Jean Krasno: For the record, Mr. Goksel, would you please explain something about your background, where you were born and educated, and when you first became involved with the United Nations?

Timur Goksel: I was born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1943, did a part of my high school in Washington, DC, where my father was the air attaché at the Turkish embassy. I finished junior high in Washington and then I attended the Woodrow Wilson High School for a while. Then, I came back to Turkey to finish high school, and attended the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, which is a regional university in the English language. At the time it was, of course, associated with Cornell University in those days. I attended the faculty of administrative sciences, but I specialized in public administration and international relations. I joined the UN as an information assistant in the information office in Ankara. The name sounds impressive, but it was a one-man office. The headquarters of the office was in Athens; it was a regional office. I joined there in 1968. In 1973, I went into the Turkish army, as was compulsory, national duty, and when I came back, that was after the Turkish-Cyprus invasion, and the regional office which also included Cyprus and Greece was not found feasible any more by the Turkish government, so the Turkish government insisted that there must be an independent UN information office in Turkey. The day that I got out of the army in 1975, I was tasked to start setting
up this office as an independent operation. And so it became an independent office, but
still I was put effectively in charge, whatever that meant, which meant that they did not
send anybody from New York, and I got some local staff myself. So, I ran that place until
1979.

UNIFIL was established in 1978, in March, and they had a couple of spokesmen --
but this was a very nasty place in those days. Not many people were willing to come here
-- it was still a combat job, and also very politically charged. The Under-Secretary
General for Peacekeeping at that time was Mr. Brian Urquhart, and I used to deal with
him because of the Cyprus issue in Ankara and all that, and his spokesman knew me very
well also. He was a Serbian who also was a first class journalist; in those days was the
spokesman of the Secretary-General. And I think they prevailed on the Secretary-General
Kurt Waldheim, in those days, that they should try a local staff member as a spokesman
here. So I was an experiment of a sort. One day in January 1979, I was told that I
volunteered for Naqoura [the UNIFIL field headquarters]. I didn’t have any problems
with the volunteering part but I had problems knowing where Naqoura was.

Krasno: So, you were told that you had volunteered.

Goksel: Yes. I was volunteered. I was told that if I can make it six months, then I had it
made and they would open an office for me for the UN. I said, “Fine.” I began studying;
I mean, what I knew of Lebanon in those days, like everybody else. What I knew of it
were the sights of the civil war of Beirut that was covered on television. I didn’t know
too much about what was happening in the south. I knew there was an Israeli invasion,
and there was a UN force coming and that was just about it. So, I arranged a crash course for myself in background reading as soon as I could, and I was totally brought here a month later. On the 17th of February, I arrived in Tel Aviv. Mr. Urquhart was in Jerusalem. I was already brought to him first. And he basically told me, “Good luck, and see if you can do it.” So, I came here; I had a Ghanaian force commander, General Emmanuel Erskin, who was a very easy man to work with and he was really pushing to have a spokesman and a press officer because he was all around. It was a really big media operation -- because in those days, you have to remember, that Beirut was the center of the foreign press in the Middle East, it was before the hostage taking and everything. So, the place was loaded with foreign journalists, and really big names. The foreign press in those days was a different proposal altogether. All the networks, for example, the US networks, were represented in Beirut with permanent bureaus, and all the big major newspapers had their permanent staff here. It was a very big operation. And now, all my colleagues in those days, the people I worked with, are now at very senior posts in the most major papers in the United States; they were foreign correspondents here. So, it was a good school for them also. It’s not the same anymore, they either displaced them for financial reasons, I mean, that the foreign press is now relying more and more on wire services, even TV relies on TV news agencies now. But those were different days. So, I was thrown right into it. The force commander said “You are on your own, find your way -- and get that press off my back.” Getting the press off everybody’s back was not too much of a problem if you knew what the problem was here, of course. I felt that it was quite a challenge because all the press guys based in this region were very experienced; they were all veterans and they knew this place inside-
out. If you are going to manage that crowd, you had better know the story better than they do, otherwise they will burn you, they will write in circles around you.

So, the first thing I did was I threw myself into finding out why we are here, what is this place about. Because when I came here, basically South Lebanon was a deserted, abandoned place, very few people were living here. Most of the Lebanese of the Shiite region in South Lebanon had abandoned South Lebanon because it had become a battlefield between the Palestinians and Israelis. And then I also discovered that between here and Beirut, which is about 120 kilometers, the PLO was in charge and not the Lebanese state. And to do anything here, you had to get your permission from the Palestinians. They had established in effect a mini-state here. But you see, when UNIFIL was put in here, we were called the ‘interim force’ -- we are still called the interim force. English is not my mother tongue, but I don’t know what interim means -- I don’t think it means twenty years.

Krasno: Interim means ‘in between’, ‘a short period of time.’

Goksel: Right. Most people thought it would be one year, maximum interim. But you see, I think this background is essential here -- why UNIFIL was created. There are many UN officials, bureaucrats, in New York, senior ones, also the field officials in the Middle East, had serious reservations about creating this force, because they said, “We are basically throwing in an international force into an area where there is no government authority, and how are these guys going to survive there, with whom?” But we also have to remember that four months before the designing of the Litani operation that led to the
creation of UNIFIL, the late-President Sadat of Egypt had gone to Jerusalem...

[interrupted] Of course, you have the role of the attack by the Palestinians in Israel, which led to the invasion and many civilians were killed.

Krasno: Right, they hit the bus in 1982 and then the Israeli’s policy was to retaliate.

Goksel: But then, you see, for the first time in history there was a dramatic breakthrough: Sadat had come to Jerusalem, and had addressed the Israeli parliament, and President Carter did not want to miss the momentum, and Lebanon was totally a mess. They had to find a way to get the Israelis out, thus, the idea of UNIFIL. “Let’s put up this international force, get the Israelis out, and let’s get back to normal.” So, everybody promised a lot of cooperation, “We will do this and that,” so UNIFIL was created. It was created -- I mean, looking back now -- it was created very quickly, although the whole UN peacekeeping department in those days was four or five people, it is now three hundred people or something. It was just Mr. Urquhart, a couple of deputies, and they could move very quickly. They first brought in troops from the neighboring peacekeeping forces from the Golan and from the Sinai force -- we had a force in Sinai in those days, called UNEF; the Golan force is still there.

Krasno: And UNTSO, was UNTSO involved?

Goksel: I’m sorry, yes. They were involved. Oh yeah, they were really involved, because they were the easiest to move. UNTSO is not an armed force, it is made out of
officers who work as observers, and so they are very mobile. They really played a role in settling down UNIFIL and meeting the troops coming in, because somebody had be on the ground showing “which way are we going?” Because UNTSO, in one shape of the format, in observing the border here as part of the Israel-Lebanese armistice commission, they had permanent positions on the border. Even before UNIFIL came, they were here. In fact, this was their headquarters. Now, they are still here, but they are now under the operational control of UNIFIL, in a much-reduced format. There are now about fifty officers, fifty-five officers from fourteen countries. They are still UNTSO observers but they are under the operational control of UNIFIL. So, this is what I found here.

But the problem was that we were told to deal with all the parties on the ground and establish liaison. Basically, the Lebanese government wished us very well. They were very leery about the whole thing, but they could hardly control Beirut in the civil war time, forget the south. So, basically we understood that we were on our own. We had a lot of good will and wishes, etc., from Beirut, but we are in the south. And the PLO was the dominant force in the south, and Mr. Arafat in those days, I think, was delighted that he was put in a position of upholding the UN force, so he promised to cooperate. That really increased their stature in the region. And we had the Israeli army, of course.

The problem with the Palestinian side of the equation was that although the PLO, in the person of Mr. Arafat, had promised to cooperate fully, when they were not happy with their situation or they felt that the situation was getting out of hand, they seemed to wash their hands of it, saying, “Oh no, we love you, we’d love to cooperate, but it’s not the PLO; it’s those undisciplined other groups.” So, there were all these other groups who were being recruited, you know? I wanted to find out who these other groups were,
and I discovered that we had about thirteen or fourteen different Palestinian factions that we had to deal with. Although Mr. Arafat had said that his was the only one that would represent all the Palestinians, but whenever the situation got out of hand or threatened the reputation of the PLO, we got told that there are these uncontrolled groups that they have no control over. So I said, “Let’s find out who these guys are.” Then I was tasked by the force commander to make this first UN index, UNIFIL index, of “who are we dealing with here?” We had to establish some sort of contact with these people.

