

YUN INTERVIEW

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JK: For the record, Mr. Epstein, could you explain the role that you played at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel? During the years 1947 through 1949, where were you and what was your role?

Epstein: I was the acting chief of the Middle East section of the political division of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. The Palestine issue became a part of the purview of the Middle East section. We had in that section an Arab by the name of Saleh Mahmoud. He stayed a few years until about 1950 and then he went back to government and became Ambassador. He is dead now. Another man who got involved in the Palestine question was a fellow by the name of Brigadier Williams. He was an Englishman. I am a Canadian. He had been Field Marshall Montgomery's intelligence officer in the Middle East. He was in a different section in the same department. When the British referred the whole question to the United Nations in 1947, Ambassador Arkady Sobolev, who was the head of the Political and Security Council Department, asked each of us to do a

paper on what the Palestine question was all about. He wanted the Arab point of view, the Jewish point of view, and the British point of view. The British had the mandate over Palestine at that time continuing from the League of Nations.

They had referred the question to the UN and we had a special session on this, the First Special Session.

JK: That was about in April of 1947.

Epstein: Right, early in '47.

JK: Would those papers be in the Archives?

Epstein: They should be. I did a paper that concluded that there was a terrible gap in the conflicting positions. The British had promised everything to everybody. They had promised a Jewish national home for the Jews in the Balfour Declaration. Then they had promised the Arabs something, also. Weizmann in 1917 or so had signed a document with Feisal, who later became king of Iraq that stated that Palestine should be both a Jewish national home or state and an Arab state. He signed that as long as there is this Arab state we will support the idea of the Jewish state. When the mandate started under the League of Nations it covered both banks of the Jordan River. The West Bank, as they call it now, and the East Bank which was Jordan. Then in 1922 when Churchill was Colonial Minister, they cut off Jordan which was then called Transjordan. The Emir Abdullah who was the grandfather or great grandfather of King Hussein was there

and Palestine was put under a new League mandate which had the purpose of establishing a Jewish national home while preserving the civil and political rights of the Arabs. Britain was given the mandatory power by the League of Nations. It was to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine according to the Balfour Declaration. Then there was the entire tense struggle between the Arabs and the Jews after 1919 or 1920 when the mandate was finally given to the British. In 1922 Churchill had divided off Transjordan from Palestine. That was to be the Arab state and Palestine was to be the Jewish national home. But they wrote into the mandate "while preserving the civil and political rights of the Arabs." Then they went through lots of troubles. The British as the mandatory power during the 20s and 30s decided to side more and more with the Arabs. The Jews and others involved called it divide and rule. Keep them at loggerheads and that means you will stay there. Then they issued the White Paper in 1938 or '39 which restricted Jewish immigration. The League of Nations Mandates Commission said that was contrary to the mandate. They had no right to do that under the mandate. It was contrary to the traditional interpretation that had always been accepted and passed by majority vote.

JK: So, the League of Nations did actually object to the White Papers.

Epstein: They did not accept it. Then the war broke out and the Jewish people of Palestine were naturally opposed to Hitler and they decided to help out in any way they could. The Arabs were ambivalent. In fact, the Grand Mufti spent a lot of time in Germany during the war putting out propaganda for the Nazis. They felt that they had been cheated by the British just as the Jews had felt. There had been a lot of royal commissions and other commissions of inquiry. I went through all of those things in the paper I did and I came to the conclusion that you couldn't give it all to the Arabs, which was what they wanted, and you couldn't give it all to the Jews because it was a difficult question. The Jews were a minority in the population. They had 600,000 and the Arabs had 1,200,000 at that time in the whole of the area of Palestine. So, I came up with the conclusion which was not new. It had been put forward by the royal commission at one time. They had a royal commission during the very late twenties or the early thirties. They had recommended partition, dividing it into an Arab state and a Jewish state. And I came to the conclusion that this was the only way out. If you have two claims to the whole of the land and you can't give it to both, then you can only divide it. It was a difficult task to divide it to make sure that the Jews would be a majority in their part of the country. I wrote that paper and I know that both Sobolev, the head of the

department, and Trygve Lie liked the paper. I had a copy of my Arab colleague's paper, Saleh Mahmoud, which emphasized the psychological problem. The Arabs had been there for two thousand years and had always been a majority while the Jews had been a minority for two thousand years. Then they started coming in with the Nazi expulsion of Jews from Germany. There was a big influx and there were big rows and the British White Paper, which tried to restrict immigration.

My colleague said you had to approach this problem from a psychological viewpoint, just summarizing it. According to all the psychological input it was an Arab region or state. The British did a typical British analysis. He said these two people are at each other's throats and we have to hold the ring there. We have to make sure that they don't start butchering each other. But both the Arabs and the Jews at that time thought that the British were playing the other's game and that it was divide and rule and not to suppress the fighting but to encourage it. It is a very strategically located area right at the Suez Canal and a crossroads not just to the Middle East but to Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Trygve Lie and the head of the department liked my paper best and then they set up this commission to go there, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). Both Saleh Mahmoud and I were chosen to go there as experts, he the Arab expert and I the Jewish expert. At the last minute, however,

I don't know who arranged it, but we were both removed. I was informed by Andrew Cordier, the Secretary-General's assistant at the time, that they were not going to have either an Arab expert or a Jewish expert on the commission because that might give the impression that there was some bias one way or another. I remember Sobolev was very annoyed by that. He said, "What you are doing is taking away the experts who are both UN civil servants sworn to be impartial in their actions and behavior. We had already had our shots and it hit the newspapers at the time that we had been kicked off on the grounds that we might be biased and knew too much. We were very annoyed.

UNSCOP came up with the plan of partition with economic union. That was the only new element over the royal commission, which had come up with partition years earlier. Another commission had suggested a bi-national state. That may have been the joint Anglo-American commission at the end of the war in 1946. The British rejected that. They rejected all the reports of all the commissions. The majority of the UNSCOP members proposed partition, the Jewish state and the Arab state with economic union. They came up with a very clever idea in which you could have crossover points, the strip along the Sea of Galilee, the valley of Jezreel, the coastal strip. The coastal strip was all Jewish whereas the Sea of Galilee, the West Bank, and a large part

of the Negev were not. They came up with this brilliant idea of having crossover points so that each of the three Jewish and Arab separate areas could have crossing points for people to cross to another area while still staying within their own jurisdictions. Their report came to the United Nations and they set up a special committee on the Palestinian question in the fall of 1947. They had various committees set up, a committee for the Jewish state and a committee for the Arab state. The committee for the Arab state didn't really do anything. They just opposed the whole thing. The real guts of the thing were handled by what they called the committee on implementation. The members on that committee were Mike (Lester) Pearson, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada (he later became Prime Minister), Herschel Johnson of the United States, the Russian, Simeon Tsarapkin who later became Ambassador, and Ambassador Garcia Granadas of Guatemala. These were the powerful committee of four. The Americans and the Russians both favored and accepted the partition plan. It was just a question of working out the boundaries and the rules. The commission had recommended that Jerusalem be a "corpus separatum," an international city. They had to deal with all these difficult questions. This was the guts of it, how you go about implementing the plan.

JK: Did you continue to discuss these issues with the committee and advise these people?

Epstein: The head of the political department was Alfonso Garcia Robles, who in 1982 won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on disarmament, and I was the Jewish expert whose paper had been taken as the basis for the partition paper, which had been taken as the partition approach. Garcia Robles was the secretary of UNSCOP and Ralph Bunche was there as one of the senior advisors because he was a director in the Trusteeship Department. They took care of the mandated territories. Although Garcia Robles was the principal secretary, he was the head of the Political Division and I was the acting chief of the Middle East section. I was the author of the partition plan that was accepted by the Secretary-General and it was obviously circulated to the members of UNSCOP. There were no summary records. So, I'm the only person alive that has a record of what went on there. I just kept notes. If they needed factual information I could advise them. But they all had their own advisors.

You had the big two, the US and the Soviet Union, which favored it, Canada who supported it strongly, and Garcia Granadas of Guatemala. He represented the Latin Americans. In those days we had 21 Latin American countries out of the 60 UN members.

