

**SAMANTHA POWER**  
July 12, 2006

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** For the camera can you tell us your name.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Sure. Samantha Power.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And can you tell us your background, the relevant portions of your background.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Journalist in the former Yugoslavia, in the early '90s researched U.S. responses to the major genocides of the 20th century, which included the on-fall campaign against the Kurds in northern Iraq. And professor at the Kennedy School of Government. Teach future generations of U.S. public servants. And worked as an advisor this last year to Barack Obama. Writing a book about Sergio Vieira de Mello who was killed in Iraq August 19, 2003.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** What do you think the United States should have done about Iraq starting in say the mid 1980's when his quasi genocidal tendencies first became evident?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Well, I think when a-- when a government starts to murder it's own people-- actually when a government is torturing it's own people and then begins even just isolated killing, even if it's not genocidal, that behavior should factor in to the conduct of American foreign policy. You know, you should sort of roll up your sleeves, scratch your head and say, gosh, if our policy is predicated on engagement being a recipe for a kinder gentler dictator, which was the essence of American policy, when a government starts to line people up and mow them down with machine gun fire or use chemical weapons it should cause a-- the U.S. government, western governments--

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Starting in the mid 1980's when Saddam Hussein moved from torturing his own people and multiple extra judicial killings to outright massacres against the Kurds in particular but against of course also political opponents as he construed them, that was an occasion when the U.S. policy should have revisited. And the policy of course at that time was that the enemy of our enemy is our friend, that Iran was the greater regional threat to U.S. interests. And that it was in the

U.S. interest to-- buttress Saddam Hussein's regime so as to insure that Iran did not emerge as a regional heavyweight.

When those massacres occurred however that was a moment in which the United States really should have said, well, wait a minute, we-- we actually can't trust that engagement with a person who's capable of lining up his citizens and mowing them down in this fashion is going to yield anything positive in the medium or long term for U.S. interest, and nor of course is it gonna be good for the people living in Iraq.

So our policies, which at that time amounted to the sharing of intelligence, the supplying of credits to buy American farm products, export, import credits and the like should have been revisited. And-- and when a government is murdering it's own people that's a decent time to say, you know what, maybe we should have a line in the sand. Which is that even if that government is allowed to stay in place it is not going to receive credits to buy American farm products. It is not gonna receive intelligence or other assets that are just gonna make it easier for it to relocate it's funds to assist it in fact in the conduct of these murderous operations.

So I think the-- the-- the most important response to massacres is actually to gather the principles in the conduct of American foreign policy and say what do we stand for as the United States, what do we want the history books to show we did when chemical weapons were used to burn the skin off young children in northern Iraq. Are there policy tools and policy levers that we have at our disposal so we could try to change his conduct? Do we have any leverage, do we have any carrots, do we have any sticks?

But most crucially is the-- are the human consequences of American decision making factoring in to our cost benefit analysis. What is so striking about the Reagan administration's response to these massacres, to chemical weapons use, is that it's really summed up in-- in a dreadful but very, very telling State Department document from 1987. Which said human rights and chemical weapons use aside, comma, our interests run roughly parallel to those of Iraq.

I mean I think-- so if one had to sum up how one would redo American foreign policy over the

course of the last several centuries, frankly, but certainly in the 1980's visa vi Saddam Hussein, it would be to never be able to put the phrase human rights and chemical weapons use aside behind a coma. In other words how are our interests exactly going to run in parallel with those of Saddam Hussein if he's murdering his own people and if he is using chemical weapons use.

So to remove the comma and-- and to actually try to determine what leverage we have to try to get him to change his conduct and to punish that conduct as well, because it's not just enough for it to be ceased. It also one has to be held accountable for it. And of course the United States did exactly the opposite.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Do you think that in retrospect it was a mistake to not go further in 1991?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Well I think that in 1991-- this is a tricky question. I think in 19-- on the one hand in 1991 the United States had the world at it's back, the wind in it's sails, the Iraqi army was in tatters. And it's very tempting to say, you know, had we gone all the way to Baghdad and ridden that momentum, the momentum of the battlefield victory, the momentum of international support, this sort of golden moment in transition between the Cold War world and the post Cold War world, and now the post post Cold War world.

