***Samantha Power:***

***Journalist, Academic, Policy Advisor, Ambassador***

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**Working/Incomplete Draft Paper prepared for:**

**15th Biennial Conference of the European Union Studies Association,**

**Miami, FL, May 2017**

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Utilizing her experiences as a journalist and an ever-expanding degree of academic expertise, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power filled a unique role within the Obama administration. Having served as a foreign policy fellow in Obama’s Senate office, Power initially assisted as a foreign policy advisor and occasional spokesperson on the 2008 presidential campaign. Following the election, she worked as part of the State Department Transition Team; she then was appointed by President Obama to the National Security Council, to the position of Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights. She arrived at that spot, as a senior foreign policy advisor to a president of the United States, after emerging as a well-known international voice on international humanitarianism and human rights. In June 2013, Power assumed the UN Ambassadorship and remained in that role until the end of the Obama Administration, departing the United Nations in January 2017. In these positions, Samantha Power used her influence in the Obama White House to encourage stronger multilateral relations with major American partners across the world, including the Europeans, particularly to address humanitarian issues. The humanitarian challenges facing global leaders during Obama’s two terms proved to be as daunting as ever, and Power naturally became the “face” for humanitarianism and human rights both within the administration and externally as one of its key representative in the international community.

In order to contribute to and advance an ongoing conversation about women in international leadership and foreign policy, this profile of Samantha Power includes important elements of her biography, particularly key movements and influences in her career. By examining those elements, one also begins to identify critical mentors/sponsors and role models for her work and her career advancements, and even some perceived successes and failures in policy making circles. This profile also concludes by offering an evaluation of her reported leadership style, and her efforts to balance family life with career opportunities and demands—factors that may be uniquely applicable to the examination of women in leadership positions.

**Educational and Career Experiences and Influences**

There is hardly anything “usual” about Samantha Power’s rise to become the youngest individual to serve as the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations, assuming that title at the age of 42. Born in Dublin, Ireland in 1970, Power is the daughter of an athletic mother who studied medicine and became a nephrologist and a father whose career was in dentistry but whose true loves seemingly were playing the piano and expounding on current news at the pub (Osno). In his December 2014 profile of her in *The New Yorker*, 15 months after the U.S. Senate confirmed her as UN Ambassador, Power mentioned to Evan Osnos the closeness she and her father shared. She apparently often accompanied her father to the pub, where he apparently discussed the news with other patrons while his daughter read mystery novels quietly in the corner (Osno). Her parents’ marriage ended when Power was just nine years old (although they could not formally divorce in Ireland), and her mother moved Samantha and her younger brother to Pittsburgh, PA, and eventually Atlanta, GA, with a fellow Irish doctor whom her mother would later marry. Her father died only a few years after his family departed for the United States, as 14-year old Samantha, who was shocked and deeply distressed by that loss, was continuing to adapt to her new life in America (Osno).

Because of these changes in the life of her family, a significant portion of Power’s education occurred in her adopted country, the United States, where she would be naturalized as a citizen at the age of 23. In an interview for the 2010 Campus Progress National Conference, Power even admitted to standing in front of a mirror practicing “American English” in order to lose her Irish brogue, so as to fit in with her fellow classmates (C-SPAN 2013). She was a two-sport high school athlete in Atlanta, and then enter Yale University reportedly with a sports obsession and an aspiration to pursue a career in sports broadcasting (Sullivan). As she mentioned in her interview with Osno, her initial career goal was to become “the next Bob Costas” (Osno). Samantha Power’s career trajectory changed, however, in the summer of freshman year, 1989. As an intern in the CBS affiliate in Atlanta, Power witnessed the live feed of Chinese government forces repressing student protesters in Tiananmen Square. Michael Osno reported on Power’s recollection of that experience, noting her as saying that “[i] t was the most shocking thing I’d ever seen,” and thought “…what am I doing with my life?” (Power, as quoted by Osno). In turn, she returned to Yale and completed a major in history and worked on her writing skills, which then led her to a post-graduation internship at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

