

Ways & Means Transcript—S3E2—Robots, WikiLeaks, and The Fight Against Human Trafficking

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Emily Hanford (EH): From Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, this is Ways & Means. I'm Emily Hanford.

Sam Borden (SB): You know, the whole situation was frankly terrible, even just to hear about it was really alarming and unsettling.

EH: This is Sam Borden. He's talking about boys – 10, 11 years old... even younger – being bought or stolen from Southeast Asia and Africa - to be used as camel jockeys in the Middle East – in countries like the United Arab Emirates. Sam wrote about camel racing when he was a sports correspondent at the New York Times.

SB: Horrifyingly, or frighteningly, as the sport grew in popularity, owners were looking for the lightest possible jockeys so that the camels could run as fast as possible. And the children began to get smaller and smaller and younger and younger. Many of them coming from places like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and, you know, essentially being trafficked into the Gulf region to be used as these camel jockeys.

EH: According to one report, boys as young as 6 months old were being kidnapped and sold to be raised as camel jockeys. Some of these kids were seriously injured during races. One child was trampled to death. (Music) Today on Ways & Means – we're talking about human trafficking – and how diplomacy and public shaming are helping to shine a light on a problem that depends on secrecy to survive.

(Music ends)

Montage of news reporters: A 7 news alert...a massive nationwide sex trafficking bust...10 men are under arrest following a child sex trafficking sting operation...good evening and yeah local and federal officials have announced the rescue of 11 women who were victims of trafficking here in Orleans Parrish.

EH: When you think of human trafficking, you probably think of sex trafficking, right? But it's much more than that. Around the world – and here in the United States too - labor trafficking is a big issue. Housekeepers forced to work for no pay – their passports confiscated. Women forced to smuggle drugs.

Susan Coppedge (SC): I always say trafficking can occur everywhere. I didn't even know this until I started my current job that, in the makeup that I wear, the shiny part of that is a mineral that comes from India and children are used to harvest that mineral.

EH: This is Susan Coppedge. She's an American diplomat who serves as the Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking for the U.S. State Department. Her office is taking a lead in the fight against human trafficking around the world.

SC: Trafficking by its nature is a hidden crime, traffickers try to keep it underground, because if it was visible, governments would better be able to tackle it and root it out.

EH: She says a key to stopping trafficking is to make it visible. She points to what happened in Thailand a few years ago after news reports began to surface about fishermen who were enslaved.

News Clip: Seafood caught up in waters around Thailand ends up in markets all around the world. It's a big earner, but one that also comes with a large human cost... Many of them are trafficked across the borders and sold on fishing boats...

SC: I always say, there's absolutely nothing more isolating than being on a boat out in the middle of the ocean. Where are you going to go for help?

Judith Kelley (JK): It turns out that fishing vessels are actually ideal places to traffic human beings, because once you have somebody on a boat out in the middle of the ocean, they really can't escape.

EH: This is Duke professor Judith Kelley – she specializes in human trafficking.

JK: And it's also very easy to throw them overboard and nobody will ever know what happened, especially if nobody knows you had the person on board in the first place.

EH: A series of investigative reports by the Associated Press uncovered what was happening in Thailand—men forced to work on boats that became floating prisons, hundreds of fishermen held captive on an Indonesian island, some held in cages. Here's Susan Coppedge again from the US State Department.

SC: When these reports revealed that these people were being subjected to these abhorrent conditions, and not being paid, not being let off ships often for a year at a time, it really galvanized the world community, because we in the U.S. buy a lot of seafood from Thailand. It's in our cat food and places like Walmart and Costco. We are unwittingly, by purchasing these products, supporting forced and slave labor. The AP's reporting helped spur a dramatic release of more than 2,000 enslaved fisherman. And it helped get the Thai government to crack down on traffickers – along with some diplomatic efforts that were happening at the same time.

Here's how the diplomacy comes in. Every year since 2001, Susan Coppedge's office at the US State Department has put out an influential report that looks at what countries are doing to root out human trafficking. It's called the Trafficking in Persons Report – or TIP Report.

The report measures about 200 countries on three Ps – Prosecution – are countries prosecuting the traffickers? Protection – do they support the victims? And Prevention – is the country implementing policies that will help deter the problem in the first place?

In 2014, just before the Associated Press investigation started coming out, the US State Department had given Thailand the worst grade a country can get on the TIP Report. The report specifically mentioned human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry.

