Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Ambassador Abu-Odeh in his home in Amman, Jordan on March 14, 1998. And I am Jean Krasno. For the record, would you please explain something about your background? Where you were born, and educated and when you became involved in the political affairs of Jordan.

Abu Odeh: Well, I was born in Nablus 1933. Nablus, Palestine. I got my schooling in Nablus under British mandate. I got my BA in Arts at Damascus University. I got involved into politics when I was a student. I was anti-government.

JK: Anti-government.

AO: In fact, I joined the Communist party in the early fifties. As a young student and before the British departure from Palestine, I had developed like many other students anti-Jewish and anti-British sentiments.

JK: In Jordan, in the fifties.

AO: Yes. I left the party in 1958 after the Iraqi bloody coup against the monarchy because I thought it was terrible. It was a shaking factor. Later on in 1966, I joined the
government, I became an intelligence officer. I moved quite to the opposite side. I was in charge of assessment and releases in the intelligence department. I witnessed the political developments, especially the events that led the 1970 showdown. I joined the military cabinet that was formed by the King in 1970 to restore law and order in the country. And since then, I have been in Jordanian politics until I retired in late 1995. My last post was the Jordanian representative to the United Nations and I was there until I retired.

JK: So what years were you representative to the United Nations?


JK: Oh, very recently. Before we turned on the tape, we were talking about the showdown in Jordan.

AO: My post, do you want to know about my post in government? I assumed so many posts.

JK: Describe your posts.

AO: I started as a minister of information in the military cabinet in 1970 and continued to assume this post for several times over more than ten years. In January '84, King Hussein appointed me as his Minister of Court. It was an advisory job, political advisor
but, that was the title. The title was abolished at a later stage and I became King Hussein’s political advisor. Twice within 25 years I assumed the post of chief of the Royal Court. The last post I had before I was appointed as Jordan’s permanent representative to the UN was chief of the Royal Court that is second in seniority to the Prime Minister. This post, in fact, represents the connection between the government and the King. So, during this period I also had an interesting experience in addition to the official posts. I became a fellow at Harvard University for International Affairs in ’75-’76 and later on, in ’95-’96, I became a fellow at the United States Institute for Peace. I also got a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center.

JK: Oh, in Washington, the one in Washington.

AO: Yes. So, I am a fellow at those three places. So I have these academic scholarly connections with these three places. That’s part of my background.

JK: But you haven’t been to Yale.

AO: No, I haven’t.

JK: We’ll have to invite you to Yale.

AO: Thank you.
JK: That would be great. Actually we should try to do that.

JK: OK, perhaps because we have somewhat limited time, maybe we’ll start, because I would really like to have your view of what you have termed the "showdown" and which the international media has called the civil war in Jordan in the 1970s, the events of the 1970s. Could you give some of the background leading up to that period?

AO: The story about this showdown started before 1970. I would say realistically in 1965, after the establishment of the PLO in 1964 by the Arab League. All of a sudden the government in Jordan found itself in opposition with the views, goals and policies of late Amad Shukadry who was appointed in 1964 as the Secretary General of the PLO, Palestine Liberalization Organization. Well, I think I should go through so many details to explain. The Jordanian-Palestinian interaction was destined to be politically activated as early as 1916 when the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Britain during World War I produced a map, a colonial map, for this area before the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and when Britain in 1917 gave a pledge, to the Zionist movement at that time to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, in what was known as the Balfour Declaration.

The map and the Balfour Declaration combined, produced the most odd situation on earth, a situation that made conflict in this part of the world inevitable and instability inevitable. Why? Simply, in one sentence the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Britain produced three peoples in two countries. We must educate people that this is the origin of the tragic story: three peoples for two countries. It was a recipe for instability, a recipe for continuous conflict. Theoretically,
to solve such a problem, there are two ways: one either you eliminate or negate the third people or you create a third country. The situation as it has been standing since 1920 looks like two seats for three sitters, in the same space. Such a situation is bound to create a sort of conflict among the three over who will occupy which seat. One of the three will be seatless. That has been the story for the last seven or eight decades in the Middle East. That’s the main theme to describe our situation.

As I said, theoretically, there is one of two ways: either you eliminate or negate one or you build a third seat. The world and the peoples of the area, or the governments of the area, have tried the first one for the last eight decades. Negating the third, went through many stages. The first stage was the Arab attempt to negate the Jews in 1948. They failed. King Abdalla, the founder of the Kingdom of Jordan tried his way to negate the third. In a constructive way, by merging the Palestinians and Jordanians into one people and one country, to make the two one, by merger and not negation. And that also did not work.

The Palestinian Fedayeen in 1970 tried to negate the Jordanian Government, and that also did not work. Within this context the Oslo Agreement, in my opinion was a historic event. It was preceded five years earlier by another historic event, i.e. King Hussein’s decision to terminate ties with the West Bank, administratively and legally. By doing so, King Hussein opened the way for the establishment of the third seat, for the third country. In my opinion, the Oslo Agreement should be viewed from this perspective. Rabin, of Israel, was the first Israeli leader to reverse the Israeli policy of negating the Palestinians to accepting them as peers or partners, and not, as the case was and as the case is now under Netanyahu, to consider them as an obstacle to be removed.
In that context Rabin’s assassination was a great loss, not only to the Palestinians but also to the Israelis and to the peace process itself. Rabin was the leader who finally, grasped the issue, that there should be a third seat for the Palestinians. Otherwise neither Jordan irrespective of its peace treaty with Israel nor the Palestinians will be reassured and satisfied. There should be a third space and the space is there, it’s the West Bank and Gaza. But it needs the recognition of the parties that this is the seat of the third sitter who has been deprived of a place to sit in for eighty years now.

Against this background, I have to tell you about the showdown. King Abdalla in 1950, united the west bank and the east bank into one country. And a hybrid identity started to grow. I and Mr. Sallah are of those who accepted this and supported this hybrid identity, that Trans-Jordanians and Palestinians become one, as Jordanians. In 1964, this process of building a hybrid identity for Jordanians and Palestinians in the two banks of Jordan, was interrupted the establishment of the PLO, the Palestinian Liberalization Organization, by the Arab League. The move to create the PLO was initiated by Nasser of Egypt, supported by Iraq, and by other states. Jordan was obviously against it. But you know, in the Arab League, great pressure was put on Jordan and Jordan had to accept it. Jordan tried, though, to obstruct, obstruct the interruption of the merger process, by trying to keep Jordanians and Palestinians as one people. This unfortunately did not work under the developments resulting from the 1967 war.

JK: So there were two ideologies that were incompatible.
AO: I would say that the awakening of Palestinian nationalism resulting from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza found itself in a collision course with the status quo in the West Bank and East Bank. An inherent tension emerged.

In 1967, war took place and the West Bank became under Israeli occupation since then. When it became under occupation, the chances for the first ideology, the Palestinian ideology, became greater because the land was no more under Jordan’s authority. Obviously the new generations of the West Bank started to view themselves as Palestinians rather than Jordanians. The Arab military defeat in the 1967 war produced a number of things. One of them was the realistic attitude of the Arabs after the War. The new Arab attitude was best manifested in the fact that Israel was there as a reality to be recognized. Ironically, the Israeli military victory produced the opposite, an unrealistic Israeli attitude with I like to call the booty mentality.

Two products that were diametrically opposed came out of the 1967 War: the realistic view of the Arabs to accept Israel, and the unrealistic Israeli attitude not to accept the Palestinians and to become like a spoiled young beautiful girl that refuses those who ask her hand. Like Penelope and the upsets of Odysseus, of Greek mythology. It is exactly like this. So, instead of making use of the fact that Jordan and Egypt, by accepting 242, accepted Israel as a reality, Israel did not appreciate that drastic turn in the history of the Middle East. Because it did not appreciate it, the 1973 War took place. And then things started to take shape after 1973. However, we will go back to our earlier question. Because these things are so much interlinked, it’s difficult to present a clear interpretation without going into details. I don’t feel I can answer your question if I miss certain points
that make it clear. Otherwise it would be very superficial. These things are much deeper than they seem.

JK: Intricately interwoven.

