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UN INTERVIEW
Brian Urquhart
October 17, 1984
Interviewer, Leon Gordenker

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Q: During our last session, you recall, we began discussing the Suez Crisis and the various developments around the Canal and the eventual pressure on the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF). U Thant, you related, flew off to try to see what he could make of the situation, to try to persuade Nasser at least to reconsider what was going on. He stopped in Paris; you telephoned him to suggest that it was really now too late to go on for this negotiation; he went on anyway, and Nasser, you related, told him that he had acted to remove UNEF before Thant's arrival -

A: No, no - he had made the announcement on ^{closing} the Gulf of Aqaba -

Q: Oh, quite -

A: - which was a casus belli for the Israelis, which sort of put the hat on the whole thing really.

Q: You knew by then that UNEF's days were perhaps numbered because some of the troops had already been withdrawn or would be withdrawn shortly?

A: No, we didn't know that; we didn't know that. It turned out later that they were. The Yugoslavs and the Indians had been approached by the Egyptians without our knowing it -

Q: Without your knowing it?

A: - no, we didn't know it.

Q: Well, now, the events developed very rapidly after that so that UNEF was surrounded by Egyptian troops, and you were approached at first through a request to your commanding general to withdraw; he referred that to Headquarters saying that this is a matter that would have to be formally put; and eventually the withdrawal took place.

Do you want to pick it up and fill that in a bit and tell us what your role in it was? What were you doing?

A: Well, the sequence of events was more or less as you describe - not quite. The Egyptian Ambassador ^{in New York} ~~here~~ came in finally with the request to partially withdraw UNEF to make way for the Egyptian army, and the Secretary-General and Bunche were not prepared to accept that, because the point about UNEF was that it was either there as an effective ^{Peace-Keeping} force or it wasn't.

It then became clear that they were going to take over in the Sinai and in Sharm el-Sheikh, ^{which dominates the entrance to} ~~the interests in~~ the Gulf of Aqaba, anyway, which they did. They took over from the Yugoslav troops we had there. And U Thant called the UNEF Advisory Committee, which hadn't been called into session ~~for~~ ^{think} for years, which was the procedure indicated by Hammarskjold in the original agreement, to consider what should be done.

Now, the problem with UNEF was that it was not set up by the Security Council; it was set up by the General Assembly. Therefore the matter could not be referred to the Security Council, and the possibility of getting the General Assembly into a special session was zero because there was no question that at that time a great majority of the Member States would have taken the line that Egypt had a perfect right to ask ^{for} UNEF to be withdrawn and there was nothing to discuss. This is a fact which has been glossed over by the critics of U Thant.

U Thant put this to the Advisory Committee in two meetings, and everybody agreed, on the legal and practical basis in which we were in the area, that there was nothing to do but to accept Nasser's request, partly because ~~on legal grounds~~ he was on perfectly good ^{legal} grounds to make this request, it being a question of Egyptian sovereignty, and on practical grounds because UNEF would not survive if the Egyptian army chose to lay siege to it.

The Advisory Committee agreed to this, but some members of it, including Canada, proceeded outside the United Nations to a great campaign of vilification of

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U Thant, which was extremely stupid in my view and, incidentally, made the situation infinitely worse. The Canadians, though they had agreed that ~~that was~~ ^{that there was no alternative to accepting Nasser's demand,} ~~the only thing to do~~ in the Advisory Committee, raised a great fuss in public, saying that the United Nations was bowing to the will of the Egyptian dictator - and they then did something ~~unbelievably~~ ^{even sillier} silly, which was to dispatch two rather unwarlike warships from Canada, ostensibly to arrive eventually in the eastern Mediterranean in order to look after ^{UNEF troops} Canadian ~~nations~~. ~~And~~ ^{it} this was very much publicized as a great macho move, and ~~this~~ caused a great fuss in Egypt, where people were a little bit touchy about the whole thing to begin with, ~~and~~ ^{to invade} there were a great number of rumours about another military plot against Egypt. ~~And~~ the result of that was that the Egyptians told us that they could not be responsible for the safety of the Canadian contingent in UNEF, ~~and they suggested, therefore, that it would be a good idea if they left.~~

The Canadians, who had been urging ^{UNEF} ~~us~~ to stay, then said that they would airlift the entire Force out if necessary. We said, No, no, no: we've no intention of airlifting anybody out. We're going to take a number of months on this ^{that's} ~~the~~ whole point - And they said, Well, we have to get our people out, they're not safe. And they airlifted the whole Canadian contingent out in about 24 hours.

Now, the Canadian contingent were the logistics of the Force, ^{so} this was a very serious blow. I ~~merely~~ mention this because there was a ~~very~~ great difference, greatly to everybody's discredit, between the private ~~activities~~ ^{positions} and official ~~activities~~ of various Western Governments on this issue, and their public statements, all of which condemned U Thant for his ^{supposedly} cowardly surrender to Nasser. U Thant, incidentally, was the only world figure who went to Cairo and argued with Nasser about ~~this~~ ^{the withdrawal of UNEF}

We were concerned about the Canadians partly because of the collapse of the logistics of the Force and partly because we thought that they ~~didn't~~ ^{hadn't} display ^{ed} ~~any~~ very great solidarity with the other members of the Force, but there it was.

Q: Let's go back a moment to the Advisory Committee: why wasn't it consulted earlier? Why -

A: ~~There was no point~~ ^{It} was consulted immediately. What do you mean, earlier?

Q: But you said it hadn't been consulted for some time.

A: Well, ^{for years} nothing had happened in UNEF to consult it about. The UNEF had been the quietest peace-keeping operation ~~for years~~ that we'd had. The only thing people worried about was reducing it in order to save money.

Q: Was the idea of withdrawing slowly your idea?

A: Yes. We thought that, if we could let the fuss which had been caused by various statements in Israel and the reaction in Damascus which had caused Nasser to take this step to die down, it might be possible to renegotiate something.

And, in fact, when U Thant came back from Cairo we put a report to the Security Council which suggested three things. It suggested in the first place a moratorium on all action until we got it straightened out; in the second place, the reinstatement of the armistice arrangements on the borders until UNEF could take its place again; in the third place, the appointment of a special representative who would travel around the Middle East and defuse the rumours which were being put around at that time, one of which was that the Israelis were concentrating troops on the Syrian border, and if that could be defused, we thought that it would be a very good way of getting into this problem with Nasser. The Israelis turned down all of these proposals, including a proposal that we should put UNEF temporarily on the Israeli side of the line. So that got no where.

~~When~~ The Security Council, ~~predictably~~, had a debate on all this started by the Canadians and the Danes, who were then members of the Council, and, equally predictably, that debate was a stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States saying that Nasser was putting pressure on the United Nations illegally, the Soviet Union saying that Nasser had an absolutely perfect right to do what he was doing - and it was a complete ^{cold war} stand-off. Nothing happened, except the Council ^{made} ~~looked like~~ an ass ^{of itself}.

