Yale-UN Oral History
Rolf Ekéus
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
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Jean Krasno: To begin with, Ambassador Ekéus, for the record would you please provide us with some background on your career as a diplomat and how you came to be Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission to investigate Iraq's capabilities to build weapons of mass-destruction, or as is more commonly referred to, UNSCOM. So, there's two parts to the question, actually.

Rolf Ekéus: I have a law degree, originally from Stockholm, and worked in the law courts for a while before I joined the Swedish Foreign Service. There I served in various positions abroad, in Bonn, Germany, then posted in Africa, and thereafter back in Stockholm where I was the Special Assistant to the Foreign Minister for several years. Then in the 1970s, I served in the Swedish delegation to the United Nations for five years, including the spell that Sweden had in the Security Council at that time. Then, for the first time I came in contact with the Middle Eastern issues, especially the Palestinian-Israeli question, which was starting up when the PLO started to be known. I was Sweden's contact with the Palestinian delegation in New York. I was at that time the first secretary to the Swedish mission. Of course, I was also in contact with the Israelis on the Palestinian issues.

Thereafter I went to The Hague and in 1983 to Geneva as Ambassador and as Permanent Representative of Sweden to the Conference on Disarmament. I was given the

task to be also the Chairman of the international negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention. I served as Chairman in the year 1984 and in the year 1987. From 1983 to 1989, I was the coordinator for chemical weapons issues of what was called the Group of 21. The Group of 21 was the group of non-aligned Member States of the Conference on Disarmament. Sweden was not a member of the non-aligned movement, but was partner in the group of non-aligned states on disarmament matters.

I had other jobs in that context, in relation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to the biological weapons convention, from 1983 to 1988 in Geneva. Then, in 1989, I moved to Vienna, and became head of the Swedish mission to the European Security Conference. I served as chairman for drafting the Charter of Paris, which was adopted in December 1990 and which is the major document outlining the principles for European security. In early 1991, the Gulf War took place. Immediately after the War, the Security Council and the victorious coalition were looking for a chairman to lead the work on cleaning up Iraq from weapons of mass destruction. At that stage, the consensus was, I would say, that the matter of eliminating these weapons in Iraq was a technical issue, and not a political issue.

Of course, I had some experience dealing with Iraq because of the work I had been doing in the Middle East in the 1970s. So, what the UN was looking for was a person who had special experience in weapons of mass destruction. What that involves was identifying such weapons in Iraq, working out methods of verification, control of weapons-relevant material, etc. The thinking was that Iraq would give up its weapons as quickly as possible because the cease-fire resolution which was adopted in early April contained a provision that if Iraq would give up its weapons it would be entitled to export all its oil capabilities, oil for weapons. Everyone took it for granted that to give up what

remained after the war of such weapons would anyhow be a minor sacrifice. So, therefore we didn't perceive a political problem, we saw it as a purely technical one. The UN looked for a specialist, and they looked for a person coming from a country which had not been on the forefront of the coalition. That was natural, and they turned to Sweden, which of course participated indirectly in the coalition, but with a field hospital and such, not on, I would say, the war-fighting part of the coalition.

So, they turned to Sweden, and there were not many more with that experience than myself. I was the only one left on the beach when the water withdrew. I was asked to take on that job, and I accepted, exactly under my own understanding, that it was complex, that it was a difficult technical task that had to be put together, but it would not be a matter of more than technical solutions to disarm the Iraqi capabilities in a few months.

So, I calculated a six-month period for the work.

JK: You calculated that it would take six months in all?

RE: Yes. But of course we came around to understand that the task was a two-fold task: one was to identify the prohibited weapons and capabilities, and eliminate them, and the other task was to create and put in place a long-term, on-going monitoring and verification system, which would control Iraq's civilian production capabilities and see to it that these capabilities were not turned into production for acquiring weapons. I will give you a simple example, a certain chemical compound can be used for the production of pesticides, herbicides, to support agriculture, but it can also be turned into production

of nerve agents, for instance. So the task was, within six months, to outline a system for monitoring, and launch it.

JK: Right. Well, as you were saying, on April 3, 1991, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 687. Was the mandate in 687 clear for the eventual functioning of UNSCOM? So let's start with that part of the question.

RE: Yes, the mandate is very clear, surprisingly clear. It stated simply, and I paraphrase, that the chemical and biological and nuclear weapons should be identified and destroyed. In addition, it stated that related components and material should also be destroyed, as well as related production capabilities. Concerning missiles, it was a special arrangement, and there the mandate was a little unclear. It said that missiles with a range above 150 kilometers should be accounted for and destroyed, and also production capabilities for such missiles, but it differed from the other three WMDs (weapons of mass destruction), in the sense that WMD research and development were prohibited, but research and development of missiles were not prohibited. I don't know the reason for that, but I think it was the result of a compromise among the Security Council members. It also meant that Iraq was free to produce, and is free to produce, and develop missiles with a shorter range than 150 kilometers. This created insecurity, because a missile can be produced, say, in the 100 kilometer range, but the range is decided by two things: by the size of the rocket and the weight of the warhead. And, if you had a conventional explosive, it's quite heavy, because otherwise it will be very little bang for a very costly delivery system. It is therefore meaningless to build a warhead with a light explosive, it has to be a heavier than that. And then, in the hundred-kilometer range, it's effective. A

nuclear device would also be very heavy, and requires a major missile for delivery. We learned, however, if you filled a warhead with gas (chemical or biological), which by definition is light, then you could make a very light warhead. A 100 kilometers-range normal missile could with a very light load (a gas-filled warhead), reach much further.

JK: Because you are talking about the range of the missiles, why was there a particular cut-off? Was there a range in which they did not want Iraq to reach?