AO: Yes. I have to say that right from the beginning, in 1918, the triangular interaction emerged between the three seaters of over the two seats, the Israeli (the Jewish, it was first Jewish and then Israeli) the Jordanians and Palestinians. The triangular interaction has never ceased. It was marked over the decades by violence and conflict. Now after Oslo and after Jordan’s treaty with Israel, it’s supposed to be transformed into peaceful interaction. Rabin was assassinated, and Netanyahu was elected to bring us back to square one, to bring to the scene that type of interaction, the adverse interaction rather than conflict management and confidence-building. Now at this moment while I am talking to you this is the case. I will characterize it this way. I will go back again to the premise of the two seats for three sitters, recipe for conflict. Part of this history for the recipe for conflict was the Palestinian and Jordanian relationship after 1967, when Palestinian nationalists wanted to have Israel withdraw from the West Bank, but after the withdrawal, the PLO, should be the successor of Jordan in the West Bank. So there was a political conflict between Jordan and the PLO over who was going to rule the West Bank after the Israeli withdrawal. Now, how did it manifest itself? It manifested itself in many ways. One of them was the PLO’s rejection of Jordan to represent the West Bank in its negotiations and international diplomacy to implement 242, the Security Council resolution, OK? That was the political conflict.
But there was also a festering type of conflict that started with the Fedayeen organizations in Jordan, who right after 1967, stationed themselves in Jordan without any rejection by the country, because the country was in no situation neither morally nor materially to tell the Palestinians “No, you do not have your right to fight for your country.” This was the case in 1967, after June 1967, until the end of the year and the beginning of 1968. The country was almost open for all Palestinian Fedayeen organizations, guerrilla organizations, to come and station themselves, to recruit fighters, combatants, Arabs and non-Arabs, and to move in weapons and to open training centers for their fighters in the country. The country could not stop them, because Jordan couldn’t defend the West Bank, in the first place. So Jordan could not tell them, “I will prevent you from liberating the West Bank.” Jordan was in a dilemma. “How can I stop people from liberating their country which I couldn’t defend.” That was Jordan’s moral predicament. It was under this predicament, moral and political, that the Fedayeen came into the country and established themselves as an embryo for another power, ruling power, in the country.

Between ‘67-’70, this new power grew into a real power to a point when we in the country started to see a state within a state. Between ‘67-’70, there were so many clashes between the Fedayeen and the government. King Hussein personally appealed to the Fedayeen leadership at that time to coordinate with the government in their operations against Israel and in their policies and they always refused. Sometimes they reached a sort of agreement but, those agreements wouldn’t endure more than twelve hours, twenty-four hours. Maximum three days and then they would collapse. So, there was a real effort to reconcile with the PLO and coordinate, but it was impossible, because King
Hussein’s policy after the 1967 War and after accepting 242, was obvious to reach a peaceful settlement. The PLO’s position at that time was no recognition of Israel. So, there was a conflict between the two parties. In fact, there were contradicting positions: one that accepts Israel and wants to reach a settlement and the other rejects this policy. Another difference was that if a settlement was reached on the basis of 242, Jordan would go back to the West Bank, its regained territory. The PLO would say, “No, I will go to the West Bank, not you!” King Hussein at one point even to eliminate this second point of difference, aspect of difference with the PLO, promised that once the West Bank was back he would ask the Palestinians themselves to decide whether they would continue with Jordan or would become separate or independent, the way they like.

JK: OK, So that was the King’s proposition, proposal?

AO: Yes, King Hussein’s proposal. But even this was not accepted. And at one point, the situation deteriorated. So many mercenaries, so many politically oriented elements were able to infiltrate into Fedayeen organizations and instead of working to liberate Palestine and fight the Israeli troops, they started to think of how to change the regime here, to make Amman like a Hanoi of the Arabs, to liberate Hanoi in order to liberate Saigon. They wanted to copy examples from other parts of the world. This one looked as if it was intriguing to them. These factors and others on the Trans-Jordanian side contributed to the fading away of law and order and mutual hatred. There were mutual fears, and the King tried his best to avoid the showdown, but he couldn’t.
In the first stage, he used to contact them to reach agreements, at the later stage when things became worse, he resorted to the Arab League to help him reach an agreement with them. Once he resorted to the Arab League, the PLO instead of becoming milder in its attitude, it became more intransigent, because that meant to them, that they became another party in the country since the King referred the issue to the Arab League. So they thought of themselves as becoming equal to the legitimate government. Without the Arab League, the King could say, “I am telling you, you are violating the law of the land, I want to regain the law of the land, I want to restore it.” But now when the King went to the Arab League, now the country itself has become like a disputed land.

JK: They could sense that he felt weakened in dealing directly with them and needed a third party.

AO: Exactly.

JK: So they emboldened their own sense of legitimacy.

AO: And so, that’s why instead of becoming more pliant they became more defiant, until the showdown took place in September 1970. Of course, that was preceded by two attempts on the King’s life by the Fedayeen.

JK: Right, I think that we should talk about that. How did that happen?
AO: Well that happened close to this place. Eight hundred meters down there. The king was living then in a nearby suburb and he was going to the airport to receive his daughter. One of the extremist groups ambushed him and a flurry of fire was shot at him and one of his bodyguards was killed. But he survived it. Another time, they ambushed him in another place outside of Amman. So, two attempts on the King’s life took place and the situation became impossible. And the people, how did they feel? Now the people, Palestinians, like Jordanians, were very unhappy about the situation, that’s why I want to negate the idea of a civil war. You know, after all, the individual’s judgment on things has to do with individual’s daily life, if one couldn’t send his children to school and feel safe, one couldn’t go and earn one’s bread, one couldn’t see public security as the place where he/she could go and ask for help, or something like this. So they become afraid and horrified about the situation. And people within themselves wanted to see law and order restored.

JK: So there were extremist elements within the PLO?

AO: That’s right.

JK: That the PLO couldn’t completely control.

AO: Yes. Those most extremist elements were, in fact, partisans, party members, political party members, who transformed themselves into Fedayeen guerrillas. I call
them synthetic groups. Since they were neither Fedayeen nor guerrillas nor party members, they became something totally new.

JK: When you say party members, what are you talking about?

AO: Political parties.

JK: Just political parties?

AO: Political parties were banned in Jordan in 1957. But they continued to operate underground. Now those come out in 1967, and took the rifle and the machine gun and the kalishnikov and posed themselves as guerrilla fighters. But they couldn’t forget their ideological affiliations and political objectives, that’s why I call them synthetic groups because they were neither genuine guerrilla fighters nor political party members who promote their policies through peaceful means. It was those synthetic groups that were the extremists.

JK: Now, the ideology, was it communist ideology? Or Marxist ideology?

AO: It was Marxist to some and Arab nationalist to others

JK: Whatever...a mixture. You are going to read from a document right now.
AO: This is an introduction to my book.

JK: An introduction to your book, OK.

AO: “On the morning of September 15, 1970, I stood at attention before King Hussein in his suburban Amman residence and handed in a sealed report from the Director General of Jordan’s Intelligence Department. This was the most unusual practice. It had always been the Director General’s job to carry intelligence reports to the King. I was not aware then that this change in the steps of practice was one signal of the secrecy that shrouded the formation of a military cabinet. Nor was I aware that I was about to become a member of that cabinet which was being formed as part of the King’s decision to crack down on the Fedayeen organization. Having quickly read the report, the King said with a sober concern: ‘you are one of the few people in this country who are aware of the implication of this situation. If it continues any longer, I am afraid we shall lose Jordan and Palestine. Therefore, we, the Royal We, have decided to form a military cabinet to restore law and order to the country and put an end to this chaos. You will be the minister of information in this cabinet.’” So that was the beginning.

JK: OK, we’ll leave it there for now. This is a book that you are writing now. What would be the title of the book? Or you don’t know yet?

AO: I know.
JK: Just for future reference people can look for the book.


JK: When do you expect the book would be coming out?

AO: February of next year. Hopefully.

JK: OK, yeah.

AO: I finished the manuscript.

JK: That's a major accomplishment to finish the manuscript. I wanted to put that in the record because then people could look for the book.

AO: Sure.

JK: We'll get this on the Internet and then everyone will know about it. And it will be in English.

AO: Yes, it is in English.
JK: All right so then moving ahead, that date was?

AO: That military cabinet was established on September 15, 1970. The “showdown” took place on September 17, 1970, just 36 hours later.

JK: Goodness, that’s a very short time, why?

AO: Yes. The whole idea was if a military cabinet was formed, the Fedayeen organizations would take the government seriously, and they would abide by whatever agreement they reached with the government. At the same time, the military command had already had a contingency plan, in case the Fedayeen would not take the military cabinet seriously, and failed to reach an agreement with the government. The army would attack the Fedayeen and dislodge them from their bases in the cities.

JK: That was the contingency plan.

AO: Yes. The government couldn’t play the game as in the past I mean to give them one day, another day, a third day because any procrastination would mean that the Fedayeen were not serious. That’s why after 36 hours the government attacked, and the “showdown” took place for three or four days, during which the Syrian troops probed into the country in the North, in our northern borders and proceeded toward the capital.

