

United Nations Oral History Project

**Abba Eban
16 April 1990**

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APRIL 16, 1990
AMBASSADOR ABBA EBAN
NEW YORK CITY
SUTTERLIN, Interviewer

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JSS Ambassador Eban, I'd like to first express appreciation for your participation in this oral history project, and if I may I would like to begin at the creation, so to speak, to use Dean Acheson's phrase, and take you back to the special session of the General Assembly which convened in April, 1947. At that time the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine was established and I believe that you accompanied that committee as representing the Jewish agency when it went to the Middle East. Two of the Secretariat members accompanying that committee subsequently were awarded Nobel Peace Prizes, Garcia Robles and Ralph Bunche.

Eban Robles received the Nobel Prize for what? He didn't get the Peace Prize.

JSS Yes, he did, I think.

Eban I'd like to look into that. He was very minor.

JSS Well, that was exactly my question, how did the committee work in terms of the accompanying Secretariat people? Did the Secretariat people have very much influence on the committee's findings, or not?

Eban I'd like to say first of all that for the United Nations,

historically, this was a very big challenge, it was the first important problem brought to the General Assembly. The United Nations Security Council had to deal with crises, especially Iran, and later on Indonesia. But here was one of the founders of the United Nations calling for a recommendation on a major international issue with the widest implications. The decision was taken in London in February and it took us, the Zionists, by surprise. The assumption was that the British were somehow going to carry on with this responsibility, we knew that they were getting impatient through their own frustration. And Bevan, who was the central character of course, was extremely impulsive. We also knew that many people in Britain were asking, why should we British continue to carry this charge when no less a voice than Winston Churchill, the leader of the opposition, had said that we should stop this squalid war against the Jews; either carry out the mandate in its original terms or else hand it back to the United Nations, or at least get the United States to come in instead, but he did use the words the United Nations as the successor to the League of Nations. Then this obviously was a concrete possibility. Nevertheless, in February when the British announced their intention there was surprise and no elation because from the first examination of the problem, the conclusion from the Jewish point of view

was that we would fare even less well under the United Nations than we would under the Mandatory Power. And we started making the count.

JSS It came really early, if I may say.

Eban It certainly did. The Arabs began with 5 or 6 votes in the Moslem countries. We thought that the Latin American countries would be dominated by Catholic theology, that the Jews ought to be a wandering people forever. Nothing to hope for, obviously, from the Soviet Union which regarded Zionism as a kind of conspiracy against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless it was a new challenge in the open arena and it was completely different working with a multilateral international organization than in a kind of exclusive relationship with one power - two completely different techniques. Therefore we approached this with a kind of innocence, and apprehension, and were surprised at the momentum which had then developed.

The first meeting was in New York and it only had a procedural purpose, which was to appoint a committee which would investigate and then make its recommendation. It became very substantive not only because most countries gave some indication of their predilections or tendencies, but because the Soviet Union ignored completely the normal procedural limitations and made a very dramatic and far-reaching announcement of a change in its policy. In fact the Soviet Union was the first

great power which openly said that Israel should be a Jewish state - admittedly is an alternative to the ideal of living together. In expressing skepticism about that, they said quite openly that if the two parties cannot live together either federally, or as a unitary state, then Palestine should be divided into two states. At that stage, already the United Nations sprang into the headlines as the forum from which a very monumental transition was made in the policy of one of the great powers. The Soviet Union was persistent and constant in this for the next 2 or 3 years.

The other innovation (and the last occasion on which I believe it was used) was the deliberate attribution of mediation to a committee of medium or small powers. Since then one is familiar with great power mediation, one is familiar with individuals like Frank Graham, like Gunnar V. Jarring, and others in the Cyprus problem - usually either Secretariat people or people brought in as the servants of the Secretary-General. One is familiar with the Secretary-General, himself, mediating conflicts as Hammarskjold did, and as the present incumbent has done since. But I don't find anything in United Nations history to compare with the idea of eleven member nations, medium and small powers. I don't know how the idea arose, probably because the super powers didn't want to show their hands too early. And these eleven member

people who were represented - they were not people who were central figures in their countries' diplomacy. Here and there was a judge like Sandstrom and Rand; somebody with colonial experience like the Dutchman, Ambassador Blom. Here and there would be a member of the Foreign Service like Hood, the Australian. I would say it wasn't the most brilliant array of talent one could imagine. Few of them had wide international experience and therefore the Secretariat became important. And it begins with Trygve Lie who was a very activist Secretary-General. The fact that Hammarskjold was even more activist has tended to obscure this fact but he took an extremely assertive view of his role. First of all, he was the first Secretary-General, and therefore would set the tone. The three people he appointed were Victor Hoo, Bunche and Robles. Stavropoulos was the legal advisor. It became clear rather early on that although Bunche was Number 2 he was, in fact, the central figure, I think, by reason of being an American as distinct from being a Taiwan Chinese. Also Victor Hoo was a very passive sort of a person. He reminded me of what some people were later to say about U Thant. When it was suggested that he was inscrutable, somebody said, well there's nothing there to "scrute". I can't remember in Victor Hoo any expression of an attitude, while Bunche was to be taken very seriously - a decisive, dynamic

character. It is clear that his influence was great on people like the Chairman, Sandstrom, and on Justice Rand, who became a really dominant figure and was the first to move the committee in the direction of partition. Here were the two very effervescent Latin Americans, Granados and Fabregal; and the quieter Latin American, Salazar from Peru. Obviously to pull that eleven together (and you know that in England eleven is a soccer or a cricket team) the Secretariat had to be very active. There was a multiplicity and diversity of approaches. For example, Granados was palpably anti-British because of the Belize problem. The tendency we would have thought of many of the others would have been rather one of deference to the mandatory power because there was Canada and there was Australia at a time when they were only just beginning to feel complete sovereignty within the British Commonwealth and Holland - these are countries which had taken refuge in Britain during the Occupation. And Czechoslovakia was still the Czechoslovakia of Masaryk, not of the Comintern. The Secretariat, therefore, in defining the agenda and in reaching consensus, was very active with Bunche as the Secretary.

JSS And would you say that they had influence - Bunche in particular- on the move toward partition as the recommendation of the Committee?

