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Washington, D.C.

Session 3 Panel Member
Dr. Sarah B. Sewall
Senior Lecturer in Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government,
Harvard University, and member of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board

DR. SARAH B. SEWALL: I want to thank IFPA. I want to thank Admiral McRaven for having this conference and inviting me to be with you. It's a pleasure. I guess my role on the panel is one of an outsider. But since nobody has really spoke to the NGO perspective and I do serve on an NGO board, I'll try to speak a little bit to how some of these issues might look from the NGO perspective.

It has been a long time since I've been in government and it has been a long time since I've lived in Washington. I think that both obscures and clarifies. But I have had the pleasure of being able to see in practice some of the magic that Special Operations can work. In fact, the last time I saw Admiral McRaven was seeing exactly that in Afghanistan. I was in the Philippines not too long ago. I've been to Colombia a couple of times and I've been to see JTF – Horn of Africa operations. So, I think from my perspective there is no question that what we've referred to sometimes in a glancing way as the neglected side of SOF is fulsome and robust and incredibly exciting as we think about the challenges that are out there for the twenty-first century.

But I think given my desire to always add value or pick up what might not be front and center on the table, I would like to pull a strand from Vice Admiral Leidig's comments, because he said something to the effect of when we have clear goals and when we are clear about where the overlap of our interests is with the overlap of our partners' interests, we can really make progress. And he spoke to the fact that we have to be selective because we can't do everything to the degree that we'd like to do it.

I guess my offerings in terms of what this means for partnerships lie at two different levels. One is a longstanding concern that connects to work that I've done in the counterinsurgency context, but it really has to do with the vulnerability of your choice of partner by way of nation state or by way of a military force or a security force with which you work.

So, when we talk about building partnership capacity, the place where we have to begin focusing on a partner is who it is that we're trying to strengthen. What do we know about them? How do we trace that Venn diagram of interest? How enduring is that Venn diagram of interest? What challenges and special opportunities exist because of the nature of that partner? And we don't always have control. There are many great examples of how we don't always have control of what occurs in the context of building partnership capacity.

And to step back even further in history and in time, when we think about the last time that the United States government was confronted at a strategic level with a global operating environment that seemed to have demand that exceeded our ability to supply, we created something called the Nixon Doctrine, which was all about enabling partners. It was all about working by, with, and through at the strategic level – with other states who would provide security in their areas. And there were some successes in that context. The shah of Iran is perhaps the signal failure from that context, because the partners with whom we partner may or may not turn out in retrospect to have been a good bet; and there is some of that that we can control in our choices and there is some that we can't control in our choices as things develop over time.

So, my first cautionary quote is before we become overly enamored of partnership capacity, we want to always keep front and center the question about who is this partner and what exactly is it that we are strengthening.

A second cautionary note, despite my broad enthusiasm for partnership capacity building, has to do with how we think about the interagency process and how we think



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about partners that are outside of the federal government. And I know it's shocking that gambling is going on here, but there is a fundamental reality that the different entities within the federal government have different missions. That's not to say that they aren't patriotic and they don't have a broad sense of responsibility and interest in the success of the United States, but they have different missions at varying levels, whether they're a service, whether they're an office, whether they're an agency.

So they see the world through the lens of that mission and they judge opportunities and they judge risks through the lens of that mission. So it shouldn't surprise us that people approach questions of partnership choice and capacity building and which capacities they would like to build differently. That's natural. And yet what we sometimes find is that natural tension that exists in terms of how we parse opportunities and challenges is not necessarily adjudicated well by the processes that we use to answer policy questions and the capabilities array that we have to use for implementation.

So, really to me the underlying question about partnerships is what is it that we are trying to do. In Washington, policy making sometimes risks coming to a lowest common denominator as an alphabet soup. But clarity and prioritization are absolutely essential when we talk about a partnership and we talk about building capacity, because unless we know what our most important goal is, we are likely to find ourselves inadvertently building things that are either antithetical to that goal or peripheral to that goal or not necessarily tracking closely enough our progress toward that central goal. That is not to suggest that that's easy, because much of what we want as a nation has to do with a fully functioning democracy that's very stable with a fast rising GDP and an inclusive political system and a constitution. We want everything, as we should. And yet in the policy-making process, with limited resources, we have to think about implementation. You have to make choices. There I think we have an enormous challenge.