JK: Why did they do that?
AO: To help the Fedayeen organizations in their fight against the government. At the same time, in Cairo, Nasser called for an Arab Summit. The showdown sparked American and Soviet mobilization because Jordan could have collapsed and eventually the balance of power in the region would have been disrupted. Jordan sought the help of the U.S. The American administration pressured Moscow, so that the latter would put pressure on its Syrian ally to withdraw from Jordan’s territory. At the same time Israel mobilized some of its forces along the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire lines and the Syrians withdrew. The summit in Cairo reached an agreement between Jordan and Arafat. King Hussein attended that summit, flew to Cairo and so did Arafat. On 23 September an agreement brokered by Nasser was reached. The agreement of cease-fire also included new arrangements regarding the Fedayeen’s presence and activities in Jordan. Its implementation did not go well. In the first place the agreement allowed the Fedayeen to exist in the country, and many of the military people did not want that to happen. So, while before 1970, it was the Fedayeen who usually violated the agreements, after the Cairo Agreement in 1970, mostly it was the army who violated the agreements that culminated in another showdown in July 1971 in Jerash forest near the ancient Roman city of Jerash north of Amman. The 1970 showdown went through two phases, phase one started after the formation of the military cabinet on 17 September and endured until the Cairo agreement, while the second phase which resulted in the eviction of the Fedayeen from Jordan completely, which took place in July 1971.
JK: Why did the military feel that the Fedayeen could not really stay? That was not a viable solution?

AO: Because before 1970 those synthetic groups were so provocative to the army, and that the army resented all their acts against them. At one point, for example, I remember when one of the Fedayeen synthetic groups arrested a number of soldiers and took them on board a pick-up truck and drove them through town, which was under their real control, in a show of ridicule. Such humiliating acts were not forgotten by the army.

JK: No, it’s very provocative.

AO: I guess so. I think there was another psychological factor. In the first phase of the confrontation the army could not expel the Fedayeen from Amman. When the Cairo agreement was reached the Fedayeen were still in Amman. It was the Cairo Agreement that put them out of Amman. They were taken out of Amman by diplomatic means rather than by the army. So the army resented the fact that it failed to evict them by force. So the military were looking forward to the opportunity that would allow them to try their muscle effectively. The Jerash confrontation was the answer.

JK: But was it also felt that if prior to 1970, between ‘67-’70, that the PLO leadership was unable to control these elements, the extremists of the Fedayeen, why would they be able to control them after that, because of the agreement in Cairo? I mean, was that part of the thinking that if they couldn’t control them before, what makes the
difference that they could now control them? That the PLO leadership could control the extremists?

AO: In fact in both cases, they were unable to control them.

JK: Right, that’s what I mean.

AO: Before and after, they were unable to control them.

JK: So the situation would not really have improved.

AO: Would not have been really improved only by the political agreement, and the events proved that to be so, proved that clearly.

JK: You had mentioned that the US had intervened in a sense. Were you at all in touch with any US diplomats or during that time?

AO: Not me.

End of Tape 1, Side 1

JK: I had been asking if you had been directly in touch with the Americans, but you had not.
AO: No. No it was in Rofoi directly between the King and the American embassy.

JK: The American embassy here in Amman.

AO: Which in turn contacted the State Department in Washington. I remember the evening of, I think, 19th September, the Syrians invaded the country, advanced in the north. Irbid, one of largest cities in the north, was taken over by the Fedayeen, and was declared to be a liberated area. The Syrian troops moved towards Amman, and the King called the military cabinet. We, the military cabinet, were driven to the King’s residence in armored cars, because the shooting was all over town. There was that historic meeting between the King and the Cabinet. The King said to us that the Syrians were in the country after they had crossed the borders, and that the Jordanian troops in the north were engaged with them in fierce fighting. The Syrians came in to help the Fedayeen. The Iraqi contingent near the Syrian borders opened the way for Syrians to come in, but the Iraqis did not participate in the fighting.

JK: So that was very serious.

AO: Now the King told us, as the cabinet, that this was an extremely dangerous situation. He had told us that he had ordered more troops to defend Amman. He asked us to give him mandate as a cabinet to call on friendly troops to come in, if necessary, to
defend the country and we gave him that mandate. Though the King could have called in whatever friendly troops to help, he chose to get authorization from the cabinet.

JK: Yes, yes, yes right.

AO: He said if necessary. He said also that our troops were fighting bravely, but in case the situation deteriorated worse, we might need friendly troops to come in. Would you authorize me to do so? We did. And then this contact took place with the Americans through one of the King’s associates. But fortunately enough there was no need to use foreign troops. Two major things happened, the Israeli troops in coordination with the Americans, displayed their forces on the Syrian front, as a sign that the Israelis might attack the Syrians if they went deeper into Jordan. And the other one, the diplomatic contacts between Washington and Moscow made the Soviets move against the Syrians and tell them “Look, we don’t want to confront the Americans in the area.” The Syrians pulled out from the country. So, we didn’t need foreign troops to fight for us, fortunately.

JK: Right. So those were very important contacts and also that they had to be made quickly.

AO: Very quickly, yes. Then they were followed by the agreement, the Cairo Agreement between the King which was sponsored by the Arab League. Nasser headed the summit and worked hard to bring the Palestinians and Jordanians into agreement. So after that another committee was established to supervise the implementation of the
agreement. It was headed by a senior Tunisian diplomat, Al-Bahi Al-Adgham who came to Amman to supervise the implementation of the agreement between Jordan and the Fedayeen that went along a bumpy way until July 1971 when the army evicted the Fedayeen completely.

JK: OK, so, at the discussions in Cairo with Arafat, at that point he had not agreed to leave Jordan.

AO: Jordan was not asking him to leave Jordan.

JK: At that point.

AO: Jordan was asking the Fedayeen to be under control and abide by the law of the land. And Jordan was ready to give them new positions, not in the cities because when Fedayeen moved from the front to the cities they built a state within the state, and became almost utterly uncontrollable to the extent that they hijacked three airplanes into Jordan.

JK: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that.

AO: ...just before the September showdown, one of those synthetic groups hijacked three airplanes and held its passengers and crews as hostages.

JK: Was that the precipitating event?
AO: Yes it was because it led to the confrontation. Because King Hussein couldn’t endure, couldn’t accept, couldn’t stand that his country had become a place for hostages by people who were challenging his authority; it was a very odd situation. He couldn’t take it. We call it the straw that broke the camel back. That was the straw.

JK: That was it. And so at any point was there agreement in ’71 with Arafat that he would leave?

AO: No, there was not. Arafat was smuggled out of the country.

JK: Oh he was, when did that take place?

AO: During the hostilities in the first phase of the showdown.

JK: Oh, during the hostilities.

AO: It was I think...

JK: He was smuggled out to Cairo and then he did not come back?

AO: He did not come back until 1978 as an official visitor.
JK: He did not come back...So can we continue.

This is a continuation of the interview.

AO: In fact, the 1967 War, has been a central event, from which the possibility of making peace emerged and on which the diplomacy to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict revolved for three decades, because the 1967 War produced the 242 Security Council resolution which, until this moment, is considered as the pivot or the base for any solution or settlement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The reason for that is the fact that Security Council Resolution 242 emanated from the balanced concept of “land for peace.” So, every now and then until this moment, people talk about land for peace. In fact, the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991, is based on this concept, which was enshrined in 242. Nevertheless, a comprehensive peace has not been achieved. For on the Arab side 242 has deepened their tendency towards litigation as a means for conflict resolution. 242 to the Arabs, meant that it was a verdict passed by the judge and all it waited for was the implementation. To them it was just a matter of enforcement once it is passed to the Marshall. This fact has governed Arab political thinking for three decades now. On the other hand, Israel took 242 as a framework, a conceptual framework within which it could use its better position, in terms of balance of power, to get the best deal possible of any peaceful settlement. To sum up, the Arabs played the plaintiff and the Israelis played the smart businessman looking always for a better deal. These two concepts governed the politics and the diplomacy of both sides for three decades now.
JK: That’s a really fascinating description. So in fact, the two sides were really operating under different, a different way of thinking.

AO: That’s right, a different way of attitude and interpretation of the same resolution called 242.

JK: So when one side would discuss it, 242, and the other side would discuss 242 they were kind of just passing each other.

AO: Each side believes that he/she is committed to 242, is abiding by 242. That reflects, to me, how the ambiguity of 242, the wording of 242 was to allow such, sometimes two, diametrically opposed interpretations.

JK: Now, tell me about the wording, because wording in Security Council resolutions is very important. As a lesson learned, for example for future writing of Security Council resolutions, what was the problem with the wording?

