

United Nations Oral History Project

**Harlan Cleveland
22 April 1990**

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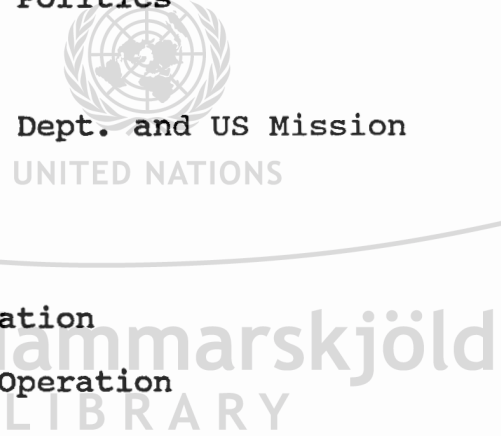
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NON-CIRCULATING
YUN INTERVIEW
APRIL 22, 1990
HARLAN CLEVELAND
HARRIMAN, NEW YORK
JEAN KRASNO, INTERVIEWER

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JK: For the record, Mr. Cleveland, could you explain what your position was at the time of the Congo crisis? As I understand it you were in the State Department. About when did that begin?

Cleveland: It began three days after President Kennedy was inaugurated. It was January 23, as I remember, of 1961. I was in the Kennedy Administration the whole time that he was President and on after, also, with the Johnson Administration. My first job for almost five years was Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. And so, all UN problems as well as other international organizations and other multilateral problems (except a few that were very specialized like NATO, which was in the European Bureau) but most international organizations like World Weather, UNESCO, and World Health, were my pigeons. At that time we belonged to 53 different intergovernmental organizations. But, the centerpiece of the job was backstopping and instructing the US Mission to the United Nations in New

York. And our gladiator up there, of course, was Adlai Stevenson. At that time, both because he was so well known and because the UN was much more central to our foreign policy, there was a UN angle to everything that happened. So I got involved in whatever happened. It was exciting. It was a very interesting task. The State Department, then as now, was organized mostly by regions and countries, which, of course, is not the way the world really works. It works by multilateral diplomacy, mostly. Almost nothing involves only two countries. The UN was a big crossroads and I had to deal with that from the Washington end and administer, as it were, from below the rather complex relationships between this extremely well known ex-presidential candidate who was our Ambassador to New York, the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, and President Kennedy and his staff at the White House. I had the feeling I was trying to administer that triangle from below, for UN affairs only, of course.

JK: As far as the Congo operation was concerned, it began in the Eisenhower Administration in July, 1960.

Cleveland: It blew just about after Independence.

JK: So, when you came on board there had been a change in administration. From your vantage point in Washington, did you see a change in the administration's policy toward the Congo operation when the Republican Administration left and the Democratic Administration

moved in?

Cleveland: No, there was actually a lot of continuity because the posture of the Eisenhower Administration was to support the initiative of Dag Hammarskjöld, and it was his initiative really to plunge in with both feet, and establish there what still ranks as the largest peace-keeping mission there has ever been. My predecessor, Fran Wilcox, and the people in the US Mission to the UN in New York, were just as supportive of that. The controversy, the political controversy inside the United States about the Congo, really didn't develop until later that year, or the following year, when some of the supporters of Moise Tshombe, who was in charge of the rich Katanga area and whom the Belgians, especially the Union Miniere, were supporting, got into a tangle with the people in Stanleyville under Lumumba who were oriented toward the Communists. There were some middle people -- the Prime Minister at the time was Adoula -- who were in Leopoldville. In the United States there were some people, notably Senator Dodd, the father of the present Senator Dodd of Connecticut, was a big supporter of Tshombe. Tshombe wanted the UN out of there (it was the Belgians really) so as to give Tshombe a free hand in Katanga which they felt would be advantageous for the mining interests. The UN presence there, with Ralph Bunche commuting over there for the UN, was a force that

had sort of buffaloes the Soviets. They couldn't figure out . . . they knew how to have a confrontation with us but they didn't know how to have a confrontation with the UN. Later, of course, there came to be a controversy about the financing of it but in the early stage the UN solved for us the problem of Soviet presence and domination in the northern part of the Congo.

JK: Now, you've brought up several issues that I want to go into a little more deeply. So, maybe we'll start with this last one. As far as US policy, what were the goals of US policy in the Congo as far as the State Department was concerned?

Cleveland: I think that they were essentially the same as the UN's, as Hammarskjöld's, to keep the country together so that it didn't split apart, to make it a viable country economically and politically (not very successful in the long run). Mobutu was head of the army at that time. He was our man in a way.

JK: So, the US was interested in keeping the Congo unified.

Cleveland: Keeping the Congo unified and keeping the Soviets, the Communist influence out of there. And also, there was a very important element of, I made a number of speeches on this subject at the time, of developing the UN's capacity to act. I was interested in that and so was Adlai Stevenson and so was Dean Rusk who had been a UN expert earlier in his life. He was the first Assistant

Secretary for what was then called United Nations affairs. So, we had very good support from him. The European Bureau of the State Department and to some extent the White House staff were skeptical about the UN. The African Bureau, of course, was all in favor of the Africans. And I found myself being assigned repeatedly, by Secretary Rusk, to keep those two regional bureaus out of each other's hair and sort of triangulate between those two interests and our interest in the UN. We had a very explicit, conscious, and public national interest in developing the UN so that it could solve problems that otherwise, because of the US position in the scheme of things, we felt that we would have to go in and solve. The very first meeting that we had on this subject, which must have been within the first two or three weeks of the Administration, was the first meeting that I chaired after I sat down at my desk. I found myself chairing a meeting with four ex-governors: Averell Harriman was there, and Soapy Williams was there, and Chet Bowles was there, and, of course, Adlai Stevenson. And we developed a very clear policy that we were going to support the UN in terms of money, in terms of logistics -- which was very important, we provided a lot of airlift for them -- and also politically, helping to beat the drum for what was going on with some of the other countries and helping to keep the Belgians at least neutral on the subject.

Paul Henri Spaak was pretty good about it but he had a lot of trouble internally with the fire eaters who were very militantly in favor of the Union Miniere.

JK: How did some of these dynamics that you are talking about relate to the secession of Katanga? Originally, the first UN resolution had been to stay out of the internal affairs but later that policy changed. How did that relate to the dynamics, for example, with the Soviet Union?

Cleveland: Let me finish first about our interests and our policy. Essentially our pitch was that if the UN weren't in there we would probably have to be. Then over a period of the next year or year and a half or two years the Congo would periodically blow up into a big issue either with domestic politics or international incidents and each time the President would say to me, "I remember your saying that if the UN weren't there we'd have to be there. Is that still right, Harlan?" And I'd say, "Yes, that's still right, Mr. President." Then he'd say, "Well then, let's take the flack and stay with it." We had very consistent support and a very consistent policy throughout that period up until the time of Hammarskjold's death and thereafter. We had very close relationships, of course, with Ralph Bunche. And indeed for part of the time when the UN troops were chasing the Katanga gendarmerie around the country, we were in better

touch with what was going on than Ralph was because the word got to him about 24 hours late through a general in Leopoldville, "through channels." We had an air attache at the Embassy out there with a plane chock full of communications equipment and I could just go downstairs at the State Department and talk to that person, I think he was a colonel, on a single side band radio directly. Then, by arrangement with Stevenson on emergency things, I'd occasionally call the UN directly, although we tried almost always to work through the Mission, of course. But, I would occasionally call up Ralph Bunche and say, "Ralph, do you know where your troops are today?" And he'd say, "Well, I think I know." And I'd say, "Did you know that they crossed the Kolwezi River this morning?" And he'd say, "Oh, my God, they're not supposed to do that. The Security Council has not said that's all right, yet." So, it was a very interesting time.

