, to be able to move major agenda issues, to get them to focus on possible threats to peace and security, and to develop a relationship that will lead to not only a give-and-take but [also] a trust in the office that they would work with the secretary-general. I think proceeding that way is more effective and safer. Any attempts to define further the powers and the role of the secretary-general, I think, will be--not only be problematic; it will end up diminishing the role and the power of the secretary-general. So I prefer to leave it ambiguous. [Laughter.]

HAASS: Yes, ma'am?

QUESTIONER: Suzanne Nossel from BMG [Bertelsmann, Inc.]. The U.N. may face one of its most challenging and high-stakes roles ever if it goes into Iraq, as many expect, after the CPA pulls out on June 30th. In your mind, what are the prerequisites, both on behalf of the U.N. and on behalf of the membership, to making that mission a success?

ANNAN: It's a simple, straightforward question. [Laughter.] Let me say that Iraq indeed is one of the most difficult challenges that we face. And when I say *we*, I'm not only talking about the U.N., I'm talking about the international community. You may recall that on the 19th of January I met here in New York with the head of the CPA, [Ambassador L. Paul] Bremer, and the British representative, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, as well as the seven members of the Iraqi Governing Council led by Mr. [Adnan] Pachachi. At that meeting we discussed the way forward between then and the June 30. The U.S. has decided to hand over power to the Iraqis on June 30. They have two options: the Iraqis--some Iraqis wanted elections by June 30 to establish a new government. The U.S. had come up with a caucus system which they preferred. We were asked to go in to determine whether elections were possible before the end of June, and if not, [whether] the caucus system [was] possible or could it be refined to make it acceptable? We concluded that neither elections were possible before the end of June, nor was a caucus system viable, because it was too complex.

Elections were not possible before end of June because you have no legal framework. You didn't have political parties or an independent electoral commission, voter registration. So we would have to set all this up. And we have indicated that from the moment this legal framework is in place you will need about eight months to organize elections. So the earliest the elections can be organized would be either end of the year or beginning next year.

You then turn to the--but everyone wanted to retain the June 30 date. The U.S. wants to retain it; the Iraqis want to retain it. And of course, once you've put out the date of June 30 for [a] transfer of power to the Iraqis, you cannot take it back. You cannot postpone it. You know, it will create more problems as everybody looks forward to it. So now the key is to have the mechanism for establishing an interim government by June 30 to whom power could be transferred to by the CPA.

The team that I sent in [in February] is prepared to go in again, but now that the Iraqis and the government and the coalition have had time to digest the report, we wanted them to give us their reaction to the report we gave them after the first team went in and to indicate if they want further assistance from us to help them design a mechanism for establishing the government by June 30. I have indicated that we are prepared to go in and help if they so desire, and so they are discussing this amongst themselves and will I hope to get--hopefully I will get a request from them.

Once we go in, if they so desire, we will not limit ourselves to the efforts to establish a government by June 30 but go beyond that and hopefully work with them to establish the legal framework for the elections that will be required next year--the national elections to establish a fully fledged and internationally recognized government. So this government that is going to be established in June will be an interim government that will perhaps last about eight months or so until the elections. Then the new government will take over. So the U.N. will be prepared to work with them on the constitutional issues, on the election, on the preparations for the elections and the actual elections. And of course, if the

security situation permits, we would also work with them on institution-building, human rights, humanitarian issues, and recovery and reconstruction.

But for the moment security is a real constraint. It's a constraint not just for us. It's a constraint for [the] reconstruction effort. It's a constraint for average Iraqis in certain cities. So these attempts being made to secure the environment are absolutely essential because if we do not secure the environment, we are not going to be able to do all the wonderful things we promised the Iraqis.

HAASS: Do you have time for one more?

ANNAN: Sure.

HAASS: Arthur Whist.