AO: Ambiguity, for example. You couldn’t expect indeed from a Security Council resolution with conflicting parties, to be so specific, in the first place.

JK: OK, in the first place...
AO: In our case in 242, the ambiguity was so harmful because it did not take into account the fact that 242 implied the Arab recognition of the state of Israel. For you as an American, you might not grasp the significance of this, because Israel is there in your mind and on the map.

JK: You’re right, I think outsiders see it differently.

AO: To you as an American what’s involved is that the Arabs would recognize Israel by exchange of embassies and establishing normal relations with her. It’s not incorrect to wonder what’s in that. If you don’t know the history of the conflict, or the psychology that was there. From our side as Arabs, right from the turn of the century, the first seeds of Arab nationalism were sown. This tendency towards Arab nationalism within the Ottoman Empire was, in the Arab mind, to flourish, bloom, and materialize after World War I, when the Turks were defeated in the war. And in the view of the fact that the Arabs under the leadership of Sharif Hussein, the great grandfather of King Hussein, allied with the West in the fight against the Turks in what is called historically the Great Arab Revolt. So there were the seeds of Arab nationalism and there was the position that they took, by aligning with the West against the Turks hoping that when the guns fell silent, that they would have their united Arab state in the area. That ambition, these were the hopes, the burning hopes of the Arabs. But after the war, they were completely disillusioned to discover that two things happened: one the Balfour Declaration, by which the British, one of the victors of the war, had already committed themselves to establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. The second one was the Sykes-Picot
Agreement between Britain and France to divide up or to split up the area under their domination into new nation states, not one Arab state, but new nation states, each one of them consisting of Arabs and one of them, Palestine, was supposed to accommodate the Jews. So the natural reaction of the Arabs to this, the establishment of a Jewish national state, was to reject it. Because “This is my space, this is my home, how can I bring in an alien body and engrave it in my midst.” So there was a psychological rejection of another nationalism to be established in the midst of their nationalism. That accounts for the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea of rejecting an alien body in their midst, especially Jews in the Middle East in Palestine were a small community, much less than the Palestinians (one-third of the population of Palestine in 1948). The idea of the Balfour Declaration was to bring Jews from outside to increase the number of this community, so that they would build a state of their own. The Arabs were aware of this and they rejected it. Arab acceptance of 242, from the Arab point of view, has been the major concession the Arabs have made to the Israelis: “Now we accept you amongst us.” Now we give up the idea that you are an alien body to be rejected, now you can be a member of the club.” Arab acceptance of 242 was a major transformation in the Arab attitude towards Israel, a development that made peace possible.

JK: Many years coming.

AO: That was, in fact, best manifested in 242 when Egypt and Jordan accepted it because 242 among other things provides for the right of every country to live within secure and recognized borders. Israel is one of those countries. It means that the other
side had to recognize it. So, when Egypt and Jordan accepted it, accepted the resolution, it implied so clearly that they accepted Israel in their midst for the first time. That great concession by Jordan and Egypt was not duly appreciated by the Israeli politicians, nor was it duly appreciated by the West. Why do I say that? Because it was not reflected in the Israeli action to the Gunnar Jarring mission in the Middle East as representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In fact, they behaved like as if they were there all the time as if there was no question about their right to exist there, as if the Arabs had already accepted them much earlier than 1967, so, the question to the Israelis was how much they should reap from their victory. The booty mentality among the Israelis defeated the conciliatory mentality; unfortunately this sort mentality is still lingering now, especially in the minds of the Likud.

JK: Now there were countries such as Syria, for example, that did not accept 242.

AO: That’s right. It took Syria to accept it, another war, the 1973 War. One of the major outcomes of the 1973 October War was that Syria accepted 242. Because the Security Council Resolution 338 included three items, a cease-fire, second, agreement of 242 and third, to negotiate peace under appropriate auspices. So, Syria accepted 242 as an item, when it came as one item in 338 of 1973. Syria came in six years later after Egypt and Jordan, to accept Israel as a reality.

All these facts, unfortunately, have not been focused on, or highlighted in the media, in Western media. That makes us sad and feel that the media has not been even-handed. Because there was no real highlighting of this fact. The Arabs after all accepted
Israel. That is the beginning of conciliation. Negating the other means that there will be no conciliation whatsoever. But now the other is recognized, and the other does not seem to be appreciating this development on the Arab side. In fact, the residuals of this mentality are still there in Israel. Recently I was presenting this argument in a meeting where some Israelis were participating. One of them retorted by saying, “Why do you think that the Arabs had to be rewarded for recognizing Israel?” My answer to him was “You should be appreciative because the area is an Arab area, it’s an Arab lot, and in the beginning, it’s like every body, you come into my body as an alien body, I try to reject you through my lymphatic system. Finally I accepted you as part of me, well, now it is up to you if you want to dig again in my body, again you make me feel like you are alien and my lymphatic system will be reactivated. But if you appreciate that you are accepted in my midst now, I shall take you as a neighbor. If you show me that you appreciate this, that will help me and help you to build confidence, mutual confidence and move towards interdependence and cooperation and be good neighbors. But if you continue to tell me that I have to move the fence between our two gardens back into mine, you will continue to remind me that you are an alien body, a harmful alien body. This is why you should appreciate it. He said, “How about us to recognize you.” I said, “It is irrelevant. It is like the relationship between the elephant and the ant. It is my space, it is my world. It does not mean anything if the ant said to Mr. Elephant, ‘well I recognize that you are there, you exist.’” It’s like this, you should be more realistic about it. We are talking about the psychology of a people. Our mutual interest lies in sharing, it is to recognize that you are there and establish a new relationship not a relationship based on rejection or expansion,
but a relationship that is based on acceptance, sharing, cooperation and interdependence. That’s how people feel.

JK: Is it somewhat, I don’t know but from your point of view and understanding of the psychology of the region, does Israel act out of fear? Is part of their stance out of fear?

AO: Out of trauma. Here is another point, Jean. We understand the Jewish trauma; we really do. But we are also traumatized, and being traumatized, we look for our trauma to be recognized by the world. The difference between the two is while Israel’s trauma is recognized worldwide, the Palestinian and Arab trauma is not recognized by the world. We are traumatized too. Just imagine how we feel after eighty years of failure. To be reminded after eighty years how impotent we are is a real trauma. This is the problem. How our dignity is being marred almost daily, that is our trauma. It’s a trauma, but a different kind. There is the Israeli trauma and there is the Arab trauma. The irony is that we are talking about two traumatized peoples. And we are usually asked to recognize the trauma of the other, but the other is exempt from recognizing my trauma. Only two days ago, Mr. Sharon, Minister of Infrastructure in Israel, made a very horrible statement, he said, “We are going to assassinate Mr. Meshal, in Amman.” Mr. Meshal is the guy on whose life there was an attempt by the Mossad last fall in Amman. Fortunately, the attempt failed. Do you remember that? And just two days ago, Sharon a cabinet minister, says, “We want to assassinate Meshal.” Can you imagine in international relations a senior official in one administration says to the media “We are going to
assassinate someone in another country.” How can you explain this? Today I have an article in one of our dailies about this particular incident.

JK: You did?

AO: Yes, I wrote an article about this. [Shows Dr. Krasno the article]

JK: I’ll get a copy of this article, because they can keep it in the library at Yale, because they read Arabic.

AO: When you hear Sharon say this about a citizen in another country like Jordan who has concluded a peace treaty with Israel, and the country that has been so forthcoming in nourishing the normalization process with Israel, how would you explain it, except that he holds a derogatory attitude towards the other, Jordan. He figures out as if he is looking at me as an impotent guy and he can punish and do whatever he can, in my country without being punished himself. See this type of trauma. This is missed and not understood in America. It’s not understood in America, it’s not there. One of my basic points, which I raise here, is the way that the American media addresses such events. I was in the United States when the first attempt on the Meshal took place. I noticed that in the American media they used the following adjective to describe the attempt. They used the “botched” operation or “bungled” operation, if you remember?

AO: And this epithet was used all over the land in the United States. Now I analyzed this in my article. I said “botched” is a very accurate word for one who is looking at it as if he were an employed guy whose job is to judge how well the executive has done of the task. The act, to him, was right, but it was imperfect. This is not the case. Now by repeating this epithet, when this operation was referred to in the media, it has succeeded in neutralizing the ordinary reader or blocking his mind from making the right judgment. For those who support Netanyahu’s policies in the U.S., they felt sad and sorry because the operation was not complete. It made them feel sad only because it was not done, because it was not complete.