So, in terms of differences, I want to just throw in a coda of a difference, because we've heard a little bit about the PM view of the world, and we've heard a little bit about the AID view of the world, a little bit about the private sector view of the world (although I think for those of you who want to think more critically about the private sector, read Steve Coll's recent book, because it's a different view on the private sector and what motivates the private sector than we necessarily think about when we're looking for that Venn diagram of overlapping interests).

From the NGO perspective, and I say this as someone who is on the board of Oxfam (but I'm not speaking for Oxfam in this capacity), the things that are most attractive and compelling from a humanitarian perspective about the strengths and the effectiveness of the Special Operations world is the work on the white side, that is in special warfare, that can and do create positive things. These good works, the humanitarian assistance and the development assistance, are precisely most problematic for the NGO community that considers themselves to be doing development and humanitarian assistance. And why? It's worth just taking a moment to think about it, because I've heard many of my friends in uniform throw up their hands in anger and frustration, not understanding how NGOs would not be embracing of food assistance or soccer balls or whatever it is.

But the reality is, and you see it in the documents – and I want to commend Admiral McRaven for his vision for 2020, because it puts us in a different place for this conversation. It's exactly where we need to be going. And he'll be the first person to say it's a work in progress and we're going to embrace partners in continuing to revise it.

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So, if we're thinking about humanitarian assistance and development assistance in the document, in the way we talk about it in the policy world, we talk about it politely and positively, as we should, but there is no question that it's instrumental. It's instrumental goodness. It's goodness to build a relationship, to foster the trust, to get the access, to enable the operation, to have the freedom of action. It's instrumental. That's what the NGO community objects to. For them, something that is called humanitarian should be good in and of itself. It should have no strings attached. It should be need-based, not political-alignment based, not outcome-based.

I just argued we have to be clear about our outcomes. I don't want us doing things just to be good when we're spending federal dollars in the context of solving critical problems. I want them to achieve their goals. I don't want them to be just for their own sake. But if you work for a non-governmental organization and you do humanitarian work, you do it because it is humanitarian. You do it where they need it most, even if they're the bad guys. So from a SOCOM perspective, there can be tension with a non-governmental organization that wants to do what it sees as its neutral and humanitarian mission or a developmental organization that says, "I want to work with the local actors. I don't care if you don't like them. They're legitimate local actors and I have to think about sustainability when I'm focusing on my scarce development dollars."

Those kinds of tensions will inherently exist. There may be places you can find a Venn diagram for an overlap, but my guess is that if you're in that Venn diagram overlap for very long you're probably with a fringe organization within the context of the non-governmental community, and you probably ought to make sure you've stepped back and done your due diligence about your partner, because the mainstream development and humanitarian relief organizations believe very strongly in humanitarian space and neutrality and their work for its own good, not as an instrumental end. And I report that to you. I say that without judgment and I say that again as someone who believes that we ought to have instrumental ends for government programs. So, that was my little coda that I wanted to bring in (in terms of the NGO community) that I think we lost.

The final point that I'd like to touch on very briefly, when we think about what it is that we want to be doing, when we try to articulate our goals as a government, as an interagency, as a collection of persons working on the ground – the tensions among those goals are very real. And that's a problem, because it's very hard to say, "I may not want to prioritize an election and democracy right now, that may not be my top priority." But we have to be clear on that. That's a whole-of-government problem. That's not a Special Operations problem. In fact, the Special Operations community should probably be not speaking out much on that question, because that's a policy question that lies elsewhere. But the prioritization has to happen. We don't do it very well as a government. If it is done better, then the 2020 vision and the Special Operations roles will fit better because there will be greater clarity about how to prioritize what *they* do. That's not a uniform military problem.

But where we do have a problem that transcends the civilian and the military worlds, it has to do with our theory of change. It has to do with the paucity of what we know about what works. I know everyone has their anecdote. I know everyone has their story. I've heard a lot of them. They're great stories. But where is our database? Where are our definitive lessons learned? Where have we captured sort of our best practices and identified with which variables, whether you're talking

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about political system, cultural pieces, terrain, climate, how do we know what works? We don't. And this goes across the spectrum. It's not just about – we know more about training military forces than we do about building democracy, than we do about enhancing human rights, than we do about a whole lot of stuff. Once you figure out the goal, the “how” is still another piece that we need to do a lot of work on as an entire U.S. government. And I think some agencies, and I would suggest that AID is among them, have done more work and are more advanced in that and can help teach other parts of the federal government how to do that. But that theory of change, so that we're not just looking at inputs, and so that we're not saying when we're doing our annual reports, well, gosh, we were so successful because we contacted this guy and we got to know him, so we got invited to that meeting; and then we got invited to another meeting. Well, where is the change? I get that you go to meetings. Where is the change? What are we evaluating?