QUESTIONER: Mr. Secretary-General, you refer in your earlier remarks to what happened in Madrid. Would you comment on the statement that Spain's new president [Prime Minister-elect Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero] made, that [Spain] would keep its soldiers there if the U.N. had a mandate? It isn't too clear what he meant. Have you had any communication on that? How do you interpret that? And can anything be done about it?

ANNAN: You know, that is the Spanish position--the position of the new prime minister-elect, let me put it this way, can pose a problem if it is not handled well. I think other European governments were in similar situations in the sense that their populations were not for the war, but the leaders, convinced that it was the right way to go, went ahead and supported military action. If the situation in Spain is not handled well, we need to be careful that we don't have a ripple effect and other reactions, similar reactions in other European countries. I think the reaction of the population or the Spanish voters is something that we need to accept--let me put it this way. First of all, it's democracy. When you go to elections, you never know the outcome. I think there were several factors, in my judgment. There was a whole investigation and the feeling that at the beginning they were not getting the full story as to who was responsible, and all that. Then, of course, when the statements came from the terrorists who committed the crime, or those who claimed to have committed the crime, linking [the bombings] with the war, it revived the whole argument about the war and those who were opposed to it. And so I think it changed the dynamics of the elections.

But I think it is extremely important that we all accept that the stabilization of Iraq is everyone's responsibility. We cannot, as an international community, afford to see a chaotic Iraq in the middle of that region. It can have [an] impact on neighbors if it is not contained, and it can have [an] impact on oil supplies and all that. So it is in everyone's interest to ensure that we work with the Iraqis to stabilize their country, to help them establish their democracy and move forward.

When we talk of a U.N. mandate or U.N. involvement, it can mean several things. One, either the U.N. is on the ground in Iraq actually playing an important role, or you have a Security Council mandate which authorizes governments to send in troops to help secure the environment.

My own sense is that the council would probably be prepared, at the right time, to issue a resolution that would encourage the--that will establish a multinational force and allow other governments to participate in an international effort to pacify Iraq as part of our international effort. Whether that will be satisfactory for the Spanish government, I don't know. But I presume that [that] sort of a mandate may suit their needs. But of course it is a decision for the Spanish government to make. But this is the way I would see it.

HAASS: The secretary-general has generously given me a reprieve so we can squeeze in one more question. Let me say in advance I know I'm going to disappoint 40 people in this room and make 40 new enemies, but I'm tough and I can live. I feel the back of the room must be favored because--I can't see you, but--yes, ma'am?

QUESTIONER: Yes. Could you envision that--

HAASS: Your name, please.

QUESTIONER: Janet Benshoof. Could you envision that a country like Burma, in which military [forces] or terrorists have kidnapped a legitimate, democratically elected government--could you see labeling that a failed state and therefore authorizing Security Council intervention?

ANNAN: Let me say that we follow the situation in Myanmar very closely. In fact, I have an envoy who goes in periodically, working with the government, pressing them to begin their democratic dialogue. In fact, he was in earlier this month. He saw [opposition leader] Aung [San] Suu Kyi [who is now under house arrest] and he saw the government, pressing them to release her, and engaged in serious dialogue.

Your question is [whether] Myanmar [is] at a stage where it can be labeled or declared a failed state, which touches on the issue of the definition of a failed state. Your question is the first time I've heard anybody use that term in relation to Myanmar. There are abuses. It is not democratic. The democratically elected leader has been under house arrest for a while. There are other problems. But is it a failed state, along the lines of Afghanistan, Somalia, and others? I think that is going to be difficult to convince the member states in the organization to adopt that line.

And so let me answer by saying with all the difficulties that Myanmar has and all the efforts we are making to get [a] democratic dialogue going and to get Aung Suu Kyi out of jail so that she can play a role, at this stage I don't think it will be generally accepted as a failed state.

HAASS: With that, let me deliver three thank-yous. One is to all of you for your interest and for your patience. To Mrs. Morse, thank you for honoring us with your presence. And to the secretary-general for coming here tonight and for all he does in his present capacity. Thank you, sir. [Applause.]