

## YALE-UN ORAL HISTORY

Jan Eliasson  
Interview II  
April 11, 2000  
New York, NY

**Interviewer:** This is an interview with Jan Eliasson, State Secretary of the Swedish Foreign Ministry. You have long worked with Iraqi issues. What role did you play in bringing the Iran-Iraq war to an end?

**Jan Eliasson:** I was serving with Prime Minister Olof Palme in the early eighties as his assistant when he was Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the Iran-Iraq war. We negotiated with the Iranians and the Iraqis for several years. It was a tense period. It was between 1980 and 1982 that we conducted shuttle diplomacy between Baghdad and Tehran. Olof Palme, as we all know, was assassinated in 1986. In 1988, I was asked by Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar to be his Personal Representative on the Iran-Iraq issue, after the cease-fire had been agreed upon between the parties, and after Resolution 598, which regulated the peace later on between Iran and Iraq, had been agreed upon.

The Secretary-General found, after arduous and long negotiations in Geneva, that he could not spare the time to do this negotiation himself, so he therefore asked me to join him in Geneva in August 1988. I spent parts of fall 1988 in Geneva, and also conducted shuttle diplomacy to bring about the implementation of Resolution 598. Intensely in 1988, but I continued till 1992, when I entered the United Nations in another capacity. At the time I was UN ambassador, but in 1992, I became Under-Secretary

General for Humanitarian Affairs. In that context, I changed perspective on Iraq, because up until then, I had been dealing with war between Iran and Iraq, the regulation of Resolution 598. But after 1992, I worked with Iraq from a different perspective, namely the humanitarian perspective. At that time, as you may know, there was quite a difficult situation for the Kurds in the north. They had been organized into special areas, and we had to conduct special humanitarian programs in the North.

I: Did this only concern the Kurdish or was this also with the Shia's in the south?

JE: It was supposed to be all of Iraq, but the emphasis of the program was on the Kurdish situation. It was also easier to work in the north, because in the south there was considerable repression by the regime in Baghdad. There had been an uprising in the south by the Shiite community and it had been very harshly repressed and therefore our programs were difficult to conduct. I want to tell you that I very much wanted to expand the program to the south, but it wasn't easy. I kept perspectives then on Iraq from the humanitarian side. For two years I stayed as Under-Secretary-General. My last contact with Iraq was 1997, when Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked me, together with former Foreign Minister Brahimi and the former UN Ambassador of Argentina, Cardenas, to go to Iraq to try to persuade the Iraqis to cooperate with us. Those were my three areas of cooperation with Iraq.

I: To go back to the role that you had in ending the Iran-Iraq war, how did you prepare for it?

JE: Well, to tell you the truth, we had a very short time to prepare. Prime Minister Olof Palme received a call by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, who asked him to come to New York the following day. He called him in his suburban house and Olof Palme told me that he was actually on his way over to bring a bottle of wine to his neighbors; they were having a little dinner. He was back in the house to pick up this bottle of wine. When he was there, the phone starts ringing, and he says to himself “Should I answer or not? After all, I have dinner with friends.” But he picked up the phone and there was Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, asking him to go as Personal Representative for Iran-Iraq.

The war had started in September 1980. This was the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1980. He took one day to consider the issue and decided to accept the following evening, the 11<sup>th</sup>. He called the then Foreign Minister Ola Ullsten and asked whether he could have a person from the Swedish Foreign Ministry to help him. I was then newly appointed head of the African and Asia department, and the two, Ola Ullsten and Olof Palme agreed that I would be the one to be asked. But the call did not take place until the following morning at 7 o'clock. So 7 o'clock in the morning, Olof Palme called. I didn't know about this at all. So he said, “I've been asked to be the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on Iran-Iraq. I need someone to help me. I've talked to Ola Ullsten last night. I didn't want to call you late last night. I want to ask you now. Could you join me?” I said, “Do I have time to decide?” “Well,” [he said], “The press conference starts at 9:30 and the flight leaves at eleven o'clock for New York.” I said, “New York, so we don't go to the area?” “No,” [he said], “We must spend some days in New York to

prepare for the mission and discuss with the experts at the UN.” I decided that same morning, and we left. To tell you the truth, it was a very difficult preparation. I had followed the conflict, of course, from my profession. Then we spent three or four intense days discussing with everybody who knew anything, including the parties, knowledgeable ambassadors, including the five Permanent Members of the Security Council. Then we went out, because we had a very clear mission to try to stop the fighting and we also had a Security Council resolution to base our work on.

I: This is my second question here. How did you and Olof Palme work together when he was the Secretary-General’s Personal Representative?

JE: We worked very closely together, of course, but we also had a team. We were not a completely Swedish team. There was a colleague, Diego Cordovez, who later became Under-Secretary-General and then dealt with Afghanistan. Diego, by the way, is Ecuadorian. Then we had Iqbal Riza, who was a Pakistani, and who is now Secretary-General Kofi *chef de cabinet*. We had later Giandomenico Picco, an Italian. We had an international team. We were working very closely with not only the Secretariat, the Secretary-General and his staff, but also with the Permanent Five. There was a Security Council resolution which was the basis of our work and we were in constant dialogue with the five Permanent Members of the Security Council in New York and Geneva.

We had a problem. The first resolution of the Security Council only asked for a cease-fire in place; it did not ask for the withdrawal of troops from the international border. That gave us considerable problems with the Iranians, because the Iranians

claimed that of course if there is a cease-fire, there also has to be a requirement to go back to international borders.

I: But at that time, weren't the Iraqis the only ones who were outside the borders?

JE: Yes, the Iraqis were far inside Iranian territory and the Iranians, in order for them to agree to a cease-fire, wanted to have guarantees that the Iraqi troops would withdraw to the Iraqi border. In fact, this was our biggest problem in order to have credibility with the Iranians, who had a tremendous suspicion toward the outside world. You must remember that the background was the hostage-taking of Americans and the great fear that the Khomeini regime would export revolution to the outside world. In fact, most of the world's sympathies at that time were on the side of the Iraqis, so the Iranians were very suspicious that the world would accept the Iraqi invasion.

