

## **The Nixon Seminar – April 2, 2024 – The United Nations and International Institutions Transcript**

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Pres. Nixon: The great challenge now is to enlist the cooperation of many nations in preserving peace and in enriching life. This cannot be done by American edict or by the edict of any other nation. It must reflect the concepts and the wishes of the people of those nations themselves.

The history of the postwar period teaches that nationalism can be dangerously disruptive or powerfully creative. Our aim is to encourage the creative forms of nationalism, to join as partners where our partnership is appropriate and where it is wanted, but not to let a U.S. presence substitute for independent national effort or infringe on national dignity and national pride.

It is not my belief that the way to peace is by giving up our friends or letting down our allies. On the contrary, our aim is to place America's international commitments on a sustainable, long-term basis to encourage local and regional initiatives, to foster national independence and self-sufficiency, and by so doing, to strengthen the total fabric of peace.

It would be dishonest, particularly before this sophisticated audience, to pretend that the United States has no national interest of its own or no special concern for its own interests. However, our most fundamental national interest is in maintaining that structure of international stability on which peace depends and which makes orderly progress possible.

Mary: That was President Nixon addressing the United Nations on September 18th, 1969. Good evening, and welcome to the Nixon Seminar on Conservative Realism and National Security. I'm your host, Mary Kissel. Thank you for tuning in. We're joined tonight by our co-chairs, Ambassador Robert O'Brien, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and our distinguished seminar members. Our topic, International Institutions, Their Missions, the Reality, and How to Reform Them.

Mr. Secretary, I'll start, as I often do with you, and maybe we'll tackle the United Nations first since we just saw a video of President Nixon addressing that body. When you look at the UN Charter, it sounds great to save generations from the scourges of war, to reaffirm faith and fundamental human rights, and dignity rooted in the human person. Let's start with your experience at the United Nations, but maybe start with the mission. Sounds good. Should we support it?

Sec. Pompeo: Well, thanks, Mary. You know, it's fascinating to listen to remarks from 1969 from a president who, frankly, wouldn't be associated with America first, and hear him talk directly about America first and about American national interests and the things we need to get right for our own people. But more than that, as someone who was a practitioner as a Secretary of State and had to interact with that institution, that body, what I implored it to do was to get back to that mission. It wasn't that the mission itself was outdated.

I think you could read that mission statement today. It'd be very difficult to disagree with much, at least as the words were originally understood in the immediate aftermath of the war when the charter was created. But if you took that mission set and laid it across the activity set for the United Nations today, man, that Venn diagram didn't have a heck of a lot of overlap. And that's the conundrum that America faces, that you now have a United Nations that has just moved away from its own core mission.

So, I think maybe I'll stop here. The problem isn't the mission of the United States. It is that the United Nations today, as structured with the Security Council and the General Assembly, as structured today, it no longer is comporting with its own mission statement. And for America, that is deeply problematic and requires a lot of thought and a set of actions that I'm sure we'll talk about here as we move through the evening tonight.

Mary: Well, we have a lot of seminar members who have firsthand experience within the walls of the United Nations, so it is gonna be an interesting discussion. Ambassador O'Brien, another one of our co-chairs, agree or disagree with the secretary?

Amb. O'Brien: Well, I agree with Mike. I've got a fair amount of experience with the UN. Actually, as a young lawyer, I worked on a committee of the Security Council that dealt with claims against Iraq arising out of the first Gulf War. And that was an example of the UN getting something right. There was a brief shiny moment in time at the end of the Cold War when we could get things done, and the UN came together and decried the invasion by Iraq in Kuwait, and then set up a compensation commission to assess reparations, essentially against Iraq for the damage it caused to the government of Kuwait and other governments, and private companies and individuals.

So, I've seen it from the inside. I then, during the Bush administration, went back as a U.S. Representative of the UN General Assembly. And so, I came from the other side as a United States representative at the UN. And I can tell you that having seen it from the inside, both as a representative and as an employee of the Secretariat, there's a lot that needs to be done to fix the UN. But if we didn't have a UN, we'd have to reinvent one. And so, it's better that we fight to bring the UN back to its original goals and keep it headquartered in New York, where we've got some additional level of influence over the UN, rather than having it in Beijing or Moscow, or Paris, for that matter. And we've gotta do things like make sure there are enough Americans.

One of the things that Secretary Pompeo and I tried to do was make sure the UN hired the requisite number of Americans, the quota system for government employees at the UN. And trust me, China makes sure that they get their quota plus more, and the Russians do the same. We were 200 under our quota because no one in the U.S. government was putting pressure on the UN to hire Americans. And that's something that Secretary Pompeo and I put a lot of time into it with Secretary Gutierrez, the UN Secretary General. So, you know, we've gotta participate, we've gotta win.

One thing I'll just mention is the Chinese view the UN as being very important. They've tried to take over the Secretariat, and they've tried to take over many of the elected official positions at the specialized agencies. And what the Chinese do is classic Marxists. They go after the legal department and try and become the General Counsel, and they go after the human rights or the Human Resources Department so that they can stop any whistleblower or anybody who

tries to illuminate what the Chinese are doing at the UN, they can stop them with lawyers and the HR folks. And so, they've captured those departments in many of the UN specialized agencies, and we've gotta fight that as well. So, look, it's not ideal, but it has a role, and we need to be there and make sure that American interests are protected at the UN.

Mary: Well, we've got a new seminar member tonight, Ambassador Kelley Currie, who was the U.S. Representative to the UN's Economic and Social Council, and was the Alternative Rep to the General Assembly. Kelley, welcome to the seminar. I think the Secretary and Ambassador O'Brien have alluded to several problems, but again, just a scene-set here, I'm wondering if you could give our audience a sense of just how vast the UN is, all of the things that it does. And if you wanna address anything else that was said, please do. The floor is yours.