Eban First of all, partition was already a fashionable

doctrine because the British themselves had pioneered it in the 1930s. They were under the influence of one of them, Sir Reginald (inaudible) , whose approach was much more analytical-intellectual than it was diplomatic-political. The area of his discipline at Oxford was the conditions in which nations could or could not form a state together. Later he was to relate that to the Indian problem and was probably the author of the Atlee Commission report which led to the partition. He was interested in why, if it was possible in Switzerland, if it was possible in Canada and Belgium, why was it not possible in India and in Palestine? Sir Reginald thought that the idea that this is a nation, that the Jews and Arabs constitute a single entity and can bring themselves to have a single allegiance was just grotesque. He once put it to me graphically. He said "I've spoken this morning to Ben Gurion and to Jamal Hussein. For you to tell me that both would salute the same flag or be responsive to the same set of values, it's nonsense. And he made this historic statement: the idea that there's such a thing as Palestinian nationality is a mischievous pretense. There is no such thing. We are quite different from one another and we can only therefore maintain a unitary state by suppression, words which would become prophetic. In other words, you have to deny either one or the other, an expression of

nationality or a unitary state which can only be maintained as a unitary state by increasingly harsh repression, something that Israel is finding out now. Because each of these entities was sufficiently turbulent and individualist and particularist, not to be digested by the other, neither of them could subdue the other, but neither of them could accept the other. So when Gromyko said "partition", he was saying something familiar. The United States at one stage (through Dean Acheson) had said in response to Zionist pressure in 1946 that one of the proposals - in fact the Zionist program - was partition. The phrase was (I remember because I had just joined the Zionist Secret Service) "a viable Jewish state in an adequate part of Palestine". This was a compromise of the great Israel idea. And if that was a Zionist proposal it had been a British one, very eloquently defended. The British had never abandoned it intellectually, they just abandoned it because of appeasement. They just didn't want to do what was necessary to put it into effect. And therefore, because of Arab interest they just abandoned it because of strategic nationalist egoistic interests. They never thought it was wrong, and in fact tried to revive it in 1944 when Winston Churchill appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Herbert Morrison, a very senior cabinet member. And what they did was to call for

partition in November 1944. When Lord Hoyne was murdered by one of the terrorist groups, Churchill in anger abandoned the whole business, the Egyptians hanged these two people and the partition committee dispersed. So it wasn't a sudden kind of innovation. And it was natural that when the Committee met (and I think this was the influence of the Secretariat) Bunche laid down the possibilities, and at the end when it came to Geneva this was how they analyzed it:

What are the options? The whole of Palestine as an Arab State, the whole of Palestine as a Jewish state, Palestine as a federated entity under a unitary system of partition. The discussions were pretty well channeled into these four options - I should have also listed continuation of the mandate. In other words, they wrote down these options and studied them in the course of their business.

The Secretariat had a very large role. Once they defined the nature of the problem (as everybody knows in science, scholarship and even in legal judgments) they have gone a long way towards narrowing it down because some of the options become obviously unfeasible.

JSS Mr. Horowitz I believe was your colleague at that point.....

Eban That was an important innovation because this was the first time that Zionism was recognized in the United

Nations system - by appointing two liaison officers who were of the Jewish Agency. The United Nations really said, well the Jewish Agency is the representative body; they didn't ask if we had any elections. The reason why there was no argument was that the Jewish Agency already had an international status that derived from the jurisprudence of the League of Nations. The mandate of the League of Nations said that there shall be recognized or established a Jewish Agency, with which the mandatory power shall cooperate. One of the great achievements of the Weizmann was not only to get the Balfour Declaration - the Zionist Policy - endorsed by Britain but also to get a unanimous League of Nations to endorse the Zionist program and the status of the Zionist organization. My feeling is that the Secretariat had a great part in giving conspicuous place to partition as one of the outcomes.

JSS

And you, representing the Jewish Agency, did you at that point assume that partition would in fact be the desirable recommendation, and did you.....

Eban

Yes. This was the banner that we carried. We wanted that and nothing else. We no longer wanted a continuation of the mandate because Ernest Bevin was very abrasive toward the Zionist point of view. Nobody understood why he was with such radical extremism. It can only be understood in terms of individual psychology.

I believe in the role of the personality of history. So we didn't want that to continue since it would eventually have led to an Arab state. We didn't want an Arab state in the whole and we didn't want the kind of federal state in which the Zionists would be a rather minor kind of province, predominantly under Arab rule. Ben Gurion and Weizmann - though they were not always in agreement with each other, were the two figures that counted, especially with the United Nations Committee. I would say that Weizmann counted more than Ben Gurion, even though he was no longer in office. That was regarded as the pro-Jewish, the pro-Zionist thing to do and when Gromyko made his statement, it didn't sound so crazy because if in February we had put the Russians in the negative column, they were not allies. It began to look as if you could get a majority. We really needed the United States and we were pretty well home. We knew the United States had a bias towards it although it was not very popular in the State Department.

JSS

Let me ask you in that connection about the geographic divisions, so to speak, and in particular about Jerusalem. The recommendation of the Special Committee Commission with regard to Jerusalem was a special one, and I wondered whether that was welcomed, accepted at that point, by the Jewish Agency, by the Jewish side, by you, or did you make an effort to alter

that particular aspect?

Eban

It's very strange when you look at the situation from the perspective of today how little passion Zionists invested in that question. And in a very notable book published by the Israeli Amos Alon he draws attention to the fact that the founding fathers of Zionism had some reservations about Jerusalem. For example, Theodore Herzl said the capital of his visionary state should be in Haifa, and Weizmann used to say that Jerusalem would never be truly ours. He felt uncomfortable there and always wanted to get back to Rehovoth. All these priests, rabbis, archdeacons and patriarchs, the whole thing reeked of incense and he didn't feel comfortable as a Zionist. When Ben Gurion made his first visit to Palestine in the early 1900s he didn't even mention going to Jerusalem. For him the central facts were the newest settlements - the kibbutzim and the moshavim - and therefore, the assumption was that the world wouldn't give it up anyway, and that it would be very good fortune that it shouldn't be given to the Arabs although our weapon was the view of the majority. And when the Committee said corpus separatum of which the fate would be decided later on (which meant that the majority would decide after 10 years) it was accepted with tranquility and the Israelis established all their institutions in Tel Aviv: the Knesset in Tel Aviv, government houses in

Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv was the capital in the Israeli eyes. If that had been left alone, if the United Nations had just left it alone instead of (in its resolution in 1949) wanting to impose a government and a trusteeship council in 1950, it could have gone on like that. The man who was the first secretary of the Israeli cabinet, Zeev Schiff, recorded in his book he never remembers anybody in the provisional Israeli government sighing with sadness and grief that we didn't have Jerusalem. It was kind of a docile acceptance of this fate. The price from the Israeli point of view was that if it was going to be United Nations, we wouldn't have to fight then, and at least it would be safe. It was only when that assumption collapsed - the idea of internationalization - when it became clear that the United Nations could not assure peace, tranquility or security...

JSS

But by the time the United Nations, as you say, put forward the idea of the international administration of Jerusalem Israel was in control of the western part of the city.

Eban

Yes, of the western part. The fact is that we had the majority there; but as the war developed Jerusalem was our weakest point. First of all it was very easily isolated from the rest of the country. If you go along the road now and you see some of these rusty old half-tracks that indicate the fight to get in. It could be

easily cut off because of its geographical position. One part in 1948 was under siege. On my television show I have an interview with General Herzog who describes how we were down to X liters of water a day to eat and drink. It was a very precarious position. I think the fact that our military people admitted that it would be very hard to defend the partition state if you also had Jerusalem. There was also of course the precedent of the British partition plan of 1937 which also made Jerusalem an international enclave. There were even those who wanted a Jewish state who didn't envisage giving it Jerusalem. There was so much jubilation about getting the state. There were some opponents of partition who said "what are you doing without the eternal Jerusalem?" But Ben Gurion and Weizmann didn't worry about it.

JSS Now these many years later with all of Jerusalem under Israeli administration it still remains a problem, though, as evidenced by the recent statement by President Bush and the reaction to that in Israel, and so forth.