But it's tempting to think that what would have awaited us in Baghdad would have been more stable, more welcoming, more inviting, less resentful, than what welcome us 12 years hence. But I don't know that we know that. I mean at the time my-- my concern was that Saddam Hussein had been left with the tools to continue to commit further atrocities against his own people. In other words to not disqualify him from using helicopter gun ships, you know, in the peace settlement that was done with him, and as a term of surrender, was further evidence that we again weren't factoring in the welfare of the Iraqi people into our negotiations with him or our dealings with him.

And-- and I think we see that throughout. It was the invasion of Kuwait, a sort of sin against statehood, sin against the national order, rather than a regard for Iraqi's or a regard for the Kurds or even a regard frankly for the people of Kuwait.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** I was also gonna ask you, combine responses if you wish or-- or respond separately. Do you think that it's coincidence or not that-- that many of the people in the current administration responsible for our recent and current Iraq policy are the same people who were responsible for those decisions in the 1980's and-- and also in 1991?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Well, one of the-- the elements that kind of unites the U.S. relationship to Iraq across time is a disregard or just a non-consideration of the welfare of-- of the Iraqi people. So whether that is, you know, in the mid 1980's, you know, seeing Iraq as a kind of billiard ball up against Iran and not opening it up and having much regard for how Saddam was treating his own people, or whether it was the use of chemical weapons, his use of chemical weapons and our decision to double our aid to his regime in terms of farm credits in the wake of chemical weapons use.

Or in 1991 when the decision was made to respond to his act of aggression against Kuwait you still didn't see any debate in policy circles about the Iraqi's, any opening up of the system and-- and consideration of how this moment, this window of opportunity, might be used, you know, and the leverage might be used to ameliorate the conditions in which Iraqi's were living. In fact as you know the sanctions package was put in place which in turn-- you know, continued it's neglect of how Iraqi's were actually living.

The use-- the-- the peace settlement and the decision to allow Saddam Hussein to maintain his helicopter gun ships, despite the fact that they had been used, you know, to dispense chemical weapons and to attack Kurds in northern Iraq. I mean all of these reflect a basic neglect of the welfare of those who lived within this society. Who just-- Iraq had become a proper noun. You know, it wasn't a country with people in it.

And so flashing forward then 12 years when you see the same architects of those policies on the one hand talking about getting right what they had gotten wrong back in 1991, you know, finishing the job, you know it was tempting to say, well, maybe they've learned. You know, maybe-- maybe they realize that-- that, you know, you-- you-- that the way a regime treats it's own people is in fact a very good indicator of the kind of long term ally that that regime can be to the United States.

You know, maybe they've come to understand the link between human rights and national security. Maybe they regret calling on Kurds and Shiites to rise up and then-- and then leaving them hanging in the lurch when Saddam Hussein cracked down against those rebellions. Maybe, maybe, maybe. But there wasn't much in the public debate, and certainly there has proven to be very little internally in 2002 and 2003 that reflected any greater regard for the Iraqi's. In other words Iraq-- the war in Iraq in 2003 was no more about advancing the welfare of the Iraqi people than the decision to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait was. Or then the decision to double our aid to his regime after he used chemical weapons.

There were certain individuals within the Bush administration who I think were moved by Iraqi welfare. You know, like Paul Wolfowitz, of course famously has said that he was involving weapons of mass destruction and the link with terrorism as kind of technicalities as a way of broadening the public appeal of this war, when in fact, you know, what he was very interested in is a kind of humanitarian intervention. This is what he has said.

But almost no one else in President Bush's inner circle was motivated, primarily anyway, by the conditions in which Iraqi's were living under. And my worry and the reason that I oppose the war in Iraq, although I agonized about-- about what my position should be because of Saddam Hussein's brutality, I mean genocidal brutality. But in the end I tipped against the war, I wish I could say I, you know, sort of validly, you know, dogmatically knew that the war was gonna turn out as bad as it was, I mean I had no special insight on it.

But I tipped against the war because it seemed that the-- these-- that when officials are making policy and they are not motivated by attention to citizen welfare or human suffering or the human condition it's gonna show in the conduct of an intervention, it's gonna show in the conduct of war. In other words, you know, some liberal hawks or humanitarian interventionist of the 1990's who were in favor of the war said, you know, you can't make decisions about whether to go to war or whether to support a war on the basis of the company you keep.