The result of all this frustration, of course, was that everybody looked for a scapegoat, and they found a very easy one in U Thant, because U Thant had refused to invoke Article 99 of the Charter and dump the whole thing into the Security Council ~~as~~ a threat to international peace and security.

Q: Why had he done that?

A: Well, there are various stories about that. ~~My own view is~~ and

We certainly we talked to him about it a great deal, - and we all agreed that if we did that, the Council would simply fall flat on its face, because it would never be able to agree ^{on a course of action} - and, in fact, it turned out to be exactly true: it couldn't.

It is also said, and I doubt it, the the Russians were very opposed to this, but I don't have any evidence of this, ~~and~~ I think U Thant was an extremely decent man and he paid for it. He was a very responsible person. He felt that in the existing set-up he was the person responsible for UNEF; he was responsible for the security of the Force, and he was responsible for living by the agreements that Hammarskjold had made. Therefore he had to take the responsibility.

In retrospect, I think this was a ~~colossal~~ mistake. I think ~~that~~ he should ~~have done was to~~ have dumped this problem on the Security Council, and then all of the members, who were later on so critical of him, would have had to take the responsibility, ^{although} and they would have arrived at exactly the same result: UNEF would

have been withdrawn, because there wasn't anything to do about it. We didn't have a legal leg to stand on; we didn't have a practical leg to stand on. And we'd already lost one contingent anyway - the Canadians - and were likely to lose the rest. *As we later discovered, the two biggest contingents, the Indians and the Yugoslavs were going to be withdrawn by their governments.*
 So that ~~but he didn't do that~~ *[invoke Article 99]* and this was, incidentally, ~~the~~ *a* major nail in the coffin of U Thant's historical reputation, something that I feel extremely strongly about. ~~I think it was~~ *absolutely appalling*, the way people in the West have behaved about this, especially in Britain, ~~and~~ *and* Canada and ~~in~~ *the* United States, ~~because looking -~~ *Nobody* except U Thant made the smallest effort to do anything about what was an extremely dangerous crisis, which led to a war within the next ten days. *else* Nobody went to Cairo; nobody tried to persuade Nasser not to do it; nobody did anything except ~~dump it on~~ *criticize* U Thant, and the result of that was that in history he is remembered as the person who chickened out to Nasser, ~~and~~ *and* I think that that is intolerable; it is a great historical injustice.

Q: Supposing that - did you consider not withdrawing the Force? Did you consider flatly refusing not to withdraw the Force? What would have happened?

A: Well, we did refuse to withdraw it partially -

Q: Yes, that's right -

A: - on the grounds that the Force was an integral whole. You couldn't have one bit of it leaving the Egyptian army through and another bit not. ~~And the~~ *And the* Israelis would never have stood for that and they'd have been right, too. And, as a matter of fact, once the Advisory Committee had agreed that ~~it was~~ *withdrawal* the only thing to do - and there was no question of calling the Assembly - and U Thant had decided - I think now wrongly, though I didn't think so at the time - not to invoke Article 99, then there was only one thing left to do.

And, in fact, nobody would have stayed. As I said, the Canadians had already ~~left~~ who were the most vocal of all the members of the Force in public about the whole thing, ^{had already left.} The Indians and the Yugoslavs, who were the whole infantry component of the Force, were leaving any way. ~~I mean,~~ ^{only,} our hope was to slow things up by the orderly, decent and deliberate withdrawal, which would have taken about four or five months probably by the time we'd managed to get ships and that kind of thing.

Q: Would it have made any difference to Nasser and to the Israelis had you stayed there with UNEF, actually slowed down the Force? What difference would it have made?

A: None. The moment Nasser announced the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba the Israelis were certain to attack, and they did. And I think the evidence is ~~that~~ they had decided long before that. After all, it was a piece of cake for them; they knew exactly what they were doing, and it was a walkover. I mean, it was all over in ^{a few hours.} ~~half an hour.~~ I think it was ^{any} irresistible ^{opportunities} ~~to~~ them. They'd had enough, and they weren't going to be deterred.

And Nasser wasn't going to change. Nasser was a ~~very~~ very obstinate man. You have to remember that Nasser ^{was} as the guy who deployed ^{about} ~~over~~ half the Egyptian army in Yemen for about five years, thereby bankrupting Egypt, on a wild goose chance of the most grandiose proportions. I mean, ~~he~~ ^{was} a very obstinate ^{way} and, very often, ~~extremely~~ a man of extraordinary ^{bad} judgement, ~~he just was.~~ And this was something he was going to do to display Arab solidarity and his leadership of the Arab world. ~~And~~ ^{it would be} it was a disaster, and we'd told him that. We told the Egyptians here that; U Thant told Nasser personally, but he didn't pay any attention. I don't think anything would have changed it.

What could have been changed was the using of U Thant, who was nothing if not courageous. He was an extremely courageous man. What could have been changed was

using him as the scapegoat for the entire thing and saying it was all his fault - which I think is an outrage.

Q: Let's push that a little bit farther. Was U Thant in close consultation with the major Powers in the Security Council?

A: Yes. We had Arthur Goldberg and Hugh Caradon and everybody in all the time. And they were all in a great state of mind about it, especially Arthur Goldberg. But Arthur Goldberg did not understand that ^{for us} an agreement made with Nasser was as valid as an agreement made with Israel. He just couldn't understand that we could treat Nasser as a sovereign State just like anybody else. Hugh Caradon was much more sensible about it, and Hugh Caradon was the person, incidentally - as far as I remember - who advocated invoking Article 99. ~~Because~~ ^{we also} we had a constitutional ^{problem,} ~~tie-up here,~~ ^{UNEP} this thing having been set up by the Assembly, according to some unconstitutionally ^{it} was the baby of the Secretary-General and nobody else.

Q: There are a couple of details that I want to raise here that have some importance only because they are in the public record, or so I think. Sometime after this whole set of incidents, Ernest Gross released a copy of a memorandum -

A: Yes, I know all about that one -

Q: - and that created quite a lot of public fuss. I must say I never understood what the fuss was about, because it seemed to me that this was a side play, but what's the significance of this? What happened during the time, and how did it come to bear on the withdrawal?

A: Well, I have had many happy arguments with Ernie Gross about this, and we still do not agree on it. ^{Ernie} ~~Ernie~~, for various reasons, was very critical of

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the idea that Nasser could ask for the withdrawal of UNEF - though how he ~~ever~~ as a lawyer could argue this, I've never been able to understand.

Q: Because he was a lawyer he can argue this -

A: ~~No, it wasn't;~~ It was a profoundly illegal argument, and Ernie knows it.

In order to get round the - what was called the - what was that agreement that Nasser and Hammarskjold had? - the

Q: Status of forces?