The report is public. When it came out, news outlets picked up on it. And Thai leaders did not like the bad headlines. Here's professor Judith Kelley:

JK: They don't want to have a bad grade on their human trafficking report because the fishing industry and the food industry in general is a big money maker for them. So they were very, very upset about getting a bad grade.

EH: At first, the Thai government was just mad about the grade – they did nothing to try to stop the trafficking of fisherman. But then the AP investigation came out... and then the next year's TIP report again gave the Thai government the worst grade a country can get. Finally, all the bad PR prodded the government to take some action.

In 2015, the Thai government increased the punishment for human traffickers – life in prison if you’re caught. And if one of your victims dies, you now get the death penalty.

According to the TIP report, though, Thailand could do much more -- particularly when it comes to investigating and prosecuting officials who are complicit in trafficking. But the country is finally beginning to take action and the public shaming seems to have had a lot to do with it.

(Music)

Public shaming has been a powerful force for thousands of years. When Duke professor Judith Kelley first heard about the TIP report, she thought the idea of ranking countries -- -- and publicly shaming the bad actors – held promise when it came to getting countries to crack down on trafficking. Judith was particularly intrigued by the TIP report because of the way it compares countries to each other.

JK: Countries care about their standing -- standing is a concept where you are relative to other countries. Right. I know, I'm from Denmark. You know we have sort of competition with Sweden and Norway on everything. So citizens will think about, you know, "How am I doing in my region? How is my country performing relative to other countries?"

Judith Kelley decided to investigate how the TIP rankings were influencing policies on human trafficking around the world by doing a series of case studies on the countries in the report. She started in the Middle East – with Oman.

JK: I picked Oman because I don't really know very much, didn't know very much, about Oman at that point in time and it's not a country that people typically pick for case studies of anything. And I thought, "Why not?"

EH: Oman has a long history of human trafficking - for example, South Asians and East Africans would immigrate there and be subjected to forced labor. Judith wanted to know if the TIP report was having an impact. One day, while she was doing her research, she Googled "Oman".

JK: And the first link that popped up was a U.S. State Department cable from the WikiLeaks release. And the title was, “Our TIP Dispute with Oman.” And the first thought that popped into my head was “Dispute? What dispute?”

Male Narrator: FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT TO SEC-STATE WASH-DC IMMEDIATE 9677 INFO WHITE HOUSE WASH-DC

S E C R E T

EH: She had stumbled on a cable to the White House from an American diplomat in Oman. It was publicly available online because of Wikileaks -- the organization that has released millions of classified documents to the public.

JK: You know, Everybody likes secret stuff (laughs) but lots of these cables were, you know, supposed to be confidential.

EH: In the cable, the American diplomat summarizes Oman’s response to its poor grade on the TIP report.

Male Narrator: Summary: The dispute over the Oman's Tier 3 ranking in the 2008 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report stems from the government's refusal to accept that there may be a trafficking problem in Oman, as well as its extreme sensitivity to its public image.

JK: So the dispute was that Oman had been put on the worst tier rating and they were furious! And they were actually threatening to cancel some meetings on nuclear cooperation and other rather important issues.

Male Narrator: The top officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have made clear that Oman will not move on our recommended action steps until we first retract the Tier 3 designation. They have been told that this is a step we cannot take, however, without some action from the Omanis. We therefore are caught in a dispute in which there is little common ground, and with a partner that has indicated its willingness to wager the relationship on the outcome of the matter.

JK: They were speaking of being insulted, that their dignity had been impugned or, I mean, the language that they were using was very emotional. And the sultan was involved and, you know, they were threatening to cancel these meetings because they felt that the grade was extremely embarrassing and they wanted to get rid of it. And they were trying to pressure the U.S. to change the grade.

EH: The TIP report had really gotten under the government's skin – leaders in Oman cared about their ranking. For Judith Kelley, this cable was evidence that the TIP report had power to convince countries to change their ways.

JK: And so, I wondered, "Well, if there's one cable, there might be more." So, I found 78 cables just on Oman that were discussions between U.S. diplomats and national officials about this TIP report. And so. I was hooked at that point because I thought, "What's there for all the other countries? What can I learn from this, if there is this rich material across a number of countries?" I could understand much more about diplomacy and about how the U.S. is trying to influence these countries and how they're reacting in ways that I normally can't really see.