Then in addition to these thirteen, fourteen groups that I found on the Palestinian side, all with different affiliations to other powers -- there was one directly involved with Iraq; they were being financed by Iraq; they were Palestinians but they were getting orders from Iraq. Several were attached to Syria; and there was the PLO itself with its famous al-Fatah group; and then there were independents that were called Leftists or whatever. Then you had one or two taking orders from Libya. They had one more or less related to Jordan. Can you imagine an international force coming here and trying to sort this out? That wasn’t enough. We discovered that all these groups had their Lebanese counterparts that they were financing and controlling. So whenever they didn’t want to be embarrassed they would say “No, no, it’s not us -- it’s those guys, they are Lebanese.” “Well, who are those guys there? Armed by the Palestinians, paid by the Palestinians...” They all had their front organizations also. So that pushed our list up to forty groups.

Krasno: Forty groups?

Goksel: At least.
Krasno: So, you did create a kind of index?

Goksel: We did. Because we had to know who these guys were. You see, it was very easy for them to tell you, “We are not responsible, sorry.” And we had to be able to tell them, “No, you are responsible.” So we had to establish these linkages between groups and whatever, as much as we could. So, I went to the journalists, the Lebanese journalists, I went to the field, I went to the PLO themselves, I said “Who are these guys, what do they do,” and then I start building “What is their ideology?” So, that was my first project, it was nothing to do with the press. But I felt I had to know these things so that I could answer the questions that I would be posed. That was one side of the story.

On the other side, we had the Israeli army, and they had their local extension here, a renegade Lebanese major called Major Saad Haddad who died in 1984. He was a proper Lebanese army major who was sent to the south by his government to protect the Christian villages, which are very few in South Lebanon, against attacks from Palestinians and the leftist groups in those days. It was an extension of the civil war. And Saad Haddad came here with his own battalion, he was a native of South Lebanon, but he couldn’t survive without help from the Israelis, so he established contacts with the Israeli army. He was totally cut off from Beirut, and so the Israelis started this policy of what is called the Good-faith policy, which initially started as a humanitarian gesture to give humanitarian assistance to the besieged villages here, medical services, things like that. But then of course it became political. This is where Israel started to get sucked into Lebanon more and more. Then they send advisors; then they send ammunition; then they send this. Then these people here had to travel to Beirut through Haifa, which
wasn’t announced but they had no other way of getting to Beirut because the roads were controlled by the Palestinians; they couldn’t go to Beirut, the Lebanese army.

So, into this mess, came UNIFIL. The idea of UNIFIL and its mandate was to see the Israelis out from Lebanon, to verify their withdrawal from here and then establish an area of peace and security for itself, and finally -- and this has been the most elusive -- to bring Lebanese authority to South Lebanon. In those days, the Israelis actually withdrew, so UNIFIL verified that. But what UNIFIL didn’t know, what the Israelis had in mind because they were not saying it. After Israel was verified “Yes, they have left Lebanon,” they said “Ah, sorry, we are not going to give this border area to you, because we never actually occupied that area -- we had to drive through it, I mean, can you jump over it?”

Never mind. It’s been a friendly area to us. It’s controlled by Major Haddad, and therefore UNIFIL cannot deploy in this area so, you cannot come to our border. Here, deal with Major Haddad.” We said “Excuse me deal with whom?” “Who is this is Major Haddad?” So, after...

Krasno: So, the language said that they had to withdraw from the area that they had occupied?

Goksel: No, the language said that they had to leave Lebanon.

Krasno: But they were interpreting it as...
Goksel: They said “well, we left Lebanon, but it was not a hostile area so we did not actually occupy this area, we sort of passed through it. We leave it to Major Haddad.” I said “Excuse me, who?” “Talk to Major Haddad.” He was the Lebanese army, so we thought maybe we could make a deal with him. It didn’t turn out that way, because he was a really mad, very temperamental sort of a guy. We got along fine, but he hated UNIFIL. And so, after long haggling and bargaining on the matter, UNIFIL was allowed to set up fifteen, sixteen positions on this -- in those days is was called not the ‘security zone’ but the ‘enclave,’ the ‘border enclave’ -- so, we set up these flag positions which had no meaning, except to just sit there, prepare for the operation. We are not allowed to patrol from them, they had basically become hostages in that Haddad land. This is what happened at the end. Then, UNIFIL got caught in the crossfire. When these initial days of settling down passed, UNIFIL got caught in the worst crossfire you can imagine here. Soon Israel was back, in manpower also. So, the verification was completely sidelined, out of the window. So, UNIFIL, instead of going to the border and becoming a buffer force, effectively became a sandwich force caught between the villagers, really bang in the way, and sometimes getting hit in the process as peacekeepers, sometimes intentionally being hit.

Krasno: Intentionally being hit by whom?

Goksel: By both sides. Haddad, the Palestinians, whatever. We had a lot of casualties.

Krasno: By the Israelis ever?
Goksel: Israeli fire at the UN came much later. Israelis used to fire close to the UN posts, but it was never actually to the UN posts, but it came very close by the UN soldiers. We hope to be over that -- we think we are over that now, but it did happen. But in the south, with Haddad it was normal daily practice; whenever he was unhappy with anything, which could have been the price of the dollar or oil prices, whatever he was unhappy with, he used to take it out on the UN.

Krasno: So, he would purposely hit the UN. With what kind of fire?

Goksel: Anything. I mean, they had all the guns here. Once I said, “All the possible guns short of a nuclear bomb, they had amassed.” In those days, finding weapons in Lebanon was the easiest thing in the world. Any kind of weapon was available on the market. And from 1982, when in 1982 the Israeli invasion... Am I going ahead of your...

Krasno: No, as a matter of fact you are already answering most of the questions I have down, so I am trying to keep track of what else I was going to ask. But just keep going because you are doing a perfect job.

Goksel: In 1982, everybody knew in South Lebanon that there was going to be an Israeli invasion. It was a matter of time. Inside, you had the Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, it was Prime Minister Begin’s government, and although there had been a cease-fire between Lebanon and the PLO for a long time -- I don’t know basically for how long --
this Sharon kept there was an infringement on the cease-fire agreement on whatever front, on the Jordan front, on the Egyptian front. If he were in Europe, he would say that there is a cease-fire infringement and all that. We felt that they were just looking for an excuse. We were not the only ones, because in Beirut in those days the press office, the press center was the very famous or infamous Commodore hotel. You could gauge the tension in the Middle East by the room occupancy rates in the Commodore Hotel, because everybody had their offices and everything there because they had the only working telex lines in Beirut, you see, in those days. By April 1982, the Commodore was full to the brim; everybody expected something and we’d get our tips from the Americans. They had traveled heavily and expensively, you know. Every one had put their two or three teams out there, it was very expensive. So, the Commodore was full, brimming from its windows. A bonanza!

Krasno: I wanted to ask you, because I understand that Arafat was warned, I think by the UN, that there was going to be an attack. Was that true?

Goksel: Well, Mr. Arafat had this tradition in those days of every year predicting a hot summer, and every time the summer was really hot, he was not here -- so he wasn’t here. But then, there came the famous assassination attempt on the Israeli ambassador in London. Although it was done by Abu Nidal, of the revolutionary council, one of the worst terrorist groups in the world, possibly, or was in those days. We knew that this was the chance that Sharon was looking for. I was in Beirut, for example, that day, and I knew I had to get back here very, very quickly because I was sure— I hadn’t talked to
anybody -- but that this was coming. That was on the 4th of June [1982], I returned to Naqoura on the 5th, and I decided that I must go home to Nahariyya [in Israel], with a change of clothing because it looked like I was going to stay for a long time. So, I crossed the border, and then I saw what I saw on the roads in the other side. On the other side, the Israeli army had come to the border and was waiting. Of course, it was a foregone conclusion that this was going to happen. When I looked at the very angry nature of the units, it became very clear that this was not going to be a limited operation, that this was a major invasion underway, so I returned back to Naqoura very quickly.

