

Yale-UN Oral History

Ambassador Adnan Pachachi
Former Foreign Minister of Iraq
James Sutterlin, Interviewer
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James Sutterlin: Ambassador Pachachi, I want first of all to express appreciation on the part of the Yale Oral History project for your willingness to participate. Knowing the important positions that you occupied in representing your government during the period of the 1960s, I wanted to start by asking if you would give your assessment of the state of inter-Arab relations in the period immediately prior to the outbreak of the 1967 war. What were the relations between Iraq and Egypt, for example, with Jordan? It was a period of some consolidation, allegedly, in the Arab world.

Adnan Pachachi: Well, in the beginning of 1967, the situation was as follows. The relations between Iraq and Syria were very strained because the new Ba'athist regime in Syria, which took power in February 1966, was very hostile to the government of Iraq, and because of a dispute that they had with the oil company, the dispute about what they should be paid for the pipeline which goes through Syria; they stopped the oil being piped from the Iraqi oil fields to the Syrian coast, which really resulted in great economic loss for Iraq. We tried our best to mediate between them and the oil company. I myself spoke to President Nasser about this matter and asked him to use his influence in Damascus to persuade the Syrians to take a more positive attitude, because it was harming Iraq very much. He promised that he would do something. Nasser was pleased in February 1966

when the regime of Amin el Hafiaz, which was very hostile to him, was overthrown by a Ba'ath party faction that included Hafez Assad. Our relations with Egypt were of course, cordial, we still had what was called the Joint Political Command, which really didn't mean very much. We used to have periodic meetings and had general discussions on issues of mutual interest. But Nasser was not very happy with the government in Baghdad. In 1965, Abdul Salam Aref, who was then President, replaced some of the well-known pro-Nasserist officers with others in the government. There was a coup attempt in September 1965 while Abdul Salam Aref was in Casablanca or Rabat for a summit Arab meeting. It failed, and as a result Abdul Rahman Bazzaz became Prime Minister. Bazzaz wanted to improve relations with our immediate non-Arab neighbors, namely Iran and Turkey and also Saudi Arabia, but of course that annoyed President Nasser because the Shah of Iran was his number one enemy, and he never trusted the Turks. As far as the Saudis were concerned, they were supporting the royalists in Yemen, and he was fighting against them.

I was asked by Bazzaz to join the government at the end of 1965 and I came to Baghdad in 1966, and one of the first things that I did was to accept an invitation by the Turkish government to visit Ankara in February of 1966. The Turks were very warm, because I had helped them quite a lot on the Cyprus issue the previous December while I still was Permanent Representative at the United Nations. And we discussed with the Turks several issues—I tried to make them take a more forthright stand on the Palestine issue, and I succeeded to some extent. But our discussions were mainly focused on two issues: one was the Kurdish insurgency that was still going on in the north of Iraq, and the Kurds were being helped both by Iran and the Soviet Union. And we asked them, because they had good relations with the Shah of Iran, to see whether they could persuade

Iran to stop supporting the Kurdish insurgency. And the other matter was the waters of the Euphrates river; that was an important issue. I was able to get them to agree that they would respect the principles of international law regarding the rights of riparian countries. When I went to Egypt in June 1966, I had a long meeting with President Nasser, and he hinted that the attitudes of the Iraqi government were not consistent with its being a close ally of the United Arab Republic, as it used to be called then.

JS: Right—Syria and Egypt.

AP: Yes. The United Arab Republic. Even after Syria seceded they still retained that name. I tried to explain to him that we have problems that are probably not faced by other Arab countries, that we have two large non-Arab neighbors, and we have also a large ethnic minority in the country, something that the Egyptians don't have. Iraq has a very long frontier with Iran and we have problems with Iran regarding the Shat-al-Arab waterway that is very vital to Iraq. And of course the fact that Iran never stopped interfering in Iraqi internal affairs by fomenting extreme Shia political activities and that this is a thing that our other Arab friends have to understand. We needed Turkey in order to counter-balance Iran, and for the same reason we needed to have good relations with Saudi Arabia. I said, we are going to try our best to improve our relations with Iran, and I had invited the foreign minister of Iran to visit Baghdad, which he accepted, and he came at the end of 1966. And in March, 1967, the President and I and a big delegation, went to Iran, and I had, myself, a long meeting, just the two of us, with the Shah. And he said, "...Iraq and Iran have so much in common, you know, and their history has been very close, and so on..." and I said, "Yes, but we still have frontier problems, and Shat-al-

Arab. He promised to be helpful, but of course he said, “You know, your ally Nasser keeps on attacking me.” And I said, “Look, you have attacked him, too!”

