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UN INTERVIEW
Brian Urquhart
October 15, 1984
Interviewer: Leon Gordenker

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Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy
Suez ✓

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Q. This is an interview with Brian Urquhart on 15 October 1984 in New York. We are going to discuss the whole development of the Atoms for Peace Conferences and the International Atomic Energy Agency, its foundation and the discussions leading to it. You will recall that a new presidential administration took office in the United States in 1953, with President Eisenhower leading it. Eisenhower made a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 1953 in which he made a number of proposals intended to achieve arms control. One of those had to do with the possibility of sharing technical information in the field of using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Others had to do with arms control through verification and information. The United States and the Soviet Union thereafter negotiated about a conference on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and eventually the results of their negotiations were brought to the General Assembly, which then called for a conference that eventually met in Geneva in 1955. You were associated with this whole effort. Let me begin by asking you, Brian, how did you as a non-scientist come to have a role in a conference on the peaceful uses of atomic energy, especially a conference which was strongly portrayed as a scientific conference?

A. Well, even scientists need non-scientists to help them. Anyhow, I got associated with it because Hammarskjöld deputed the work on this to Ralph Bunche, whose chief assistant I then was. Initially we were, with Hammarskjöld, the secretaries of the Scientific Advisory Committee, probably the best committee this Organization has ever had, and certainly the most distinguished. The function of the Advisory Committee was to try to put together the programme of what promised even at the beginning to be an absolutely enormously complicated conference. The Advisory Committee started off extremely badly in full cold war gear. But Hammarskjöld, by managing to get rid of most of the political advisers on the

delegations, after a certain amount of very plain speaking, managed to get the extremely distinguished scientific members of the Committee to start talking to each other as scientists. That was a major achievement, especially between the Americans and the Russians, in the shape of Professor ^{I. Rabi} Raby(?) on the United States side, I. I. Raby ~~of~~ of Columbia, and Academician ^{SKOBELTSIN} Seebeltsin(?) on the Soviet side. They squared off to have the normal heavyweight cold war discussion on this, and Hammarskjöld, who was the chairman of this group, by a really masterly display of good chairmanship and intellectual grasp of the subject, completely derailed the cold war part of it and we had after that, for ever after, as long as those people remained in that Committee, one of the most constructive, most collegial and ~~must~~ ~~say~~ hard-working and ~~most~~ efficient committees I have ever attended. It was marvellous. The level of that Committee was extremely high. I mentioned Rabi ^(?) and ^{SKOBELTSIN} Seebeltsin(?). The British had Sir John Cockroft. The Canadians had W. B. Lewis(?), the French had Professor Perrin(?) and Bertrand Gold^{ch}mid^t(?) and the Indians had Homi Bhabha, who was a remarkable physicist and mathematician - an extraordinary man.

Q. He was chairman of the Committee?

A. He became the chairman of the conference. ~~And so on.~~ It was a very enjoyable group to work with. However, no group is ever capable really of administration, and it became very clear from the first meeting on that it was going to be a tremendous job to get this thing together between January and August 1955. So they appointed a secretary-general of the conference, Walt Whitman(?), who was Professor of Chemical Engineering at MIT. This was an absolutely inspired choice, because Walt was the most ~~extraordinarily~~ able, perfectly delightful, really dedicated, ostensibly rather simple-minded man, who in fact used this to conceal a

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very tough intellect. He put together a team of scientific secretaries who were going to be the secretaries of the various sessions, because it was split up into subjects - isotopes, health, energy, high-energy physics and so on. These were ~~again-ahsolutaly~~ remarkable young scientists from all over the place. We then set about trying to find out what papers were going to be submitted. Walt and I undertook a journey which started in the United States and Canada and we managed to get from those two countries a list of the papers they were going to submit, which were far beyond anything that anybody had imagined. Armed with these we went to Britain and France and got their lists and then we went to Moscow and discussed it with the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. After a bit they came up with again a spectacular list of papers. This was all very exciting stuff, because in those days nobody had ever declassified anything in this field, so it was an absolutely major scientific historic event. Having got all this stuff - I forget how many papers there were in the end; I believe it was about -

Q. About 1,500 in the first amount.

A. We had to try to organize it so that it could be presented in a relatively ~~credible~~ ^{manageable} way in a two-week conference. This was a ~~not~~ tremendous feat of organization, for which Whitman and the scientific secretaries really deserve all the credit. They did a fantastic job. We simply helped them on the political side, helped them with all of the political pitfalls ^l which you normally fall into in United Nations conferences, and if I say so myself I think we managed to avoid all of them. I even managed to persuade people not to have rules of procedure, which obviously would have wasted six months, and nobody ever missed them. We made rules by which the sessions all started on the minute and finished

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on the minute, and everybody was allotted an exact time for their presentation, of which they were informed in advance.

It was an extremely efficient conference. We had to rig up a very complicated system of public information for it, because most of the subjects were unintelligible to the layman anyway, ^{but} ~~and~~ with a little bit of help from outside and with the scientific secretaries I think we did as good a job as was possible in explaining the meaning of all this stuff to the press. It was a very highly publicized conference. We also had to organize an exhibition, incidentally, because the main nuclear Powers wished to exhibit stuff. The most spectacular exhibit was an American swimming pool reactor, which was installed in the grounds of the Palais des Nations and caused a great deal of "ooing" and "aaing", because if you looked into its depths you could see the old reactor core glowing. I met that reactor again about six years later, because after the conference, I think very unwisely, the Government of the United States gave it to the University of ^{Congolese} ~~Levanium~~ in the Congo, in Leopoldville. They ^{needed} a reactor like a hole in the head but, nonetheless, there it was, and when we had all the trouble in the Congo in 1960 one of our main concerns was what was going to happen to this potentially lethal machine. So we had to depute a great number of troops to try to prevent people from getting into it. But that is a sideline.

Q. Let me go back to some of the things you have been saying and question you just a bit further about it. Hammarskjöld, you say took a very important role in this; he took a real share in leading it. Why did he do this?

