Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Blanca Antonini in New York on July 30th, 1997 in her offices. I'm Jean Krasno as the interviewer. So for the record, what was your role in the Central American peace process and when did you begin?

Blanca Antonini: I was Assistant to Alvaro de Soto who was the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General in the negotiations between the government of El Salvador and FMLN. The way it began was – let me go to the first element. The Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar together with the Secretary-General of the OAS, in December 1986 had visited the area, the Central American countries, because as you know, at that time, there were various conflicts and it was an area in which the internal conflicts and the influence of the two superpowers, with one or the other of the parties to the armed conflict both in Nicaragua, in El Salvador and in Guatemala and even whatever there was in Honduras, played a very important role. So both Secretaries-General decided to go there and see what the situation was because they were genuinely concerned about the destabilization and the prospective in the region, given the conflict, and they thought that maybe both organizations, the United Nations and the OAS, could play some role in trying to support some initiative towards peace agreements.

They came out of that tour that they made to all the five Central American countries a little pessimistic and they issued a statement saying so. After that, there was an effort to substitute the Contadora Peace effort, which you are familiar with – I am not going to talk about that-and the support group. It was seen that it hadn’t led anywhere. It had reached a stalemate.
Therefore, there was a domestic effort to make a proposal that would help start a peace process in the various countries of the region. That was when the Costa Rican president, Arrias came up with what was formulated as Esquipulas II. Esquipulas II was a peace agreement among the various governments that contained several elements in common. That basically it had the character of an inter-governmental agreement encouraging open elections, free and fair elections, and that was particularly something that was addressed at the Nicaraguan government – at the moment it was the Sandinistas. Also, the establishment, internally of reconciliation commissions with well-known representatives of the various forces or independent – not governmental representatives-in order to create a forum in the various countries that would help to reach agreements and would keep some kind of forum for debate to the opposition. And it encouraged the disarmament and demobilization of insurgencies within the context of free and fair elections and respect for human rights and a number of guarantees to which the government made a commitment to give the matter respect. In this context, they created an international commission for verification that was established with representatives of the governments of the Contadora group, the governments of the support group, there was a support group to the Contadora,

JK: And that meant that eight countries were represented?

BA: Exactly. Last, a representative of the UN and of the OAS. The UN became involved in that respect as part of that group. And as part of that commission, the UN visited the five countries of the region. At present, as you know, Panama is also considered to be part of Central America, at the moment Panama was not considered that’s why we are talking about five countries. I believe it was still in dispute. So, they visited the various countries and eventually
they presented a report. The UN played a very important role in drafting that report with consultations with the OAS and the other members establishing what the situation was with regard to the commitments undertaken in Esquipulas. At the summit meeting of the Esquipulas agreement they took the report and they didn’t give the commission any other task to follow. So, in practice the countries of the region decided to assume the report and think how they would deal with it.

In all this process, in El Salvador, there were elections. The party that won the elections, which had been in the position until that time - before that the government was Christian-Democrat - the Arena Party took over the government. The president, President Cristiani, the first thing that he did when he assumed power was to say that he was going to start offering negotiations – a new peace process with the guerillas. Several attempts had been made in the past and they had not been successful, by the Duarte government. The President said that was his main priority for his presidential mandate. The negotiations started – two rounds of negotiations, if I am not mistaken, and he invited, as witnesses, a representative of the OAS and a representative of the UN.

JK: Now, this was in 1989?

BA: That was in 1989 and there was one in Costa Rica and then there was one in Mexico. There was no movement at the time, no movement and the role of the UN was just the role of a passing witness. Then there was no movement at the negotiating table when the guerillas launched their more ambitious offensive. Right? That was in November 1989. As you know they took important parts of the Capital, etc. So, in a way, it was their way of saying “We still
have to be reckoned with, we still have a military might and therefore you have to negotiate more terms with us.” At the same time, the assassination of the Cheswicks took place. In a very sort of – in perspective – I would say that that was also a very, very important element in pushing the negotiations forward in a way. Because it created a degree of awareness on the part of the international community, particularly on the part of the United States that in addition to what the government of the United States, at the moment, considered the need to reach an agreement that would stop the war and, therefore, allow – I mean, sort of disengage the government from the massive support that had been provided over the – throughout the decade to the government without achieving – without the latter achieving a definitive success in the war against the guerillas. Those elements were – to say – the last drop in convincing the American and the international community, in general, that a special would have to be made and through peaceful means achieve peace. You know, the special historical circumstances of international relations at the moment. I don’t need to tell you but that was a very important . . .