On the secession and on the internal politics, there isn't any such thing as staying out of internal politics, of course. Every aid program we have is involved deeply in internal politics. Even educational exchange is an intervention in internal politics. The important thing is to keep it from being party politics. But, policy politics it always is. And our purpose and the UN's purpose was to keep the country together because without the riches of Katanga the rest of the country would

really be a basket case. I went over there at one point and did an economic study leading to the beginning of a more formal aid program and it was clear that the southern part of the country would be needed as part of the mix. So, despite the fact that everyone was kidding themselves about not getting involved in the internal affairs, the United Nations operation was clearly involved in the internal politics. It was helping guide some the chief figures on their relationships with each other and in general it was very active and so were we. We had a couple of very active Ambassadors over there. Ed Gullion was there for a while and he was an activist type of ambassador.

JK: Did you deal with the Belgian or the British Ambassadors in Washington on some of these issues?

Cleveland: Yes, some, but the protocol was that if the Belgians had a problem they came to the European Bureau and the European Bureau would fuss with us. But I saw all those people all the time at parties, of course, and there was a certain amount of interaction. The same was true on the African side.

JK: The Belgians were not interested in bringing the country back together.

Cleveland: Not at all. They were heavily influenced by the mining interests and by the Belgian citizens who were still down there and owned most of the riches. And I think they felt

that they could dominate it better if it were a smaller thing and they regarded Tshombe as their man. Whereas we were trying to bet on and to build up the central government of Adoula and later other people, eventually Mobutu.

JK: How supportive were the British of the UN operation?

Cleveland: Well, they were ambivalent, I would say. They voted for it. They let it go through the Security Council. On the other hand, they were more influenced by Belgian pressure than we were. They were on the sidelines but I wouldn't say they were among the chief litigants. The chief litigants were the Belgians, the UN, the United States, and some of the other Africans who saw the UN action as helpful in developing an African state there.

JK: Did the British or the French put any pressure on the US to stay out of the secession affair?

Cleveland: I don't recall, but I think if they had been very active on it, I would recall.

JK: You mentioned Ralph Bunche and Adlai Stevenson, were there others at the UN in New York that you were in touch with?

Cleveland: Well, there were four other ambassadors under Adlai Stevenson and I saw all of them all the time. The most active on this subject were Charles Yost, who was the number three man and the top foreign service officer in the mix, and Francis Plimpton, the New York lawyer, who

was the Deputy Ambassador. But Charles Yost handled most of the high level diplomacy and was in day-to-day touch with Bunche. Brian Urquhart was there and General Rikhye was in charge of the military operation itself.

JK: Were you in touch with these people frequently, as much as everyday?

Cleveland: Not everyday because we had a mission up there for that purpose. But, I had an arrangement with Stevenson that I went up at least a day a week and had an office right next to his. I was determined that we would not get the sort of problem that had happened frequently before that time and happened after that time, for example, when Andy Young was up there in the Carter Administration. He was off the reservation about every three or four weeks. Adlai Stevenson never got off the reservation that badly and I think, at least a part of it obviously was that he was such a gentleman, but also part of it was that he and I were in very close touch on everything, no secrets and so on. He never got an instruction that he was surprised by. He would occasionally produce some rhetoric up there that would surprise us in Washington, but usually it was just going farther than he was instructed but in the same direction, like in the Cuban Missile Crisis with that famous passage at arms with Zorin, "Are there nuclear weapons in Cuba? Don't wait for the translation, answer yes or no." That wasn't exactly in our script. But, it

was the most memorable thing that was said that afternoon.

JK: So, you went up to New York frequently and you were in touch with Leopoldville by radio.

Cleveland: And also daily cables back and forth. Of course, the Embassy in Leopoldville was formally responsible to the President but in practice was responsible to the African Bureau. So, the African Bureau would be the action office for sending them things. And the European Bureau was the action office for dealing with the Belgians. I was the action office for dealing with New York. But, that meant that I often, or my staff, wrote messages to Leopoldville or Brussels or London or Paris. Because we had the operation hour-to-hour. We had to watch it. We had a very active and politically very important client in Adlai Stevenson up there. And so, (in the bureaucratic broiling and boiling on this subject) we tended to have "the power of the first draft." That is, our client needed an answer even if it should be answered by somebody else, maybe they had already gone home but we were still there, so we would write it out, clear it with them and send it off. I had a very, very good staff. Joe Sisco was my first deputy and Dick Gardiner was also a deputy working more on economic and specialized agency issues. Walter Kotschnig was an old hand on the economic side; Bill Buffum who was later an undersecretary at the

UN -- in Bunche's job, in fact -- was the head of our political section; Don McHenry who was later Ambassador to the UN was a young first year foreign service officer. So, we had an excellent staff.

JK: You mentioned that at times you had better communications with the Congo than the UN had. Did the UN have a problem with having adequate communications facilities?

Cleveland: Yes, they had to deal through their field commander who was General Prem Chand. He was in Leopoldville at headquarters. Later on I think they had a Brazilian General there. But the brigadier general who was running the outfit was actually leading the troops down in Katanga; he was the man I described in the passage in my book (The Obligations of Power, 1966). And he was an absolutely charming character with a very self starting personality. If he felt something needed to be done he'd go in and do it and tell headquarters about it afterwards.

JK: In your book you mentioned that you did make a trip to the Congo.

Cleveland: Yes, several.

JK: You mentioned also in your book a particular Indian officer who you said when they were planning a troop movement, he would often drive in ahead.

Cleveland: Right, and that would so astonish the Katanga gendarmerie that they'd either deal with him or they'd flee. He had

very good control of his troops.

JK: What was his name? I didn't recall that you mentioned it in your book.

Cleveland: I can't remember his name off hand. But I'm sure it's in the archives. Brian Urquhart would know.

JK: Did you have a chance to speak directly to this Brigadier General?

Cleveland: Oh yes, that's how I got these stories.

JK: How did he manage to talk them out of combat?

Cleveland: I think it was just that he was very good at bluffing. And it wasn't wholly a bluff because the UN had I think five thousand troops in there at one time. Most of them were Indians, Gurkhas and others, and they were known as good fighters. The gendarmerie was a rag tag band and they weren't going to take on these very professional soldiers if they could help it. So, they tended to avoid confrontations. There really wasn't a lot of bloodshed in all that chasing around in Katanga.

Peacekeeping troops have a very interesting and peculiar function. I call them "soldiers without enemies." Soldiers are not brought up to not have enemies. Their whole education is to defeat somebody. But the purpose of this was not to defeat anybody but to keep the various factions out of each other's hair and calm things down and keep things quiet. Even in the more orthodox peacekeeping operations on borders like the

Sinai Peninsula, for example, or in Lebanon, the UN troops carried weapons but they didn't initiate any shooting. There was an incident (I think I mentioned it in the book) where a lot of civilians especially women were beating on the Indian soldiers as they stood at attention and not one of them broke ranks, not one of them hit back or anything. This Brigadier General was one of the most genuine leaders I have met.

JK: For the UN troops to learn this new style it took retraining.

Cleveland: Yes, and it took strong and clear leadership by somebody who understood what the exercise was. There was a Malaysian also there, either a major or a colonel, who had a contingent of Malayan troops. And they were also good and tough. They had been fighting the Communists in the boondocks in Malaysia and they were very well trained. I was also impressed with the fact that he had a clear idea of the completely off-the-chart kind of mission that peacekeeping troops have, which is so different from anything in military history.

JK: In 1964 when most of the UN troops had been taken out of the Congo fighting broke out again around Stanleyville and there were various incidents where people were being brutalized. The US and the Belgians carried out a rescue mission. Were you involved in the planning of that event?

Cleveland:Yes, very much involved, all night long.

JK: What were the circumstances around that event and how were the people removed?

Cleveland:Well, they had some hostages and . . .

JK: Were these Gizenga's people who had taken hostages?