A: No, no; it had a very strange name. It was the good-faith agreement, ~~I believe, yes~~ which was quite clear. Ernie, who had been Hammarskjold's private legal adviser during the Suez crisis, produced a personal ^{paper} Hammarskjold used to write notes to himself, since he didn't have too many people to talk to, to clarify his mind, and he was always doing it, and he wrote one about the negotiations with Nasser and the meaning of the good-faith agreement, and it was one of these very convoluted, Hammarskjoldian soliloquies, of which there are literally hundreds in his papers, but unfortunately, in this case, he'd given ^{a copy} ~~one~~ to Ernie as his private legal adviser.

^{The paper} ~~It~~ had no status whatsoever; nobody except me had ever seen it. I had seen it because I was writing a book about Hammarskjold and had been through Hammarskjold's papers, but nobody else had ever seen it; it was a completely private paper. And actually, if you read it carefully, it says that if Nasser really insists on removing UNEF at any point there's nothing we can do about it. So I could never understand what the fuss was about.

What it does describe is the extreme difficulty of the negotiations with Nasser and the length ^{of} that Hammarskjold had had to go to ^{to} get an agreement at all, which is slightly different from what I ~~think~~ Ernie Gross said it was. This was

published with great fanfare in The New York Times as if it cast an entirely new light on U Thant's decision, ~~and~~ ^{what's} wrong with that is, in the first place this ^{paper} wasn't in the ^{official} records at all. ~~it was never~~ The only ruling document on this was the good-faith agreement, which had been put before the General Assembly by Hammarskjold as the guiding document. Anything that Hammarskjold might have written personally, even supposing it had said what Ernie said it said, would have been irrelevant because nobody else had seen it. Nasser had never seen it; the Assembly had never seen it; nobody had ever seen it; U Thant had never seen it, and I actually finally turned up ~~a~~ ^a copy in my archives because I was writing this book. That was the only copy that existed ~~here~~ ^{in New York}.

~~I think it was~~ ^{This} a great storm in a tea-cup, because even supposing it had any validity, this document, ~~which it didn't~~, it didn't actually say what it was said to say. What ~~is~~ ^{was} said was, that it had been immensely difficult to get any agreement with Nasser at all and that to get that agreement Hammarskjold had had to give in to the notion of the primacy, the paramountcy, of Egyptian sovereignty, which after all was precisely what we were all talking about.

So I've never been able to understand what all the fuss over that was about.

Q: Do you think that this was connected with the onslaught on U Thant in some way?

A: Oh, yes, because the impression given by what I regard as some extremely misleading comments by Gross and others, ~~the impression given was that~~ Hammarskjold had taken ~~this~~ ^a fearless line ^{with Nasser} and had been betrayed by his successor. The opposite was the truth: Hammarskjold had made an agreement in which the key was that Egyptian sovereignty at all times was paramount, that is to say, that Nasser would be allowed to remove this Force at any time, which was the only condition on which Nasser would allow it in in the first place. And you can

understand it: Egypt's been beset by foreign armies throughout its four-thousand-year history, and they weren't about to have one in there they didn't control

~~The second thing was that in that agreement it was said the "good-faith"~~
~~in the 1956 agreement~~
referred to ~~was~~ all parties in good faith not terminating the existence of UNEF until it had finished its task. Now, this ~~was~~ ^{agreement} written in November 1956 when the task of UNEF was to supervise the withdrawal of the French, the British and the Israeli armies. And in 1956 the task of UNEF was finished when those armies withdrew. It did not refer to the later task given to UNEF, which was the task of remaining on the international border, which was only given to UNEF in March 1957, so whichever way you look at it, ~~the~~ ^{Gross's} argument ~~is~~ ^{was} nonsense, ~~that this was relevant~~
I could never understand how ~~the~~ ^{we} ever got into this big hassle. It seemed to me to be nonsense.

Q: The other point that I wanted to get you to talk about a little bit was, was did U Thant do to defend his position, and what could you do?

A: Well, very little. ~~He made~~ ^{U Thant} he was the only person who, A, went to Cairo and, B, publicly suggested ways of getting round this, ^{the crisis} which I've described already. He suggested them actually, ^{in a report} I wrote the ~~document~~ in a report to the Security Council, and it was unceremoniously turned down by Israel.

After that, there was very little he could do, and it was impossible to explain, such is the bias - I'm sorry to say it, but it's true - of much of the Western press and public figures in a matter such as this, it was impossible to explain that, ^{in the UN Secretariat} ~~based on the fact that we work on,~~ that all Member States, including Egypt - Nasser was a dirty word in the West at that time; we have to remember that - including Nasser, have sovereign rights which are not negotiable. ~~I mean,~~
They just are sovereign rights. ^{Nasser} ~~He~~ had a perfect right to do what he was doing.

It was a stupid thing to do, very stupid, a great disaster to Egypt and everybody else, but nonetheless he had a right to do it.

Completely impossible to get this point across. When the war broke out we had the spectacle of every columnist in the United States sounding off about this cowardly, appalling surrender of U Thant. If U Thant had been a cowardly man, ~~he~~^{he} would have dumped ~~it~~^{the responsibility} squarely on the members of the Council, and then we would have seen who was cowardly and who wasn't.

~~I mean, Nobody~~ was about to do anything ^{practical} about this ^{the withdrawal of UNEF}. ~~They just weren't. They~~ just wanted somebody to blame, and they chose ~~him~~^{U Thant}. ~~And I think~~ it's something that makes me angry even now, because I think it was a gross act of injustice.

Q: I can see that.

~~A: I mean, it was really terrible.~~

Q: What were your expectations at the time, after this series of developments and the isolation of U Thant and the withdrawal of UNEF?

A: Well, we were just waiting for the Israelis to start. I mean, everybody knew they would.

Q: And did you -

A: ~~Well, then~~ Of course we did try a number of other things. Our aim was, knowing that the moment the ^{Egyptian} blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba was declared - which actually didn't make much difference to the Israelis because there weren't any Israeli ships going through the Gulf of Aqaba anyway in those days - so that it really was more a symbol than anything else - we wanted to try to limit the thing, and one of the things we particularly wanted to do was to stop the Jordanians from getting into the act.

For that purpose, we sent General Odd Bull, who was the Chief of Staff of United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO) in Jerusalem, to

Amman when the balloon went up to say, ~~look~~, for God's sake, don't do anything!

But, unfortunately, ^{Hussein} Hussein was actually on the phone with Nasser when Odd Bull arrived, and they had at that point a joint command of the ^{if} forces, and ^{Jordan} he came in, ~~he went~~ into the demilitarized zone in which Government House was in Jerusalem, ~~and he went in~~ and tried to take all that over, and the Israelis clobbered ^{him} ~~him~~.

And that is when the Israelis moved into the West Bank and produced what is the main, most difficult problem in the Middle East problem now, which is the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem.

