

CONVERSATIONS WITH MIKE MILKEN



Ambassador Kelly Craft

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

July 10, 2020

Mike Milken: Ambassador, thank you for joining us today. You were appointed in September of 2019 to the United Nations to be our ambassador. But I'm going to start back in 2007, when you were appointed by President Bush to be the alternative delegate to the United Nations, and particularly with a focus on Africa, with more than 50 countries. Africa has come to the fore again with the unique challenges they face during this COVID-19 crisis.

Ambassador Kelly Craft: Thank you, Mike, for having me. It's more important than ever, especially during a pandemic that we continue talking about crises that were already in place. One of the biggest adjustments is that during this COVID-19 we have to really focus on the continent of Africa, on the problems that that were there previously. In 2007 I had the utmost honor of representing the Bush Administration at the U.N. Upon returning in September of last year, it was a sense of pride of representing the most important country in the world. We are the leaders of the Free World. I think that that experience gave me just a little bit of an insight into the importance of breaking down barriers, making certain that we treat every woman, man, and child in order to mitigate further pandemics, further viruses.

Africa has been very important to me personally. My first trip as the U.S. U.N. ambassador was to South Sudan, and I tell people that when I got back on the plane to come home to the United States, I didn't leave anyone behind. I brought them all with me. This is

something that I work on daily. It's very important to me that I utilize American taxpayer dollars appropriately because the Americans are the largest contributors on a humanitarian standpoint throughout the United Nations.

We are the luckiest people to be born Americans, and it takes no more than traveling for people to tell you that. And you just come back with a whole pride and you come back with a sense of moral responsibility to help those people, to help those that have less.

I don't think people in the United States fully appreciate the decisions to provide medical care and aid back in those years during the Bush Administration. Two-thirds of everyone in the world living with AIDS or HIV lives in sub-Saharan Africa. We now have had a situation where a woman has a 98% chance with proper care of not passing AIDS onto their children. The United Nations has projected that 4 billion people will be living in Africa at the end of the century.

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You were appointed in September of 2019. You're the representative on the Security Council. We are back in an event that is similar to World War II. It is not a military threat in the United States, but it's a biological threat, and every single country on the planet now is under threat. How does the world look to you today versus how it looked in 2007?

First of all, speaking about World War II, I think the difference is now we have a strategy. We've come at this early. Obviously we wish it was earlier if China had been more forthcoming and transparent. But I think the important part is that we cannot allow any pandemic or any economic situation currently to cloud our moral responsibility for issues that are already on the ground. I spent months studying every country. We are one of the 193 member states [in the United Nations]. You have to really focus on our similarities and that's from where I take my diplomacy.

Now, there's plenty to talk about that we don't have in common and you do mitigate that. But I will tell you that when I accepted this position, I had a really long conversation with former president George W. Bush. He said, focus on the smaller countries; the U.N. is their only platform and sometimes their only ability to be able to have donor countries understand their needs. That was some of the best advice that has really served me well.

I don't think people realize how well you get prepared and study. I remember at a dinner we had when you were appointed in 2017 to Canada; how we started discussing every potential issue between the United States, Canada and Mexico. And when I visited with you in Canada, we talked about NAFTA.

I had worked on this in the late 1980s and felt that as the percentage of people in the U.S. of Latin American ancestry continued increase that NAFTA was an essential issue. Well, 30 years later there were numerous challenges to get this done. Take us back to that experience and the diplomacy required to get this passed.

President Trump, when he was running for election, focused on keeping manufacturing, growing the economy, keeping our jobs within the United States. We negotiated this most important largest trade deal in the history of the United States. Now we have more manufacturing. Our economy was stronger going into this virus. Can you imagine if we didn't have a president that set the economy on the right track, not knowing that we were going to have this pandemic, but how the solid foundation has helped us and is helping us get through this pandemic from an economic standpoint? With NAFTA, we wanted to make sure that we protected Wisconsin, Michigan, all of the dairy farms, the heartland of America, and the farmers. Those are the people that we were really looking after in NAFTA. It was the ones who make our economy grow. With the auto industry, I learned a lot about the importance of labor issues and hourly wages, your workers' compensation; just all of the information that deals with manufacturing.

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You and I had many discussions on the aluminum and the steel tariffs; that was something that we worked at the very end. It really taught me well diplomacy, because there were days when we would meet for 10 minutes because we would break up over just a very minor detail. But we respected one another enough to know not to have a negotiation starting at from a negative point. It was a matter of respect for each person's economy. When you respect each person's economy, Mexico and Canada, and the U.S., you know that everybody can work together because it is about a supply chain, and you're only as strong as your weakest link.

So it was really important that this trilateral deal was very strong unilaterally for each country. And that is why the president was adamant about renegotiating NAFTA, updating NAFTA to benefit all three countries. But we're going to focus on the United States because we have to focus on our own at home, and then we can be better givers to other countries.