RE: Yes. In the 150-kilometer range, the normal SCUD, which Iraq had acquired from the Soviet Union, had ranges of two to three hundred kilometers, and Iraq modified them to even longer ranges, which made them effective against, say, Tehran in the Iraq-Iran war. These missiles could be used against Saudi Arabia, against Israel. So, that was the cut-off to prevent regional warfare. But I think the consensus, I should not say consensus – the sentiments in the Council were that Iraq should be allowed to keep a conventional force. It was not the meaning of the resolution, as I understand it, to destroy Iraq's capability as a normal state, to defend its borders, to carry out warfare in defense. The idea was just to prevent Iraq from terrorizing the region, and not work as a regional power. But it should be capable of defending itself.

JK: How was this Resolution 687 different from other UN resolutions?

RE: It covered many other aspects obviously. The core element was, for sure, the matter of the weapons, but Resolution 687 was a cease-fire resolution and it has a very interesting provision, namely that it states in one paragraph that Iraq is obliged to accept

the resolution. It's a Chapter VII resolution. Iraq as a member of the United Nations is bound by that resolution, of course, because of its UN membership. But it was added above that, another layer on the cake, namely that Iraq has to accept formally that resolution. And so did Iraq, in the form of notification to the Security Council—I don't remember if it was to the Secretary-General or to the President of the Security Council. But, that was a formal notification. Resolution 687 stated Iraq's formal acceptance would constitute a cease-fire between the coalition supporting Kuwait, and Iraq. So, in addition to being a sort of mandatory Security Council obligation, it established a contractual relationship, which was, I think, a very good element. But it also meant something quite interesting. It made it more difficult for the Security Council to change the rules of the resolution as it had become quasi-contractual as a cease-fire provision.

JK: What kind of contractual relationship?

RE: Because Iraq stated in its notification: "We accept this resolution." My understanding is that this acceptance made the provisions of Resolution 687 legally binding to both Iraq and the coalition. This is something which has been agreed upon, not only dictated—it has that layer under Chapter VII, everyone is bound—but this addition was to constitute a sort of agreement. Iraq accepted this, and that constitutes a cease-fire. This is important when you come to today's history, the crisis we have now. If a material breach of the cease-fire occurs, the cease-fire is no longer valid, it's broken. If there is no cease-fire, new acts of war can legally be undertaken. That's why this construction in 1991 made it possible to attack Iraq because of its violation of Resolution 687; it's therefore different from all other resolutions. The Council sometimes takes the

liberty to interpret its own resolutions, and in this case it makes it a little more tricky because it is not a pure resolution; it has an element of contract in this exceptional case. Then, of course, materially, Resolution 687 contains certain classical elements for a cease-fire: exchange of prisoners, return of stolen property, compensation, accounting for missing persons, and also later on, regulation of the boundary between Iraq and Kuwait. So, it is a very rich resolution, a major, complex resolution.

The resolution also contains two very, very important provisions that I have forgotten to mention. It is what we call the "constitution of the sanctions." As you recall, Iraq attacked Kuwait on the 2nd of August of 1990. A few days after, the Security Council passed a resolution containing two main elements, the prohibition to import from Iraq, in other words the oil embargo, and the prohibition to export to Iraq. The second contained the reservation for food and medicine, which was allowed; there was never a prohibition on that. So, what the Council did in the cease-fire resolution, it added the prolongation of the sanctions, and it had two paragraphs, Paragraphs 21 and 22. These are important to understand.

Paragraph 22, to take that one, is the most disputed paragraph. It states, and I paraphrase, that when the Security Council agrees that Iraq has fulfilled its obligations under the weapons part of the resolution, which involve sanctions, then the prohibition against imports from Iraq shall no longer be enforced. So, it's an automatic link *if* it is shown to the Council's satisfaction that the weapons are accounted for and the system for monitoring is in place, the two tasks which I'd mentioned. Then, technically the oil embargo should be lifted. It's not even a matter of asking for a new decision.

The other paragraph, Paragraph 21, deals with exports to Iraq. As I said, there is the prohibition on exporting items to Iraq, with the exception of food and medicine,

which are free of sanctions. Paragraph 21 talks more loosely about how the export prohibition should be lifted. It states that sanctions—I am not talking about the oil export now, but the sanction on the export to Iraq—sanctions should be eased or lifted in the light of the promises and practices of Iraq. So it gives room for a more subjective, political assessment. Paragraph 22 is rather detailed, has clear language; and paragraph 21 is, I think, designed to give room for freer interpretation. Iraq could of course not import much of anything; the sanctions became very effective for the simple reason that Iraq did not have the funds to pay for anything. It had large debts. It attacked Kuwait to get money to pay its debts, which was a bad miscalculation.

The political discussion has come to focus on this paragraph 22, and you will see many statements from Iraqi officials where they refer to paragraph 22. Paragraph 22 became the carrot to be used by the Commission, saying "Only if you behave, you will get all your money through the lifting of the oil embargo." I used that many times in order to compel Iraq to give up freely its WMDs. That is a very special resolution. So that is the answer to your question.

JK: Yes. Well, I'm glad you went into that because I had felt that it was a particularly unique resolution. How would you describe the authority that UNSCOM was given?

RE: The resolution just tasked the Secretary-General to prepare a commission to carry out this job. The Commission was also tasked to support and assist the Director General of the IAEA to carry out the nuclear weapons part of the mandate. So, the Secretary-General, at that time Pérez de Cuéllar, together, of course, with the leading members of the Security Council, outlined a commission that should be led by the Executive

Chairman, which was a very important provision. It was not an ordinary chairman in the UN lingo. It was a person who has to negotiate an agreement between the several participants. Making the head of the Commission the Executive Chairman made it clear that the operations of the Commission were to be decided on in an executive form and not in the negotiating form. The powers were given to the Executive Chairman. The Commission's job was simply to supervise the implementation of the weapons part of the cease-fire Resolution 687; Iraq should declare all its holdings that were prohibited, which we asked it to identify, and the Commission should ratify the correctness of these, and then supervise the destruction of these prohibited weapons. That was one task.