Cleveland:Yes, it was Gizenga by that time. And they were Belgians for the most part. We decided to help the Belgians. They are our allies, after all. Also, it was nice to be able to work with the Belgians and not always be adversarial with the Belgians as on the Katanga issue. So, we decided to help them; we decided that we should not engage in combat, but to supply the air transport. It was planned very carefully and was carried out with remarkable secrecy. Usually operations like that leak ahead of time. And they got in and out before getting into very much trouble. There was a little bit of a fire fight but not very much.

JK: So, it was basically Belgian troops with US transport.

Cleveland:Yes, sort of commando type troops. It was called the hostage snatch. We were able to get them out of there. It was about the most successful thing of that kind I think in modern history other than the hostage snatch at the Entebbe airport that the Israelis had carried out. I stayed up all night with that operation. Every few minutes we had reports on how things were going.

JK: When there was a change in administration from Kennedy to

Johnson was there any change in the support for the UN operation in the Congo?

Cleveland: No, because Johnson's theme was continuity. In fact, his first intention was to tell us all that we shouldn't even put in the pro forma resignation that people tend to do. And actually Dean Rusk had to talk him out of telling us not to resign. It would set a bad precedent for an incoming president to just fold in everybody automatically even if he intended to do that. We should all resign and then he should reappoint us, and just keep the resignations in his drawer. So, there was a continuity in personnel and in policy. Stevenson, in fact, thought that he was going to have a much closer relationship with the White House when Johnson came in because Johnson was his generation and he had never quite gotten used to the fact that he was working for somebody (Kennedy) who was about of an age to be his son. So, in the first two or three weeks of the Johnson Administration he was down on the ranch over the weekends and so forth, but that cooled off pretty fast. Johnson and Stevenson were really not on the same wave length on most things.

JK: You mentioned that the US supplied transport for the rescue operation. What other kind of logistic support did the US provide during the Congo operation?

Cleveland: Economic aid was the main thing.

JK: Economic aid directly to the Congo?

Cleveland: Yes, we were the biggest provider of economic assistance.

I got very much involved in that. I had been in the aid business earlier in my life, during the Truman Administration with the Marshall Plan. So, I was the natural person to send over to study the aid situation and try to figure out what they needed and what the balance of payments was, which was impossible to figure out because there weren't any numbers for us to work with.

JK: Did the US get directly involved in the training of personnel both military and civilian?

Cleveland: No, the military contingents involved were provided by countries, Canadians, Ghanaians, Indians, Malaysians and so forth. And they were trained mostly by their own countries -- on the hoof because there wasn't an international peace academy or anything. So, there wasn't really a training system. I think that's what drove Rikhye to establish the International Peace Academy because there was a big gap to be filled and he has hoped to fill it.

JK: In the beginning it was hoped that the Congolese would be able to fill in the military officers positions. I was wondering if the US had gotten involved in training the Congolese.

Cleveland: Well, yes, there was a lot of educational exchange,

people coming over and going to school. Some of the Congolese military came over to our military schools, I guess, but that was not something that I was involved in. But, I was involved very, very much in the economic part.

JK: You had mentioned that one of the US concerns in the Congo was the Soviet involvement. And you mentioned also in your book that the US was interested in keeping the Soviets out of the Congo and pretty much out of the UN operation itself. At one point when Mobutu took over the government the Soviets were kicked out of Leopoldville.

Cleveland: They mostly left much earlier than that, though, at the end of the Eisenhower Administration about the time we were coming in. The person that deserves the most credit for that was Ralph Bunche. He went over there and he was a kind of nursemaid to the new government. He stayed over there and commuted over there during that period. And the UN had a series of quite strong Secretary General representatives like UN ambassadors, as it were, resident in Leopoldville. They had the Irish poet, Conor Cruise O'Brien, over there for a while. So, the UN took a good part of the brunt of the advising and helping the new government get organized. We did quite a lot of that, too, but more under the table.

JK: As far as your recollection is concerned, the Soviets did not have any presence in Leopoldville after that point.

Cleveland: They didn't have an effective presence. They still had an Embassy there, at least for a while until the Mobutu thing. And, as usual with their embassies, they had a covert operation going. But, they were really not very effective. As I said, they were buffaloed by the UN. That was something that was not in the categories that they had learned to think with, the UN being operational that way. They thought of the UN as sort of a committee. But we thought of it quite consciously as an action body. Part of our purpose on each of the peace-keeping operations was to try to leave a situation where the UN had a greater capacity to act after the crisis than it had before. So, the crises themselves were building up the UN's capacity. That was our theory on Cyprus and the Middle East and New Guinea and so forth.

JK: You mentioned also something interesting in the book that even though there were Soviets in the UN who could be consulted on the operation that somehow their consultations were avoided on major decisions.

Cleveland: Yes, well, the US and the UN secretariat were in close cahoots, you'd have to say retrospectively; it must have looked that way to the Russians. The Russians had an Undersecretary General for Special Political Affairs which meant you didn't really report anything of importance to that office. They'd have these Military Committee meetings which weren't really terribly

significant; the Cold War was on. There wasn't very much informal conversation with the Soviets, and I think that Hammarskjold and eventually U Thant, too, were not sympathetic to them. And the Soviets were more and more offended by the UN developing its capacity to act, and they consequently made more and more trouble about the money and stopped paying their dues. That's where we got into the crisis over article 19, whether the General Assembly would lower the boom on the Soviets and exclude them from voting.

JK: You mentioned that Senator Dodd had led some criticism of the UN operation. What was the basis of that criticism and how effective was it? Was any of the criticism of the UN operation warranted?

Cleveland: Well, I thought that Senator Dodd came close to being on the payroll of the Belgian interests that were involved. He was virtually the "Senator from Katanga" the way he acted. I failed to see what US interest was engaged here. His interest was obviously engaged. He was a powerful and articulate guy and so he was able to stir a lot of mud off the bottom of the lake and imply that anyone supporting this UN operation was "pinko" and so forth, a tactic left over from the McCarthy period. But, with the President as solid as he was on it, and the Secretary of State -- (Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had never really engaged himself on the subject)

-- Senator Dodd was a big annoyance but not a big problem. One of the chief interests of the President in the UN was to keep Adlai Stevenson on board in the Democratic Party because as you know Kennedy only won by a few hundred thousand votes. If on any issue Adlai Stevenson had defected, resigned in a huff or anything like that, it would have been a major body blow to the Democratic Party and to the Kennedy Administration. Whenever a President gets into the White House he's already thinking about the next election.

JK: You also mentioned in your book that both the UN and the US have been better at discouraging violence rather than resolving some of the problems that have led to the trouble.

Cleveland: They are better at peacekeeping than at peacemaking.

JK: So, taking a look at the Congo and the problems that have continued to arise there, in what way could the UN have dealt better with the underlying problems that were causing the crisis?

Cleveland: I think the UN did in the Congo what it set out to do and we set it out to do, which was to keep the country together and to make it a viable country and to develop the national leadership. The only problem was that the national leadership turned out to be a General who in the years since then has become more and more corrupt and overbearing and stealing the country blind, I think.

It's like Somoza or Pinochet or Marcos or some of the other delightful characters that the United States has supported because they were there and the US couldn't figure out what else to do. But, during the time that I dealt with the Congo, what everyone was worried about was that Mobutu wasn't strong enough. There was real doubt when he finally took over that he would make it because he wasn't a very powerful or charismatic leader at all. So, in a way it has been surprising that he has lasted so long and disappointing that power tended to corrupt so much.

JK: During the Congo crisis there were a number of tragic deaths that occurred and a certain amount of suspicion surrounding these deaths. One was Patrice Lumumba. From your point of view and from the sources of information available to you, was there any complicity on the part of the Western powers in his death?