JK: The Jewish Agency was here in New York.

Epstein: The Jewish Agency had been created by the mandate and they were the spokesmen for the Jewish case for the ad hoc

committee on the Jewish question.

JK: What was the Jewish Agency's view of partition?

Epstein: They accepted it completely, no question about that.

They took an active role in adjusting the boundaries that had been recommended by UNSCOP. That was one of jobs that had to be done, that of adjusting and finalizing the boundaries. That was the main problem to be dealt with and you had to create a statute for Jerusalem as an international city. And you had to create the provisions for the economic union. The Arabs refused to cooperate. Herbert Evans of Australia who was President of the General Assembly tried to carry on discussions with the Arabs and got nowhere. The work was done in a subcommittee on how to solve these difficult problems, for example, where would the airport be. Under the plan put forward by UNSCOP the airport had been just inside the Arab state. But it was used mainly by the Jews and by the British. I remember at one meeting Tsarapkin of the Soviet Union insisted that it was used by the Jews and the British and other outsiders and not by the Arabs, so it should go in the Jewish state and the boundary should be moved over just a little bit.

Then there was the whole question of Jaffa. That was an Arab city in the Jewish state. That was settled automatically later on because most of the Arabs fled from Palestine. Their own leaders told them to flee. They said, "We'll come

back and you'll take over the whole country." The Arabs charge that they were driven out by the Jews, but I know specific instances, stories where the Jews and Arabs, in Haifa particularly, had good relations. The Jews went around in trucks with loudspeakers saying, "Don't leave, you'll be safe. We'll work together." But the Arab radio said to get out and flee. So, they fled. There had been a lot of fighting between the two groups. A number of nasty incidents took place. Jews were massacred in one whole village, Kfar Etzion. Arabs were massacred in retaliation by the Jews, and all kinds of things. It wasn't an easy time.

JK: Just to back up a little, the British had referred the matter to the UN, indicating that they wanted to pull out.

Epstein: They didn't want to pull out. They were asking the UN for advice on which was the best way to proceed. They were hoping that they would be asked to stay on.

JK: They did want to stay on? My impression had been that they wanted to get out.

Epstein: That was the impression they gave. After the report of UNSCOP was submitted calling for the separate states, the British said, "We will have nothing to do with it. We will leave on May 14th and let them take over. They left under such circumstances that they gave the military advantage to the Arabs. They pulled out of the Jewish areas first and the Arab areas last. That gave the Arabs the advantage in the

fighting. The Jordanians and the Arab legion were organized and operating under the British in the West Bank and were, in effect, permitted to take over the West Bank. It was like leaving the keys in the door. But that comes a little bit later.

JK: The commission favored partition. Was that unanimous?

Epstein: There were eleven members in UNSCOP. Eight favored partition and there was a minority report. That is all in the documents. I have all the documents at home, actually. I would have to refer to them. The majority plan was eight out of eleven. The minority plan was India, Yugoslavia, and Iran. The majority plan was Sweden Canada, Uruguay, Guatemala, and some other countries. I'll never forget two conversations that I heard. When it came to vote on the partition plan of the economic union, the French Ambassador, Parodi, wasn't 100% sure what was the best thing to do. Parodi asked Henri Vigier who said, "Obviously we should support the partition plan or it will continue in chaos." Then I'll never forget Herschel Johnson, American Ambassador, saying to Mike Pearson at one of our meetings, "Hell, we should tell the British they better damn well stay there until the whole matter is settled. They've got the mandate."

But they were giving up the mandate which they decided to do when the UNSCOP report came out. They were giving up the mandate and they were pulling out of Palestine. Herschel

Johnson said, "How can they do that? That is abandonment of their responsibilities." I'll never forget Mike Pearson saying, "How can we prevent a nation from assigning bankruptcy?" In other words, how can you force a nation to do something it cannot do?

JK: So, the commission reported to the General Assembly.

Epstein: They drafted the dates of everything. On the 14th of May the plan was to go into effect. In the meantime they set up a Palestine Commission of five members with a Czech as chairman. There was a Philippine, a Dane, a Czech, and someone from Latin America. Bunche was selected as its secretary and I was selected as the senior officer from the Political Department. Their job was to implement it as soon as the Resolution was adopted. And, boy, that was a tough job, adopting the partition plan.

JK: This was the General Assembly Resolution.

Epstein: Yes, adopting the plan of partition with economic union. All of the Arabs were against it. Nearly all of the Western countries plus the whole Soviet block were for it. This was one of the few times that you found the Americans and the Soviets together on a political question. It was a matter for notice that the superpowers were joining together here and the British getting kicked out. There was one of the Arabs during the Special Session, Hussini, a representative of the Arab Higher Committee, who gave

evidence to the Session just as the Jewish Agency did. They were not governments but they were the representatives of the people. The Jewish Agency had special status in the mandate to represent not just the Jews in Palestine but the Jews of the world. Hussini said, "We are lost, we are lost," when Gromyko came out with a speech favoring partition. He also said, "This will be nothing but a line of fire and death." The Arabs tried everything to block this Resolution. Kamil Shamun, who was just killed in Lebanon, came up at the end when it came to a vote and he moved that it be postponed and that there be other efforts to resolve the problem, that there be continuing efforts by the Arabs, British, and the Jews to try to solve it. I remember the Jewish Agency people were very worried because this would have meant a postponement of what they had been waiting for 2000 years. This would be very dangerous. The President of the General Assembly and the Special Session was Oswaldo Aranha of Brazil. He said, "This is not a Resolution for postponement which means this would have priority, it is a substantive Resolution. The other calls for postponing it and it calls for additional consultations and efforts at compromise. This is a substantive Resolution. So, we don't vote on the other one first." There may have been some countries that would have liked to postpone the whole question.

JK: This was the Special Session in the fall of 1947.

Epstein: Yes. In the ad hoc committee on the Palestinian question both Chaim Weizmann and Ben Gurion appeared. The only time Ben Gurion showed up here. I think it was the only time that Weizmann showed up. Weizmann talked about that they had to have their Jewish state. It was 2000 years of history. They always carry a knapsack on their back and there always seems to be anti-Semitism in the knapsack as they go from one place to another, the wandering Jews. It was time to end that and give them their place. Ben Gurion came out with a very short but a very powerful speech. He said, "The only way we can have peace in that area of the world is to have an Arab state and a Jewish state and an Arab/Jewish alliance." He pounded the table when he said that. I was so impressed by that and he was right. That is what led to the idea of the Arab state, the Jewish state, and the economic union.

The vote in the General Assembly was something like 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions. It was an overwhelming majority. The Arabs all stood up and said that they would oppose it and they would not cooperate. It was an historic vote. The best place I've seen it written up with emotion was in Leon Uris's Exodus. He gave the reaction from people listening in to the voting over the radio. They danced in the streets in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Then the Palestine Commission had to go to work.

JK: The fighting intensified after that.

Epstein: The fighting got much worse than it had been before.

It was almost perpetual guerrilla warfare. The Palestine Commission said that there was no way that they could go and implement this plan. Their task was to implement the plan of partition and economic union. The British wouldn't guarantee their safety. I remember Golda Meir asked me, "What about setting up a United Nations force to police the area?" I told her the difficulties in setting up such a force were such that she had better forget it. "There was no point in relying on a United Nations force to implement your plan. If the plan is to be implemented at all, you will have to implement it on your own. You cannot expect the UN to do it." They came before the Palestine Commission. I was a senior officer there. Bunche was the principal secretary. We met day after day after day and finally we submitted a report saying that there was no way they could implement this thing because there was a virtual war going on in Palestine.

JK: The British were not interested at all in implementing it?

Epstein: On the contrary, they said they would not do anything to implement the plan. "All we will do is withdraw our forces and our government on May 14th, which was the day selected in the implementation Resolution. All we will do is leave the key in the lock. We are not going to transfer anything to either Arabs or Jews. We will just leave

everything and let them do it." I remember saying to Golda Meir, "Look, if you're going to do anything here, you've got to do it yourself. There will be no help from the British."

Many people said the British were trying to sabotage the plan. There would be no help from the United Nations because we didn't have the machinery for doing it. Then they submitted the whole thing to the Security Council.