Eban Well the powers had really gotten used to the idea of the partition of Jerusalem. If in 1967, King Hussein had left it alone, Western Jerusalem would be the capital. In my speech in the Trusteeship Council in 1950 I said, why not leave it alone? The Jordanians want to leave it alone, we want to leave it alone. The Jordanians are just as hostile to internationalization as they are to

Jewish control. If Hussein had left it alone in 1967, it could to this day be a divided city. Which doesn't mean it couldn't be united some other time. But again, in each case the Jewish reaction was one of defiance, "leave us alone and we'll leave you alone". When the United Nations failed to establish security then the Jews would be perfectly satisfied with Western Jerusalem. The endless error on the part of the Arabs, especially Hussein, was to be drawn by Nasser into the war and bombarding Jerusalem. I experienced that personally and have a collection of shrapnel in my garden. The reaction was "OK, if that's the way you want it then we'll see who has the better military organization. In two days Jerusalem was in our hands, the seventh of June.

JSS

Mr. Ambassador, the ensuing years, have you ever thought or do you think now of an alternate solution for Jerusalem in the event there could be a peace?

Eban

What is completely out of the question is this very naive idea of international administration by the United Nations. I explained that in my speech, I think in March 1950. I know it was then because in an Israeli paper, Maariv, which publishes a column "40 years ago" there was recently a headline in which I am denouncing the idea of removing the existing administration and appointing a governor. I think the United Nations has developed to a point that the idea of administering territories and

population is completely overtaken. The trusteeship system is obviously purely informal. Somaliland and a few colonies were probably the last. The trusteeship provisions of the Charter were never really put into effect. The idea of what is called evolution to self-government and independence didn't happen that way. The United Nations does have an important role in decolonization by supporting the idea of self-government against the idea of colonial rule. But administratively it never brought any opposing kind of system. If it had it would be governing in all kinds of places, even to this day, in Hong Kong and God knows where.

JSS

To continue on a somewhat different subject, what was the Jewish reaction to the idea that was put forward partly by Trygve Lie quite early of an international military force to maintain order in Palestine? This was amplified later I think in the third session of the General Assembly, when Trygve Lie proposed specifically a constabulary, an armed constabulary?

Eban

The weak point of the November resolution was what was called implementation. Here was a very surgical operation being suggested and the assumption was that it would be carried out peacefully. On what was that based when one of the parties didn't want to have anything to do with it? Who was going to keep order? And there was something rather unreal in that respect about the

November recommendation. It was so detailed in other respects: the structure of governments and democracy, self-determination and civil rights, but not going into the question of the enforcement. Of course this reflects the general weakness of the United Nations system and especially the General Assembly. Later we were going to see the attempt to make the General Assembly a surrogate for the Security Council in the Uniting for Peace resolution. But Trygve Lie was actually completely correct, he was in support of the partition - very actively. Incidentally, both he and Hammarskjold showed a predilection for taking positions. There was always a Secretariat view. He was for the partition of Palestine, he was for the participation of Communist China. Trygve Lie really didn't have this hesitation. Just as there were governments which had their position, the Secretaries-General had their positions. And usually on very sensitive issues which, of course, stirred up the enmity of those opposed to it and the admiration of those who agreed. We frankly admired Trygve Lie, he was our ally. But the idea of a constabulary -

The United States was very apprehensive. In fact it led to their temporary abandonment of the partition idea because it really meant that they were going to take over the British role. What's involved in a constabulary is this: you enforce, you punish, you provoke, you enrage,

you arrest people and put them in jail. The United States, one must remember, was very reluctant about assuming the British role. They wished to God the British would stay where they were. There was a kind of contradiction in American policy which enraged the British. On the one hand they maintained an anti-colonial rhetoric all the time and Churchill was irritated by Roosevelt. On the other hand, when it came to the point, they wished the British would just get on with it in Greece, Turkey, Palestine, and Iran because so long as they were there, the United States didn't have to enlarge the range of its responsibilities. By 1947 I think the Truman Doctrine for Greece and Turkey was already enunciated. But not only was it unrealistic, having a constabulary, even the partition commission would not be allowed in. This was a very interesting development, the British hostility to partition, because logically and historically they were the authors of the idea. It took the form of this five-member commission - Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Bolivia, and the Philippines -- and they wouldn't even let them go into the area to carry out the partition resolution. All they did was to make a judgment that the Arabs were at fault in defying the resolution. They were called the five lonely pilgrims. I don't know exactly what Trygve Lie was doing there; he seemed to choose the least significant people he could.

There were much more significant Latin countries than Bolivia and Panama - and much more significant countries in Europe than Denmark. At any rate this commission met and it was quite obvious by the end of 1947 that the matter would be decided on the battlefield, not by some United Nations enforcement. You must remember that there had already been a collapse of the Charter provisions on the Military Staff. They were meeting ridiculously every month, very high officers - American, Soviet, British, French and Chinese. Then after 5 minutes they said "we have noted that we have met" and went home. So the idea of the United Nations as an enforcing agency had been weakened in general and therefore the idea that in the particular case of Palestine there would be a United Nations constabulary was really logical but unreal.

JSS

And so on the Jewish side you did not attribute great importance to the idea.

Eban

It was obviously not going to happen and we would obviously have to fight for ourselves. The Arabs understood it. I talked with

(inaudible) and he said "you will have to fight, and if you don't win, you won't get your state. And we're going to try and prevent it. The United Nations had not built the kind of image that would reassure. I don't think that there was any serious discussion in Washington or Britain. The British were afraid that, in the end if you

said constabulary, they would be asked to stay on. And they really didn't want to stay on. I understood because if they had given up India, what's the use of Palestine? Palestine was regarded as one of a series of bases. Malta, Cyprus, and Palestine were stepping stones on the way to India, and if you don't have India, what's the point of having the others? You would be on your way to nowhere. If you are going to have a major decolonization, these places weren't important enough for 100,000 British troops to be tied down there when the war was ended. It was a country which could sustain massive losses if there were a war, but the war had ended. And they were getting killed and the public just wouldn't stand for it. Or they said, "what for?" and it was very hard to say what for. It wasn't a source of mineral wealth or oil. I would say it was like a beehive without honey. You've got the stings and you've got nothing out of it.

JSS

Mr. Ambassador, you mentioned that the idea of the constabulary might have had some effect on Washington and the move away that Washington took from the partition idea. You have discussed this in your autobiography of course. It remains somewhat mysterious how the United States could have switched positions so suddenly without any warning and quite contrary to the indication that President Truman had given before. I wondered, are you

still inclined to attribute this initiative in the Security Council to the influence of the State Department on American policy, or have you gained new perception on the situation?

Eban All the new perceptions support the idea that in this case the State Department was not very careful about getting presidential support. Truman made a dramatic gesture on the 14th of May. There's a book now in the bookstores about General Marshall. Also in my interview with Clark Clifford in the television series the virulence of Marshall's opposition to it surprises me very much. He's almost insubordinate.

JSS To the proposed partition?