Krasno: So you didn’t get home...

Goksel: No, I did. I got home for the morning, because I knew I wouldn’t return after that. I returned back here, and with my friends and, at the time, with the force commander Lieutenant General William Callaghan, of Ireland. It was Sunday morning about 5:00. They would never attack on Shabat; that was on Saturday on Shabat. They would not launch an operation on Shabat, you see. So, we knew it would be Sunday morning, about four or five o’clock. So, Sunday morning came, five, six [o’clock], nothing happened. Then about 9:00 in the morning, General Callaghan got a message, a cryptic one, from the chief of staff of the Israeli army, who at that time was General Rafael Eitan who is now the Minister of Agriculture in the government. He asked General Callaghan to come to a meeting, and they said “But don’t go to Nazeret [Nazareth]” which was their headquarters, “but come to Zefat.” That was a signal to us that something was definitely happening, because they had moved their headquarters
from Nazaret to further north, because Zefat is north of there. It is not permanently there, but that day, that was the first time we heard it. So, Gen. Callaghan went to Zefat, about 10:35 that morning -- we all remember this time -- we got a message from him. He called us and he said one word, which was “Rubicon.” “Rubicon” was the code word for the invasion, it was the UN code word. Now, when we heard “Rubicon,” what would we do next? Here we are a peacekeeping force, whose lives were in their hands, and I had seen what was coming from the other side, the biggest invasion force I can imagine. But anyway, all the units were warned, we had a Motorola system here and somebody got on the air and just said one word, “Rubicon.”

Krasno: To everybody?

Goksel: To all the units. So, at 11:00 Sunday, the 6th of June 1982, up the road from here on the coast, there was a Dutch position, a checkpoint up the road from here at a place called the Hamra Bridge. And there were six Dutch guys there, with their rifles, and they had the great honor of meeting the first invasion column of this army, as thirteen Centurion tanks showed up at the checkpoint.

Krasno: Thirteen tanks. And these are five Dutchmen?

Goksel: Six Dutchmen, soldiers, young soldiers, with rifles in their hands. But that’s their job. It was hardly a fair match. They threw tank obstacles on the road. The first tank broke its drive shaft, so we got this report: “We immobilized the lead tank.” Hmm.
Good. Then, the soldiers came and they bumped the tank out of the way with other tanks, so the Dutch threw another obstacle on the road, and the second tank broke its track. The problem was at that point the Dutch had run out of tank obstacles, that’s all they had. That is not a position geared for an invasion; it was a peacekeeping position. So the tanks went through. This is how the invasion started. The thing is that everyone was expecting a very major defense by the Palestinians, those who were in South Lebanon, but they were caught flat-footed. Whoever tells you that they were ready for this day, they were not, the Palestinians.

Krasno: They weren’t ready.

Goksel: No, because these tanks move so fast. I think in the Israeli battle plan, they were expected to reach Hamortil, which is about nineteen kilometers from here, in three or four hours. They got there in fifteen or twenty minutes. They moved so fast, they lost their tail, which means they were without any infantry cover, without logistics back up. There was no opposition because up the road from here, at Betitir Village, there was the really heavily armed Palestinian refugee camp called Mashidir camp. Now, that camp was the camp that had dueled with the Israelis and Haddad for years. They were armed to the teeth. They just passed by there, and they came as far as Tyre, that’s where the first Palestinian resistance started, from Boujaji-camp here. Some fighters came up and they effectively blocked the Israeli army for more than thirty-six hours. What happened -- they also entered the Norwegian area from the Mount Hermon, or Jebel-ash-Sheikh, as the Arabs would call it. From that region they were to open the way to Bekka, but the Israelis
had not . . . they goofed there badly, because Sherba is a town that you go through even
on a bicycle, forget about a tank. The Israelis tried to go with their tanks so they blocked
themselves. The Norwegians, acting on orders, had blocked the road with their vehicles.
Now, when you put a Land Rover on a road, and the tank comes, the tank just drive over
it. This is what happened. We lost a Land Rover because they just drove over it. But
then the town stopped them because they couldn’t move through it, and they had to build
a by-pass road, which they did.

Krasno: They had to actually build a road?

Goksel: Oh yes. It’s called the Invasion Road, it’s still there now. Because they
couldn’t go otherwise.

Krasno: How long would it take them to build a road?

Goksel: Ah, the just bulldozed it for the tanks. There was already a track, so they just
expanded the track.

Krasno: So they had a bulldozer with them?

Goksel: Oh yes. Always. When they had no road, they were always led by armed
bulldozers or tanks with bulldozer-blades in front of them. They would always go first,
the combat engineers. At another point, when they started to enter at the central part of
the UN area, the Irish were there. So, the Irish, knowing they were coming, blocked the road with six huge concrete blocks, just like the ones you have in front of the White House and all those buildings. Ours were not concealed by flowers or whatever, but they are just blocks. So the Irish put them on the road, but of course the Israeli tank came, the guy pointed his main weapon, so the Irish moved respectfully away, and five shots into the tank obstacles and no more tank obstacles. If you fire your battle guns into those concrete blocks, they pulverize.

And the most interesting one I know about the ‘brave UN stand’ here. And it was brave under the circumstances, I mean, because it was such a mismatch, because first of all we are not here to stop an invasion, we are a peacekeeping force. We are not equipped for that and nobody would send their boys to get killed in Lebanon, so there’s other questions they value more than that. At that time, we had a brand-new French battalion who had just come in. They were so fresh they had not even received their main weapons yet, they were all from storage in Tyre, someplace. So, these guys had just taken over their area, they had their personal weapons rather than the major stuff. So, in a place called Tigar, a French sergeant who knows the UN mandate very well, he sees this tank coming, so he jumps to the roof and says, “Stop!”

Krasno: He personally did this?

Goksel: Yes. He was armed with a pistol. And the tank was good enough to stop. So, he goes up to the tank, the tank says, “Yes, what can I do for you?” He says, “You cannot
Krasno: So, what language are they speaking?

Goksel: Oh, English. And most Israelis speak English. So, there was a column of 150 tanks, and the French sergeant stopped them, he stopped the column without knowing because he couldn’t see behind. He was on a curve there. He stopped 150 tanks, and then the guy said, “I’ve got 149 behind me...” What can he do?! So, they went off.

Krasno: The Israelis didn’t want to have to shoot a UN person.

Goksel: No, they were trying to be very careful about that. They caused some damage here and there. But, I mean, our guys were not dumb enough to challenge the military. Because once you know that this is an incursion, that this is not a minor reconnaissance [mission] but this is a major invasion, then you get out of the way. We had another story, from the famous Nepalese position in a place called Carbala Bridge. That bridge had been blocked for years and mined, because it was controlled by the PLO position on top of what is called the Bopol Castle, it was a crusaders’ castle. It dominated the whole area. So, nobody was at this spot, but the village was there and a UN position on the bridge -- the Nepalese were in control of that. And since the road was never used, half the sleeping quarters of the Nepalese had jutted onto the road. Nobody used the road, so half of their bedrooms were on the road, because it was not used. So, the Israelis came...
there, they said, “Look, why don’t you guys move out of the way? Get ready to leave this place because we need this road to occupy this village.” They were not trying really hard because at that time they had not secured the Bopol Castle. It was a question of evicting the PLO from the castle. The Nepalese said, “No.” There were eight Nepalese. They said, “We cannot let you pass. This is a UN zone, you cannot pass.” The Israelis said, “Look, you guys, get out of the way, we have to sort of bulldoze this place.” “Nope, you cannot pass.” On third day, when finally the Israelis realized that they had secured the Bopol castle, this time they came not with personnel but with bulldozers. And they told the Nepalese, “You have five minutes to get your belongings out of your bedroom, because in five minutes you will have no bedroom.” So, they just bulldozed the bedroom out of the way.