They-- you heard this a lot from many of my colleagues and people I respect a great deal. But I

would say, but wait a minute, isn't the company you keep kind of important, because the company you keep, namely Don Rumsfeld and-- and Dick Cheney and others, they're gonna be the ones who decide whether to park the tank in front of the hospital or the oil ministry. Like it is relevant who the company is that you're keeping.

And so the point of the humanitarian hawks who supported the war was, look, even if the Bush administration isn't motivated by humanitarian or human rights concerns, so what. You know, you've got break eggs to make omelet. At least the effect of this war will be to liberate the Iraqi people even if that's not the motivation for the war. But I was very worried about the predictive power, because we've seen it in other interventions, of this other set of motives.

In other words if it were about weapons of mass destruction, if it were about oil, if it were about finishing what George Bush's father had started, if it was about Israel, you know, if all of these things were higher up on the list chances are the Iraqi people would yet again, you know, for the enumerable, you know, the umpteenth time be last on the list of things to look out for in the planning. And that that would be very detrimental to their long term welfare.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And so if this had been done differently by different people with different views, concerns and ideals, would you have supported a war to depose Saddam Hussein?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Well, because war is-- is so dreadful, and having lived through a much tamer war in fact in-- in Bosnia in the early '90s I really do believe the-- the propaganda on war that it should be a last resort. It seemed to me that there were two axis on which one would decide whether or not to go to war. One was the national security axis, you know, did he pose a clear and present and imminent danger to U.S. citizens or to the U.S. welfare. One. And then, two, the human rights or humanitarian axis, did he pose a clear and present and imminent dangers to large numbers of Iraqi's.

And certainly in 1987 or '88 he would have been in the red zone, you know, sirens blaring on the humanitarian and the human rights axis. And I would have been probably at least would have made some effort to draw attention to this and to-- and to urge some kind of international response and even potentially humanitarian intervention if he was committing genocide as he was at that time.

The conditions of course in 2003 were very, very different. And-- it was-- in a sense a-- a post genocidal state. So the fact that he had committed genocide was pretty predictive. He was capable of doing that again. One had to be on the lookout. And tyranny is no fun. Especially tyranny where torture and extra judicial murder is a-- you know, a routine occurrence. So it seemed to me on the human rights and the humanitarian he was very much on-- in the orange zone and-- and, you know, sort of moving up and down in-- in-- in the danger zone, I mean in a very, very serious place.

But it wasn't-- it didn't seem to me enough to override the will of the international community, such as it was represented at the UN. And I felt like ultimately the way you make a judgment about when-- when to go to war and to risk what war entails is to try, and we're all-- it's guess work largely, but to try to gage what the cost and benefits are gonna be to the Iraqi people, who seem like they would only benefit. It was hard to imagine that their lives could get that much worse, even though one had to be concerned about the people who were making war, the cost and benefits to the region. And frankly the costs and benefits to the United States.

And-- and so ironically-- this war seemed to me the wrong war, because given how un-liked we were before we went to war it seemed to me we were gonna generate many more enemies than we were gonna neutralize. So as-- even though I'm a human rights advocate and a human rights professor, it was actually in the end a combination of a concern that they wouldn't do the job right and look out for the Iraqi's but primarily a concern that being this despised and then in a sense, you know, tearing up the envelope of the international system, tearing up the envelope of the world and alienating so many people who were already predisposed against us seemed very, very bad in a long term for U.S. national security.

Now if a different cast of characters had been in place, characters who hadn't abrogated five international treaties, you know, in the 18 months that preceded the war, a different cast of characters who could have gone to the UN and been given a different hearing. I mean had their arguments be taken ser-- seriously in the international arena, which I don't think they really were. Not just because they were bad arguments, proved to be bad arguments, but because the disposition was very much against the Bush administration in the run up to the war.

Had you been able to get again the-- the sort of wind in your sails, the world at your back, you know, the kind of sort of exploitation of past interventions, learning about nation building that had gone array in the 1990's, elaborate planning for the-- the post conflict period, then maybe your odds of success would have been higher and you would have done far less damage to U.S. national security, to regional stability and to international law.