~~I mean~~ ^{I mean} It was the most disastrous development, there's no getting away from it, but I have thought a great deal about this, and I have never, knowing Nasser's temperament, ~~I have never~~ been able to see anything that would conceivably have deterred him from doing what he did, and if he did what he did, there was no doubt what the Israelis were going to do. The only thing that could have happened would have been to keep Jordan out, which we tried to do. We completely failed, and ~~I think that was a colossal mistake and a huge error.~~

Q: Did you try to approach Syria and Lebanon as well?

A: Lebanon never really got in, in terms of actual fighting. Syria came in on the Golan Heights and got clobbered.

The Israelis at this point had complete air superiority in that whole area, and they used it brilliantly, including on Nasser's new armour in Sinai. They simply went straight down the road and took it out. The losses were enormous.

Q: Were you able to discuss any of this with the Israelis?

A: We discussed it before ~~the~~ war -

Q: After the war started?

A: Well, we were in touch with the Israelis all the time because, after all, we had ~~the truce~~, the whole truce arrangement there, and the Israelis used that to make cease-fires and to -

At one point, the Israelis found themselves with absolutely nothing in front of them on the way to Damascus, and they were very anxious not to have to capture it. It was ~~the worst~~ the last thing they needed. So they were very anxious to have ~~of~~ ~~cease-fires~~ delivered with all the supervision that was necessary. We did that, but by that time our role was a somewhat secondary one because the war had started.

Q: Did you make any efforts during the war to limit it?

A: As I say, we tried to limit the participation of Jordan, which was a disaster.

Q: That was at the beginning -

A: We made efforts throughout to get a cease-fire. ~~And actually, it wasn't too~~ I mean, ~~the~~ war lasted, as everybody knows, six days. And it was more or less a military walk-over. ~~There wasn't any great~~ ~~it wasn't like 1973.~~

Q: Then you eventually - eventually the Security Council went on to adopt the famous resolution 242 (1967), in March 1967 which, in a sense, marked an end to this particular campaign and put the United Nations involvement on a somewhat different footing.

Do you want to talk a little bit about what role you had and how you saw the operation of the United Nations around resolution 242?

A: On the ground, our main function in those very disagreeable years of the war of attrition, up to 1973, ~~was to~~ was running a very very difficult observer operation on both sides of the Suez Canal in which we had a lot of casualties because there was a very heavy exchange of fire all through that period

between the Egyptians and the Israelis in that area. And doing the same thing in the Golan Heights.

And then, of course, there was ^{Gunnar}Jarring. We dealt with Jarring a great deal. I wasn't actually on Jarring's staff.

Q: This was Gunnar Jarring, the Swedish diplomat.

A: Jarring was appointed as the Special Representative in the Middle East, an idea, incidentally, which U Thant had suggested before the war and which had been turned down ^{by Israel}, but which found its way into resolution 242.

~~And~~ Jarring set about a series of absolutely interminable conversations with all the parties about how you would get to a series of withdrawals of Israeli forces, ~~and~~ leading up to a peace agreement. The ~~whole~~ essence of Jarring was ^{the concept} of territory for peace.

^{Jarring} He never really got anywhere with it, not because, not for lack of trying, because nobody could have tried harder than Jarring did, or for lack of ingenuity, because as a matter of fact what Jarring suggested - the famous Jarring memorandum, which was in 1970, ~~170 or 71~~, a memorandum given to Egypt and Israel requiring an undertaking ^{to be} given to Jarring ^{for} Israeli withdrawal ^{and} for peace with Israel on the Egyptian side - ~~as a matter of fact, that whole process was exactly what happened~~ ^{was the essence}

~~of~~ Camp David. It was a kind of rehearsal. The difference was that Jarring was a very very capable Swedish diplomat working for the United Nations; Camp David was run by the President of the United States, with all the clout that the President of the United States has, and he succeeded.

~~As a matter of fact it was very odd,~~ because ^After the Camp David Agreement, ~~was~~ ^{she} Dayan once went to Stockholm and asked to see Jarring, who ^{was} he had never met, ~~and~~ the reason he asked to see him was to say, "I've been reading all the papers in the Israeli Foreign Office, and I see that you anticipated Camp David by five years,

and I wish to congratulate you, it was very helpful." ^{Sarnig's} ~~and~~ it was a great effort, but lacking in clout and leverage.

Q: Dayan is Moshe Dayan, the Israeli general and politician?

A: Well, he'd ^{been} the Chief of Staff and then he was the Foreign Minister, and then he died.

Q: Now, were you personally during this period, the 1967 war and afterwards, more and more deeply engaged in the diplomatic process and in the military direction? By this time, you were -

A: Well, we'd been engaged in that all along, but we became more so.

[Side 2]

A: At this point, Ralph Bunche began to show signs of the illness that finally killed him. His eyesight began to go and he was increasingly ~~very~~ infirm. It was a very sad period for all of us because we adored Bunche, and it was sad to see this old warrior steadily sinking. That really ~~did~~ ^{ed} start about this time. ~~He~~ Bunche was quite sick throughout the whole six-day war period, in which we were meeting night and day in the Security Council or with other people, trying to get things sorted out. He became increasingly infirm from that time on until he died in 1971.

As a result of that I was more and more taken up with ~~sort of~~ filling in for him when ~~he~~ wasn't there, and also trying to lighten the load on him, which was very considerable.

Q: He had always operated under the principle of having a very slender staff.

A: Yes, he sure did. Well, it took him about fifteen years to get to trust anybody, ~~so that~~ which cut down on the number of people he would employ. ~~It was not a bad~~ In my view it was an excellent principle, nothing wrong with it. ~~I don't complain, but~~ -

Q: You must have followed your principle then as your responsibilities increased?

A: I've got a much larger staff than Ralph ever had, ~~but~~ well, it ~~isn't much larger, it's~~ about twice as large. It's eight instead of four, ~~but~~ -

Q: Well, was this really enough for you up there? Here you've described some very fancy diplomacy -

A: ~~Well, everybody's always~~ - You know, we're the only group in this whole business who are constantly criticized for being too small rather than too

large. But Ralph's method of working was based on total confidence, and also on doing a fantastic amount of work himself, and he just didn't want the hassle of administering a large staff. And also, he didn't want to worry about whether he trusted somebody's judgement or not, and with us he knew where he was. I have to say that I think on the whole it was a better way to run it than having a huge bureaucracy.

I don't think ~~actually~~, we ever actually fell down on anything, as far as getting things organized; on the contrary, we were rather ^{and more efficient} quicker than most people. I think we're ^{still} the only office in this ^{UN} building who, as a ^{firm} rule, answer all communications on the day they arrive. Even if we can't answer them, we send interim answers saying "We've got this thing under consideration and we'll let you know as soon as we can."