Therefore they absolutely insisted on the withdrawal of the Iraqis troops to the border. Olof Palme and I discussed this in depth, how we would deal with that problem. We came to the conclusion that, yes, there was no mention of the withdrawal in the resolution – which, in fact, was a disadvantage for the credibility of the Security Council at that time – but we also could make reference to international law. According to international law, you may not acquire territory by force. It's a rule of international law that was not written into the resolution.

So we said to the Iranians that it may not be part of the resolution but in fact we are all bound by international law and that you may not take territory by force. That helped us to establish dialogue with the Iranians. They accepted our negotiations but

they also saw a certain split, a distance between us and the Security Council resolution. It was a fascinating period, particularly in the beginning when the Iranians had so little experience with international negotiations.

I: So you mean that the Iraqis had more experience?

JE: The Iraqis were more experienced. The Iraqis had much better prepared dossiers. You might even have thought that they knew that this was coming. They had maps, they had arguments and we met of course always Saddam Hussein. We spent several hours, over 20-25 hours with him. We spent a lot of time with the then Foreign Minister Hamadi, and the later Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, who is extremely skillful and very sophisticated, and knowledgeable, and with a tremendous grasp of details which I am sure you will hear about from Hans Blix, Kof. Annan, and Rolf Ekéus later on.

They were also very proud of never changing their views and positions. They said, "You go to Iran, you hear one thing from the mullahs, and then you hear another thing from President Bani Sadr, but from us you will hear the same thing. If you trust us, if you make an agreement with us, it will hold, but for the other side, you will never know who is in charge." At the beginning, the Iranians were less knowledgeable, less sophisticated, didn't know much about international law. They were bound by shari'a law and the Quran, and not by international law. But later, it changed. The Iranians have tremendous potential, they are educated people, and they came in, and later proved that they had similar skills.

I: You have long worked with Iraqi issues. How would you describe the necessity and efficiency of UNSCOM inspections during that time?

JE: I think they did a very effective and useful job.

I: It was hard since it was the first time it had ever been done.

JE: Yes, of course it was the first time ever that this type of forced disarmament had taken place but in fact, it was an almost remarkable success. They were definitely successful in almost bringing about the elimination of nuclear capacity. It is hard also to conceive that the Iraqis could still keep the long-range missile capacity. Of course the most difficult area is, as you know, biological and chemical weapons, which are difficult to detect and also easy to conceal, and very easy to produce different combinations in different places. Therefore, with the issue of biological and chemical weapons, there has to be a much greater trust in the intentions of the Iraqis and that trust hasn't really existed. That's why the inspections are still needed as we will now see with Mr. Blix's experience with this task.

I: Yes, exactly. Would you like to see them operate or work differently from the way they did?

JE: I was there in 1997 for the Secretary-General and at that time, the Iraqis showed us videos of inspections taking place, where perhaps the manner in which the inspections

were taking place was not correct. Even if we deal with a country that has been guilty of war crimes or atrocities – in this case, they used chemical weapons against their own population and definitely against the Iranians around 1984 – I think there is a minimum standard of correct behavior. At least, the video portions they showed us, which of course were also part of the Iraqi propaganda, showed that some of the inspections were not done in such a way that inspired confidence. I think there has to be an element of correctness and that was not always there. But all in all, I think they did a good job. I was impressed by the skill and professionalism of the staff. It is important that the recruitment is as international as possible, and I hope that Dr. Blix will be successful in having a truly international recruitment for this important task, which is a common task to the United Nations.

I: Do you think that UNMOVIC should work differently from UNSCOM?

JE: Well, the Security Council had a long, and I would say to some, painful, discussion about the mandate for UNMOVIC and there were certain changes in the mandate. I still think that you cannot get away from the fact that there has to be on-the-ground inspections. You have to, by your own eyes, by your presence, see that things are in order, and I would hope that the Iraqis would realize that it is in their interest to have inspection on the ground. Unless this inspection is done on the ground to confirm that no weapons of mass destruction are produced, only then can the sanctions be lifted, and we all know the tremendously painful tragic effect of the sanctions for the Iraqi people. I



would hope that they would realize that there have to be pretty detailed inspections but that the good thing coming out would be the lifting of sanctions.

I: How were the operating procedures changed for UNMOVIC in comparison to UNSCOM? For example, now the Iraqis know how UNSCOM and the West work, and they know how to find a way around it.

JE: Well, the problem is, of course, that if there are bad intentions, it is very difficult to get anywhere. That's why there has to be, also on the Iraqi side, a realization that they cannot continue this game. Some years ago, it was absolutely clear that they had concealed and that they had deceived the international community. Mr. Ekéus and his team found that it was obvious that they had given false information, and you can't do that because, if that is done, you ask yourself, "What else do they hide?"

Especially when it comes to, as we said earlier, biological and chemical weapons, it's hard for anyone on the outside to have a hundred percent certainty of what you think is the case. In the case of nuclear weapons, you know that there is a need for so much equipment, that you can indeed prove it. With biological and chemical [weapons], there has to be an element of faith, and that unfortunately has been sadly lacking.

I: During the work of UNSCOM, many countries were working very closely, and sharing sources of information and intelligence. Do you think that this could lead to a danger in a future situation, that actually these countries, between each other, know too much about each other?

JE: I don't think so. I think that it's important for the United Nations to have a system of receiving classified important information to deal with crises. The ideal case would of course be that the United Nations itself had this capacity, but you can't expect that the United Nations could have the sophisticated equipment and also perhaps the methods to bring in the information that exist within countries like the Permanent Five (the United States, UK, France, China, and Russia).

I would also think that it would be a good thing if one could receive information from different countries. Then of course it's up to each country to decide whether they're willing to take the risk of sharing this information with the United Nations. It's up to them to make that calculation. I think its important that if you receive information from one country, you should also ask for information from other countries, because otherwise there might be suspicions that you have special relationships with one or two other countries and have special channels of communications with them.

I: That country would be more vulnerable than the other countries.