So in that sense, you know, maybe one would have tipped for the war given how horrific Saddam's regime was. But that was nowhere in the cards. And-- and, you know, part of the frustration I think that-- that many of us who were fierce critics of American appeasement of Saddam Hussein in the 1980's on the one hand but critics of the decision to go to war on the other, we felt a great frustration because no other country was really stepping up and telling any kind of story about how life might actually be altered for people living inside Iraq.

So the French and the Germans were-- were happy to-- to pooh-pooh, you know, the American war gaming and war planning, but the entire sort of international agenda was consumed with one issue, which was weapons of mass destruction. And there was almost no debate at all about how if the war did not go forward about how the Iraqi peoples-- the Iraqi people would live in conditions other than those that-- that they lived in at the time of the war, which was conditions of severe repression with the specter of genocide hanging over their head.

So perhaps if some cast of characters had come along and said it's about the Iraqi's principally, Saddam Hussein we have evidence that he's about to commit genocide and or he has started. You know, I mean-- so there-- there are fact patterns where one can imagine the urgency warranting the risk. And also you can imagine the risk being minimized by a greater international consensus. But those circumstances were no where near present in-- the spring of 2003.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And how much differently do you think this could have turned out if it had done competently as opposed to the way that it actually was done? I should say competently and-- and with some regard to the welfare of the Iraqi people, or greater regard for the welfare of the Iraqi people.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** I think that-- you know, when you-- when you make war in the name of universal principles, which the Bush administration did, even though it was motivated by pretty particularist interests, you know, namely American concerns. But it waged war in the name of liberation right from the start. The more that you invoke principle the more important it is for you to do so in cluttered company.

I mean it's sort of an obvious point really about-- about legitimacy. The-- the debate about whether to get UN sanction for the war really boiled down in-- in American circles to, you know, does the world support us, are we-- you know, why do they hate us and are they gonna hate us more. We didn't really think through properly the fact-- the degree to which international legitimacy buys you a great cushion domestically.

In other words all the legitimacy conversations were about the United States *visa vi* it's allies and *visa vi* it's foes externally. But so-- so there are several issues that, you know, or several features of the American occupation that-- that are devastatingly troubling. One is the shoddy planning, and that owed something to, you know, a naive belief in America's sort of intrinsic goodness and how obvious a liberation was gonna be for the Iraqi's. And also over-learning the lessons of Kosovo and Afghanistan, a belief that war is just easy when you have-- when you are the hyper power.

It also of course stemmed from a desire not to have a difficult domestic debate about what the cost would actually be. So it was also quite a deliberate strategy of downplaying what-- what one might encounter in a post conflict situation. So all of that would have had to have been done differently. One would have had to really predicate your planning on worse case planning rather than best case scenarios.

But it would have also required a very different relationship to international organizations. Firstly to-- a recognition that having international organizations on your side buys you good will with those you're about to encounter. But maybe as importantly a desire to mind international organizations for the lessons that they had learned in the previous decade, conducting operations much less complicated it would turn out than Iraq. But far more complicated than anything the United States had been a part of.

So, you know, if-- if you had a group of individuals who believed in international organizations, believed in international law, were sort of studying not Japan and Germany, you know, but-- but Somalia, Liberia, East Timor, Kosovo, Bosnia, you know, these-- these cases that were pooh-poohed, you know, by the most senior U.S. planners as kind of soft irrelevant non national interest 1990's social work, which is how Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described that kind of work, nation building work.

So if you had had individuals that took those lessons seriously maybe you certainly would have improved the odds of-- of-- making-- of having an occupation, giving the occupation a greater grace period of enlisting more moderate Iraqi's to the cause of stability and not driving so many into the insurgency. If you'd had-- if you'd tended to the issues of policing, if there hadn't been the looting, if there'd been a plan for, you know, blanketing the country with security forces, again preferably from other countries and not just from the United States, then you wouldn't have had people turning to sectarian militias as their sources of neighborhood security.

So if, if, if, if. But to be clear, and-- and the other nation building experiments that were done in the 1990's were relatively straight forward and relatively easy compared to Iraq in terms of Iraq scale and-- and complexity. But this business is hard. I mean very few of these cases go smoothly. And-- that's why it's a very bad idea to invade a country unless again the genocide looms or unless there's-- it poses approximate threat to you and your interests.