Amb. Currie: Thank you, Mary, and thanks for welcoming me. I'm excited to be participating in this very timely and really important topic. I think that it's almost easier to say what the UN isn't involved in at this point than to say what it is, because it's literally managed to try to insinuate itself into every facet of every possible issue, from traffic to, you know, obesity, to, you name it. They literally have resolutions on international day of three-toed ungulates. And, you know, if you can tell me what a three-toed ungulate is, then you win a prize. So, yeah, that's what we're doing at the UN most days.

We have one of the largest missions, the United States does, at the United Nations, and we could not keep up on a day-to-day basis with what they were doing in terms of managing all of the different committees that were meeting, all of the resolutions that were being churned out, and just trying to keep on top of everything that every agency was doing and starting up was near impossible for the United States government.

So, you can imagine what most governments there that are, you know, we dwarf them in terms of the number of people that we have. And I take Robert's point about us being underrepresented in the Secretariat, but our mission, like I said, is one of the largest, both in New York and in Geneva. And we also

deploy substantial personnel in other places where the UN has a presence, and we can't keep up with all the nonsense that they get up to.

And I remember I used to say, you know, they have so many nooks and crannies because they're doing so many things that there are just so many little nooks and crannies that they can hide their corruption and get up to no good. And that's basically what was going on. And so I think that one of the things that was our mantra under Ambassador Haley and continued to be my mantra after I moved back to D.C. and was working for Secretary Pompeo, hi boss, at the State Department, was back to basics, that we needed to get the UN focused on getting back to the charter, getting back to the basics, back to the three pillars of human rights, peace, and security, and development in ways that were focused, targeted, measurable, and concrete, and not be doing all of this nonsense that wasted everybody's time.

The problem is that most countries that are represented at the United Nations don't really have any skin in the game. A lot of countries make absolutely no dues payments or very minimal, only like a literally de minimis dues payment every year. And countries like the United States carry the financial burden, but we are up against a lot of countries that... It's like the worst parliament ever because you have all these countries represented that don't pay for anything, but they just keep gening up entitlements every session.

And so they don't have any accountability, and they don't have to pay for any of the stuff that they create. And so they do it for their own reasons, for self-reflective, and to look like they're accomplishing something, but in the end, they just gunk up the whole thing. And I used to liken it to silting up the channel, that they silt up the channel to where now ships can't get through. And so, when you actually need the system to work, it doesn't.

Mary: Well, I'm sure we'll come back to you, particularly on the China issue at the UN and corruption. I know that's something that you and others on this seminar team have worked on. And I commend to everybody the work of the late Claudia Roset, who exposed the Oil-for-Food Program, which was one of the largest public frauds in history, and that was committed under UN auspices. But Nadia Schadlow, you were Deputy National Security Advisor, dealt with

the UN as well. Do you agree with Ambassador O'Brien's assertion that if it weren't there, we'd have to invent it? Do we really need it?

Dr. Schadlow: No, I think a lot of times... The way that I put it sometimes is when I'm speaking to a group of students often, if you look at the problem sets that we're dealing with today, you know, whether they're refugee crisis, whether it's climate, whether it's development issues, would you create the same set of institutions today that we have today? It's a little bit unfair. I know it's one of those, you can't go back.

But if you actually sort of started with a clean slate and look at the problem sets we have, would you recreate the institutions we have today? Maybe in some cases you'd recreate parts of them, but certainly not all of them, like, you know, sort of off track but the role of capital today. There's a lot of capital out there today. Would you recreate the World Bank and the IMF? Would they function in the same way? Or, you know, Kim on the seminar knows. You know, she has experience at EXIM Bank. So, sort of, that's the overall frame.

But having said that, we have the institutions that we have, but what did occur to me as Ambassador O'Brien was speaking was the sense of, you know, I don't think we go into organizations like the UN with a UN strategy, right? We actually don't think strategically about how to manage that organization and how to win in that organization. And it's sort of almost improper to say win in the organization, but everyone on this call knows that this is a contest being played out in these organizations.

And for the most part, our state department, you know, no offense, but I know Secretary Pompeo has seen this, and I know Mary has too, doesn't roll up its sleeves and say, "How are we gonna win at the UN today?" I mean, you did, you know, Ambassador Haley did, others did, but not everyone in the bureaucracy does that.

So I would step back and say, what are the outcomes that are in the U.S.'s interest? And to what degree can the UN help us get there? And if so, what's our strategy? And only focus on those issues. And that helps. And, you know, some of Kelley's terms, to get rid of the craziness. We're just not gonna even

focus on the craziness. It doesn't matter if we're not at the meeting for that creature that you mentioned. I don't know what that creature is.

But we're only gonna focus on the 5 outcomes, the 10 outcomes that the UN can help us get there, maybe help align states to get there, roll up our sleeves, and kind of play the game in the organization that we need to be playing more effectively. And I think the same can be said of several other organizations. And then, as we get on, there's several that maybe we just don't need at all, but we can talk about that later.

Mary: Well, you said the key word, strategy, and we have a grand strategist on the call, Bridge Colby, who wrote a book, the "Strategy of Denial," which I'd also recommend to everybody on the call. Bridge, if you look at an organization like the United Nations, you know, what are those key priorities? Is it to restructure the Security Council? Is it to finally shape up UN peacekeeping to do good rather than to just pay off the member nations that provide the troops? Is it humanitarian aid? I mean, you know, what are those top-line items that we should focus on?