A. ~~Well~~ ^{for} I think a number of reasons. In the first place, Hammarskjöld was one of those enviable people who could master almost any subject intellectually

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even if he did not understand anything about it to begin with. In the second place, he thought it was extremely important not only scientifically but also politically, as the first real break on the nuclear front in the cold war, which indeed it was. He understood this right from the outset. He also became fascinated, as we all did, by the discipline of the scientific and especially the nuclear scientific world, and he did think that it was an absolutely major matter of really historic importance, and I think he was right about this. The only trouble was that, like so many events in United Nations history, when we have a success it gets ~~totally~~ overdone, and there was a great deal of very windy - as I now see - stuff going on, even among the scientists. For example, the sort of general theme being put around on the energy side was that nuclear energy would shortly be ~~completely replacing to all intents and purposes~~ on a large scale fossil fuels ~~and things like that~~, like oil and coal. It was billed as being much easier than it actually was, and there was a great deal of talk also about fusion - that is, harnessing for peaceful purposes the hydrogen bomb, which has never been anywhere near being done as far as I know. There was a mood of very infectious optimism, which I think did cause quite a lot of confusion. I noticed that young men at that time were all rushing into any branches of the nuclear energy business they could get into. When one thinks what has happened now, perhaps we rather overdid it.

~~I think~~ On the political side it was extremely important, because both the American and Soviet delegations, let alone the British, the French and the Canadians, to the conference were extremely distinguished, and to see these immensely distinguished figures together in this international United Nations framework ~~I think~~ psychologically was very important.

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Q. Do you think it had anything to do with arms control?

A. There again, I think there was a lot of very woolly thinking about all this, and when we get to the Atomic Energy Agency it really has more relevance than the conference to that, because the conference specifically was nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. It was nothing to do with weapons. The Agency made a kind of obeisance to the disarmament business, which in my view was a fraud, but I didn't realize it then. I only realized it as we were setting the thing up, but we can come to that later. This really was very strictly on the peaceful uses side.

Q. This does touch on another question that I wanted to ask you - that is, the question of the relationship between what you were doing in the conference and the eventual organization of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The resolution of the General Assembly implies that this was a parallel effort and then promptly separates the two efforts, but the implication was there and the timing was there, and the original impetus -

A. Of course, the Agency took another year before we even got to the conference on the Statute, which took place here, as I remember, in September 1956. Then, as far as I was concerned, the Suez crisis intervened, and after that was over we got around to trying to set up the Agency.

Q. Did you have substantial work to do in that, too - in setting up the IAEA?

A. Yes, I was the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission. But I was delayed in getting there, because of the Suez crisis, because I was very much involved in the setting up of the first United Nations

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Emergency Force, being, I think, the only person on the 38th floor who had any military experience.

Q. We will get to that later.

A. I think they were really two separate things. The idea of the Agency was partly that, ~~as it were~~, the capital that would be accrued by the enormous declassification of knowledge would ~~than be kind of~~ digested in the Agency's assistance programmes and in its isotope programme and things like that. But then, of course, the Agency was supposed to have to do with safeguards on reactors, and it was always said by the optimistic that this was the thin end of the wedge for control and inspection of nuclear weapons. In fact, people like Philip Noel-Baker were always writing indignant letters to me and others saying "You must go at once for the most important thing. You must insist the Agency does safeguards on Soviet and American nuclear plants." Well, dream on. That was not at all what the Americans or the Soviet Union had in mind. On the contrary, those existing facilities were specifically excluded from the Agency's safeguards programme, which was designed for countries acquiring a nuclear potential after the Agency had been set up. So to some extent it was based on a public confidence trick, perhaps. I for that reason never wanted to stay with the Agency, because it seemed to me that having sited it in Vienna, a back water if ever there was one, and having deliberately cut off ^{it from} what, ~~certainly~~ in the public mind at any rate, would have been the most important thing it could do, it was something of a secondary mechanism, to put it mildly. I am sorry to say that I think that is true until this day. I mean, you don't really hear the nuclear Powers constantly proclaiming their dedication to the principles in the Agency's statutes.

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Q. When did it dawn on you that this was the situation of IAEA, and when did your chiefs begin to perceive it?

A. It began to dawn on me, I must say - I hadn't really thought very much about it, but I had had a lot to do with the conference on the statute, being the kind of co-ordinator of getting the whole thing together, which went very well - but as soon as we began to set up shop in Vienna and look into what sort of people we would want for the safeguards section and things like that, it became very clear to me that our job was an extremely restrictive^{ed} one. In fact, the Agency was in existence for a whole year before any country asked for Agency safeguards, when Japan did. So I think it became very clear as we were setting it up.

Q. Why was it that you couldn't get some feedback of enthusiasm of the sort that was in the original conference to go into the Agency? To put the question another way, how did that separation, that sharp separation occur?

A. I think one of the troubles was that at the conference people's enthusiasm was somewhat exhausted by their ~~euphoric~~ euphoria over the conference. Then the moment you start to set up a United Nations agency all sorts of politics always enter in. There was all of this horse trading about where the thing would be sited. I must say, fond as I am of Vienna, for the headquarters of a key world scientific body it does not necessarily spring to mind as the most suitable place. If it had not been there it would have been put somewhere else equally unsuitable, no doubt. Then there was endless politicking about the board of governors, about who should be chairman of the first conference of the Agency, and the worst thing of all was the politicking about who should be the first director-general, in which there was a major confrontation between the United

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States and the Soviet Union, which Bunche was finally called in from New York to help to solve, and indeed did eventually. It became Sterling Cole^f, who was a somewhat obscure American Congressman, not exactly the kind of dauntless leader of a great new scientific enterprise or any other kind of enterprise, come to that. I must say I got fed up. Having worked my head off trying to get the thing going, it seemed to me it would be nice to get back to New York and get back into the mainstream again. I didn't see any point in staying there.

Q. Supposing we go back for a minute to the original conference. We have developed a very nice contrast here: IAEA highly political, the usual problems of who is going to represent what, who is in on it, and here is the conference about which Hammarskjöld said in a press conference one time that this was not non-political but had political implications - it had implications that went into political issues. Do you agree with that kind of assessment?