You know, would we have vastly improved our odds as an international community of succeeding, of getting a grace period with the Iraqi's if we had international legitimacy, if we had others by our side. If we focused on security, security, security and security and then began to focus on the free market and Halliburton and all of things that we sort of led with. Of course we would have improved our odds. But would Iraq, you know, be a stable democracy today? You know, I think it's anybody guess. But if you go in and tear up somebody's country you certainly have a responsibility to maximize your odds even knowing humbly how difficult it is to operate in other people's countries.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** And why-- why don't you say a little bit about what you've learned

about how the UN conducted itself after the 2003 war and how the United States behaved towards the UN.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** It's totally fascinating to me. So-- when President Bush went to the United Nations and tried to make the case for war in Iraq he did so I think quite brilliantly invoking prior UN Security Council resolutions. And what he did was he-- he almost taunted the organization. He said, you know, do you really want to become another-- a debating society. He invoked the League of Nations and just said, you know, you're about to become as irrelevant as the League of Nations if you allow your resolutions to-- to just sort of wither in the air.

If they're just-- if they're worth nothing more than the piece of paper that they're written on. And one of the people who listened to that and I think was really kind of spooked by it was Kofi Annan and the Secretary General of the UN. Who himself in the 21st century is concerned as many UN be-- believers, even true believers are, about UN relevance.

So here comes President Bush saying you're not gonna be relevant, you're not gonna be relevant. You know, the world is passing you by. And of course it's not Kofi Annan who was gonna weight on the legitimacy or the legality of the war. But it was the UN flag that was going to either be soiled or be ignored-- if President Bush chose to go to war.

And-- and so when Bush and the British plowed ahead, went to war, you could have felt the fear and the insecurity within the United Nations in ways that I don't think people outside the UN really appreciated. It wasn't just about Iraq, it was about the future of a global organization. It was about the future of international law. It was about a precedent that had been set that any country within the UN could now run with invoking what the United States had done. Which is basically summoning national interest and saying, okay, we understand that we can't clear the Security Council but we've done our own balancing act, we're not gonna submit ourselves to the so called global test and we're gonna go for it.

We-- we-- we have made our own calculation. There was terror that this was gonna become the 21st century way of doing business. Now in the wake of the war of course, the-- of mission

accomplished, in the wake of the conflict phase of the war, the traditional conflict phase of the war, President Bush decided to return to the UN. And this to some degree was the State Department getting the quid for the quo. The State Department kind of remained more mute than it should have in the run up to the war.

And the trade off was that in the aftermath of the war there would be an effort to bring the international community back into Iraq. Now from President Bush's perspective this was very much in accordance with the U.S. interest, just as going to war without the UN was in the U.S. interest, now it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world if you could get some Fijian police, some, you know, Indian and Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

You know, he'd even be willing to throw a few reconstruction contracts, you know, to the French. If that was what was required to get troops from other countries in so the United States forces could get out. So the Bush administration went back to the UN, a resolution was passed that-- that where the price of admission for those other countries that had been shut out was acknowledging the legitimacy of the occupation.

This was resolution 1483 passed in May of 2003. Now in-- this was sort of a moment in time where it looked like the war had been won, it looked like the-- there was gonna be a reconstruction bounty for companies across the globe, specifically of course for American companies. And both the Europeans who had opposed the war and the Americans were delighted with this compromise. Because it meant that basically we could kiss and makeup. And-- and the lowest point in U.S. European relations, you know, since the second World War could be overcome and we could begin to move on.

This UN resolution was an olive branch. Now Kofi Annan was so concerned about relevance, about UN relevance, that even though the UN itself, so not the countries that comprised the UN but the secretariat. You know, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping, even though they weren't given any meaningful function in the post war administration, even though it was very, very clear that the United States and the British were gonna be running Iraq, Kofi Annan said, well, wait, if we can get a foothold in there it's incredibly important for us to show the UN flag.

Because the UN flag again has been spit on by the Americans. We've got to reassert it and show that we are relevant in the 21st century. So even though the UN had been given almost nothing meaningful to do other than to feed people, no political role, and of course Iraq's entire future was gonna be settled on the basis of how that political process unfolded. So the only relevant role to have was a political role. But that role was to be had by Paul Bremer and to be had by the Pentagon ultimately.