I'll never forget the American Ambassador, Warren Austin, at a meeting of the Security Council. He was talking about the terrible guerrilla fighting that was going on. Jews and Arabs were killing each other. He pounded the table saying, "If only the Jews and Arabs would have a little more Christian spirit, behavior and ideas." That was written right into the record.

JK: Neither being Christian, that was hardly possible.

Epstein: Right, anyway at the end he came up calling for restoration of the mandate. I'll never forget Trygve Lie saying to me, "Epstein, tonight the first born child of the United Nations died." That was when the Security Council said there was nothing we could do to enforce the Partition Plan. Then somebody came up with the idea of appointing a mediator. And they finally agreed on Bernadotte. He was to recommend the best way of proceeding. This was after May the 14th. What happened is that on May the 14th -- and this was a dramatic occasion -- the Assembly was in session at that

time.

JK: There was a Second Special Session between April and May, 1948.

Epstein: That's it. They had called for a truce. They set up the Truce Supervision Organization shortly following that. Before May 14, they were debating this thing and the Arabs were making long speeches and the pro-Israelis were making long speeches. There was a fellow by the name of Sayre, an American Ambassador at the time. All of a sudden there was a hush that came over the hall and people were going outside. There was a tremendous hubbub outside. Finally, an Arab spokesman went up (it may have been Fawzi of Egypt) and spoke, "We hear that there has been news that has come out that the United States government at six pm (or whatever time) tonight recognized the provisional government of Israel." The Israelis had created a provisional government on the day before the 14th because the 14th was a Saturday and was a Jewish holiday. So, the day before they declared the establishment of the Jewish state, implementing the Partition Plan, A pressman came to me with a wire service statement, "Tel Aviv, State of Israel: declaration of the establishment of the Jewish State." And a few minutes later everybody went out of the hall. Then Fawzi went to the podium saying, "We want to get government information. We hear from the press that not only has there been the

establishment of the Jewish State, but that the American government has officially recognized the provisional government of Israel.

JK: How did the establishment of the Jewish State and the US recognition of that status effect things at the United Nations?

Epstein: I have to go back to another point. There were legal questions involved. How can the General Assembly recommend that there should be a Jewish state and an Arab state? By what authority? You have to have some authority to do that. The legal experts said the Assembly can't do that. I remember the Israelis asking about that and I told them to read Article 14 of the Charter which said that they could recommend anything on any questions of peace and security. They can make recommendations, not decisions like the Security Council. The Russians said when that question was put to them, "This has nothing to do with the Charter. This is a continuation and disposal of the League of Nations mandate. The United Nations is the successor to the League of Nations and, therefore, we have the same jurisdiction to deal with their mandate as the League of Nations had." So, that legal argument was dropped. Also, under international law there was a recommendation made that there be a Jewish state and that the Jews of Palestine said, "We accept that recommendation and we are going to implement it." That made

it strictly legal. It was immediately recognized within minutes by the United States and the following day by the Soviet Union. The British were livid. They thought this was much too hasty. Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, was really upset. Many Israelis and British told me that he was anti-Semitic. I have had lots of confirmation of that.

That was a dramatic moment. One Arab after another went to the podium. Fawzi said he had been misled. It was a fake. "The Americans had told us they wanted to bring about a peaceful solution. They misled us. It is all fakery." Zafula Khan of Pakistan was a strong supporter of the Arabs and more intelligent in his historical arguments than many others who were motivated primarily by emotions and psychological reactions. He was trying to be political, historical, and legal. He stood up and said, "Well, so be it, but there are going to be a lot of problems and troubles." This is what I remember. I'm speaking everything as I recall it.

I'm not sure when it was that they set up the Truce Supervision Organization. The Security Council called for a truce. They appointed a chief of staff of the organization.

The first one was General Burns of Canada. He went out there.

JK: He is no longer living. Is that correct?

Epstein: Yes, he's dead. But he wrote a book about it. I

remember the Security Council appointing a mediator and calling for a six weeks truce. They set up the Truce Supervision Organization to observe the truce during that six week period. He went out there and he was given staff and everything. Bernadotte was the mediator. Saleh Mahmoud and I had been kicked off UNSCOP. But when Bernadotte made his headquarters at Rhodes we all got telegrams, Mahmoud, Epstein, Vigier, "Come to Rhodes to work on the Partition Plan." I remember asking, "How come they want us now when they kicked us off then?" They said very plainly that our job now was to implement the Partition Plan and the mediation effort and the truce. Now they needed our expertise to implement both Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

JK: So, you went to Rhodes during the time that Bernadotte was there?

Epstein: Yes, I was the senior Jewish UN officer. And Mahmoud was stationed in Cairo as a liaison because he was an Egyptian. Vigier was in Israel. He was the senior political officer in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. John Reidman was an economist. He became an important advisor to Ralph Bunche on the mediator staff. I'll never forget the night that Bernadotte was assassinated.

JK: Explain what happened.

Epstein: I was in Rhodes with my wife. We heard the news that Bernadotte was assassinated outside of Tel Aviv. He was in

his car. There was General Saroul, a Frenchman, and somebody else in the car. Bunche was supposed to go with him on that trip, but he didn't. He had some other function. We had little branch offices in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. In Jerusalem we had the headquarters for the Truce Supervision Organization in the old government house which is still there and the Truce Supervision heads are still there, too. One of my jobs assigned by Trygve Lie and Sobolev was to be the Jewish expert and liaison with the Jews, find out their thinking, explain our thinking to them, etc. One of the nicest things that has ever happened to me in my life was on May 14th, 1949, a year later, when I got a letter from Chaim Weizmann, President of the Jewish State, expressing his thanks to me for all the help I had been to them during the days when the question was being considered at the United Nations. I thought it was a very nice gesture. I showed it to people around the UN.

JK: Was Count Bernadotte considered to be neutral or impartial?

Epstein: He was on the whole neutral and impartial. (Oh, I've got to tell you another story, a real cute story. I mustn't forget that one.) He had come up with the idea in one of his earlier proposals that Jerusalem should belong to Jordan, the Arab state.

JK: The entire city?

Epstein: Yes, the entire city, an international city, would

belong to Jordan, at least all of the holy places, the old city not the new city. The old city was where all the historical places were. I'd have to look this up. Maybe he wanted the whole corpus separatum to belong to Jordan or maybe it was only the holy places. That idea he came up with sometime in June. Then they thought he was being very anti-resolution, anti-Jewish. I wrote a memo when I got there saying that this was the worst conceivable thing that could happen because the Jews wanted to implement the Partition Plan as a whole including the provisions on Jerusalem. For him to depart from that was a big mistake. That made an impression on him because when he came out with the final Bernadotte report he went back to the idea of internationalization.

JK: But this was a public statement that he had made?

Epstein: Oh yes, they were proposals to the Jews and the Arabs how he visualized the solution. He wanted to cut down the Jewish territory a little bit and increase the Arab territory a little bit and give them the old city because his thinking, as I had it explained to me by Bunche and by himself, was, "Look, the Jewish support we have for the Partition Plan. We have to attract Arab support. So, we have to give them something because they are the ones who are putting up the fight against the Partition Plan." The Palestine Commission in their final report to the Security Council said that the

Jews had accepted the Partition Plan and wanted it implemented, whereas, the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab governments were trying to overthrow it by force. Therefore, there was no way that they could go and implement the plan. Let me get back to what I was saying about Berndotte's assassination. I and my wife were there. Vigier, a French Roman Catholic although not all that religious, and his wife were also there. One of us confirmed that he had been assassinated and two others with him. We would all have a drink before going into dinner. When we walked into dinner there were many anti-Semitic remarks, "Those God damned Jews," etc. It was enough to curl your hair. We usually went over and joined everybody, but they were so busy damning not just the assassins but all Jews and Israelis and anybody in the world who had any Jewish connection. So, we decided to go over to our own little table and have a drink. Vigier and his wife came into the room right after us and they saw what was going on and so, they asked if they could come and join us. I thought that was a nice gesture. He was an older person. He had been in the League of Nations. He was the oldest person around and a man of considerable stature and prestige.