Eban Yes. When the recognition of Israel was made he really was insubordinate to his own president. He said "it's just politics, and if you do this I might not vote for you". And Truman who revered Marshall said "OK, that's one vote less". It had to be fought very heavily. In March why they abandoned it I think was clear. First of all they didn't think we were going to make it. You must remember that this Israeli invincibility was a myth. Our military situation was very, very bad, and we were going to lose, and even our own Haganah leaders were saying that it's not sure that we can do this. Here we are only fighting volunteers, and not the official Arab armies. They hadn't reached the frontier. Yet Jerusalem was cut

off, the Negev was cut off. The Arabs had seized points of communication, the Jewish state was fragmented. The Arabs very cleverly didn't try to defeat the Israeli armies but to seize communication points. The United States was watching us with skepticism, and that's on the local scene. They thought that was going to be a massacre and they would have to come in and rescue us. They were getting reports from people like Marshall, General Montgomery, saying in March that the Jews were really (it's a slang phrase) they've got a hot potato there. They can't do it. The French were always saying it was absolutely impossible. On the international level the Soviet war pressure was intense, there was a prospect of war. Czechoslovakia was invaded, NATO was established. People like the Pentagon - Forrestal - were saying the Arabs were beginning to cancel oil contracts. So there was a feeling that it was beyond the possibility, beyond Israel's power, to implement partition and it was against American's interest to fight for it. So they said, "let's have another look." The other look was a little bit absurd -the trusteeship - but at any rate, let us halt the dynamism with which the state is established. Truman was surprised because he had met Weizmann the day before, and they talked about partition, partition, partition. Clifford is going to illuminate this in my own book. The next morning he

reads in the paper - and I don't know what happened. I think after November 29 Truman thought the matter settled and he would go on to deal with other matters. But he left the whole thing alone. It doesn't figure in history very much between November and March. And then when he heard of this, "oh my God, what's happened?" And it's then that he very conscience-stricken, about to see Weizmann, sent John Rosenmann (Judge Samuel I. Rosenmann) to see Weizmann to say "if you've decided nevertheless to establish a state I'll recognize it. I won't take responsibility, but if you'll take responsibility, it's OK. So the gap was very strong, but this description of the recognition meeting on May 12, this biography of Marshall, indicates that the confrontation was so great that after the meeting, Lovett, the under-Secretary, called up Marshall and said "there's a great danger here that there will be a Truman-Marshall rift which would of course destroy the cohesion of the Truman administration". What kind of a chance would the Democratic Party have of winning an election if there was a rift at that high level? Marshall was more than just a Secretary of State, he was a figure in his own right, probably could be president himself. And therefore they thought that this declaration of Jewish independence as going to be a headache.

JSS

And then in due course apparently....

Eban It did show the President was not the President who had been elected, that's another matter. He had been the Vice-President, he was not the assertive Truman of from '48 to '52, a completely different person, saying "I've been elected, you just do what you're told". He didn't have that sort of approach.

JSS But apparently then, for his part Truman never told the State Department of his conversation with Judge Rosenmann or of his intentions.

Eban Obviously not, because it doesn't figure at all in the May discussions. But they must have been suspicious. The fact that he recognized the state 10 minutes afterwards, it must have been clear to Marshall that he had thought this one out before. I mean that was not a decision to be taken in 12 minutes. In other words the whole thing was laid on before.

JSS Ambassador, before we leave this period I want to go back just a minute to the Soviet attitude which you have referred to and which was really very positive. I wonder what explanation do you have for the strong and consistent support of the Soviet Union at that time for partition and for the Jewish state, especially in light of the subsequent history?

Eban You really have to look to the general foreign policy considerations of Moscow. They came out of the war terribly worn with 20,000,000 dead, and suspicious that

everybody who could invade the Soviet Union would do so. The central aim of their foreign policy was to get rid of the bases which surrounded them. It sounds absurd when you look at a map, but they had a fear of encirclement. Western bases then meant British bases, and would for several years. The British had Palestine, the British were in the Canal Zone, in the airport in Iraq. Even when the Arabs claimed freedom they had no objection to having British bases. These kings, they would sign up with the British, it was a tradition. In North Africa it was French and it was the Soviet objective to shake them away, push them away. It explains their aggressive policy towards Turkey and Greece. The people more likely to get the British to move out - the Arabs - were being hit on the head very hard by the British for revolting against Britain. But in the end they would settle for a base. I think the Soviets understood in point of fact that at that time the people who were saying "get out" to the British were the Israelis and that's the only reason for the Soviet policy.

JSS So it was a strategic concern.

Eban Yes, a very important strategic concern which persisted for two or three years. In the early 1950's they no longer had that concern. The Israelis had done their job of getting the British out: now the Soviet policy was to win the Arabs over in their cold war against the United

States. During that period one must stress how right they were. They were more constant in their assertiveness in support of Israel than even the United States. There were no wobblings, no vacillations. And in the end without the Soviet Union this generation couldn't have made it because without their five votes, and without their Czech arms, we couldn't have made it either diplomatically or militarily.

JSS Do you think that Ambassador Gromyko had very much influence in this policy or was it strictly as you say strategic, determined probably by Stalin himself?

Eban I've just read the memoirs of Gromyko. He was the servant of policy and did not presume to initiate it. Once he was told that was the policy, he played it very strongly and boldly and embraced us. Sentimentally, he reminded me of this later on in Geneva in 1967. He said, "I raised my voice in the Security Council and the GA, read my speech again." He became a Zionist hero. But one must say, however uncomfortable it is, this came from Stalin, the clearest part of whose policy was to get rid of this encircling grip. And while they needed to do it - they even found an ideology - they talked about the Zionist ideology as having historical roots.

JSS Even though they had opposed Zionism, and for very good historical reasons?

Eban And continued to oppose Zionism in the Soviet Union.

They gave us no help in the exit of the Jews but supported this national struggle with all the terminology of a people struggling for independence. They attacked the Arabs vehemently. Then and afterwards, the Soviet Union were either for you or against you. If they were for you, they were 100%, if they were against you, they were 100%. The United States always had a plurality in their objectives and tried to combine their objectives in a single policy. So they were never 100% for you, and they were never 100% against you. Nobody could completely trust them and nobody could completely despair of them.

JSS But you needed them.

Eban Oh yes.

JSS Trygve Lie, as you mentioned, took a very strong position in favor of the partition and in fact he appears to have been even more stunned than you on the Jewish side by the switch in the American position. He even threatened to resign at one point and I wondered, were you in direct touch with him?

Eban Very much, for you see, he was our great ally. He said, "don't accept this major change." For him it was a tremendous blow to the United Nations. In his book In The Cause of Peace he says this was the first attempt since the Second World War to achieve a political end by aggression. Therefore the United Nations system was

challenged. It was the first real action by the General Assembly. He thought that it was making a fool of the United Nations and a fool of him personally, that it was destroying the hope of that degree of authority that comes under the myth of prestige. It was a terrible defiance of the United Nations system by one of the founders of the organization and he became the ally of the Zionist lobby in working against it. I don't know how the views of the other Secretariat people were. I thought that Robles was rather cool, the legal advisor, Stavropoulos, was somewhat hostile.

JSS I was going to ask you about that

Eban I suppose you've been talking with Brian Urquhart.

JSS Well, Brian was not too much involved at that point. Actually the three that Lie seems to have consulted most closely at this point were Cordier and Protitch and, later, Sir Robert Jackson who was a very young man at that point and kind of a troubleshooter for Lie.