JK: Yes, the Berlin wall, and

BA: No, that was before the Berlin wall. It was when Gorbachev was in government and when he realized that he had to have a more cooperative relationship with the United States, particularly on its involvement in the Western Hemisphere. So, they also pushed for that and at the same time, Cuba was providing support but could not provide as much support materially but more in terms of keeping the guerillas there and that kind of thing. The reason for this was at the time, it didn’t have very much of a capacity to provide a lot of support. Okay, let’s leave that
aside because it is a whole different question. That’s when the offensive, the biggest offensive of the war was launched in November 1989 in El Salvador by the guerillas.

The guerillas had some contact with the UN, separately, you know. Exploring the possibility of a UN involvement but, at the same time, they were very reluctant to have an international involvement that was seen within the context of Esquipulas because Esquipulas as we said before was a whole agreement that was anti-insurgent even thought it provided for a drastic reform of the various states involved in a way that would make them more democratic and more open. That it required as a first element to have the demobilization and disarmament of the guerillas, in that context.

JK: Because it was focused as well, also on the Contras in Nicaragua as well as the issues in El Salvador.

BA: You know that Esquipulas which is an element of the guerillas, I didn’t mention it, I should have, it said that in order to verify compliance with the military aspects of the agreements of Esquipulas and the agreements of Esquipulas and its military aspects said that no country would allow the use of its territory to launch attacks against another country of the region or in other ways. So those were the security aspects more than military aspects of the Esquipulas agreement. In order to verify those, it provided the establishment of a peacekeeping operation – for the first time in the Western Hemisphere. Right? Even though there had been a president in 1965 in Santo Domingo but that was different. Right? But in practical terms, it was the first president in the Western Hemisphere that shows also the fact that the superpower rivalry is given way to a cooperative relationship. One of them is between El Salvador and Honduras and
between El Salvador and Nicaragua. Because one important element wasn’t supported that the
Sandinista’s were providing to the guerillas particularly in terms of them becoming their, as you
know, deposits of weapons and being able to live there. So, then it was an important element
because it was the first time that the blue elements had been accepted in a peaceable preparation
in the Western Hemisphere. They got a knowledge of the terrain and the kinds of problems of
the persons involved, of the most important characters, of the ways of operating militarily by the
guerillas, their rules that they used, etc.

Also, from the domestic point of view of both countries, it familiarized them with the
idea of what a peacekeeper could do. That it would give them a way of being present at the
maximum international quorum for security decisions, which is the Security Council. It
provided them with a very qualified witness, let us say. That exercised a very important
restraining input on governments.

JK: For the UN, it seems to me that you are explaining to me that it was a kind of a learning
experience that later benefited the work in El Salvador.

BA: Absolutely. So in El Salvador, going back to one of the questions that you have in your
list, I am not following the order, you can interrupt me whenever you wish. If there are big gaps
you tell me next time we meet. This time was very important even though the agreements in El
Salvador were an important element from the very beginning was the question that they would
be agreement verified by the United Nations and through an operation that would report to the
Security Council – that was essential to the agreement. Because of the nature of the agreements
in their totality, the entailed far more, as you know, than the simple operation of military aspects
of a cease-fire with separation of forces. Demobilization and disarmament on one side and on the other side reduction of the armed forces, let’s say, and accepting certain rules of the game and their behavior in the field.

JK: The agreement you are referring to now, is the El Salvador various peace agreements.

BA: Talking about El Salvador various peace agreements. The various peace agreements of El Salvador covered far more than that which were the traditional aspects that were covered by any disagreement that eventually were verified by a peacekeeping operation. They covered, as you know, a whole aspect of reform of the state and the relationship to the cities of the guarantees for human rights, institution building, re-integration, I will talk about that at another time. So, because of that, it was decided that the verification should not be conducted in an integrated fashion – not by different bodies. Because all the agreements, both in the operation and the military aspects and in the broader political aspects were part of the whole and therefore it was decided, it was thought that it would be better and that is what the Security Council approved, to have a single operation and a single operation that would have a military component and the single operation would be under a civilian head of mission. It would have a very good understanding of all the aspects of the peace agreement.

JK: When you talk about that, when was that sort of holistic concept conceived? Was it actually understood even prior to the negotiations really beginning to take form? Or was it something that the UN was beginning to learn through the process of that year and a half or so of negotiations that went on?
BA: Well, I was still talking to you about the pre-UN process. I was talking about the time when the parties had negotiations between them and that the church, the Catholic Church, had been opposed to and to which, because for the first time, Christian invited the UN and the US to be witnesses. That was before the launching of the offensive. When the offensive, the military offensive was launched and the whole process was interrupted that’s when both the FMLN which had had various letters of contents with the UN and President Cristiani came to see the Secretary-General and told him “We would like you to be an intermediary not a mediator in this process with the guerillas.” So, then a process started, a negotiation directed and direct and very confidential. Nobody knew and it didn’t come out in the press. To establish the terms of negotiations, and at that moment it worked several months. The guerillas had asked the Secretary-General through a letter through de Soto in December 1989 to do that. The President came to visit the Secretary-General Javier.

