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Post-Lecture Discussion

SPEAKER:    DAYLE E. SPENCER
MODERATOR:  THOMAS L. SHAFFER
SPEECH:     “LESSONS FROM THE FIELD OF INTRA-NATIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION”
DATE:       FEBRUARY 21, 1992

Professor Shaffer: [Professor, Notre Dame Law School.]

So we're open for questions and comments on Dr. Spencer's paper. If you have any questions or comments for Dr. Carter, perhaps you can relay them.

Professor Goulet: [Dennis Goulet, Professor, Department of Government, University of Notre Dame.]

You just spoke of the four paths that you employed to try to break the log jam. All of these paths are procedures, they are channels. At the beginning, when there seemed to be an absolutely irreconcilable fixation on national sovereignty and self-determination, what topics or substantive issues did you choose to discuss in the paths, and how were these topics chosen?

Dr. Spencer: The two rounds of negotiations that I described addressed procedural issues. That is to say: how would the parties manage their substantive negotiations? They reached agreement on working languages, they reached agreement on records, they reached agreement on venue, they reached agreement on co-chairmen, and so forth. There were fourteen separate areas of written agreement between them by the end of the Nairobi talks. Now, in those particular topics, there was not as much tension as there was on the ultimate issue of national sovereignty versus self-determination.

But one of the things that we learned from another path, which is working with these joints groups such as the group that Roger was involved with that I mentioned, was that sometimes you can fractionate those seemingly irreconcilable issues and begin to build small agreements on parts that are not as threatening to them. And on the basis of those small agreements, work toward the larger agreements.
Let me just give you one example of what I mean by that. If you look at the question of national sovereignty, it is a label that encompasses a lot of different component parts. It may be that national sovereignty includes the right to fly a flag, the right to raise taxes, the right to operate a standing army, the right to have roads, or the right to have an educational system. There may be a hundred different components of national sovereignty. If you could fractionate that and begin to talk to the parties about maybe one through twenty-five of those that are not so threatening and not so inviolate. Once you get an agreement on some of those, then the degree of trust building that occurs just in that process can help you move the larger issues.

Professor Demars: [William Demars, Professor, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Notre Dame.]

I wonder if you could comment on the role of a particular set of issues, famine relief in particular, and where did that fit? For example, was that one of those issues where you could get agreement and attempt to build? And did you get agreements on specific famine issues? And were you able to make that transfer and build from that on to others?

Dr. Spencer: Ethiopia and Eritrea had been struck by this major famine in 1984 and 1985. Many, many people had died in that. That’s the one we all saw on television with the children with swollen stomachs, dark circles under their eyes, and with the flies. Everybody has a visual image of what that famine was like. Well, so did the government of Ethiopia. And the visual image that they had was that the international community had blamed them for the problem, had said, you didn’t take measures to stop this when you knew it was coming. You didn’t feed your people when you might have, and you didn’t let the international relief agencies feed your people when they were willing to do so because you wouldn’t cooperate with them. And so what we were able to do—and again, this occurred only after literally months and months of direct involvement with these parties—was to use the influence that we had developed with the degree of legitimacy that we had with them was to just say to in very candid ways, that if this isn’t dealt with, you’re going to be blamed again. President Carter would meet directly with Mengistu and suggest to him certain things that he could do as a head of state to facilitate this process. It was heard differently by Mengistu coming from another
head of state than it would have been heard by a less powerful third party perhaps, and it was responded to.

We were able to get access for the relief agencies that they had not previously had. The Eritreans had inadvertently bombed a truck that was carrying relief supplies during the famine, so they were mindful as well of their international prestige suffering from that incident.

So in each case, we were able to work in parallel ways. It was not that they worked together to develop a joint famine strategy. Through the third party, each developed a strategy.

Professor Demars: The second part of my question was: were you able to build from those parallel agreements into anything else? Was there any linkage?

Dr. Spencer: It's hard to draw a direct linkage between what was happening on the ground with the famine relief and what was happening at the negotiation table. But I do think that they began to see the third parties as individuals who cared about their people. It was not enough for us just to question the procedural niceties or substantive agreements or whatever. It was a concern about their civilian population. So I think to some degree there was some transference factor. But it would be hard, if not impossible, to say there was a direct linkage.