Cleveland: Well, I don't know for a fact about that. I have always assumed that the CIA was in on the act, though probably not directly doing the assassination but at least helping to finance and support the anti-Lumumba folks up in the Stanleyville area. Lumumba looked like quite a threat to US interests at the time because he was very much oriented toward the Soviets and he had the most leadership qualities of anybody around and it looked like he was going to end up as leader of the central

government. I don't myself know and I assumed it would come out at some time like everything else the CIA seems to do. But, I've never seen any direct evidence of it.

JK: The other tragic death was that of Dag Hammarskjold.

Cleveland: Yes, it's still not clear whether it was an accident or not. It was assumed at the time, and I don't have evidence that it wasn't, that it was just an accident. It was way in the jungle, pretty remote, the place where the airplane fell down.

I happened to be in New York when that happened. I was awakened in the middle of the night. Dean Rusk was also up there because it was during the General Assembly. So, we met at an early breakfast, Stevenson and Rusk and one or two other people, Yost and/or Plimpton, and myself to discuss the implications and what we ought to do. We drew up a very short list of people that looked acceptable at the time. There was a Finn who looked like a very good bet. The Asians hadn't had it yet and U Thant had been around quite a while as the Burmese Representative at the UN. And in the end the only person who was acceptable on the US list and on the Soviet list turned out to be U Thant. U Thant was something of a disappointment for the US government to Dean Rusk and so on. He was very Third World oriented, and he was not at all sympathetic to the US on Vietnam.

JK: In the Congo operation was there any difference of

opinion?

Cleveland: No, there wasn't. There was real continuity in the policy all around in that. The Congo operation sort of tapered off after '64 and we had other crises to deal with. The Congo was long running and complex, legally, logistically, and politically. There have been a couple of books on the subject. You may have seen the one by Kalb, Marvin Kalb's wife.

JK: We've covered all the questions that I had prepared. Is there anything that you'd like to add?

Cleveland: Only to emphasize that for a thing like that, which required deciding to support the UN and then staying with that decision over three rather harrowing years, it would have been impossible if we had not had a consistency of view and of support from the Secretary of State and from the President. I think the role that I was trying to play did turn out to be quite crucial and quite central because somebody had to coordinate the White House relations, the relations with the other bureaus, the relations with Congress on the subject, and the relations and instructions to the mission in New York, and even deal with the Pentagon to some extent on the logistical support.

I remember one of the golden moments of my life was going over to meet with the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the subject of the UN peacekeeping in general

but with the Congo very much in everybody's mind. I was proposing that we should predesignate some forces and do some training for this new kind of mission and get set up professionally to be supportive of the UN's peacekeeping capacity. The acting Chairman of the Chiefs that day (the Chairman was sick) was General Curtis Lemay who was a fire-eating airforce officer. So, the job had many interesting aspects to it.

JK: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.



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United Nations Oral History Project

**Harlan Cleveland
22 April 1990**

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NON-CIRCULATING
YUN Interview
Ambassador Harlan Cleveland
Cuban Missile Crisis
Interviewed by James Sutterlin
April 22, 1990
Arden House, Harriman, NY

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YUN Interview
Ambassador Harlan Cleveland
Cuban Missile Crisis
Interviewed by James Sutterlin
April 22, 1990
Arden House, Harriman, NY

- JS Ambassador Cleveland, I first want to thank you again for participating in this Yale University United Nations Oral History Project, and I thought, if we could, we would begin this part of your conversation today on the subject of the election of Secretary General U Thant. You, at that point, I believe, were the head of the International Organization Department in the State Department, is that correct?
- HC Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs.
- JS Could you describe what happened on the American side after the sudden and unexpected death of Hammarskjold? What thoughts were put together in terms of a replacement?
- HC Well, what I don't recall is the full slate, I must say. I was awakened in the middle of the night with the news about Hammarskjold, and with a summons to a very early breakfast, not in Adlai's Waldorf apartment but in another suite in the Towers there where Rusk was. And so we all got together there for -- Adlai Stevenson, Dean Rusk and myself, and I don't recall who else was present but almost certainly Francis Plimpton and Charlie Yost

were, and maybe somebody else from the State Department, but I can't remember. And we began immediately to cast about and came out, as I recall, with three people on the slate, one of whom was U Thant. But he was the least preferred on the general theory that he would tend to be very Third Worldish and would cater to the developing country majority and also would tend to be of a Burmese - passive nature, which was the opposite of the Swedish activism that Dag Hammarskjöld stood for. I may have the chronology wrong but I believe there was a Finn named Max something . . .

JS

He came later. There was a Finn at this point, and his name was Ralph Inkle, I believe. A Finn, and then the Tunisian Mongi Slim and Frederick Boland of Ireland, they were all candidates.

HC

But it rather rapidly developed but the Soviet list was quite different from ours, except that U Thant turned up on their list, too. And so it was a rather rapid process of elimination as I remember. The basic question, as often in the UN in those days, was whatever the US and Soviet Union could agree on nobody else was going to get in the way of -- because that was such a difficult agreement and the appointment did require Security Council action, therefore you had to have both the U. S. and the U.S.S.R.

JS This was still in the aftermath of the Soviet proposal for a so called Troika, which I believe, at this point, they had not entirely given up.

HC That's right. So it was part of our interest to get a solution that would knock that on the head, finally. I must say that I never thought that that would fly. I thought it was just a ploy, and I think it was essentially just a ploy. I don't think they (the Soviets) really thought that a three-headed secretariat was going to be approved. One thing; it was sort of unconstitutional under the Charter and so we never, I must say, took it very seriously. There was a lot noise about it -- newspapers, much debate in the editorials -- but looking at it from the inside, it never looked like something on which we had to make policy. We just obviously were against it and therefore it wasn't going to happen.

JS Did the US work closely with one or more other countries at this point in trying to decide or determine who would be the next Secretary?

HC There was a good deal of consultation, which was normal, with the British and French, but I went back to Washington almost immediately. I usually just spent a day or two up there and then I would go back to my desk. So I wasn't involved in the actual canvassing of delegations. The mission was organized in such a way

that there was somebody responsible for each group -- for keeping in touch with each group, more or less organized by geography -- and those people, of course, all fanned out and took soundings. But my recollection of it is -- your research would reveal how quickly the decision was made -- but my recollection was that the consensus came quite fast.

JS Well, there was a good bit of back and forth because the Soviets, while giving up the Troika idea, proposed that there should be an interim administration of four Secretaries General. But then, you may recall that quite an argument developed about how many advisors the Secretary General should have because, even on the American side, I believe, according to the records I have here, the US proposed that the new Secretary-General, who would be U Thant, would have a certain number of advisors who would come from the different regions of the world.

HC There again, my recollection is that we were trying to stalemate the Soviet suggestions for converting the Secretariat into a committee. All of their suggestions had that common characteristic: that it would become a collective executive -- sort of like the EEC -- and our mindset was that that was bad business. We had put a lot of emphasis -- in fact, I made a number of speeches in that period on the subject -- about the UN's "capacity to act." In a way, I was arguing with the conventional

wisdom of the UN experts that, well, after all, the UN is a good thing because it is a place where everybody gets to blow off steam and it's a good talk place. But I always argued that what was important about the UN was its capacity to act -- not in an independent way, exactly, but in a sort of objective and neutral and non-sovereign way -- and that that was why the things that were working did work. The World Weather Watch, arrangements for civil aviation, arrangements for divvying up the electromagnetic frequency spectrum, and world smallpox eradication (which was started during that period) all seemed to work for us because we empowered an international organization actually to do something. Whereas the organizations that mostly talked had difficulty getting around to doing anything, UNESCO being an outstanding example even in those days. So this "capacity to act" theme ran through much of what we then thought we were doing.

JS And for that purpose you thought there was a need for a strong single Secretary-General?

HC Yes. And with a staff that knew how to act. We needed an executive, in other words. Now our problem in thinking about an U Thant was that we were unlikely to find it in him a person who would be willing to take the kind of independent initiative -- to pick up the ball and run with it in the way that Hammarskjold had been willing

to do. But even U Thant was a unitary executive -- U Thant was an improvement over some committee. So that was about where we came out.