So this was the situation. The Iraqi government was trying to improve relations with its immediate neighbors, to the displeasure of Egypt. Bazzaz was driven out of office because he had promised that there should be elections very soon, and that the army should no longer interfere in politics, which of course antagonized the officers, and they were able to prevail on the new president, after the death of his brother, Abdul Rahman Aref, to ask for Bazzaz’s resignation. A new prime minister was appointed, and the president asked me to join the new government. I didn’t want to but he insisted and so I accepted, because I thought I had to get Iraq out of its isolation. So, not only I tried to improve relations with our immediate neighbors, but I wanted to improve relations with Western Europe also. Our relations with Western Europe at the time, in 1966, were very bad. Of course, with the United States, we had the Israeli conflict, which had always affected our relations. With Britain we had the problem of South Arabia and Aden, in which we took a leading role, and I introduced the question of Aden in the United Nations and was instrumental in the two resolutions that were adopted by the General Assembly, and later accepted by the British. West Germany, our relations were strained with them because we had recognized the German Democratic Republic.

So, there was France—now, after the Algerian conflict ended in 1962, General de Gaulle seemed to take a rather independent stand. I was talking to the French Ambassador in Baghdad and I said, “You know, I admire General de Gaulle’s attitude” and he said, “Well, would you like to go to Paris?” and I said, “Yes, OK.” And so an official invitation took me to Paris in July of 1966. I met General de Gaulle, and I said, “We are very anxious to improve relations with France, because France has taken a

proper stand on various issues which we feel are important.” And he said, “Yes, you know France traditionally has always had good relations... or mainly cultural relations with Egypt and the Levant and Syria and Lebanon, but not with Iraq.” I said, “Well, I think the time has come to change all that.” And as a result, from that moment until the present day, relations between Iraq and France really blossomed. In spite of the changes in regimes, they remain excellent relations. Of course, we had a lot of economic cooperation; we bought military equipment and hardware from them and so on. This was part of my whole desire to see that Iraq breaks out of its isolation, no longer an appendage to Egypt, and having its own foreign policy. But of course we remained on good terms with Egypt.

JS: There is one thing you haven’t mentioned in this tour d’horizon, and that is the Arab League. What role if any did it have?

AP: Not really much. We used to have these periodic summit meetings, the last one was in 1965, in Casablanca. But after that nothing happened really until the 1967 war.

JS: There was too much dissension among...?

AP: Too much dissension, yes. But the Arab League could not play an independent role, it is like the United Nations in a way: it is as good as its members and as bad as they are.

JS: And at that time, there was certainly not sufficient harmony among its members.

AP: No, as I told you. I went to Moscow in April of 1967, at the invitation of Gromyko, and I discussed with him three issues: first of all, we had wanted to get some military equipment that they had been procrastinating about, and I discussed with him also the support that they had been giving, material and also from the point of view of propaganda, to the Kurdish insurgency, and finally we discussed the question of Israel, of Arab-Israeli relations. He said, "You know, you should avoid a military confrontation now because I don't think you are ready and you shouldn't do anything like that unless you are really ready and sure that you will be able to achieve results. But at the same time, you should continue your political efforts and pressure through the United Nations to isolate Israel and to expose its expansionist aims, and so on." That was April 1967.

I had also spoken the previous October with Dean Rusk in New York, and I said we are a little worried because the United States has replaced France as the main provider of arms to Israel. For years, the United States did not provide Israel with any, except economic assistance. He said, "No, we are not giving them too much, but anyway Nasser is taking a very hostile attitude toward us." "Well," I said, "this is partly because your attitude has been hostile. You stopped the wheat agreement, for example," and I hinted that the accession of Lyndon Johnson made a difference because Johnson, being more of a politician, went along probably more than Kennedy did with the Israelis. He said, "No, our policy hasn't changed." But of course it had. So, this was the situation in May of 1967, when we heard about the alleged Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian frontier.

JS: Right, because that's where my questions begin. But before we get to that, I wanted to ask one more thing by way of background. In this interesting description of the

inter-Arab relationship, you did not mention the Palestinians as Palestinians. My question is were you at that point, I don't mean you personally but I mean as representative of Iraq, still thinking of the Palestinians primarily as refugees, as they were to figure in Resolution 242, or had you begun to think of the Palestinians as a Palestinian state?

AP: We concentrated, as you know, during that period from 1949 to 1967, on trying to implement Resolution... I think it's 194...

JS: The General Assembly resolution?

AP: Yes. The refugee resolution, I forget the number. I think it's 194.

JS: On the return.

AP: On the return, yes. And every year the United States used to submit a resolution, and it was always the United States, for years—it was a traditional thing—reaffirming the rights of the refugees. But it gave us a chance to explain all the aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestine question and the question of negotiations, the return of the Palestinians, and I still remember Golda Meir was sitting there and between us was the Irish representative and she said, “The delegate from Iraq keeps on talking about the Palestinians and the Palestine Question and there is no such thing. There are no such things as the Palestinians and the Palestine question. It is finished. And I think, what is

needed is negotiations between the Arab states and Israel.” That was their attitude until the Madrid conference.