At Carnegie, Power worked under the tutelage of its president, former Assistant Secretary of State Morton Abramowitz; as he reportedly “was consumed by the conflict unfolding in the Balkans.” His perspective further cultivated her own interest in world affairs and particularly the unfolding situation in Bosnia (Pollak). By 1993, Power’s new obsession with Bosnia had caused her to pursue U.N. credentials so as to serve as a freelance journalist, starting first in Zagreb, Croatia and then crossing over into Sarajevo, Bosnia. From there, she spent over two years reporting on the atrocities of that war, for such publications as *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Boston Globe,* *The Economist*, *The New Republic*, and even *The Washington Post*. In an interview with *The Irish Times*, Power described the impact of that experience: “For me, it was the images of emaciated men behind barbed wire again in Europe; it was so chilling. It really stirred not just mine but many people in my generation’s conscience” (Power, as quoted by Pollak). In addition, Power made clear to Sorcha Pollak that her time in Bosnia “was the foundation of her career, feeding her interest in foreign policy and conflict resolution” (Pollak).

As the Bosnian war was ending in 1995, Power returned to the United States and enrolled in Harvard Law School with the goal of studying international law, although she would travel back and forth to Bosnia several times in 1995 and 1996 (Birnbaum). In her second year, Power enrolled in a class that focused on the just use of force, “a survey from Thomas Aquinus’s theory of just war to the U.N. charter” (Sullivan). In an interview with Robert Sullivan for *Vogue*, Power explained her epiphany of sorts in the course of class discussions. “And we talked about the norm to use force only in self-defense, except when genocide is happening….And I was like ‘Wait, I was just in a situation where ther *was* a genocide’” (Power, as quoted by Sullivan). In a paper for the course, Power examined “historical cases of genocide, looking at the Armenians, the Khmer Rouge, and Saddam Hussein’s Al Anfal campaign and Rwanda” (Power, as quoted by Osnos). She subsequently sent copies of the paper off to *New York Time* columnist Anthony Lewis and then editor of *The New Republic*, Martin Peretz, both of whom urged her to expand that initial piece into a book (Osnos; Birnbaum).

Power moved forward with those suggestions (while also completing her law degree, which was conferred in 1999), the result of which was her Pulitzer-prize winning text, “*A Problem from Hell”: America in the Age of Genocide*, published by Basic Books (a member of Perseus Book Group) in 2002. This sweeping examination of the United States’ inaction in response to multiple cases of genocide in the 20th century afforded Power the opportunity to display her depth as a academic analyst and her unique capacity for “riveting storytelling” (Roig-Franzia). Initially under contract with Random House after her 2000 co-edited volume with political scientist Graham Allison (that being, *Realizing Human Rights: Moving from Inspiration to Impact)*, Power turned to Basic Books when Random House rejected the first manuscript of *“A Problem from Hell”*, apparently because it too political and not personal enough (Brennan). In 1998, Graham Allison had also invited Power into the Belfer Center for Science and International at Harvard’s Kennedy School, to help launch the Center’s Human Rights Initiative, which by 1999 evolved into a new research center called the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy. Power was named its founding executive director, and served in that capacity until 2002. Power’s “star power” continued to rise in following couple of years, in the midst of her promoting *“A Problem from Hell”* and accepting the Pulitzer Prize. That best-selling book “made her not just a foreign policy wonk of high renown, but a kind star among young people” (Sullivan), particularly as “she toured American college campus, drawing large crowds” (Osnos). In March 2004, Charlie Rose featured Power on the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide (Rwanda was the focus of a chapter in her book); by late April, *Time Magazine* named Power one of the 100 most influential people in the world. At the same time, Power also took on an assignment from *The New Yorker*, resulting in a lengthy “Reporter at Large” piece titled “Dying in Darfur” in which Power examined the ethnic cleansing of non-Arab Sudanese in Darfur that was being perpetrated by the Sudanese government and its *janjaweed* militias (*The New Yorker*, August 30, 2004). Through her writings, speeches, and interviews , Power consistently described “a “toolbox” of interventions—sanctions, asset freezes, prosecutions in the International Criminal court, and in certain circumstances, military force—but, most of all, she called for a moral commitment” (Osnos; also noted by Roig-Franzia)). She had told Rose that “[t]hey can’t live by the maxim that they do in Washington, which is that if you make a moral argument you’re not going to get invited to the next meeting. Make the moral argument and see” (Power to Charlie Rose, as quoted by Osnos).