JS

If I could just go back for one moment to Hammarskjold's tenure, Hammarskjold was an activist, certainly, and in the final stage of his career as Secretary-General, I believe, he enjoyed the full support of the United States. But that was not always the case. I wondered, from your perspective as Assistant Secretary of State at that point, was it your sense that Hammarskjold could continue along the path that he was moving or that he, perhaps, had reached the limits of his capacity, given the attitude of the Soviet Union?

HC

I think as far as US support was concerned he certainly could continue. By the time I came into the picture, which of course in his life and tenure was very late (January 1961), his development of the UN's capacity to act was perceived as clearly in the US interest.

In the Congo, we argued to President Kennedy, (and he kept remembering this at subsequent meetings), that if the UN weren't in there buffaloing the Russians we would have to be. And the UN was obviously a much better mouse trap than we could otherwise invent. But that theme of empowering the UN -- I used to argue, for example, that the way you would measure the success of crisis management in the UN context, from the US point of view,

would be whether after each crisis the UN was stronger and better set up with a capacity to act for the next crisis, which there was bound to be somewhere in the world. We even tried to get some regular arrangements for earmarking forces and facilities and so forth, that would be made available to the UN on request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't like that idea very much. But we had very good support for the general policy favoring U.N. peacekeeping, and for the UN being in the picture -- in West New Guinea, later on, and even on the Dominican Republic where Latin Americanists in the Department and the folks in the White House were so appalled at first with our notion that Stevenson and I came up with that there should be a UN person also involved in the Dominican Republic affair -- a UN observer. And also, of course, we argued it was not our jurisdiction - the OAS should be involved. So I don't think there was ever any serious thought that we would go for any kind of committee to do peacekeeping; we wanted international organizations with a "capacity to act."

JS In the end, I think, all U Thant said was that he was going to invite a limited number of persons to serve as his senior advisors, and he specifically listed Ralph Bunche and a Russian named Arkadiev. This, presumably, was quite satisfactory to the American side.

HC Ralph Bunche was already there . . . had been for years.

JS Oh, yes, very much, very much . . . he'd been there since Trygve Lie.

HC So that wasn't an outside advisor.

JS No

HC And Arkadiev was just the ranking Soviet in the secretariat.

JS That's right. So that's actually the way U Thant got out of this particular problem.

HC It was very Burmese.

JS But, I had asked the other question because, in fact, I wanted to move ahead and ask you, based on this experience and your rather intimate observation of the operation of the United Nations since then and even before, is this the right way to select a Secretary-General, by negotiations, so to speak, by finding the man or woman who is most acceptable to the most number of countries? Do you see this as a weakness of a system or can you suggest something better?

HC Well, I think it's inherent in the structure if you decide to have an international organization that is a committee of sovereigns with a staff, you're stuck with the sovereigns on the appointment. Now, in many ways, I've always regarded the Treaty of Rome as a brilliant departure from the committee-of-sovereigns-with-a-staff sort of thing. It was one of Jean Monnet's most interesting inventions. First of all, people are

appointed by their governments, but they can't be removed except by unanimous consent -- this would never happen. They are political level people, the members of the Commission, typically ex-cabinet members or sometimes sitting cabinet members were appointed. They have a lot of jurisdiction. The Commission has a monopoly of certain subjects that are laid down in the treaty as "European." They have the capacity to consult publicly - - with labor, agriculture, the media and now with a directly elected parliament. Then at the last stage they do have to go to the committee of sovereigns. But the Treaty of Rome had this wonderful gimmick in it that says the committee of sovereigns can't edit, it can only say yes or no, but it can't say we don't like paragraph eight and we're going to rewrite it this way. So the Commission has the ball and gradually, it took quite a number of years for it to realize that it had the ball, but it really has the ball tucked well under its arm now. In fact, nowadays you hear people in Europe complaining that the European Commission is so strong that it could become a kind of dictatorship.

JS Whereas in the case of the United Nations you've heard no such complaints since Hammarskjold.

HC Not since Hammarskjold, no. And there are some situations in which, if you have a strong enough person, a committee of sovereigns with a staff can really act

like an executive agent. I think that's been true of the World Bank and the IMF, by and large, which have had a strong leadership -- strong executive leadership. But it's not the norm, it has not been the norm at UNESCO or FAO or most of the other agencies. It has been the norm, interestingly enough, in the UN Environmental Programme, maybe because UNEP isn't a Specialized Agency. The degree of initiative that Mustafa Tolba and his staff have been able to take, on things like the Mediterranean clean up and more recently the Ozone Treaty, more recently, is very impressive. In fact, at this American seminar on the global environment we were attending at Arden House, I wrote a paragraph patting UNEP on the back, which got through by acclamation.

JS That's surprising because there's not such a generally positive assessment of UNEP, I think.

HC Well, it has got all the problems with the bureaucracy and besides it's in Nairobi so nobody knows really knows very much about how it works. But, in fact, UNEP has served as catalyst and gadfly and innovator, demonstrating a capacity to act. I go back to that old theme, I still think that that's the right theme and that that's the way an international organization ought to be judged.

JS With U Thant in office, fate brought the US and him together on a number of issues, the outcome of which were

HC

controversial from the US perspective, I think. One of them was Viet Nam which I don't propose to discuss, but the other was Cuba and the Cuban Missile Crisis. I wonder if you would just describe how you saw that situation develop from the perspective of the State Department beginning, really, with the Bay of Pigs because that was an issue at the UN which the US representative had to handle, and there were problems, if I am not mistaken. Could you describe that a little bit? Well, there was a recurring Cuban item on the General Assembly agenda in which, in various ways and with new evidence each time, the Cubans would accuse us of being about to invade them. Such an item was due for debate in the General Assembly on the day the CIA invaded Cuba -- a brilliant piece of timing, we always thought, on the part of the CIA. We were not terribly well briefed. Tracy Barnes came up the week before and I went up with him and Arthur Schlesinger from the White House, and Adlai was briefed and we all talked about it and we didn't like it very much, but on the other hand they hadn't -- they were assuring us that these were really freedom fighters. They didn't tell us anything nearly all the truth about the degree to which the whole thing was a straight CIA operation. So Adlai, I think, was always uncomfortable with it but he wasn't going out in the streets and opposing it or anything. Well, the first

thing that happened before it got thrown in to the UN was that on the day that that Cuban item was starting, Adlai was on the floor of the General Assembly anyway. A pilot flying a plane with Cuban markings landed in a swamp in Florida and announced that he had defected. It later turned out that this was a pilot that had flown to Nicaragua and back, but it made a big splash in the media. So, of course, we wanted to know right away in our Bureau what was going on so we could tell Stevenson what he could say because there he was on the floor of the General Assembly and everybody else was listening to the same radio news programs and reading the same newspapers. So I got hold of the Latin American bureau and the Latin American Bureau got hold of the CIA and they came back with this story that, yes, indeed, there was a defector and so on. And we authorized Stevenson to say that. He said it, then he compounded the error. His alert staff saw the same story coming out of Florida with the pilot's cover story, so they tear the story off the AP ticker and rush it into Stevenson and he says, "Well, I just have confirmation here," then he reads the same cover story over again. In less than twenty-four hours some enterprising reporter scratched the side of the airplane and found US Air Force markings underneath the Cuban markings. So the cover blew off and Adlai was absolutely fit to be tied. He was a rather mild person,

really, and tolerant, but he was just furious that his government could have hung him out to dry that way. And he was very nice about not blaming me for it. I was the proximate authorizer of that mistake, of that lie. So we already had a rather sour taste in our mouth about Cuba, but, although it's not really part of your inquiry here, to me it's always been an interesting contrast between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Bay of Pigs operation happened in April of the year '61, which was the year Kennedy came into office. Kennedy had never been an executive. The last executive job that John F. Kennedy had had before he took over as President of the United States was to be head of a PT boat, and he didn't know. I later asked one of the Joint Chiefs of Staff how it had happened that they had never told the President that from a military point of view, this operation was, in hindsight, obviously for the birds. I just happened to sit next to this man, who has since retired, on an airplane and I got talking to him. He said, "Well, Harlan, you won't believe this, but we were sitting around -- we were all old enough to be his father -- but he was this charismatic young political hero and we were waiting to speak when we were spoken to, and he never asked us." I used to teach public administration. My diagnosis is that an executive learns, usually on the hoof rather than by studying, how to be a leader. An

experienced executive learns that the way you "execute" is mostly by asking questions. People gradually get the idea from the drift of your questions in which direction they're going to go. In April of '61, Kennedy didn't have that feel for the executive function. Eighteen months later he had it to a tee. He participated personally in the staff work on the Cuban Missile Crisis asking skeptical questions all the time.