JS: That was why I was asking you this question because, of course, Jordan, at this point, was in fact in control of what’s now the West Bank, and Jordan was relatively close to Iraq at that point.

AP: Not that close. No, not really. Of course, Jordan was being pilloried by the Egyptians all the time, but Iraq, although in spite of its alliance with Egypt at the time, had very correct relations with Jordan, and of course it would be hard for King Hussein to forget what happened to his cousins in Baghdad in 1958. The PLO had just been formed, in 1963, and Ahmed Shukairi was chosen to be its head. He constantly had problems with the Jordanians; he accused them of obstructing the PLO's work in the West Bank, which was under Jordanian control. There was a kind of competition for the leadership of the Palestinians between the Jordanian monarchy and the Palestinian leadership.

JS: The sense of my question really is at what point did one begin to think of the “Middle Eastern problem” as a problem of the Palestinians primarily as opposed to a problem between the Arab states and Israel?

AP: Well, the 1967 war was of course a war between the Arab states and Israel. And Resolution 242 tried to deal with that war. The mention of the refugees in the Resolution 242 is because the refugee question was one of the issues that really affected relations between the Arab states and Israel. But that does not mean that the rights of the

Palestinians were really sacrificed in Resolution 242. The Egyptians and Mahmoud Riad, who at that time was the Egyptian Foreign Minister, was criticized and unjustly accused of reducing the Palestinian question to a matter of refugees. The fact is 242 has nothing to do with the Palestine question. It was to settle the conflict between the Arab states and Israel. The Palestinian question has to be dealt with in a different context.

JS: Did you see it that way?

AP: Yes. I certainly saw it that way. I did not think that 242 in any way diminished the rights of the Palestinians or their claim to their country and their right to have eventually an independent state. Because the question of an independent state—we did not really say that Jordan had to give up the West Bank. There was no question about that at the time. It was really the restoration of Palestinian rights, and the right of self-determination, eventually, hoping that they will probably join the West Bank or maybe set up something on their own. But it was only in 1974 that the Arab states decided that the PLO was the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people—which of course changed the whole equation.

JS: The whole dynamic—that's interesting because you were at the UN and you were in a sense the most articulate of the Arab representatives at the time that 242 was being drafted.

AP: Yes. But of course the drafting of 242—I had several meetings myself with Arthur Goldberg at the time. He asked me, "All right, if Israel were to withdraw from the

occupied territories, the territories which were occupied during the war, are the Arabs prepared to sign a peace treaty with them and have normal relations?" I said, "Of course, I can't speak on behalf of the other Arab countries, but certainly if they indicated that they were prepared to withdraw, then the matter can be discussed later on between us and with you and others through the Security Council." But Arthur Goldberg of course, was committed to protect Israel's interests. I saw him, in fact, I mention this in my book, I saw him five days before the war. He invited me for breakfast in his...

JS: ...in the Waldorf.

AP: Yes. I was living there too. And he said, "We don't want this war to happen because it will be a disaster for all concerned." But he warned me, "Israel is stronger than you think, and they will be able to inflict a very heavy defeat on the Arabs." I told him, "Look, we are not going to start this war, we have no intention of starting a war, and we hope that you are able to restrain Israel." I said the same thing to the President, to President Johnson, when I saw him the following day in Washington.

JS: I noticed that in your book, and I wondered on what basis you were able to say that?

AP: Well, I had talked about this with Mahmoud Riad. But let me go back to 22 May. A ministerial delegation, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, and I was of course there.

JS: An Iraqi delegation?

AP: Yes. We went to Cairo and we met President Nasser. That was around the 22nd or the 23rd of May. And I asked Nasser point-blank, I said, “It seems that you have decided to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Do you think this will result in armed conflict?” He said, “Yes, I think it is 80 percent likely.” I said, “Well then, are you prepared?” He said, “We can deal with the Israelis, but if the Americans help Israel, of course, we hope the Russians will come to our assistance.” He should have realized that the Russians were not as committed as the United States is. The commitment of the Russians to the Arabs was far less than that of the United States to Israel. I think that was one of his mistakes. He didn’t realize that. The war in Yemen was not going well and he had been taunted by the Saudis and the Jordanians especially, that he had been protected by the United Nations—you know the United Nations force was deployed there. So, he wanted with one stroke to retrieve his position in the Arab world and return to the “glorious days,” as far as he was concerned, of 1957 when, thanks to Eisenhower, the Israelis and the British and the French were forced to evacuate Egyptian territory. So, he thought that he was given assurances by the Russians that “as long as you don’t do anything rash, you will be able to get away with it.” And of course the Americans told him as they told us, that they were going to restrain Israel.