The Israelis came in prepared with very good intelligence about the Palestinian positions in the area, and initially or a few days later, some from the local population wanted to see the back of the Palestinians as soon as possible. They actually welcomed the Israelis. In some cases, they told the Israelis where the Palestinian positions were. So, all this cleaning up took only two days, so in two days basically, the Israelis had left the UN area and gone north.

Krasno: So, they were already north of the UN area in two days.

Goksel: In two days. Now, here you have a peacekeeping force, its area was completely overrun, and we had no idea what was next. So, instead of just sitting there twiddling our thumbs, we decided that there was a humanitarian tragedy in the town of Tyre. Tyre was
not in the UN area, it was a PLO controlled town, but we had contacts there, we used to
go there shopping, we knew most of the people there. We were told that there were six
thousand civilians on the beach without anything for two days. The whole town got told
to report to the beach by the Israelis. So we decided, “Let’s take a gamble, let’s go and
help those people.” So, we organized this big convoy from here, based on volunteers. I
was in the lead, with a Canadian officer from UNTSO, who also had great friends in
Tyre. So, we just said to our people, “It’s just purely on a voluntary basis, we don’t know
what we are getting into, let’s go.” So we took some bottled water, medicine, food, and
doctors, and ambulances.

Krasno: Now, did you have clearance from headquarters in New York to do this?

Goksel: No.

Krasno: So this was a humanitarian effort on a volunteer basis.

Goksel: We didn’t ask. So we just took off from here, and on the way, the first Israelis
we saw said that we should not use the road because they were using the road and it
wasn’t very secure yet, and we would be impeding their traffic, so can we kindly get the
hell out of the way. We were about twenty meters from there. We were told it was best
to go back. But we didn’t, of course. By that time I had been there three years, so I knew
all these oldish plantations, and I knew that all oldish plantations in Lebanon have tracks
so that you can collect the oranges and bananas and all of that. So, we had a little
powwow with our officers and we decided, “Let’s go through the tracks.” They usually go on a north-south axis for some reason. [... interrupted ...Mr. Goksel had been called away to a ceremony and the interview had to continue in the car on the way.]

[... continues in car ...]

Krasno: [We are now traveling in the car, so if you hear strange noises, that is why.]

When we left the office we had been talking about the humanitarian effort that UNIFIL had taken on.

Goksel: The initiative was a really an impromptu, ad hoc, effort by UNIFIL, and we went the town of Tyre, which is about twenty kilometers from Naqoura. When we got there it was a very bad sight. They had about five or six thousand people on the beach, in hot weather, nothing, no food, no water, and they were surrounded by the Israeli army. They were just waiting there. The first thing we did was we went to the Red Cross center in Tyre, which is now a hotel, it was a government guest house, but it was used by the Red Cross in those days, and they had turned that place into an infirmary of sorts, there were a lot of wounded people lying on the ground, on the floor, on mattresses.

Krasno: And they were wounded from...

Goksel: From the Israeli [army] firing.

Krasno: From fighting between the Israelis and the PLO?
Goksel: Yes. And also there were some old people who were frightened and had shock or whatever. The problem was it was the most unsanitary place you can imagine. It was not a hospital. There were a couple of foreign doctors with the Red Cross who were living in Tyre, who had volunteered to help these people, but they had nothing. So, we took I think about twenty of those people, put them in the UN ambulances, and we distributed water and food to the people, and we said, “We’ll come back tomorrow.” And we brought those patients to our hospital in Naqoura.

Krasno: So you brought some of the patients back with you. About twenty?

Goksel: Yes. [Goksel comments about the helicopter which was supposed to take him to the ceremony but couldn’t because the weather was bad.] There’s our helicopter coming back, you see. We don’t make it there, because it’s the mountains.

Krasno: OK.

Goksel: So, the next day we did the same thing. That was on the 8th of June, we made another convoy, a bigger one, with more help. But this time, we had more problems getting there because the Israeli army told us that Tyre was not in the UN area, so we had no right to be there.

Krasno: Even if you went on the back roads?
Goksel: It was out of our jurisdiction. And moreover, they said, since they were now occupying the country, they needed the roads, and for UNIFIL even to use its own units which are not in Naqoura, its wise and whatever, that they had to be escorted by Israeli officers from now on. I was very unhappy with the arrangement, but they told me that they would use force to block us if we tried again a third time. So, anyway, the second day we went there, the people were released from the beach and they were allowed to return to their homes. So basically, we had finished our purpose, and the people were able to go home and reunite with their missing ones, all the families had scattered all over the place.

Then came this feeling of helplessness in the UNIFIL that all of a sudden you realize that your area is gone, it is completely occupied, now the question is “What are we doing here?” So we all thought in UNIFIL, in those days, that it was probably time to go home, that the Security Council would tell us that we are no longer needed. The area is occupied. But the Security Council, what they did was, they first extended us about two months, I think, which was a bit unusual, it is usually six months, saying, “Let’s see what’s going on.” Because, of course, we understand, it is not an easy decision to dismantle a force which has been there three years, already established itself or whatever. So, two months later, the Security Council decided that, as the Israelis will eventually withdraw, and they would have to create another peacekeeping force anyway, so why destroy the one we have here? And so they said, “Why don’t you guys just hold on and wait?”
Krasno: Now, were there any casualties for the UN?

Goksel: Only one Norwegian soldier was killed, and I think he was killed by artillery fire from the north, which means it could be it was in the fields of the Bekka valley in the east, so it had to be either a Palestinian or a Syrian artillery fire. He was watching the whole thing, and one stray round killed him. You couldn’t target him, it came from a very long distance, a ways. Otherwise we had no casualties.

Krasno: So, basically neither side, the Israelis or the PLO wanted to really shoot at the UN?

Goksel: No, they were so busy with each other they forgot us. Gratefully. They were very busy with each other. But the Israelis, that is why they called the force commander to say, “Look, we are entering this invasion, it is a massive operation, we have no intention of hitting the UN or harming you in any way, but don’t try to get in our way. This is an invasion, it is not anymore a minor incursion or a reconnaissance patrol. This is a massive invasion.” Because, it is not our job. They put in about 90,000 soldiers here; it was a massive invasion. They had 1200 tanks and 4000 armored vehicles. It was a massive operation. It was overkill, but then, on his side, you realize and the Israelis themselves realize, that the people who planned this operation were not telling the truth to their own government. You see, even the government thought that the aim of the invasion was to push the PLO out of rocket-range of Israeli, which is about 30 or 40 kilometers, but by the time the Israeli army stopped, they had gone north of Beirut. Even
to this date, they are arguing that the defense minister at that time had not told the government the truth. It is still a big contention in Israel, it is a historical controversy.

Krasno: So, it was a split between the defense minister and the ...

Goksel: Well, it became very clear later on that what we had been told, that this was just to push the PLO out of the area was not the primary point of the whole invasion -- the real intention, the first intention was to change the whole political system in Lebanon and therefore maybe affect the Middle East also. This is what the aim appeared to be at the end. Why were they in Beirut? The whole idea was to push the PLO out of Lebanon as a whole, and therefore establish a friendly government in Lebanon and take it from there.