JS

Could I just interrupt a minute to ask there was, of course, extensive criticism in the UN of the Bay of Pigs operation. Did this in any way effect the attitude of the Kennedy administration toward the UN and toward using the UN?

HC

Well, I'm not sure it was a big factor. First of all, within a day of the invasion, Kennedy comes out publicly and says, "OK, it was a booboo. Let's go on from there." So the fact that there was criticism of the UN was obviously not surprising, and nobody felt sort of huffy about it since we'd obviously done something wrong. And the President himself had said so. So, no, I don't think that that was a big factor. A more surprising thing was that it didn't particularly rub off badly on Stevenson. His colleagues at the UN sympathized with him and didn't blame him for lying to them. So then in a way it passed over, partly because the President stepped up so fast and coolly. I've often contrasted that with Nixon's handling

of the Watergate burglary. If he had come out the next day and said, "Hey, burglary? We don't do that kind of stuff," the whole history would have been different. Do you want to move to the Missile Crisis?

JS I'd like to move ahead to the missile crisis if we could, yes. I just did, though, as we move along to there, want to get some of your perception of the developing US attitude toward the United Nations itself. I assume, as we go later in the story after Kennedy's death, the Viet Nam situation affected the attitude of the US administration

HC Most importantly, it soured Rusk, who was basically very pro UN and interested in the UN.

JS Well that's exactly what I wanted to ask, because as we go into the Cuban Missile Crisis period then you would say that the attitude of the US remained positive toward the UN and toward utilization of the UN.

HC I'd say that the attitude of the Secretary of State was very much so. That was not particularly true of some of the other bureaus who still felt they were in the bilateral diplomacy business, and George Ball was never a great UN user. But Rusk definitely was, and I always had very good access to him and he was always very much interested in what we were doing. So that was one factor. In the White House, using the UN was not the sort of thing that would occur naturally. It required a

lot of reminding. In the early days of the Kennedy administration, we had a rather interesting central problem because the new President would pick up the newspaper in the morning, which he read while he was still in bed, and he would see three front-page stories about what he was doing in Washington, and he would see three other stories about what Adlai was doing in NY. The NY Times at that time, more so than now, tended to cover the UN as if it were local politics, so it got good coverage in the NY Times. And I began to get these rumbles from the White House staff. Mac Bundy, would ask was that position we took on the Angola issue that was just on the front page this morning -- was that really cleared with us? And I talked to Rusk about it and Mac Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger, who had been assigned to make sure that Stevenson was happy. (For a couple of weeks he thought he was in charge of UN affairs and then we got that settled.) Finally Mac Bundy and I worked out a scheme whereby at the end of the day, with Rusk agreeing that I could bypass him (and the day ending usually about seven thirty, eight, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, whatever), I would write a one-page memo that said what we had done that day with special emphasis on things that were likely to be covered by the media. And in those days, turning on the television at the end of the working day was not as much how everybody got their

first hard news. Newspapers were still more important. And that memo was put into Kennedy's bedtime reading folder and when he opened the newspaper in the morning and saw what we had been doing in NY he was in a position to say, "Well, I knew that." And with that small, almost gimmicky, procedure the whole problem went away. Kennedy was very conscious all the way through, right until his death, of how important it was to keep Adlai Stevenson happy and in the administration. Adlai was a grumbler, a cheerful grumbler, and a couple of times a week I'd get somebody rushing into my office and closing the door and saying, "You know, my cousin sat next to Adlai Stevenson last night at a party and he said he was going to resign." The first two or three times this happened I went up to George Ball who had worked so closely with Adlai before in his campaign . . . "George, we've got a real problem." George would say, "Pay no attention to it, just keep doing what you're doing, it doesn't mean anything, it's not going to happen." And he was right. But it was very important that Adlai be kept on the reservation. That's why Arthur Schlesinger was assigned to worry about that for the White House. They cleared Illinois judgeships with him. When Jackie went to NY, Adlai was her escort to the theater; they liked each other very much. And Kennedy invited Stevenson down: whenever there was any important meeting, he would

make sure that Stevenson was invited. That, by the way, made my job even more interesting because even if it was not something that the Bureau of International Organization Affairs was handling at all -- say, the Berlin crisis -- Adlai would look to me to brief him before the White House meeting. And so I could go and invade the jurisdiction of all the other bureaus to find out what I needed for my client. This was also important in our relations with the other bureaus because we had a client who usually needed an answer faster than other bureaus' clients did, and it was more important for our client because our client was a cabinet member and a member of the National Security Council. So we tended to have "the power of the first draft."

JS

Now when it did come to the Cuban Missile Crisis, my impression is, and this may be wrong, that it was U Thant who took the initiative in order from his position to try to reduce the level of the crisis and provide a means through which the two sides could come together.

HC

Well that's the way it was supposed to look. But you have to lead up to that through the very beginning of the crisis. At the very beginning of the crisis they called -- there were fourteen people who were called in a consultation and became the Executive Committee, the EXCOM. It's interesting that the National Security Council only meets in times of tranquillity, but when you

have a crisis you have a special group of some sort. That's not exactly what the drafters of the 1947 law [the National Security Act] had in mind.

Most of the arguments among those 14 people (I was not one of them, but Adlai was), had to do with the military options. There was the Air Force wanting, as usual, to do a "surgical strike." The notion of a blockade emerged. After about two days or three, when they brought in a second tier of people, of whom I was one. My somewhat prejudiced version of the Cuban Missile Crisis is that things began to get sensible when they brought in some staff people to do some solid analytical work. But of course as one of the staff people that's a natural view.

Our staff work did strongly propose that we should handle the politics of the matter in multilateral forums, that we should go to the OAS and that we should go to the UN. And if I can continue this a little bit . . . because I had a, for me, very dramatic crisis in the coordination of that scenario on the day after the President revealed the missiles in a television speech on the Monday evening. On the Monday, according to plan, we had deposited with the OAS a request for an "immediate" meeting by which we meant first thing in the morning and we deposited with the UN a request for an "immediate" meeting by which we didn't mean the right away because we

wanted some time to present the issue to the OAS first. As you remember, the scheme was to have the blockade be a Hemispheric action before we talked to the rest of the world about it. So on Tuesday morning the Latin American ministers were meeting over in the Pan American building -- Dean Rusk went over personally with Ed Martin who was the Assistant Secretary of Inter-American Affairs -- and by lunchtime they didn't have a consensus, which was not surprising because they only just heard about it the night before. Many of them didn't have instructions yet, and they had to go home at lunch and call up their foreign ministers and so on. A Latin lunch tends to be longer than some lunches and so it wasn't actually until about four o'clock that the OAS meeting reconvened -- maybe a little bit before four. The Security Council had been called for four o'clock. In the chair of the Security Council, by the accident of monthly rotation was Valerian Zorin of the USSR, and the first speaker was obviously going to be Stevenson. Well we had worked on a speech all through the weekend -- Arthur Schlesinger, Tom Wilson, who was my special assistant for writing things for Stevenson to say, and myself. Tom and Arthur had both gone up to NY, also my deputy Joe Sisco, to help, and I stayed back in Washington to coordinate things. I knew the speech was pretty long, about an hour long, and so we had a little leeway with the OAS action