Even though the UN was given nothing meaningful to do Kofi Annan seized the opportunity and decided to send in his very best troubleshooter, Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Brazilian diplomat who had been Bremer in Kosovo and been Bremer in East Timor. He'd been the kind of viceroy, quasi colonial overlord or administrator. And he had learned incredibly valuable lessons about how not to do nation building. And one of those lessons was don't over-rely on exiles. Another lesson was have elections sooner rather than later. Hemorrhage the power that you're given by the international community. Because if you hoard all the power you will hoard all the blame.

You know, he had all of these-- because he had made the mistakes that-- that the United States would go on to make. Policing and the importance of security were-- were paramount in Sergio Vieira de Mello's mind because he had-- he had lived through circumstances where there was a security vacuum into which hardliners always step. A breach into which they will always step and assert themselves.

So he had sort of come from making mistakes in other nation building. So Kofi Annan said let me send my best, if anybody can carve out a bigger role for the UN and restore UN relevance it's my guy, it's Sergio Vieira de Mello. Sergio for his part said, okay, if I'm gonna go with this meaningless little role, you know, it's almost like a gnat that would be swatted away by the Americans, this big overlord, 150,000 troops. And, you know, the-- the weight of the hyper power.

If I'm gonna be this little mosquito sort of flying around I'm gonna bring my best. So Sergio then assembled the best repatriation refugee person, best transitional justice person, the best refugee person, the best person on policing, and-- and pulled together was he called his A-team. And so the idea was if the A-team went maybe just on a merits Bremer who was new to nation building might turn to them and actually harness some of this expertise that had been amassed the hard way, namely through

mistakes in the 1990's.

Initially there was some-- Vieira De Mello was able to make some inroads. Bremer was trying to pull together a governing body or transitional, you know, really a figurehead body or a rubberstamping body. And Sergio had done-- had assembled similar bodies in Kosovo and East Timor. There were certain parties in Iraq like the cleric Sistani who wouldn't meet with the Americans but was willing to work with the UN.

So initially Sergio was able to play a kind of in between role, in between American interests on the one hand and the interests of a variety of Iraqi factions on the other. But as soon as the governing council was assembled, as soon as Bremer had made use of Sergio, had made use of the UN he had almost no time for the United Nations. And so on issues like detention policy, hoodings was one of the - the issues that Sergio raised again and again with Bremer and with General Sanchez, the hoodings of prisoners. At that time there was no knowledge of dogs and torture.

But Sergio was-- was very early on on to the recognition that if there were no procedures, if you had contractors who were unaccountable, if you had no clear command and control, and if you weren't-- if there were no organized visits by international human rights organizations excesses were gonna happen. Bremer would hear none of it. I mean Americans of course weren't capable in Bremer's mind of committing atrocities of the kind that were later revealed.

But-- but what Sergio lived through was two months-- two months of in effect being used as a vehicle to get to certain segments of the Iraqi society, and then for his last month what he endured was not having his phone calls returned. And-- being treated as-- precisely as irrelevant as the UN Security Council had been treated in the run up to the war in Iraq.

One of the things that Sergio did that is very poignant in retrospect is that recognizing that the Americans were hoarding or sort of-- sorry. One of the things that Sergio did that is very, very poignant in retrospect is that seeing that the United States had boarded itself up in the green zone and was not accessing the Iraqi street, seeing that it was taking instructions from the Pentagon but not actually being solicited of Iraqi opinion, Sergio created a structure in Iraq that was precisely the opposite of the green

zone.

You might call it the anti green zone. And he made UN headquarters the hub of-- Iraqi complaint. There would be long lines of people outside the green zone but they couldn't get in in order to register their complaints about missing family members or about, you know, tanks that had, you know, bulldozed through their homes, or about low flying helicopters or about the demobilization of the army, de-Baathification complaints.

You'd have these long, long lines right outside the green zone but they could not make their complaints felt. In-- in the UN compound by contrast it was incredibly porous. If you wanted to complain the UN was-- was very, very eager to hear your complaint and Sergio saw it as his role to relay those complaints to Bremer at the highest levels in the hopes that some of these things would get tended to before an insurgency took root.