~~I think~~ that makes a great difference to morale in the field. ~~I think~~ that ^{commands} what exasperates field operations is when they send what they believe to be a very important communication to the Headquarters and Headquarters is so busy going to meetings or something that they don't answer it - which happens, I'm sorry to say, in our administration. It's one of the reasons why the administration isn't trusted: it ^{often} takes weeks to get answers by them. ~~And~~ I have always refused to have that. I think that our job, first of all, is to the people who are at the front, and after that we can take care of diplomatic chores and so on, ~~etc~~

And I think for that you do need a small staff. If you have a big staff, everybody sends memoranda to everybody else and worries about the pecking order, and it's a pain in the neck. If you've got good people, it's much better to have a small number of them.

Q: Did you work primarily as a group combined, or did you specialize, did each officer specialize in some areas - by "areas," I mean functional areas.?

Q: It was, because Jordan, the King of Jordan, kicked them out in the early 1970s -

A: They really were much more conspicuous after Black September - which was in 1970 ~~wasn't it, I think~~ - when they got a base in Beirut and really began to operate on the international scene. It was 1970, September 1970.

Q: How much did you know about all of this development, and what did you think of it? How did you react to it?

A: We didn't actually know too much about it. Our business with the Palestinians has been two fold: ~~one is~~ to look after the refugees and ~~the other is~~ to try to get some negotiations leading to the realization of resolution 181 (1948), which, although it's repeated every year by everybody, has never got any nearer.

And the PLO was, as I say ~~I think until Black September it didn't really~~ ^{after} ~~have too much of a~~ ^{look to aircraft} ~~it was evident in terms of hijacking.~~ If you remember, there was the famous three-plane hijack to the Jordan desert, and there was a lot of that in the late 1960s, ~~but in terms~~ - They began to use the United Nations as a forum - Arafat came here and I think addressed the Assembly in 1974, didn't he?

Q: Yes, it was that late -

A: The PLO in that year got observer status in the United Nations, and it became a very vocal part of the international scene. ~~Personally, I must admit,~~ ^{a lot of} my own opinion is that it's done its own cause ~~nothing but~~ ^{nothing but} damage. ~~I think that~~ ^{tended to} ~~Almost everything the PLO has managed to do has completely derailed~~ any possibility of doing too much about the Palestinian problem.

On the other hand, one has to say that until they took to what is by some called terrorism, like hijacking and kidnapping and so on, nobody paid the smallest attention to the Palestinians; they were just a bunch of refugees, and, in fact,

they're referred to as that in resolution 242 (1967). They are referred to as a refugee problem, they are not referred to as the Palestinian problem, the rights of Palestinians. So I think one has to say that the PLO has made some impact. I think, as a practical matter, they have complicated matters vastly, because they have always adopted the most extreme positions, which has made it completely impossible to get the other side to take negotiations seriously - and that still is the case.

But one has to say that as far as what ~~is sometimes called~~, consciousness-raising about the Palestinian problem, they do a bang-up job with ^{the} all of these high-jinks.

Q: Were you able ever to have anything much to say about the Palestinian refugees in that operation? Were you in touch with them? Do you ever -

A: Well, we're in touch the whole time with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), because we have all sorts of overlapping problems, and we try to help them as much as we can on the political side, but that is a very large, more or less autonomous - in fact, it's the largest United Nations outfit of all. It's a very very large group of people.

Q: Yes, it is large, and they're completely dependent on a political settlement which does not arrive.

A: And there is a great argument, of course, now as to whether UNRWA shouldn't be abolished, on the grounds that it perpetuates the refugee problem. Personally, I think if it's abolished you'll have a revolution in at least four if not more Arab countries, because you will put on the street a bunch of extremely motivated and ~~aimless~~ teenagers, and it's not going to be any good. But - no, they're not in the business of trying to solve the problem; they're in the business

of looking after the Palestinians until the problem is solved, and that looks now as if it's going to be a very long time ahead.

Q: It's always looked that way.

Well, now, during this period you were building up to the 1973 war. How much anticipation did you have that there was going to be another outbreak there; how did you learn about this; how did you keep in touch with it?

A: We had, actually - funnily enough, as it turns out - a rather vivid anticipation of this. We had about 200 observers, 100 on each side, on the Suez Canal, right from 1967 on, and they had a very very sticky time, especially during the war of attrition, which was extremely rough. It became quite clear in 1972 and 1973 that the Israelis, having constructed this enormous sand wall, about 90 feet high in some places, behind which they lived, and having constructed very big fortifications in the sand wall, were sinking into a completely different form of defence, which was called the Bar-Lev line, and which in fact was manned by - I think I'm right in saying ^{less than} ~~about~~ 5000 people.

On the Egyptian side ^{by 1973} there were something like a million soldiers, which is enormous, and it always seemed to me that that didn't really make sense, ~~and just~~ ~~didn't~~ because the Israelis obviously weren't going to cross the Canal anyway, they had no intention of doing so, and in that case, what on earth were the Egyptians, who couldn't afford it, doing with a million soldiers on their side?

We were very bothered, therefore, about what was going to happen in that area, because the Egyptians were getting nowhere with the Jarring mission; the Israelis simply wrote it off, they would have nothing to do with it, they turned down the Jarring memorandum. And then, in the summer of 1973 the Egyptians demanded a meeting of the Security Council at which my old friend ^{Mohammed} El-Zayyat ~~was~~ came as the Foreign Minister. He was a very eloquent and extremely civilized man, and he made

a number of extremely emotional speeches to the Council demanding that somebody really give a nudge to the peace process and to getting back Sinai, which, after all, has been Egyptian for 4000 years. Nobody really paid any attention to this, I am sorry to say, and in retrospect, if you read particularly El-Zayyat's last speech, when the Council had failed to do anything because of the American position, it is a warning of what's to come, because he said - I can't quote it accurately, but he said, "Have you nothing that I can take back to my Government and my people? After all, we are merely asking for what is our right; have you really nothing to say to us? If you have nothing to say, I have to say goodbye, and I do not know when we will be able to meet again in these circumstances." It was a very emotional thing, and everybody said, "Oh, there he goes again."

~~And~~ Of course this was the point at which they had decided on the October War. I went with Waldheim to the Middle East in September 1974. It was the first time Waldheim had ever been to the Middle East, and I must say it was a fairly bizarre trip one way and another, but we'll go into that another time - all sorts of really banal things happened - But we went to see, among others, Golda Meir. And we had just published the Secretary-General's annual report, which I had written, in which ~~on the Middle East~~ we had said that the situation in the Middle East was probably more dangerous than at any time since 1967, it was extremely explosive.

When we got to see Mrs Meir, she went into a tremendous denunciation of this report; she was very rough. Poor Waldheim, who didn't like that kind of thing, was looking very jumpy, so I said - I knew Mrs Meir quite well - "You know, Mrs Meir, I think you shouldn't go on at the Secretary-General about this because, since I happen to be the person who advises him on the Middle East, you have to blame me because this was the advice I gave him."