A. Well, I think everything has political implications. I mean, food has political implications, so why would not nuclear energy or nuclear science? I think the difference is that due to a tremendous effort by Hamm^arskjöld and the fact that he got behind him the most distinguished scientists of the main countries it was possible to de-politicize the conference ^{and free it from} ~~in terms of~~ the kind of absolutely nitpicking nonsense that we waste most of our time on here. We just didn't have it; we didn't have arguments over posts; we didn't have arguments over procedure; we never wasted any time on that. That was very largely due to Hammarskjöld and Walt Whitman and, to a lesser extent, people like me. You couldn't keep that up in a political institution. The conference was a single phenomenon. Well, there was a second one, because it was so successful; there was another in 1958, which was twice as big and nothing like as exciting.

Q. Why did you have a 1958 Conference?

A. Because nobody could leave well alone. The moment you have a success everybody wants to repeat it, and of course it is interesting that the 1958 Conference was organized by the United Nations. It wasn't organized by the Agency, much to the annoyance of the people in the Agency, because the Governments didn't want it to be; they wanted it to be organized by the central political body, which gives one a little bit of a hint as to what Governments really felt about the Agency. I think it was a great shame and I think it was wrong.

Q. Was the 1958 Conference a contrast with the earlier Conference?

A. No, it was beautifully organized, I need hardly say.

Q. Was it a continuation?

A. It was a continuation and an enormous amount of stuff again was presented - nothing quite as new as in the 1955 Conference. It went very well, but it wasn't the kind of turning point that the 1955 one was.

Q. Let me ask what may be a question without an answer: Is it your impression at all that the ball got away from the Soviet Union and the United States in this and came under the control of the scientists, much to their astonishment?

A. Well, one can't take a thing out of the context of the period. The year 1955 was a period of détente. Stalin had died two years before. There was an armistice in Korea. There was very a strong new administration in the United States. It was ^{the} a period of, I think it was called, the Camp David spirit in those days. I don't know which particular Camp David that was. Anyway, there it was. There was a lot of coming and going and certainly the scientists were very powerful and extremely anxious to get out. They had all been sealed up in these hermetically

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sealed security systems for so long, and to meet their old buddies again was just great. They hadn't (met really) effectively since before the war, if then, so I think there was a great momentum developed, though I have no doubt that what was declassified was rigidly controlled. I don't think anybody came rushing out and said things they were not supposed to say.

Q. Although at the time I remember very clearly the impression was given in the press that in fact much of the old secrecy had been abandoned.

A. Nobody got up and gave a sort of do-it-yourself lecture on how to make the H-bomb or anything like that. It was a very controlled series of categories, although it wasn't any less important for that. I think it was very important.

Q. How important was it? That is the last question I want to put to you on this subject. Was there a long-term effect? Did it just dribble away?

A. I am ashamed to say that I think the Conference - I now think; I didn't think so then, because I was younger and much more naive - but I now think that the Conference, like the Agency, was to some extent a confidence trick of the nuclear Powers. They had no intention of lowering their guard on weapons, which was at that time far and away a larger proportion of the use of nuclear material, and probably still are, than the peaceful side. They were not even mentioned; they were kept out. To some extent I think it did distract attention from the fact that nuclear stockpiles were still going on growing and nobody had really tackled the key question, which was how you get rid of nuclear weapons, not how you learn to use isotopes in medicine or something like that.

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I don't think Eisenhower intended to do that. I think Eisenhower probably genuinely intended that this would be the beginning of a new phase in the nuclear age, where by getting people together on the peaceful uses you would diminish gradually the military uses. It didn't work out that way at all.

Q. Did the co-operation on the peaceful level maintain itself at all?

A. I believe it still does, as far as I know, but it's a very small part of the picture. That's the trouble. I mean, I think if one were to go in for tonnages of nuclear material, radioactive materials, one would find that the tonnage employed in weapons is infinitely larger than what is used elsewhere.

Q. That is certainly true of plutonium.

I think my last question you have really by implication answered: was this an innovation in international co-operation? The answer would seem to be "Probably not".

A. Well, I think it was an innovation in one way, which didn't do us any harm. It was always said before this Conference that we could not handle a great technical conference, ~~and~~ ^{but} actually by the time they had finished all the scientists, including people from General Dynamics and places like that, said they had never seen anything like the United Nations; it was absolutely fantastic. We were all offered ~~enormously~~ well-paid jobs as Vice-Presidents of this and that all over the place, and I think most of us refused. But the fact of the matter was - I am not saying it is very important - but it did show that the United Nations was capable of running conferences which were not strictly political or diplomatic. That is something that has been used since. I would not say this was a tremendous ~~sort of~~ primary achievement, but it was something.

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Q. Now I am going to turn your attention to a set of events which are very complex, which began during the period that you were engaged in organizing the Atoms for Peace Conference - the whole question of the crisis in Suez, which came to an enormous peak in 1956 and led eventually to the establishment of what many authorities claim is a real innovation - that is, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, the first of them, and also led to something of a quieting of the situation in the Middle East. Simultaneously with this, of course, the crisis over the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary occurred, and it was an immensely complex affair. I am not going to try to get you in any sense to deal with the whole of it, because that is too big a job for this kind of an interview, and is probably something that could only be done in writing, but I would like you to recall, if you will, how you became part of the group that was working on the Suez crisis, how you perceived it when you started, what sort of expectations you had and how it began to develop. I think if you begin to talk along those lines more specific questions will also arise. I might just note before you do that by this time the Secretary-General had negotiated with China for the release of the American prisoners who had been left over from the Korean war and that by that time, therefore, his success in that regard had made him something of a star figure in international diplomacy.