Elbridge: Well, thanks a lot, Mary. You're far too kind. And great to be on the panel once again. I thought it was actually pretty interesting what President Nixon was saying about international order, and it gets back to, you know, often Kissinger is associated with that kind of rhetoric and probably he had a hand in that speech, but I think it's interesting that it came directly from President Nixon having a vision. And, you know, it's just interesting. I mean, you know, the UN in its earlier days was really designed to be, as I understand it, and others know a lot more than I, a forum for kind of high-security politics or sort of, you know, matters of great power war and peace. And it's really gotten away from that. I mean, it's been striking.

I even remember, I think Robert May have been there at that time or certainly around that time, and I think Nadia was in the area, but just the drama at the UN, even as late as 2003 in the run-up to the Iraq War. I don't think the UN gets that kind of attention now. I mean, you know, with a possible perception of the narrow issues around Israel...not narrow issues, but around the particular issues around the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict and so forth, that may be

aside, but certainly, the aborning rivalry between the United States and China, it's pretty much absent from the UN agenda.

And we know why that is for structural reasons, but if I were... I mean, I think when people went back to what the core purpose of the UN was, it was the prevention of major power war. I don't know if that's... I mean, I'm personally pretty skeptical that it has a good chance, but maybe that's something that could be part of an agenda for real UN reform. Because, as a number of people were saying, there're so many things the UN's doing, but it's a classic case of organizations like the State Department probably doing so many things and missing out on kind of the core purpose.

Mary: Well, there's a great quote from one of President Nixon's books. He wrote, "The 20th century has demolished many myths, but none so more devastatingly than a wishful notion that world organizations could bring about perfect peace." Kim Reed, I wanna turn to you, because one of the underlying assumptions of the conversation so far is that the United Nations either does frivolous things, crazy things, or it just gets gucked up and it can't achieve anything. But there's another possibility, which is that it does real harm, like in the World Health Organization. Can you speak to that?

Kim: Absolutely. And greetings from Zurich, Switzerland. Before I speak, I just wanna pause for a moment to say how much I'm enjoying being with our Swiss colleagues here at American Swiss Foundation Inaugural Leadership Summit. And we're saying goodbye this year to a good friend of Switzerland to the United States, Ambassador Jacques Pitteloud. And he sends his regards to everyone. And he's done a great job in the United States helping us, as Ambassador O'Brien has, with a very important topic, bringing our hostages home and how we work with Switzerland on that.

And I asked Ambassador Pitteloud directly this evening about the topic we'll be discussing today. I wanted his Swiss perspective on this, and he believes the United Nations should be saved, but it should be recreated in the way that America first created it. So, just wanted to share that. And also, we heard from Harold Hamm. And Secretary Pompeo, I got Harold Hamm's book, and you



wrote the introduction to, "Our 50-year Mission to Secure America's Energy Independence." So, just sending greetings from Zurich, 2:00 a.m.

And Mary, before leading the Export-Import Bank of the United States, I was President of the International Food Information Council Foundation, where we focused on communicating the science on food safety, nutrition, and health. And so, I was extremely engaged with a part of the UN, the World Health Organization, as well as FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. And I would attend something called the World Health Assembly every year as a civil society delegate, where we watched all the countries that are member states participate and decide what should be on the agenda and how those things are taken up. And I also testified before the UN at a special high-level meeting on non-communicable disease such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease.

And my observations included sending comments to WHO for consideration. There needs to be more transparency of what's going on. They call for conflicts of interest checks on industry's involvement in issues that require industry's involvement. Yet what I witnessed many years in a row were how activists would lead countries around and tell them what to do and how to vote, and what to think. And they, I would say, had extreme disregard for the United States and our science-based focus, and what our government was trying to do, let alone the dues that we pay to these organizations.

Mary: Gosh, Kim, I mean, what a great point. I remember many years ago, those same activists lobbied countries to degrade our intellectual property protections, and they convinced Thailand to violate the patents of several major pharmaceutical companies. So, you're right. But, you know, when we say WHO, I think Wuhan Lab and the coverup that the WHO engaged in when COVID broke out.

Kim: At this conference I'm at right now, our former U.S. Surgeon General, Jerome Adams, is here, and he was our U.S. Surgeon General during COVID. And he's come out with a new book. And he said because of WHO's inaction, as we all know, on China, we've lost millions of lives that...unnecessary. And we really need to hold these organizations accountable. We need to do a complete

rethink. And it's just very frustrating to me. A colleague of mine, Dr. Jack Chow, who was the U.S. Ambassador for Global HIV and AIDS during the Bush administration who's taught me a lot about WHO, he wrote a piece in foreign policy, "Is WHO Becoming Irrelevant?" And this was back in 2010, before we had COVID.

But one thing that he pointed out that we've already discussed is we really also need to take a look at the personnel system of these organizations. And we need experts in places like WHO and in all parts of the UN, but there are linguistic requirements, geographic requirements. And where do these experts end up going? Not to this institution. They go elsewhere because of the archaic system. And it's just very frustrating. So, I'm looking forward, hopefully, to a complete rethink on this. And speaking of Israel, do we remember what the UN felt when President Trump asked to move or said that we were moving our embassy to Jerusalem? Do we remember how they behaved?

Mary: Not well.

Kim: So, it's time for complete rethink.

Mary: Time for a complete rethink. Well, we've got many comments going on the live stream, so thank you to viewers out there for sending in your questions. I'll try to work in as many as I can. But Nadia Schadlow, you had a quick response in addition to what Kim said. Over to you.

Dr. Schadlow: Just a quick point on the WHO, which I discovered might be of interest to listeners. If you go back and look at what happened and unfolded during the first SARS epidemic, it's really actually pretty amazing. You can go back to some of the documents, and if you sort of white it out, the pandemic, you wouldn't know, in some ways, the difference of sort of the early ways in which the WHO handled it and the lack of information, lack of transparency, many of the same concerns. It was shocking to me, and I still haven't really seen that kind of comparative assessment. So, it's worth looking at and worth someone writing about.