JE: Exactly, and I think it might sound paradoxical, but you have to be transparent and open about dealing with classified information. If you receive classified information from let's say, the United States, one should be able to say to Russia, We have asked the Americans about information, we asked them to provide what they know, now we ask you, what can you help us with? Then of course the calculation that they will have to make is, Is this a risk that this will come to the other side? Fortunately, we live in a time

which is not the Cold War, so relations between Russia and the United States have improved considerably in the nineties as compared to the eighties and seventies. But I think that you would get a better answer to this question, from first Rolf Ekéus, and later on from Hans Blix, who is going through exactly this problem.

I: Iraq is very divided in terms of its people and religions and so forth. How was the national stability during the time of the inspections and do you think that the tension on Iraq actually led to domestic peace, or more stability than there was before?

JE: In Iraq?

I: Yes.

JE: Could you repeat that question?

I: I think it [Iraq] is pretty unstable, when thinking about the situation with the Kurds and Shiites, and when the severe tension was actually on Iraq [from abroad], did that lead to increased domestic stability within the country?

JE: I see. Well, I think the fact that the world's eyes were directed to particularly the Kurdish situation, led to a restraint and a caution on the side of the Baghdad government. They had of course paid a very a high price, with the invasion of Kuwait, and Saddam Hussein was saved by his skin at the end of that war. He knew that he was going to be

very hard-pressed. The Americans and the British were conducting the operation, and also to make sure there were no flights over the Kurdish area, and this was a reminder to the regime, that there could be also very concrete reactions. So they were watched. On the other hand, Iraq is a tremendously close and isolated society. First of all, because of the character of the regime, but also, perhaps tragically, by the sanctions. This means that the population is receiving only the official news, that if anyone dares to suggest something different, I wouldn't want to sign on their life insurance. So, it was a very sad form of stability, stability under repression, and under the fear of another military confrontation.

For the people of Iraq to talk about this period as a positive period is very difficult; they had a combination of repression and, as you know, a very low standard of living, as compared to how the Iraqi lived when I came there at the beginning of the eighties. Then there were boys and girls in school uniforms, very well fed, in good housing districts. In fact, one of the good things about that regime was very little corruption. Health clinics were built, schools were built, roads were built, the oil riches were pretty well distributed. That Iraq is the Iraq of the past. I was there in 1997, after 17 years – well, I'd been there all through the eighties, but I hadn't been there between 1992 and 1997 – those five years, I saw a serious deterioration of the physical conditions. But also sadly, in the eyes of people, an emptiness, a situation without hope. Therefore it is important that, in the future, of course, Iraq would be allowed back into the international community, because this could be a very dangerous type of society that could be developed. But that's another story.

I: France has always treated Iraq differently from what the rest of the Western world has done. Why is this so? Was it something to do with their nuclear weapons policy, or is it mainly because of treaty relations?

JE: I think it has nothing to do with their nuclear policy. I hope to God not...no, I think it has to do with historic relations. It has to do possibly with economic and commercial interests. I said earlier that most of the world had sympathy for Iraq at the beginning of the war because Iran was seen as the culprit although, in retrospect, that picture should be rectified. At that time, there were also very substantial deliveries of arms to Iraq. Those deliveries came, to a large extent, from Russia and from France. So today, one of the greatest debts that Iraq has to the outside world is to France. So France, and also Russia, have an interest in bringing Iraq back into the international community, to be getting enough oil to pay back their debts. Iraq and France have had this long term economic and commercial relationship which I think perhaps played the most important part. Plus, in the beginning, there was sympathy with Iraq vis-à-vis Iran.

I: Besides Russia and France, China has also been very friendly. Does that also have to do with the same thing?

JE: Well, with China, I think it's also that they don't have the same sensitivities as some others about the democratic character of the society. China has always been negative to the actions of Western powers, especially if it is done on their own, and not [through the] the Security Council and the United Nations. It would seem that also in

issues related to Kosovo and other areas, China has stood for respect of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and shown a reluctance for military action. They have agreed or abstained in certain situations, but the picture is clear. Iraq has met with the greatest sympathy in the Security Council by China. For some periods also, with Russia, and on sanctions with France. But when it came to the invasion of Kuwait, I want to say that it was striking how unified the international community was. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, everybody took a stance on that. There was no hesitation. China did not hesitate. Russia did not hesitate, and of course France did not. Then there was a complete support for the action, which was one reason for the success – well, it's never a success to see people die – but after all, the invasion was turned back and he [Saddam Hussein] had to get back. That was also a result of the unified UN position. Not only was the Security Council unified, but also the General Assembly.

I was at that time UN ambassador, and I was traveling around the States, giving speeches about negotiations between Iran and Iraq which was a special subject of mine. I remember one time, after the invasion of Kuwait, and after the UN took this stand, and after the operation had succeeded and the Iraqi troops had withdrawn to Baghdad, I received a standing ovation. I was representing of course the UN and someone who had dealt with Iraq, in the United States, as you know, where there is a pretty UN-skeptical attitude. So there was unity when it comes to clear cases of breaches of international law.

I: It's not often that it happens.

JE: There was a problem later on, when it came to the reaction to the Iraqi action against UNSCOM. There was always a very difficult discussion with Britain and the U.S. on one side of the Security Council, France usually on their side on the key issues, but still on sanctions, not taking the same view. Then Russia and China particularly being very skeptical of UNSCOM. That weakened the United Nations vis-à-vis the Iraqis and the Iraqis could of course use that, take advantage of the split in the Security Council.

I: Do you think that was the reason why it was so important for Rolf Ekéus to keep it as independent as possible?

JE: Definitely. He was still met with suspicion, as he will probably tell you. And of course, Butler was received with even more suspicion.

I: How willing were the Iraqis to negotiate?