The other was to put these long-term limits on the system and to work out a system for controlling Iraq's capabilities and see to it Iraq didn't acquire the weapons again. It would be stupid to take out their weapons and then allow Iraq to acquire them again. So that was the second task.

JK: How did UNSCOM operate in relationship to the IAEA?

RE: It is interesting that the resolution doesn't give the task to the IAEA, as such. It states that it is the Director General of the IAEA who is tasked. Fundamentally, his job was to supervise, and to receive Iraq's declaration on its nuclear weapons capabilities in the same way that UNSCOM did. Then to verify the correctness, supervise the destruction of the prohibited weapons, and establish a monitoring system. But, first of all, why the Director General and not the IAEA as such. In every-day language, you would always say "the IAEA" and not the Director General of the IAEA. But it was clear that the Security Council, did not like the idea of letting the IAEA's institutions do this,

because then you will go contrary to the resolution's language as regards the Special Commission, with its Executive Chairman. The Security Council didn't want the Governing Board of IAEA, or the General Conference, to start going in there and negotiating various elements. What the Council wanted to do was to use the technical skills and experiences in the Agency, of the organization, but they didn't want its political governance to have any influence, that's why they did this arrangement. The IAEA was given the main responsibility for the nuclear weapons capabilities in Iraq.

The Commission was given the task to assist and cooperate with the IAEA, well, with the Director General but from now on I'll call it the IAEA, and it was more specifically defined, for instance, the most important provision in this context between the two organizations was that the Commission was tasked—well, the Executive Chairman was the only person—to designate locations not declared by Iraq for inspections. To designate sites of inspections, sites which had not been declared by Iraq. So, in very simple terms, the responsibility for what Iraq declared under the resolution, was the IAEA's job. But regarding the other category, namely locations which Iraq did *not* declare, suspect locations, in other words, it was for the Commission's chairman *alone* to decide which searches were to be undertaken. Normally, the Action Team of the IAEA carried out the actual inspection of the designated site if it was related to nuclear weapons. The reason behind this construction was to protect the IAEA from the tough political confrontations: secret activities, the hidden lies. It was up to UNSCOM to take on this confrontational part of the mandate. The Security Council didn't want to drag the IAEA into some kind of political controversy.

JK: Well, hadn't Iraq been a member of IAEA, and hadn't there been IAEA inspections?

RE: Iraq *is* a member, has been a member. Iraq has signed and ratified the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is interesting to see that Iraq acted totally contrary to its obligations under the treaty. It's one of the most gross and reckless violations of international law that I've ever experienced: signing a treaty, ratifying it, and then acting contrary to it. You have signed saying, "We will not acquire nuclear weapons; we are fighting against the proliferation of nuclear weapons." Iraq signed that convention, and then embarked upon a big nuclear weapons program. The signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty was obviously a trick by Iraq to squelch any suspicion of its nuclear weapons program.

JK: So, the IAEA had been conducting inspections on declared sites prior to the Gulf War. Why were they unable to uncover that Saddam Hussein had a nuclear weapons program?

RE: I think you said it in the question, I mean, the 'declared sites.' The IAEA inspected Iraq in the context of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the safeguard arrangements that are linked to that treaty. So, their inspectors went regularly, and regularly means a couple of times per year to visit the declared reactors and the declared facilities, nuclear facilities, taking samples and counting the amount of fissionable material there and the amount of nuclear material as good bookkeepers, but they were not

tasked to investigate something outside of the declared areas. They had no chance to detect anything.

JK: Did they suspect? Was there any evidence that material was missing?

RE: No. I'm afraid to say that the IAEA reporting gave high marks to Iraq. One should be very skeptical about results like that. Normally there are shortcomings because of sloppiness, but here was a perfect reporting!

JK: It was too perfect!

RE: So, one should be suspicious.

JK: What was your relationship with the IAEA's Director General Hans Blix Isn't he also Swedish?

RE: We are good friends, since long before 1991, and our families are friends. It was not necessarily, in the beginning of the operations an easy professional relation. I think it was partly because of different cultures: the IAEA's Director General is one of the leading international lawyers, highly respected. So his was a very renowned name in international law circles, highly respected. In the mind of the IAEA, the problems were two-fold: first it was, of course, that the IAEA became threatened, as such, because of its short-comings in Iraq, because suddenly international attention was brought to the safeguard system, saying it doesn't function since Iraq could produce nuclear weapons

without being found out. Was it the fault of the organ, of the agency responsible for supervising? Was it totally inept? Of course, that wasn't the case. But that was the debate. So, the organization came under severe scrutiny, even with ideas of radically limiting the organization's responsibilities by building an alternative institution. The Director General had a problem being both the executive under the cease-fire and the leader of a big and significant administration. That is my guess; he had a great responsibility to protect the future of the IAEA. That meant that the IAEA wanted to play down its shortcomings. It became a complicated agenda to handle for Blix. That was one thing.

The other was the legal aspect, in a sense. I think it is very difficult to set up. Of course, the Director General didn't operate alone, obviously, it took a team. He established a special team inside, called the action group, or action team, responsible for Iraq, composed of inspectors, specialists, some taken from Agency personnel and some from elsewhere. But still, that carried the IAEA culture, and the legal culture, from the Director General, namely 'innocent until proven guilty,' which was, I think, a very risky position to have when the inspection activities began. While the Commission under my direction had the opposite starting point—we said 'guilty until proven innocent.' I consider that this was the tenor of the resolution. Iraq had to show what it had, and we should verify that it had shown everything. These different cultures were, I wouldn't say, "clashing," but were in friction, because in the early stages, I think, no one in the IAEA believed, really, that Iraq had a nuclear weapons program. But, the shock came when their own inspection team ran into being blocked. They were shocked that they were being blocked to start with. Why was it they were being blocked? But they were guided by information that had been generated by the Commission, supported by certain

governments. I was the one to designate these non-declared sites and locations. The Agency had to send their teams together with the UNSCOM who went with the Agency to the sites. Then we detected components for the production of nuclear weapons and, of course, there was a lot of heartache before the IAEA would accept that there indeed was a nuclear weapons program in Iraq. It created quite a tension inside the organization. Naturally it created a desire to protect the agency from criticism when it was proven in some significant way that there was a major nuclear weapons program.