I think the Americans knew that the balance of forces was heavily in favor of Israel. I think they must have known, they had all the knowledge about the capabilities of the armed forces on both sides. And I believe the assurance that Johnson gave to Abba Eban that in case of Arab hostilities as the result of which Israel occupied some Arab land, they would not be forced to withdraw as was done in 1957.

JS: I noticed you had that in your...

AP: I think that because the Israelis had been preparing for all these years to inflict a decisive defeat on the Arabs, hoping thereby if not to acquire more territory, then certainly to force the Arabs to a peaceful settlement of the conflict on their terms. Now, as it happened, they were able to occupy the whole of the West Bank and Gaza and Sinai, and the temptation was too great. Immediately, you know, after the war, Arthur Goldberg insisted that there should be no call for withdrawal, but just a cease-fire. I knew from that day—I told my Arab colleagues—I said, “They will never get out of the West Bank. Sinai maybe, but never out of the West Bank, because this is part of the myth they have about the Land of Israel.”

JS: Let me go back now to the immediate beginning of this, and that is as you have referred to these reports that came from the Russians, of the Israeli concentrations on the Syrian border. To what extent were these reports circulated among the other delegations? In other words, had you heard also?

AP: Oh yes, yes. Because the Syrians made such a fuss about them.

JS: But at that time the United Nations, as you probably know, sent observers to the Syrian border and reported back that there were no concentrations. Did that information reach you also?

AP: Yes, yes. Now, we realized it but by then Nasser had already asked for the withdrawal of the UN troops. So, the question of Israeli concentrations on the Syrian border was no longer the issue. The issue was what to do on the Egyptian sector. And as I said, Nasser thought that he would be able to get away with it and retrieve his position by one bold stroke.

JS: There is one theory that Nasser believed the report about the Israeli concentration and therefore thought that he would be stronger because the Israelis had their troops in the north, on the Syrian border, even though the reports were not true.

AP: He knew they were not true. Almost immediately he knew it was not true. But then he was trapped into this thing about asking for the UN troops to be withdrawn. In fact, when U Thant wanted to go to Cairo, he preempted his trip by ordering the closing of the Straits of Tiran even before the arrival of U Thant. U Thant, of course, when he came to Cairo, had nothing to do. I think the Russians played a harmful role. They gave wrong information to begin with, and then they gave assurances that they could not really fulfill.

JS: To what extent did Nasser consult with Iraq?

AP: He did not consult with us about closing the Straits of Tiran. We were just informed. But then he really thought at the time that he would be able to deal with the Israelis, but then later on with the assurances that he got from the Russians and from the

Americans that the Israelis are not going to move, that maybe he would be able to get away with it and to prolong the negotiations.

JS: Now, did you have contact with the Soviet Ambassador at that point, the Ambassador was Federenko in New York. Did you have contact with him?

AP: Yes. I was asked by Mahmoud Riad, the Foreign Minister of Egypt. When we went to Cairo, he asked me to go to New York to take part in the debate in the Security Council. I went there and I spoke to all the members. I had the feeling that Federenko was not too happy about the whole thing. I don't think he liked the Egyptians, frankly. He had no faith in them. I don't know whether you read the book of Shevchenko who just died recently.

JS: Yes, I have read it.

AP: He said some very unflattering things about the Egyptians, especially about their representative at the time. So anyway, Mahmoud Riad said to me, "In all your contacts, please make absolutely sure that you inform them that Egypt has no intention of attacking Israel or of starting a hostile action against Israel." Frankly, when I went to the UN and I went to Washington afterward, I was acting for the Egyptians, because this is what Mahmoud Riad had asked me to do. The conflict, of course, was between Egypt and Israel: the question of who has the right to go through the straits and what kind of ships could be taken in and out. And you remember U Thant's proposal to have a breathing spell, you know the details of that of course. Well, that encouraged Nasser to think that

there would be no trouble, and there would be prolonged discussions on how to implement the proposals of U Thant. Until a few days before the war, we thought that the thing was going to be resolved peacefully.

JS: You did?

AP: I thought so, until the Israelis formed a government of national unity and they brought in Menachim Begin, and I said, "Ah, that's it."

JS: Even though the Israelis had said that the closing of the straits was...

AP: ...was a *causus belli*. Yes. They said that. But of course, I trusted the assurances that had been given to us by the Americans and Johnson. He was very emphatic. He said, "We told the Israelis that if they start anything, they will have to bear the consequences in the end." But still I think Nasser made some very bad miscalculations about the whole thing. He dragged King Hussein into it.

JS: That was my next question. King Hussein made a disastrous decision. Again was there any consultation?

AP: Absolutely not. King Hussein was under tremendous public pressure; the Palestinians, the whole Arab world was feeling that this time we have to confront the Israelis, the situation has changed from 1948, we have different kinds of regimes, we have certainly more and better military equipment and arms and we were supposed to be

better prepared. Our Minister of Defense, the Iraqi minister, was with me when we went to Cairo, just before the war, and they took us around in Sinai to show us and the Defense Minister told me that they couldn't be better; there is no way for the Israelis to be able to get through here.