JK: He came here to New York.

BA: I don’t know exactly the date; I think it was the 17th of January. He said, “Okay, let’s establish the main rules of the game for these negotiations. Then we will launch the process in an agreement to be signed by the parties and the United Nations. So that we think what the process will be because I cannot be involved if this is not something that is clearly established and is serious and that the parties made the commitment to reach certain basic objectives, not to withdraw from the table and to respect my role in such and such a capacity, not to go to the press” were several rules of the game. So there was a backhand court. Right?
JK: Was he involved in establishing these ground rules?

BA: Yes, I was the de Soto’s assistant.

JK: Were there conversations between you and de Soto and Javier Pérez de Cuéllar on what kind of process to set up and as you were talking about – not to go to the press and so forth?

BA: Yes, de Soto was the person that was more, you know, into thinking all of this – what the process would be and he was in constant touch with the government and the guerillas either on the telephone or in meetings here or traveling back and forth. I went with him to every one.

JK: Just for some diplomatic history, I am very interested to know about this and have a record . . .

BA: I didn’t answer your question, let me answer your question. This process started on the objectives and the basic procedures and rules of the game of the negotiating process. Both parties had a contact at the Secretary-General to ask him to participate as a go-between in negotiations.

JK: Let’s talk about establishing the process.
BA: Establishing the process. So there was all this back and forth and then we talk about the details back and forth since 17 January since the President officially asked the Secretary-General until the 4th of April. The 4th of April they signed in Geneva with the Secretary-General in presence. In April 1990, they signed an agreement establishing the basic objectives and the basic rules of the game and procedures and the character of the Secretary-General would have and what the basic things that they would respect. Among those things, there were four main objectives. The objectives were: to end the war, full respect for human rights, that as you know entailed events of the old peace agreements having to do with the judiciary, the police, the armed forces, etc. So there were four objectives.

From that moment it was clear that the peace agreement would not be a simple surrendering of weapons through, you know, the capacity to incorporate into the political system, but rather a much more ambitious thing and I would say that the thrust of it is the change of the nature of the state and the relationship towards the citizen, particularly with regard to the role of the armed forces, the establishment of a new national civilian police and a new security system and all the institutions that entail and guarantee respect for human rights domestically and then there is another element – there were questions that had to do with re-integration – social-economic re-integration of ex-combatants of the populations more affected by the conflict. There were all sorts of mechanisms for participation – right – like COPAZ which was a political mechanism and also a quorum for discussion of social-economic questions which lawyers and the clergy and the state would be present and then the operation and military aspects of disarmament, demobilization and reduction of the armed forces.

JK: Were you in Geneva at the Geneva protocol?
BA: Yes.

JK: How do you think, in your opinion, that the government of El Salvador was willing to agree to such an agenda – it would reform itself? In which the government itself would have to be reformed. You can see why the FLMN would support such a process.

BA: Not really, because the FLMN, of course, you know it came from the tradition of the Latin American guerilla, even though it had evolved further than the traditional Latin American guerilla. I don’t exactly remember the date, but there had been an article in foreign affairs that had supported elections which as you know was a taboo or something not acceptable for the traditional 70s or 60s Marxist guerillas. Right. So, they believed they had evolved quite a lot but still, for them, you know, to talk about democratization in the traditional sense of democracy as well as understanding, and understand it with several parties and elections, etcetera. You were not sure whether they really wanted it or not but in any case they supported it. At the same time, they it a point to allow negotiations of keeping their military capacity because they said that that was their only power, real power. Therefore, it was an element, otherwise the government would not negotiate. That’s why the cease-fire came at the end.

On the part of the government, I think there was a lot of international pressure and don’t forget that anybody, that is my personal opinion, they didn’t know what the final product would be. They didn’t know what the final product would look like. What it would look like and how far they would go. But, they knew that they had to modernize the system. To modernize the system they had to make concessions in terms of further democratization. It is not clear to me
how far they wanted to go from the very beginning. But according to him, he didn’t know that
they would go that far and he, of course, is the best defender of the peace agreements at the
moment. So I think that each side didn’t have a very clear idea of what they wanted. Even
though, I must say that the guerillas, tended to be more creative, for obvious reasons. They were
the ones that wanted to change the status quo, because they were the ones that were not in power.
The government being in power is the less interested in making a lot of changes. So, I think they
really didn’t know, at least not all of them that they wanted to reach a degree – I think they went
further than they thought they would go. The guerillas, on the other hand, I think from the very
beginning they knew that they were – some of them were not convinced that they would
surrender all their weapons, I think. But that’s my personal opinion, because they kept that card
until the last minute.