Eban His chief fame was to be the husband of Barbara Ward.

JSS I want to ask you one philosophical question, if I may. In your book, you refer back to your experience at the General Assembly in Paris, I think in 1948, and you say that your legal advisor whose name was Robinson did more than anyone else to educate us all on the potentialities and limitations of multilateral diplomacy. And I wonder how did you assess at that point the limitations and the

potentialities of multilateralism and how have you changed?

Eban

Well it was completely new because there had been one power that counted, Britain, although it was recognized that the United States would have some influence. There was the permanent mandate Commission, comprised of learned and somewhat remote academic judges like Professor LaParra and Professor Hambro and others. Basically we had one central international organization, and now we had to worry about Paraguay and Iceland. It was quite a change and we had to adapt ourselves to a completely new technique and then ask "was the United Nations very important? Could it really change for good or ill the destiny of our history?" The chief feeling was that failure would be catastrophic, that it would lead to the loss of what we already had in the League mandate and the Balfour Declaration. Success would open vistas. It must also be remembered that the United Nations at that time had great prestige, I would say the first 5 years were its florescence. People took it very seriously. Some of its actions were actually implemented. We wanted the Soviets out of Iran and they got out. And the Dutch left Indonesia. It had, as it were, impressive psychological victories like the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. There was a tremendous press corps, with much more coverage than now.

Hundreds of journalists. For the general debate foreign ministers would come for three weeks and not leave New York. We would see each other, conduct transactions together, listen to each other's speeches. Today the speeches of foreign ministers in the general debate pass from the ministerial lips into oblivion without even a temporary resting place in the New York Times. You could pick up the New York Times in 1948 and 1949, and there were two large pages with excerpts of speeches. There was a great sense of gravity, solemnity and importance, decisiveness. Now you can be here in the middle of October and not know if there's a session on. New York society was dominated by the United Nations session. The Secretary-General would give a dinner here and the Mayor a dinner there. And you had Bevan, Acheson, Robert Schumann - all these luminaries. That was the United Nations that was dealing with our problem. Yes. Now if you look at the situation today it could be suggested that there's almost a return of the situation in 1945 and that there is a degree of agreement, a consensus among the five Permanent Members of the Security Council and this has been reflected in some effective actions by the Council or the Secretary-General in the past two years. Has this influenced your perception of the potentialities of multilateralism as reflected in the United Nations?

JSS

Eban

Well first of all, the Israeli disillusionment with the United Nations is understandable in the short term which is not a very historical view. The United Nations first of all was the first outlet for the Jews from their agony. It was a pioneer in familiarizing the world with the concept of the Jewish state. On the first of September, 1947 when I went into the Palais des Nations to receive the report, I reflected that this was the first time that the words "Jewish state" had been used by an international organization. The words had not even occurred in the Zionist program. There it was "the Jewish national home" or "the Jewish people in Palestine". The Balfour Declaration said the same thing. It really put the concept of the Jewish state on the international map - legitimizing it. The November resolution may have been weak judicially; it was only a recommendation. But it was very dramatic and historic. The Zionists called it a decision, which it was not. The Arabs called it a recommendation, and were on stronger ground. In fact in February 1948 there was a very important Four Power meeting which ruled that the Security Council had no obligation to take any notice of the General Assembly resolution. In general, GA resolutions have merely moral force as noted in Goodrich and Hambro. Nevertheless, the November resolution marked a turning point in the emotional and psychological

history of Israel. And then above everything else, Israel was admitted to the United Nations, which is also admission to the other 30 agencies on the basis of what is called sovereign equality. In other words our status is equivalent to that of the United States or Soviet Union. These are services to Israel that completely transcend all the pinpricks of the resolutions later on. And then the peace-keeping in 1956 which gave us free passage in the Gulf of Aqaba and the ability to put up the pipeline piecemeal over the years in the South; and resolution 242 which legitimizes to this day our presence in the territories, subject only to the establishment of peace. The work it's doing on the Golan Heights. United Nations was a great success while it lasted. What went wrong was that it was abandoned, as I said, very precipitously by the Secretary-General. I'm not sure that Hammarskjold would have bowed so easily as did U Thant.

JSS I have a question on that...

Eban I don't believe Trygve Lie would have either. But anyway there is this obscene anti-Zionist resolution which is completely ineffective in any legal sense. It doesn't commit anybody to anything. I think it is really perpetuated because Israel perpetuates it.

JSS You mean that "Zionism is a form of racism?"

Eban Yes, otherwise we would agree, so much other nonsensical

stuff has appeared - I'm not sure it's wise to make it the anniversary of this resolution. Nobody cares about it. It hasn't affected anyone's relations with us. I'm rather perturbed. The idea of revoking resolutions has never occurred in an international agency. If you put it up and fail I think it's nonsense.

JSS Mr. Ambassador, we were talking about multilateralism and its prospects.

Eban It has had a tremendous effect. I don't think it should be left to any single power with its strategic emphasis to make these breakthroughs. The other point is that once you enter the multilateral sphere you enter a world in which there is also a certain spirit, a kind of idealistic rhetoric. There was the stupendous transition - and the United Nations inaugurated it - from the lowest point in our Jewish history. Of course the price was and this was because the Zionist leadership had the genius to define its aspirations in concrete terms which were violent and they did not want to share sovereignty, to share territory. I have said on many occasions, and I would say again, that if the Zionist movement had then said "we want 100% of the territory and to be sovereign", the number of countries that would have given support would have been zero. The world would have organized itself successfully to prevent our emergence and therefore sharing territory and sovereignty

with the Palestinians was built into our history. And that's why it's proving so difficult to emerge from it and that's why the idea of having 100% territory and sovereignty has won no victories anywhere, not even in the United States. Not one nation out of the 160 has really abandoned its partitionist approach.

JSS Later I want to come back to this in questions about the Secretaries General and the role of the Secretary-General, but I'd like to move on now if I could to the 1956 war. As you have pointed out in your books, Ben Gurion stated that the major objective of the Suez undertaking from the Israeli point of view was the achievement of a peace treaty. My question is, was this understood at the time by the British and French?

Eban No, because that was not really the objective. All of this is covered in several books and in Ben Gurion's memoirs where he states very realistically that the short term objectives were to break the blockade of the Suez Canal and the Gulf of especially Aqaba. If you have Elat, you don't care about the Canal because you have your independent link; and to give such a blow to Nasser that we would be left in peace in the South. If he fell - well, obviously if Nasser should fall, there would be no one with whom to make a peace treaty. Once we had succeeded I put up the slogan "not backwards to belligerency but forwards to peace" . Now we had an

opportunity here; dictatorial power has been broken; there's now a chance that even people who objected to it I think I said that we might wish to have reached this situation with less sacrifice and tension; but having reached it, we mustn't go back. So the idea that this was a chance to get a real settlement was then accepted by people like Lester Pearson and others who wouldn't have approved of what we did. Foster Dulles became a little bit interested in it later on. He became very anti-Nasserist in 1958. Therefore precipitous withdrawal was not very intelligent from the viewpoint of the United Nations. But here we encountered a Secretary-General who felt, on the contrary, there were two principles involved: one was that you had to respect existing juridicial situations. The armistice system was the existing juridicial system which, incidentally, the Israelis had signed onto. Secondly, it would be a great blow if something as unauthorized as the Anglo-French Israeli attack were to be rewarded, and therefore either it shouldn't be rewarded at all in the case of Britain and France or, in the case of Israel, it should only be rewarded on that matter where Israel had a strong case.