JS: There was no inter-Arab consultation in which you would consult as to the strength of the Israelis?

AP: Not really. We had to rely on our military people who were supposed to be in a better position to know what was going on, and we were not given an accurate picture. As I said it in my book, the diplomats were really betrayed in a way by the military brass, by the military leadership, because they underestimated the Israelis and over-estimated our own forces. That's why when I spoke in the Security Council I said we were not going to start a war but if Israel should launch a war against us then we are going to fight and it won't be the same. I didn't realize that the Arabs were much weaker. And anyway, the sudden attack—it shouldn't have been sudden, that's another matter as I mentioned; they should have expected an Israeli aerial attack on Egypt. I don't know how they were surprised, really.

JS: This remains something of a mystery, that's why I'm asking these questions, that the other Arabs did not...

AP: No consultation really. Nasser did it on his own; he just informed us.

JS: And in your book you have a very good analysis of the mistakes that Nasser made. That was *post facto*, so to speak. Did you see that at that point?

AP: I saw that the involvement in Yemen was wrong; I saw that antagonizing countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia and other so-called 'conservative' regimes was wrong; that his support, his almost unlimited support of the Syrian regime was wrong because that was a regime that could not be trusted; and of course leaving General Amer in charge of the Egyptian armed forces after his disastrous leadership in the 1956 war [was wrong]. All these things. But of course, Nasser, after the secession of Syria in 1961, became even more dependent on the Soviets...

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JS: My next question actually relates to that, because it was a resounding defeat for Nasser, but how did you and your government assess Nasser's leadership role in the Arab world after this defeat?

AP: Firstly, I thought he should have resigned, and he did, and he should have maintained his resignation. It is wrong for a leader to be so disastrously defeated and to stay in power. In fact, that's what I told U Thant at the time. He asked, "Do you think Nasser can survive?" and I said, "Frankly, I don't think so, and he shouldn't." But he did. And of course he tried; he mended fences with Jordan, with Saudi Arabia, and with other conservative regimes in the Arab world, and he concentrated on trying to rebuild the Egyptian armed forces.

JS: Did Iraq at this point see itself as a potential rival for leadership?

AP: No, not really.

JS: There was no comparable, charismatic Iraqi leader at that point?

AP: No. And I think we realized that we couldn't aspire to that, because after all we took a very minor role in the war, and we had no right to lecture others about it. Of course, we were terribly disappointed, and I think that weakened the government, because you have one of the questions, your last question, whether that contributed to the Ba'athist coup in 1968 and it did, in fact. It did. Because it weakened the government completely. A lot of nationalist elements in the country were disenchanted with the government and they turned away from it. After the war, President Aref tried to reverse the policy of independence from Nasser. He changed the government and brought in pro-Nasser elements. I was replaced and reappointed immediately the same day as the Permanent Representative again. That was while we were in the midst of our debate in the General Assembly in 1967 on the various draft resolutions.

JS: Yes, and I wanted to ask further on that, because a great deal of attention was paid to the General Assembly, it was a special session.

AP: Yes, the Russians asked for it, because the Security Council could not deal with the matter any more.

JS: Yes, and in fact Gromyko was there, I believe, and Dobrynin.

AP: And Kosygin came, himself. He spoke before the Assembly and then he met in Glasboro with President Johnson.

JS: In the end, how do you assess the significance of that special session?

AP: Well, unfortunately, it was a failure for the Arabs because they were not able to get a resolution asking in a very clear way for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied land. That was our main objective. And the Latin American draft, which was supported by the United States and unopposed by Israel, asked very clearly that Israeli troops should be withdrawn from the occupied territories, but also in return we should renounce the state of belligerency. I urged very strongly my Arab colleagues at the time to accept the Latin American draft resolution. But the Algerians and the Syrians, and other radical regimes refused. The Egyptians were also in favor of the Latin American draft, but we couldn't persuade our Arab colleagues and unfortunately we had to vote against it, which was, I think, a disaster. I mean, I don't know if it would have changed anything very much, because the Israelis were determined not to withdraw unless they were subjected to extreme pressure from the United States, and I don't think they were prepared to do that, the United States. Johnson was still President, of course.

JS: But I think when you read the documents that have been released, you will find that Golda Meir actually was prepared to trade the territory for peace. But you didn't

know this at the time, I judge, and you didn't believe it. It was the last chance, as a matter of fact. None of the Israeli governments after that, after Golda Meir, until Rabin.

AP: What are these documents you are talking about?

JS: They are American documents in which this is reported.

AP: But very clearly saying that?

JS: Yes. And they do show that the Americans favored that. But at that time, on the Iraqi side and for that matter on the Arab side, there was no belief that it was possible to get the return of the territories?