JE: In the beginning of the war in 1980, they were very reluctant to negotiate. They felt that they had the military initiative. They also felt that Iranian society was in disorder. They also felt that there was a risk of Iranian export of revolution of a religious character, and as you yourself have said earlier, there is a large Shi'a community in the south of Iraq. Very few people know that the holiest places for the Iranians, or the Persians, or the Shi'as, are two places in Iraq [the cities of Najaf and Kerbala], where in fact Khomeini spent time. The Iraqis threw him out. Khomeini was there in the middle of the seventies; he was there for a long time. He was thrown out by the Iraqis because

he was considered a nuisance, I think, inside their own society. He was at one of the two holiest places and he was thrown out. In fact, he was thrown out to France, where he stayed. When Khomeini arrived in Iran, you may remember, he came by a flight from Paris to Tehran. But the point is simply that the Iraqis were feeling at the time that yes, they had the military initiative, yes, Iran was dangerous, and they were in fact hoping for some type of military victory. Even there were those who were speculating that Iraq wanted to take the southern province of Iran, which is called Khuzistan.. They call that province by an old Arab name, Arabistan, and the Iranians always said, "Look, they are changing names. They want to invade, they want to occupy this territory."

I: They actually warned you?

JE: The Iranians were extremely suspicious. They of course said, "Yes, they want to occupy us;" that they will not hand over territory. That's why we had to remind them about international law, the non-acquisition of territory by force. If the Iraqis had attacked them, which they claimed, and they had a good case to say that, then in the end, by international law, territories should be returned. That's why we had a negotiation basis with them. Now I come to your question again: in the beginning they didn't have any, or very little interest, in negotiation. We went through the motions. Later on, when the Iranians took back the territory, sometimes with tragic elements, child soldiers and so forth, and when the Iranians came to the international border, they unfortunately decided to go into Iraq, to punish the Iraqis. By that, they lost the moral high ground. They could have gained a lot, in my view, at that time to say, "Here, we have thrown them out but we



will stop at the border." That could have given them a tremendous boost internationally, but instead they continued into Iraq. Then the Iraqis became interested in negotiating, then the attitude changed.

We had two methods of negotiation: one was to try to have a comprehensive settlement, a settlement with all the elements which later turned up in Resolution 598. But when that failed, we also tried something which we called a step-by-step approach, which I would call with a metaphor like "Pulling out the teeth of the war."

I: Make it weaker.

JE: Make it weaker, to ban attacks against the other side by artillery that could hit civilians, to ban attacks against traffic in the Shatt al Arab, in the Gulf area, to ban the use of chemical weapons – which should be banned anyway. To pull the teeth out of the war so you would reduce the level of warfare, and then negotiate in a calmer climate. We also suggested something which was a joke to begin with, but then turned out to be pretty serious. We suggested that the parties should respect or accept what we called a "verbal cease-fire," in other words, tone down the propaganda in the words. Don't hate each other so much in the press, don't condemn too much, lower the tone. Why don't you have a cease-fire in words? And this was half a joke, and then both of them realized it was very important, because it's only when you reduce the level of hatred that you can make a compromise.

So, in sum, a long answer to a short question, in the beginning, very little interest in the negotiations. After a couple of years, greater interest. In the end, I think the

agreement on 598 was brought about by a combination of a realization that nothing could be gained by either of the sides, and simply war-weariness. They had paid a tremendous price, maybe 7-800,000 people had been killed, maybe 3 million refugees had been out on the roads, and the material destruction was incredible. But here is a point. I compared the end results of Resolution 598 with our proposals in the early eighties when we went to the area, and the tragic conclusion is that there was a minimal difference in the proposals that we made in the early eighties and the end result in 1988. In the meantime, during seven years, 700,000 people had been killed, 3 million refugees, enormous material destruction had been produced. What was the point? They could have agreed to this in 1981 or 1982.

That's the tragedy of war. But you know, when war starts, it's like the genie getting out of the bottle. You can't get it back, and the war creates mechanisms of hatred within a population. You have to make legitimate the sacrifice to your own population. You have to punish the other side. If your brothers and sisters have been killed, then in another month, it's even more brothers and sisters killed, and then in a year, it's hundreds of thousands, and then the longer the war goes on, the more difficult it is to back down. One tends to become philosophical about this.

I: Do you think that the Iraqi inspection question has been handled through the right means?

JE: Well, we talked about that earlier. I think the first step, the decision on UNSCOM, was a very firm and good answer and I think in world history, it could turn

out to be important that you find a method of really dealing with the basic ills. So the resolution was good, and I think Rolf Ekéus did a very good job, but as I said earlier, there were some problems with the way the inspections were taking place, the manner in which the inspections were taking place. That, I think, could be rectified. I also think it's important that the members of the Security Council see this as a common task, that they all, all of them, work united. There was a tendency that this was considered an American issue, or a U.S./U.K. issue. That is not right, because this should be an international concern. So I think, I hope, that the Permanent Five in the Security Council see this in the future as a common task. Otherwise, it could be exploited by the Iraqis. So the more you can have unity in the Security Council, the better.

I: This is very difficult.

JE: It's very difficult. But after all, they agreed on the resolution, and the resolution is now the basis for UNMOVIC. The key question now is whether Iraq will cooperate.

I: Should one have been careful from the very beginning? But as you talked about the question in the situation between Iraq and Iran, you were a little more pro-Saddam.

JE: No, I think you are right. There was a period where the work was too much influenced by the Iranian hostage taking, which was of course, a terrible action, and a very grave mistake by the Iranians. I think also there was a fear, probably at the beginning justified, about the export of revolution. The character of the regime was such,

when it comes to human rights and treatment of minorities, that there was a feeling of repulsion and definitely strong criticism, and rightly so, from all over the world. I think this influenced the judgment of the conflict, which was in fact another thing.

I: But it took so long for –

JE: It took so long, and even when it became clear, around 1983-4, that chemical weapons were used, in my view, in the beginning first by the Iraqis - possibly later on by the Iranians, which is not to be condoned either - but it was started by the Iraqis. The Iraqis talked during our negotiations about terrible weapons that they could use.

I: You mean, threatening you?

JE: They were threatening not us, but the Iranians. They were saying that they may have human waves, they may have hundreds of thousands of young soldiers, or even children, but that will not help. We [the Iraqis] will have something to reply. That was always, by us – we thought in terms of them developing some type of weapon. It turns out that it was possibly, probably, chemical weapons, possibly also biological weapons. There were rumors already at the time of nuclear capacity. But, in retrospect, yes, I think we condoned the Iraqis too much. There was some type of irrational sympathy for Iraq who were fighting the Iranians, so that we nurtured the phenomenon, a regime which was on its way to develop weapons of mass destruction and not only develop them but also use them. I think we have now paid a tremendous price in seeing those weapons in the

hands of a regime which was also willing to use them against its own population. I think that says it all.