So, we had nothing to do here. The UN area was very quiet. There were no incidents. But then, at the end of 1983, the Israelis at that time had been in Lebanon for more than a year and a half, they withdrew from Beirut and established this very infamous called the Awwali line, the between Beirut and Sidon, and basically turn South Lebanon into an open-air prison for its inhabitants. Nobody could drive into this zone, everybody had to be checked by the Israelis and their local militia men. Basically the whole of South Lebanon had turned into a very humiliating open-air prison -- humiliating for the Lebanese residents, of course. So, it didn’t take very long after that for the people in the south to turn against the Israeli occupation of their land. The people who had initially welcomed them had become enemies, and this also meant that the resistance against the Israelis started. Now, there is a little footnote here; you see, in those days, unlike what most people would think nowadays, the resistance was not launched by the Hezbollah,
there was no Hezbollah to speak of in those days, but it was the Shi‘ite movement, which was really popular in those days here, a massive popular movement. And the Lebanese organizations like the Communist party led the way. When the first attacks against the Israelis started, there was a little confusion in Israel, because the Israeli establishment was very proud to say at all times that the Shi‘ites are their friends that they are not against the Shi‘ites, they are against the Palestinians. So, they first tried to give this impression that these attacks being launched against them were by the Palestinians, and we said, “No wait a minute, there is something wrong. You are not being attacked by the Palestinians, you are being attacked by Shi‘ites.” I got several nasty comments about that from the Israeli newspapers and officials: “What do you know, you UN guys? We know best these are the terrorist Palestinians.” But we said, “Pray tell, where are the Palestinians? You just pushed them out of Lebanon, you pushed them out of South Lebanon.” And I said, “There is also another thing. I know the guys by name who are attacking you. I’m not going to tell you who they are -- that is not my job. But these are proper Lebanese Shi‘ites.” It was a revelation to them, that the people that they were toting as their friends and all that, had become their enemy. This was very eloquently explained by the defense minister at that time, Mr. Rabin, late Prime Minister Rabin, he said, “We went to Lebanon and we let the...
UN Security Council had made a little addition to our mandate, and they said that UNIFIL should do its maximum to protect the local civilians. This was in response because now the Israeli army was coming under attack in South Lebanon. Then the Israeli army started operations against the villages in South Lebanon who were harboring those resistance groups of people, which really meant rounding up the people of the villages, lining them up for questioning, arresting them, and threatening them to help the resistance and all that. That became a bit nasty. We were told by New York to do our best, without actually fighting with the Israelis, to counter these things. So, all our troops tried very hard, they really tried very hard to moderate the Israelis. And it worked in most cases.

Krasno: So, how would you do that? Because I think that’s important.

Goksel: Because they were entering the UN villages. We were making sure that our observers and the units on the ground would be there in force.

Krasno: OK, so that the observers would be there to see anything that would be going on?

Goksel: Yes. Now, being watched, the Israelis didn’t like that but they couldn’t kick out the UN guys from the own villages.

Krasno: So, by watching, it did keep the Israelis operating more moderately?
Goksel: Yes. Then, I contributed. You see in those days Beirut-based journalists didn’t have too much access to South Lebanon. They were just cut off by the Israeli army. But all the foreign journalists who were coming from Israeli to visit the UN area, I decided that I would take these guys out every day in my own car, and just tour them in the area, and if you just happened to be sitting at the side of an Israeli operation, we would go and have a look.

Krasno: So, you would go out, in a UN vehicle, with a UN flag?

Goksel: That’s right. I would go driving in my own car, and I would have five or six journalists at least, most of them would be Americans, and maybe some from very influential media in the United States, and they would come out with us, and these are all, as I said, they were basically all old Lebanese hands, they knew the area. So, if we see any Israeli operation in a village, we would just stop the car, and the journalists would get out. Let me tell you, that’s the best way to temper anybody. I mean, given the special relations between the Americans and the Israelis, and that the American government at that time, the Reagan administration, was not very happy with the way the whole thing was going, and so the Israelis were being... I mean, the one thing they didn’t need was to have very negative press coverage in the American papers.

Krasno: All right, so the journalists would come with cameras? Video?
Goksel: Oh, everything, cameras, etc. We had the networks come in with their own vehicles. But most of them I would take in my car were print journalists. They would take turns in coming. And I would take everyone, five or six guys, and as I said, if you knew in which area the Israelis were operating, we would go to those areas. It didn’t make the Israeli army happy, but that was not the intention anyway. And we found it was a very useful way of tempering the activities also. And it was very much appreciated by the local people, that there were foreigners in the area. Journalists or not journalists, really, but even just the UN and all these officers from different countries. Also, don’t forget in those days we had a significant American officer presence that nobody knew about. We had these Americans serving with UNTSO in UNIFIL. And they were all over the UN area, and they would go and watch those things also, and the Israeli army did not cherish the idea of confronting American officers who are, after all, supposed to be their best allies. So, this was another UN ad hoc way of tempering the activities in the area.

That brought us to 1985 when the Israeli government decided that they would withdraw from most parts of South Lebanon, but would create a security zone and establish this militia called the South Lebanese Army. It wasn’t very difficult for us to predict which areas they would keep, because we knew the topography, the lay of the land. They were under very heavy pressure by the resistance in those days. And they were taking heavy casualties and there was an uproar in Israeli public opinion. I think before everything else you have to give credit to that public opinion for the decision to disengage. Now, this decision to disengage from Lebanon was not a full one, it was a partial one.
Krasno: In the meantime, what had been happening with attacks over into the Israeli territory?

Goksel: In those days there were no attacks on Israel at all. None at all.

Krasno: So, that had stopped?

Goksel: Yes, because at that time you had a major occupation force here, they were the targets. There were no attacks against the Israelis, against Israel, or against civilians. Nothing of that sort.

Krasno: OK. So that had stopped.

Goksel: Oh yes, completely. So, the local resistance had become very professional, and they were really taking a toll on the Israelis. That was when the Israelis decided to disengage. Now, in 1985, they withdrew from these parts of South Lebanon, from Tyre, etc., and created what they call their 'security zone' now, which sort of edges against their own border, but in some areas its depth differs from between five to fifteen kilometers. So, they withdrew, and for a while we had a quiet period, we had a lull here. Now, there were two reasons for the lull: first of all, the groups that were resisting the Israelis and who had been really instrumental in pushing them out, they actually thought that the Israeli stay in the security zone would be temporary and that they would be going home.
So they didn’t really push it in the beginning. And second, they were not equipped or geared for a resistance operation in that area, which had been previously under Major Haddad’s control, and the Shi’ites had no gripe with Major Haddad. I mean, it was the Palestinians who were fighting him, so they had never thought of actually organizing a resistance or anything like this in that part of South Lebanon. So, we had a lull of five or six months. At that time also, when the Israelis were thinking of withdrawing, there were two major schools of thought in Israel. One was, “Let’s get out of here, totally, before we make worse enemies of Shi’ites and let the Lebanese take over their own country, and if necessary we can intervene from the border.” The other group still had this illusion of changing things in Lebanon or whatever. They said, “No, no, no. Let’s keep the security zone otherwise we cannot control the situation. Anyway there are all the villages which are friendly to Israel, they need our protection. So, let’s stay.” So, this group won out, and they stayed. But there were in those days very serious warnings about staying here and becoming a foil to Shi’ites, but they didn’t take it seriously because it was quiet on the terrain. The guys who wanted to stay said, “Look, it’s working. Nobody is attacking us, it’s all quiet.” But wait about six or seven months. That’s also the period when Hezbollah started to come to South Lebanon in force.

Krasno: OK. That’s what I was going to ask you. So, this marked the beginning of Hezbollah. And Hezbollah is supported...

Goksel: They were created by the Iranians at that time.
Krasno: They were created by the Iranians?

Goksel: But you see, there is a background to that one. Maybe it is convenient for most people to forget those days. The first Islamic resistance in South Lebanon was a home-grown affair from a village called Gipshit, near the market town of Nabatiya, north of the Litani river. There was a sheik there called Sheik Al-Gapark, he is a fire-brand preacher, young, thirty-four years old, very charismatic type, but unlike most Shi’ites he was not trained in Iran but in Iraq, in Majab. So, he identified with the Majab school of Shi’ites. He set up around him what he called the Islamic Students Association. They are the ones who launched the attacks first. Hezbollah came later and assimilated this group into Hezbollah. Then around 1985 you had the Hezbollah starting in earnest in the operations here, at the end of 1985. And then it got very heavy for the Israeli army. But whatever was, Lebanon being Lebanon -- and it was still in the middle of a civil war, and in a civil war to militia men holding turf is very important, you know, you marked your area and put your forces in. Now, initially, Amal, the Shi’ite movement, which was very popular here, they didn’t see Hezbollah as much of a challenge because they were so confident that everybody was with them, and they had just pushed the Israelis out; they were riding high, big festivals and everything. But then, in 1986-87, Hezbollah started to slowly expand its influence to the villages, Amal became uncomfortable. They realized that they had some competition. Meanwhile, Hezbollah was launching one after another attacks against the Israelis in the security zone and also their local allies the South Lebanese Army militia. But Hezbollah was doing it in a very childish, amateurish way, and they
were taking very heavy casualties. They were basically running up to positions and getting killed, very amateurish.