JK: So once it was accepted, that there really was a major nuclear weapons program under way, did the relationship between UNSCOM and IAEA then become easier?

RE: Gradually, gradually. UNSCOM insisted, how should we say, on the prerogative of identifying hidden activities. It was still, like, in a sense, putting the agency under a certain control. It was the Commission that identified the prohibited items. It developed with time a *modus operandi* that the IAEA analysts could suspect certain non-declared locations, and they then turned to me to ask for a designation which I gave as a matter of course, and so that loosened things up. The IAEA would ask for a designation of a site and if we responded by designating the site. There could be some cases where we didn't designate a site because it could have been linked to other activities by the Commission, so we didn't want to disclose that and go in there, so to say, prematurely to a site. It was a working system and it was important that the key decisions were in one hand and not doubled. Thus the decisions on the inspection of non-declared sites which constituted the secret part of Iraq's programs, were in the hand of the Commission. That was very important.

JK: Now, eventually we'll get to other things, but I'm still asking questions on the structural relationships of the different entities. So, I wanted to ask you also about UNSCOM's relationship with the Security Council during the time of your tenure.

RE: The relationship with the Security Council was established very quickly in the form that the Council, at my proposal, was to receive regular reports. In the beginning, we sent four formal reports a year.

JK: This was a part of a proposal that you had worked out?

RE: Well, that was worked out like that, yes. In the summer of 1991, after Iraq had blocked the inspectors, the Council adopted a very angry resolution, resolution 707, which set down the reporting obligations. There was also another special resolution, which outlined the reporting obligations, but it had no other substance. It meant that every October and every April, a six-monthly report was issued on the first task, namely search and destroy. And then, there were the June and December reports, which also were six-monthly reports, on the monitoring and how to get the monitoring system operational. In other words, one set of reports addressed the search for old weapons and one set addressed the prevention of the acquisition of new weapons. So these were the four.

JK: That makes sense.

RE: The first time we were blocked, that was an IAEA team led by David Kay. And when he was blocked, he turned for instructions to me because I was the one who had tasked his team. I was headquartered in New York. I took the case to the Council. That meant calling the President of the Council for the month, waking him up early in the morning; we were waking up the Permanent Members, so when it was a dramatic situation like that, normally it happened at two or three o'clock in the morning NewYork time. I let them sometimes sleep until five or six, and then asked them for action, to react. We couldn't shoot our way in to the blocked facilities in Baghdad, so we had to get the political support of the Council. So, the Council then, in the beginning, adopted a formula they still use: issued a statement condemning Iraq's action and asked the Executive Chairman to go to Baghdad and present the Council's position, and report back. So that was the formula which was adopted early on.

From thence on, I had the role that when the new President came in every month on the Council, the first working day I had a session with him, and briefed him about our operations and some of our secrets, like the President of the United States who comes in every fourth year. I had to give the Council President the sense of what could happen this month, and to establish a personal rapport with him. It was important because these are sensitive issues and if you only talk to those who are most enthusiastic, the United States or the U.K., or with the Russians, the permanent members, you will create a sense of dismay among the rank-and-file of the ten others who are not Permanent Members and who may feel they are not part of the decision making process. For me, it was therefore important to establish the principle of briefing the President. When we had a crisis, I always made the point, first, to go to the President of the Council, even if it was a country with very little experience. And then, of course, I talked to the Permanent Members

about the situation. These were secretive events, but the president was put on the spot. He had to make up his mind what to do with the information. I advised him, and then I had fulfilled my responsibility towards the Council. The President probably contacted the major powers on the Council. I couldn't spend time talking to the fifteen individually, giving every detail, but focused upon giving the necessary briefing to the President. The further dissemination of the information was up to him. The Presidents reacted very differently. Some made the judgment that they should keep the information to themselves for the time being and wait for a formal request from me. I did not always make a formal request. I had to assess the situation. Or if they were very nervous they could convene the Council immediately. So every president in their own way handled differently the question of informing the members. I was a little nasty about keeping the president informed.

JK: Why would you say that?

RE: Because, it always put him into a little fix, I think.

JK: In general, was the Council responsive?

RE: Yes.

JK: Did you feel that if you went to them they would respond?

RE: Well, it was excellent; I mean it reacted very well. Of course my friend Tom Pickering, who was the US ambassador in 1991 was an enthusiastic supporter, in the sense that he went far above and beyond his duties to help us. Quite often I was sitting on the thirtieth floor and then later on the thirty-first floor of the UN Secretariat building, and in the breaks of the Security Council meetings maybe on other issues like Somalia or Rwanda, he took the elevator up and came into my room to share the latest news. I almost always had some new things to tell him. So, he kept himself well informed, and that helped us. I tried to keep all members similarly informed but there was a limit to how much one could reach each and every person.

This approach had a down side among other members in the Council, because they were wondering, "Why is Pickering so well informed?" "Why is he privileged?" And then I had to tell them, "Because he is coming to my office on his own and keeping himself informed – you can't expect me to knock on your door all the time and disturb you during meetings of the Council, or attack you in the halls. I have a full job myself."

[end of side #1]

[side #2]

JK: We were talking about your relationship with the Security Council, so you felt fairly satisfied that they put it as a high priority.