I: What are the main reasons and motivations in the development of all the weapons programs?

JE: I think, in the beginning, I'm almost convinced that it was the fear of the survival of the nation. They were fearful that Iran would, with a larger population and greater mobilization capacity, win the war.

I: But did the Iranians have any intentions?

JE: Well, the Iranians, according to shari'a law, were thinking always in terms of punishment. If you attack someone, there has to be a punishment. The punishment was not the classical view, but also punishing them physically. We had a situation once where we suggested they withdraw to the international borders. Then they said, "Yes, and then we have to punish the soldiers." [We asked] "What do you mean, punish the soldiers?" [They said] "Well, according to shari'a law, they should have lashes." This was at the very beginning, they didn't have much of an international law. But then, they claimed that if someone breaks into your house, there has to be a punishment, they have to be punished, at least the officers. And of course this was not possible for us. But then the following day we found a quotation from the Quran, thanks to our friend Iqbal Riza, who is Muslim. He found a quote with which to open the negotiations saying that, "If the

enemy turns its back at you, you are not allowed to attack him.” So we told them, in the Quran, it’s also this recognition, so then they changed their attitude. But what was the question?

I: What were the reasons and motivations in developing the main weapons programs?

JE: In the beginning, it was no doubt that the Iraqis felt that they had to have a capacity to deter the Iranians from invading Iraq. That gave them a great motivation to develop the weapons. Later on, after the war was over, there was another motivation. It was to achieve a superior power position in the Middle East, to develop a regional leadership role, and possibly also the factor is not only the relationship between Iran and Iraq but also between Israel. They saw the capacity that they had developed during the war as an instrument to develop their great power as a nation. Those are the two reasons. The first reason was because of the war, and perhaps the legitimate fear that they were going to be invaded. But they of course used a method which is absolutely unacceptable. They broke all international conventions. But I would be interested to hear from Rolf Ekéus how it’s done, have him answer the question politically.

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I: With whom did you go to Iraq, and what was the main purpose?

JE: Well, I went in three capacities: the negotiations with Olof Palme and also later on, when I myself was the Personal Representative, with the UN team in both cases. I went to Iraq also in 1997, for the mission for Kofi Annan, to try to get the Iraqis to cooperate with UNSCOM. The third function was between 1992 and 1994, when I was Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and we established the program, the humanitarian program, mainly in the north, in the Kurdish area. We also tried to establish the program in the south for the Shi'a groups, but unfortunately it was more difficult. We had great cooperation from the Kurdish authorities and it's no secret that we also sent in much of the material, the food, the medicine, from Turkey, which was a very difficult issue vis-à-vis the Iraqis. It was of course not quite in conformity with what they considered respect of their territorial integrity. But I opened up an office in Baghdad, I established an office there. I was careful to have the office in the capital, although we had local offices of course also in the north. The program in the beginning was stumbling. It was very difficult because we had to get money from voluntary contributions. There was no Food for Oil program, so we could not get the sale of oil and by that get food, as was established in 1995. So we had to get a quarter of a billion dollars every year, 250 million dollars, by voluntary contributions.

I: And this was mainly governmental?

JE: Yes, mainly governmental. There were some NGOs [non-governmental organizations] establishing themselves slowly. The most active ones were CARE Australia, who took care of the food distribution, World Food Program UN was very

active, UNICEF was there, different UN specialized agencies. Later, more NGOs came in; I think also Save the Children and others. They were working also through Turkey, but it was a period when I noticed the slow deterioration of the situation among the people, the humanitarian situation, a situation which has deteriorated even more during these recent years. Although the Food for Oil Program meant quite a relief, not only when it comes to fund-raising but also to the situation on the ground, there were still deficiencies. To feed a population of 22 million of this nature, with this program, is not possible, and the program took some time to expand to the sites that were needed, and also to get rid of some of the bureaucracy. For instance, we couldn't send tires for ambulances or spare parts to the oil industry, because they could be used according to some for dual-use [for weapons].

I: Who actually decided what could be used as dual-use?

JE: It was a Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council, which was set up, and the Sanctions Committee worked by instructions from the fifteen governments of the fifteen members of the Sanctions Committee. In other words, UK had to go back to London, and U.S. had to go back to Washington, and so forth. Then they came back and it was a rather difficult bureaucratic exercise.

I: Did you have people stationed there?



JE: Yes, we had an office in Baghdad and we had local offices, particularly out in the Kurdish area. We tried to establish offices also in the south and for a limited period of time, I think we had UNICEF and the World Food Programme in Basra, but they couldn't work very well. So our main presence was in Baghdad and the Kurdish area.

I: Was transportation mainly done by cars or was it by air?

JE: No, mostly by cars, by trucks going in from Turkey. There was a considerable trade from Turkey to Iraq, and of course back. Some material came from Baghdad but mostly via Turkey, by road.

I: Your trips to Iraq to negotiate, you wanted to get very many different things out of each of the trips, but did you get the answers that you wanted? Did you get out of it what you wanted?

JE: You mean the first part of the negotiations, the early eighties? Or do you mean later on?

I: I was actually thinking about all three of them. Did you reach your goals, and was there anything that surprised you?

JE: No, in the beginning the Iraqis were not very cooperative because they felt they had military victory within reach, and they also were extremely fearful of the export of

revolution. So there was not much cooperation, although they were courteous and logical as they said all the time.

I: They said that they were logical?