JK: It was a difficult time for you.

Epstein: I couldn't believe that he had been assassinated for a while. They attributed it to the Stern gang. In Israel

there was the Jewish Agency and their military was called the Hagannah. They had the revisionists which became the Likud.

Their military arm was the Irgun. The Stern gang did not have any solid political group. They were just a gang. That was why they called them the Stern "gang." They attributed the assassination to them. They carried on many investigations, but they never really found out who did it. The Swedes were quite testy for a long time until they carried out a deep and thorough investigation, not just a superficial one.

JK: What effect did the assassination have on the negotiations?

Epstein: I don't think it had much effect at all. Bunche was immediately appointed acting mediator. Bernadotte had approved the report before he had left on his last trip to Israel. In the report they were going to reduce the amount of territory the Israelis had in the Negev. Bernadotte was assassinated in late September. Bunche had taken over as acting mediator. I got along very well with both Bunche and Bernadotte. Bernadotte wanted an extension of the six weeks truce and he was going to the Security Council to ask for it.

I was along with him when he went to the Israelis and they said yes that they agreed to the extension. They would abide by the truce. I remember urging Bernadotte to get that down in writing before going to the Security Council. After I came, the first job I had to do was to write a report on the

incidents in which the Truce Supervision Organization and Bernadotte had had to intervene and investigate. I wrote a long report. I spent days and weeks sifting through tons of reports sent in by the truce people, by the Israelis, by the Arabs. These were alleged breaches of the truce. I had to write a long report about it and I did. I said that while there were a lot of incidents and charges and claims, they had all been investigated and on the whole the truce had held up and was a success. That was the final conclusion.

I'll never forget. After he read it, he came up to me and shook my hand and said it was a wonderful report, very accurate. He went to the Security Council and that was the first time they threatened to use Chapter VII of the Charter.

They approved the truce extension and said that if either side refused the Security Council would take action under Chapter VII of the Charter. So, they extended the truce for a period of time.

Then he came back and we were working on his report. We had lengthy discussions. I argued with him and others and some of my points they agreed with and others they did not agree with. Then he came up with the report that the Negev would be divided and that the Jews would be given the areas they had captured in the fighting, Lod and Ramle which is east of Tel Aviv, and the parts they had captured in Galilee. Then they had all of Galilee, all of the Coastal plain down to

Egypt. But he wanted to give the eastern part of the Negev to the Arab state.

One day Bunche had me busy writing something up and that night my wife said to me, "Who are these people who came in today?" I said, "I don't know. I've been working all day."

She said, "Well, they must have been people of some importance because a plane came to drop off just the two of them." So, she went to check with the desk to ask. And one was Sir John Troutbeck, head of the British Middle East office in Cairo, and the other was Colonel Robert MacClintock, the special assistant to General Marshall, who was then Secretary of State. They had come in and I didn't know anything about this. I hadn't been told. Later I was told that on the same plane that had brought them in, Bunche had arranged for all the press people to leave, saying that they could get a free flight to Paris where the General Assembly was going to meet. The newspaper people like free rides. So, as Troutbeck and MacClintock got off one end of the plane all of the press got on the other end. So, they weren't even around.

JK: This is the second part of the interview with William Epstein on the founding of the State of Israel. Today's date is

October 23, 1990. We were previously discussing the negotiations at Rhodes and I wanted to ask about a couple of things we had talked about informally. Would you like to talk about the incident when the young man was mistaken for you?

Epstein: There was a young Canadian lawyer about the same age as I, was a very handsome chap. His name was Courtney Kingstone and with his looks and a name like that you would think he was an actor. He was a member of the legal department. Stavropoulos was the director of the legal department. This fellow Kingstone was assigned to the Bernadotte mission. I was located at the headquarters at Rhodes. I was permitted to go to Israel but not to the Arab states. My colleague, Saleh Mahmoud, was stationed in the Cairo office and would come to Rhodes occasionally and as a rule did not go into Israel. We were there as advisors in the area of our expertise. They were very tense times. Bernadotte was driving to all the different countries trying to persuade them to accept some form of mediation. He had come up originally with his first plan in which he had suggested that East Jerusalem, the old city of Jerusalem, should go to Jordan. He agreed to change his mind on that afterwards. There were a lot of small things that had to be settled. There was an oil refinery in Haifa and there was a question as to who was supposed to own that. It had been owned by one

of the British oil companies and they didn't know what to do with it. I said that there wasn't anything that they could do with it except let the Israeli authorities decide who owned it. It was a private company. It was in Israel's territory.

There was a lot of guerrilla activity going on, small fighting, no large things. When the six weeks of the truce was over Bernadotte had to go back to the Security Council and get an extension. Israel had agreed to its extension and the Arabs had not. The Security Council then lay down under Chapter VII that they had to accept it or they would be subject to sanctions. But, in the meantime there was a lot of guerrilla fighting, uncontrolled, sporadic fighting. Once when Bernadotte was visiting Amman on some mission (he had members of his staff stationed in the various capitals in the surrounding states), Courtney Kingstone, an aid to Bernadotte, was captured by some guerrillas. Instead of shooting him right away they put him in prison saying that it was that young Canadian Jewish lawyer advising the Secretary-General as the Jewish expert. They thought that he was William Epstein. He tried to explain to them who he was and what he was. They didn't believe him. He got more and more worried and scared. You know things were really fairly chaotic at that time. You didn't know who was in charge. Some of these guerrillas would shoot first and ask questions

afterwards. He was really worried and then he struck the one sure way he could prove that he wasn't the Jewish chap, William Epstein. He showed them that he was uncircumcised and that was proof enough that he wasn't Jewish. So, he escaped that way.

JK: That is quite a proof. He was lucky.

Epstein: I remember him telling me about it later. He said, "Thank God my parents didn't circumcise me." Then he would never have been able to persuade them. It was a scary thing at the time for him, but it was an amusing story afterwards.

The other thing that was interesting was that Mr. Robert MacClintock who was assistant to Secretary of State Marshall of the United States and Sir John Troutbeck, head of the British Middle East office in Cairo, both arrived on one plane which was obviously prearranged by Bunche. Bunche had told the press that he had some people coming in to discuss the refugee problem. There were a lot of refugees in different camps. We had somebody sent out to us earlier from the Disaster Relief section of the United Nations at that time to take a look at what could be done to help the Arab refugees who had gone into Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and the surrounding countries. They had become a real strain on those governments.

These two officials arrived. I don't remember if this was

after Bernadotte had been assassinated.

JK: If Bunche was acting mediator then it must have been after the assassination.

Epstein: He was assassinated in late September and I remember we took off for Paris on the 8th of October. The governor of the Dodecanese Islands (Rhodes was one of the Dodecanese Islands) had invited them and Ralph Bunche and all of the senior staff to dinner at his government palace. I was naturally invited with my wife. (She was English. We had met during the war. She worked for the British Ministry of Information.) There was a shortage of women around and so she sat between these two people. She got to talking to them on a friendly basis. She was telling them that on the top of the mountain on the island there was an ancient factory where they made pottery with the same patterns of those going back to the time of the ancient Greeks. They sounded interested so she said, "Well, if you people are free tomorrow morning, I would be happy to take you up and show you around. They arranged for transportation, either a car or the local horse and buggy, or I think it was a donkey. She went up there with them and they were telling her what they were doing. They told her they were there to help Bunche finalize the mediator's report.

So, after that I made it my business to walk into Bunche's office frequently and they were always pouring over maps.

Then to my shock and amazement they changed the original report we had agreed to. Instead of dividing the Negev, the desert in the south, between the Arabs and the Jews, they had cut off the border of Israel at a place called Faluja south of Tel Aviv some distance on the coastal plain. The Israeli part of Palestine would then have been just Galilee, the Hula region just north of the Sea of Galilee, the valley of Jezreel, and the whole Mediterranean coast down to Faluja. All the rest which was more than half the territory would be going to the Arabs. There was some question which I would need to check on that the British would be allowed to keep some property which belonged neither to the Arab State nor to the Jewish State.

JK: These changes would have been different than those made in the General Assembly Partition Plan.