A. Yes, that's true. Actually, Hammarskjöld had begun to make a very ^{impressive} considerable ~~amount~~ by this time. You mentioned the Chinese prisoners. There was also the Atomic Energy Conference and he had become - although nothing like the star he ultimately became - quite well known in the profession, at any rate. I think it is important to remember that in 1956 the armistice machinery in the Middle East, which is what regulated the situation on all the borders of Israel with her Arab neighbours -

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Of course, at the same time a completely different set of complications was arising in the Middle East, over John Foster Dulles ¹⁹⁵⁶ ~~the~~ sudden decision of Egypt to buy arms from Czechoslovakia because it could not get them from the United States, and that all culminated in the affair of the High Dam. The British, the Americans and the World Bank having promised they would finance the High Dam, to the tune of - I forget; it was quite a small sum of money, about \$240 million, but a colossal sum in those days - suddenly pulled the rug out from under Nasser. Nobody ~~ever~~ quite knows why. It was something, I think, to do with Dulles' missionary anti-communism and the fact that Nasser had recognized the Government in Peking early in 1956. The fact that the Israelis had done the same thing in 1951 did not appear to occur to Dulles as being terrible. ~~That process went through a very complicated series of steps, because~~ Nasser's reaction to this really fantastic slap in the eye - because they did not even tell him they were going to pull out from it; they told the press first - ^{was immediate and violent. G.V.} was a tremendous insult to the Egyptian President, and he ^{retaliated} ~~came back on that~~ by saying he was going to nationalize the Suez Canal, something that would have happened anyway eventually. The British, who had pulled their troops out from the Canal zone the year before, ~~I think~~ were ^{involved} ~~very heavily~~ ^{and} ~~into this, because~~ Eden had at last succeeded Churchill. This is a very complicated story, but it is necessary to go into it in order to explain the nonsense that took place thereafter. Eden had succeeded Churchill after years of waiting and had then pulled the troops out of the Canal Zone and had then been accused, ~~as always in all politics,~~ by the hawks on the right of being a weak Conservative Prime Minister, and he was absolutely fuming at this. He also blamed Nasser as being the primary cause of his humiliation, ^{Nasser} so that when ~~he~~ nationalized the Suez Canal after the High Dam fiasco Eden was keen to topple Nasser at any

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~~price~~ ^{interprise} price. In that he found willing allies in the French, who at that time were fighting in Algeria and who were very annoyed with the Egyptians for helping the Algerian rebels, as well, of course, as the Israelis who were extremely worried at the rise of Nasser as the great leader of the Arab world with, at least on paper, extremely radical views about what to do with Israel.

Hammarskjöld tried to negotiate the Canal business, and curiously enough ~~he~~ ^{he always} ~~paper~~ succeeded. He had a meeting here in New York of all the Foreign Ministers concerned - Fawziq ^{Dulles,} for Egypt, Selwyn Lloyd for the United Kingdom and I forget who the French Foreign Minister was. They negotiated a ten-point agreement which in fact ~~mixed~~ ^{reconciled} Egyptian sovereignty over the Canal, which was an undeniable fact, with the rights and interests of the users of the Canal. It was an extremely ingenious agreement. The French and British ^{ministers} then went home and were instantly confronted with a ~~series~~ ^{series} of events going in the other direction, namely, the secret agreement between the Israelis, the French and the British to rig up a war in the Middle East which would topple Nasser. That was going to take place in two phases. It was going to be an Israeli invasion of Sinai and then the British and the French, straining everybody's credulity to the utmost, were going to come rushing in and demand a ceasefire between the Egyptians and the Israelis and put a force on the Suez Canal to hold it. Anybody who would have believed that would believe anything. ~~But~~ they actually went ahead with this plan, thereby ~~resulting in a mess~~ ^{splitting} which split the whole Western alliance. It split the United States from the British and the French and split the Security Council right down the middle between the Western Permanent Members, ~~and created a most~~ ^{It was a} ~~fantastic mess. The trouble was~~ ~~that~~ the Israeli expedition was self-contained and got to the Canal fairly easily. The British and French expedition was a tremendous muddle, because they started with the bombing of Cairo and Alexandria five days before they could land any

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troops at all, because the troops were coming from Malta, which is a five-day trip in rough Mediterranean weather. Of course, by the time five days had gone by there was an uproar in the rest of the world, led by the United States and Canada, to stop this nonsense at any cost. In fact, it was at that point that Macmillan, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, was told that the financial assistance from the United States would cease, thereby threatening the British pound. So it was a rare old mess. It came to the United Nations, and Hammarskjöld ~~first~~ ^{asked} was ~~put on~~ to negotiate a ceasefire. This he did, but the condition by the British and French for the ceasefire was that an international force would take the place of the British and the French. Actually, the British and the French had suggested that they would be part of it, but that was ruled out. So we got the rather unusual, completely new situation of the United Nations being asked at no notice whatsoever to put in the field a peacekeeping force, something that had never been done before. This took place, as I remember, on 4 November. The original idea for this was that of Lester Pearson, the Foreign Minister of Canada, and Hammarskjöld was ~~with Pearson, the team which worked this out.~~ ^{at first, quite} Hammarskjöld was ~~extremely~~ ^{extremely} dubious about this innovation.

Q. Were you in on it at that point?

A. I got into it because when Hammarskjöld had to present a report... There was another thing about this force which complicated matters no end later on. Because of the British and French vetos in the Security Council, it was set up by the General Assembly, and they did not do what the Council does, which is ^{the Assembly} actually ~~as the Security Council set up the force,~~ they asked the Secretary-General to set ^{the force} it up ^{and largely unsupported} and negotiate it into Egypt, which is where the action was. So the Secretary-General was given an enormous ~~sort of unassisted~~ responsibility which

nobody thought of at the time, but of course poor U Thant paid the price for ~~that~~ ten years later. Hammarskjöld had simultaneously to present a plan for setting up this ~~thing~~ ^{force}. ~~Nobody~~ ^{Except we know} in the bureaucracy here ~~knowing~~ a damn thing about military matters. We didn't even have a military adviser. That is where I came in. Having had six fairly intensive years of military life, I at least had some idea which end of a rifle was which and that kind of thing. Bunche was put in charge of that part of it.