JK: Now, in the end we saw that these negotiating teams achieved something that was
remarkable. But during the process it seems as though there were times in which the negotiating
team, on the part of the government, or the negotiating team on the part of the FMLN, were not
always perceived by the parties that they represented as really doing the work in the best interests
of the government or in the best interest of the rebels. There were times when there was tension.

BA: That’s right. According to the agreement of human rights, the guerillas were severely
criticized by some of the followers. Not so much because I think the question of the content of
the accord, maybe they question the fact that the accord could blame for violations of human
rights on both sides. Right? On the other hand, I think particularly because of what it meant
politically to sign an agreement that you -- that you could easily be manipulated by the
government as a publicity device in order to make them look good without really changing the situation. On the other hand, from the point of view of the negotiations themselves, I think it was very important for various reasons. One, because it broke a stalemate. For the simple reason that it had been several rounds and no agreement had been signed even though discussions had been held and had been very useful to know what the positions of the parties were – to clarify, to know each other, etcetera. The fact that there was no agreement, there was a lot of skepticism because there had been a lot of initiatives in the past and the people in El Salvador – some of them tended to think that there was bad faith on both sides and they were sitting there to pretend that they were – let’s say – reach an agreement whereas their real interests lay somewhere else. So it was important for that reason.

It was also important because it pinned down both. Right? Because after you sign an agreement it is very difficult then – it is more difficult to go back to square one. Another reason was that that agreement provided for the establishment or the verification mission that was eventually established before the signature of the final agreement as the negotiations went on. For the first time in history, the history of the United Nations, there was a mission that had to verify – very ample powers to verify the whole range of human rights throughout the country; because it was present not only in the capital but also in various regions. Right? It had capacity to go to any place that it felt that human rights could be violated. It had a lot of inherent capacity to verify and to report on that. So that was a very important element in gaining the confidence in getting to know the United Nations for the local populations in the areas closer to the land and more subject to military attacks from both sides – as an element of confidence. Then, also, because it provided a guarantee that the other side could not – you know – cheat or renege on its commitments because this was highly visible and qualified witness.
JK: In the agreements that eventually came out with the human rights agreements that were in the summer of 1990 in Mexico.

BA: It was in May.

JK: In May? Whenever, we can look up the date.

BA: No, no, you are right. It was after that. Because May 1990 was the agenda. Caracas.

JK: At any rate, when the negotiating team came together for those meetings, did they reach a human rights agreement on the main agenda or did they expect to come up with that kind of an agreement? Or did they really meet to come up with something else.

BA: The first substantive subject that started being discussed once Geneva, which is sort of a procedure of things, basic objectives, and Caracas which is also an agenda, you know. When they started discussing specific substantive question, the started discussing the armed forces. So, when it was so clear that it was a stalemate, et cetera, the United Nations they prefer it, because consultation (558). It was Pedro who had prepared it – the agreement under the direction of de Soto, the draft agreement to human rights on the basis of discussion that he had with both parties, of course. He was the one who formulated it and the idea of putting forward an agreement as a way of, you know, jump-starting the process by another way or through another subject was a UN idea.
JK: Had Pedro prepared this proposal prior to the meeting in Mexico?

BA: He had several - yes - it wasn’t in Mexico. That was in Costa Rica. He had been elaborating ideas, etc. It was his own ideas, but on the basis, also, on the conversations he had with the parties. You know, if you want to keep the confidence of the parties of a mediator or a de facto mediator as the UN was – it wasn’t formally a mediator – you have to be very much aware of what the parties consider to be their main interests. You have to be forceful but you cannot force them to do something that they really don’t want to do. So he preferred a nice agreement that he had had conversations with the party – but it was very much his own initiative.

JK: He was working for the United Nations at that time.

BA: Yes. It was the initiative of the UN. He was the one who was the specialist; a very well known lawyer in human rights, international, with a long history. He was the one had the substantive, better qualified substantively to prepare those agreements. But the strategy was de Soto’s strategy under the direction of the Secretary-General. De Soto was the one who designed it -- who carried it out. De Soto was the initiator and the substantive elements were very, very crucial.

JK: That was presented to the parties and opened for discussion and then did they (both speaking at one time here)…
BA: Yes, they discussed many changes. In the end it was accepted after very lengthy negotiations and finished at six-o-clock in the morning. At the end of the road it could be said that the parties had agreed and they signed. They had agreed to this agreement. The Armed Forces were still being discussed. Then it had a negative reaction, domestically, in supporters of the FMLN and the government but it turned out to be good for both because it strengthened their hand. Because, in a way, you could say if you look at it from a negative point of view sort of presenting them with a fait accompli because they hadn’t composed a word of it. But I think it was the right thing to do. As I told you, it was not just the content of it that could be open to discussion but it was also the occasion of signing or not an agreement. So there was a lot of political speculation.