In early 2005, Power’s career took another significant turn. She accepted a dinner invitation from the newly elected Senator Barack Obama, whose own “star power” had soared in the wake of his 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address that ultimately confirmed his landside Senate victory in November 2004. As Power has relayed in numerous accounts (including in her acceptance of the U.N. ambassador nomination in the White House Rose Garden in June 2013), Obama had apparently read Power’s book and asked his Senate office staff to arrange the dinner meeting. While she has also noted that Obama was late and initially seemed somewhat preoccupied, by the end of their lengthy dinner conversation, Power apparently offered to work for him, which resulted in her placement as a foreign policy fellow in Obama’s Senate office from 2005-2006 (Osnos; Roig-Franzia).

In 2006, Samantha Power returned to Harvard’s Kennedy School after completing the Senate fellowship, being appointed its first Anna Lindh Professor of the Practice of Global Leadership and Public Policy. Harvard had named that newly created endowed chair for Sweden’s first female Minister of Foreign Affairs who had been brutally assassinated while shopping in a Stockholm department store in September 2003. In her position of prominence in the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Gőran Perrson’s government, Lindh also had most recently been a leading voice in Sweden’s “pro-Euro” campaign, a movement that unfortunately would end with the defeat of the Swedish national referendum on the issue just days after Lindh’s horrific murder. By accepting Harvard’s new academic position, this young Irish-American journalist and human rights advocate directly connected herself to the spirit of a fellow European female leader, who was widely recognized and celebrated for her own commitment to the valuable role that international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union should play in the preservation and protection of human rights. Serendipity aside, Power acknowledged the power of that connection in the Kennedy School’s announcement of her new appointment. She said, “Anna Lindh has been an inspiration to me and to others as we fight to secure basic human rights and liberties for peoples in countries throughout the world….Her leadership on behalf of international dialogue and cooperation serves as a model for those of us who seek greater regard for international law and greater protections for innocents caught in the midst of ethnic violence and war” (Harvard Kennedy School).

By the time that Samantha Power began her fellowship in Senator Obama’s office and in advance of her return to Harvard, she had taken on a new writing project—a biography of Sergio Vieira de Mello. Vieira de Mello was a charismatic and highly respected Brazilian diplomat whose entire 34-year professional life was devoted to realizing the multilateral humanitarian and human rights commitments of the United Nations, most often through the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). His particular deftness for compelling warring adversaries to negotiate and implement peace agreements and move ahead with peaceful governance gave rise to Power’s own description of him as a “decathlete of solving problems” (Power, TED Talk, February 2008). Power had met first met Vieira de Mello in her early days as a freelance journalist, in April 1994 over dinner in Zagreb. He was serving in the United Nations mission there after five months on the ground in Sarajevo, one of multiple war-torn regions to which the UNHCH and the UN secretary generals would deployed his skills over the course of his career.

In September 2002, Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed Sergio Vieira de Mello as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, based in Geneva, Switzerland; yet, shortly thereafter, he temporarily moved Vieira de Mello to Baghdad in April 2003, to serve as Annan’s special envoy and leader of a UN mission stationed there in the wake of the United States’ March 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq. Four months later, in August 2003, Vieira de Mello was killed in the suicide bombing of the UN Headquarters, after surviving the initial blast but dying after being trapped underneath rubble that proved unmovable due to the lack of appropriate equipment at the scene. Power’s subsequent book, *Chasing the Flame: On Man’s Fight to Save the World*, was published in early 2008, and clearly represented her deep connection to the idealism and realism that Vieira de Mello endeavored to balance in his life’s work (Power, TED talk). By 2010, it had been translated into an award-winning HBO documentary film, accompanied by a re-release of the print biography, *Sergio: On Man’s Fight to Save the World*.

