

**Transcript of the interview of Mr. Martin Griffiths with Becky Anderson – CNN's Connect the World
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ANDERSON: These pictures from the United Nations on the ground there and across this in every way. And the U.N.'s

man handling the Yemen fowl, Martin Griffiths coming to you now live from Oman, in Jordan. A common pitstop as he travels in and out of Sana.

Martin, did the announcement from Washington on a cease fire within 30 days catch you by surprise?

MARTIN GRIFFITHS, U.N. SPECIAL ENVOY TO YEMEN: Thank you for having me on the show. Not entirely. I was in Washington last week and we had meetings

with Secretary Mattis and leaders in the State Department and NSC. And we talked a lot about the need to resolve this conflict. And one of the main

reasons for that, as you have just pointed out, is the threat of famine. It's a very real threat and it risks doubling the numbers of people in

Yemen who are at risk of dying of hunger or famine.

[11:35:00] So, that's the urgent factor here. So, I wasn't entirely surprised, but I certainly found it welcome news when I woke up on

Wednesday morning to see the statements made in Washington.

ANDERSON: Ok, let me just push you on this point. I wonder then how you explain the timing. Because the talk of a near famine has been a narrative

that has been widely discussed now for months and months. I wonder then if you think this is more about U.S. scrutiny of Saudi involvement in Yemen in

the wake of the Jamal Khashoggi murder, U.S. midterms, what do you think the explanation is, sir?

GRIFFITHS: I think it's a mixture of all the things you mentioned. I think that there was already, to be honest, from my own knowledge, the

beginning of a very strong desire to move from war to peace in Yemen. But I think things have catalyzed -- the issues that you mentioned have

catalyzed interests in these countries, and not just in the U.S. and the region, but in Europe as well where I was earlier this week. You know,

will take help from any quarter to move this file forward.

ANDERSON: Let's talk about whether the U.S. has any leverage here. What does it have so far as

leverage is concerned to set this deadline? Because

without any leverage, we are talking just rhetoric and optics, which, Martin, I think you and I will agree helps absolutely no one.

GRIFFITHS: No. I think the challenge -- exactly what you say -- the challenge now is to turn this call into action. I think to answer your

question. The U.S. does have leverage. Particularly in the coalition which it supports, which supports the government of Yemen. But it also has

activism. One of the striking features I've noticed for many, many years of U.S. public engagement is activism. Secretary Mattis and Secretary

Pompeo, they're on this day and night, and we found it now in Europe as well. But as you point out, calls are one thing. Action is another. And

what we now urgently need to do is to see what are the first steps that we can make on deescalating this conflict to give some space for the political

process.

ANDERSON: All right. And that's important. Let's talk about that. Because, of course, the U.K. supports this call certainly. The British

Prime Minister, Theresa May, backing Washington's calls, but with a caveat. Cautioning -- and I quote -- we certainly back the U.S. call for de-

escalation in Yemen. But a nationwide cease-fire will only have an effect on the ground if it is underpinned by a political deal between the conflict

parties.

Let's have a look and see what's been said at this point. We've had reaction from the Houthi leader dismissing America's calls for a cease-

fire. Because, quote, we consider it an informal demand, he said. An attempt to abandon their previous statements after the world knew the

horror of their aggressive crimes.

We've reached out, Martin, to the coalition for a response, all parties in this coalition, to calls for a cease-fire. We are as yet to get a

response. We will continue to push.

Of course, there is a framework for a political solution in resolution 2216. I don't want to get stuck in the weeds, but it's important our

viewers know this, resolution 2216 in particular calls for and I, quote, all parties in the embattled country in particular, the Houthis,

immediately and unconditionally end violence.

So, what do you want to see happen next? And as far as you are concerned, I know you are in constant contact with these stakeholders involved here.

What has been their response behind closed doors and what do you want to see happen next?

GRIFFITHS: I want to see us move forward. I don't want to see us getting stuck on things that are difficult to put together. I think a nationwide

cease-fire is obviously a marvelous and wonderful thing and must be the aspiration of all those who worry about the humanitarian situation in

Yemen. Any Yemeni family would want that to happen.

But I don't want to make that a precondition for consultations and talks which we hope to hold later this month. So, I think the urgent need at the

moment -- and I do think this is understood in all the stakeholders as you say that I keep contact with.