Among Hezbollah, relations, in the meanwhile, got progressively worse. Then in February 1988, an American officer, Colonel Higgins, who was the chief of the observer group for Lebanon here, he was kidnapped by a group calling itself the Organization for Revolutionary Justice or something. He was kidnapped. So, he joined the ranks of other Western hostages who were being taken in Beirut in those days. Colonel Higgins, he was a marine officer.

Krasno: Right, and that was in the press everywhere.

Goksel: Now, Amal immediately mobilized because they always felt that Higgins and other Americans, and the UN, were their guests here. Because, in fact, the chief of Amal in that day, for South Lebanon, was a man called Taout-taout who was killed later on by his group.

Krasno: Killed by Hezbollah?

Goksel: Yes. And he had been a very dear friend of UNIFIL all the time, and a few days before Colonel Higgins was kidnapped, he had told Higgins personally himself that there was nothing to fear, and that they were his guests. Now, three days later Colonel Higgins was kidnapped, so Amal took it very personally. So, they launched this very major operation to find him. They couldn’t. But they had a lot of confrontations with
Hezbollah. And, a few weeks after that incident, an Amal-Hezbollah war broke out in Lebanon. And that ran for two years. So, they were so busy fighting each other, Amal and Hezbollah, the Israel-occupied part of South Lebanon became quiet because both parties, they were so busy looking at each other they had no time for the Israelis. So, the occupation zone again became very quiet. Maybe, there had been a hundred attacks a month before, it went down to ten or fifteen attacks. Practically nothing. Again, those in Israel who favored to stay in South Lebanon said, “See, we told you. It’s very quiet! Nothing is happening, we can stay.” So they stayed. But at the end of 1991, Damascus and Tehran intervened in the Amal-Hezbollah war, and they brokered a truce, which was called the Damascus Accord, which basically disengaged them, and told Amal to let the Hezbollah chiefs return to their homes in South Lebanon, because Amal had expelled them from the south. The Israeli security zone was almost quiet because all the guys who were running those attacks against the occupation area were expelled from the area by Amal.

And then came this very famous 1991 Taif accord. Now, the Taif accord is the accord that officially ends the civil war in Lebanon, disbands all the militias, etc., etc. Now, the chief of Amal, even today, is Mr. Nabih Beri. He was at that time the head of Amal but he was also the head of the Parliament. He was the Speaker. So, then the government and all of the parties and everybody signed this deal, the Taif accord, to disband the militias, he was the first one to disband Amal as a military force. He was not really comfortable, anyway, although it gave him a lot of power, but he felt the Amal militia men, the military arm of the Shi’ites in the south, were being very heavy handed, wandering around with their guns, with little kids telling the supporters of Amal, the
financers of Amal, what to do, what not to do. And Berri was very uncomfortable with that. So he welcomed this opportunity and he disbanded the Amal militia.

Krasno: Did the UN play any role in the de-mobilization?

Goksel: No. It was internal.

Krasno: As observers? or nothing?

Goksel: Totally internal. This is the way it should be, anyway, they should do it themselves. The only which was not disbanded was the Hezbollah’s Islamic Resistance, because they said they are fighting the Israeli occupation, they are not using their guns in internal [Lebanese] politics. So why not: “We stay?” So they exchanged their arms, but slowly.

Krasno: So that was tolerated by the internal politics, because they promised that they wouldn’t fight internally.

Goksel: Yes -- it’s not for internal politics, but to fight the occupation. But by 1992, all Hezbollah forces are permanent in their villages, have moved in their weapons and armaments and their logistic systems here, very quietly, without showing to anyone, and then they had also apparently reviewed all their earlier attacks against the Israeli army, found their mistakes, where they went wrong, why they took so many casualties, because
all of a sudden a new chapter opened in the battle in South Lebanon. First of all, we realized that it is not any more massive, human-wave sort of attacks or anything like that. But these people had made their group much more compact, much more invisible, and considerably autonomous from Beirut, which meant that their field security was improved tremendously. Nobody knew what they were doing. Even to this date, in this village where you are now, which is called Jebel Botu, Hezbollah is very strong in this village, a lot of people in this village. In fact, most of their mortar support teams come from this particular village. If you come through the whole village you will not see a single sign that they are here. They are very careful; they do not make mistakes like the Palestinians did. They did not identify themselves, they look like the people here. They are all local farmers or students or whatever, but when they are called on to do their job they will come and do it and they will disappear as they come. They are not the showing-off type because if they show-off locally the Israelis will know where they are also. So they are very careful.

So, in 1992, you had that dead year; the civil war was over, and this goes on to this date. Now, just to make the comparison between 1988 and 1990, when Amal and Hezbollah are fighting each other, I said they had about fifteen or twenty attacks a month, last month we had 115 attacks.

Krasno: This last month? In February 1998?

Goksel: Yes. And that’s the highest number we have recorded since 1986. That tells you something, that they are still very much out there and are determined to do what want
to do, which basically is to get the Israeli army out of South Lebanon. Now, the UNIFIL angle on the thing is that in 1986 or 1987, when Hezbollah had just returned to South Lebanon, was forming itself in South Lebanon, they had a lot of problems with the UN. They killed several UN people in clashes. They were not onto the UN; they didn’t know what the UN was about. Also, they were really uncomfortable with our close relations with Amal, which they thought of as their opposition. They were really uncomfortable with that. They wouldn’t talk to us, we had no dialogue, we didn’t know who these people were. A lot of problems there, and it was getting very negative because they were using the mosques to preach against the UN. And these are people who are very pious guys, they listen to their sheiks and preachers, and they are being preached over and over and over again not to cooperate with the UN, that we are the enemies, that we are the extension of the Zionists, what-have-you.

Krasno: Did they use radio or other media to do this?

Goksel: No, no. Just in their mosques and in their prayer centers, that is much deadlier than the radio. The villagers have by and large always supported UNIFIL, and they depended on media in those days, now they have their Islamists mosques. They could not use the Lebanese media anyway; they would not do it. Now, in 1991 there was a change. When they signed this accord with Amal and they came to South Lebanon, for the first time in their history Hezbollah came to us and they said, “Look, we want to talk to you guys. We want to say let bygones be bygones. Let’s talk. We are not your enemy anymore. We understand that we do not have to love you, but we understand that you are
trying to help our people here, so we don’t want to tangle with you guys, but if it isn’t a problem; we’d like to liaison with you.” We said, “Fine.” And I think I was the first one in UNIFIL, they came to my office in Tyre, there was a big affair for the Lebanese, it was seen as making soulha in this part of the world, which is making peace after blood-feuds. We didn’t have a feud; they had one, I guess. But that was how it was presented, a soulha between UNIFIL and the Hezbollah. Fine. And to this day we are in touch, we can find each other, we can by and large... we don’t agree on most things, they still have their ideology and sometimes they get carried away with it and they can mislead you in actions because they are so security-conscious, which borders on paranoia sometimes. They can accuse us of the most incredible things, at times. But still, we are able to talk to them; if there is a serious problem, we can find them, I can find their chiefs, talk and try to sort out the things. We still have confrontations from time to time on the field, but basically we are able to sort it out, basically. So they solved their position vis-à-vis UNIFIL.

Meanwhile, Amal is still very much present as an ideology, but as an effective force on the ground, they don’t count anymore. So, we don’t count them anymore. But, we have their substitute. As a result of the Taif accord, the Lebanese army came to South Lebanon. We gave them a chunk of UNIFIL area in the western part.

Krasno: OK -- so UNIFIL made an agreement with them and gave up some of the territory.