Hammarskjöld also had to negotiate with Egypt the conditions on which ~~it~~ ^{the force} would go into Egypt, and at the same time he was trying to deal with the Hungarian crisis, so that it was a fairly full time for him. We set up shop in our conference room on the thirty-eighth floor and we ~~sort-of~~ co-opted the military attachés in Washington of the countries which probably would be able to provide ~~etc~~ troops, who were various Scandinavians, the Indians, the Yugoslavs ~~I can't~~ ~~remember who they all were now.~~

Q. You chose those countries out of your general knowledge?

A. Well, they were chosen as politically acceptable and people who were likely to have troops available. We simply had all these military attachés up there and just simply ^{built} ~~took~~ the thing from scratch. The Canadians, of course, were a very important part of this because Mike Pearson had thought of it. But then ~~I pointed out that~~ the trouble with the Canadians was that they wore identical uniforms to the British and since the Egyptians had rather strong feelings at that point it was going to be very awkward to put them in there in British uniform: How would the Egyptians know? Then we came to the whole thing of insignia and hats, and everybody said they must have a special United Nations blue hat and ~~said "yes,~~ ^{perhaps} blue berets ~~that kind of thing~~. Then it was discovered it took exactly eight

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and a half weeks to have a consignment of blue berets made, which was much too late. Then one of us - I think it was me - said In the meantime "Let's have all these ^{berets} things made, but let's get all of the helmet liners from the United States stores in Europe and simply dip them in a bucket of blue paint, which will not take a minute." That is exactly what we did. That is where the "Casque bleu" came from - the blue helmets. That was all done in Pisa. We set up a base in Pisa as a sort of staging base ^{for it}. Then there were all the things ^{like} of food and rations. We had no logistic system of any kind. ^{the UN} ~~this~~, as you certainly know, is a kind of conference-running bureaucracy; we are not operational at all. The question was how to feed these chaps when they got there. Fortunately, somebody figured out there were 16 ships stuck in the Canal and we simply fixed up a lighter service and ^{bought} took all the stores off them. ~~We bought them~~. They could not use them anyway. This was all improvisation, and it worked extraordinarily well on the whole. Everybody rather enjoyed it. A lot of things went wrong, but that was a sort-of round-the-clock operation for some weeks.

Q. So your role in this was primarily an organizing military liaison role?

A. Yes, and also doing things like giving the troops instructions and writing directives and telling them what they could and could not do. Then, of course there was a very important legal side to it, which was done by the Legal Counsel ^{Constantin} Stavropoulos, which was to negotiate a status of forces agreement with Egypt, which ^{gave} the status of these troops on Egyptian soil, because without that nobody was prepared to send troops there. One of the main points in that agreement, incidentally, which is extremely important to this day and the first time it had ever been done, was that we got the Egyptians to agree, after a lot of

argument, that United Nations troops arrested off duty on ~~of~~ civil charges, which troops tend to be, would be tried in their own countries and not in Egypt. That made it much easier to get people to send troops. This was the kind of thing we all did.

Q. And in your role as the key man in arranging the military aspects I suppose if you were consulted about the legal negotiations -

A. Well, we had to keep that all going in the same direction.

Q. How did you do that?

A. Well, we just had a 24-hour-a-day floating crap game up there, ~~it~~ ~~was great~~ and everybody turned up according to what subject was being discussed. Actually, it worked extraordinarily well.

Q. How much attention could Hamm^oerskjold give to that?

A. He used to drop in quite a lot. He was very much interested. One of the reasons why he was so good was that he was terribly interested in detail and loved to fuss about what the name of something was going to be or how he would phrase the directive to the commander and things like that. That was why he was such an able performer. He knew much more about the ~~sort of~~ overall political context than anybody else did, because he had been dealing with the French, the British, the Egyptians, the Israelis, the Security Council - everybody. He was very, very good. ~~One~~ ~~of~~ the main problems immediately after we had set up UNEF, of course, was to get the Canal cleared which was another major problem, because ~~there~~ were, I think, ^{17 major} ~~obstacles~~ obstacles blocking the Canal, including some fairly heavy ones. The railroad bridge at El ^{Fixdan} ~~Fixdan~~, for example, was down. Then there was an LST called the Akar⁴ which they had filled with concrete and sunk. An LST full of concrete is a very big obstacle. That was a separate operation under General Wheeler.

Q. How did that hook into your -

A. Well, it hooked in because we had to do escorts ^{for} the safety of the ^{ships} ships, but it didn't really hook in very much, except that it was all part of the same thing, and we helped with supplies and things like that.

Q. Once you have got UNEF into place - and that a story which we touched on earlier and is quite well known - the story is less well known. How did you run it? What did you do here? Who was doing what? How did you keep it in order?

A. Well, this was a point at which the ~~whole~~ operational part of the Middle East, which up till then had only been the Truce Supervision Organization, had been run in the Secretary-General's Executive Assistant's office, Cordise ^{or}. That was all then shifted to Bunche - the whole peacekeeping business was shifted to Bunche and me and remained there for ever. It has been there ever since, which I think, if I say so myself, was a better arrangement, because in the first place we knew more - at least I did - about the military side and also because we had more time. ~~Since it had got set-up~~ ^{(the Canadian) E.L.M.} we put in General Burns ^{as} as the commander, who had formerly been the Chief-of-Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization, and he established very quickly a headquarters, mostly using the ^{former UN} observers.

Q. Was Burns's nomination -

A. That had to go to the Council - the Assembly, rather. It wasn't approved. ^{Hammarskjöld} He just informed them of it. Later on it had to be approved, but it wasn't so then.

Q. Did it come out of your office or did Pearson -

A. No, that was Hammarskjöld's idea, as simply being the man who knew more about that area than anybody else. Of course, then what happened was that the first function of UNEF was to get the British and the French out, which was achieved by Christmas. They left. In fact, I think the last one left on

23 December. Then Hammarskjöld had to turn his attention to the withdrawal of the Israelis from Sinai, and that was much more difficult. That went on for two or three months, ending more or less with an ultimatum from President Eisenhower, telling the Israelis that this was an obligation which they were going to have to fulfil and the United States would see to it by various means. The Israelis did in fact withdraw at the end of March 1957. Then a new task was given to UNEF, which was not only to follow the Israelis ^{withdrawal} up but something which had not been thought of before - to remain on the border between Israel and Egypt and also in the Gaza Strip.

