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INTERVIEWER: Question. Are women's rights human rights? Whether or not you believe they are, there is a very strategic reason for supporting gender equality. It's better for everyone.

Jennifer Klein is a visiting fellow at the Yale Law School Center for Global Legal Challenges. She's a veteran of both the Obama administration as Senior Advisor in the Office of Global Women's Issues and the Clinton administration as Special Assistant to the President for domestic policy. She talked with us recently about the direct connections between gender equality and national security. Thanks so much for coming in today.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Thank you for having me.

INTERVIEWER: Help us understand what gender parity has to do with national security or even global security, for that matter.

JENNIFER KLEIN: So it's a question that I get a lot because for most people, for many people, when they think about gender equality, they think about rights. And this is absolutely about rights. There are certain things-- first of all, there is a strong basis in international human rights law for women's rights. And there are many things that are absolutely issues of fundamental human rights. But in addition, women's issues are also issues that are incredibly important to our national security, to global economic prosperity.

And so what I like to think about is why. What makes these issues that anybody should care about who works on any of those issues, whether it's globalization, whether it's economic prosperity around the world, or whether it's national security? And the answer is because the evidence really points us in that direction.

INTERVIEWER: So connect those dots for me.

JENNIFER KLEIN: So for example, if you look at something like girls' education, girls absolutely should, in my view, be educated in equal numbers as boys around the world. And historically, they have not been. There's been a huge gender gap in levels of education.

That gap is closing when you look at primary school. There's still a tremendous gap when you

look at secondary school. So girls are dropping off at much higher rates than boys.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm, still.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Still, for various reasons, cultural reasons, economic reasons. Families make the determination in many countries around the world that it's just not economically viable for their girls to go to school. There are concerns about safety. There's a whole host of reasons. But again, when you think about it, you think about the right of a girl to go to school.

But on top of that, there's very strong evidence that educating girls has huge economic benefits not only for that individual woman, but for her family. Not even only economic benefits-- health outcomes of her children will be better. There's economic benefits to a community. And there's literally evidence that shows that wages go up and therefore, economic growth eventually goes up because greater numbers of girls are educated.

INTERVIEWER: So for everyone, it's good?

JENNIFER KLEIN: For everyone, it's good.

INTERVIEWER: And an--

JENNIFER KLEIN: It's a win-win.

INTERVIEWER: And an economically stable society's probably a more peaceful society?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yeah. There's some evidence of that. There's certainly evidence that in countries around the world where women are discriminated against, there's higher levels of political instability.

That's not necessarily causal. There's a co-relation in some cases. But those two things are absolutely connected.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. So I noted that the Women, Peace, and Security Act was recently signed into law--

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: --which is great. So why is it important to involve women-- of course it's important to educate them. It's important for them to enter the workforce. But why is it important to involve them in resolving conflict?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Well, a couple of different reasons. But again, there's a strategic reason. What we now know--

and by the way, it's important to note that this evidence-- while there has been really strong evidence of the connection between women's rights and equality and economic prosperity, there has been far less research on conflict and peace negotiations. And the reason that there's fewer data is because there have been historically very few women involved in peace negotiations so there's not a lot to study.

On the other hand, we're now seeing more and more research and there is some really good evidence. And there's a couple of things that you can point to. One is that we now know that peace negotiations that involve women at the peace table are longer-lasting and more sustainable.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Uh-huh.

JENNIFER KLEIN: And the reason for that is-- there's several reasons. But one important reason for that is that women are likely to raise issues that are important to longer-lasting peace. So we know-- there's a number of different studies. The International Crisis Group has done some work.

But what it shows is that women raise issues like health and education, human security issues. And if you think about it, it's completely logical. If those issues aren't resolved, if the negotiation at the peace table is simply about a geographic divide or simply about the exchange of arms--

INTERVIEWER: Right.

JENNIFER KLEIN: --that peace is more likely to fall apart. And so we see that peace is more likely to reach a peace agreement if women are at the table and you're also more likely to have that agreement last a lot longer.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. So there's evidence for that?

JENNIFER KLEIN: There's literally evidence to that. And also, I'd point to the issue that I was raising before, which is that just by virtue of having greater amounts of equality in a society, you often see those are societies that are more stable so they don't get to conflict in the first place.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And what about girls and women bearing the brunt of conflict? Is that related?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Absolutely. That's a really important point. And it's interesting that I skipped over that because that's always the primary argument, that women are disproportionately harmed. And they

absolutely are.