Mary: Secretary Pompeo, you were obviously deeply involved in the response to COVID, the outreach, not just to the UN but to the Chinese government.

How do you see the UN's role in really, the devastation that COVID wreaked upon the global economy and on human lives?

Sec. Pompeo: Oh, goodness, Mary, you're trying to get me wound up. You know, the reality that we experienced was the current leader of the World Health Organization, completely in the pocket of Xi Jinping. There's no other way to describe it, observationally. We saw it, not only from his public statements, but we saw it from the actions of the World Health Organization. If one was counting on the WHO to stop the next pandemic, you should not feel good about that because they are unlikely to achieve that because they have become so deeply politicized.

I've said this publicly before, if you go back and look at how he was elected, you can clearly see that there was no option for him in the moment of peril. He was completely beholden for his job to the Chinese Communist Party. And so there was little doubt about how he was going to behave in the moment. And we saw it, and we witnessed that. And the result of that was, you know, I'm guessing Xi Jinping would've done about the same thing he did, but, man, the public pressure that was relieved by having the WHO essentially grant him a free pass for the first year was of enormous value to the Chinese Communist Party and its enormous damage to citizens of the world.

And then, you know, the other thing that I observed was when they were called out for that, they suggested somehow, we were racist, right? So, "You don't like someone who's from Africa. You don't like the Chinese. You don't like..." Right? Instead of just accepting the reality that this was an enormous failure of the World Health Organization. And so, I don't put a great deal... By the way, if you will remember, the Trump administration did attempt to hold WHO accountable. We withdrew, we withheld monies from the WHO, our funding for the WHO. We had our envoy there raising Cain as best he could about how they had behaved, the process failures of the WHO, only that to be ended within a handful of hours of the new administration coming in.

So, I don't think we should think for... I guess I mentioned that, not to be political, but to say the United States has the capacity to shape and influence international institutions, but you have to be prepared to lean into it, and you

have to be prepared to go work it and compete. I'll tell one other quick story. I remember one day I came in and the secretary of political affairs told me, "Hey, sir, next week, there's gonna be an election. Or two weeks off, there's gonna be an election for the World Intellectual Property Organization." Mary, you would remember this. I was...what's a polite word? I was unhappy.

Mary: Quite unhappy.

Sec. Pompeo: I was quite unhappy. And so I called in the team and said, "That's not gonna happen. We're gonna go win this election. We're gonna go take this thing down." The Chinese candidate was gonna win. And I think everybody in the room thought, "Yeah, we should, but there's no way we can pull it off." And, you know, we built a really good team out and we started calling every country in the world. We tasked it out, and we started just rolling. We found a candidate that was above the bar, above the threshold for us, and we started just applying American power in the finest tradition to this.

We showed up with a team on election day there of about 11 or 12, and we thought, "Oh, my gosh, that's, like, way too many people. We're sending 11 people to this stupid thing." The Chinese had about 70, but we beat them. We beat them. We got our person, the person we wanted elected. And I hope that person has now executed against the mission set that we have lined out for that person. You have to be prepared to go fight and win these institutions. They're not noble and good because they're global institutions. They are important to America when they shape and are reflected by what it is America's trying to achieve inside these institutions. That's not selfish. That's just good governance by American leaders.

Mary: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We have a question from a viewer. What benefit does the U.S. gain from membership in the UN? Well, you've just given one of the answers. When you have the UN shaping international practices or norms, or intellectual property rights rules, shaping institutions like that so that they promote a free world order is certainly in our interest. Ambassador Currie, you wanted to jump in. Over to you. And don't rest, Alex Wong, I'm coming to you next. I wanna get you on the Security Council. Kelley.

Amb. Currie: Yeah, I think that that's exactly right. With these standard-setting bodies, it is important that the United States is present, that we're active, that we send our best into those. That has not historically been the case. In fact, I think we tend to ignore the technical bodies in favor of some of the sexier things, like the Security Council, which, unfortunately, has been hopelessly deadlocked for about a decade now when it comes to major issues of international peace and security, and has really just not been very useful. But I think to follow up on what Secretary Pompeo was saying, I think that it's really, if you look and go back to what Nadia was saying, after the SARS pandemic, the World Health Assembly and the WHO reconstituted all of the international health regulations in order to avoid a repeat of that situation.

But what happened in 2019 and 2020 was the Chinese Communist Party and the WHO under Tedros just ignored all the IHRs because there was no enforcement mechanism, there was no accountability behind them. And it showed that this was all just farce, that it didn't actually, at the end of the day, mean anything. And if you set standards, and if you set up rules for the road, but there's no enforcement mechanism when somebody violates them, and we see this with Ukraine, right, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, if they're able to do this, to invade a sovereign UN member state, and there's no consequences across the UN system, then these rules don't mean anything.

So, not only... I mean, Secretary Pompeo is 100% right on the things that matter to us, where we have vital national interests at stake, we have to be in there, we have to be prepared to fight and devote the resources to actually make a difference in terms of getting our message across and getting our interests protected. But we also have to be prepared to walk away when the deck is so stacked or the system has become so corrupted and so unfit for purpose that there's no point... You're just, like, putting, you know, good money after bad. And we can't give into these sunk cost fallacies that we can fix things that are not fixable.

And so I think it's a really tough thing for us to do because we're Americans, and we always think we can fix it if we apply our...you know, if we just work hard enough or apply our American ingenuity. But some of the stuff just may

not be fixable at this point, and we have to have some hard conversations with ourselves about that.