JK: Was the meeting taking place in Costa Rica? Previously I have asked you about the role of the friends of the Secretary-General. The four countries that had been . . . (interview was interrupted here and began again) Well, we were talking about the negotiations of July of 1990. What I was wondering is the role of the friends of the Secretary-General. I know they had an important role later on in terms of helping to write Security Council Resolutions and so forth. Were any representatives of these four countries in Costa Rica at that time?

BA: Usually, the negotiations were just the UN team and the two parties. That doesn’t mean that the three of them met at the same time together in the same room. It meant sometimes that the UN went back and forth. Things that which being together proved to be more counter-productive because both parties starting giving their own political speeches rather than trying to see the . . . so there was a lot, sometimes, of the UN. Going to first to see the government and
then consulting with the FMLN and coming back and coming back and then deciding. The procedure was always part of a negotiation and the government said we had better do it bilaterally. Meaning we meet with the UN and explain to them what we want. We don’t want to have the FMLN in crossfire. Because they come up with – I don’t know – this will start being a different issue and we will not get anywhere. So, the UN went and did a lot of proximity talks, so to speak, in many cases or in certain subjects or, for instance, to establish a group that was informal, for instance, the work in Costa Rica next to a swimming pool procedure. It was more informal and was not with the teams, per se, but just one, two, three of the team and of the UN one or two. You see, and it gave a different framework, it gave them more freedom to say what their real concerns were. With the friends – the friends were not present. But the friends were always there through their ambassadors in the country. Therefore, de Soto, for instance, we had negotiations with both sides in the two modalities I told you of the various sub-modalities? Then, at a certain point, at the beginning and towards the end and sometimes in the middle – it depended on the needs or the length of the round, et cetera; we had meetings with the friends and informed them what was going on. We told them, for instance, I remember when the very lengthy negotiations of the constitutional reforms that the contacts with the friends were important in the contacts than emphasizing their influence with the government, for instance, for the reform.

I remember they considered the reform of the mechanism for reform in the constitution which the government did not accept to do. There was a lot of, you know, the sort of asking them to do it. It is much better if you do it through the friends – but in this case we are a group selected by the Secretary-General at his initiative to support his efforts than going to an inter-governmental body and telling them, “Please do that.” That is far more difficult because it is
public, because there are more interests involved, whereas on a one-to-one basis. At the time, the Americans were not part of the so-called friends of the Secretary-General. Of course they were essential to the negotiation process. Without them, I think the peace agreement would not have made progress even though it started, I gather from your questions you have the impression they were not always in complete agreement with the ways the United Nations was conducting the process. Because they tended to be

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JK: We have been talking a bit about the process that the negotiations went through. In July the Human Rights Agreements were reached. Then, what was the next step by the UN at that point? You had the Human Rights Agreements, then you had been asked to verify. What did the UN have to do at that point? You went to El Salvador to make an assessment about . . .

BA: That was later, because the most important element after that were the rounds of negotiations without a definitive result – even though there was progress – as I tell you in certain general ideas of how to address, particularly, the question of the armed forces. Part of the question that emanated from the armed forces was public security – National Civic Police – because as you know public security was one of the main responsibilities of the armed forces. It was very clear, in those negotiations that both parties agreed to separate from the responsibilities of the armed forces the question of public security. So, there was the establishment of the Civic Police. That was the general concept that was more or less agreed. But, for instance, for the government, at the beginning to do that it was enough to create – let’s say separate it from the Minister of Defense and but it would be basically the same officers that had been police officers
that could go to a certain procedure and eventually be part of the new police force. There was no idea how the final product would be even though the general concept was more or less accepted and we were talking in those terms. The most important date after that was in October, in Mexico, it was agreed, the parties agreed to have the UN play a role without putting that in writing. Which is, what is the difference from a go-between, which in practice it could be far more than a go-between – but not, let’s say, legally or formally. We expected that the UN be the only one who drafts non-papers that are used for discussions. So, they will abstain from presenting other papers. So in practice, they did have their own non-papers, etc., but the things that were discussed at the table was the paper prepared by the UN. The paper prepared by the UN was not any paper that Pedro thought was the best model, it was something that tried to put together at least the essential elements that the parties considered essential that the could consider intrinsic to their own interests. At the same time, it went much further than that. Pedro had prepared a draft on the armed forces. The parties of the 31st of October 1990 expected to accept it, the UN prepared paper that would be a non-paper, but that paper would be the only paper to be discussed on the subject. It was only a non-paper, it was not a proposal but it would be the only one to be discussed and they would abstain to present their own papers to accept the paper that the United Nations, on the basis of their discussion on its own work, had formulated the armed forces. So it’s the day when they received the first non-paper prepared by the UN. That was an important element. That first non-paper is the one that evolved a lot, changed a lot, etcetera, but eventually it’s part of this chapter of this book on the armed forces. That covers all there is – sections, you know – duty, security bodies, reaction.
JK: Is there any record of the non-papers? Are any of those non-papers kept in anybody's records or files or personal files that might eventually be donated to the archives? That would be very interesting.