Epstein: Completely different. But they did go back to the idea that Jerusalem should be a *corpus separatum*.

JK: Going back then on Bernadotte's suggestion.

Epstein: Bernadotte himself had reversed his decision on that and went back to the General Assembly Resolution.

I had really a very unhappy discussion with Bunche about this and he said, "Bill, look, the best way to handle this matter is to get the British and the Americans on the same side together instead of the Americans and the Russians both supporting the establishment of the State of Israel. That's

the best way out of it. If they are at loggerheads with each other, then nothing will come out of it. That's what we agreed to and their governments are supporting it and that's the way it's going to have to be." I told him that it was contrary to what we had agreed before and I doubted that it would ever be accepted by the United Nations because it was completely contrary to the division of the country under the Partition Plan. There was nobody there we could mention it to because all the press people had left. Nobody knew about this thing.

JK: Had Bunche purposely wanted to get rid of the press at that time?

Epstein: Unquestionably, he didn't want them around because that would have blown the whole story. The press would have been asking why are these men here. They were there to tell Bunche what they would agree upon. It would be to bring the British into the agreement, in effect. He didn't say that he had any instructions or had cleared it with the Secretary-General, so I assumed that he was doing this all on his own. As mediator, I suppose he had the authority to do all that. When we got to Paris I remember telling this to Sobolev, the head of our department, and to Abe Feller the legal advisor at the time to the Secretary-General. They raised it with Trygve Lie. At one of the meetings I remember Bunche coming up to me furious saying that he wasn't going to take this

sort of treatment from them. They were raising hell with him for not adhering more closely to the Assembly Resolution. But the work went on and the Assembly went on. At the same time the Security Council was meeting.

JK: So, the General Assembly and the Security Council were meeting in Paris at that time.

Epstein: Yes, in the fall of 1948 the Assembly session was there and the Security Council met there, too.

There were some beleaguered, cut off Jewish settlements south of Faluja. The Egyptians had established control of the Gaza Strip up to Faluja and there were a few isolated settlements south of that. Paul Moan, a Swede, had been left behind by Bunche as the senior officer there. The Israelis had come to him and said, "Look, we are not going to let these settlements starve. We need permission from the Egyptians to get through and bring them food and water. It was understood that we would be able to do this during the period of the truce. If we don't get the permission, we're going in ourselves anyway." Paul wrote a letter to the Egyptians at that time saying that they should allow them to go through and if they didn't he would authorize them to go ahead anyway. And he did. There was a hell of a row about that. Since Paul Moan was the representative on the spot. He authorized them to go but, nothing came of it.

JK: So, the Egyptians did not let the Israelis through?

Epstein: Right and Paul authorized them to go ahead so, they broke their way through. The Egyptians complained that this was a breach of the truce. Bunche was going to criticize the Israelis over the issue but I warned him that I'd understood from contacts with the Israelis that they had had Paul Moan's permission. They had a copy of the letter telling the Egyptians that they had the right to go through and help feed and bring water to these settlements. Nothing came of it but, it was tense for a few days.

There was another very interesting story. There were all of these refugees in the Egyptian occupied parts and the West Bank, Jordanian occupied, and Lebanon. I don't know if there were any in Syria or not. There was a real problem with this and a big strain on these governments. They were in camps. They didn't let them blend into the country. They kept them in camps. Bunche decided that we ought to set up a temporary relief organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Middle East. He had a team of senior advisors that met with him from time to time.

And he had this meeting with Dean Rusk, who was then head of the African or Asia section of the State Department. He wasn't Secretary of State until much later. Bunche proposed this and he needed the American backing. Nothing would work in those days without American backing. An American once said to me, "Every resolution adopted by the United Nations

is an American resolution." This was a bit arrogant but it really was the truth in those days. With 51 odd members the United States completely dominated the thing. There was a difference between them and the British over the Palestine issue but in general the Western powers all went along. The Cold War got colder and the Russians took over Czechoslovakia in 1948. This all happened in '48. I think Nazarik committed suicide. He was a strong supporter of the Jewish State as were the Russians at that time. So, Dean Rusk said, "No, we're not going to agree to that. This would go on forever. We would be buying into something that will go on forever." Bunche said, "No, this will just be a temporary thing to tide the people over for a year or so until the whole problem is solved."

JK You are referring to the refugee problem.

Epstein: Yes. Dean Rusk said, "I'm not sure this is going to be a temporary thing. I think we would be buying a pig in a poke that is going to last for years." Finally Bunche persuaded him, saying that the US was the one that pushed through the Partition Resolution and supported the mediation effort that resulted in this terrible problem of the refugees. They had a moral responsibility and it was a politically wise thing to do to help these refugees. Otherwise, it could be a big problem. Finally, he persuaded Dean Rusk and the Americans to go along and support a

resolution to establish this works agency. And it is still going on to this day.

JK: So, Dean Rusk was right.

Epstein: Dean Rusk was right. One other interesting thing was that there were four of us working at night. There was Ralph Bunche, Vigier, the old League of Nations chap, Stavropoulos, the legal man, and myself, the senior Jewish advisor and the senior officer of the Security Council Political Affairs. You had to have people from different areas of the Secretariat. We sat around one night. There were about 600,000 Arab refugees at that time. There were roughly half a million or 600,000 Jews. Egypt had around 190,000 and Iraq had some and Yemen, mainly those three countries. Stavropoulos, who was Greek, recalled the exchange of Turks and Greeks after WWI and he kept suggesting this to Bunche. This refugee problem will never be solved. He wanted to bring about an exchange of populations, Arabs for Jews. But, Bunche fought that like a tiger. We stayed there all night.

JK: Do you recall what Bunche's reasons for that were?

Epstein: Yes, he said that it was "a forceful exchange of populations and just imagine what kind of precedent this would set. In the United States there are a lot of people who don't like the Negroes" -- Bunche himself was a Negro -- "and some wise guy will say, if we set this as a precedent,

`Why don't we exchange our blacks for the whites in Africa?'"

He and Stavropoulos fought nearly all night. Vigier and I kept out of it and almost dozed off during this long battle all evening. It was a very interesting thing because Stavropoulos used to say, "I am an anti-Semite. I don't like the Jews or the State of Israel, but I am a practical man." It was quite funny because Bunche was quite sympathetic toward the State of Israel and to the Jewish problem in the world. They still had their problems in Europe, getting the refugees settled in Palestine and now Israel, the exodus. Bunche was arguing against the exchange of populations and Stavropoulos, who was an avowed anti-Semite, arguing for the exchange of populations. Bunche obviously won out. His solution was this United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Stavropoulos was not very friendly to the State of Israel. Greece was one of the latest countries to establish relations with them. They didn't have diplomatic relations with them for many, many years. Stavropoulos said the exchange of the Greeks and the Turks worked successfully after WWI and I always thought that was an interesting idea. In fact, I remember someone saying later that Bunche was responsible for keeping all these refugees in these camps, you know unwittingly. Bunche got the Nobel Peace Prize later for his truce settlements.

JK: How did he operate as a mediator? Was he able to bring the

Arabs and the Israelis together?

Epstein: Not together, I'll tell you shortly what did happen.