And unfortunately that very accessibility, the fact that, you know, Iraqi generals who had been disbanded and-- and weren't being paid, people whose family members were in detention and who were complaining about torture and so on, the very ease with which they were able to access UN officials within the UN compound that ease made it also very, very easy for a suicide bomber to access Sergio and the compound itself.

And on August 19th, 2003 in what is now known as the UN's 9/11 a large Russian made truck pulled right outside Sergio Vieira De Mello's window and set off just a huge amount of explosives. The entire southwestern corner of the UN building collapsed, 23 people were killed. Sergio was under the rubble and alive for more than three hours awaiting rescue. But of course even though the United States had predicated it's war on Iraq in Iraq-- sorry. Even though the United States had predicated it's war in Iraq on a link between Saddam Hussein and terrorism no prewar planning had been done for a terrorist attack on a civilian target. None.

So there was no search and rescue capacity whatsoever in the U.S. military. Everything was made up on the fly, on the day of the attack itself. It was the first attack of any consequence on a soft target. And so Sergio and others paid the price, in Sergio's case with his life for the shoddy or

nonexistent American planning. And with that attack the UN presence in Iraq was scaled way down. Other civilian institutions that might have been tempted to come in and try to mitigate the effect of the occupation, mitigate some of the suffering in Iraq, they began to think about packing their bags.

And then over the course of the next two months the same network of insurgents probably under Zarqawi began striking one by one by one against soft targets. Including the international community for the Red Cross, the Turkey embassy, you know, assassinating diplomats and aid workers and others. And so by the end of 2003 there was almost no international civilian presence to speak of. And so all you had then was this ever more fortified green zone. And those same Iraqi's with lots of complaints but no place to lodge them.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** One of the things that I've been told by somebody who worked for De Mello during that time was that he and a couple of his senior political aids-- found themselves to some extent sought out to some extent were sought out by the embryonic insurgency. And spoke with--

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Yeah.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** --a lot of these people. And found that although they were certainly nationalistic that it was possible to speak with them, negotiate with them, and that--

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Yeah.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Do you know anything about that?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Definitely. No, of course. Sergio had a-- had his tentacles in places that the Americans either couldn't reach or did-- showed no interest in reaching. When Bremer issued the order to demobilize the Iraqi army a number of the most senior generals came to the Canal Hotel, to UN headquarters, and made an appeal to Vieira De Mello to-- to try to pre-- prevail upon Bremer to rescind this order, or at a minimum to pay these officers who had been demobilized.

And they were very explicit that the consequence of letting this order stand and of marginalizing this incredibly powerful segment of society would be an insurgency. They were incredibly explicit. One of Sergio's senior aids, a Lebanese diplomat named Hassan Salameh, turned to his colleague as the generals walked away after one of their meetings and said, "I see bullets in their eyes, I see bullets in their

eyes." And-- and these generals were very, very explicit. If-- if-- you know, if there was no place for them in Iraqi society, if they weren't able to feed their families, and if there was one-- in their mind one source of that marginalization and that misery, and that was the Americans, they were gonna take matters into their own hands.

The other sort of en-- point of entree that Sergio had that the Americans didn't have was in the Shiite religious community. And again he was able to meet with Sistani and at a time when the Americans thought that they could get away with, you know, passing edicts and administrative laws without consulting religious elements within the society. So Sergio I think played some constructive role in enlisting Sistani in the cause of stabilization. And that was something the Americans were not doing on their own.

Where Sergio had no contacts though at the time that he died was with the Al Qaeda elements, with the foreign fighters and foreign insurgents. And in the end it is much more likely that he was killed and that the UN was blown up by foreign Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda cousin terrorist networks that exist around the globe than he was blown up by those Iraqi's that he had engaged who would later join the insurgency.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Do you know if De Mello had any contact with Sistani with regard to the disbanding of the army?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** No, he didn't. When the-- yeah, I mean this is not even worth answering camera. But he-- the army was disbanded at the beginning of June, you know, just after Bremer arrived. And Sergio didn't meet with--

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** Late May actually. May 23rd.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** May 23rd. Okay. When did Bremer arrive?

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** May-- May 11th.