Dr. Johnston: [Douglas Johnston, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.]

Dayle, I agree totally with your notion about the U.N. getting involved in internal conflicts, and it would seem a bit of a precedent has now been established.

But I also wonder if, given the plethora of these conflicts that exist, whether or not we may end up in a situation where it's oversaturated, more than the U.N. could bear. Might that fall into a need for a regional kind of approach, where, for example, you have the C.S.C.E. attempting to do something in this area in that region? We also might want to look toward similar counterparts in other regions of the world. I really think it's more than the U.N. will be able to handle.

Dr. Spencer: I agree with you entirely, Doug. It is not the exclusive prerogative of the United Nations, although they are the premiere
agency charged with this sort of responsibility at the intergovernmental level.

Actually, I would take that one step further. I think it's incumbent on each of us as individuals to be involved in peace-making. It is easy enough to let the governments do it or let the international organizations do it.

If you look again at the global perspective, we are spending $2 million a minute on defense. And yet when the United Nations tries to collect the dues from the member nations just to maintain their peace-making and peace-keeping ability, the United States doesn't even pay its debt. We don't honor our treaty obligations to the United Nations. So it's incumbent on us to shift that level of emphasis from everything for the military structure and everything for the defense environment, at the rate of $2 million a minute, to a significant portion on peace-making and peace-keeping at the U.N., at the regional and international organization level, but also at the community level.

Participant: My question feels sort of crass to ask, but I think it has some impact. And that is: how were the negotiations in Ethiopia paid for? I imagine it was expensive to transport teams of delegates and negotiators to the United States and to Nairobi. Are these kinds of resources available for other conflicts and countless others? I would guess that before the U.N. or other organizations, even regional organizations, are going to start to commit monies to that, they want to see some successes, and someone probably is going to pay for those efforts before larger monies, the $2 million you talked about, can be found.

Dr. Spencer: I think that's not at all a crass question, but a fundamental one. We didn't have the budget to fund these peace talks when we were asked to convene them, and we literally had to go out and raise the money. We had a great deal of support from the Nordic countries, from Sweden and from Norway in particular. The parties themselves bore a portion of the expense. They paid for their own travel, for example, to Atlanta for our talks. But we were able to raise in-kind support from Atlanta hoteliers and others who wanted to see peace come. They were glad to donate hotel rooms. Others were glad to donate transportation services and so forth. In Kenya, President Moi, as our host, underwrote the peace process once we arrived on his soil, providing all of the logistical and support arrangements that we needed for the talks
there. But again, it was a substantial amount of money that had to be raised externally in order to fund it.

What we have found, though, was that the cost of waging peace is so economical compared to the cost of waging war. It’s a bargain. If you want to invest your money wisely, do it on this end of the spectrum rather than on the defense budget. So it’s not at all crass—it’s fundamental.

*Participant:* I have two questions. One: what are the advantages and problems of being the only woman on the negotiating team? And the other one is: working with eminent persons, I’m wondering, you know, you also have eminent personalities (laughter). I’m wondering what it’s like as a negotiator working with them?

*Dr. Spencer:* The Eritreans accepted me immediately without reservation; probably because a third of their fighting force is female, and women soldiers who became pregnant would work in the revolution until their babies were due. They’d deliver their babies, and then hand them off to people to raise while they continued the resistance fight. So Eritreans see women certainly on an equal level as men.

For the Ethiopian government, the opposite was true. I went through this period of being tested by them, of having to demonstrate that I knew a little bit about what I was talking about before I was accepted, and that relationship evolved over time. I think I was a bit of a novelty for both of them. Africa is sort of a man’s world still, and so in some ways it’s an advantage and a disadvantage both.

With respect to the eminent persons, what we have found is that we work best with them when we have them as a group. It’s like having a lot of big frogs in a pond; they control each other’s behavior, they check each other’s conduct. So when they’re together as a group, they don’t act up. Don’t tell anybody I said this, okay? But it’s a different matter entirely managing them sometimes on a one-on-one situation, you know, where they are *the* eminent person in the room or at the table.

*Professor Shaffer:* Dr. Spencer, thank you very much.