JK: And not the issue of whether it was right or wrong to be doing it to begin with.

AO: Exactly, not that issue, not to denounce it, not to say it was wrong. This sort of thinking, this is why the American mind is far away from the reality of the Middle East, because the type of reporting on the Middle East is void of so many important elements to make the ordinary reader have a better understanding of what is going on.

JK: So the language defines the situation and then one’s interpretation follows that definition.

AO: Now that’s the focus of the language of course. And wording and what you say.
JK: Well, I want to go back a little bit to just some points in history and to put the analysis into other points of history, and to talk about issues leading up to ‘73. At that time Sadat was the president of Egypt and very secretly, Sadat carried out the plan for an attack against Israel.

AO: That’s a leap (ahead).

JK: OK, that’s a leap, then so tell me, fill me in.

AO: Let me tell you what happened, this is really important. Just go first, and see what was the American policy until 1973. It was to keep Israel strong, that the strength of Israel would make the Arabs finally accept to make peace with Israel. And that reflected on the American diplomacy. There was never a serious diplomatic effort from the side of the United States during the Johnson Administration because that was the idea of Johnson.

JK: So you had 242, but then you had no implementation.

AO: No implementation, so there was no real no serious attempt, no serious diplomatic attempt on the side of the US. Then comes Nixon and Rogers’ plan, the Foreign Minister for the administration at that time. And it didn’t work. Then, Nasser dies and Sadat succeeds him in Egypt. Sadat comes up with an initiative to open, reopen the Suez Canal, asking for a partial Israeli withdrawal and the reopening of the Suez Canal, trying to link
his initiative with international interests, trade interests, and at the same time with the Egyptian/Israeli conflict. But his initiative was not taken seriously, neither by Israeli nor by the United States of America. That made Sadat think of another way. Then he started to plan for a limited war to activate the diplomacy that his initiative failed to activate earlier. This is history. Then the war takes place, after the war, American diplomacy has changed drastically.

JK: Now let me before we go to that period, I wanted to know if you did President Sadat have consultations with King Hussein, prior to ‘73 War?

AO: No, King Hussein was unaware of a plan for war that Sadat was working on. On that side, Sadat and Assad were working together in a very admirable secret mode, which is not one of the traits of Arab policy. It was very strange, very unusual.

JK: Yes, because from everybody that I talked to who was around in that time, said that nobody knew.

AO: I was close, I was the King’s second man in the government, I was his Chief of the Royal Court then.

JK: Completely taken by surprise. But as I understand it the Egyptian forces were congregating along certain areas. I mean, if one had taken that seriously, you might have interpreted that there was an attack being planned.
AO: No, in the first place we didn’t know about the congregation of the Egyptian army, they are far away from us.

JK: OK, so you didn’t have any information about that. Why wasn’t it anticipated at all?

AO: Because, you know, one important event took place. Sadat at one time talked about preparing for war to liberate Sinai. Everybody in the area, was poised to see that war initiated and then Sadat at one point said in a very famous statement, that we were trying to do it but that there was too much fog that prevented our forces to operate. It became a joke in the Arab world.

JK: Oh really.

AO: So, no body took it seriously. So, whatever information came later about congregation, no body took it seriously, and they were all jokingly referred to Sadat’s “you are incompetent for the war because of the fog.” I think that was an interesting event in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even the Israelis didn’t take him seriously, for that matter.

JK: But they didn’t take him seriously because...
AO: They took him seriously, only after the 1973 war. And the Americans took him seriously too.

JK: They allowed the Israeli forces to go for Yom Kippur.

AO: And according to the reports later on, it seems that the Israeli intelligence was aware a few days before that, that there was something suspicious going on, on, the other side but, they didn’t take it seriously.

JK: So King Hussein knew nothing about it.

AO: No he did not. To the best of my knowledge, no he did not. He was surprised as much surprised as everybody else.

JK: What, from your understanding, was the Soviet role? In terms of the Syrian part of it and the Egyptian part of it.

AO: Well the Soviet role was basically to supply weapons.

JK: The Soviets.

AO: To supply weapons to both Egypt and Syria. Before the war, their shipping of weapons increased. Still, no one took it seriously. But I don’t know whether the Soviets
were aware that Sadat was planning the war or not. I don’t really know. Because there was confusion between the need of Egypt for weapons to sustain the war of attrition along the Suez Canal and an all out war. So in all cases he needed the weapons because there was a sort of war of attrition, in the region.

JK: Was King Hussein involved in any of the talks after the war had broken out?

AO: No, in fact, the war, was October 6th, and the cease-fire that was imposed by the Security Council resolution 338 was on the 22nd. So, the war was relatively a longer war, it continued for sixteen days. During which everybody was busy with the war, rather than in talks with anyone. Until Kissinger and Nixon’s Administration moved to get along with the Soviet to reach the cease-fire.

JK: So let me ask you, there was a specific kind of media coverage during the ‘67 war, coming out of the Arab countries, did the media coverage change?

AO: Yes.

JK: In what way did it change?

AO: It changed drastically. It was less rhetorical it was less imaginary as the case was in the 1967 war. It was noticeably more realistic, not completely but more realistic than
the approach of the coverage that was in 1967. And one shouldn’t also miss the fact that the coverage this time was characterized by elation, rather than depression and fear.

End Of Tape One, Side Two

JK: So we were talking about the difference between the media coverage of the ’67 war and the ’73 war.

AO: As I said, the coverage was less rhetorical but more elated simply because of the success of the Syrian and Egyptian forces to cross the cease-fire line, and occupy part or regain part of the occupied territories. By the end of the war, when Israel, thanks to the American armament to the Israelis or to the airlift of sophisticated weapons to Israel, the tide of war started to change in favor of Israel, and the media started to reflect the fear as they did in 1967. But at the beginning, for almost ten to twelve days, the situation was less rhetoric and more elated.

JK: Were there other changes that happened during that six-year period that made the media change their approach?

AO: Yes, of course, there was a lot of self-criticism of the role of the media in 1967.

JK: What kind of criticism?
AO: It was mainly revolving around one thing, that the media exaggerated and lied, exaggerated the Arab achievement which did not exist, in reality, and it lied and deceived the people. It was obvious in that sense. There was in the 1973 war, I remember, at least on our side, in Jordan, for the first time, an exercise of psychological warfare, against the Israelis rather than a psychological warfare addressed to the Arabs. The media in the Arab world in 1973 addressed the Israeli audience to weaken their position, to demoralize them, rather than address the Arab audience to misguide them. That did not happen in 1973. For example, I remember the Egyptians on the Sinai front, were able to have a number of prisoners of war, Israeli prisoners of war, and they released a picture of those prisoners and we took that picture here in Jordan and presented it on our TV which is watched by the Israelis because of the short distances. So in Jordan, they could see our TV in Israel but they couldn’t see the Israeli Egyptian TV clearly or partly, but our TV, the Jordan TV, could be seen from the heart of Israel, from the densely populated centers including Tel Aviv itself. So we used that footage of the Israeli prisoners, and transmitted it having in mind that we were addressing the Israelis. We put the script that accompanied the footage. We addressed the mothers of the soldiers, the wives of the soldiers who were prisoners, the children of these soldiers. We said “You Israelis, now you see your Sons, husbands and maybe your fathers and we are sure that you have Arab prisoners of war who have mothers, fathers and children and we want you to understand that as you feel distressed and worried about your sons, husbands and fathers and so are the Egyptians and Syrians are equally worried about theirs.” This sort of approach never existed before.
JK: So to try to humanize the situation.

AO: Exactly to humanize it. For the first time we applied the psycho-warfare rules.

JK: To understand the human quality on both sides.

AO: To appeal to the human aspect which is usually dissipated in a war, while the war is going on. Our objective in Jordan was to be able to precipitate in the Israeli mind the need to make peace, real peace. So that is the sophistication we learned after the 1967 war.

JK: OK, OK. That’s very interesting. I had been talking to someone here who as a boy was in the West Bank during the ‘67 war and he heard over the radio things like that Iraq had entered the war on the side of the Arabs, and that the Arabs had come into Israel and were liberating the Palestinians.

AO: That’s right, that’s the exaggerating side which I mentioned.

JK: And that the tanks that were coming were Iraqi tanks. But when the boy went out of school to see the tanks, they were Israeli tanks.

AO: Oh, that’s ‘67 not ‘73. Oh that was crazy.
JK: That’s ‘67. And so what I was wondering is that if there was a change in the approach of the media because of things like this?

AO: Exactly, that’s a good example. In 1967, people were completely uninformed about what was going on, completely put in the dark, so they were left to their imagination. I mean, I remember, one time in my hometown in Nablus when Israeli tanks came into the city, they thought they were Algerian tanks.