By the time that Samantha Power’s biography on Sergio Vieira de Mello was published, she had again reconnected with Barack Obama, having signed on as a senior foreign policy advisor to his 2008 presidential campaign; as such, she also became a visible spokesperson for the campaign. Even in interviews to promote the Vieira de Mello biography, Power was seen wearing a prominent Obama 2008 campaign button. In the acknowledgements of the book, Power noted her relationship with the Senator, saying that he was “the person whose rigor and compassion bear the closest resemblance to Sergio’s that I have ever seen” (Power, *Sergio* 525). Yet in early, as part of the book tour in Europe, she was interviewing with the *Scotsman* and was quoted (off the record, she thought) as saying that Hillary Clinton “is a monster”, although she seeming was referencing Clinton’s campaign tactics and not her personally (Power, as quoted by Osnos; also see Sullivan). Needless to say, that comment became part of media “fire storm”, causing Power to apologize and the resign from the campaign. Following the election, Obama incorporated her into the transition team, and then she quietly joined the National Security Council, as a special assistant to the President and director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights.

In 2012, Obama added a new responsibility to Power’s portfolio, that of leading a newly launched an Administration task force called the Atrocities Prevention Board, “which was intended to insure that U.S. government agencies focus on emerging human-rights crises before they reach the level of genocide” (Osnos). One can interpret this move as confirmation of Power’s influence on Obama, as well as Obama’s confidence in Power’s position that genocide prevention was not only possible but a necessity. That appointment came barely a year after Power had argued persuasively for decisive, aggressive (military) action against Libyan dictator Muammar Quaddafi, who had exhibited a willingness to crush opposition forces while potentially committing war crimes in the process. Although Obama was initially reluctant to utilize military action as a response, he ultimately was convinced, in large part because Power apparently ensured that such a response remain front and center on his agenda (Osnos; Roig-Franzia). After pursuing the support of the U.N. Security Council, the United States joined NATO allies in imposing a successful no-fly zone over Libya and bombing Quaddafi’s forces in March 2011.

Not only can one observe Power’s influence in the Administration’s official position on Libya. Arguably, that impact could be seen as well in the toughness of “Obama’s human rights talking points for his historic 2012 visit to Burma [Myanmar] and [his] pushing for a strong U.N. resolution on human rights abuses in Sri Lanka,” the latter position which could not have been presumed nor necessarily expected according to an administration source (Roig-Franzia). Naturally, human rights activists within United States and around the world expressed excitement about the creation of the Board, anticipating that it could be “an in-house advocate for action in situations where otherwise we would not have taken action. Yet, even some board members have said “we all had expectations that were beyond realistic” (Roig-Franzia). Thus, it is hardly surprising that natural critics of the Administration would inevitably point its “immense humanitarian and strategic failure in Syria” (Elliott Abrams quoted by Roig-Franzia) as the now classic example of the limits of the Board’s effectiveness, and, perhaps, Power’s capacity for persuasion in her boss’s decision making circle. It is certainly hard to ignore that Syrian civil war began in early 2011 as well, and the evolving crisis consumed Obama’s second term and, thus, paralleled the work of the Atrocities Prevention Board. Moreover, that crisis was omnipresent as Samantha Power assumed the role of United States Ambassador to the United Nations, the nomination of which was announced by President Obama in early June, 2013, and was confirmed by the United States Senate (by a vote of 87-10) on August 1st of that year.