Q. When you say "given", that developed out of the negotiations?

A. That developed in the Assembly from the Israeli withdrawal in March. That had not been contemplated. The Israelis at this time were very anti-UNEF. They didn't like it, and a great deal of ^{trouble} effort was made in the Western press, who are always ^{susceptible} susceptible to that kind of thing, to say that Hammarskjöld was in Nasser's pocket and we were allowing the Egyptian army back into Gaza, and the whole ^{UNEF} thing was a fraud and so on. If you think of the fuss they made when the ^{ten years later} thing was removed, it is quite funny really. We then ^{lived through} put up with a somewhat bad-tempered early part of 1957, but things settled down very quickly after that ^{UNEP} thing and once it settled down, ~~UNEF was not like, for example, the operation in Cyprus or in southern Lebanon. Really very little went on there. It was mostly a matter of logistics and of command in the field and morale and so on. So that~~ Really by about May 1957 there wasn't all that of a job here, ^{much going on in the UNEF area} ~~except to keep an eye on political developments and to keep an eye also on the whole logistical back up of the thing.~~ ^{UNEP} Of course, that was a much easier force in another way to run; it was set up by the General Assembly. It had no time limit, and all that had to be done was once a year to report on it to the General Assembly. But it didn't have to be renewed or anything, so the bureaucratic end of it was much easier, too.

Q. How much concern did you give it? Did you visit (?) a great deal?

A. A great deal, yes. We all used to visit a lot, a great deal. Then, of course, later on, ~~much later on~~, people began to worry about the money, because due to the fact that it was set up in the Assembly the Russians and the French said it was illegal (or unconstitutional, rather) and therefore didn't pay, and those who did pay worried a great deal. ~~It seems funny now, because I think I'm right in saying~~ I used to be sent out every year to reduce the expenses, a very dreary task ~~It~~ ^{UNE E} was costing in about 1963 about \$14 million a year, which is not terrific if you come to think of how much it cost when we removed it. But we used to have these tremendous arguments with the Treasury representatives of the United Kingdom and the United States about "How can you justify this? what are those Swedes, those 36 Swedes, in Sharm el Sheikh ^{doing}, - absolutely nothing, they're not doing anything at all. ^{That's the whole point} You can't justify ^{it} ~~it~~ "It's very expensive." ^{and we would answer} You say "Well, the whole point is they're doing nothing. If they were doing something it wouldn't be any good. The whole point is they are there."

"No, no, you have to find something for them to do. You can't justify it."

I finally did find something for the Swedes to do in Sharm el Sheikh, ~~(actually, apart from scuba diving, which was to count the ships going through the Straits of Tiran, which is completely unnecessary because Lloyds does it anyway,~~ ^{that} but that satisfied the Treasury. ^{After the breakdown of UNE E} ~~A year later people would have given a billion dollars a year to have 30 Swedes in Sharm el Sheikh. It is interesting the way peace-keeping, the moment it succeeds, loses its value in people's eyes, and then~~ You have to remove it in order to show that it was actually doing something useful.

Q. You're almost saying that success breeds misunderstanding in this area.

A. Well, I don't think anybody, such being the way things are reported, especially in the Western press, ~~... In the first place, nobody~~ understood that the Israelis right at the beginning, in March 1957, Ben Gurion, had refused to have UNEF on the Israeli side of the line, which made UNEF a one-legged arrangement to begin with, ~~not least because the Israelis were the ones, after all, who had gone into Egyptian territory, not the other way round, but they always refused to have it in Israel. The result was that~~ From the point of view of stopping infiltration across the border ~~we were one-legged, and it~~ ^{this} was a great disadvantage. They ^{Israelis} had done this on the grounds that it would have been a ~~violation~~ ^{violation} of Israeli sovereignty, and everybody accepted it. When Nasser asked for ~~the chaps~~ ^{UNEF} to be removed 10 years later everybody was screaming and yelling about bowing to the will of the Egyptian dictator. But he had a perfect sovereign right to do what he did. It was an extremely stupid thing to do, as we told him at the time, but in fact he had a perfect right to do it, under the agreement that got UNEF in, because in the agreement which Hammarskjöld made with Nasser it said that Egyptian sovereignty was paramount - that is to say, the Egyptians could at any time have the force removed.

Q. Did you understand it to mean that at the time?

A. Yes, absolutely.

Q. You had an advisory committee that had to be consulted. When did you consult that advisory committee in those nine years between -

A. Well, Hammarskjöld consulted them a very great deal in the first year, when there were a number of extremely tricky political decisions to be made and also when there was this tremendous campaign in the Western press to discredit UNEF completely. Pearson once made a wonderful remark about that. He said "When I was up in Ottawa I was called a tool of the Israelis and now in New York I am referred to as Nasser's cat's paw. I must be doing something right", and it was absolutely true. ^{UNEP} It was a new thing. Nobody knew about it. It was very sensitive, and Hammarskjöld at that time used the advisory committee ~~I must say to~~ ^{with great} enormous effect. The minutes of those meetings, or it is actually a verbatim record, are absolutely fascinating. They have never been published.