**SAMANTHA POWER:** Okay, right, right. Okay, so yeah Bremer had been there a few weeks. So, yeah, the-- the Army had been long disbanded by the time he went and met with Sistani. And they only had one meeting and it was in late July. And it was much more focused on the drafting of the

Constitution and on the issue of elections. So it was on at that time, you know, Bremer was still under the illusion that Noah Feldman could draft the Iraqi Constitution. And-- and Sistani basically told Sergio that he was gonna issue a Fatwa on Noah-- Noah Feldman's head. And Sergio came back and relayed to Bremer and Bre-- but it took months for Bremer to actually rethink the sequencing of the handover and-- and of the Constitution.

It wouldn't be until Brahimi got involved in 2004 that-- that Bremer started to finally apply the lesson that Sergio had learned in these other places. Which was that, you know, the only way to be present in someone else's country is to-- is to hand over power sooner rather than later. And-- and have the resentments that are inevitable in any kind of post conflict situation be channeled toward legitimate local actors rather than through foreign occupiers.

**CHARLES FERGUSON:** When-- how frequently did-- was De Mello able to speak with Bremer and-- and did he think that he had any impact on Bremer's thinking do you know?

**SAMANTHA POWER:** That's a great question. When-- when Sergio first got to Iraq Bremer was a little bit at sea in terms of-- thinking through the transitional process. And-- and Sergio had ideas that Bremer had never heard before. Again, keep in mind that none of the architects of America's policy in Iraq were-- were terribly respectful of UN operations in the 1990's.

And so, you know, talk of transitional councils and exiles and transitional justice and these things that were sort of household terms of art that had been carefully studied if not terribly well done in the 1990's, all these were kind of foreign terms to-- to-- to Bremer. And when Sergio first got there largely just through force of personality and-- and through charm and because he was-- he had this kind of technocratic side to his personality where he brought real skills. You know, he brought the goods of having governed in a way that almost no one on the CPA did.

Bremer I think gave-- began to give him the time of day. Initially Bremer was very, very skeptical. You know, thought, oh, the UN, I mean the UN, you know, didn't authorize this war, the UN-- oil for food, the scandals, the weapons inspections, the nation building social work of the 1990's. Uh, the UN, what does the UN have to offer? But when he actually got to know Sergio the person, and

this is what Kofi Annan knew would happen, he had a lot more time for the UN as embodied in this one individual. Because Sergio just knew so much about the kinds of issues that Bremer was confronting.

And Bremer had no one to consult with back in Washington who knew anything about nation building or governing a society and transition. So there was about a-- a five or six period where Bremer actually had a lot of time for Sergio. Didn't mean that Sergio's views were acted upon. One of the things that Bremer did often was invoke Washington as grounds for explaining why he couldn't actually do what Sergio was asking him to do.

You know, the over-reliance on the exiles which is something that Sergio pointed out to him early on. You know, Bremer would just sort of-- well, you know, I have my orders from Washington, you know, there's almost nothing I can do. These are the handpicked favorites already. You know, there's only so much we're gonna be able to mix to tinker with this equation.

But once Sergio established contacts with the clerics and with other elements in the society who Bremer had not paid attention to Bremer also began to use Sergio as a conduit to those elements that were hostile to the occupation but relatively friendly to the United Nations. But as soon as the governing council was formed in late July and-- and Sergio had pushed for the governing council to be given many, many more executive functions than it would eventually be given. Sergio was the person who came up with the name governing council.

He said you got to put the word govern in the title of this thing or else everyone's gonna know-- because Bremer initially wanted to call it the advisory council or the advisory board. And-- and Sergio said, no, you know, you've got to signal that these guys are-- are actually in charge of the country's destiny. So Bremer changed the title but didn't change the functions. So he kept it as an advisory board, as a rubberstamping board but called it a governing council. And of course it was that disconnect between the title and the manifest, you know, lack of power of this council that discredited the governing council in the eyes of Iraqi's very, very quickly.

So Sergio had, you know, some impact in terms of the composition of the council, he was responsible for the-- the name change, changing the name from an advisory council to a governing

council. But what he never really succeeded in doing is prevailing upon Bremer or impressing upon Bremer the indispensability of handing over executive authority sooner rather than later. He simply could not communicate that. And that was a lesson that Bremer ended up having to learn himself at the cost of incredibly precious credibility. And at the cost of a year in the life of Iraq, perhaps Iraq's most important year of existence.

\*\*\*END OF TRANSCRIPT\*\*\*