RE: Yes. There was a great deal of attention given to our work, especially when there was a crisis. We had a practice of routinely talking when there was no crisis – two cycles of six months. It worked very nicely and smoothly, up until the summer of 1992 when

the US changed its leadership with Ambassador Perkins coming to the UN. The Commission ran into the Ministry of Agriculture [in Iraq]. We had identified through analytical work that a building in the center of Baghdad was used by Iraq to hide weapons-related documents. We had, a full year before, the sensational find in September of another ministerial location within Iraq, which had been part of the nuclear program. This had been a major breakthrough for us. But we felt that in the Ministry building there were missile parts and documents relating to certain WMD programs. So our team went Monday and it was blocked. We then established a siege of the building. We put our team members to watch at both the front and back so we could control the movements in and out of that building.

I went to the Security Council the day after. I presented the problem to a closed session of the Council. Cape Verde was the President for the month. He was very much in the circle, politically, with the Third World delegations who shared the impression that UNSCOM was plotting against Iraq. But he was also a lawyer, so I could put him on the spot and he prepared a tough statement by the Security Council to warn Iraq, and it contained a draft that he and I worked out before the meeting. It stated that this was a serious event and could have serious consequences. It was a violation of Iraq's obligation to Resolution 687.

When the meeting started, the American delegate, Ambassador Perkins, raised his hand and said that maybe we shouldn't say "serious consequences" – we condemn, we criticize Iraq, but we don't say "serious consequences." I was surprised because I had expected a hard line from the US. The statement was issued in the modified version, criticizing Iraq of course, but those who knew what had happened in the closed meeting knew that the US had taken the lead to soften it. If you had seen the two texts, the

President's statement and the actual outcome, you would have understood that here was a problem, even more so if you learned that it had been the US, not Russia or China, who had been intervening to soften the language. Of course, if Iraq had known that, then this threat would not have been especially alarming.

Not surprisingly, we came into a situation where Iraq didn't budge. They continued to refuse us access. I decided to travel to Baghdad, but I had no special mandate. What could I do? I decided to visit our team at the Ministry. I had to go around enormous pressure, violent demonstrations against the inspectors. It was summer so they were sitting in these cars with a high sun, burning them, and the morale was definitely sinking among our people. What should we do? Just sit there, day out, day in, for twenty-four hours a day? Terrible job. They were professional scientists, not security guards or security company guards you see outside doors.

JK: Actually, as long as you are talking about this event, perhaps we should just explain a little bit more about the event. I mean, we are going to do some more of the other events later but we are already into this one. Where were they, and what was the issue? Were they not allowed to leave the parking lot?

RE: No, that was another one. In this case we had locked in Iraq. The parking lot is another event, when we were locked in. Here, we locked in Iraq at the Ministry building, with two doors, one front and one back; we were watching that no major items were brought in or out of the building. We had a siege. We laid a siege on the building. So, I went there and talked with Tariq Aziz, and then he told me—and this is interesting. He said, "You see, we know every word which is spoken in the closed session of the Security

Council." – which was interesting information to me – "We know every word which has been spoken, and we know that the United States has said that there should be no 'serious consequences.' Why do you think we should let you in?" That was interesting information to me. I was shocked, and I understood that we had no chance to prevail in that confrontation – but if we stepped down it would be a terrible setback to the Commission and our credibility. So I was in a real dilemma. When I returned to New York I was concerned. I didn't know what to do. I tried in vain to convince the Americans in New York, but then I decided to go to the White House. I went to see Brent Scowcroft . I told Scowcroft this story, and now we were at the end of August, it had been ten days after the Council's reaction. My first visit took a couple of days, then I went back again to try to do something.

JK: Were the inspectors still guarding the building?

RE: Yes, and the situation was terrible. We had big problems and the morale was low, and we shifted out inspectors and, you know, tried to relieve some of them. So, I told Scowcroft what happened in the Council almost three weeks ago. I said, "The US representative deleted the words 'serious consequences,'" and Scowcroft became very alert and said "Who instructed this? I had not heard about that." His assistant was blushing red and said, "I gave the instruction to delete the phrase ''serious consequences.'" And of course, that changed everything.

JK: But do you know why? What was the explanation for why that had happened?

RE: Well, the US administration was tired. As you know, we had already had this parking lot incident. They were not ready for another serious confrontation. But this is significant, this event, because it has a bearing upon today. The administration understood that when they blinked, and they really had been sleeping, not only blinking but also falling asleep, that would destroy the situation and the inspection team. Now they understand that if you allow Iraq to go, you lose momentum.

So, suddenly, they woke up and had to go back and reassess the situation. But, sadly and unfortunately, at that time, our inspectors were starting to be physically attacked with knives. There were really serious situations. So I had to order them to leave the Ministry buildings. It took a couple of days after the inspectors had withdrawn to their hotels before the Council reached agreement and came up with a threat of military action. This was a concrete threat because the US had woken up. But came too late. It was quite dramatic. The US prepared to attack and blow up the building. But attacking the building in the center of Baghdad would be really something extraordinary, and I was concerned about the continuation of the Commission's inspections. So, I had tense talks with al-Anbari who was still the Iraqi Ambassador in New York. The talks took place in my hotel room in Beekman Towers because we couldn't be in the UN buildings since all the press in the world was around. Everyone saw the war coming. We forget how enormously upset everything was at that time. So we had secret meetings at my hotel, and we linked up to Baghdad, talking to the Iraqi leadership by phone. In the end, the Iraqis caved in and permitted inspection of the Ministry building, but on one condition: that I came to Baghdad myself. I didn't mind, then, the delay, because our inspectors had been forced away from watching the building and it was clear that it had been cleansed of incriminating materials. But for the sake of it and to avoid the bombing, I went to

Baghdad. However, we were vindicated in the sense that we could then inspect the building and we didn't find anything. It was cleaned out completely.

JK: It was too perfect!

RE: Yes, there was absolutely nothing in the Ministry of Agriculture, there were no documents of any sort, no papers. It was funny to find a Ministry containing no documents at all. This anecdote gives in a nutshell the complexity, the need to react firmly and clearly. It tells about the bombing threat as a backing up for our inspections. This story contains so much of the whole complexity of the inspection work. But above all, it shows that when the Council is blinking, this has serious consequences for the implementation of its resolutions.