BA: I must say that the FMLN had, I would say, that the basic idea that most of them had – except that they were not in the same context and at San Pedro they went much further – they kept until very late the negotiation process. Until September 1991 they never accepted the fact that they would not agree to anything less than the dissolution of the armed forces or the merging of both armed forces.

JK: They had a plan of eliminating the armed forces. Like the Costa Rica sort of situation.

BA: Exactly. They said that Costa Rica was more advanced and was less affected by the crisis than other countries in Central America. They were probably quite sure. They kept that. So the way it was dealt with – because to the government it was absolutely unacceptable and to the United States. Nobody wanted to support them – none of the four friends – not the United States – because it was politically impossible to say that. Therefore, what the United States did – the United Nations, sorry, was to propose, okay, let’s say – let’s put this in the freezer. Let’s keep it there and continue with those things that we can discuss, with which we can make progress. Eventually, we will take these out of the freezer and see what we do with it. That was the way it was handled.
JK: General Vargas explained to me that I believe, in July, in Costa Rica in 1990, that he had proposed a plan. I believe he said it had something like thirty-one elements to it on reforming the military. It was not basically discussed or put on the table necessarily but that eventually that the final agreement really reflected quite a bit of what was in that document. What is your assessment of that?

BA: I wouldn’t go that far, you know. Because I think, for instance, when I was telling you the question of public security – it was very important because they had accepted the notion that the military had to deal with defense – external war – and the police had to deal with internal security – meaning by internal security, the protection of the cities. That was quite, quite, progress conceptually. But they way he conceived it was that those elements that were now within the military that have specialized in police questions would be the members of this new police force that would not longer be under the military. So it is a different thing. But of course it had elements that were useful. Then Vargas always was answering much the question of the Commission, the Purification Commission. There were two commissions established. One was the Truth Commission that dealt with impunity. The crimes – various grievances, human rights violations committed in the pact. That was mostly military but it was not especially military – not only military. Because impunity was the basic problem and it involved pacts committed by the guerillas. But then, it was established with three very well known high-level figures of an international stature by the Secretary-General. Then there was the Ad Hoc Commission. The Ad Hoc Commission was a commission established with three Salvadorians that were very respected and would go for the fight and the record of military people – it didn’t say whether they should be officers or soldiers or what and established on the basis of their record and their behavior with
regard to respect for democracy, human rights, their property, in general, their behavior, but with a strong accent on human rights. Whether they should remain or it was recommended that they leave there. The government agreed to having all those that were mentioned by the Ad Hoc Commission to have them be named – that was one of the big problems because they mentioned 102 officers and among them were the high military command. Then things got worse a few months later. The Truth Commission report came out and it involved who was responsible for ordering the resignation. It turned out to be the Minister of Defense under Cristiani. Cristiani didn’t want to touch him because he felt it would put in danger his own government. So, there were these two commissions and those are things that you could argue that these are not things that tend to change the nature of the state but just specifically established to address one historical fact and then they disappear but I think it creates a precedent that is sometimes stronger than trying to establish a new institution. The military in San Salvador would never forget the experience of those two commissions.

JK: Then in the days before the final agreement was settled here in New York, in December, which was right at the last few weeks of the Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. What were some of the issues that were involved in the final weeks of the negotiations. Tell me a little bit more about your role also in that period of time and then earlier in terms of what you were doing and in terms of meeting with the people or preparing.

BA: In the last weeks here in December, there were several tables at the same time. There was only one negotiating table but several sub-tables, because one of them had to do with the socio-economic aspects on landing, particularly. That was very, very difficult to achieve. Then
there was another one on the armed forces even though the armed forces had been the one that had been more discussed all along, the final touches on whether the *Ad Hoc* Commission would have just three civilians. The government insisted until the last minute of having one military officer and it was never accepted. They said okay, let’s have military officers that are going to be part of the deliberations but not of the decision-making. Those kind of details. Then there were the socio-economic aspects. For instance, it was in those days that one way of getting out of the socio-economic aspects, covering them without going into the details of socio-economic aspects, was that the establishment of a committee on socio-economic aspects that would be set up, as I told you before, with the participation of the government of the business sector and of the workers to discuss conditions of work and to discuss even economic policy.