Goksel: Yes, the north-west part of our area, which had now become quiet. And now they are our neighbors. They also have liaison officers in all the UNIFIL units; we are
very close to each other. We cooperate, we are always in touch. And now, this is luxury we have enjoyed for many, many years -- it’s not a luxury, it was essential, but it had become a luxury because it was an essential item for UNIFIL’s existence, that we didn’t have a local authority in the area -- but now we have it. So now if anybody takes up arms against UNIFIL or we have any confrontation on the ground or anybody breaks the law, we cannot detain those people; we are not a police force. But now we hand them over to the Lebanese army who takes care of it. This is what we should have had in the beginning, which is why the mandate in those days was not very applicable, in 1978. That essential ingredient, essential element, came in 1991, with a strong Lebanese Army. It’s a very happy relationship with them now.

And on top of that of course, one thing we always have to underline here is the attitude of the Lebanese people. I think the UN, of course here UNIFIL, is one of the luckiest missions in the world, the most fortunate ones, in terms of the support we get from the local population. That is also very important for a peacekeeping forces’ success and survival.

Krasno: OK -- why do you have that support?

Goksel: Well look, for many years, this population here was totally dependent on UNIFIL for everything. We still provide tremendous services to those people, medical service, our soldiers go and fix their schools, and in those days we fixed their roads, we fixed their power, and we protected them against attacks, and to this day. Now we are in an area on the confrontation line, here. [He is talking about where the car is going now.]
This is a village called Yetak, which is very close to the security zone. And now, this was a completely abandoned area, now it is a lot of people, construction going on, it is alive now, but the minute the shooting starts here, and the Israelis or Hezbollah decide to fight here, all these people will head to the nearest UN position for cover.

Krasno: Is that what they do?

Goksel: That’s why they got killed two years ago in the famous shooting of the UN division headquarters, because they had taken cover in the division headquarters. Because they have no civil defense here, and they think that having the UN flag does it; that means they have no shelters, they have nothing. They all think that having a UN flag over their heads is their best protection. So, if they cannot enter the UN position, which are very small, and you see one here now, they will come and park next to it, you know, just around it, and hoping, hoping that this position will not be hit. Which is hit time to time, but it is still better than staying home. It is better protection.

Krasno: So, by carrying out these kinds of actions of goodwill, then you created support.

Goksel: Of course, it just came that way. I mean, we have this military mandate but we have a zero budget for military work. We have two or three officers dealing with that. What we do is that we never throw anything away in UNIFIL, we recycle everything, typewriters, photocopiers, desks, chairs, whatever, we give them to schools that are in the area. Then, our medical teams, they are fully open twenty-four hours a day for local
people, and on top of that we send out mobile clinics to very poor villages who have no access to local medical services.

Krasno: So basically you have been doing this as a kind of thing on the side, unofficially?

Goksel: Of course. For example, can you imagine a UN force -- we have something called the Harvest Patrols. These villages here, they all have olive plantations on the hilltops here, in the valleys, etc. But they are on the front line of the security zone, and the people are afraid that they will be shot at if they dare go to those fields. The other side, you fire first and ask questions later. They don’t want anybody sort of circulating in close to their lines. So what do we do? For example, now we are in the Nepalese area. Come the olive harvest time, the Nepalese will run Harvest Patrols and they will take the people out to their fields under the UN flag, guarded by UN soldiers. All the battalions do that. This came by itself also. It’s not in the UN book. It’s not in the peacekeeping manual. It just came out that way.

Now, also for example, now that the power is coming back, the state electricity grid is coming back. But for many, many years, we gave power -- we generate our own power -- to the nearest medical center or government office or police station or a school. We gave them power, for example. Things like this have been going on for years. And also we have soldiers who spend their free time fixing up schools. Or if your bulldozers are free for the weekend, we ask the soldiers if anybody will volunteer to go and make a football field for somebody, because we have bulldozers, of course. They don’t have
These things in South Lebanon. Now, on top of that, now, the battalions they also use their own means to help, without asking us. But this has also led to another thing: now, the countries that can afford it, are giving bilateral direct help. They have humanitarian projects here. For example, we now have one going which is very interesting. The Finnish government has granted half a million dollars to its battalion here to run the first pilot project for garbage disposal in Lebanon. One thing you will notice here, the Lebanese homes and villages are very clean, but the roadsides are all garbaged-up because everybody dumps their garbage because there is no garbage collection system and no disposal system. And the Lebanese are very much aware of this, so they are trying to create projects and projects and projects. [He points to a hillside.] Look at this palace!

Krasno: What palace is that?

Goksel: It is a simple villager who lives in West Africa, and his house is facing the nearest security zone position -- he is in the line of fire. But he comes and spends millions here... And look they are cutting mountains to make terraces. These are the Lebanese who have voted with their feet that they want to stay here. And this is all because of the UN, because there was nobody here all these years. It is amazing -- look at the construction around you. Look at these places. I wish you could fly and see swimming pools on the mountaintops. We have no roads but we have swimming pools. Everybody is building tennis courts but nobody plays tennis. This is Lebanon. They enjoy it.
Now, this garbage disposal project is very important. It is a pilot project, financed by the Finnish government, executed by our troops here on their free time. What they are trying to do is to set up a cheap disposal system for ten villages, and the Lebanese are watching it very carefully -- if it works, they are going to copy it also. So, we have projects like this. And, another unseen help is that we have all these humanitarian agencies, UN or non-UN, who have funds, limited funds maybe, in Beirut, and they are looking for projects, so we identify their projects here in the South. And we help them execute it. We provide security, we do this, we do that. These have all endeared us very much to the Lebanese public. But also, in 1996, when the Israelis launched an Operation to basically uproot the Lebanese, all these people from their villages, and go to Beirut to tell their government to get rid of Hezbollah or something. They had all these strange thoughts. So, this area came under sustained air and artillery bombardment for about ten days. We had a similar operation in 1993, and about 300,000 people escaped from South Lebanon because they were constantly being warned by Israeli radio to get out otherwise they were going to get killed. The idea was to send them to Beirut to make pressure on the Beirut government. Now, the problem was that this time, a lot of people left but many stayed behind. So, all of a sudden there was a humanitarian tragedy over here, there were thousands of people hiding in the villages to protect their own property, but with nothing to eat, nothing. It became a duty for us to find these people, feed them, give them medical help, or whatever.

Krasno: And again, you took this task on unofficially?
Goksel: It came by itself! And, I mean, it was a very dangerous time here -- there was constant shelling constant bombarding, so we had all these volunteers, civilians, UN civilians, most of my press staff in Tyre, for example, and the volunteers from the battalions, the officers, and all the battalions contributed trucks. So we started running these incredible, most strange convoys anyplace in Lebanon to pick up supplies. People were willing to give supplies, but they just couldn’t bring it to the South because of the shelling of the roads. So we were telling the Israelis, “Look, we are running a convoy, you bomb it, if you destroy a UN forces convoy, you get the consequences.” So, we were running these convoys up and down, collecting diapers -- we were told to bring diapers! Somebody said, “Hey, there are children in those houses. Diapers!” So we found diapers. I remember. I was there -- four truckloads of diapers. So, we started running that, and for fifteen days we sustained these people here. But now the Israeli air force, for their tactic or whatever, started cratering the roads and making the roads impassable so that nobody could move. Our engineers started filling those holes, and on the 27th or 26th of April 1996, when this thing ended in a cease-fire and the people were told to come back home, they realized that they couldn’t go home. But within two hours, our resources had gone out, filled all the holes, made them passable, and people went. So now the people realized they had something in common with the UN soldiers. That made the bond that much stronger, than ever before. So, the relationship with the local people is very, very clear. And I also think personally, that it is one of the main reasons that all these countries who are staying here and also spending money out of their pockets, taking the casualties, taking the missiles sometimes that comes with peacekeeping, the ammunition that comes with peacekeeping, I think most of the reason why these countries
are staying is because of the reception, the hospitality that they get from the Lebanese people. I think it clearly influences their thinking about being here.

Krasno: So, they feel they are really doing something worthwhile?

Goksel: And that they are appreciated. Because these people show their appreciation. It is a very close relationship with the people.

Now we are at the new Irish battalion headquarters that we moved here a couple of years ago, hoping that it won’t be targeted. So far it has held out.