but not too much. And I told Ed Martin the timing problem. Well, it comes along about 4:45 and still no word from the Pan Am building and Stevenson is coming down to about three or four pages from the end. Finally the phone rings and it's Ed Martin saying, "OK, everybody but Uruguay has agreed." Uruguay, at that time, had nine presidents and they had some difficulty deciding on a policy question. So the Secretary authorized me to go ahead and get it into the speech. I called a number -- my secretary called a number -- of a phone that's right outside the Security Council, and we'd had a girl sitting on that phone all afternoon just to be sure nobody was using it so that we could get at that. And I asked her to go in and get Joe Sisco off the floor. I'm in my office with several members of my staff watching all this on television, of course. I could see Joe Sisco get up from behind Ambassador Stevenson, and go out and take my call. I dictated a paragraph to him, and told him where to put it into the speech. Then I could see him come back, on our TV screen, saw him put a piece of paper down in front of Stevenson. But Stevenson obviously didn't see the piece of paper. He was sitting there with his manuscript held up this way, in full flight of oratory. I was trying to figure out: is there time to get Joe to come out again and tell him to do something. Then the phone rings and my secretary comes in absolutely white as

a sheet -- she was normally a very cool customer -- and she said, "The President's on the phone. I mean personally!" So I pick up the phone and a familiar voice says, "I just heard about the OAS action. Is there any way of getting it into Stevenson's speech before he finishes?" I reviewed my life briefly, wondering what I would have said if we hadn't thought to cover that elementary base, and I finally said, "Well, Mr. President we've done an insert on that and we've put it in front of him, but I don't . . ." And just as I was saying that, on television I can see Adlai looking around his manuscript, seeing there was an insert and picking it up and starting to read it. The President said, "Oh, I see, he's picking it up and reading it now. Thank you very much Harlan." I wrote this up one time, and I ended that story by saying "The Cuban Missile Crisis wasn't over, but mine was."

So we were very multilateral from the beginning. We had a big fight with the CIA about releasing the photos because they didn't want to show how good their photographic resolution was.

JS Those are the photos that Adlai Stevenson shared with them.

HC Yeah. We then made, I think, a very good tactical decision not to use them in the opening speech, to wait until we were challenged, and then roll them out as

rebuttal. Zorin absolutely fell like a ripe apple into our hands because he said, in effect, "Who says there are missiles in Cuba?" We had had this message from a business man -- name, I think, was Knox, . . . Do you know that part of the story?

JS

No

HC

. . . who had gone to see Khrushchev in Moscow that very day. Khrushchev had boasted of having nuclear warheads in Cuba. Knox came hightailing over to the U.S. Embassy, and the Embassy shot us a flash message about it, repeated to Stevenson. So we had in our hands a piece of evidence that gave Stevenson confidence to face down Zorin. I wondered later whether that businessman ever realized how important was the part he played. And so Zorin questioned it and Stevenson said, "Oh, would you like to see these missiles?" And then at a signal -- I mean we had this all worked out ahead of time -- doors flew open, easels were rolled in and so forth -- it was a media event of the first water. And I think that the drama of that, including getting the OAS on board and then the drama in the Security Council, worked, as far as anything can work in politics, perfectly, and was very persuasive to everybody, including U Thant.

So, here you have a blockade -- the "quarantine" of Cuba. Khrushchev's ships are heading toward the blockade. The question was what to do about it. We suggested and got

clearance on the idea of getting U Thant to tell Khrushchev not to challenge the blockade, and also tell us not to fight about it. Not just to tell Khrushchev not to. We had a debate about that one. I argued, I remember very clearly, that the important thing was that the UN should be telling both sides to cool it, that's what the UN does. So we wrote, in fact, a message for U Thant to send to both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. It was already late at night; we got the draft up to Stevenson, and Stevenson, or Yost, maybe -- I'm not clear on that -- actually went over to U Thant's residence and went over it with him, and U Thant authorized it to be sent to both Kennedy and Khrushchev, and that's the letter that he was referring to in there.

- JS Because he does not give that background in his book.
- HC Well he wouldn't, obviously, I mean, you can't admit that one of the litigants is doing your drafting for you. But he knows it because he got it from our people.
- JS So the letter was actually suggested and partly drafted on the American side.
- HC Oh yes, and not even in NY, in my office. And then we had to wait and see and it did not take very long and I notice that that's confirmed here. It took such a short length of time that Zorin was caught off base by it, according to U Thant's story. And in effect it was by replying to the UN he was able to save a little face by

saying, "Well, we certainly wouldn't turn our boats around because we're afraid of your pickets -- your destroyer pickets -- but the UN asked us to so

JS And Khrushchev did reply to U Thant, as I recall, rather quickly.

HC Rather quickly, and I just looked up that part, I was reading that part. Zorin was beating on his desk and telling U Thant he had to throw the book at us for illegal blockade under international law, and so forth. And U Thant goes down and less than sixty minutes later, it says on that page, he brought a note saying -- no, the deputy Soviet representative comes to him, Zorin didn't do it for face reasons -- with this message in Russian and he reads it to U Thant, and it says that in view of your request we take it very seriously.

JS Could I just ask at that point, given the American participation from the beginning and U Thant's initiative, it is to me surprising that Khrushchev responded more quickly than the American side. Can you explain that?

HC Only that it was difficult to persuade all the other people that had to clear it, especially in the White House, that we were guilty of anything. There was still a little bit of resentment, in the White House staff especially, that U Thant's message had been addressed to both sides. I mean how could we -- we're as pure as the

driven snow. Some of the people just didn't get the politics of it. I kept trying to explain to people that politics at the UN are just as practical as politics in other places. You know, most people (including members of Congress) thought of the UN in sort of an ethereal way and didn't really think of it as a snake pit of a very complicated and interesting form of politics. Then we also developed a message for U Thant to send to Castro, asking him to accept inspection. This was a little later.

JS This was after the Russians had agreed.

HC Well they hadn't agreed, I mean, there was never an agreement. They just turned their boats around. The agreement came the following February after Vishinsky and McCloy had a long negotiation. I'll say something in a moment about that, too. We never thought that Castro would agree to inspection. We thought it was important that the question be put and that it not be put by us -- we didn't have diplomatic relations anyway -- but we could've found some way to get the word to him. But U Thant was anxious to get things calmed down and anxious to be helpful. So we got him to -- he actually sent in all three messages, as I recall, to Castro reiterating different proposals for inspection, softening it some. We kept suggesting new gimmicks.

JS The contact with U Thant on this was Stevenson?

HC Stevenson, Yost. Yost did a lot of the real scurrying back and forth, and Ralph [Bunche] was still there. And some was gotten through Ralph, too. But the access, especially by Yost, was very good. U Thant trusted him and respected him as the professional's professional that he was. Did you know him?

JS No, I'd met him but I did not know him.

HC Absolutely lovely, low key, the ultimate professional and great to work with. A lot of my business with Mission was really done with him. You only had to say it once and he got all the ramifications immediately. He was an old pro. Also he spoke French fluently -- which was a big help -- and he'd been in Europe, he'd been in Asia, and he went to all of the cocktail parties where much of the real negotiation was done.