And the UN has paid attention to this. And the reason they started was by looking at women as victims of sexual violence in war. And that's absolutely a very important point to make early on, is that women have been disproportionately harmed, particularly by sexual violence, but also by the effects of war more generally.

INTERVIEWER: Disease, like the spread of cholera, I imagine? So just to close that logical loop, less traumatized, less harmed women and girls makes a healthier society, makes a more peace-prone society. Is that safe to say?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes Yes.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes. And there's also some very basic-- you asked the question, why should women be involved in peace negotiations? What impact does it have? There's a great story about the peace negotiations in Darfur in the 1990s.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

JENNIFER KLEIN: I think this is a true story. It may be apocryphal at this point. But I have been told the story over and over again as fact, where the men were gathered around the peace table. Women were not permitted to participate, but they were surrounding the peace table literally.

And the men were sitting at the table arguing about a river. And they were deciding which side should have rights to that river. And one of the women came over and tapped one of the male peace negotiators and said, I think you should know that the river dried up five years ago.

INTERVIEWER: [GASPS]

JENNIFER KLEIN: And whether that story is exactly right or has been told and retold in ways that it has changed slightly, the truth of it is really still important to keep in mind, which is that-- I call it facts on the ground, right?

INTERVIEWER: [INAUDIBLE]

JENNIFER KLEIN: The other thing that's important is women have the facts on the ground. They're the ones getting the water. They're the ones gathering the firewood. So they're the ones who know

whether the river still exists.

INTERVIEWER: That's so interesting. Yeah. So is gender central to every security issue?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Oh, that's a hard question. Of course, I would argue yes, not necessarily in the way that I normally talk about women as central to security. But women are 50% of the population so of course, women are central to every major issue in our foreign policy. I guess I would say yes, and in certain areas-- and I don't mean geographic areas. I mean certain substantive areas-- it's particularly important to think about women's issues.

INTERVIEWER: So I have two questions that are related and slightly ornery. I was noticing-- you're here at Brown to be on a panel about gender equality and national security. And I noted in the promotional materials that it says women's rights are now widely regarded as fundamental human rights.

And I just thought, really? It's 2017 and we have to kind of-- they're widely acknowledged? When will that just not even be a question? So my question is, can you talk about some progress that's been made around the world and maybe areas where we still need a lot of work?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes. Yes, absolutely. So I wish the answer to your question were, of course women's rights are human rights. But I would say that we have made a lot of progress. And one of the areas where we have made a lot of progress is rights on paper.

So even if you look at the period between 1995 when the Beijing conference for women happened-- which was an historic occasion for a number of reasons. One was 194 countries gathered together to discuss women's rights. And secondly, and I would say almost equally importantly, there was a nearby conference of civil society leaders. About 1,000 people were gathered in Huairou, which is near, but not that near to Beijing, because the Chinese government actually put the Civil Society Conference sort of safely in Huairou so as not to interfere with the government conference. But that's a whole other story.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER KLEIN: And one of the things that if you look from that moment, which was certainly not the first moment that women's rights were thought of as human rights, but an important moment for the world, till 2015 or so, which is the last data that I've seen, although we're now in 2017 and the trends are continuing, you see an increasing number of rights on paper. So for example,

there's been legal reform. Just this year, we hear about Saudi Arabia lifting the restrictions on women driving.

You see lots of economies in the world, like Japan, for example, investing in women so that women can be equal participants in the workforce. Generally speaking, there are three areas where I would say there has been tremendous progress. And again, I caveat that by saying that within each of these areas, there's some variations. But if you look at health and you look at education, and as I said, if you look at rights on paper, legal reform, we have seen tremendous progress.

There are other areas where we've seen less progress. So I've talked a lot about economic participation. But we're still woefully behind, both at the top-- women who are entering the workforce-- not the workforce, but leadership positions. We still have tremendous disparities really all around the world. There's a pay gap everywhere in the world.

And similarly, every country in the world, women do more unpaid work than men. It varies widely among countries. But in every country in the world, women do more unpaid work than men and that has tremendous economic consequences. So in economic participation, we have a long way to go. And the other one, where we started, is security.