Krasno: So we are arriving now.

Goksel: This is the Irish battalion headquarters in a town of Tibnin, and you are now at St Paddy’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, which is very important. I learned that it is a very important day for the Irish, because the Irish have this Arabic trait for observing it for a week or so, you know. St. Patrick’s Day never ends. It never ends.

Krasno: Well, I know we are going to have to stop... maybe on the way back.

[interrupted]

Krasno: This is at a ceremony presenting awards to the Irish contingent at UNIFIL...

[Irish bag pipes are playing in the background during the ceremony, which is recorded on the tape.]
Let me ask you about the contributing forces and what countries have contributed and also to comment on the fact that of the permanent five only France is represented here.

Goksel: UNIFIL started off by borrowing contingents from the UN forces in Sinai, UNEF and UN Force in the Golan (UNDOF), and then gradually its own units began to come in. At the outset, we had Canada, we had Iran, we had Fiji, Nepal, the Norwegians, the French, they all came in at the initial lot. The Canadians came for six months and they left; it was a signal unit just to start the force, then they left. The Iranian battalion left after the revolution in 1979; they were pulled out from here. And then Senegal left after a while, but then the Finnish came in to replace the Senegalese. Then at the end of 1979, the Ghana battalion joined us. So it's been moving. Now, we are nine countries, and the latest to join us were the Polish, who first started in the hospital and then took over the logistics from the Swedish. And then in addition we have a small Italian unit, which runs our helicopter wing. So we have nine countries.

Now, after all this experience, it is very difficult to run a force more diversified than this one, because that starts the problems of, first of all, communications -- language, not even communications, language. Now, the UN has a philosophy of “the more countries, the better,” the more international. Of course, it gives a more international atmosphere to it, but on the other hand it does complicate command and control. We are in a relatively small area with nine contingents, and it takes a lot of effort to make sure everything is understood and done the same way. And compounding the problem is that these contingents rotate every six months. They are posted in and out. There is also
another key problem, which is that in UNIFIL, only the force commander serves more than years as a military man. On the civilian side, I am an exception. I have been here... I am an exception in most peacekeeping forces, you don’t have anybody in this job -- this is a political job and a press job -- who stays on so long. The problem is that you don’t have an institutional memory. And these experiences are never transferred down the line. Every six months you basically rewrite the book of peacekeeping, and that’s not healthy, especially in a violent environment, in a politically highly charged environment. That could be very problematic. UNIFIL does it -- because we are not so many, we managed. But I could just imagine what my colleagues had to go through in a mission like Somalia, in a massive area, with thirty participating countries -- it must be a nightmare.

On top of that, there is a linked question that you had about the participation of the permanent five. Look, that is a weapon that cuts two ways. On the one hand, it is good to have countries with clout here, who can be more influential on the parties involved. On the other hand, if things don’t go well, those countries can become targets, as it happened in Somalia. They had the same problem with the French here for a while, in the 1980s. The Americans did it in Somalia, and in Bosnia, whatever. If you are not accepted, and if you have parties opposed to your presence here, and who have no scruples in using weapons or whatever, then they know that to hit the UN, the weakest link is the strong country which is going to get coverage, publicity. Right? So, what you thought of as an asset becomes a liability. Now, in UNIFIL, we only have France, and the French as a nation, as a country, they are obsessed with Lebanon, because they see Lebanon as a francophile [francophone] country; they were the colonial power here. They have very strong links to the country and they really feel for the country. So, they
are always trying to get involved in one way or another. Their involvement in UNIFIL was OK, because it is under the UN flag. But again, that is a weapon that cuts both ways. On one side, you really have a country that truly cares for this country, and they want to do things, and they know people, they can be helpful, but on the other hand there are always parties on the ground that accuse them of bias or prejudice. So I think this is one aspect of UN peacekeeping -- the make-up of the force -- where I don’t think you can write a manual on that one. You just have to play it by ear, according to the country where you are going. The best, in my experience, is, and we said all this, are those countries who have no political or economic links to this country -- they are the best to survive here.

Krasno: Because they don’t have any interest involved.

Goksel: No. They are not accused of anything. We are always accused, as a UN force, by this and that side of bias. But when you have countries like this, there is nobody in the world who is going to accuse the Irish or the Norwegians or the Fijians or the Ghanaians of having anything do to with Lebanon except human interest. As I said, with more countries it becomes unwieldy, it becomes very difficult to control, and it is very difficult to follow the same voice. In fact, you are creating a command problem yourself. But the problem is, there is a saying that beggars cannot be choosers, sometimes, in the sense that we don’t always see so many countries so readily volunteering and willing to join UN peacekeeping, with all these risks and monetary involvement. So, sometimes you don’t have a choice. But if you have a choice, I think you have to do it on a case-by-case basis.
I think what was sorely missing in other peacekeeping missions was that the countries coming should be told what to expect here. They should not come with an expectation that it is peaceful. If you are going to a volatile area, there could be violence, and even as a peacekeeping force, you might have to resort to weapons. You’ve got to tell the countries what to expect, that there are risks, that there might be casualties, so that you don’t have to fight this out all the time. Because if you don’t, and if these people come with the misconception that, “Ah, it’s going to be all nice and touristy, and we are going to see the Middle East and do our shopping, and strut around a bit and go back home,” then all of a sudden you say, “Hey, take out your gun and start firing,” the first instinct for that unit becomes to call home and say, “Can I fire?” We can’t do that.

Krasno: Another part of that that I wanted to ask you about is the difference between military training for combat and military training for peacekeepers.

Goksel: Now, first of all, you train them as soldiers. Every country does. Now, most of the soldiers who come here, you teach them, you take them from the civilian lives, and you teach them how to kill. This is what soldiering is about. You don’t train them as peacekeepers from the outset. You train them as soldiers. You try to instill the mindset of a military man who follows orders, at the first sign of threat opens fire and kills the enemy. Now, you bring this guy, these people here, you throw away the ropes, “forget what we just told you -- now you are diplomats with rifles in your hands. And you cannot open fire on suspicion. You have to wait until somebody opens fire to you first, and if they don’t hit you, then you can fire back.” That is what self-defense is about. “And, at
the checkpoint, if the guy swears at you, no sir, you don’t bang him on the head, you try to talk him out of it.” That is what peacekeeping is. So, therefore, peacekeeping is not a military job. But since there is nobody else around who can do it, you try to do it with the military. Now the UN is trying that with the police forces, in Bosnia and elsewhere. Because really, it is against the grain of military thinking, the peacekeeping job. But, since they are disciplined, they are the best ones to do it. They take orders, they are organized, etc. I mean, putting together a police force is not that easy. It is much more complicated than this one because they are not organized like this.

Krasno: They are not organized in the same fashion.

Goksel: Yes. Now, most of the countries that come to UNIFIL, for example, they run peacekeeping forces in their own countries. They have publications, they have briefing papers. Some of them are very organized and very sophisticated. The Nordic countries have a combined one [training operation], for example. And they all come very properly briefed. But, on top of all that briefing, training, etc., you have to have some officers who are in a bit, political animals, who know how to be flexible and not always push the bottom line or show the flag. There is a lot of talking and soothing going on here. So, I mean, it is a very special breed of officer that you need, but you don’t always get that because you have choice over those you get. Every country has their own selection criteria, they send their people over here, some of them turn out to be fantastic and you never want to let them go, and some of them you would like to see the back of them in a
month or so. They come with their own preconceptions, oh boy. But you get both sides, like every organization, which is to say, in a multinational environment.

But of course, according to the background, according to the military culture of the country, according to their financial resources, there are discrepancies in training. But there is not a single manual, there is not a curriculum developed by anyone to do this or that, so we try to make up for it here. What we do is we have a crash training briefing for our guys, before they come in. All the officers are given a crash briefing in how this whole thing operates. There is more involvement from headquarters than there would be from a normal force, national force of this kind.

Krasno: We have run out of time and tape, so I want to thank you so much for your cooperation in this interview. Thank you.

Goksel: My pleasure.

[end of side 2]