Anyhow, The Israelis went beyond Faluja. The British put forth a resolution, saying that the Israelis had to pull back. They couldn't stay where they were. If they didn't pull back they would take action against them under Chapter Seven of the Charter. Bunche had met privately, though I was there, too, with the members of the Security Council dealing with this specific issue. The Americans went along with this resolution. There was somebody there from the "Nation" magazine, a Miss Lilly Shultz. Freda Kirchway was the Editor of the "Nation" then. She saw what was happening with the American delegation, going along with threatening sanctions against Israel if they didn't pull their troops out. It was a tough situation. You don't pull troops out that easily as we're finding right now. She sent a cable to some people in the American government. This was on the eve of the election in November and they got through to Truman and told him what was going on. She'd written up in the magazine how Sir John Troutbeck and Robert MacClintock had come and tainted the new mediator's report. Ralph Bunche's report. She said they were threatening sanctions against Israel. The meeting took place and people were being called to the back of the room. We were sitting on the stage of the Trocadero building in Paris, where the conference was held. I didn't know what was

going on so, I was nosing around trying to find out. I was told that the President had sent a cable to Warren Austin, who was then the American representative, saying, "What's this nonsense of using sanctions against the Israelis? We won't support them." Austin got that cable in the morning. He called Sir Alexander Cadogan to talk to him. Pretty soon all of the delegations were leaving their seats to talk to him. Sobolev and Trygve Lie asked me, "What's going on?" I said, "I think that the Americans have received a cable not to accept any anti-Israeli resolution over this situation down in the Negev. The Americans had to tell this to the British and to the others." They hadn't heard a word about it. Nobody had told them. That's actually what happened. About that time just a day or two later Gideon Rafael of the Israeli delegation -- he wrote this in his book, not mentioning me by name, just saying a member of the Secretariat -- asked me for help in drafting a resolution. I felt it was part of my job. I was liaison with the Israelis under instruction from Trygve Lie and Sobolev. We sat down in a cafe late at night after having dinner together. I helped him draft a resolution which instead of calling on the Israelis to pull back to the pre-Faluja lines which were in the report, it called for the establishment of the Truce Supervision Organization, which would establish truce lines between the parties and that the parties would not be

permitted to cross those truce lines. He liked that resolution and sold it to his government. They circulated it and showed it to the Canadians, to Pearson, and to Belgium and one other country, three countries that were then members of the Security Council. They put forward this resolution and it was adopted on the 16th of November which established the truce lines beyond which the parties should not cross, the truce lines as they were then. That was something that was possible and feasible. There was no way you could pull the troops back unless you were going to have sanctions against them. That was adopted and that eased that whole situation.

JK: Did the Arabs agree to those truce lines?

Epstein: Well, they didn't know how else to handle the situation. I don't know what the vote was. I'm sure they didn't support it. The original resolution called on Israel to withdraw its troops and threatened sanctions. This replaced it. It shouldn't be too difficult to consult the record. The date was November, 1948. That settled the problem of sanctions. It also in effect settled the problem of these truce lines and what would be the lines of the future settlement. When the mediator's report came up for a vote -- I don't remember if it had Bernadotte's signature on it or not -- the committee recommended support for the mediator's plan with the borders and as I predicted it didn't

carry. It was defeated on a tie vote. I'll never forget Sir Harold Bealy was sitting there and turned to his deputy saying, "We just had an unmitigated disaster, Sir." He told him loud enough that we could hear. The meeting was over. He said, "We just lost the resolution and now everything is open. They contented themselves with establishing the Palestine Conciliation Commission which was supposed to carry on the work of conciliation.

In January, Bunche got a cable from the Egyptians that they were ready now for establishing some kind of peace or truce.

So, he went to the Island of Rhodes and called the Egyptians in and he represented the Secretary-General. I didn't go back. He produced the first truce agreement. The next one was I think with Jordan. And the third one with Lebanon. I remember he gave all of them these big platters that had been made by the potters up on the hill in Rhodes. He told us a joke that he had told both the Egyptian and the Israeli delegations who were meeting with him there that if they didn't agree with him on this truce he was going to break these plates over their heads. If they did agree he was going to present them with these plates as presents. That was a wisecrack, of course. That was the breakthrough, the direct contact under Bunche. It became the Truce Supervision Agreement. This was with Egypt. Then they worked one out with Jordan and Lebanon and finally with Syria. Syria didn't

have one till months later. They were tough. This all happened fairly quickly because they had to do something to stop the fighting and to implement the Relief and Works Agency.

JK: In your opinion why did Bunche decide to negotiate separately with each Arab country?

Epstein: For two reasons, the Egyptians sent him a cable saying they would like to negotiate with him.

JK: So, they were the first to come forward.

Epstein: Yes, as they were many years later when Sadat went there. Bunche was quite convinced by that time that anytime you got the Arabs in a group together they always took the hardest line. It was a competition to not be soft on the Israelis. That was the one way to guarantee no success. On a one-on-one basis there was a much better chance of success. That became one of the guidelines throughout. That was a tremendous breakthrough and Bunche got a Nobel Peace Prize for that. I always had the feeling that Trygve Lie's nose was slightly out of joint that they gave it to Bunche when Bunche was acting on his instructions.

JK: Was Bunche particularly good at getting the two sides to agree?

Epstein: He was good at urging his point of view on everybody, very good at that. For example, he talked Dean Rusk, who was certainly an able negotiator and talker, into agreeing to set

up UNRWA. Later, he talked the Egyptians and the Israelis into agreeing to this Truce Supervision Agreement. And those things lasted for a long, long time. The Truce Supervision took care of the military and the border questions and the Palestine Conciliation Commission was somehow supposed to work out a conciliation between the Jews and the Arab states.

The Arab states always refused to recognize Israel. They always wanted to go through a mediator or the Secretary-General's representative or something like that, thereafter.

The refugee side was taken care of by UNRWA. The situation was more-or-less stabilized. Bunche got the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1949 Israel was admitted into the United Nations. The situation was stabilized.

In 1949, after reaching the Truce Supervision Agreements and the agreements between Israel and its four neighbors, there was really hope that this thing was on track for some kind of a solution.

JK: On a permanent basis.

Epstein: Israel was now a member of the UN. The military situation was taken care of by the four Truce Supervision Organizations. You had the refugee problem taken care of by the UNRWA and you had the Conciliation Commission set up which was supposed to set up negotiations with the Arabs and the Israelis to set up some kind of a peace settlement. But the Arabs just plain refused to recognize the existence of

Israel. They wouldn't budge on that. For a year or two things were fairly quiet but, then they started up again and in 1956 when Nasser took over Egypt we had the 1956 War.

JK: The fighting was never completely resolved.

Epstein: But it was on a low key. It was more marauding and guerrillas and terrorists and so forth, low key bloodshed, not armed forces as such. All the great hopes of '49 and '50 disappeared. We still have the problems today.

JK: This concludes our discussion on this topic. I want to thank you for being so candid with your comments and taking time to share your experiences with us.

JK: This is the third part of the interview with William Epstein and takes place in the UNITAR building in New York on October 25, 1990. This portion of the interview will deal with the Suez crisis. First, I'd like to ask you what your position was and what role you played at the UN during the Suez crisis in 1956.

Epstein: I was the chief of the Disarmament and Military Agreements Section at that time which was a section that was originally supposed to have been the Military Agreements and Enforcement Division. There weren't any enforcement measures so they reduced it from a division to a section.

JK: At the time of the crisis in 1956 during that summer Nasser had nationalized the canal. There had been negotiations going on to try to resolve the disputes over the canal.

Epstein: Let me go back a little bit further. I had been in London that summer where the subcommittee on disarmament, the five powers, were holding their meeting at Lancaster House in London. One of the young British Foreign Office chaps who was on their disarmament delegation and whom I became quite friendly with was having lunch with me one day. This was after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. He asked me a question that rang a bell in my mind because it didn't make sense. He said, "Don't you think the Israelis might take umbrage over the nationalizing of the Suez Canal because that would prevent Israeli ships from going through the Canal?" He thought the Israelis might react. There were other grounds, too, because there had been Fedayeen and marauder attacks against Israel. The fact that he asked this about the Israelis made me take note because this was not the sort of remark one would make. It was the British and the French who had owned the Suez Canal Company and had controlled the Canal. So, why drag in the Israelis? I didn't think about it until Israel did attack and then the British and the French announced that they were going to occupy ten kilometers on each side of the canal to preserve the canal against damage from the Israeli and Egyptian fighting. That

was phony as hell. Later on we learned that there was an understanding between the Israelis, the British, and the French. The Israelis should go in and fight and then the other two would take over from there.

JK: They had been planning it for a while.

Epstein: Right, they had been planning it. When I had talked to that young man -- he knew I was in the UN -- he mentioned the possibility of that and I laughed it off. I didn't think that Israel would go into a war to pull the Canal Company's chestnuts out of the fire. They had suffered enough in the War of Liberation in 1948. They had five or six thousand people killed out of a population of only 600,000. That was their big war. I had forgotten about the thing and then along about in October the Israelis did start something. Eban and Golda Meir and everybody else around here said they were responding to attacks on them from the Fedayeen coming from Egypt. That's why they had to do it, in other words, self-defense. It's permitted under Article 51 of the Charter. The Arabs were all insulted. The character of the war changed when the British and the French went in there to occupy the Suez Canal. Then they did it so stupidly. The Israelis had gone right to the banks of the Canal in six days. Then the British got held up at Port Said by the Egyptians for a hell of a long time.