EH: In the case of Oman, Judith's research shows that soon after these cables went back and forth among diplomats, the U.S. began to meet more frequently with Omani policy officials...Eventually the US directly advised the Omanis on the text of new anti-trafficking legislation. And the legislation passed.

Announcer: A new day in the desert and the ancient animals of this arid land are ready for a race...

EH: We're back at the camel races in the United Arab Emirates where we started this story. But something has changed.

SB: I saw that there weren't people riding on top of the camels.

EH: This is Sam Borden again, the reporter we heard from earlier.

SB: There were these- originally I thought they were dolls when I saw the pictures, I was like, "Oh, why are there dolls on top?"

EH: But they weren't dolls – they were robots. Robots have replaced little boys as the camel jockeys.

SB: You know it looks sort of like a miniature ... I hesitate to say human, but a miniature figure...an alien or something like that...

EH: So what happened? How did robots replace little boys at the camel races? Turns out the TIP report had something to do with it. In 2001 and 2002, the US State Department gave the United Arab Emirates the worst grade possible on human trafficking, citing the fact that kids were being used as camel jockeys.

In 2002 – after getting two bad grades on the TIP report - the government banned the use of jockeys under the age of 15. People who violate the ban can get a one-year racing suspension, or even prison time. And because of the harsher penalties, the US State Department gave the UAE the highest TIP report ranking. But the sport of camel racing could not survive without little jockeys-- so the industry came up with a new solution – the little robots. Each robotic camel jockey is handled by a team in an SUV. One man drives, tailing his camel on a road right next to the track, and another man controls the jockey. Sam rode in one of those SUVs – and watched the controller.

SB: He was like, making these sounds and, like, you know, almost like, cooing noises into the speaker to try to encourage the camel to go and when he wanted it to pick up the pace and run harder he would yell at it. And then as we got towards the last quarter of the race he started to use the remote control to make the whip go in an effort to make the camel try to sprint towards the finish.

EH: According to Judith Kelley's research, the TIP report has led to changes in other several countries, too -- it's prompted governments to train judges and police to better understand human trafficking, to improve shelters for victims, and to increase trafficking prosecutions and convictions. It's becoming clear to Judith that a scorecard like the TIP report can prompt real change. But – there are politics involved, too.

C-span Audio: Good morning – welcome to the Department of State we have quite the full room.

EH: Ambassador Susan Coppedge released the most recent TIP report at the State Department's Press Briefing Room in Washington, DC in June.

C_SPAN Audio... thank you all for joining us today for the release of the 17th annual Trafficking in Persons report (applause)

EH: There were about 300 people in the room, including plenty of powerful politicians. Bob Corker, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Ivanka Trump was there too. The TIP Report is an American effort – mandated by the US Congress. And countries that get a bad grade on the TIP report – they're often as angry at the grader as they are at the grade.

You heard that in the secret cables to the White House about Oman. The Omani government wanted the US to change its grade. But ultimately, according to Judith Kelley's research, the report prompted a closer working relationship between the U.S. and Oman around the issue of human trafficking.

And in Thailand – when the TIP report called out the government for failing to do anything about the trafficked fisherman – that didn't lead to change right away either. First, the Thai government spent \$400,000 trying to get the US to change the grade.

JK: And we see officials in different countries going out and defending the grade in the media, either by saying, "It's true we have a bad grade, but we're going to work to change it. Don't worry we're on it," or saying "That grade is just wrong. The U.S. is wrong. The U.S. is arrogant," you know and just sort of objecting to the grade, but they're out there commenting on it.

EH: In this year's TIP Report – the US State Department downgraded China to the worst possible ranking. Among the recommendations for China to better its grade? China needs to end forced labor in government facilities and impose prison sentences on human traffickers -- including government officials who either facilitate or are complicit in human trafficking.

News Report: The Chinese Foreign Ministry forcefully pushed back. China resolutely opposes the U.S. making thoughtless remarks according to it's own domestic law about other country's work in fighting human trafficking.

EH: There is evidence – particularly reporting from Reuters – that indicates the team doing the TIP report rankings has been influenced by other State Department staffers to grade certain countries, including China, more kindly than they deserve.

The State Department responded to the Reuters report by denying that the rankings are politicized. A state department spokesman said (and I'm quoting here) "As is always the case, final decisions are reached only after rigorous analysis and discussion between the TIP office, relevant regional bureaus, and senior State Department leaders."