AP: I certainly didn't believe that and of course I went along with the Egyptians. Resolution 242 was negotiated mainly by the Egyptians and Jordanians, with the British and the United States, of course. I was indirectly involved, and they used to consult me and report on what was happening, both Mahmoud Riand and Abdul Monem Rifai who are sadly both dead now. I kept on saying, "Fine, if you can get a resolution which will help us," although I kept on showing my skepticism.

JS: Did you, or did anyone on the Arab side, appreciate the significance of the missing "the" in the draft?

AP: Well, it was noticeable, obviously, and we were told at the time, “Don’t worry about that.” I was told by Caradon himself, who introduced the resolution, or he drafted it anyway. And he said, “No, there have to be some minor rectifications of the frontier, you know, which will be mutually acceptable to both sides.” But obviously, if you read the whole resolution, with the preamble, the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war and so on, and the withdrawal from territory, when you read it together, obviously the withdrawal has to be almost complete, certainly substantial from most of the territory -- not what Netanyahu is offering now...

JS: ...something very different...

AP: So we thought, “OK, fine, there will be minor things,” but of course with time the Israelis were asking more and more and more. And of course on Jerusalem there were two resolutions. That’s why I am wondering whether any resolutions of the General Assembly would have much effect, because there were two resolutions from the General Assembly and one from the Security Council on Jerusalem, in which they asked the Israelis to rescind all of the measures they had taken to incorporate Jerusalem, and of course nothing happened. So, I was wondering whether even if the Latin American draft had gone through, whether it would have been implemented. You say that Golda Meir was prepared—maybe. I don’t know.

JS: There’s a question about Jerusalem, I should add that. That’s one part she might not have been prepared to do. I should have added that.

AP: Yes. But also the whole pattern is that they ask for something and when finally we accept to do it, then we are presented with new demands. For instance, “Let’s have direct negotiations.” OK. We have been having direct negotiations for so long. “Recognize Israel.” OK. We recognize Israel. “Do this and that”...

JS: Were you aware a little later on of the secret contacts between Golda Meir and her government and King Hussein?

AP: We heard rumors about it, but I wasn’t sure. We knew that King Abdullah certainly had contacts, and we heard rumors about King Hussein having contacts and I think probably the Egyptians knew about them and they hoped to embarrass him with them or to make use of them. But I certainly did not have any hard information about that.

JS: So this was not an element affecting the relationship among the Arab countries at that point?

AP: No. Unfortunately, in Khartoum, you know the famous “three no’s.” “No negotiation, no recognition...” or whatever it is, which was another mistake at that time.

JS: Now, I wanted to ask you again about the Palestinians in terms of refugees. Resolution 242 does cover that, but what did you realistically see, and other people on the Arab side that you were in contact with, as the likely solution of the then-called refugee problem? Did you believe that there could be a return, especially of those who had left?

AP: Not really. We knew the Israelis would never accept that, and maybe they would be prepared to make adequate compensation, with, of course, American financial help, and also maybe return a token number of Palestinians; but we had no illusions about hundreds of thousands of Palestinians coming back. But possible, as part of an over-all peace settlement, something could be done for compensation, for resettlement, but we had no illusions. I certainly had no illusions, myself, that the Israelis would ever accept for a large population to come back. They said that a comparable number of Jews from the Arab world also went to Israel, so—they keep on saying that—there was a natural exchange of population. That's another matter, of course.

JS: Although there is a relationship there, because I think Iraq is the only country that did not accept any of the Palestinian refugees. Why was that?

AP: No. I will tell you, for one thing the Palestinian leadership did not want the Palestinians to go to Iraq, but the 30-40,000 who went to Iraq did not live in refugee camps. They were integrated into Iraqi society.

JS: There were that many who went, then?

AP: About 30,000, 35,000. But they all became part of Iraqi society; they were not in refugee camps. They worked in this and that and the other, in all walks of life. But the idea of resettling a large number of Palestinians in Iraq was of course something that the Iraqis would not accept because the Palestinians would not accept that because it would

weaken their claim to go back to Palestine. Also, there is another element that is not being mentioned because in a way it's taboo. If you get hundreds of thousands or a million Palestinians in Iraq, at that time especially, it would change the demographic balance. All the Palestinians are Sunnis and the Shia majority in Iraq and the Kurds also, in the north, would feel rather threatened if this huge influx of Sunni Arabs comes into Iraq. I assure you a lot of the militant Shias would reject that, and also the Kurds have always, whenever there was any rapprochement or talk of unity between Iraq and other Arab countries, they were extremely concerned and they tried their best to combat it. They said, "No, Iraq has to stay as it is."

So, now of course, they are still talking; there is still talk going around that perhaps eventually a lot of the Palestinians who are still in refugee camps in Syria and Jordan and Lebanon will be resettled in Iraq. There would be difficulties. Maybe some Palestinians now feel that that is their best hope, because they are not going to go back.