You have the memorandum of Dulles to me in February 1957 that we were right about the illegitimacy of the blockade, we were right about illegitimacy of the fedayeen raids. So Israel should only be satisfied on

those matters on which the right was on its side - on these two issues. Ben Gurion always justified the action - whether this is retrospective or not - saying "all I had in mind were these two things". There is some evidence that even in advance when we met with a group called Maporen who were against going to war, he said "we are not going to keep the Sinai. We just want to get a breakthrough to the East and we want to give Nasser a kind of spanking so he really ought to leave us alone.

JSS So the Canal was a very important factor?

Eban The Canal, really the Straits of Tiran, much more because they provide an Israeli outlet and if you have that and you also have a land connection, you don't really need the Suez Canal, 90% of which is oil traffic and we would be getting our oil from Iran or from the Gulf.

JSS You just mentioned your friend, Lester Pearson. A little later Dean Acheson in describing his experiences at the United Nations said that, while he liked Lester Pearson, that there were two people in New York that gave him problems. One was Krishna Menon and the other was Lester Pearson. This was with regard to Korea. But I wondered if you could give your perception at this point of Lester Pearson's influence at that time in the movement toward peace-keeping and the resolution of the Suez War.

Eban There grew up in the United Nations system a gallery of

people who were fundamentally Western in their allegiance but who didn't believe that the United States had a monopoly on wisdom. There was Canada and there was Brazil. There was India which, with its representatives attending, could not even be described as pro-West, and the Scandinavian countries (especially Sweden and Norway) - at that time, Lange - I remember these people. It was kind of a third force within the United Nations basically oriented to the West whose members thought there could be independent initiatives. It came to special expression in Britain when they joined the movement toward relations with Communist China. So the United States was not really the father of a great obedient family. Largely I think for personal reasons, countries like Canada and Sweden developed an idea that the United States ought to be listened to with deference but not with docility. On the question of Israel, for example, Canada was really embarrassed because the two countries which came first to Canada had gone off on the Anglo-French expedition. On the other hand the juridicial element in the External Affairs was very much against that sort of going off on a tangent alone. But Pearson in his speech said he was quite willing to chastise where deserved but frankly this didn't mean that the status quo was right and shouldn't be disturbed and that way building something. Peace-keeping was to be the first, and that naturally was

a tremendous development in the United Nations system although frankly he worked very much with Bunche on that. Bunche already had his Nobel prize for the Rhodes Armistice which, incidentally, is a very great United Nations achievement. The United Nations, after all, is the author of these Rhodes agreements which have, in fact, defined the Israeli-Arab partition since they were devised. We are still living within

JSS

In a very pragmatic sense

Eban

Yes, except that the salients on the Golan Heights and in Jerusalem have developed within the system laid down by the armistice agreements. Because the word "armistice" sounds modest, it is not always rated as one of the great achievements of the United Nations system. The fact is that in those days, which bears out what I said before, if a conflict had to be resolved, the natural thing was to see if the United Nations could resolve it. So they both deserve their Nobel prizes. They come to expression on the Israeli when the United States tried on trusteeship. It, after all, was defeated by Western countries - Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, Canada. They didn't want a contemptuous revocation of the partition resolution. There were people like Karl and (inaudible) who were in a rage about it. Then on the Korea cease-fire, Acheson says, Pearson - I would say that Gladwyn - Jebb and others were his

opponents on the matter. Jebb, who conquered the microphone, used to make speeches in direct collision with Acheson. Pearson really represented one sort of United Nations zealot who, without surrendering their devotion to the Western cause because they were all NATO partners, didn't see why the United States should have all the responsibility, especially as they said we, Canada and certainly Britain, certainly Sweden, we're not inhibited by the Jewish lobbyists. This was one of the rationalizations of why they should be allowed to develop positions as Europe is doing now.

JSS

And from your point of view, his thinking was not as restricted by the moral principles you mentioned that was very evident in Hammarskjold's approach to the problem?

Eban

Exactly. The fact is that if the process is leading to something negative, it doesn't mean that the best thing to do is put the egg back in the shell - if it's not a good egg, it's not a good situation. I think they accepted the example I used to give that when there has been a fire, you don't reconstruct the exact proximity of the gas to the fire exactly as it was before. This was my attempt to ridicule Hammarskjold's conception of reconstitution of a situation, which was not valid. Pearson was more enlightened than Hammarskjold because he was willing to join in the castigation of what was done

but this didn't mean to say we shouldn't try to do better than what existed.

JSS I'd like to go ahead now to Dag Hammarskjold's efforts to get a status arrangement with Nasser on the presence and departure, or non-departure, of UNEF. First of all I want to ask if you were familiar with the texts of the memoranda that Hammarskjold agreed to with Nasser on the status of the UNEF.

Eban I don't remember being shown the documents. I do remember talks with him in which he said that we didn't need to worry, and it's not true that they can just walk out any day. This was not realistic. But of course everything has to be left a little bit in the air. He liked leaving things in the air - words like "assumptions", "hopes", "presumptions". In 1957 he worked up the typical compromise under which the maritime powers could get up and say they assumed that the following would happen and the Egyptians would just sit there and say nothing. They never really committed themselves to it. On the other hand, as time went on we went deeper and deeper into the assurance that the United Nations force can't just be taken away when there is explosion and violence. What happened, as some feared, was that he always gave me and others the impression that would not happen. When I said in the Security Council that it was like the fire brigade going away at the first

smell of smoke or abandoning the umbrella just as it begins to rain. I could see that U Thant was very disgruntled by that. But I could see many glances of approval around the table. Even the United States didn't much like what U Thant was doing, not that you could have denied Egyptian sovereignty. The United Nations couldn't really compromise on the principle of Egyptian sovereignty; but it could have compromised on the pragmatics of how you reacted. It could have said "let's wait a minute. If the United Nations's going to go out, we'd just like to know what's going to happen."

JSS

One of the questions though that did repeatedly arise was whether U Thant should have taken the matter to the General Assembly, and it has been expressed that was the anticipation of Dag Hammarskjold. I think in your autobiography you have quoted the memorandum that was published after Hammarskjold's death which I think you interpret as meaning that this was Hammarskjold's belief and intention.

Eban

I still have the feeling that he would not just have.... think U Thant just lost his nerve, or perhaps as a Third World leader he was more sensitive to territorial sovereignty of the members. I think that both Lie and Hammarskjold said, "Oh I agree to accept the principle the United Nations has to move out but you have to give us time to find out what will succeed the condition.

Since the Egyptians needed their territory back, they would have compromised in a way that later on they accepted. Even now in the peace treaty they have accepted the massive demilitarization of the area. I think that he gave up much too easily.

JSS

So what you're thinking is that if the matter had in some way been referred to the General Assembly this would have at least given a delaying time.