So she turned on me, and she said, "You international bureaucrats, you UN people are always the same: you can't stand anything going well, and it's simply ridiculous what you're saying. In two years the situation between us and Egypt will have been completely normalized, they'll accept the occupation of the Sinai, and we've reduced our troops on the Canal, and what you're saying is nonsense, and I think it's a most disruptive thing to say."

So I said, "Well, I'm sorry you think that, but you know, the difference between you and us is that we have people on both sides of the Canal. You don't. Can you explain to me why the Egyptians would have on their side of the Canal not only a million troops under arms but also a great deal of bridging which you can see when you drive there? I mean, I've seen it." She said, "Oh, nonsense; absolutely ridiculous." So I said, "All right. ~~we~~ ^{we} have an honest difference of opinion, but I'm not convinced by what you say."

~~Well,~~ This was three weeks before the October war. ~~And then~~ we went to Egypt and saw Sadat, who was extremely silent. He didn't say anything very much; ^{he} was very polite, ~~and, poor man, I now see -~~ ^{his problem when} well, ~~he~~ explained we saw him about six months later, and he said, "You know I'm terribly sorry, the last time you came was a bit awkward for me, because I couldn't really say anything because I couldn't obviously tell you the plans for crossing the Canal, and so it was a bit difficult and I'm sorry about that."

In Mrs Meir's memoirs - I can quote that accurately, because I was so amazed by it - she says: "All that long summer I lay awake at night questioning the estimates which my chief of staff - General Dayan - had given me on the situation on the Suez Canal. I was deeply concerned that the Egyptians might be planning something." She wasn't at all, as far as I know. This is defensive stuff. And of course, Dayan was the person who took the can back for that one.

~~But I don't think~~ I think the Israelis and the Americans were completely ~~it was~~ ^{it was} a psychological warp they were in. The belief was, the Egyptians would never fight, the Egyptians couldn't fight, the Egyptian army is hopeless, they would never do anything, and therefore they ignored ~~I mean,~~ ^{the signs,} they were taking aerial photographs three times a week of the hinterland behind the Canal with all of these vast build-ups of pontoon bridging - I mean, a bridging train across the Canal is 280 vehicles each bridging train, and they had 20 of them, so that that was 20 times 280, I can't do it, but anything -

Q: It's a lot.

A: It's a hell of a lot of very big vehicles, and they're very easily visible. The Americans had a satellite going over it twice a week which also took the same photographs, and everybody said, "Forget it, nonsense, your Egyptian is not a fighting man." It was a classic example of ^{big} ~~this~~, and it was a colossal mistake. And ~~I must say~~, when we tried to point it out we were told we were interfering bureaucrats. I didn't mind particularly, but there it is.

Q: Did you try it with Henry Kissinger as well as Mrs Meir?

A: Well, we certainly told the Americans. The Americans could read this report. But they thought they knew better.

I think the Americans did eventually get a little concerned, but even then I think it was quite a surprise. ~~There's an amazing~~ Do you know the story about the fire hoses?

Sadat told us that story when we went to see him after the war. He said, "You know, I always thought that people's opinion of the Egyptian army was really very low, but I was amazed how low it actually is, and I'll tell you a story about our preparations for the crossing of the Canal."

"The Israelis had built a sand wall, which is in some places 90 feet high. It's a vast sand dune, huge. And we had done a large number of experiments to see how you could possibly cut through a sand wall, because infantry can't climb up 90 feet of sand; it's impossible. And we had tried bombing, bulldozers, everything" - they'd built a whole model of the sand wall somewhere in the desert. Nothing worked.

And then they discovered that if you have a concentration of about 30 high-pressure fire hoses and you fire them like a knife at the sand wall, you could start at the top and cut right down it, and the water, of course, impregnates the sand and keeps it from falling in, and that's exactly what they did. You could see these cuts for a long time afterward - they're just like a piece out of a cake.

And Sadat said, "When we found this, we realized that we were going to need an awful lot of fire hoses, which we didn't have, so we ordered" ~~---I think it was~~ something like 4000 fire hoses from West Germany, which apparently has the best fire hoses.

"And everything was going splendidly, and then, in August 1973 the firm that was making the fire hoses went on strike, and this was simply terrible for us, because we'd decided the date of the Canal crossing and these were absolutely a key to the whole thing. There was no way the infantry were going to get out the other side if they didn't have them. Fortunately, the strike lasted for only four weeks, but that was bad enough.

"We then took the whole of the Egyptian airline, Egypt Air, out of international service and flew a shuttle run from Frankfurt to Cairo carrying nothing but fire hoses. We did it for ten days; nobody ever noticed that we'd taken the Egyptian airline out of international service. Frankfurt, ~~which~~ is full of spies of all nations ^{but} nobody commented on the fact that we were picking up all

these fire hoses in Frankfurt. And the reason was that nobody thought the Egyptians were a military threat; it never occurred to anybody that we would be up to anything to gain our own land, to regain Sinai."

And he said, "Then I realized exactly what a low reputation we have as military people. And it was a very sad realization for me, but it's true." And I think everybody was completely taken in by this psychological misapprehension about the Egyptians.

Q: One of the celebrated events just before the war was Sadat's decision to dismiss the Soviet advisers in the country and send them home. This came in October 1972. Did this have any real bearing on what you were thinking or what you people here thought?

A: No. If you went to Cairo often, you could easily see that the Soviet advisers weren't getting on frightfully well with the Egyptians. I mean, at every level. There was a great complaint about the ~~the~~ particularly ^{shops} shopkeepers, who said they were very mean, and, you know, it wasn't a happy marriage, there's no question. And I think they were trying to take altogether too much part in the political direction of the army, and Sadat didn't like that. He decided he'd had enough.

Q: Once the war started in 1973, what was your role? What did you do?

A: Well, our first role was to try to safeguard our own people. In fact, the Egyptians overran a lot of the ^{UN} observer posts; they killed two ~~of~~ ^{observers} ~~them~~ which they then, when they were winning, tried to have all of the UN communication system ripped out of Egypt, which we resisted.

Then, after about a week, when the tide turned and the Israelis counterattacked and Sharon did the famous counterattack across the Canal, of course

~~the Egyptians~~
they were screaming and yelling for the UN to come back and stop the Israelis, something we could not do.

As you remember, we had a non-stop series of meetings in the Security Council here, but we were mostly geared to anticipating what would happen if you could ever get a cease-fire, and eventually, as you remember, in a great example of the right way to use the UN, Kissinger went to Moscow and got the Russians to cosponsor resolution 338 (1973), which demanded a cease-fire and an immediate resumption of negotiations. That was unanimously passed one Sunday evening by the Security Council.

I did point out, ~~I must say~~, to Kissinger at that time that it was exceedingly unlikely in the military circumstances to work, because at that point the front looked like a kind of "S", a dollar sign, with the Canal going right down the middle, and you had the Israelis way over the Canal to the north and heading south to Port Said, and then you had the Egyptian Third Army trapped in the south on the wrong side of the Canal, and there was a very messy battle going on on this line, partly on one side ~~of the Canal~~, partly on the other. If you'd just told everybody to stop, it was very unlikely they'd be able to do it.