JE: Logical, yes, they were logical, and you could trust what you hear from the Iraqi side. In other words, they were implying that from the Iranian side, there was a change of leadership and you never knew if you talked to someone who could decide, was it the mullahs or was it Bani Sadr, the president in the early stages of the revolution. So they were courteous, they were well-organized, but when it came to real political will to find a settlement at the beginning of the war, no. This changed when Iran took over, when the Iranian initiative led to the withdrawal, led to bringing the Iraqis back to the border, and of course when Iranians entered their territory, it was a different thing. We tried also to get step-by-step solutions, but it wasn't easy. We got something important though. The bombardments of the civilian population that took place were ended by an agreement on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, I think, 1984. This was interesting, because it was one of the successes actually of negotiation. We had a pretty somber picture when it comes to success, but in 1984, we took the initiative of asking the two sides to stop the bombardment of the border areas, which had hurt civilians to tremendous and tragic degrees. Both sides accepted. We sent a cable Friday to the two sides. We asked them to respond by Sunday, not to each other, but to us, so that the commitment was made not to the other side, because they refused to have anything to do with each other at the time, but they

could of course accept us. So they sent the cable to the Secretary-General of the UN, and said that yes, we would respect not bombarding civilian targets across the border.

I: What made them accept this?

JE: Well, I think that they both paid a heavy price for this, and it of course led to the suffering of a lot of people and I think both sides saw the disadvantages of these rockets coming into their land and their villages. So it was in both sides' interest. But the negotiation construction was interesting. I think it should be kept in mind for other conflicts when parties don't want to have anything to do with each other, that you don't ask them to agree between each other, but you ask them to agree with a third party. This takes off the political burden to make a "deal" with the other side. They responded to our humanitarian requests that the civilians should not suffer. So they said, Yes, due to your humanitarian reasons, we will accept. In the later stages, the Iraqis were very reluctant. They didn't like our humanitarian program, because the Iraqis wanted to have the lifting of sanctions immediately, so they were very suspicious of us. If we had a well-functioning humanitarian program, the world would not notice that the Iraqi population was suffering. In fact, the Food for Oil Program was not accepted until 1995. It was devised in 1993, but it took two years for it to be established, partly because the Iraqis feared that it would take away the pressure of world and public opinion to take away sanctions.

I: That's why it took so long?

JE: Right, plus also some negotiations among the fifteen [on the Sanctions Committee], not quite similar views between, lets say, the United States on the one hand and China on the other. The last part of cooperation was of course when we came at the end of 1997, to persuade Tariq Aziz and the Iraqis to cooperate with UNSCOM. That was very tough. I think, on the surface it looked like a failure, our mission, but it was not a failure. We sent a very strong message to them that they had to cooperate, and I think a couple of weeks after we had visited, after the mission, the Russians put in a great push – I think Ivanov and Primakov – told the Iraqis to cooperate – and then they agreed. So this was the first crisis vis-à-vis Iraq, though there was another one in February, which we also overcame it. But then came the third one, when the bombings took place. Three times we attempted. It looked like a failure in the beginning, but I think it was a success from the point of view that they, in the end, did agree to cooperate. But it took some time.

I: Interesting, actually, that it took Russians to do the final –

JE: Yes, I think that without the Russians pushing in the end, I don't think it would have worked. There's an interesting parallel to Kosovo, where also in the end, when Ahtisaari went to Belgrade, remember that the most important person in his group was of course Chernomyrdin, the former Prime Minister of Russia. When Milosevic saw Chernomyrdin on the side of Ahtisaari, he realized that Russia was not on his side. In the same way, Saddam Hussein also felt that he would not be saved by the Russians. That

shows the importance of unity in the Security Council. Remember, we talked about Kuwait earlier, the invasion of Kuwait and the unified response and how solid the UN was. If you are split, it's always exploited, by Milosevic or by Saddam Hussein.

I: We touched the subject about the bombardment of urban areas. What role did you and Palme have in this period?

JE: We were very instrumental. I remember phone calls to Iqbal Riza and from Iqbal Riza, who was then the contact point to the Secretary-General, and in fact I think Iqbal and I worked out the formula, together. Of course, I discussed this with Palme. We also had this firm deadline. We didn't want to just put in a request. We said, You have to answer by Sunday night at six o' clock, to put a certain drama in the initiative. Then, of course, I don't recall who thought of this, but whoever did had a brilliant idea, and I won't take the credit myself, but it was very smart that we didn't want them to respond to each other. They should respond to us, to Olof Palme and to the Secretary-General. We were very instrumental.

I: I know that you had a big role in drafting Resolution 598, but what were you actually doing? What was your direct role in it?

JE: Well, Olof Palme had died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1986. I started as UN ambassador in March 1988. I took on the new task as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General in the end of August 1988. The resolution was being discussed, or

rather an action was discussed in the beginning of 1987. At the time, the Cold War was coming to an end, at least some wise people felt that this was in the air. One of them was Pérez de Cuéllar and he took the initiative to suggest the Foreign Minister's meeting in the beginning of 1987. At that meeting [which took place later], there was a high degree of consensus that one would indeed make a common effort and really put pressure from all five members and the Security Council on both sides to end the war. Capitals were working, Pérez de Cuéllar's office was working, I was contacted by some members of the Security Council, and I went to some capitals to discuss the elements of the resolution, because I had six, seven years of experience with the issues and Palme and our team had presented comprehensive settlement ideas back in 1981 and 1982. Those elements were indeed very useful and they were put partly into the resolution later on. The main work was done in May/June of 1987, and the resolution was adopted by one of the sides in 1987 and by two of them in July 1988, and the cease-fire came into place. Very much also thanks to Saudi Arabia, which played a very constructive role in the end. And then of course, the negotiations about the implementation of Resolution 598 started in the end of August in Geneva.

I: You talked about Saudi Arabia's importance. What kind of importance? How could they have been important?

JE: Well, Saudi Arabia is of course a very prestigious nation in the area, but they had also supported Iraq considerably during the war. Iran was for most of the period of the war also a threat to Saudi Arabia. The export of revolution to Sunni communities, Sunni

societies, was a real threat. Therefore, Iraq was given considerable support from Saudi Arabia, and if then the leadership of Saudi Arabia required Iraq to end the war, this was in their interest, too. I think it had an impact. Even some Iraqis have admitted that the Saudi influence in ending war was instrumental in making them agree to the cease-fire and Resolution 598.

I: And isn't it also that the Iraqis owed them a lot from the war?