Eban

Yes. I have always found the Security Council a more rational body. I don't know what would have happened in the Assembly at that time. I think they might have appointed a committee to negotiate with the Egyptians the conditions for withdrawal - not with 150, but with 8 or 10, or they might have asked the Security Council. I think there should have been a negotiating process, not just an order - not just say O.K, we are asked to leave, we will leave. Of course I know his rationale was that he didn't have a choice. Some of them were going anyway, Yugoslavia and India were going whether he said so or not. Recently in the peace-keeping machinery sometimes countries have walked out because they're tired. In one case Canada got out and Ireland came in. That's rationalization. The other rationalization was that Nasser was in a very angry mood and he would have thrown the United Nations out anyhow, physically. I wonder if he would have done that when he was trying to get

sympathy for himself. If he had started killing -I don't know who - Norwegians?

JSS In the end though from the perspective of Israel, you feel that this decision and the withdrawal of the United Nations had an adverse impact in terms of Israel's interests?

Eban Yes. First of all it certainly committed us to a war that was very bad. What I have said in the 1967 speech is true. It undermined our interests and created the dangers that we would not otherwise have faced. It put our national security in the gravest possible peril. And the United Nations - the idea that you could create a vacuum like that - is irresponsible. Internationally, and certainly in terms of Israel it had the psychological effect of creating skepticism in Israel about the United Nations (inaudible). I think it undermined the importance of the United Nations in the world as such because there was a certain stability and because the United Nations was the custodian of that, and the United Nations abandoned its trust.

JSS One specific question I wanted to ask you. In 1957 Dag Hammarskjold established a study group which included Anatoly Dobrynin to examine and draw conclusions from the UNEF experience. Did you have contact with Dobrynin when he was in the Secretariat?

Eban Who appointed the study group?

JSS Hammarskjold.

Eban Hammarskjold?

JSS And the report has been published. It points to the weaknesses as well as the strengths. Hammarskjold wanted to play down somewhat any euphoria about what peace-keeping operations could do.

Eban And this is before the fiasco of U Thant?

JSS Yes, this was....

Eban I wonder why he had reason to look at it then?

JSS Well, Brian Urquhart has talked about it on tape actually. It's not in his book, but he gives that as the reason why Hammarskjold established this group. In any event, you personally, if you were doing an assessment of the UNEF experience, how would you come out with it?

Eban The UNEF experience was a success story. The fact is that it enabled Israel to create a new dimension in international communications. It sounds fantastic if I say we became a two-ocean country. It's at the root of our success in Africa and Asia in creating that great network of development agreements, of access, it gave us independence in our oil traffic, it made Elat a center of oil traffic which I think it still is, in spite of what's happened in Iran. It was very viable and that's why it's tragic that it was brought to an end. It could have created a new belief in the United Nations as a stabilizing influence in international politics. There

was not a single shot fired in anger in Gaza, although the Egyptian administration came back. The Egyptian army didn't come back.

JSS So you would conclude that this was a very persuasive illustration of what a peace-keeping operation can do, a multilateral operation?

Eban Except that its effects were diminished by the skepticism about its durability.

JSS In bringing it up-to-date, how do you assess that in terms of the present world situation? There are increasing demands now, a call for peace-keeping operations of a different type.

Eban I'd say in general that theoretically (I'm going to have a talk with Pérez de Cuéllar in connection with my book) the present context, if glasnost, is not going to be killed by Lithuania (it's quite a setback) - if glasnost and perestroika stay alive, that's a situation in which an international organization ought to come back into its own. It seems to be the real arena in which the new spirit can be expressed of planetary concern. The functional organizations ought to have much more freedom. The Secretary General ought to become a much more important figure. I don't know how he sees that but in theory we ought to be going back to the era of the first five years in which the United Nations was really the central arena for international diplomacy. Also this

fact: I think the American administration is less unilateralist than it was in Reagan's time and Bush also has a United Nations background. I haven't seen it developing, perhaps it's too early because the ASsembly will only start meeting again for the first time since perestroika in September. I don't know if the Sec Gen is thinking of how to put a stake for the United Nations into this new situation.

JSS Well, I can tell you that he very much is. Would you give your thoughts on this particular change because between the first five years and now, the nature of conflict has altered. There are not many wars left that are between states, between national armies. They tend to stem now from societal roots and that raises a question. You were mentioning just now the functional organizations, the greater freedom and so forth. Do you see the United Nations or multilateral organizations in general having the capacity to deal with this type of conflict which is likely to characterize the world?

Eban Here we come across one of the paradoxes of the foreign aid situation. The preference of the donor powers if they give this money away, and especially if they have to persuade their parliaments, is to give it away under their own flag. That's why I said in my "New Diplomacy" the tendency in the United States is to want to wrap its own flag around itself where it is active, and therefore

the disproportion between what it's prepared to do in its bilateral programs and the relatively small amount it is prepared to devote of its foreign aid to international agencies. I don't know whether that will change or not. What makes me a little pessimistic is, as I've said, that monies come not from governments but from parliaments, and parliaments tend to be proprietary. They go to Nigeria and see that the United States has built some great system of irrigation. They want the stars and stripes on it. They don't want the blue flag. Whether an American administration could be disinterested enough to allow the international agencies to take responsibility? If it should? No. One reason that recipient countries are more congenial to accept aid from an international agency than from a foreign power is because then it's free from any suggestion of domination - of "Washington runs you". etc. An international agency can't dominate you. One reason why the Israeli programs were successful was that recipient powers knew they could throw us out on five minutes notice. They weren't sure at all if aid was coming from the Soviet Union or China. They didn't want this Yankee imperialism, especially in Latin America. So it would be intelligent for the United States [to use multilateral agencies]. This really meant that the glasnost thing has to take hold and come to expression in the United Nations and it depends

on what will happen in the fall. That's why I'm very perturbed that in the fall they may only be discussing how to get the Soviets out of Lithuania, or how to get the Lithuanians to be less impatient. It's a tragic thing, it's emotional. I saw it yesterday on television. It's a question whether the summit will be torpedoed as was the case with the Eisenhower-Kruschchev summit.

JSS

If the United Nations were to be able to play a more decisive role in bringing assistance in order to head off the type of conflict that stems from social and economic causes, it would require a greater coordination by the United Nations, I think, of the functional agencies. Based on your experience, which was, of course, not so directly related to ECOSOC, do you have any feeling that the United Nations is capable of doing that?

Eban

ECOSOC has been rather weak since each agency has become rather like the Roman governors, with independent Much more depends on who are the directors-general. There is the misfortune that UNESCO degenerates under this African gentleman. You might have to have an African president when there isn't one available, but it's got to be an African. I don't see any escape from that. To take the most powerful of them - the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, they're pretty independent organizations. I would say even their dependence on the Secretary-General was rather weak. He doesn't interfere

much. There's never really been a Secretary-General who saw the functional agencies as his main terrain. They are all captivated by the conflictual diplomatic conditions.

JSS Well this is an area where he has no power.

Eban Yes. In other words their link is very weak. It's a very loose federation of agencies. I think that whoever is the Director General of UNESCO counts for more than anything in the center.