JK: When was this?

AO: In ‘67. And that is the best evidence to tell you how people were unaware of what was going on around them. Now compare this situation with 1973, the media was more accurate, not completely but more accurate, less rhetoric and more human in their approach, as I told you earlier. That has been the change.

JK: I think that was an important aspect of an important change. So, when Sadat entered into negotiations to end the war what was Jordan’s response to that?

AO: We thought that was a good beginning for diplomatic efforts that might come to a fruition which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Gunnar Jarring, of Sweden, failed to achieve after 1967, on the basis of 242. So it gave us hope that what Gunnar Jarring failed to do, the United States may succeed to achieve because
the United States was involved in the peacemaking efforts. Because of that, we, in Jordan, wanted to be part of the process, because we wanted to get back our territory, the West Bank which was occupied in 1967, as soon as possible.

JK: Then after that, President Sadat made a trip to Jerusalem.

AO: That was 1977, four years later. But after 1973, some important things took place. Mainly that Henry Kissinger focused on a number of things. One of them was to create a forum, a symbolic umbrella, for step-by-step negotiations. Hence was the Geneva Conference in September 21, 1973. Kissinger wanted to lift the Arab embargo on oil because there was an oil embargo during the October war, imposed by the Arabs. Kissinger wanted the American people to believe that American involvement in the peace process was serious this time and not motivated by the oil embargo, but rather by the general interest of the United States in the Middle East. He wanted, also, to make the Arabs believe that they are responding positively this time, not because of their own embargo but because they wanted to make real peace in the Middle East. And they wanted at the same time to let the Soviet Union feel that it was not excluded from peacemaking while practically it was fully excluded from it. So that was the objective of the Nixon administration, which was implemented by Henry Kissinger. Now, during his efforts, Jordan that did not open a front against Israel in the 1973 war, but sent contingents to the Syrian front to defend the Syrian territory against the Israeli offensive, was excluded from the disengagement agreements.
JK: So Jordan did send contingents to Syria.

AO: Jordan sent the contingents to defend the Syrians when the Israeli counter-attacker came into effect after the Americans sent weapons to Israel. Jordan sent a contingent to Syria to help the Syrians defend their territory. At the same time, Jordan did not open a front along its cease-fire line with Israel. Because the Americans told Jordan, or relayed to Jordan an Israeli message that the Israelis were afraid that Jordan might open a front here. The Israeli message to Jordan was “If you open a front against us along the cease-fire lines, that would threaten the heart of Israel, in this case Israel would turn it major power against Jordan to destroy it and then go back to fight its battle against the Egyptians and the Syrians. So Jordan couldn’t open a front. Now, we come back to the American initiative carried out by Henry Kissinger. Jordan was happy that a new diplomatic effort was to begin; that effort might achieve what Gunnar Jarring failed to achieve and Jordan will get to be a part of this effort. At one point, Henry Kissinger relayed to King Hussein a message from the government of Israel that Jordan that did not fight in the war, was not entitled to a disengagement agreement. So Jordan said, “Oh God, was that our reward because we didn’t fight against Israel along our front?”

Later on, the Israelis came up with a proposal, something that Kissinger more or less endorsed. The proposal was to have Israel and Jordan engaged in administrative disengagement, not a military disengagement. What does that mean? Three military disengagement agreements were signed by Israel, Egypt and Syria. Two were with Israel and Egypt and one between Israel and Syria. By the disengagement agreement, Israeli forces withdrew from certain territories that they had occupied. Jordan wanted to be
another party to the military disengagement agreement and suggested that Israel withdraw between eight to ten kilometers parallel to the River Jordan, as a beginning of a Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. But the counter proposal from Israel was “No, we wouldn’t withdraw from our positions along the River Jordan, instead we would agree on administrative disengagement. What does that mean? Israel would withdraw from certain cities and villages where Jordan would go in and administer, take over the administration of those cities while the Israeli troops would keep their positions around those populated centers and along the Jordan River.

Jordan refused because that meant Jordan would do the job of the Israelis who were still occupying the land, in keeping the security of the cities. At the same time, the Arab states in two consecutive summits, one in Algeria in November 1973, just after the October war and another one the next year in October ‘74 in Rabat, Morocco, decided to consider the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people which implied that Jordan was not responsible for the West Bank. That ingredient became a central element in Arab politics. Since then Jordan and the PLO wrestled over the West Bank. That fact persisted until 1988 when King Hussein announced in a historic speech that Jordan decided to terminate its legal and administrative ties with the West Bank and to give the responsibility of regaining it to the PLO. For fifteen years, the Arab summit decision has governed the Palestinian-Jordanian relationship as well as in many cases, the Jordanian-Arab relationship in Arab politics over the Palestinian situation. These are important junctures in the history of the Middle East. Now we go back to Sadat, and when Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977.
JK: In ‘77. Did Sadat consult with King Hussein before going?

AO: No. But Sadat announced, if you remember, announced that during an interview with Barbara Walters on ABC that he was ready to go to Israel as far as Jerusalem and announce maybe his good intentions about peacemaking with Israel. Some people took it seriously and some people not. So, we learned from the media, like others, we were not privy to what he was planning to do.

JK: What was Jordan’s response then to his visit?

AO: We were really stunned because we took it as a first sign that Sadat would go unilaterally in peacemaking with Israel, which to us meant that the Arab position would be weakened because when Egypt went out of the gate and went to peacemaking unilaterally, the Syrian and Jordanian position would be weakened. That’s why the Arab reaction to the Sadat initiative was an Arab Summit in Baghdad, in which the Arabs took a position to castigate Egypt, to punish it and to move the headquarters of the Arab League from Cairo to Tunisia.

JK: That decision was taken in Baghdad.

AO: At the same time, the Arab oil countries took the position to strengthen the other states like Jordan, Syria and the PLO financially, to make them capable of defending themselves after being weakened due to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. So, they got
committed to a ten-year financial aid to these three parties, Jordan, Syria and the PLO. Saudi Arabia, only Saudi Arabia, lived up to its commitment for ten years. Other Arab countries like Libya, Algeria and other oil states in the Gulf did not. Some of them did for a while like Qatar, the Emirates, Kuwait, and Iraq. But for some years, Iraq continued to be committed to Jordan, but not to Syria because of the Iraq/Iran War. The Iraqis were financially in a bad situation. But countries like Kuwait, like Qatar, like Emirates, I think in 1982, they stopped paying. Libya didn’t pay one single penny right from the beginning. Algeria paid one or two installments. But Saudi Arabia was the only country that kept its commitments until the end, until 1989.

JK: So by Sadat coming into Jerusalem it was pretty much indicated that there would be an agreement, and then when Camp David took place it was not unexpected.

AO: It was not unexpected because this visit to Jerusalem was so obvious that Sadat would go it alone. If you go back to the minutes of the negotiations or what was written about the Camp David negotiations, Sadat was very much serious and sensitive to the question of not turning down the Palestinians. Sadat was very sensitive to the idea that he would not be seen as one who turned down the Palestinian question. He wanted a linkage between his agreement with Israel and the Palestinian question. He was insisting on it.

JK: So there’s a piece of that in the ...
AO: That’s why there were two agreements, in fact. The framework agreement between Egypt and Israel and the agreement on the self-rule in Palestine, on the West Bank and Gaza. That was the linkage. The whole idea was that Egypt was involved in the whole Arab-Israeli conflict because of the Palestinian question. So, Sadat didn’t want to reach peace with Israel without addressing the original cause of the Egyptian involvement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, that’s the Palestinian question. He was so keen on having something worked out. Of course, what he and Israel reached about the Palestinian question (the self-rule agreement) was not accepted by the Palestinians, was not accepted by Jordanians, was not accepted by the Arabs, but he reached something to indicate that he had not neglected the major issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

JK: Now you mentioned that the Arab, oil producing Arab countries had taken on a commitment to economically help certain of the other Arab countries. Why was that a critical issue after Camp David?

AO: It was important to strengthen the confrontation states, those who are confronting Israel and who had land or territory lost to Israel in 1967 war. You have to have them strong enough to defend themselves and to prepare for the future to regain their territories.

JK: Was this in terms of economic aid?

AO: Financial.
JK: Financial aid and was this used for economic development or military development?

AO: Both. I think Jordan was allocated 1.1 billion dollars, and Syria 1.8 billion dollars, I heard the PLO got 300 million dollars. But as I said, not all donors lived up to their commitments.

JK: It is interesting to have your analysis as you put things together. Now another issue that's an important issue which we haven't really discussed, is the issue of water.