Mary: Yeah, we certainly do. And by the way, when the Australians called for accountability, Beijing basically enforced consequences on them. So, consequences are coming in the wrong direction. Alex Wong, jump in.

Alex: Yeah, I mean, I wanna make an observation here just to level-set. I think there's well-founded skepticism of the UN system within the United States among the general population. That's understandable, given all the scandals, given how much money and resources we put there, given... You know, I'm from New York, so there's a lot of animosity among the New York population when the UNGA happens and it shuts down the city, and the unpaid parking tickets by various PAM reps.

But I wanna say, and we should recognize, that the UN is a prestige organization among many other nations. And not just small nations, but partners like Japan and others that really do value the soft power, the magnification of their power and reputation that come from being a participant in the UN, that come from being a rotating member of the Security Council, taking up the President of the Security Council, for instance.

And because there is that prestige aspect among other nations, that gives us the opportunity, if we use our power right within the United Nations to rally these countries, get them on our side, and have a coordinating effect among like-minded, or at least binding effect when there's a UN Security Council resolution.

So, an example, you know, one of the successes of the Trump administration were the very severe and binding UN resolutions of sanctions on North Korea, which in my job, were trying to enforce those sanctions to pressure Kim Jong-Un, were actually extremely useful and were extremely persuasive, not just cudgel, but kind of a moral calling to many of these nations to isolate North Korea, develop our leverage, implement sanctions, and shame even great powers like Russia and China, which did feel some obligation, at least politically, among, you know, the group of 77, or the "global south," to at least mouth and take some action on sanctions implementation.

But to get that kind of good effect, to take advantage of that aspect of the UN, I wanna go back to something that Kelley said, that this is not really foreign policy. This is an unruly parliament. And when it's a parliament, you have to play hardball politics. You have to lobby, you have to count votes, you have to have a whip operation. And I don't think it's a coincidence that some of the most successful operators of the UN, and Secretary Pompeo being here, and Ambassador Haley, were actually legislators before.

They had worked in parliaments. They understood that that's how you operate in the United Nations system. It's not classic diplomacy. And that's a realization I think we have to internalize more in our career of foreign service, that we just have to internalize more in the United States government, that this is hardball politics in Turtle Bay to get effects and advance interests that we have and use the UN to advance our interests.

Mary: This is hardball politics. Quite an observation. Ambassador O'Brien, I wanna get to a question from a viewer that concerns the Security Council. When will the Security Council get rid of veto power, and why is it not a majority vote? Is this an example, for instance, of one of those places that could be more effective to Alex's point, used for good, if it were restructured?

Amb. O'Brien: Well, we get outvoted all the time in the Security Council, so having the veto is really critical for us and for our allies like Israel that rely on our veto, being able to stand up throughout the UN and say, "No, we're not gonna go with one of these crazy plans," and protect our national interests and the national interests of our allies.

So, I don't think it would be a good idea to get rid of the veto, but I do think it's a good idea that we do what Alex said and do what Secretary Pompeo did on the WIPO election, and that's use our power at the UN to get the results we want. The Chinese showed how effective it could be because they captured the WHO, and they captured an institution that allowed them to have the biggest coverup of a natural disaster or manmade disaster since Chernobyl. And they use the UN system to cover up their bad acts.

And so, look, we've got a huge leverage at the UN, and that leverage is money. The U.S. pays about 27% of the budget of the UN. Without that money, all the

perks, the free gas, the tax credits, the nice housing, the kids going to school at U.S. universities and foreign universities. I mean, everything that the UN, where all the corruption comes from, is money-based, and we control the money. The Chinese have been brilliant because they've captured so many of these institutions, but they've done it without putting any money into the UN because they're kind of a developing country, and they pay about 2%. They've got the second-biggest economy in the world, and they pay almost nothing into the UN system.

And so, we've gotta take our money that we've got and start make our contributions to the UN voluntary to support the programs that work for us. And if a program doesn't work for us, and I don't care how popular it is or how noble others think it is, if it doesn't work for us, we shouldn't pay into it. And that lever will give us tremendous hard power in the wheeling and dealing process that Alex referred to and that you and Mike engaged in on the WIPO election, just for an example. So, we've gotta use the dollars that we put into the UN, we're basically funding the whole thing, and use those dollars wisely, choke off the corruption, and choke off the anti-Semites, and choke off the anti-Americans where we can, and invest in programs that actually work.

The International Postal Union, you know, it's pretty cool that you can take a letter and write a letter and it ends up in the Congo and it gets delivered, you know, hopefully. Whether you can pick up the phone and dial a country code number and, you know, get connected to an overseas destination. So, there are things that work at the UN, and that's what we ought to concentrate our funding on. And where it doesn't work, or where it's been corrupted and captured by the Chinese communists, we ought to cut them off.

Mary: Well, speaking of that, just to give the current administration their due, I believe they did win an election for the International Telecommunications Union, which, like the World Intellectual Property Organization, sets standards. It's a very important UN body. I wanna dig just a little deeper into the politics and the hardball that happens. And Ambassador Currie, I'm gonna put you again on the spot a little bit with a bit of current events.



And part of the reason why we're doing this seminar is because this really gained international attention, and that was the abstention of the United States in the Security Council on something called Resolution 2728, called for a ceasefire in Israel. There seemed to be two points of view on these resolutions. One, that they just don't mean anything, so who cares? And the other side that says, actually, no, this is very meaningful. It's a big change in U.S. policy. We should care a lot. Where do you come down?

Amb. Currie: Most of the stuff that the General Assembly does, you have to distinguish between the General Assembly and the Security Council. Most of the stuff the General Assembly does is basically nonsense. But when the Security Council acts, that is the closest thing you get to black letter international law. And, you know, I'm a lawyer, so I talk about things like black letter law. But when the Security Council acts, it is meant to be, like, more or less binding on the international system.