Q. I know.

A. They are the ~~most amazing~~ exchange of very intelligent people on a very difficult problem. They are fantastic. It was a very useful instrument, that advisory committee. It also allowed Hammarskjöld to say what he thought to a group of government representatives who would then explain ^{things} it when he could not say ~~things~~ publicly. There was a very complicated ^{arrangement} thing about, for example, about ^{where there were Egyptian} Sharm el Sheikh, which was the ^{demand} coastal batteries commanding the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba. ^{and} One of the key ~~things~~ ^{points} was that the Egyptians should not reoccupy the coastal batteries, which were the contingent cause of the war in the first place, because it was when the Egyptians had closed the Straits of Tiran that the Israelis had gone to war. Hammarskjöld had a long negotiation with the Egyptians and came up with a thing called the 12-point agreement, which has remained secret to this day. ~~and~~ One of the ^{points} things was that the Egyptians would not take over the coastal batteries again, and of course Fawzi ^{FN}, representing a country which had

just been invaded by three foreign armies, could not conceivably (publicly) say that naturally a fourth group of foreigners would be sitting in one of the key strategic locations of Egypt. So Hammarskjöld simply said "Let me try it this way: I assume in our long friendly relationship that as long as UN troops are stationed in Sharm el Sheikh the Egyptians will find unnecessary to be there", and Fawzi simply closed his eyes and nodded. ^{is} ~~New, he~~ ^{Hammarskjöld} could not possibly publish that ~~to a public~~, but he told the advisory committee ~~was~~ and the advisory committee was a kind of guarantors' club really, ~~and it was very good~~. It was the right way to use this form of diplomacy.

Q. But you said it was used for a year?

A. Well, ^{after that} ~~then~~ nothing much happened. If you remember, virtually nothing happened in UNEF until the big row in 1967. That was what was so sad. We reduced it and reduced it and reduced it. By 1967 it was down effectively to about 1,200 or 1,300 men on the line, and it was a 500-mile-long line. ~~That was nothing~~, ^a and ~~it was~~ ^{it} was ~~of~~ symbolic force.

Q. That was the point though.

A. The whole point was that it was symbolic. It could not fight, but of course by that time it had been so successful that everybody assumed it was like NATO and also, such is the rather weird way in which the Western world looks at the Middle East, that in some way the Arab States are always the aggressor, even when they have lost a third of their country, which the Egyptians had. When Nasser, I think very foolishly, moved to put a lot of heavy armour into Sinai ^{in 1967} ~~again~~ everybody was going on ^{in the West} ~~there~~ as if it was an act of aggression against Israel. Sinai has been part of Egypt for the last 4,000 years. ~~It was, to me, the most~~

~~extraordinary experience, that whole 1967 thing, because you could not believe.~~

People were so completely biased in their thinking about this that they didn't even know they were biased. I mean, what they had ~~insisted on~~^{accepted} for Israel as an act of sovereignty in 1956 was an act of aggression by Nasser. ~~It was really very weird~~^{in 1967}
~~and~~ I don't think we handled that episode very well. I must say I wish we had handled it better.

Q. 1967?

A. I mean from the public relations point of view.

Q. Let me ask you some questions about that. What you have done now is to sketch an operation in UNEF that maintained itself. It was quiet. It was doing its job. There wasn't much pressure on it. It became less and less a matter of political contention until the outbreak later on. Moreover, Hammarskjöld went to some lengths to codify what it was doing in his 1958 report. Let us talk about that for just a minute.

A. That is a very important point.

Q. Did that 1958 report really represent anything except Hammarskjöld's hope that this was going ...

A. What happened was that by 1957-58 the enthusiasm for UNEF ~~had~~ had got out of all control. When I tell you that the greatest enthusiasts of all were the two Dulles brothers, who were not necessarily always very keen on the United Nations, and that the joint Houses of the United States Congress passed a unanimous resolution demanding that UNEF be made into a permanent international force, you will see the kind of loony business we were getting into. We were suffering terribly from over-^{success}popularity, and Hammarskjöld was very worried about this. Where Hammarskjöld was simply extraordinary - and if I keep praising Hammarskjöld, it's

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because I mean it; he was the most amazing man - Hammarskjöld was extremely aware that peace-keeping operations touch on all the most sensitive nerves of ~~national~~ sovereignty, all sorts of psychological difficulties about foreign troops, the differences between Governments, the immense complication of using the military where they cannot use force and so on, and he was extremely anxious not to push it too far. The idea of trying to establish a permanent force would have been a disaster, so he suggested that he should report on the lessons from UNEF to the Assembly in 1958, to try to ~~damp down a bit~~ ^{put} this huge blast of enthusiasm ^{in perspective}. ~~It~~ ~~really was amazing. It was vary undesirable~~ when he did that he appointed, ^{Amery} characteristically, a group of senior officials, including Bunche and ^{Dobrynin} (2), who was then the Soviet Under-Secretary, and I think the Legal Counsel and one or two others, to write a report on the experience from UNEF. Naturally, they passed it on to me and to other people. We collected an enormous amount of information about UNEF and wrote what I must say is still an interesting - I wrote it, actually ^{1/2} 100-page report on this, really saying what had happened and describing all this improvisation. None of us got the point about what Hammarskjöld wanted. I remember vividly ^{that} I spent my whole ^{was that summer} holiday writing this damn thing, about 10 hours a day, and came back very proudly with it, ~~and~~ Hammarskjöld received it perfectly civilly and never mentioned it again, because it wasn't what he wanted. In fact, when Hammarskjöld died I found the copy lying at the bottom of one of his ^{filmy cabinets} drawers. What he had wanted was an analytical political report describing the shortcomings of an international organization operating a force in the field, which is much more interesting. He finally wrote it himself, ^{and} it is an absolutely brilliant analysis. If you read that report and then see what happened in the Congo you can see how very far-sighted Hammarskjöld was. Almost all of the things that went

wrong in the Congo actually are ~~kind of~~ hinted at in that report. It is a remarkable piece of work.

Q. You have just described a kind of disjunction between the views of the Secretary-General and your views, as one of the staff members, because your notion here was that you were going to talk about the importance of UNEF and his notion was that he was going to talk about the outer limits.

A. That's right.

Q. Which is quite a different perception.

A. Well, you know, it is surprising how long it takes to become even relatively mature in political judgement. ~~He~~ ^{Hammarskjöld} had a much more sophisticated and far more interesting and much more difficult thing in mind, and I think he was never able to explain it. ~~because~~ I once asked Bunche and Dobrynin ~~(?)~~ if they understood what they had been asked to do and they said, well, as a matter of fact, since I asked, no, they hadn't; they hadn't got the point at all. ~~He~~ ^{Hammarskjöld} was the only person who could write it. He had an analytical, ~~sort of~~ philosophical mind and he was capable of generalizing and ~~act of~~ abstracting these very important principles from this huge mishmash of practical detail, which he did, ~~and~~ ^{and} it was a very important thing to do.