Judith Kelly says it would severely hurt the effectiveness of the TIP report if politics were routinely at play in the rankings.

JK: The policy has floundered at times. The U.S. , the State Department Office has sometimes given into pressure to give more lenient grades to certain countries than others. Sometimes it's become politicized -- you can only do that so much. And then, the whole thing falls apart, because once it seems like these grades are willy-nilly then why should I be worried about what grade I have?

And Judith says she gets why countries would be annoyed at being graded by the United States– but, she says, it would be difficult for the report to be done by an international body. It would be hard for international organizations, for example, to criticize individual governments frankly over sensitive problems, since international organizations rely on those same governments for funding, support, and cooperation.

She also says in public, governments may criticize the report and their own rankings – but that's politics too. Her research shows that in private, many governments cooperate with the U.S.

Ultimately, though, Judith believes the TIP Report can become a model for how to deal with a wide range of human rights issues across the globe.

It doesn't cost a lot of money- relatively speaking - to do the research to create the TIP report and you get a lot of "bang for the buck" she says.

And that's because a lot of the power in the TIP report is not just that the United States is giving a country a bad grade – it's the way the TIP report ranks countries and then groups them by their rankings

JK: Venezuela reacted once by saying, "We're not as bad as Cuba on this issue." Right, so there are sort of countries you do or do not want to be compared with. There was one year that that Israel had gotten a poor grade- in 2009- and an official, a deputy foreign minister at that time commented and said that a U.S. government report lumping Israel together with states like Afghanistan, Jordan and Botswana has troubling political implications for Israel and has as a direct impact on Israel's standing in the international community

EH: In other words – being as bad as that country you don't want to be compared to – that's easily as powerful a public shaming as the United States calling you a bad actor, according to Judith Kelley's research. She has written a book about her work. It's called Scorecard Diplomacy, Grading States to Influence their Reputation and Behavior. She says it was a tough book to write, because she had to pore over so many harrowing tales of human trafficking and child labor around the world.

One day – seeking some respite about halfway through writing the book – Judith found a homemade book at home. One that had been handed down in her family. It had typed pages, a carved wooden cover – and the whole thing was held together by string. Inside she discovered a family history – including the story of her grandmother, Ane Katrine [Anna- Kuh-THREEN] Nielsen who was born in the Danish countryside in 1902.

JK: And I sat down to read that and I was struck by the fact that she was used as essentially a child laborer from a very early age. She was sent away from her home to do hard, hard labor.

EH: Judith was surprised by what she read – there was child labor in her own family.

JK: She could only come home very rarely and maybe on the weekends she had to walk a long way to come home and visit her family and then off she went again. And it was her job to watch the cows, in and out of the field all by herself and she says, "I was just, you know, just a small girl and it was a scary job to have to deal with those big cows all by myself." You know, what it brought home for me was- we're so quick to judge other countries and to say "Oh, they're so backwards," or whatever, but we really don't have to go very far back before we see practices that at that time were just normal.

EH: Child labor is not considered normal anymore in Denmark. Judith (Yoo-dit) says finding that family book, and realizing how much has changed around the issue of child labor since her grandmother was a little girl – it gives her hope for what can be accomplished when it comes to human trafficking. What's key, she believes, is getting governments to understand they have to be proactive about cracking down on it – and there's still a lot of work to do. But her research shows that exposing what's going on – shining a light, publicly shaming the bad actors - that can be a powerful tool.

(Music)

This podcast episode is the second in our three-part series, *New Ideas for Policy in the Developing World*. It's made possible by the Josiah Charles Trent Memorial Foundation Endowment Fund.

Next time on *Ways & Means*— we'll head to rural India for a story about healthcare. We'll explore how finding out what doesn't work in healthcare can be just as effective as finding out what does work when you're developing smart policies. That's next time.

We'll have a link to Judith Kelley's new book -- *Scorecard Diplomacy, Grading States to Influence their Reputation and Behavior* – on our website, waysandmeanshow.org

Thanks to Sam Borden. We'll post a link to the story about robot camel jockeys he wrote for the *New York Times* – there's a video too. Sam is now Global Sports Correspondent for ESPN.

Ways & Means is produced by Carol Jackson, Alison Jones and Karen Kemp. Our assistant producer is Tamina Stoll.

Cristina García Ayala creates original artwork for each episode.

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Special thanks to Andrew Park.

Until next time, I'm Emily Hanford.