[11:40:00] The urgent need now is to do something on the issue of downing the temperature of the war while we move towards talks. And there are

ideas that have been put out by the U.S. which I think are urgently being considered now in Sana --

ANDERSON: Like what? Like what, Martin?

GRIFFITHS: -- in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Well, I think it's interesting to think about, for example, should there be a freeze in Hodeida, that's one

idea, to ensure that humanitarian pipeline. The second one, could we ask Ansar Allah to suspend their long-range missile and drones' program? Could

we ask the coalition to suspend air strikes on civilians in particular? These things have to be worked out. It's easy to say that, but it's

difficult to actually define exactly what needs to be done.

ANDERSON: The UAE will say that before the summer, they enacted a freeze, certainly from their side on the action against the Houthis in Hodeida.

The Houthi's didn't stick to the agreement. So, there is a massive deficit in confidence, certainly from the coalition's side.

GRIFFITHS: Well, everybody has their own narrative of events in a war, as you know. Perhaps even more so than in -- under any other circumstances.

It's absolutely true, absolutely right and to be honored that there has been no direct assault on the city or port of Hodeida and that's good news

for the people living there, that's good news for the humanitarian program. We must hope that continues. And we're grateful to the coalition. And,

you know, we honor also the fact that the Ansar Allah forces haven't provoked it. But Hodeida is a very, very volatile frontline and it's very

easy, without planning, just out of incidents happening, for the war there to flare up. This is exactly what we hope will not happen at this time.

ANDERSON: So, you're calling to --

GRIFFITHS: It's important to preserve the chance it is.

ANDERSON: Calling for all parties to get involved -- go on. Please continue.

GRIFFITHS: I think what -- from my point of view as a mediator, I just want there to be no incident which upsets the path that Secretary Mattis

and Pompeo and others have called for. We would like to get to consultations during November, the end of November. I need to go see

President Hadi to get his agreement to that. And as I said once to the Security Council, the problem about the path for peace is war. War takes

peace off the table. I think everybody must focus on not allowing that to happen in the coming weeks.

ANDERSON: Martin Griffiths, when will this potential meeting between stakeholders be, where will it be, and why, when the Geneva talks failed,

should any further meeting be a success?

GRIFFITHS: I'm hoping to have -- we haven't got a definite date or place, but we're in talks. Sweden has been mentioned as you know. I was talking

to their representatives today. That's quite likely towards right at the end of the month is the likely target. Again, as I say, I need to see

President Hadi before we go firm on this.

And as to your last point. We're doing all we can and we've made a lot of effort in the past week since Geneva, to make sure that the logistics -- if

I could just describe it in those terms -- allow Ansar Allah, and the delegation from Sana, to get to the talks in a way they find secure and

doesn't rob them of their confidence. We have things in prospect which I think will deal with that issue.

ANDERSON: What is the prospect for peace in Yemen and what is the alternative?

GRIFFITHS: Well the alternative is devastating. It's famine, of course, which is, as you know, a viral disease which is completely different in

scale from hunger. That's the first problem. The first horseman of that apocalypse. Secondly, it's terrorism which flourishes in chaos. Thirdly,

it's threats to the stability of the region, the trade routes which come up through the Red Sea into Europe. Yemen is positioned in a way which

affects us all, not just the people of the region. And that's what we need very urgently to stop -- we see wars the other countries, Syria and others.

If you allow them to go on they get much more difficult to resolve. This one has gone on far too long. But we know from previous negotiations,

between the parties in Yemen.

[11:45:00] We know the outlines of an eventual settlement which will allow for a government of transition to bring the parties together or the people

of Yemen back to peace. We know the elements of it. We know that it needs to include political inclusion and disarmament of militias and return to

the state of the monopoly of force. As usual, the solution is not the problem in ending a conflict. The problem is getting the confidence, as

you refer to earlier, for the people to take a gamble on each other's promises. And that's I guess my job is to provide that opportunity.

ANDERSON: And when there are existential threats on all sides, clearly that is when there will be massive confidence deficits.

GRIFFITHS: Exactly.

ANDERSON: Martin, thank you. Martin Griffiths, the U.N. special envoy to Yemen, charged with undoing what is this Gordian knot there. Thank you so

much for coming on to the show and do stay in touch and let's speak again soon.

Live from Abu Dhabi, I'm Becky Anderson, this is CONNECT THE WORLD.