AO: I think the issue of water is a central issue, in the conflict and the peacemaking. And also it is central if we want to interpret Israeli political behavior in the peace negotiations, especially over the Arab territories that Israel still occupies: the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and South Lebanon. Part of Israel’s insistence to keep certain territories is due to the fact that these territories include sources of water that the Israelis use.

JK: In terms of resolving some of these issues, is there a UN role for reading some kind of solution to the sharing of the water?

AO: So far, the United Nations has been intentionally excluded by Israel with the help of the United States.
AO: The Israeli rationale which Israel sold to the Americans was that the United Nations would not help to bring the Arabs to negotiate directly with Israel. And to end this conflict according to this rationale is a must. That was the first principle that the Israelis stuck to throughout the whole period since 1967. And the second principle they adhered to was to negotiate individually with each Arab state, not as a whole. The Americans adopted these two principles, excluding the United Nations and supporting Israel to negotiate individually with the Arab states. That started in Camp David and it was institutionalized at the Madrid Conference when the Madrid Conference established the use of two types of tracks, a multilateral track and bilateral tracks, the Syrian-Israeli track, the Lebanese-Israeli track, a Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli track, (the Jordanian and Palestinian track was split into two, through the back channel which the PLO and Israel had in Oslo). The Jordanian-Israeli track, of course, came to an end when Jordan and Israel concluded a peace treaty. Now we have the Palestinians-Israeli track; we have the Syrian-Israeli track; and we have the Lebanese-Israeli track.

AO: According to Madrid, the Madrid Forum, as I said there are two types of tracks, bilateral and multilateral. In the Jordan-Israel track some issues of water considering the
two countries were discussed and they reached certain agreements but the water issue is beyond the bilateral interest, it’s multilateral, because the sources of water for example, the Yarmuk River comes from Syria, mainly from Syria, and from Jordan but it goes down as a tributary to the Jordan River, where Israel takes a share from it and Jordan gets its share and the Palestinians should benefit from it. That’s why water is also a major issue in the multilateral track. In the multilateral track, there are I think twelve to fourteen Arab state and other countries like Canada, Japan, France, Germany, United States. So that’s why it is multilateral. What does the idea of a multilateral track reflect? It reflects the international involvement in issues that have multilateral nature, like water, security, like development, like environment. These are multilateral issues.

JK: So, would Jordan be interested in a UN role in this?

AO: Sure, we believe that the UN should have a role. From our point of view as Arabs, the UN has a dormant role, at least. It is a reservoir of international legitimacy of the international law because the UN resolutions are part of international law and the United Nations is the reservoir of international legitimacy. This is our view, but it is dormant? We are ready to resort to it every now and then. But I believe, at one point, down the road, if things go the right way and bilaterally talks come to fruition, the United Nations should play a more visible role, a more substantive role in peace arrangements, security arrangements, in water, in the refugee problem, in environment. In other words, it is more acceptable to the Arabs and it should be to the Israelis that though the United
Nations was excluded from peacemaking, it should not be excluded from peace
maintenance and peace-building.

JK:  Well the UN has had a presence for since the beginning basically in UNTSO.

AO:  This conflict is the oldest in the United Nations among other issues. The United
Nations was established in 1945, and as of 1947 the Arab-Israeli conflict has been there,
until, this moment.

JK:  So, well then as long as we have worked our way up to more recent history, can
you describe the peace arrangement between Jordan and Israel and how that came to the
moment ripened for that to happen?  What were the elements that came together at the
time.

AO:  Let’s go back to my basic thesis that the Sykes-Picot and Balfour Declaration
produced two countries for three peoples. The triangular interaction was sparked from
this reality. For seven decades, this triangular interaction was marked by adversity,
conflict.  Now when we set out for peacemaking, the adversity of that triangular
interaction started to take a different direction, a direction for interdependent cooperation.
This is best manifested now between Jordan and Israel. The third party that is the
Palestinian party, is still within the boundaries of the adverse interaction, more within
them, more within the adverse interaction rather than the cooperative one. Why?
Because until now, Israel ...no, let me put it this way...Until now, Israel has not accepted
the establishment of a Palestinian state, to have a full fledged partner in this triangular interdependent cooperative interaction.

So, first things first, before we reached a comprehensive triangular cooperative interaction, the third party should have its seat in this space in the room to be equal and to deal with the other two on equal footing, this lacking element is now in the hands of Israel. That at least was thought to happen under Rabin’s administration, because Rabin was the Israeli leader who reversed the trend of the Israeli thinking after 1967 that was based on the fear that the Palestinians were an obstacle to be removed or obstruction to be bypassed rather than a partner to cooperate with. He reversed this trend and also by accepting the Palestinians as a partner, when Rabin was assassinated, and elections took place in Israel and a new Prime Minister was elected, Mr. Netanyahu, he reversed Rabin’s orientation and brought us back to square one where he believes that the Palestinians should be largely bypassed by giving them a sort of self-rule but under the Israeli sovereignty. So, he has obstructed the momentum that was created by the Oslo Agreement between Rabin and the PLO. This is the most unfortunate happening since Oslo, it is more than a snag. It’s a new policy that is really threatening the whole peace process.

JK: All right then how does that fit in then the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty?

AO: The Jordanian-Israeli treaty went the right way. Jordan and Israel moved from adverse interaction into cooperative interaction, that was manifested in twenty, at least twenty agreements based on the peace treaty between the two countries, which
characterized the concept of complementarily in infrastructure, economics, etc. Now then we come to the reality of how the Israelis and the Jordanian are implementing the agreements, according the papers today, the Minister of Commerce, the Jordanian Minister of Commerce is accusing Israel that it is obstructing the development of trade between the two countries. It's unbelievable that this is happening.

JK: So that is going through more than a snag.

AO: Yes, well in fact, the basics were agreed upon but when it comes down to implementation, the Israelis are obstructing it.

JK: In the building up to the Oslo Agreements and the agreements between Jordan and Israel, what kind of role did the Gulf War play in '91?

AO: Oh, it played a very interesting role, a very important role. It made it possible for Madrid to convene.

JK: In what way did it make it possible?

AO: Iraq was the party to reckon with when it comes to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Iraq was always characterized as a belligerent party. When Iraq was destroyed in the war, this actor was weakened. Number two, the war among other things sorted out the Arab world into two camps. One camp chose to join the American-led alliance against
Iraq including Egypt and Syria and the other camp did not accept to join it and stuck to an Arab solution of which Jordan was one. Psychologically, this split meant one important thing, the Arab constraint has eroded, the Arab constraint on Jordan to make peace with Israel has eroded because Iraq was not there. Syria could not outbid Jordan on making peace with Israel because Jordan could tell Syria; “Well you were with Americans while we were not in the Gulf.” So, the Arab constraint on Jordan had eroded in Kuwait.

JK: So that was it.

AO: And there was no Soviet Union at all. The demise of the Soviet Union was another factor and both coincided. The Gulf War and the demise of the Soviet Union coincided. So, another constraint had vanished, the Soviet constraint.

JK: So why did Jordan take the position of, as I don’t know, I think you said siding with Iraq, but however you want to say it.

AO: Not sided with Iraq, Jordan sided with the concept that an Arab solution should be adopted, not an international one. That was the position.

JK: Didn’t the Arab League meet at the time to try and come up with a solution?

AO: Yes, they met six or seven days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and they disagreed on what to do. It was split.
JK: Why was there that split?

AO: Here, I don’t want to speak for other countries. I would guess as an observer that each individual Arab country had to look into its own interests. Many of them were very much keen to maintain the best relations with the United States of America at that time and the best relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states that needed the defense and the protection of the international community.

JK: So they were fearful of Iraq?

AO: No, they were not fearful of Iraq. These countries cared more about their bilateral interests with actors, like the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait and other rather than fearful of Iraq. But those who were fearful of Iraq are the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, other Arab countries, for good reasons but not Egypt, or Syria, or Morocco. They had their interests, bilateral interests.

JK: But Jordan shares a border with Iraq.

AO: That’s right, we share borders with Iraq. We were not fearful of Iraq.

JK: Why not?
AO: Because we knew better than the others that the Iraqis made a major mistake by invading, that the Iraqis couldn’t hold onto the Kuwaiti territory, that the Americans were serious about evicting Iraq from Kuwait and that Iraq would be destroyed. In fact, King Hussein advised President Saddam against staying in Kuwait and asked him to withdraw from it. In a letter that was submitted to the Iraqi leader in September 1990. It was published later on in the White Paper that Jordan published about Jordan and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

End of Tape 2, Side 1

JK: The Arab League had not been able to reach a solution in their meetings in August of 1990.