After that, we never experienced wavering, sometimes sagging maybe, but fundamentally the Council was very alert, leading up to January 1993. I think the US was contemplating military action even after, if there had been a new blockage. But then Iraq understood that there would still be risks associated with the Republican convention in August 1992 when President Bush's support started to fall. I believe there was a serious concern in the Republican circles that he was looked upon as not tough enough against Iraq. Therefore there was a strong preparedness to take tough action against Iraq there. It was tense, and I had intensive contacts with Scowcroft and others. Gallucci, who had been my deputy, was then head of political and military affairs in the State Department. He was my first deputy when we set up the Commission and he had moved to assistant secretary. Through the contacts with those two, we learned that the US had been close to military action. But Iraq avoided an outright confrontation with our inspectors during that

time period. Even a minor incident would probably have led to a major attack because it was so tense during that period.

However, during the fall of 1992 tension was building up and in January 1993, in the last days of the Bush administration, Iraq took the steps to block us. This happened when we had our inspectors in Bahrain, most of them, for rest and recuperation over the New Year period. They had to fly back in to Baghdad when made the pronouncement that: "We will not allow you to fly into the no-fly zone, we will shoot you down." I went to the Security Council immediately, and said, "This is a major blockage." The US was ready to take action immediately but other Permanent Members hesitated. However, Iraq immediately modified its stance and said, "If you fly, you may be shot down, maybe not intentionally, but unintentionally." Within hours I responded and said, "This is tantamount to a violation, a blockage," and then they sent back a message, "But our air defense will be so nervous that they will shoot at everything." I said, "This is still a blockage."

I must say, because this is history, I had a problem with the British and the French ambassadors who lost their nerve in that situation. They started to be critical of my actions as chairman, especially that I had rejected the responses by Iraq without consulting the Council. They wanted themselves, the Council, to be involved and discuss these counter-offers. Iraq followed up with a new proposal: "You can fly from Bahrain around the no-fly zone and go via Jordan and into Baghdad." That would have meant, for us, that we couldn't use our aircraft; we had fixed-wing aircraft, big transport airplanes. But they couldn't fly one day, then, they had to stay overnight and go back, which would severely undercut operational capability if we had to make these huge detours from Bahrain where our staging area was. So, I refused that. That lead to a serious dispute

between me and Paris and London, I mean the ambassadors Jean-Bernard Merimee and Sir David Hannay—I was not impressed by them actually. They wanted me to accept the Iraqi bidding. When I complained to Scowcroft, he said, "These guys should recognize instructions from their bosses." And then President Bush rang President Mitterand, woke him up at twelve o'clock at night, it was six o'clock here, and I understand that Scowcroft or Bush rang John Major, one of them rang Prime Minister Major, and then the two ambassadors were ordered to keep quiet. The day after, they silently, but quite angrily, had to accept my refusal of this offer from Baghdad. My refusal was submitted to Iraq after five or six hours of conversation with the President of the Council.

Iraq had exhausted its possibilities and there was a heavy attack on Iraq. It was the only time during my time that there was military action against Iraq, large-scale. We had, of course, these pinprick attacks, which were linked to the operations which were going on in the north, and we had a big attack in the summer of 1993 when President Clinton acted on the report of the assassination plot on President Bush. But that wasn't related to our mandate. Our mandate has been involved in major military action once, which was this one. And then it was a big attack, but limited to one target. It was actually a facility related to nuclear weapons production and was blown up. The Iraqi side had a meeting the day after the attack and decided the Commission team could fly as much as it would like. All blockages were ended, but only after the attack had taken place. This was a little difficult.

JK: You had mentioned Iraq and that Tariq Aziz had said to you that they knew what had been going on in the Security Council. How were they getting that information?

RE: I don't know. They could have because they always had someone as a sympathizer. Egypt was then on the Council and Egypt gave, I think gladly, information to Iraq after the sessions. After Egypt ended its tenure, it could have been another Arab country, perhaps Morocco. It showed how important it is to have a closed debate, given the closed room of Council members only. No formal notes are taken by the Secretariat from these closed sessions. But of course anyone can take his own notes. There are fifteen members and a number of Secretariat personnel. But anyhow the key is that reports of the argument had been carried out of the Council.

JK: That's amazing. Now, the next step in this whole relationship is, what was UNSCOM's relationship with the Secretary-General?

RE: With Pérez de Cuéllar—and that has to do with the individuals—with Pérez de Cuéllar it was excellent. I mean, he was formally the one who nominated me, after consulting with the Council. It is stated frequently, and I may have supported that, that it is the Council that nominates the Executive Chairman, but technically it isn't. Of course at least the Council should approve the Secretary General's selection, but it cannot take the initiative on that. But when we started off, it was a mix. I mean with Pérez de Cuéllar as Secretary-General and as an individual, he was sympathetic and helpful. With his enormous experience it was good for me to go and talk to him. I did the thinking, brought up the new ideas, but he gave me moral support. It was clear however in the UN Secretariat context that we were not particularly liked. They didn't like me and they didn't like Gallucci.

JK: Why is that?

RE: I think that the executive and operational character of the Commission was totally foreign to the UN system. Everything should be filtered up to the Secretary-General, and with this league of various advisors with all their own agendas including self-interest, unfortunately including money, resources, rooms, everything and all sorts. And they made hell for us. I mean there was a really, really, negative attitude from the whole system, with the exception of Pérez de Cuéllar, who understood. However, he was not a man with iron hands. He sent vaguely supporting sounds down, but I remember, we went to the then-legal counsel, a man who would later be a good friend of mine. He is no longer legal counsel. I wanted him to help me, to give me legal advice. When you set up an institution like that, you need someone with knowledge of how to do it.

JK: Who was that?