JS: But economically Iraq was in the best position to absorb...

AP: Of course, it can absorb, there is no doubt. Iraq can absorb, not now, but it could have absorbed a large number. But there were two problems, as I said: one is the Palestinians did not want to do that, and secondly, of course, a large part of Iraqi society was a little hesitant about it, although the Palestinians who did come to Iraq were treated very well, and as I said they were absorbed into Iraqi society.

JS: Now, I have this leading question here, but putting oneself back into the mentality of 1967, did you or do you think other Arab leaders, other than King Hussein, perhaps,

were you able to visualize any resolution of the so-called Middle East problem that included a continuation of the existence of Israel?

AP: Yes, I think actually the Arabs accepted de facto the existence of Israel when they signed the armistice agreements in 1949.

JS: Already then?

AP: And in the Lausanne protocol of 1949, I think was it—or 1950—the Arabs accepted the partition plan more or less, because the maps of the partition plan were annexed to the protocol, the Lausanne protocol. Which means that since 1949, the Arabs accepted the existence of Israel within the frontiers that were decided by the United Nations, by the partition resolution. And this is what Eban said: “Behind the armistice frontiers established by agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1949, the national life of sovereign states has become crystallized in an increasingly stable mode. There is some evidence that thoughtful minds in the Middle East are becoming skeptical about threats to change the existing territorial and political structure by armed force. Such threats and the policies concocted to support them offend the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Charter: they violate bilateral agreements, freely negotiated and solemnly signed; many undermine the central principles of international civility because they encounter insuperable obstacles in the opposition of the world community to the alteration by aggressive force of the legally established and internationally recognized situations. They regard the present armistice plan as immune from change without

consent.” This would be the perfect Arab position, so eloquently expressed by Abba Eban.

JS: That in a way should have been I think the... this isn't part of our conversation but in fact Abba Eban is now one of those who...

AP: He supports a Palestinian state.

JS: He still supports that same position.

AP: In a way, yes. Well, I think that that would have been the... Of course, after 1967, the Arabs could maintain that they would recognize Israel within its frontiers that were more or less the armistice. You see, in 1949 they accepted the partition of Israel under the partition resolution; in 1967, they accepted Israel after the armistice agreements, which of course meant more territory than the partition, as you know. The whole of western Galilee which was supposed to be part of the Arab state was incorporated into Israel and the Arabs accepted that in 1967. So, this idea that the Arabs want the elimination of Israel and to throw Israel into the sea, I think is Israeli propaganda but in fact it is not the truth.

JS: Isn't this one of the elements of tension introduced in the relationship between the Palestinians when they became more organized and the Arab states, because the Palestinians did include it in their National Covenant? The call for the elimination of Israel?

AP: Not really. What the National Covenant said is that a resolution of the Palestine problem is to have sort of a bi-national state, to have a country in which Jews and Arabs and Muslims and Christians have equality. Netanyahu and some of these people want not to relinquish any part of the West Bank and Gaza and to incorporate them in Israel. You can't have two million people being treated forever as second-class citizens. What the Palestinians have called for is a united Palestine. But the Jewish extremists want it all for themselves drive out the Arabs from Palestine, which of course now I think most Israelis realize can't be done.

JS: You may be interested, in the same series of interviews I did interview Abba Eban and he said that in his opinion the greatest catastrophe that has happened to Israel was the victory in 1967.

AP: Maybe he is right.

JS: For this reason, that it is impossible to absorb the territories within the kind of state that had been foreseen by the founders of Israel.

AP: Of course, it is suicidal to force a hostile population in the country and then keep them down. It can't be done over a long period of time. But of course, the extremists want to transfer the Palestinians elsewhere. I'm sure this is one of their aims. They want to get rid of the Palestinians, or as many of them as they can. I think it is part of the plans of the various extreme rightist parties. But I don't think it can be done. In the end, you

know, the whole thing will depend on the Israeli electorate. Now we hear that between 60 and 70 percent of the Israelis don't mind withdrawing from significant parts of the West Bank, and they don't even oppose the creation of a Palestinian state which would be totally demilitarized and with all kinds of restrictions. The only one point on which there seems to be some problem is really the settlements: what are you going to do about the settlements? Well, I think the Palestinians now are saying, "Look, you don't have to dismantle all these settlements, but certainly the settlements that are going to be within the Palestinian state are going to have to be under Palestinian sovereignty and authority with all kinds of international guarantees and so on and so forth." Well, of course, some of the Israelis say, "No, they have to be under Israeli sovereignty." That makes it very difficult to have a viable Palestinian state, if all these settlements are spread around. It can happen if the two peoples were on friendly terms and there was peace between them: you could have that between Canada and the United States, you know. You could have American enclaves all over the place and Canadian enclaves. But in the end it is up to the Israeli electorate; they have to decide what kind of Israel they want, what kind of relations they want with the Arabs.