JE: Indeed, quite a lot, both politically and above all financially, billions of dollars.

I: Could you describe the problems you encountered trying to bring the two parties together in implementing the provisions of Resolution 598, and what was each side trying to achieve?

JE: There was a tremendous degree of suspicion between the two, after this war, with all this hatred, also the historic hatred between Arabs and Persians, or at least the distance between the two. But then, the whole personal element - Saddam Hussein, Khomeini - feelings were running very high. The negotiations at the end of August, beginning of September, were extremely difficult, extremely tiresome. I felt all the time that we were going to have a negotiation breakdown. I was keeping them busy all the time, because I didn't want them to have any excuse to leave. So I invented new questions, and I told them that the Security Council would eagerly wait for their answers. I kept them working from early morning to late in the night, and still I tried to look fresh in the morning to

receive them and give them the impression that we were prepared to be there forever, if needed, and we were prepared for every session and negotiation.

I even had contact with the airport in Geneva. There was at the same time, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1988, a non-aligned movement meeting in Cyprus, and we were fearful that they would sneak out there and go out as a pretext that they would go to this non-aligned meeting and then we wouldn't see them [again]. So my office was even in contact with the airport. We had an agreement that if the engines were warming up, or if they asked for permission to leave, we would be informed. So that showed the nervousness around that negotiation.

Their suspicion took many forms. I can tell you even some funny parts about the sensitivities. They [the parties] had to enter the room at the same time, so we had security people in both side rooms with walkie-talkies to make sure that they entered the room at exactly the same second, so that one side would not be put in the position – a humiliating position, to them – of waiting for the other side.

I: Everything took place in Geneva?

JE: In Geneva, at the Palais des Nations, the big palace. Majestic rooms, I remember. Another funny example was the shape of the table. It's classical diplomacy negotiations that the shape of the table could be an issue of dispute. But it was. We had, in fact, the meeting organized to begin with in the form of a table of the form of a "U", with us of course connecting the two. They realized that if they have a "U", you would have to look at each other straight into the eyes, and they then suggested – it was both sides who



wanted this – that the table should be changed to a triangle so that the two sides would not face each other, and they could talk through us, the third party. They still wanted to give the impression that there were no direct negotiations, but through us. Pérez de Cuéllar and I joked about this sensitivity: “How do we bring them together?” We came on the idea that we should have a coffee table at the tip of a triangle, where the two sides were to meet. We had brewed coffee coming in, waited long for the pause to break, good cookies were brought in! Then we broke it [the pause, tension], and the Secretary-General said, “Now I invite you to the coffee table.” They reluctantly approached the table, moved like cats around it. And then they started talking. That was the beginning of contact.

I: Around the coffee table?

JE: Yes.

I: Do you think they liked it? Liked the coffee [break], I mean?

JE: Yes, indeed. There were at first discussions between the interpreters, then between delegation members who knew the language. There was one other story though. I just thought about it. There were two people in the delegations who were very open to contacts and discussions. One was Ismat Kitani, who later worked with the UN, Iraqi. The second one was Cyrus Nasser, who was the Iranian ambassador to Geneva. I invited them to something in my hotel that I jokingly called “Confidential Breakfast.” Let us

have a “Confidential Breakfast” together! So both of them accepted after a couple of weeks of these types of talks, because I needed to have them sit with me and discuss between us. We couldn’t do it in the negotiation room.

I: Do you mean that you were alone during these negotiations?

JE: Yes, at that time I was alone. With the Confidential Breakfast, it was the three of us, so the three of us had breakfast at the Hotel Intercontinental. We all three of us refer to this as the “Confidential Breakfast of October 1988.” This was the first time I could sit in the same room with the two parties, with people in responsible positions, and discuss the different formulas of negotiation. This shows the sensitivities in the beginning.

I: Great stories!

JE: I hope it comes out on the tape recorder!

I: How did you assess Iraq’s chemical warfare capacity on the basis of your observations during the Iran-Iraq war?

JE: Well, we had reports about the use of chemical weapons, already I think in the end of 1983. We took it very seriously but we felt that it couldn’t be a negotiation issue, because it was a very serious charge, of course by the Iranians, which had to do with the respect of international conventions and humanitarian rules of warfare.

I: So at that time it was just rumors?

JE: It was rumors till the end of 1983. Then, in 1984, a mission was sent by the United Nations to the area. This mission was led by Iqbal Riza, who did a very good job, not surprisingly, but he did a very good job. This report, I think, puts a rather clear burden of responsibility on the Iraqis. So though it did not exclude also chemical weapons used by the Iranians, it gave certainly the impression – which was the right one – that Iraq has started the use of chemical weapons. At that time it was obvious that it was not only rumor, because there were Iranian soldiers brought back from the front to the hospitals in Tehran. I was there myself in 1983-1984, and I didn't go there physically myself, but we had people who had been visiting these hospitals. There was no doubt in our mind that, in fact, chemical weapons had been used against those soldiers. There were terrible, terrible, terrifying sights. They died, of course. But there were those who were in great pain, and the effect of those weapons was obvious. Anyway, the UN report came out and interestingly enough, Iqbal Riza came into trouble. He was criticized by Iraq for the report. There were also some other actions that were taken against him and he was not working with Iraq-Iran issues for some time after that. Which was of course not fair, because he did a very good job. So we saw it [chemical warfare] coming, and this was another example of the world's soft and rather unclear reactions to the Iraqi side. You asked earlier about whether we should not have been tougher. If you get a report which puts a rather strong burden of responsibility on one country about the use of

chemical weapons, I think there should be a very strong international reaction.

Unfortunately, it did not come about.

I: And you want us to be aware of it for the future?

JE: Yes, of course! How could you imagine, how could you in the future deal with other conflicts if you make a judgment that you like one party more than the other?

That's why he [Saddam Hussein] could use methods that are not in conformity with international law. It doesn't make sense.

I: Could you briefly describe your working experience with Iraqi and Iranian representatives? What was your impression of Saddam Hussein, Tariq Aziz, Rafsanjani, and Velayati?