RE: Fleischhauer.

JK: Oh, yes, of course, Fleischhauer.

RE: I saw him the other day, in The Hague. He is very happy. But he told the story later on, in which he said, "To me came two characters." He said. "One was a cowboy with big boots and, you know, peculiar dress, and the other a Swedish pastor with white hair. And the pastor and the cowboy asked me to provide them with a top legal person. And of course I didn't help them." This is the story he told about our meeting. But, I

didn't know then that he saw me as a Swedish pastor. The cowboy was Gallucci, of course.

JK: And the cowboy was Gallucci.

RE: But I remember he said, "We'll take care of all your legal problems, you just write a memo and send it up to us and we will give you an answer." How can you write that? He needed to see it and to work with us because we had our own extremely complex problems which are the most legally complex issues facing the United Nations, including violence, war, I mean all the elements. So, but that was just typical – and to get space, we, of course, had to pay for all the space.

Secondly, I mean, we got no money from the UN. And the debt situation characterized my relationship with Pérez de Cuéllar.

JK: You got no money from the UN…

RE: No, he gave me money from his, I would say, pocket money, a couple of millions on *loan*, which I had to pay back. But Pérez de Cuéllar and I were agreement, in principle, that the financing of the operation had to be under the UN budget, because it was a sort of peacekeeping operation. But, the US blocked that. They blocked it saying there should be no financing through the UN. What happens if the Security Council begins a peacekeeping operation, it has to be financed, and that goes then to the General Assembly because there is a special budget committee, the ACABQ, the Advisory Board, and you know the structure of the UN so you know how it works. Pérez de Cuéllar and I

were in agreement. We really tried to work closely on this to finance it through the system, but the Americans said, "No." And then it became like that, so we had to raise money. To my surprise, my job there, in addition to being weapons specialist, I was now turning into an Arabist, specialist on the Middle East, and I had to add "fund-raiser" to the list. So, I became a fund-raiser to finance the Commission, to pay back the loan to the Secretary-General. You know, it was really, really tough.

JK: So, UNSCOM was supported through voluntary contributions?

RE: Yes. Plus, there was originally the Iraqi money, so-called "frozen assets," not unlimited, but governments were allowed to take frozen assets according to the Chapter VII resolutions.

JK: "allowed to?"

RE: Yes, because you have only private claims. If you have frozen, say, a hundred million dollars of Iraqi oil money in your bank, probably they have debts for three hundred million. The debtors don't accept that the government is taking their money because they claimed to get paid. Well, no government made use of that more than the United States, so it de-froze over the years totally two hundred million dollars, sixty million was released for us, which was not, far from it, enough. But anyhow, they gave us some breathing space, and we didn't get it in one go. I mean they had to squeeze us. Of course, the other amount was given to compensate the victims, and so on, but we got sixty.

So, I had to go to Saudi Arabia, to Kuwait, to Japan, Germany, to beg for money, beg for in-kind, beg for everything.

JK: I had no idea that was going on.

RE: I spent so much time on fund-raising. At one stage, we were down to two months' money when I signed, I remember, say, ten new six-month contracts with people, and I told my wife, "There were no banks." I was the only one. I was with my name putting the little house we have in Sweden and other little things up…

JK: … for collateral?

RE: … a sort of collateral, yes. My name was the only thing. I signed six-month contracts, because we couldn't stop because we had two months' money. It was scandalous. Pickering at that time told me: "We will never let you down. In the end, we will come in." But when we really came to them, we did not get any cash from the United States cash, its own money. Yes, we got the frozen money. But I was up at the Congress and at that time they were so supportive. Everyone said, "If the administration comes to ask for money, we will give it to you." But that is just talk. When it comes to reality, it is so difficult. It doesn't work.

I had assurances from people like Lee Hamilton, who was Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee and Senator Claiborne Pell, but of course there are many appropriations committees and all sorts of delays. However, after a while I started to appreciate this solution, in spite of the hardship, of course, for the chairman to get the

money. It created a freedom from the Secretary-General and the Secretariat. It didn't matter to us when Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was there, but when Boutros-Ghali came in, to have him to control it, and to decide how much resources you should have, would have seriously compromised our progress, given the operation, the structure, the type of personnel, geographical distribution in recruitment. Appropriate money always came loaded with conditions.

JK: So, ultimately the decision to keep the funding autonomous ended up being a good idea.

RE: It was a productive decision, for the strength of the Commission, its independence. And that's why UNSCOM didn't turn into something like one of the wishy-washy UN operations. Some are very good. In this case, it became a pure Security Council operation. The General Assembly and the membership at large had no influence on it. It operated only under the Council and its political influence.

JK: OK. So, with Boutros-Ghali, then as Secretary-General, an Egyptian, from the Middle East. What was his support of what you were doing?

RE: He has a quick mind and I admire him very much. I had good talks with him, but he just kept his hands off. That meant you didn't get any support either, of course. And we didn't get any support of the administrative staff. We still had to struggle for everything, to get just a room. These were bad working conditions. And we paid rent for the rooms. We had administrative personnel provided by the Secretariat. We paid their

salaries, of course, with money that I had to raise. So, it was no real love, and the system didn't love us. They didn't like the way we were approaching the things. They said, "Now Ekéus has been traveling up and down and now Ekéus is back with the bombing," etc. The language they used against us was unpleasant. So, I was disappointed with the way the Secretariat behaved. It takes a long time to get their trust. They are fundamentally UN loyalists, I mean in the extreme.