There are two points of view, it seems to me. There is one that says, "We don't need the Arabs, we are far more advanced than they, we have absorbed the new technological revolution, and we can have close relations with Western Europe and of course with the United States, and we can do without our neighbors." Of course, others like Shimon Perez say, "No, we can't do that. We have decided to create a state here in this region, so we have to be part of this region and we have to have normal relations with our neighbors. Otherwise, you will always be living in a ghetto." So, there are two

points of view in Israel now, but still the majority I think support the Perez idea. We don't know what will happen in two years' time.

JS: I want to go back just for a minute, there is one question that I did not ask. Back to the 1967 period, regarding the Secretary-General U Thant. What was your assessment of U Thant and the way he managed things?

AP: U Thant was actually a good friend of mine. We worked together briefly when he was the Permanent Representative of Burma, and I was the Iraqi Representative, and I certainly, with others, pushed his candidacy after Hammarskjöld died. We always maintained very good relations. You know, he was not lot like Hammarskjöld. I worked with Hammarskjöld; he asked me to be Under-Secretary in charge of the Congo operations from New York at the time. U Thant was a good man, a very decent man, an honest man, and he depended a lot on his advisors. He is not the kind of person who would take bold initiatives. His advisors, with the exception of Ralph Bunche, were really civil servants. They didn't want to upset anybody or anything. Ralph Bunche, of course, had his own stature. He depended a lot on Ralph Bunche, but he was very cautious and he wouldn't take bold initiatives or really sort of stick his neck out on anything. But he was a decent man. His position in 1967 was that Egypt was within its rights to ask for the withdrawal of UN troops, after all in 1957 UNEF was established with the consent of both sides, and as an act of sovereignty they accepted that some troops would be there. Israel said, "No, I won't. I will not have any troops on my side of the frontier." That was an act of sovereignty too. So, in 1967 when Cairo decided to withdraw the UN troops, it was acting within its sovereign rights, obviously. But that is a

purely legalistic argument. Unfortunately, the political situation was quite different. But U Thant had to uphold the legality of the thing. Some questioned the legal validity of unilateral withdrawal as they requested. The Israelis say they had an understanding with the Americans, but that was an understanding that Egypt was not party to. Of course, the whole thing was not legal. It was a very political issue, which should have been dealt with in a political way. And U Thant of course wouldn't do that. He didn't try to mediate.

JS: And he did not take it to the Security Council or the General Assembly.

AP: No. He brought it to the states concerned. Hammarskjöld would have done differently. Hammarskjöld took a very active role in setting up UNEF at the time, as he did later on in the Congo. He asked that the Congo situation should be discussed in the Security Council. And he had some very, you know, bold initiatives and ideas. We will never have another Hammarskjöld, I don't think. Everybody else after him was really a glorified civil servant.

JS: The other question that I have is with regard to Goldberg. Of course, he was Jewish.

AP: Not only Jewish, but also an active Zionist.

JS: Well, this is my question, really. Did you view him as less than impartial?

AP: He was. He was active in Zionist organizations, and we knew that. I mean, obviously, the way he talked, the way he negotiated, obviously he had Israel's interest in mind. He was a very intelligent man, very capable. But from the very beginning, when he steadfastly refused that there should be in the cease-fire resolution that was adopted on the 6th of June, that there should be a call for withdrawal. Usually, in such cases, there is a call for withdrawal to the positions that were held before the conflict.

JS: Except in the case of the Iran-Iraq war.

AP: The Iran-Iraq war, yes. But the Iran-Iraq war, at the end I don't think there were any areas that were occupied by the other side.

JS: No, but the Security Council did not call for a cease-fire until after Iraq was well within and it didn't include a call for a return to...

AP: No, because Iraq was considered in 1988 as the lesser of two evils. Of course, they learned otherwise two years later.

JS: I wanted in the end to ask you if there were any other point, especially with regard to this 1967 period, that you would like to put on the record here?

AP: Obviously, in our opinion, my opinion, the 1967 war was not a spontaneous act of self-defense, as the Israelis claim. It was part of a plan, brought up to date and refined over the years, to just seize the right opportunity at the right time to inflict a heavy defeat

on the Arabs. I don't think with the aim of occupying more land; possibly this was also part of the plan, but I think the main aim of the plan really was by inflicting this defeat on the Arabs, that the Arabs would come to their senses and really settle the whole problem by recognizing Israel as Abba Eban has indicated here. That was his hope, because he was foreign minister of Israel in 1967, and he was hoping that with this defeat, the Arabs would finally be reconciled to the existence of Israel and that they would have normal relations with them. But of course, it didn't progress that way, unfortunately. It was really a golden opportunity, in 1967, 1968. I still don't know—you say that they were prepared... I don't know. Of course, we'll never know, will we? We will never know.

JS: No. Thank you very, very much.