JE: Well, there's a story on each. Saddam Hussein, the undisputed leader, tremendous sense of unlimited power, a respect that almost entered the area of fear, and obedience, a combination. You could almost feel the fear in the room. He was not used to informal remarks or direct questions. He looked at me in a combination of amusement and irritation as I asked some very basic questions about their intentions, going back to internationally recognized boundaries. Questions that had never been posed to him, evidently. We had long negotiations.

I: Why do you think that was? People didn't dare to [ask him questions]?

JE: No, in certain political cultures, the leaders don't get the difficult questions, don't get the bad news. You know, as with the Greek messengers, you share bad news, your chance of survival is not very high. That's the beauty of democracy, that you are sometimes beaten up, but you are not surprised at criticism. Apart from the cultural gap, you have to sharpen your arguments, and he didn't know the answers to some of the basic questions. But I spent hours and hours with him. I remember he walked me down to his map-room, where he showed me with a big stick where the troops were, that they in fact could invade all of the area but they were restrained, they only need a buffer zone from Iranian aggression. He took great pains in describing the situation to me and I felt there was a lack of information, lack of critical questions, posed to him, that I was probably the first one to pose these questions. I had a similar experience when I was there with Olof Palme in the early eighties. I met him alone, of course, once when I was also implementing 598.

Tariq Aziz is extremely skillful. He is tough, he's knowledgeable, he is shrewd, smart, has a tremendous power of details but also good political sense. So as a negotiation partner, he is respectable but very difficult. Professionally, I have sympathy for him. He is a Christian. We spoke much about our children. He had a twelve-year-old son at the time. The son must be thirty now. We spoke about not being with the family. You have to connect sometimes; even with the most difficult partners, you have to develop a human relationship. We developed in a strange way a rather close relationship. Rolf Ekéus could tell you more because he spent more time with Tariq Aziz than I did. I spent hundreds of hours with him, but I think Rolf spent even more. The

others that you mentioned: Rafsanjani was always there. He was the one who stayed. Everybody was leaving, Bani Sadr left, some other leaders were killed, Rajai was killed, Beheshti was killed. Rafsanjani was the Speaker of Parliament. Later, of course, he became President. He was the survivor, he was very smart. Very shrewd, very pragmatic. He kept the nation together after the divisions of the early eighties. Very intelligent, and also a person for whom you could feel a reluctant admiration of dealing with situations. Velayati is a pediatrician, children's doctor. He was impressive with his working capacity. He worked forever, always. He slept three hours a day. He was working on his thesis, because he was also teaching at Tehran University.

I: At the same time?

JE: At the same time. Not all full-time, of course. He was writing lectures, he went to international conferences in the Hague and in Switzerland on pediatric practices. Once, he told me he was playing tennis, and I said I was playing tennis too, and he said, "OK, let's have a game." So I said, "What time?" He said, "five o'clock." And so I said, "Of course, five o'clock in the afternoon." [And he said], "No, five o'clock in the morning, after prayers!" He has now left. He is closer to Khomeini than he is to Khatami. I had hoped that he would be on the reform side, but I'm not sure now.

I: How effective was the UN in monitoring the cease-fire?

JE: I think we really didn't have a headache with any of the two sides. They were so sensitive to the cease-fire. They knew that a breach of the cease-fire could lead to war, and we really didn't have serious problems with the cease-fire. It was also relatively easy to supervise because the great part of the cease-fire line was the river Shatt al Arab, and the river is of course easy to supervise. There was also a tremendous war-weariness after this war. They had paid such a heavy price. It was pretty easy.

I: Pretty much both of them wanted to have a cease-fire?

JE: Yes, after some time. I told you about the difficult period at the beginning. It could easily have been broken in the first three or four months, but after half a year or so, it was stable. From then on, the focus shifted. The Iraqis saw their enemy not in Iran but in Kuwait, more and more. Remember how they shifted their attention? They got so aggressive about Kuwait. They felt that Kuwait had not contributed enough, they had oil, that this was a former part of Iraq, so the focus shifted from Iran to Kuwait.

I: I hope I have time for one more question, about Sweden gaining insight on the nature and intentions of the Iraqi regime from the assignment of two senior Swedish diplomats on the Iraqi disarmament effort.

JE: Well, it was actually three. You have Rolf Ekéus of course, who was asked in 1991 to do UNSCOM. Hans Blix did the same job but for the nuclear sector, since he was the Director General for IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. We had also

other Swedes. We had experts on chemical weapons, who were in Iraq. We had officers in UNSCOM, Swedish military officers. We had a diplomat Johann Molander, who was helping both Blix and Ekéus. I have a colleague Elisabeth Borsiin-Bonnier, who worked on chemical weapons, so I would say we had 15-20 Swedes. The most known people are of course Rolf and Hans. But Sweden, including myself, has of course, spent twenty years following Iraq from different perspectives. It seems as though we never end working with it. I hope one day we can see a peaceful, prosperous, democratic country. It's been a high Swedish priority. We have long traditions, of course, in the Middle East, and I think one should continue to develop knowledge of the Middle East. I think it's important that a country in the northern part of Europe shows an active interest and shows that it wants to do something. It sends a very important message, that Sweden is not looking inward, that the European Union is not looking inward.

So I really hope that my colleagues in the Foreign Ministry and others keep an interest in this area, because too often in history, a lot of tragic developments have started in that area and spread. Conflict in the Middle East, conflict in the Gulf, would have serious effects on the whole international atmosphere, on the international economy, and of course on the degree of fundamentalism in the Islamic faith.

I: Mostly in Iran?

JE: Not only in Iran, because you have fundamentalists in many Arab countries, also in North Africa.



I: But I thought in the Middle East area, it was mainly Iran.

JE: Yes, of course Shi'as are mainly there [in Iran], but there are fundamentalist movements also in Sunni communities. If you have a conflict in the Middle East, where the Palestinians would be the victims, or if you have an explosion in Iran-Iraq, you would have immediate effects, politically, economically, and socially all over the Muslim world. That's why I think it is good that Sweden put these resources into the Middle East and Iraq-Iran, and I hope that we will continue to follow this road.

I: Thank you so much.

JE: Thank you.