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INTERVIEWER: So what do you say to someone who believe that issues about women are women's issues?

JENNIFER KLEIN: I say first and foremost, women are 50% of the population. I say second, that while the term that you and I both use is widely recognized, I think women have basic human rights that need to be recognized simply because they are human rights. But third is it's better for everybody, right?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

JENNIFER KLEIN: There's a strategic reason.

INTERVIEWER: It's not just a moral reason. It's a strategic reason.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: Got it. You also have an interest in public health. Where does that fit into your work?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Well, again, public health is a women's issue as well. And one of the things that I worked on when I was at the State Department was the Global Health Initiative. And actually, a true story of what actually happens in the workplace was I was gathered around a table that was hosted - the first meeting to figure out exactly how we were going to implement the new \$51 billion investment in global health through the Global Health Initiative, which President Obama had announced. And I was gathered with people who worked on HIV/AIDS, with people who worked on malaria and tuberculosis, family planning, maternal health, the full range of health issues, many of them with particular programs through USAID.

And I was there representing the Office of Global Women's Issues, thinking that my job was to raise the fact that global health is a-- it's important to think about women when you're thinking about global health programs. And I was not at all the person who raised that issue. Every single person working on every single either health issue or related issue to health talked about the importance of investing in women for two reasons. One is in many cases, women are the face of that disease. If you take HIV/AIDS as an example, 60% of the disease in Africa are women--

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

JENNIFER KLEIN: --which is disproportionate to the number of women, and also because women, again, are part of the solution. Women are the ones who are obviously having the babies. Women are the ones who are often caring for the children. Their health has consequences for the health of their children. So again, it's just good public health.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That's great. It sounds like an enlightened group you were with. You're also a Brown alum. And I just wondered if your interests in gender parity and national security and public health, does any of that start at Brown?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes All of it starts at Brown. Although for me, interestingly, it started as an interest in health. I, when I was a junior, was asked to serve on a council to think about HIV/AIDS on the college campus, which of course dates me because that was 1986, I graduated in 1987, when nobody knew what HIV/AIDS was on a college campus and what the ramifications were for having students who might be HIV positive, which sounds like ancient history at some level.

But there were real questions about housing and discrimination. And even a college/university that wanted to do the quote, unquote, "right thing" didn't know exactly what that was. So I was

asked to serve on this council to represent the student perspective, which completely turned on my mind and my interest in health issues.

INTERVIEWER: In health and justice, it sounds like.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Absolutely. And it was the moment where I realized that justice issues and equality and inclusion are all related to health and obviously, to many other issues. But for me, that was the moment.

It was through the interest in health that I broadened, over the seven years that I was in the White House, to be interested in and work on a range of issues which, by the way, she, the then First Lady, and I didn't call "women's issues." We called them "health issues" or "economic issues," things like family leave or child care or the Children's Health Insurance Program. But in fact, they are women's issues.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Yes. Well done. And you've spent some time here today at the Watson Institute and you've been talking with students, I think?

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What is your impression of Brown students today?

JENNIFER KLEIN: I had a coffee this morning with about 10 or 15 students and I left more excited than I have been in a very long time. Because these days in Washington are somewhat distressing to me so to be surrounded by people with such great values to start with and so much energy coupled with an amazing amount of intelligence was incredibly heartening. And in some sense, it's the same Brown student than when I was here, but they're great.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. And does it make you a little optimistic?

JENNIFER KLEIN: It does. It does. I have to say, as you might imagine given my background, I am very distressed these days about the state of our country and the faith people have or don't have in our institutions and the leadership we are living with right now. But even since the election-- I mean, this was completely confirming of it, but not isolated-- the one thing that I do feel hopeful about is the power-- no one young is complacent. And they might agree or disagree with me and my politics, but I don't feel like anybody's complacent.

And they are ready to take up the mantle. They are ready to lead. They are ready to run for

office. The number of people, particularly young women, that I hear talking about running for office is really stunning. So I think that the silver lining is a grassroots swell of people and the importance of civic action.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I think those things were catalyzed in an important way.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that is heartening. Jennifer Klein, thank you so much for coming in today to talk to us on *Trending Globally*. I really appreciate it.

JENNIFER KLEIN: Thank you.

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