AO: Yes, that’s right.

JK: So, once it was clear that the Arab League or the Arab world were not going to come up with a solution, why did Jordan adhere to that position?

AO: Well, because if Jordan went with American-led alliance, Jordan would have lost any possibility to become an accepted broker because we thought that even the Americans might need a middle man, at one point. If you are committed to one side, you will not be a credible broker. That was how we looked at things at that time. Of course, we did not attach much significance, or enough significance, to the fact that the Americans had
subliminal objectives. It was not only that they were looking to remove Iraq from Kuwait, it was more than that. We were not aware of it.

JK: So you were not aware of the other implications of the decision to actually carry out the attack.

AO: Not the implications, but the subliminal objectives which of course were revealed right after the war and still they persist until today. The Arabs only recently realized, that the Americans had subliminal objectives. The objective was not only liberating Kuwait, it was also the destruction of the military and technological capabilities of Iraq and also the removal of the regime of Iraq. The perception of the Arabs as to the American subliminal objectives are responsible nowadays for explaining the Arab behavior towards the last stand off between the United States of America and Iraq.

JK: This is just a few months, a few weeks ago. [In the early months of 1998, the US had threatened to attack Iraq if it continued to bar UN inspectors from doing their investigations into Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.]

AO: Yes, that’s right, until today. If the Arabs now are asked about the issue they will tell you, “Well, the idea was to liberate Kuwait and Kuwait was liberated.” There are Security Council resolutions to destroy weapons of mass-destruction. OK, that’s fine, they should be destroyed. But what we see now is the call for an intervention in the internal affairs of a country. We are afraid of this, because by the same token, the
Americans can find a reason to interfere in my country and in your country. So, they don’t like it.

JK: With the recent events which, for this tape we can explain, is that there was a stand-off between Iraq, or Saddam Hussein, UNSCOM or the inspectors to get into certain sites. The result two weeks ago that, at least for the time being, Secretary-General Kofi Annan managed to get was that, in this particular case, a number of countries in the Arab world were not willing to let the United States use certain bases for launching a new attack.

AO: That’s right. In fact, the Arab position was to send a message to the Americans that the issue as it stands is an American-Iraqi issue, while in reality it should be a United Nations-Iraqi issue. The Arabs view the American intervention as one that aims at the change of the regime, the intervention, emasculating Iraq for good. Some of them even link this to the Israeli objectives in Iraq. America is being seen now with Israel as one party against an Arab country.

JK: That’s the view from the Arab world.

AO: That’s why the Iraqis as well as the Arabs wanted to re-establish the fact that the question is a UN question. It’s a UN responsibility not an American responsibility, because that’s safer. We would feel safer with the UN as the other party to the stand off rather than America as the second party.
JK: So you mentioned the issue of sovereignty, that if the UN or the United States is allowed to interfere with the sovereignty of Iraq what would prevent it from interfering with the sovereignty of the other countries? So that has become another issue.

AO: That has become an obsession. It means that you are legitimizing, and licensing the strong guy’s intervention (that’s America) in any other country. Who knows, one day the United States would say to the Syrians, “your country did so-and-so” and they try to mobilize the United Nations behind them while, in fact, the policy is an American policy and the Americans can mobilize the United Nations in their own way. They will find the British as the first one to support them and then they get the support of Costa Rica on the phone and the support of Micronesia on the phone. People are aware of all these things. There is a majority that America can bring to its side on the phone, including some Arab countries. This perception is now flourishing and taking roots in the Arab political arena. It is revealed daily in the daily Arab papers.

JK: OK then leading into that, let me ask you a really rather big question, but it has to do with the end of the Cold War. You mentioned that the coinciding of the Gulf War with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in fact had a positive element that is laid the ground work for Jordan and Israel to come to an agreement.

AO: It laid the grounds for a more serious effort for a diplomatic solution, for the convention of the Madrid Conference.
In that sense there was a positive element to the ending of the Cold War but, now how is the UN viewed and the permanent members of the Security Council viewed now? The Cold War has ended, so the stalemate between the East and West has ended as far the Security Council is concerned. Is that completely viewed positively or are there parts of that which may appear negative?

Yes, to the Arabs, only recently they start to feel that it was negative to have one super power. Recently they have started to write some articles and hold symposia where they bring up this issue? Why at this time? I guess it has to do with what happened recently in Iraq. When Yeltsin came up with the view that if the United States will go unilaterally to strike Iraq militarily that might end up in a World War. Yeltsin’s threat was not serious, but God, when there is another super power it’s to the benefit of the weak states. It is safer for them because there is another power to check the giant from going unrestrained in its policies and subduing others. That has been very recent and came as a result of the latest standoff between Iraq and the United States.

This brings me to another question having to do with the United Nations, because this interview is under the auspices of the United Nations. There’s been a lot of criticism by those who are not permanent members of the Security Council, that the permanent members, the five permanent members, have the veto. So one member can stop something from happening and that you don’t have a simple majority necessarily to pass a resolution, So what you are just talking about...
AO: Is that it is good to have the veto power.

JK: So may be it may be in certain kinds of circumstances, it is not so bad.

AO: No, as I said, this has been recent. It started only three, four weeks ago. That’s the logic of it. You see, the Americans at least were restrained by such a statement given by a nuclear power like the Soviet Union, like Russia. “There might be another world war,” he said. People started to remember, oh God when we had the Soviet Union, we were in a safer world than the world of today where the policies of the United States go unchecked. This is a new phenomenon in thinking globally.

JK: In order to avoid the veto, in this particular case as an example, in order to avoid it, the United States had to negotiate.

AO: That’s the meaning of it, to have a compromise, to lower its ceiling of objectives, to be able not to have the veto. The United States was aware of this. If you remember the U.S. continued to say until today that they don’t need if they were to strike militarily, they don’t need another resolution from the Security Council. That is the American position. They don’t need it but, the other members said to them: “No you have to ask for or consult with the other Security Council members.” In other words it is invoking the power of the veto of the other side. On the side of America, it is evading the power of the veto of others who do not see eye to eye with the United States’ position.
JK: But the United States needs the legitimacy of the international community.

AO: That’s right. But again, there are a lot of ironies in this. While they need the legitimacy of the United Nations, while they use the United Nations to justify formally their actions outside, you have the Congress who refrains from living up to the American commitment to financing the United Nations. So this is America, where your State Secretary Albright says something and Senator Lott says something else. There is also the problem of American politics itself, the Congress versus the White House. I think, since the end of the cold war, only seven years has elapsed now. I think it will take America several years in order to establish new norms for the administration: 1) versus the Congress, and 2) versus the United Nations. As an observer from outside, I noticed that such a formula has not materialized yet, and still it’s in its the adolescent phase, maturity hasn’t been reached yet. That’s what I feel. It was a mere coincidence to be in the States for the last six years. I was there from 1992 until last month, when I came home. I had been there watching, listening and reading the debates in the Congress here and there, the statements given by the State Department or by the White House. You could see there are differences of attitudes on how to deal with the United Nations. I remember that famous slogan, “How can we accept to have American troops led by the United Nations? By some foreigners?” Such statements were used by those who were against sending American troops to Bosnia. You could see that the rules of how to deal with the United Nations after the demise of the Soviet Union, have not been agreed upon in the United States itself, not yet.
JK: Well we are coming to the end of the interview, pretty close. I was thinking of a way to summarize this, I'm not sure there is, but, how would you view in retrospect the role the UN has played in the Middle East? Have they been a positive force in the Middle East or have they been for all essential purposes been kept to the sidelines?

AO: You know the United Nations is its members, it is not a separate entity. In fact, at one point it is usually the five permanent members. No matter what, I think the United Nations has played a positive role. Simply because in the worst-case scenario, it posed as a sanctuary where people rightly or wrongly believed that their problem could be solved.

JK: You were saying that the United Nations is really the member states.

AO: Yes. It is the member states of the world. But nevertheless, in my opinion, in the worst-case scenario, those who believe that they were unjustly treated by their neighbor or their region, they would find the United Nations, as a refuge through which they can resolve their problems. Whether or not their problem is solved, still they resort to it. It nourishes their hope that a solution will come. And the other factor which I mentioned casually, it continues to constitute a reservoir of international legitimacy, which is in our world, in our globe in which we are living today is the only thing we have that will make it possible for us all to live as civilized peoples or nations. We need this institution; otherwise the law of the jungle will prevail. So, the United Nations is a must. If the law is not there, we have to create it.
JK: Well, I think that we covered a great deal in the interview and I really appreciate so much your taking the time to do this. Thank you so very much.

AO: It is my pleasure.