JK:  It was this COPAZ that . . .

BA:  No, no. That’s a different one. COPAZ was agreed to in September. It was agreed to before – in September of 1991.

JK:  I see, okay. So that had been written into previously.

BA:  September 1991, which was several months before the final signature of the agreements, was a very important breakthrough. The parties at the highest possible level came to New York, invited by the Secretary-General, and that helped to break a stalemate. The stalemate had been that FMLN had not accepted until that moment to withdraw from the table his idea that the armed forces had to be either dissolved or at the moment they said merged. The wait was solved
in September 1991 was through these high level meetings called by the Secretary-General. You see, there were two basic channels. The Secretary-General saw the FMLN concern about the merging or the dissolution of the army and the question of security and participation. He said, “Okay, that cannot be achieved.” But what can we do instead. The two channels were COPAZ in which the FMLN would participate before becoming a full-fledged political party. It was the FMLM together with the government and together with all the other political parties that had representation in the legislative assembly. That gave them ten members in total. That gave five members that were more or less the opposition and five members that were more or less likely to support the government – either part of the government. But they had to, let’s say, agree on the draft legislation necessary to implement the peace agreements and they also could discuss anything within the scope of the peace agreements. So that was an important element for political participation.

Then in the establishment of the National Civic Police, the agreement said that, “The new police would not admit members of the former military forces or of the FMLN. It would be all people that came from an independent origin and had not been involved in the war, with this exception, this caveat.” During a two-year period, there would be a transitional period, until the new force could be established. Because the new force would be established through a National Academy for Public Security that would give them the academic and technical preparation they needed to become policemen. But, it would take a minimum of two years. In those two years there would be a temporary police that would withdraw gradually as – (interrupted by telephone call) – as the National Academy for Public Security produced new policemen they would be deployed in different areas of the country and the old police that was there temporarily would be phased out. During those two years, certain elements of the FMLN and certain element of the
National Police, the existing National Police, could enter the Academy. But the two of them together should not exceed the rest of the students at the Police Academy. It didn’t go farther than that. That allowed the FMLN to tell its ex-combatants, “You have this chance of entering the Academy and becoming police.” The FMLN very much wanted until the last minute, particularly for keeping a lot of them. This was completely out of the question because what you want is to democratize the country and you want reconciliation of society – you cannot keep the police, the military force, under one faction, but this formula was eventually accepted by them.

So it’s COPAZ, and that provision that for two years they had the capacity to have candidates enter the National Academy for Public Security to become, eventually, part of the National Civic Police.

JK: That was achieved in that September of 1991.

BA: That was achieved and they accepted to withdraw their demand that the army be either dissolved or merged.

JK: Should we stop here?

BA: Yes.

JK: Do we have time to discuss the negotiations in December or do you want to do that next time. Okay, let’s take a few more minutes to talk some more about this, the negotiating process. Because, in December then, when the parties met here in New York, we talked about the fact that
there were negotiations going on at the table and at the sub-tables. Now, why was it that the parties felt that it was important to reach an agreement before Pérez de Cuéllar left?

BA: It was obviously very important because the Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar had been personally involved in the negotiation process. Also, the Americans had given us signs that either the agreement was reached that year and then nobody knew what would happen in the next year. Negotiation process would unravel – could easily unravel again. So it was felt that it was essential to achieve on the 31st of December. Also, to severely enroll faith of Salvadorians in the negotiation process; don’t forget that the negotiations had been going on for two years. So that was an important thing. Also, was a small country, where the enlarging new conflicts that were more and more taking center stage in international concerns and in a way the kind of conflict that FMLN presented – so you could say that it was becoming sort of obsolete – and therefore it was understood that that was the moment which was ripe. After that it would have been the same. That was an important consideration for the guerillas.

JK: So what was it that was holding it up on the last day? The parties, when I was interviewing them, told me that they wanted to stop the clock because they were even up to the last hour.

BA: Because very, very important, substantive progress was made. There were very important element that were still needed. So the formula that was agreed was an Act. It was called an Act. It’s like a formal document saying “We have reached agreement on the basic elements for a cease-fire for this and that and we will sign the final agreements of the 16th of
January in Mexico.” All of them signed that. In a way, what they set was another deadline and they committed themselves to achieve all those points that were supposed not to be substantive but just questions of mechanism and time-table, et cetera, before the 16th of January. In fact, those discussions were resumed on the 3rd or the 5th of January 1992 and it was very, very intense and took very often until 5 o’clock in the morning or 6 o’clock and then we came back at 10 o’clock. I remember we were really exhausted, because the timetable can be seen as sort of a procedural operation aspect. But I don’t think it was in this case because the synchronization of who does what when in relation to what is done by the other side at what point – was essential. For instance, I will give you an example. The demobilization of the special battalions had been set up for the war. The dissolution of those battalions – at what point would they be disarmed. In comparison with what other things should the FMLN do. That took a long time. At the same time, at another table were discussing, you know, lands, and another table was discussing another thing, so the general framework that there many important elements missing on the 31st of December even though they were important but they were not. The most important – you couldn’t finish the agreements without them. So what they agreed to was to sign this commitment to finalize whatever they had to finalize and sign the final agreement on the 16th of January. I will show you the documents here so that you will see what it says. Oh, no, I don’t have it here. Do you have the agreements?