Boutros-Ghali himself was not at cross-purposes with us. He never acted against us, the Secretary-General. And he focused on the task of implementing the Food for Oil mechanism, which he did well. It took a lot of pressure off us. He sometimes helped us by putting pressure on his staff. Maybe I should mention that he often said that he had a very skeptical view about Iraq and especially about Saddam Hussein. He didn't believe they would comply or give in to us. He was probably right in his skepticism. Another fact is that when the Iraqis complained to the world, and to him, about UNSCOM and about me specifically, he never came back and put any pressure on us. So in a sense I had a very fair relationship with him. He made some moves in the beginning to get the sort of obligatory reporting to him through his system, which I refused. But then we established a voluntary system. I asked to see him regularly, even if nothing special was happening. If some major problem were coming up in a complicated operation, which could lead to Council action, I gave him a special briefing. But he wasn't terribly interested. So, it was good. We kept our distance. The relationship was independent.

JK: OK. All of this is extremely helpful to understand the dynamics, and of course all of this is still going on today, so it's important to understand.

RE: But it's a different Secretary-General now from then.

JK: Now, were you still serving when Kofi Annan came in?

RE: Oh, yes. I was serving until July.

JK: You were the Executive Chairman until July 1st, right?

RE: 1997.

JK: 1997. So, what was the difference in the change from Boutros-Ghali, then, to Kofi Annan?

RE: Well, it was, I think, a much more cordial relationship, a better understanding, it was a different ambience. There was better support for our modest requests for support of a material character, like getting increased floor area for instance.

[interrupted]

RE: … just to conclude the relationship with the new Secretary General, was that he and I together worked to get Richard Butler as my replacement. Of course, I had been aiming at him for a long time. I knew his time was ending as Ambassador of Australia to the UN. We were friends; we had worked together in Geneva. He was Australia's permanent representative to the Conference on Disarmament, so we became friends there

in the 1980s. We kept in touch over the years. We worked closely in the Canberra Commission. I had known his qualities, skills; I know that people maybe were somewhat more concerned about his personality, so I worked very closely with Kofi Annan to select Butler. Otherwise, I would probably have stayed, because I didn't want to leave the job without having a strong candidate for a replacement. On the other side, you know, you shouldn't over-stay your welcome.

JK: How many years were you there?

RE: Six – more than six years. Six and a half years. During the last two years, I was looking for a replacement. My family was fed up, and they begged me to leave. I felt it was time for me to go. I wanted to do it. I think we were successful. On the other side, you see people in all sorts of functions believing that they are indispensable. And if you start to believe you are indispensable, I mean, that's the first sign that you are no longer indispensable! So, I was very eager to hand it over. But I didn't want to leave without being replaced. The Commission was a creation almost of my own. We started with nothing, including knowledge of how to get the legal advice, how to get money, to get the whole big operation going, airplanes, everything. So, I didn't want to just let it collapse. I was anxious that there should be a good solid, person who could withstand the enormous political heat in the future.

JK: Perhaps this is a delicate question, and I don't know how much you want to say about it, but your two personalities are quite different, though. I mean, I know that I have met Richard Butler on various occasions. I think he is an extremely bright man…

RE: Yes, he is.

JK: … but you do have different personalities, and I mean, he was even asked about this in the press: "How will your more aggressive personality ever replace the more diplomatic character of Rolf Ekéus?" I don't know if you can comment on that.

RE: No, no. I didn't see the difference that much, maybe, but because I would say our relations were extraordinarily friendly. We never had any confrontations over the years. We worked on the same side on so many issues, the nuclear test ban especially. But, I felt what was more important was the character and the capability to withstand the pressure. Of course, one must be different; you shouldn't have a clone.

JK: You can't really have a clone.

RE: You should be changed. It's good. An organization, a company, anything, has to change. So, that was not my worry. My wish was to have a strong Commission and a technical mission after I left. But the ways to do it should be left to the next person.

JK: In your approach and what you have described, I mean, you did take a very strong stand in many cases. But it seemed as though you did it in a way that was low profile. Was that intentional?

RE: Actually, I think it was unnecessary to create a deadlock. First of all, the face-saving aspect we were very concerned about. Not to put anyone, especially not the Iraqis, unnecessarily in a confrontational position. Sometimes you had to use harsh language with Saddam. That's what he understands. It was a firm language, but still you should show respect, especially for the individuals, because that makes it easier for you. But equally delicate was continually dealing with the members of the Council, especially the Permanent Five. You had to be very, very careful and think through, "What is their real concern?" And try to avoid complicated episodes.

Of course I told you before about briefing the President of the Council, which was a policy I used to see to it that all the time the non-permanent members had a chance to be informed. Because if they saw that they were not listened to, they could react negatively, as critics and skeptics. So, you had to spend a lot of time on information dissemination. And that's why I traveled quite often to the capitals, not only to get money. There you had to be alert about their sensitivities and extremely cautious and supportive of their region and the other countries. But you had, of course, to be delicate in Paris, Moscow, London, and maybe especially with the Chinese, to listen carefully to what they were saying. That was, I would say, the diplomatic side of my profession. There were so many elements you had to deal with, give a lot of attention to, and never be arrogant, keep them informed, always be careful, explain, explain.

The second, of course, was the managerial, the heavy managerial demands.

JK: You had started out by saying in the beginning of the interview that it was envisioned that this would be a technical operation, that you would be overseeing the

technical inspection. Now it sounds as though it turned into as much a political job as well as the technical, and that was not envisioned.

RE: No, it wasn't. The idea came out nicely when Richard Butler replaced me, because I think he met Tariq Aziz on his first day at the office. Tariq Aziz was visiting New York. Richard told him, "Well, in my job I will not be political," which I felt was somewhat critical of me. "It will be a technical job," – and of course I smiled a little, and thought "Wait and see if the job is purely technical!" If you read the resolutions of the Security Council, you will see that they are silent on the political side. But the first time – and that was a couple of days after he took the office – and inspection team was blocked on the road to a facility it wanted to inspect, that was the end of the purely technical. When you have to make a decision how to handle such a situation, you have to raise it to a political level; you have to hold on to the principle that "We have the right to entrance." And as you can't use force yourself, you must find other ways and means to enter the facility. Only by political means can you get entrance. The solution to the problem ends up being political.

[end of side #2]