**Summary of Key Issues for Samantha Power at the United Nations**

Only a couple of weeks after Samantha Power’s confirmation as U.S. Ambassador, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s forces launch two, now well-documented a sarin-gas attacks on Ghouta, outside of Damascus. While death toll estimates varied in range (from a few hundred deaths to approximately 1700), the news coverage was prominent and included gruesome pictures and videos. The American public and its national media turned its attention to the Obama administration, questioning whether it would take significant military action against the Assad regime, now that the critical “line in the sand” had been crossed. Almost immediately, eyes also turned to the United Nations, and the newly seated American Ambassador. On, September 7, Power, who had been confirmed by the Senate barely a month before and was addressing the Center for American Progress, spoke forcefully in support for the Administration’s proposal to the U.N. for limited, off-shore, counter military strikes against Assad’s forces (Fisher). Although Obama would make a similar request directly to the U.N. General Assembly shortly thereafter, no multilateral nor even unilateral military action would be taken by the United States against the Syrian regime, regardless of Power’s consistent efforts to argue otherwise (to the Administration and to the United Nations) and her own irritation concerning that inaction (Osnos). On this issue, and on similar ones (ie., ISIS, the Ukraine, Russia), Power vocalized the profound need for attention and multilateral solutions.

Nonetheless, Power continued use her highly visible position at the United Nations to speak out against and bring attention to myriad human rights issues and challenges around the world. Those issues include the protection of religious freedom and minorities; the plight and protection of refugees; human trafficking; the promotion of democracy and protection of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa, Sudan, and Myanmar; and, the protection of women’s and LGBT rights. By December 2013, she had visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, after exploring the ongoing human rights abuses being perpetrated there, and announced during that trip “that the United States would be provide a hundred million dollars in support of French and African Union troops” that were on the ground a modicum or order and security (Osnos). She would make a similar kind of trip in 2014 to West Africa to explore and bring attention to details of the unfolding Ebola crisis—at the grass roots level, and to bring back to her U.N. colleagues plausible approaches/solutions for their consideration and response. In response to her unwavering efforts, the American Academy in Berlin, in May 2016, announced that it was awarding Samantha Power, its 2016 Henry A. Kissinger Prize. The Academy said that it was recognizing her “determined pursuit of a more secure, peaceful, and humane world….she has worked to rally the international community to respond to global threats – from the Ebola outbreak to the rise of violent extremists groups – and has a been persistent and forceful advocate for human rights and democratic accountability” (American Academy). Interestingly, in its press release, the Academy noted that Power would be the first woman to receive the award.

**Additional issues that will close out this profile/paper:**

**\* Relations with Europe and European Allies:** as an American with roots deep in Europe, Power seemed to have a nature affinity with European allies and the European Union. She had spent considerable time in the European theater while covering the Bosnian war. In February 2014, she offered important remarks in the Security Council on “Cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations” (including the EU). She gave major speeches in Brussel regarding “Why Peacekeeping Matters to Europe” (Friend of Europe summit) and a broader event at the U.S. Mission to the European Union. She also would be a key Obama negotiator and spokesperson in its effort to encourage an increase in Europe’s military commitments to peacekeeping missions in various venues.

**\* Career Mentors, Sponsors, and Role Models:** imbedded in this profile there are numerous clues, including Morton Abramowitz, Graham Allison, Barack Obama, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Others not yet discussed: Richard Holbrooke, Madeline Albright

**\* Women as Leaders: Balancing Career and Family, Questions about Leadership Styles**: Power assumes the UN Ambassadorship as the youngest American ambassadors ever, and one of the youngest in the UN’s history. Conversely, she had married in her late-30s, and thus was a “young mother” during her years in the White House and at the UN. In numerous events and interviews that highlight women as leaders, Power has address the countless challenges of being a major international woman leader in a male-dominated environment, and also serving as a mother while carrying out significant job-related duties(ie, Campus Progress National Conference, MSNBC Know Your Value, Forbes Women-Mentoring Moments, *The Atlantic* Women in Leadership Series, S.H.E. Summit; *Vogue* and *Elle* profiles). She has talked about her leadership style (cooperative and collaborative), others have noted her intellect, profound level of preparedness, and even her charm and good humor, as characteristics/traits that have helped her succeed. At home, she tries to remain “present” especially to her son, even talking with him about the array of international issues and people she encounters daily in her work. She consistently notes how important her nanny has been in helping her and her husband manage the daily duties of home life while balancing them with prominent roles in a presidential administration (and an academic career). She talked about following the lead of other females, like Madeline Albright, and about collaborative relationships with female colleagues (such as Susan Rice).

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