JK: Yes, they are in the book. No, I don’t have them with me.
BA: The big book, the blue book, right? Here it is. I want to show you what that agreement says. Let me check. I would hardly say that all the other things were not substantive, the remaining details . . .

JK: That’s an important part of the history of this. In the future, when these kinds of negotiations go on again it’s important to know this sequence of events and the history of it and how it eventually worked out. So that you can have a sense of the fact that this can be accomplished even though it seems very complicated, how to use these kinds of techniques. Back in relation to – I’m trying to figure out exactly what kinds of other things that the friends of the Secretary-General did. One of the people that I had interviewed in El Salvador said that in the last part of the negotiation – and I don’t know if that was here in December or whether in Mexico in January, was that they still had not come up with a formula for forming the police.

BA: That was in September. That is what I told you.

JK: Okay. One of the friends had suggested that it be 20 per cent FMLN and 20 per cent government and the remainder was to be recruited.

BA: No, not that. Because the agreement doesn’t say that. It said, “Okay, for two years they can have FMLN and the PN, National Police, the candidates for the National Academy for Public Security take their courses and then become National Civic Police. But, the sum of those two elements should not be more, should not be higher, than that of the candidates not coming from any of the parties and not being related to the outcome. It could have been 49 per cent
between the two of them and 51 per cent of the defendants or any other formula. The formula of 20-20-60 was reached at the time of implementation. That’s an important element in the process because the peace agreements are so wide and comprehensive and they can be understood and interpreted different ways and because some of the implementation takes resources that were not available or procedures that had not been worked out by the parties. An expedient way of doing it eventually was that the parties got together with a when and they agreed on ways or interpreting those things. These are the implementation agreements and one of those agreements said, “Okay, what are the figures for those elements of the FMLN that can enter the Academy or the National Police and back and forth and back and forth. They reached the formula of 20 per cent, 20 per cent but it wasn’t agreed here. It is true that the friends were very involved in that September 1991 negotiations. Not at the table but in context with us, with the parties too.

JK: Actually, where did those negotiations take place in September, here in New York?

BA: The Secretary-General invited – because they had reached a stalemate, a deadlock - so what he did was send a letter to Cristiani and de Soto. FMLN, saying, because of blah, blah, I think that the point has come where I would like to, you know, break the stalemate and therefore invite you to come at the highest possible level. Before sending the letters, of course there were of – as you know you don’t send a letter without first knowing, what more or less, the reaction of the other party will be. So, he sent a letter to both sides inviting them to come here. They came here at the highest level because it was the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General is the highest level we have and therefore he can ask the highest level of both sides to come here. The highest level for the FMLN was to have all the five commanders of the five groups here.
JK: That included Shepee Condal and . . .

BA: Shepee Condal was always involved. Shepee Condal was head of one of the groups. Then there was Vavela Saénz. So the five groups were here at the highest level.

JK: On the government’s side it was General Vargas?

BA: On the government’s side it was the President.

JK: Oh, Cristiani.

BA: That was another thing that the Secretary . . . sometimes it was not that easy with the Communist delegation to be able to reach an agreement. Because some of them didn’t have decision-making power. They always had to call Cristiani. The one that had more leeway, of course, was Vargas. Because Vargas was a military man even Cristiani could not be sure of. All of this I am talking to you and it’s my cooperation and you know where it comes from. But, I cannot, you know, working at the UN, I cannot be seen as giving you this information and making . . .

JK: We can discuss how you want to release this. Because we need to do that. If you want to hold it back for a few years.
BA: You can just say we discussed this without saying exactly what.

JK: We will discuss that again. Do you remember which of the friends of the Secretary-General did make the suggestion of the two-year interim period of the different sides.

BA: They said that the two-year interim period – they said the question of allowing the FMLN and the government in proportions that would be lower than those of the independents. I think it was, I will have to check, that my impression is that it was . . .

JK: I am going to be talking to them next week actually. I am going to ask them a few things. It will be helpful.

BA: I remember that the one that was more reluctant was Colombia.

JK: Why don’t we finish for today, because it is quarter to five.

END OF TAPE