They picked that up very quickly, and the non-aligned group in the Council, following on our suggestions, then put forward the idea of putting in a peace-keeping force to create the cease-fire and to create a disengagement, and we did that with great speed. We took a lot of people from Cyprus. We got them there in under 24 hours, and that did have the required effect. And they also, among other things, maintained ~~with~~ ^{the} supplies and so on ~~the~~ ^{to Egyptian} Third Army, which was cut off. And then they were used in the disengagement process as the people who organized the stages of the disengagement as the Israelis withdrew in the two disengagement agreements.

It was a ~~very~~ very successful operation, ~~and it was what I think~~ - I wish it would happen more often - ~~was~~ a very good mixture of super-Power statesmanship and UN capacity to do things that super Powers can't do on the ground. It worked extremely well.

Q: On the ground you were improvising most of the time?

A: Well, we always are improvising -

Q: But you were able to bring the people from Cyprus -

A: But then of course we also had a great deal to do with the Geneva ^a peace conference in December of that year.

Q: Before we get to that, let me put to you a couple of questions about your new Secretary-General at this point. Here you have this non-stop series of Security Council meetings and the beginning of a way to disengage this trapped force and all the rest. Were you briefing the Secretary-General all this time; were you discussing this with him?

A: Oh yes, absolutely.

Q: He relied on you pretty much?

A: Well, I think it would have been very sensible of him to do so.

After all, we had a great deal of *experience* -

Q: That's the point -

A: Well, Waldheim, you know, has got a very bad press, for various reasons partly because he has an unnegotiable public personality - not his fault, he just has. I mean, he has only to appear before a television camera to switch everybody off.

But in fact he was a ~~very~~ sensible, quite practical person who was extremely good to work with once he got the idea that you knew more about it than he did. He was excellent. I mean, I have no complaints about Waldheim at all, *as far as operations are concerned* And, in fact,

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~~we put across in that emergency, when it was absolutely -~~ If you remember, there was a bigger emergency ^{at the time} because the United States and the Soviet Union began to be sucked into the thing, and there was a nuclear alert in the United States, there was ^{one} tremendous movement of airborne troops in the Soviet Union, ~~nobody to this day has ever been able to explain to me what was really happening.~~ Maybe this was all play-acting, I don't know, but certainly, whatever it was, it was quite scary.

The United Nations played ~~think~~ a very important role in this. One of the great spin-offs of this crisis was that we were told to put together the directive and the mandate for this new force in 24 hours, ~~and~~ ^{this} was a peace-keeping force being put together really for the first time after the Article 19 crisis. There had been already ten years of completely fruitless argument in the ^{General Assembly} ~~Committee of 33~~ on peace-keeping about the principles on which peace-keeping forces were set up. They had never managed to agree; the East and the West had always been in total disagreement; they simply couldn't do it.

We, in 24 hours, put together a report - which is one of the things I'm most proud of in my entire service here - which, taking the arguments which had been made in the abstract in the Committee of 33, we put together a practical arrangement which set out the delimitation of functions between the Security Council and the Secretary-General and the commander in the field. And we got it accepted - everybody, including the Russians, accepted it - and it was and is the basis of all succeeding efforts, incidentally. And it is the most invaluable document, because nobody will ever, in my view, manage to improve on ^{it} ~~that~~, and it actually works, ~~and you couldn't get everybody to agree on it, so that wasn't bad.~~

And I think ~~this~~ ^{was} a great, a remarkable step forward, actually, because we did in practice ^{during a very dangerous crisis} solve all the problems of ~~the~~ peace-keeping forces which could not be solved in theory. So that was something.

But Waldheim was good about accepting advice, ~~he really~~ was. And I must say, very very active. ~~I mean he would~~ he could be got at any hour of the day or night to make the necessary telephone calls and get on with it, and he was excellent. I think he behaved very well over ~~that~~ *at this time*.

Q: Would you characterize his work during those meetings of the Security Council as leadership? Is that too strong a point?

A: Well, I don't think leadership was quite what was required. It was efficient stewardship which was required, and he certainly provided it, and was able to put forward all of the practical suggestions on which we could make progress - and they got accepted, so that I think that was pretty good. Including the troops and where they would come from and when they would go there and who would be the commander and how big a staff and so on - I mean, all these things had to be done, and he did it, so I think you can't fault him on that.

Q: When you wrote your document had you been - were you in touch with people from the Soviet and the American delegations?

A: No.

Q: British? French? None?

A: No, not at all, nobody - well, there wasn't time, thank goodness. No, I think that would have been a mistake, because when we put it to the Security Council in fact, ~~we~~ *Malik, the Soviet Ambassador* put forward a whole series of amendments, and we all sagely nodded our heads and kept right on with the document, and we finally got the document and it was all right. No, ~~I think we couldn't possibly~~ if we'd started consulting with anybody we'd have been lost.

Q: Did the - it's quite clear that the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Kissinger mission to Moscow, had a good deal to do with the ultimate success in the Security Council -

A: Well, tremendous - it set the whole tone. ~~I wouldn't at all - I think the whole framework in which this worked was a Soviet-American framework, and I think it's what the Charter says is supposed to be the way in which the Council operates. And they actually did it.~~

And Kissinger ^{also} did a number of things which ~~I think~~ we could have said was going too far. ~~One of the things~~ ^{he} gave the Soviets ~~was~~ 36 Soviet observers in the UN truce supervision organization, something that ^{we} people had been desperately trying to ~~stop~~ ^{prevent} ever since 1948, and we suddenly woke up one morning and found that Kissinger had said ^{UNTSO} they should have as many Russians as Americans. He didn't tell ^{about this} us anything. ~~I personally have nothing against it, but it was a little bit bizarre.~~

~~and then, of course,~~ ^{he} also set up the arrangement by which the Americans and the Russians were the joint co-chairmen of the peace conference, in my view an admirable arrangement. I think it was extremely sensible.

Q: Let's go into that peace conference a little bit.

A: Wait a minute; before you do that there's another point, which is that that peace-keeping force that was set up ~~then~~ contained an eastern European component, the Poles, which was completely new, and ~~because of all this activity by Kissinger and us and everything~~ the Russians also paid their dues for that peace-keeping force, so it was totally solvent: a very important fact. I wish it was true about some of the others.

Q: Is that true for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) too?

A: Yes, they pay for that. They do not pay for others, though ^{it}

Q: Is UNDOF really different from UNEF II down there on the Suez?

A: Well, it's a completely different concept.

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~~I mean it's a different,~~ It's a much smaller force, and it's based on a very ~~sort~~
~~of~~ detailed map, on detailed zones, on a completely understanding about what
everybody does, including UNDOF, with arms-limitation arrangements and
arms-limitation zones and buffer zones and so on: it's a very ~~very~~ neat, extremely
specific arrangement, and it works very well.