JK: Just to back up a little bit, I wanted to ask about the

negotiations that had been going on in New York prior to the attack when Dag Hammarskjöld was meeting with Foreign Minister Fawzi of Egypt.

Epstein: And Abba Eban. I'll never forget those conversations.

Gideon Rafael was along with Eban as his senior advisor. Eban was Israel's Ambassador to Washington and to the United Nations. Rafael was along during one of the discussions between Eban and Dag Hammarskjöld. He told me afterwards, "You know, Bill, it was a terrible meeting. Neither one could get a word in edgewise because the other was talking all the time." They were both eloquent speakers. They both had a great capability with the use of the English language.

JK: You are talking about the conversation between Eban and Hammarskjöld?

Epstein: Yes, and actually I was told by some people at the time. Eban was a scholar and his Hebrew was better than that of the Israelis and his Arabic was better than that of the Arabs. His Arabic was classical and so was his Hebrew. His English was better than that of the British. Alexander Cadogan always said that he was the best brain and speaker of English around. When Eban came up to speak all of the delegations came in from the lobbies and the halls to hear him.

But I don't know too much about what went on because I was no longer in the Middle East section. All I know is from my

contacts with the Israelis. I had a lot of friends amongst them. And I had a few friends amongst the Arabs. Fawzi sat in one room up there on the 38th floor and Eban in another room. Dag Hammarskjöld would go running from one to the other. It was odd but, the Egyptians would not sit in the same room with the Israelis. That is the main trouble in the Middle East. The Arabs won't talk to the Israelis or discuss things with them. They always insist that there has to be a mediator or an intermediary. There has to be somebody else in between, a third party.

JK: In Hammarskjöld's talks with Lloyd and Pineau during that period before the crisis, did he conduct those meetings in the same way?

Epstein: No, he didn't need to put them in separate rooms. He could meet with them together or separately as it suited him. But Hammarskjöld was livid at them. The thing which I remembered most was the Canadian Ambassador at the time, R.A. Mackay. I was very friendly with him at the time. We were having a drink at the bar. They were meeting all night in those days, the Security Council and the General Assembly. When there were vetoes in the Security Council they would move over to the General Assembly. There were vetoes on two things. The Russians were vetoing the Hungarian fighting that was going on and the British and the French vetoing the Suez issues. I said to this Canadian, "I think the British

have lost their marbles. They've gone mad." He said, "Absolutely, I just cannot understand them." Lloyd was the man in London but, their man here was Pearson Dixon. He was a very nice guy and always very friendly with Hammarskjöld. Hammarskjöld was livid because he thought he had been double crossed. He relied a lot on the British and the French to act as counter weights in the fights between the Russians and the Americans. Here the Russians and the Americans were together. The Russians were on Nasser's side. The Americans had to oppose the aggression. In those days the United States figured they ran the UN, which they did, in fact.

JK: Immediately after the attack there was a meeting of the Security Council. What went on in that meeting?

Epstein: I don't remember the details, but I do know that there was some kind of a resolution calling on the British to pull out. They went in on October 30th.

JK: Right, the Israelis attacked on October 29th and the British went in the next day.

Epstein: The Israelis had hit the banks of the Canal and the British were still stuck in Port Said. Then on November 2nd there was a meeting of the General Assembly. The resolutions had already been vetoed in the Security Council. That's the night that I was having a drink at the bar with the Canadian Ambassador. Earlier that day Mike Pearson had put forth the idea of having a peace-keeping force to separate the parties

as a buffer between them. It could only be done with the consent of the parties because it was not an enforcement measure.

JK: Now, you called him Mike Pearson. That is Lester Pearson?

Epstein: Yes, everybody called him Mike. As a matter of fact he calls his memoirs Mike Pearson. You might take a look at his memoirs. He would probably tell that story. I was very friendly with John Holmes who died just a short time ago. He was Pearson's personal assistant and traveled with him all over. He had been charge d'affairs in Moscow when Pearson was there. Geoffrey Murray was a more junior fellow. He was here with the delegation permanently at the UN Canadian Mission. So, it was John Holmes and Geoffrey Murray. Pearson came down with this idea and Hammarskjöld said, "It's not in the Charter. How are you going to get the parties to agree? Who is going to provide forces for this?"

So, Mike Pearson went back to Ottawa and got it approved by the Cabinet and came back to Hammarskjöld and said, "Look, I've got a piece of paper in my pocket that says that we will put up forces." Hammarskjöld's eyes opened up and he snapped into it. He thought the whole thing was feasible then.

JK: Why would he think it was more feasible with the Canadian forces?

Epstein: Because nobody had forces. Once the Canadian forces were available it was different. The Canadians had a

reputation for being good, positive members. We had been involved in every single observer mission and forces, with one exception. They have been involved in every one of them.

They have been regarded as one of the best members of the UN on peace-keeping, development, all of the good things. They used to take a more active part in disarmament than they do now.

JK: Had the Canadians all along felt that the UN ought to have some kind of forces available. Had this been a long term idea?

Epstein: Yes, absolutely. I understood it from talking to Mike Pearson. He said, "Look, Canada is in an awkward position. We have our ties with the British and with the French. We are part of the Commonwealth, but we have strong economic ties with the United States. If the British and the United States are on the same side of any question it is very hard for us to maneuver. When they are not on the same side then we can use the UN card and that will give us a real role. The UN card, anyhow, gives us a chance to resist direct pressures from the Americans or the British." That's understandable. Mike Pearson was a good man and he had a strong belief in the UN. He absolutely believed that it was in Canada's best interest that the UN should be strong and active and powerful. So, he came back with this paper in his pocket.

They had to go through the General Assembly to set up this United Nations Emergency Force. That night when they were going to adopt the resolution, about 11 o'clock at night, Dragon Protitch, a Yugoslav who was Undersecretary for the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, grabbed hold of F. Y. Chi and myself. Chi was Secretary of the Security Council and I was chief of the Disarmament and Military Agreements Section. That was the shrunken form of the old enforcement measures division. They were supposed to make military agreements and under those agreements make forces available to the UN. That's where the military agreements came in. When I was there I had done a complete survey of all the military agreements that the Americans had made with other countries. They would come to the aid of the UN. That's why I was called in. He called Chi and me. He said, "Look, this resolution is going to pass. Hammarskjöld wants to set up this emergency force. They are having a meeting at 11 o'clock in the morning and I have got to get a memo from you two immediately. So, go to work on it and get me a memo on how we go about setting up this emergency force." I looked at Chi and he looked at me. I had been in the army. I had been a lousy captain at military headquarters, but to set up this whole damn force and to do it all in a hurry so that he could have something ready by 11 o'clock in the morning. Boy, we were stunned. So, I had a

brilliant idea. John Holmes, Pearson's assistant, was around and I thought, "I'll get hold of John." I started looking all around the damned Assembly and the bar. I went around looking for John around midnight. Then I suddenly saw him in the corridor just outside the General Assembly hall. I went running towards him and he saw me and started running towards me. I said, "God, John, I've got to talk to you." And he said, "Bill, I've got to talk to you." And I said, "No, I've got to talk to you first." I must have shouted louder than he did. I said, "Look, I've been looking all over for you. Chi and I have been asked to prepare a report on how to go about establishing this emergency force. Since Canada put it forward we thought you might have some ideas about it." He said, "I've been looking all over for you figuring you might have some ideas on how we could set it up."

JK: Because it had to be done very quickly.

Epstein: Yes, and nobody had really thought it through very well. So, poor Chi and I sat around. I was no help to John Holmes and he was no help to me.

JK: Hammarskjöld initially was not very enthusiastic about this proposal.