So, Kelly, if there's one thing we know that's going to change from this coronavirus, it's that you're not going to have your ingredients in an essential product being made where you don't have access to it someplace else in the world. I've been involved with meetings relating to Europe and other parts of the world on who has access to this vaccine. You have a different view of the worldwide supply chains. How has this issue affected your leadership over the past few months?

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Every day, I'm very thankful for whomever is going to be delivering to mitigate this virus, because if we don't mitigate to the furthest corners of the world, it's going to come right back to us. So we have got to have adaption strategies. We've got to really focus on areas that we know in Africa, Latin America countries; we haven't talked about Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, areas where the virus is really very strong at the moment.

I'd like to turn to another area, and that's your own family. Your father was a veterinarian. But he was also a Democratic political activist. Where did you get your interest to serve? Was it from your dad and your family?

I was very close with my father and my mother. They were married 53 years and they both passed away. My father taught me that your word is everything. I have yet to see anyone who worked as hard as my dad. I can remember very early on discussions, maybe third grade at our dinner table, talking about politics and in a way that we all were allowed our own opinion. My whole family were Democrats. My dad's entire family, from the mayor of Lexington who was his cousin, I think he was a three-term Democrat. My parents really pushed us to make our own opinions and we never could just say we agree. You had to always be prepared to be able to explain your argument or your response.

They pushed us to be engaged in our community. We were taught is to give of ourselves. That's why I'm so proud to be at the U.N., because when the United States gives their word, we are there. We are the most incredible givers in the world, the largest donors –

which is really irrelevant – what matters is what we do with the money and how we make certain that we are helping those that are in need.

We're in a crisis that has involved all countries and the solution, whether it's antivirals, antibodies, immunology, or vaccines, will affect the whole world, just like the polio vaccine reached the world. You're now at the United Nations, and you discover that there's a bunch of countries that their actions are to undermine the United States. How do you deal with that?

We have got to really focus on the people of some of these countries that have terrible regimes, whether it's Iran, Syria, Yemen. There are so many situations going on that we cannot for one minute overlook. And, we have the renewal of the Iran arms embargo coming up very shortly. That is a real focus because if you can imagine, Mike, on October the 19th, if that arms embargo expires, Iran will be able to purchase weapons from Russia, from China. They'll be able to sell weapons to their proxies. The entire Middle East will become at risk. We have got to keep our eye on these regimes that are bad actors.

We've got that going on in Syria with Assad. We have a big issue coming up in two weeks, making certain that two borders in Syria that are open for

humanitarian aid. We've got to make certain that they remain open. The Russians do not want to keep those two borders open, neither do the Chinese. We're hoping for a third border, which would take care of northeast Syria. We have Iran propping up the Syrian regime, the Assad regime. We have Russia supplying a lot of the proxies, a lot of the mercenaries. We have possibly the worst starvation in history in Yemen.

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The U.S. is at the forefront of making certain that we take care of the innocent people, whether it be Yemen, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, you name it, Latin America. We're in Venezuela right now. We're very concerned about the countries on the border that are taking in the maximum refugees. I went to Colombia, visited with the president. Then I visited with the refugee areas. It is amazing, the problems in this world, that when an American arrives we're bringing hope. That is really a testament to the American taxpayers that they trust the people of UNICEF, the people of the World Food Program. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. They trust me. I take that very serious because I feel accountable to each person in the United States that is allowing me to deliver, to be that voice, to deliver the aid.

You're in a difficult situation at the United Nations trying to negotiate all day, but there is a group you can retreat to, if it's for a minute, five minutes, an hour, and that is family. Let's talk about how your own family has been and your ability to see or not see children or grandchildren.

"I can remember very early on discussions, maybe third grade at our dinner table, talking about politics and in a way that we all were allowed our own opinion. My parents really pushed us to make our own opinions and we never could just say we agree. You had to always be prepared to be able to explain your argument or your response."

I have to say that during the pandemic, we've had more opportunities to be able to have Zoom time with them and, you know, people's lives have slowed down. Normally I have to schedule time with them. Well, they haven't had soccer practice. They haven't had tennis lessons. So Joe and I were able to really spend some quality time, obviously on the screen, because they don't live in the same state. But I have to say that it makes me get up every morning a little bit earlier, stand up a little bit straighter, work a little bit harder because I have these grandkids. I've watched you for years; you have been a phenomenal role model; to be able to allow me to know that it just takes one voice, but it takes a passion. That's what I've really learned from you; that if you have passion, it's

contagious. You set that example, Mike; if there's anybody I've ever known, you definitely define what it is to be an American.

Well, thank you for those kind words, but thank you for your passion. And I want to thank your mom and dad for instilling ...

You're gonna make me cry...

... a sense of service. Your voice is being heard around the world at the United Nations. And I just thank you for your passion. And we thank you for your service during this most difficult period.

Thank you, Mike.