Q: So that could be described as rather more technically based than -

A: ~~Yes, well of course, the thing about UNDOF was, it was~~ the result of
something like five weeks of negotiation by Kissinger, whereas UNEF II was put in
in an emergency, and ~~really~~ we more or less had to wing it.

Q: Now, what about the Geneva Conference? What role did you have there;
what were you doing there?

A: Well, Waldheim and I were the kind of all-purpose - I don't know what
you'd call it.

Q: The bearers of -

A: I mean, we were the people who had to arrange it. And it was quite a
mess, actually, the Geneva Conference, partly because everybody was very nervous,
so that ~~I mean~~ we had the Swiss army on the roof and things like that - and
partly because there was an enormous press interest in it. It was the biggest
press turn-out I've ever seen for any meeting.

It had very prestigious persons there, including Kissinger, and, as always,
the great problem was the seating arrangement, which again, theoretically, was
insoluble, because nobody wanted to sit next to Israel, including the United States
for various reasons. We tried everything. Finally we ended up with separate
tables, but even then the whole business of who was next to whom mattered. I had
invented a purely random plan which had no logic, which ended up with the Israelis

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sitting next to the Russians, and everybody was enthusiastic about this, but unfortunately nobody had told Gromyko, ~~and I pointed there we were.~~ It was a Monday morning, the thing was due to start at 11, and there we were at 11.15, everybody enthusiastically agreeing to this random plan, and I felt obliged to point out that nobody had bothered to consult the Soviet Union. And so Kissinger ~~then~~ said, "Well, you'd better go and tell Gromyko," and I said, "Don't you think it might be better if you did?" and he said, "No, no, no, you do it."

So I went over to Gromyko and said, ~~you know,~~ I started off with a long thing about the urgency of establishing peace in the Middle East and all that, and how important the Soviet Union contribution was, and I could see a vast skepticism creeping over him - but he was very nice about it. And then I said, "I have a rather bizarre proposal to make, it's about the seating. ~~And then~~ the only way we can get this damn' thing started, we're already half an hour late, is as far as I can make out, this plan. But there is one rather strange element in it, which is that you seem to be sitting next to the Israelis, ~~which isn't in the alphabet or~~ anything."

Gromyko laughed, and said: "Very interesting, very bizarre. I accept on one condition."

So I said, "Oh really? What's that?"

And he said, "Henry must come on his knees and ask me."

So I went back and reported this to Kissinger who, I must say, was very good. He said, "Oh, all right, fine," and he went over and put it to ~~him~~ ^{Gromyko}, and we got it. But unfortunately, that conference only went for three days, and then it set up various working groups, which organized the disengagement agreements and ~~kilometres~~ and then it stopped. I think it was a very great pity because ~~I think~~ it potentially was a very good instrument; we've never managed to get back to it.

Q: I think this is a logical place to stop.

[Technical discussion]

Q: Let's go back to the 1973 war. You were discussing the Geneva Conference.

A: The subgroup actually was only the Egyptian-Israeli one, Kilometre 101 and all that.

Q: And this came to a halt?

A: And that led to the disengagement agreements which finally led, of course, to Camp David.

^{ut} By then the whole conference procedure lapsed, ~~and~~ there was a fundamental point of disagreement, which was the representation of the Palestinians. This was the point at which Arafat was just beginning to throw his weight about internationally and had become a very conspicuous figure, and there was never any way you could get to an agreement on the representation of the Palestinians. That went on until 1977, when the policy of the Carter Administration was the Middle East peace conference or bust, and in fact we spent four or five weeks running around the Middle East trying to work out a solution to the Palestinian representation problem, all over the Arab world.

Q: With much encouragement from Washington?

A: ~~Well,~~ they were very keen on it. And we also took some time off to get the first high-level agreement between Makarios and Denktash at that particular point, too. Actually, the report on that, even if I say so myself, is the clearest thing on this particular problem in the whole of the 1970s, in my view; it's a report of the Security Council.

Just when everybody was trying to see whether there wasn't some way into this with a united Arab delegation or something like that, Sadat went to Jerusalem, and that of course started the whole Camp David process, which completely sidetracked any idea of a comprehensive Middle East peace conference; so that to that extent, ^{Peace Conference} the ~~thing~~ was really still-born. I mean, after Geneva, in 1973, it never really met again.

Q: You're saying now that the Camp David meetings and the subsequent agreement really represents quite a different track from where you had started?

A: Well, it's a one-on-one track. It's a bilateral negotiation between Israel and one Arab State ^{with} the United States as kind of godmother, which is completely different from the conference, which was the idea of trying to go simultaneously at the whole thing and to break down into subgroups to discuss different aspects of it, which is what many people now want to get back to, of course.

Q: Did you have any advance signals about the Sadat visit and the Camp David process?

A: No, absolutely not. I don't think anybody did.

Q: But you had encouragement from the Americans to go on with this round in the Middle East? Did you have encouragement from anyone else?

A: Well, the Americans were very keen on it, and, in fact, what in my view is one of the better documents - in recent years certainly - about the Middle East was the Soviet-American communiqué of November 1977, which is an extremely sensible ~~well, it's a little bit like the Reagan initiative, except it's much shorter - it's an extremely sensible~~ document, and the Americans had to withdraw their support of that because Sadat was against it. And of course the reason became very clear soon, because then Sadat went to Jerusalem instead.

But that was in fact, I think, in many ways the high point of a sort of enlightened effort to go for a serious solution. But then it collapsed because Sadat was against it.

Q: Whenever we've talked about serious solutions, you tend to opt for a multilateral solution, quite naturally you prefer this; you look in that direction. Is this really competitive with a bilateral approach?

A: I think if you could get bilateral approaches it would be fine, but this is anathema in the Arab world. I mean, that's why they're so angry with Egypt, because Egypt concluded a bilateral treaty with Israel ~~and thereby left~~ ~~the~~ - and the Arabs believe this was an act of treachery to Arab aspirations. Rightly or wrongly, that was just the fact; that's what they think. And that is where, I think, that any effort of Jordan, for example, to now start negotiating with Israel is going to come into very serious trouble, because they're going to get hell from Syria, which is just up the road, and they're going to have a lot of trouble in the Arab group over that.

I think it's a pity, but nonetheless there it is; it's just a fact. ~~So one~~ ~~has to try to~~ I think the ideal thing would be to devise some tent or umbrella under which all sorts of negotiations could go on, and you could call it a conference or any old thing, but under a large blue tent all sorts of things could happen. But so far at any rate, the Israelis and the Americans are against that.

I've got to leave you.

Q: All right. Let's stop here. Thanks, Brian; that went very nicely. Did you enjoy it?

A: Not particularly, but it's all right.

Q: Oh, come on! Don't you think it was better than hanging on the telephone up there now?