Epstein: He wasn't, but when Mike Pearson came back with the authorization from the Canadian Cabinet to provide forces for UNEF. He saw that the resolution was going to go through and he had forces to call on. Then he did a quick flip flop and

I think that comes out in Brian Urquhart's book on Hammarskjöld. If it doesn't I've said it. Brian came in later. I don't think he was involved at that time. It was the Security Council Department and Chi was the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council. Protitch was the Secretary. I was working on the military agreements and enforcement measures. Although we didn't have much to do. I had done a big assembly of all bilateral military agreements. The US always put in a clause about using forces against aggression.

JK: What were the provision that you came up with, then?

Epstein: Chi and I chewed it around trying to figure out how to go about this thing. We were not military experts. The Military Staff Committee was completely out of the picture then. They could have done something on it. They were absolutely moribund because of the East/West stalemate. Finally we came up with the bright idea and the only idea we could come up with and was absolutely right. We prepared a brief one page memo to Protitch saying, "This requires people who know all about the logistics, the size of the forces, the nature of the forces, the weapons of the forces. That requires specialized information that is not available here in the Secretariat. But we think the most important thing that you've got to do and the one thing that is absolutely essential is that you've got to appoint a Chief of Staff."

We didn't tell him whom to appoint. He didn't need our advice on that. We said that that was the first indispensable step to take. That was our entire report. We gave it to him at five in the morning after we had chewed around with the damn thing for hours. That was right. Then they immediately arranged for General E. L. M. Burns who was then head of the Truce Supervision Organization and who had the high confidence of Mike Pearson.

JK: And also a Canadian.

Epstein: Of course. He had the high confidence of Mike Pearson.

They immediately arranged both with the government and with him that he should be transferred. He was already on the UN staff. So, He was transferred from Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to Chief of Staff of UNEF. He agree and within a day or so he was here and started working.

He knew the kind of forces you needed. He knew what they were, the logistics and everything.

JK: When did they decide on the composition of the forces?

Epstein: Then they started on the composition of the forces.

They immediately offered to send a regiment. Whom do they choose? An outfit called The Queen's Own Rifles. That is going back to the Empire days. We had the Highlanders and the Queen's Own Rifles and the Prince's Pats. The Egyptians absolutely blankly refused and it took days to organize that.

Finally they agreed that Canada would supply the logistics.

JK: But not the actual troops.

Epstein: No troops. Then they looked around at all the countries they could to find troops. They can always count on the Scandinavians and the Canadians. We had what came to be known as the Scandia-Canadian alliance, particularly Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Canada.

JK: There was also a decision that there would be no permanent members of the Security Council represented in the forces.

Epstein: That's right and both the Russians and the Americans preferred that, particularly with the French and the British on the Security Council. Neither one trust the other so, it was agreed that they would have the small countries. They did have some Scandinavians. That's all in the records. Chi would know much more about that because he was the Deputy Secretary of the Council. He would know more than Urquhart.

In his book Urquhart wrote a note of thanks to me because I briefed him on all the disarmament material which he didn't know and which I did know. Chi, I'm sure, briefed him on the Suez Canal. Then Garcia-Robles was put in charge of the Suez operation, cleaning the Canal. He was in charge of the whole Suez Secretariat in Cairo. He is the same fellow who was the Secretary of UNSCOP. He was put in charge of the whole UN operation in Cairo.

JK: You mentioned that the General Assembly had called for the

cease-fire.

Epstein: The cease-fire and UNEF under the Uniting for Peace Resolution. The Russians had always said that the Uniting for Peace Resolution was absolutely illegal and contrary to the Charter and so does Kelson, the author of that big book on the law of the United Nations. But this time they went along. First, you could transfer by a vote of seven members from the Security Council to the Assembly and call a special session.

JK: That was considered a matter of procedure.

Epstein: Yes, but then they also agreed that the General Assembly could deal with the matter because no action was possible in the Security Council. The Russians, therefore, bought the whole Uniting for Peace procedure under the Suez Crisis.

JK: Was this the first time that this had been implemented?

Epstein: Yes, they had tried other things. There was a little assembly that they had tried to set up. There was a peace observation group. There was a collective measures committee that was set up and I was the chairman of that committee. They didn't do much. They would meet formally but, they didn't do much. The Russians boycotted all of them saying it was all illegal under the Uniting for Peace Resolution. But here, without saying it was illegal, they went along. They wanted to get the Israelis and, even more so, the British and

the French out.

Then George Ivan Smith was head of our DPI. He had an excellent contact with a chap in England by the name of Clark who was the spokesman and public relations man for the Foreign Office. Hammarskjöld got excellent information from Clark through Ivan Smith about what was going on in England in the Foreign Office and Parliament and elsewhere. That was a big help to him. I don't know if it is even mentioned in Brian Urquhart's book. Hammarskjöld took this as a personal affront because he had relied so much on Pearson Dixon. They were the ones who were the intelligent old-timers. They weren't like the brash new Americans who at the end of the war didn't have much expertise. There was tremendous pressure from the Americans on the British and the French. They really threatened the British with everything under the sun, letting the pound go all to hell, cutting off oil, etc. They really threatened them. The British just had to cave in. It damn near killed Eden. He had to resign.

JK: The Soviets had made a proposal I understand suggesting that the Soviets and the US supply the Egyptians with arms if the British and French didn't withdraw.

Epstein: I remember vaguely about that but, I wasn't directly involved. The Americans turned it down. They didn't want the Russians in it at all. John Foster Dulles was very cool at first to Mike Pearson's proposal, too, the same as

Hammarskjöld, saying that it's not in the Charter. But once Pearson had gotten the Canadian authorization to provide troops he went all out, too. The Americans and the Russians worked together which made it good and easy for Hammarskjöld.

It made it tough on the British and the French. It made it tough for the Israelis to stay. The Americans put a lot of pressure on Ben Gurion to pull out of the Sinai.

I was at a party one night including Geoffrey Murray, probably Chi, and one or two others. I had heard from the Israelis that they had agreed to pull out from the Sinai. I said this to Geoff Murray and he said, "Damn." He was furious. I said, "What are you so furious about?" He said, "We wanted to get UNEF forces on both sides of the border, on the Israeli side and on the Egyptian side." One of the reasons that the Israelis had agreed to pull out was that they didn't want UNEF troops on their territory. They could stay in the Sinai just on the other side but, they didn't want them on their territory. Recognizing that that might happen, they unilaterally took a decision to pull out of the Sinai and, therefore, they had no reason to have troops on their territory. Geoff Murray was furious because he wanted to have troops on both sides of the frontier. That's what they were working for. They would have gotten it passed the Security Council but, once the Israeli troops had pulled out and gone back to their own border they had no grounds for

asking for forces on both sides. Those are the personal things I remember.

JK: So, the Israelis were agreeable to the Emergency Force idea?

Epstein: They were in cahoots with the British and the French. After it was clear that the British and the French were clearing out they were the last ones left. Eisenhower was putting a lot of pressure on Ben Gurion. I heard this also from the Israelis. Golda Meir came over. She was Foreign Minister at the time. Lyndon Johnson was leader of the Senate and a member of the American delegation. He was naturally much more pro-Israel than the others because the Senate and the Congressmen have always been more pro-Israel than the officials. There was an American, Loy Henderson, during the UNSCOP days who was in charge of the Middle East and he was an out and out pro-Arabist. He and Harold Bealy, the British, were out and out pro-Arab. That's why they appointed Herschel Johnson. And Truman appointed a general to watch to see that the State Department wasn't undermining UNSCOP and interfering with his orders. Warren Austin was the UN ambassador, but Herschel Johnson was brought in. The British Foreign Office was always pro-Arab. The American State Department always took the lead from the British in those days. They were turning out to be pro-Arab and that is why they went along with that resolution threatening sanctions against Israel in 1948.

Eisenhower put a lot of pressure on Ben Gurion and Abba Eban to pull out of the Sinai and the final thing that made them pull out was that they would be stationing UNEF troops on both sides of the border. They were damned if they were going to have anymore UN forces in Israel watching their every action. They found the Truce Supervision people at the government house a damn nuisance at times. Well, that's what I know about the Suez. It isn't much but, there are a few interesting points.

JK: Thank you very much.