And this brings me to a third difficulty that we wrestle with at Oxfam all of the time, and I know AID wrestles with it. Every organization wrestles with it, the military does too, but not often in these broad, grand ways: monitoring and evaluation in learning. We don't have the right tools for that in this spectrum of twenty-first-century challenges that we're trying to tackle. I don't expect us to. But that's where we need to be thinking about going. And it's the database that we ought to be building now.

And even if we start just on the military side capturing that information, that will be an enormous contribution, because the kinds of problems that we're looking at are going to be with us for decades to come. So, we have a long time to be learning from the investment in creating the actual data from which to learn.

I guess I want to echo the plugs that were made before about prevention; but my final point I guess will be about planning and the cacophony of planning processes and how much improved it is from when I was last in government in the mid-1990s, but still how really terrible it is. And it's terrible for a lot of very good reasons that are no single person's or agency's fault. But we have, if you look at it, we have moved forward in developing additional planning processes, and we have sort of long term, we have short term and we have the ambassador in charge of this, and GCC in charge of this, and we have the TSOCs doing this. We may have people within the military planning against each other, and we may have different parts of an agency not planning together. We just heard Ambassador Barton talking about how he is going to be planning and they're doing it with SOCOM, and then we hear State PM is actually the interface between DOD and the State Department. So, we've got a lot of opportunities, but we don't – and we've got a Global Sync Conference, we've got tactical, we've got all kinds of stuff going on, but I'm not sure we know what we're really trying to do and who has got the ball. So, I think there is a lot of room for an interagency effort to clarify and simplify perhaps, what planning processes are out there and to help people who are working very hard at planning and trying to think through the integration of effort, trying to think through goals and roles and missions. Help them do it in a way where they know where their boundaries are.

We may not need to stay in our lanes, but we do need to be able to see the lanes and know when they're supposed to come together. So, that's a sort of hodgepodge of reflections from an outsider with a little bit of an NGO view. Again, I want to thank you all very much for having this conference and this conversation.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DR. CHARLES PERRY: All right. Thank you very much, everybody on the panel. It has been, as I said, a very rich discussion. We just have a few more minutes for some questions, if people would like to ask some questions. So, please raise your hand if you'd like to ask. I see one person right here.

Q: Hello, Hale Laughlin(?), with Johns Hopkins University. This morning there was discussion on the panel, for instance, examples where we recognize when we provide train, advise, assist type of activities we have to make sure that there is institutional development in the MOD and the MOI to provide the sustainment to support that effect. In the international development community, there is general understanding for decreases in corruption, increases in transparency of government institutions, especially in the developing world that receives aid and assistance. And I really guess I have a two-part question that I can direct.

One would go more to the State side and one would go to Ms. Sewall on the NGO side. For Ms. Sewall on the NGO side, my question would be how does the mainstream NGO community as you characterize it, sort of deal with the moral hazard of providing humanitarian, non-instrumental aid to the people with governments that should be providing that service and thereby sort of providing longevity to those bad actor governments? And to the State side – and these are related – what would be the perspective of criterion standard based foreign policy in a lot of these places? So, at the same time we're providing some military assistance and military train, advise, assist security sector reform type of activities, it's linked directly in a carrot and stick fashion to making sure that the institutions develop along with those operational and tactical capabilities. Thanks.

DR. SARAH B. SEWALL: I think it's fair to say that from the perspective of most NGO actors, the thought that we would penalize a baby dying of diarrhea because to do so would be to somehow perpetuate the regime hundreds of miles away that we didn't like, is anathema. It simply wouldn't occur to them to frame the question that way. So, I think the short answer is that the humanitarian perspective is very short term and very immediate and very human, and it doesn't speak to the broader political science, second-order-effect questions that you intimate in your question.