The problem with the U.S. abstention on this resolution is that, as I guess it was Secretary Pompeo mentioned...or no, it was Robert mentioned, we veto stuff all the time because it's not in our interest. And, you know, a lot of it is about free writer stuff that, you know, literally the veto is the only thing that keeps the worst stuff from happening. But a lot of it is to deal with the incredible and intense anti-Israel sentiment that pervades, not just the membership of the United Nations, but also the Secretariat, the operational part of the United Nations.

The United Nations itself is an intensely anti-Israeli and anti...you know, I would characterize some of it driven by anti-Semitism organization. And the bias against Israel that is inherent in everything that the United Nations does is so extreme that it almost has to be seen to be believed, as it can be breathtaking.

And so for the United States to abstain on this resolution, it is this happened before under the Obama administration when Samantha Power was the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. So, it doesn't shock me, particularly, that this administration has done it again, but they think that they're being cute and clever because they believe that they got certain language out of the resolution, that is, they got rid of the worst aspects of it. But the headline is the headline,

and they don't seem to understand how damaging it is for them to do this and how it damages the United States as an ally to Israel, how it damages Israel, and how it empowers the worst elements of the United Nations and the worst actors in the system, both at the country member state level and within the Secretariat.

Mary: I just wanna put some numbers on what Ambassador Currie just said. Last year, there were 15 UN General Assembly resolutions against Israel, and there were 7 against the rest of the world. And this is a world that includes communist China, totalitarian North Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the world's largest state sponsor of terrorists. So, just to put some numbers on that. I do wanna talk about other international institutions other than the UN, but this is such a rich topic. Bridge Colby, reactions to what you've heard so far on the UN?

Elbridge: Well, I think it's a major issue, and it is unfortunate that the... And, you know, I certainly don't support the administration's decision to abstain on the Security Council resolution. I mean, I think, you know, looking at that issue where the UN does have a significant role for some of the reasons that Alex was pointing out in terms of international prestige and Israel being a relatively small country, and so forth, look, I think it's a very difficult situation in Gaza.

Obviously, there's an immense amount of human suffering, but Hamas attacked, and it seems to me that, you know, despite the pressure from the Biden administration, that there's pretty much, I don't know if it's unanimity, but there's a pretty broad consensus across the Israeli political spectrum that they need to go in and, you know, I mean, you're never gonna get the last Hamas guy, but pretty much decisively defeat Hamas.

And, you know, I think if we're in for a penny and for a pound, I mean, we can, of course, encourage Israel to respect, you know, the humanitarian considerations. But I think it's pretty clear there is no easy solution, and Hamas has made sure of that. And this is an area where if the UN, I think for many Americans, certainly Americans more on the right, if there was gonna be a hope for a reinvigorated sort of respect for the United Nations, that you go back, it's almost touching, the confidence that people had in the UN Secretary General in,

say, the 1950s, if you go back and you see histories from that time or something, I don't think this is gonna do a lot to drive support up.

And I think, you know, to Alex's point, I've also seen that the Russians have vetoed actions against the North Koreans. So, if anything, frankly, the UN seems to be moving in the wrong direction. I fully subscribe to the idea that you gotta compete. And, you know, to me, it's probably gonna be, I mean, looking at it kind of more from a realist lens, it's gonna be a forum for competition rather than resolve. There may be areas where it can, where there is genuine... You know, people generally presumably have a common interest in country code, you know, being able to send a letter. But where there are differences of interest, and I think those are gonna become more intense, I think we're likely to see it. I mean, for instance, the Guyana issue, you know, we're not gonna see much going on there. So, I'm not super optimistic, but I think we have to play, unfortunately, that's the reality. If we're absent, we're not gonna benefit.

Mary: Well, ironically, one of the good things the UN has done in recent years was the commission of inquiry on human rights in North Korea. They've also, I know Ambassador Currie, you worked with the folks in Geneva to raise awareness about the Uyghurs or to advocate for Taiwan, so that the Taiwanese could at least enter the doors. They're barred from entering the UN compound on the East River, which is just absolutely shocking given the original signatories of the UN Charter I believe were not from communist China.

I do wanna turn the conversation briefly to some other international organizations. We've got an election for the NATO Secretary General coming up. Ambassador O'Brien, is NATO one of those functioning international institutions? I mean, it's very mission, just to go back to where we started, it refers to the UN Charter. It says that we reaffirm these principles and the desire to "live in peace with all peoples and all governments." Does NATO work? Does anything there need fixing?

Amb. O'Brien: Well, I think NATO works. I've said this in the past that NATO's probably the most effective alliance since the Romans had the relation allies and the wars against Hannibal. So, look, we won the Cold War with NATO. I know Mike served on the border with Eastern Europe. I was there

back in the bad old days and went through Checkpoint Charlie and went into East Germany and saw how terrible things were. And we've got a reunified, peaceful, for the most part, Western Europe. And NATO's standing strong against the Russians in Ukraine and other places. So, I think it works, but the question is, how do we make it work for the 21st century? How do we make it work for American interests now?

And one of the things that we did, and one of my favorite pictures for my time in government, is a picture of Mike and myself, and the President at the NATO Summit in London in 2019, where we really twisted arms and we got the number of NATO countries meeting their funding commitment for defense spending at 2% of the GDP up from 4 to 11. I think we're up to even to about 18 now. So, it was very hardball diplomacy. We were called anti-NATO. We were called anti-European. But what we actually did was we helped them help themselves. And because of that increased defense funding, they've been able to give surplus supplies to Ukraine and stand taller against Russia.