JSS Mr. Ambassador, to go ahead again to a rather broad question. In your positions, you were able from the beginning to work with and observe four American presidents very closely, all of whom were directly involved in the Middle Eastern situations, and in the United Nations' role in the Middle East. I wondered if you could give your perception, not of the presidents as individuals, but of their attitudes toward working with the United Nations, through the United Nations, in terms of the Middle Eastern situation.

Eban It has followed a curve. It was highest in the early days and then it declined. Truman's attitude toward the United Nations was very respectful, Eisenhower's was almost deferential. I used to say that in Eisenhower's theology, between the President of the United States and God, there was an intermediate level, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Remember Foster Dulles'

speech about Suez and how he said more or less that our devotion to the United Nations transcends our devotion to our allies and our strategic interests? I think it's the only occasion when you could prove that a major power gave the United Nations predominance over its own egotistic interests. Although we didn't like it at the time, there was a degree of self-sacrifice because frankly, strategically they ought to have supported the British and French. People like Acheson said, "what the hell are you doing?" Kissinger says it to this day. If he had been around he would have supported the British and French, or at least prevented them from being humiliated because the humiliation of Britain and France injured American interests. It created a bi-polar world. Suez created a bi-polar world instead of a diverse world.

Then you come on later in the scene and Johnson became very disillusioned by his experience in 1967. He said to me, "I will go through the motions of going to the UN but I would be strongly surprised if they do anything". And his reference was to U Thant who was a pain in the neck to him. Goldberg also began to regret that he hadn't stayed in the Supreme Court. He had the idea that in that job he was going to have a preponderant role in American foreign policy. He found, as Stevenson found out, that that isn't true. It's not true, first of all, because of physical absence. You're not in

Washington. The fact that you're a member of the Cabinet and the Security Council doesn't count very much. I see now the United States has expressed that in the appointment of a career officer, no longer these pundits like Cabot Lodge, Stevenson, Moynihan, and Kirkpatrick. Johnson became really irritated by the attitude in 1967 and Nixon developed the idea of great power politics, of a Council of Europe. The direct American-Soviet line - that was the important thing. There was no disposition to, say, let the United Nations take something over. Carter should have had the disposition but in the end he found if there was a massive and important conflict to be resolved, it had to be resolved outside the United Nations system. Moreover, the United Nations had spoiled its credentials with Israel. That's why Camp David had to be done as an American (inaudible). The Geneva Conference was an opportunity but Kissinger was so apathetic about international organizations that he stole the UN flag, hijacked it, and went off on his own and came back only for the signature.

JSS If I recall correctly that's the only time the Secretary-General was present, opening the meeting.

Eban That was arranged at the beginning, incidentally, because Israel was worried and Kissinger couldn't get us to go there until he gave a letter saying the Secretary-General would simply set the ball rolling. Actually in

Kissinger's time he also got Waldheim to accept that role in the Indo-China Conference. The Secretary-General became like a monarch, breaking the bottles to launch a ship, but after that the ship goes over to somebody else.

JSS Why did Israel have any reservations about the Secretary-General?

Eban Because in the United Nations we had this built-in majority against us and therefore the less answerable to the UN, the better for us. There was even some problem (I thought it was a great success) when we got Golda [Meir] to agree to the Soviet chairmanship of the Conference. Later on Pérez tried to revive it by accepting the idea of the five permanent members inaugurating the Conference. Even then the United States was very dubious about it because the Soviet Union would be involved. I don't know what they say now. Peres said yes because if you had that arrangement, Israel would be the predominant military power and the United States would be the predominant political power. Nothing could happen that America and Israel didn't want to happen.

JSS There was the brief period at the beginning of the Carter administration when there was a successful consultation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Eban Yes, in October. Yes, but even then you couldn't call that a United Nations framework. Carter believe, and he believes now..... , I believe, we will have to come back

to that and that it is much more logical now that the Soviet Union has a much less acrimonious relationship with Israel.

JSS This gets away from the United Nations but just to divert, there is the theory that this move by Carter to reach an understanding with the Soviets was one of the things that prompted Sadat to make a move toward Israel. Do you agree with that?

Eban Oh yes, because he was much more fanatic about the Soviet Union than we were. He had broken relations with the Soviet Union. That was his enemy. So if they are going to the Soviet Union, then we go to Israel instead of the Soviet Union. And, in fact, he dictated that there should be a unilateral American mediation. He accepted Carter very well, as America, as the United States, but not the Soviet Union tagging along. In the disengagement agreements with Egypt in 1974, both Kissinger and I would have accepted the idea of signing that in Geneva, or rather of conducting the discussions in Geneva. I think in the end we did sign the agreement in Geneva.

JSS It was signed in Geneva. But you mean the disengagement on the military front at kilometer 1 where there was a United Nations presence.

Eban Yes, but very muted. The military signature was in Geneva. The fact is that by actions, chiefly I must say, by the GA rather than by Security Council action; the

Security Council has always been more central. In fact I would say, the Arabs would say, it has gone the other way because the United States would veto anything to which any Israeli objected. If Sharon were to say we have to capture Damascus, the United States would veto a resolution expressing criticism. I'm not sure it's very good for us. The United States is passionately against these settlements, both nationally and Bush personally. They won't allow the Security Council to act and the reason they give is, not that they're against these resolutions which the other 14 accept. They're for it but they don't want to give the Security Council the idea that it's back in business. Here I see they have a point. If you allow the Council to make one condemnation, then every three weeks it will condemn some action of Israel.

JSS

You think that's the stronger influence than the consideration of the American Jewish community?

Eban

I think that's part of it. When they have let things pass, nothing terrible has happened. They did abstain on something to do with the settlements. In general, of course, they say quite correctly, "it's the Arabs' fault". They [the Arabs] formulate their texts in such a way that there's no balance and they're rather stupid in not allowing some third party to formulate texts in a way that isn't pro-Arab - some of the Europeans. It's

always a resolution which is full of anti-Israeli rhetoric. Then the American representative says, "we agree that Israel shouldn't have done this, etcetera, etcetera, but we can't vote for the text. It's not balanced. It only condemns violence that emanates from Israel, and not violence which, either before or after, emanates from them. The PLO is becoming a little more sophisticated. Once they start getting Sweden or somebody else, or even Britain for that matter, to formulate a resolution, they might get it through.

JSS

Another 242. Mr. Ambassador, going now from presidents to Secretaries-General. You have recorded your impressions pretty well in the book of the work of the first Secretaries-General. You didn't get around to Mr. Waldheim, I don't believe.

Eban

One is a personal reason. I never served with him really. It was a period when my work was in the parliamentary thing and not so much the executive branch.

Also I once said of him, and I'm afraid he got to hear it, that his career refutes the theory that nature abhors a vacuum. On the other hand, my friends who worked with him said that Israel had no cause for complaint, like Chaim Herzog. I think he was very helpful with the Soviet Union. He came to Israel and he had a little mishap. I gave him lunch or dinner and he said how nice it is to be here in this capital of Israel and the Israel

television celebrated it too early so we more or less revoked it by changing it to the spiritual capital of the world. Whatever has arisen around him since then had no expression whatever during his Secretary-Generalship. In a way we are rather grateful because President Herzog has been against this witch hunt, as he calls it. Also my own feeling is that all one can say is that he was a Wehrmacht officer.



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