Q. This document really was not much of a guide to your operating UNEF. You knew how to do that without the document.

A. ~~No, we didn't know.~~ It was really more of a guide to Governments, which is what it was meant to be - what you said, on what the outer limits were and what you wanted to watch out for. That's what it was, and it was general principles.

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Q. When the UNEF idea began to break down, that is, with the crisis of 1967, what was your warning on that? How did you know that things were getting bad?

A. Over the whole period of UNEF in times of stress in the Arab world one Government or another would accuse Nasser of hiding behind the skirts of the United Nations. The Syrians did it quite a bit, and the King of Jordan did it quite a bit, too. Relations between Jordan and Egypt in those days were spectacularly bad, and the accusation was that though claiming to be the leader of the Arab world, with far the largest army, Egypt in fact was not facing up to the common enemy, Israel, but was hiding behind the United Nations. Hammarskjöld went to great lengths to get people to knock this off, saying "~~Look here, for God's sake just shut up. I mean, don't do it~~" But it had always been a possible threat to UNEF, much the greatest threat, actually, and we all knew that. In 1967 there was an election in Israel. I forget which election it was now. One of the candidates had, in the way that people running for office so blithely do, mentioned that they would perfectly prepared to take Damascus if necessary. This was parlayed in Damascus into a threat of aggression, and ~~at that time it was the United Arab Republic, and~~ ^{consisted of both} Egypt and Syria, ~~had, I think I am right in saying, still a joint Government, or if they didn't they had the residue of the UAR.~~

~~Q. They had, yes.~~

A. It was a joint military command, and the Syrians blasted the Egyptian chief-of-staff, who unfortunately was in Damascus at this point and said "There you are. Look at that. ~~And~~ ^Y you people are sitting comfortably down there with the good old UN between you and Israel. What the hell is this?" So this guy roared back to Cairo and reported to Nasser, and Nasser, who had just got a whole new batch of Soviet armour said "All right, that's it. We are going in." And he

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first of all tried to do it on a technicality, simply through military channels, telling the commander of UNEF to move over because they were coming in. That was referred to New York. U Thant then said "I can't do that, because UNEF has a task and it either does the task or it doesn't do the task, and anyhow there's a good faith agreement between us and we would have to discuss this." Nasser said "~~No. This Soviet (?) is moving in~~", and in fact they moved Egyptian troops to take over in Sharm el Sheikh, which was a very key point and in various points in Sinai.

~~These were Yugoslavs,~~ and Both the Yugoslavs and the Indians had been warned of ~~an advance by Egypt~~ ^b this before and had both told Nasser that they would withdraw their ^{UNEF} troops immediately, so we had lost the entire infantry power of the force before we even heard of it. ~~In addition to that,~~ Nasser was legally perfectly right. He ~~had an~~ ^{did have the} ~~absolute right.~~ ^{to demand UNEF's removal,} It was his territory, and he had an absolute right to ask UNEF to get out, no matter how foolish a move this was, and as a purely practical matter there was no way you could keep UNEF in there for one day if the Egyptian army wished to stop it. We had at that time, I think, about 2,000 troops, counting the logistics. All of the supplies came up through the desert ^{across} through the canal from Port Said, and it would take only a squad of the Egyptian army to simply block the roads and that was it. In fact, when ~~they~~ ^{the Egyptians} said they were going to do that the Canadians, who had been very vocal about the withdrawal of UNEF ~~long before we were~~ ~~going to withdraw,~~ withdrew their contingent in 24 hours, because they said they were unsafe, which was not very helpful. Our strategy was two things. One was to draw out the process of withdrawal of UNEF for such a long time that we would be able to renegotiate the arrangement so it would stay there. I remember the words were "Orderly, deliberate and dignified" - "ODD" - which was going to take, in our view, about four or five months. We would get ships rather leisurely to come and

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pick them up and so on, and we were going ^{in the meantime} ~~then~~ to try to negotiate ^{UNEF} ~~it~~ back. Of course, there was all this frothing from the Americans, British and Canadians - George Brown, ~~I think~~, was then the British Foreign Minister - and they really competed in silliness. They all insulted the Egyptians and said that U Thant was caving in to the Egyptian dictator, all of which made Nasser absolutely determined to speed things up. If they had been persuaded just to be quiet and let the ODD syndrome work, I think we might have got somewhere.

In the meantime, we suggested to the Israelis that we reinstate the armistice arrangement on both sides of the frontier to hold things down, ~~since there was no~~ ~~any~~ Egyptian threat to the Israelia whatsoever. They refused, because they were by that time I think quite determined to go ahead with the military operations, ~~although they always denied it.~~

U Thant then decided that he would go to Cairo and talk to Nasser. Greatly to Bunche's and my annoyance, he was advised that it would be unwise to take an American or a Brit with him, so both Bunche and I were excluded from this trip, ~~when~~ ^{this} I think ~~was~~ a disastrous mistake, because Nasser knew us perfectly well and there was no logical reason why he would suspect us of being anything except what we were. Anyhow, ^{U Thant} ~~he~~ went by himself and while he was on his way to Cairo Nasser made a speech ~~to the air force academy or something or other~~ proclaiming the closure of the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping. Everybody knew that this was a casus belli. The Israelis had always said they would go to war if that was done, so that was it. That was the end. I called U Thant up in Paris to apprise him of this move. I said "You might want to think whether you want to go on. I don't see any point, frankly. You're not going to stop anything now." He said "No", he had to go and make the point. So when he got to Cairo the first thing he said to Nasser was "Why on earth did you do that when

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you knew I was coming here?" And Nasser said "I didn't want to embarrass you by doing it after you'd left, so I did it before you came, so that nobody could blame you."