So, look, NATO can't be an American project. It has to be a true alliance where our partners participate, where they spend money on their own defense, and where they're prepared to make hard decisions. And look, I think we're gonna have to see NATO get involved in the Asia-Pacific region, whether we're gonna have to drag them in their kicking and screaming. Fortunately, the French have interest in the Indo-Pacific, and the British do as well with some of the islands, and some of the defense treaties with Singapore, and Australia, and New Zealand.

So, look, I think there's an opportunity for NATO to be more effective than has been. But I think, overall, and history's shown NATO to be a very effective alliance. We shouldn't walk away from it. We should make it better. And unlike the UN where we're dealing with countries that hate us and hate Israel, and hate our way of life, generally with NATO, we're dealing with countries that are like-minded, that believe in the rule of law, and they believe in democracy and human rights and are our closest allies. So, we just need to make it work better, but I think it's an effective alliance.

Mary: Well, just to put some numbers on that, and this is from NATO Chief Jens Stoltenberg. Last year was the 9th consecutive year of increased defense investment across Europe and Canada, with defense spending rising by an unprecedented 11%. You know, with all [crosstalk 01:17:01.740] ...

Amb. O'Brien: ... Thanks to President Trump. You know, everyone talks about Biden, you know, bringing America back. America came back when we strengthened the alliance, and that goes directly to the hardnose diplomacy that our State Department and DOD, and the White House engaged in those critical days that put us in that position that Jens is talking about. And he was our partner in that. I think he appreciated. He had to be careful about what he said, but I think he appreciated the pressure that President Trump brought to all our European allies to do the right thing and trust that it wasn't easy, especially with the Germans.

Mary: But we do love our German allies, we hasten to say, or most of us. I wanted to just address an implicit question, which is if these institutions that we've inherited, like the United Nations and all of its various affiliates, don't work well, if there's silt in that channel, as Ambassador Currie put it, then is it time for voluntary international organizations, things like the Quad, which is India, Japan, the United States, and Australia, or AUKUS, Australia, the U.S., and the UK? Secretary Pompeo, is that a better model for getting things done? I know that you also convened a group of like-minded countries to address some problems that we faced in the world as well. What are your thoughts on those kinds of international groupings?

Sec. Pompeo: Mary, I'm convinced that they will often lead to better outcomes, not only for America, but for the world. Call them bespoke solutions for particular problem sets. So, problem sets in Asia and the Pacific require a bespoke institution or a set, a grouping of nations that share overlapping interests sufficiently that they're prepared to work together on them.

You know, you mentioned in your opening, we haven't talked about UN peacekeeping. Bit of an oxymoron for me. A little hard for me to get out in the same sentence, but nonetheless, I did it. It doesn't come to those of us tasked with trying to build peace to say, "You know what I think we should do? I think

we should create one more UN peacekeeping mission." It's just, it's literally number 17 on the list of things one ought to do, because I think this is fair to say, they have epically failed in almost every instance in which they have been deployed because they immediately become co-opted, at best, or corrupted, at worst.

You know, we continued some of them in the Trump administration, as I look back on underwriting them. As I look back on it, I'm not convinced we shouldn't have ripped the bandaid off of some of these. Once they're in place, it's very hard to do. It's because, you know, everybody's screaming, "No, it's better than the alternative." In many cases, it's not. And this really gets to your point, I think, which is we often default to the institutions that exist because they exist. But, you know, I encountered, no one's mentioned this tonight. The leader of the UN today is a Portuguese socialist, which just, you know, we should all acknowledge that, and we should set our expectations accordingly.

And so, the United States, in particular, should not be fearful of saying, "This isn't working. We're gonna do our best to make it better, but meanwhile, we're actually gonna go deliver for America. We're gonna go solve this problem set in a way that is bespoke and capable of actually delivering over a relevant time period a really good outcome for the American people." So, if for a moment it's overlapping. I give you PEPFAR as an example, right? So, you've got this thing, and you'd say, "Boy, the WHO ought to just be all." Well, they hadn't a prayer of solving that or addressing it adequately. It took American power, American innovation, American creativity.

And we should, I think, more often say, "We're gonna withhold our funds for this. This isn't working. When you all figure it out, we'll help you do that. But in the meantime, we're gonna go apply our resources against a solution that increases the probability of a good outcome for the American people." And we did some of that in the Trump administration. I wish we had done more. I am hopeful that in a next administration, that team will choose to head down that path more frequently and perhaps take a few more risks at angering some institutional historical biases that just aren't working.

Mary: Great points, all. PEPFAR, of course, was the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. It was the George W. Bush administration, and many consider it one of the most successful public health programs in history, saved millions and millions of African lives in this present in more than 50 countries around the world, just to give those folks their due.

Secretary Pompeo, you know, when you talked about bespoke solutions, it also raised the economic and trade organizations. Of course, Kim Reed, you were head of the Export-Import Bank. And it raises another problem that we have, which is in institutions like, for instance, the World Trade Organization, when you have one of the biggest members breaking all of the rules, in this case, communist China, what do you do? Can you really fix that? And, you know, Kim, I think it's just such a tough question. You know, are we on the right track doing things like, you know, revamping and reimagining the USMCA, the old NAFTA, or doing bilateral trade deals? Is that the way forward to enhance trade with our friends?

Kim: I think so. And I know that U.S. Trade Representative, Bob Lighthizer, has come out with a book that I recommend everyone read on this. But if the system isn't working, we need to have processes in place that work for America. And I think that we will be seeing more bilateral agreements going forward.

Mary: Yeah, it's certainly been a challenge across administrations, not a partisan issue even necessarily, because I think the Biden team has adopted many of the same trade practices as the Trump team did. And I'm not suggesting it's an easy question to crack, but if China continues to break all of the rules, what do we do? What are the mechanisms that we can put into place?

Bridge Colby, you've been silent for a moment, which we absolutely can't allow, and I'm conscious that we've only got six minutes left in the program. Are there any other international organizations, be it in the economic sphere or the military sphere, or regional organizations like, for instance, ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, that have good qualities, that have practices that we should adopt or take into account as we reimagine our participation in these groupings?

Elbridge: Well, thanks, Mary. I guess maybe just kind of on that point, I'll say, I think that having a kind of plasticity, you mentioned the Quad, AUKUS. I think both have their pluses and minuses, but having a more flexible approach and not trying to solve all the problems, not trying to, like I'm not a huge fan of creating an Asian NATO, for instance. I think we should be more sensitive and kind of have this sort of... Yeah, it's famously, the Olin Foundation, the founder was a conservative guy, and I'm sure Nadia's very familiar. And he said, these institutions all turn liberal if you let them keep going. So, he said there was gonna be a sunset clause. I thought that's kind of, you know, just having that kind of flexibility and plasticity in there, I think is very valuable.

Just on the issue of NATO, I mean, I'm a believer in NATO. I think it's been tremendously successful, but I think it's gotta adapt to be sustainable. And I think that the Europeans are finally kind of getting the memo, like, maybe for real now. I wish they'd gotten the memo six, seven years ago. You know, they sort of got it. The increases in defense spending are encouraging, but they're behind the curve compared to the Russian militarization.

The Russians are a very serious threat, especially in the East. They're remilitarizing their economy. They're gonna have a battle-hardened military. And the United States military, obviously you saw, but much of the reports, the Biden administration's only increasing the defense budget by 1%. They're only asking for one submarine. Multiple ship programs are behind budget. I mean, Ambassador O'Brien knows this stuff cold. But we're not where we need to be. Hopefully, if there's a Republican, President Trump in office next year, you can start to rectify that, but, you know, the downward pressure on the defense budget's gonna be significant.

I think we need to move, and I think President Nixon, certainly President Eisenhower are a big fan, more to kind of a partnership model of our alliances. And Israel, as a model here, India, countries like South Korea is, you know, where they really take... But I think getting that into NATO, especially, and moving away from really what's a post-Cold War. I mean, Secretary Pompeo obviously served with distinction on the inner German border.



At that time, I remember talking to an army general I worked with in the Pentagon, the Bundesfeier was, in some ways, maybe the most formidable military in Europe, on our side, other than our own maybe. Although even there, it was competitive. And so, this is not something the Europeans can't do. They can do it. We just need to just get going, get practical, and then we can have it, you know, sort of as things will have to change to stay the same. That's my view.

Mary: I like to try to end on a positive note. And you raised another interesting question. Maybe I should have asked this at the beginning, but quick answer here from Ambassador Currie, and then I wanna go to our co-chairs and then we'll close. Are there partner nations, Ambassador Currie, that help us, that don't get attention? You know, Bridge referenced India, South Korea, I believe. Britain's an obvious partner. Australia is. But in your experience, you know, are there other nations out there that deserve a shout out that do partner with us today?

Amb. Currie: Yeah, I think that some of our most consistent allies are some of the smallest countries in the world, our Pacific Island nations, which have tiny populations but they get the same vote as us and China, and Indonesia, or India, and big countries in the United Nations. And they consistently align with us. We work really closely with them. And they don't ask a lot from us, and we really struggle to deliver even the minimal things that they ask for.

So, for me, it seems like a no-brainer, that instead of dumping good money after bad in some of these organizations that don't serve our purposes, then we need to really focus on, you know, privileging our relationships with the countries that are there for us, like these Pacific countries that are strategically absolutely important for us. I mean, we really need to shore up our relationships. China is all over these countries and coming in and meeting whatever requests their leaders have, and we can barely get our COFA agreements in place with some of our closest allies. And we've gotta do better. We've gotta be a better ally to the countries that are good allies to us. And if we've learned anything from any of this...

Mary: We've got to help out...

Amb. Currie: What?

Mary: ...the countries that support us. We are coming up on our deadline. Thirty seconds, final thoughts from you, ambassador?

Amb. Currie: That's it. We've gotta be a better ally to the countries that are good allies to us.

Mary: Ambassador O'Brien, final thoughts. Thirty seconds.

Amb. O'Brien: Well, look, because the American people want change and they wanna win at the UN and other international organizations, we need a team of policy experts and diplomats. And I just tell people, look at this seminar. Mary, yourself, and Kelly, and Kim, and Alex, and Bridge, and Nadia. I mean, I don't know what Mike and I'll be doing, but you guys are the future of this country. And talk about the hard-nose diplomacy compared to what we're seeing now with America weakness. We wanna get back to peace with strength.

We need to have the personnel that, you know, exemplify peace with strength, and the folks in this seminar and that have participated in the past, Mike Waltz and Gallaghers, and Alex Grays, and others, together with people here tonight, that's the team that peers like Mike and I depend on to win for America. And so you want a team like what you're saying tonight, go elect a Republican in November.

Mary: Secretary Pompeo.

Sec. Pompeo: Let's see. No fuzzy-headedness. We can't love these institutions because they have fancy names. They are utilitarian institutions that need to be used in a way that deliver not only for the United States but for their central charters, for what it is they were designed to do. And if we can do that, if America doesn't lose its eye on that, then they will prove at least a modicum of utility for us as we move forward.

Mary: Modicum of utility. High hopes. I wanna thank our co-chairs, our seminar members, the Nixon Foundation, and all of you for watching. We'll be back on May 7th, but that's it for tonight's Nixon Seminar on Conservative Realism and National Security. I'm Mary Kissel. Goodnight.

[01:30:15]

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