HC What we were doing, and quite consciously in fact, was trying to establish a little new piece of international law. It was obviously against international law in general to fly over another sovereign's territory if they didn't want you to. And while you could fly and take pictures diagonally, which is how the U2s did it and how some of those pictures actually got taken, that was awkward and also very expensive. So what we were doing, really, was setting up a situation in which we could say, "Well, in general, invading another person's airspace is bad business. But in extremis and if the UN has asked a

country to accept inspection and they won't accept it, and it's a matter of national security, that makes it legally all right to fly over" -- which we then did regularly. After a while that legal question sort of went away when the satellites got up there and we'd get such good pictures from them. And since nobody could shoot the satellites down, it had become sort of a practical international law that flying over some one else's territory is all right once you're in space. As you know, there has never been a legal determination as to where the air stops and space begins. I presided at the only meeting on that subject which may have ever been held, at the end of which we decided that we didn't need to decide this question in order to have a space program.

So, as things worked out after the Missile Crisis, we had, in a sense, our permission, our legal justification for doing the surveillance of the taking out of the missiles. And Castro really couldn't -- in a way he was estopped from saying anything and he was estopped from shooting down an airplane because all hell would have broken loose if he had done that.

JS

Right. If I recall correctly, U Thant made his trip to Cuba and did meet with Castro, and a U2 plane or a similar plane had been shot down just before that and the pilot was being held by Castro.

HC I think that incident happened before the missiles were revealed.

JS One was before and I believe

HC Was there another one after?

JS I think so. I believe it did affect to a certain extent U Thant's conversations in Cuba, but again

HC Didn't they eventually send that pilot back?

JS Yes, they did. The point there was that apparently the Soviets had sent instructions that no American plane was to be shot down but that it was actually a Soviet officer and gun which shot the plane down and that particular officer hadn't gotten the word.

HC There's always some son of a bitch that hasn't gotten the word.

JS That it was not the Cubans who did it but . . .

HC What's conveyed by those two stories -- the message to Khrushchev and three messages to Castro -- is how extremely useful to American foreign policy the UN could be if we were skillful about it. And that was a lesson that I rubbed in at every opportunity with the White House staff.

JS Now it was at some point here just prior to the climax that it's now known that President Kennedy sent a letter which apparently reached Adlai Stevenson for delivery to U Thant asking his further intervention in the event that the crisis deteriorated further. Were you aware of that

in the State Department at that time? Are you familiar with this particular _____?

HC Yes. As I recall I learned about it from New York. Our relations were really very good. And if they got something like that . . . the turf problems were not such that they wouldn't tell me about it and vice versa. When I learned something that they weren't supposed to know I'd tell them.

JS It's historically interesting since it would suggest confirmation of what you have been saying and that even in the White House, at that point, they did see a role for the Secretary-General in the most serious of circumstances.

HC Very much so. And I think that the drama in the Security Council plus U Thant's willingness to carry our mail, as it were, -- those things, I think, deeply affected Kennedy's thinking and the thinking of the White House staff. They saw that it wasn't just airy fairy Adlai up there wanting to be sentimental. It was a practical political operation there.

JS Now that brings me to the next question I wanted to ask. An impression grew up that Adlai Stevenson had, in fact, favored a different policy than the one that was followed. Can you give the background of that?

HC Yeah, I can. In one of the meetings of EXCOM, Adlai said, in effect, "Well, we could always take those

missiles out of Turkey because we don't really want them there anyway, do we?" And Kennedy was rather, well, he was sore not at that proposal, he was sore at the fact that they hadn't already been taken out because he thought they had been ordered taken out some time before, but they were still there. My impression is -- I'd have to research this -- but my impression is that Bobby Kennedy had also made that proposal, but some of the hardliners (and Bobby was generally a hardliner) were apparently offended by this idea and somebody talked to Charlie Bartlett about it. Now the fact that Charles Bartlett was something like Kennedy's best friend suggests that it was probably Kennedy himself that talked to Bartlett, whether unthinkingly or not. Or it may have been Bobby, which wouldn't have been unthinkingly but with malice aforethought in his case. And so Bartlett comes out with this in the Saturday Evening Post, I think it was. And all hell broke loose, and Adlai really was going to resign. And I rushed up to NY to talk to him about it. I talked to everybody, I talked to Rusk, I talked to people in the White House, and I said the President just has to countermand this article. And I drafted a letter which was somewhat watered down, but eventually was sent by Kennedy to Stevenson to say that we love you dearly, but not fingering who was responsible for the leak.

Stevenson was really deeply offended by that and, of course, it did reflect the view of people in the White House that, in a pinch, Adlai was likely to be soft on the Russians. And that had already been evidenced by the decision to send John J. McCloy, to negotiate the deal on paper about the Cuban missiles, even though they were already being taken out. The deal on paper, in a way was almost post facto by the time it was finally signed, sealed and delivered. McCloy was very conscious of the difficulty and the embarrassment that it would create for Stevenson for him to be up there. And we worked out an arrangement -- McCloy and I were involved in that -- whereby the assignment was given to the Mission to do this negotiation and McCloy was sent up as an ad hoc member of the Mission. That meant that every telegram that came into Washington on this was signed Stevenson. And that helped. I mean, it was a small thing, but that helped.

JS Why was the decision made to have these negotiations in NY? It's another interesting aspect of the UN's position.

HC Well, for the same reason that -- and that may well have been Rusk's proposal, I don't know, but it would stand to reason. Every year, Rusk would spend two weeks up there doing bilateral diplomacy. He would see fifty or sixty foreign ministers during the general debate. And Rusk

was very sensitive. The first year of the Kennedy Administration I was afraid the two locomotives (the Secretary of State and the Ambassador to the U.N.) I was working for were on a collision course and were going to crash. Because the normal thing is that the Foreign Minister goes and makes the first speech. The first year, 1961, we had Kennedy going up to the U.N. in New York. But he was up there not as the US representative but there as the host. We still had the US speech to give. And so I went up to see Rusk just to say that I thought there was going to be trouble with Stevenson about this. I found that he had already thought about it -- naturally, being a bright fellow. He said, "Look, we've got the world's best known, best loved, and most skillful megaphone up there. It would be absolutely silly for me to go up and make the US speech. Why doesn't Stevenson make the US speech? And I'll then come up a day or two later and start seeing foreign ministers." And that's the way it was for every year that I was there. Kennedy came up again in 1963. LBJ came up almost as soon as he became President. Almost the very first thing he did was, in effect, to introduce himself to the world by coming to the UN with a huge reception, shaking everybody's hand. (Briefing him for those encounters, which I did going up -- I've got a picture of myself talking with LBJ in one of these little

executive jets -- was quite an experience.)

So negotiating about withdrawal of the missiles in a U.N. context was the most natural thing in the world. That was a place you could talk to anybody. We could even talk with the Cubans there. And later on we could even talk with Nicaragua at the U.N. So I think that it was a kind of a natural arrangement and it suited the Soviets, too. It would have been awkward for the Soviets to come and do it in Washington -- it would almost be coming to pay tribute, as it were, on their knees. We couldn't do it in Moscow. I mean, nobody at that point would have wanted a high level representative of the President to be resident in Moscow for what turned out to be three or four months. We could, I suppose, have done it in Geneva or Paris, the way we did later with Averall Harriman going to Paris to talk with the North Vietnamese for the better part of a year. Anyway, it was done that way, but, in fact, McCloy was negotiator. But the symbolism was maintained and McCloy was very careful to maintain the symbolism. He was very good about that. And eventually he had the famous conversation with Vishinsky, sitting on the fence of his won estate, with Vishinsky saying, "Never again." I think historians -- they've already recorded and they will record that that was the beginning of the real arms race, of the real trip up to fifty thousand nuclear weapons on the two sides.

JS

I would like to ask one final question in this regard. I realize that the Vietnamese war had a substantial impact on the impression in Washington of U Thant, but I would like to ask if you would give your final conclusion, so to speak, on the performance of U Thant as the Secretary-General. How would you assess his tenure?

HC

Well, I think he was over-impressed with the need to stay in good with the "Group of 77" [the developing-country caucus] and under-impressed with the various kinds of power that the great powers do, after all, have. He was also offended by the idea of a land war in Asia, with white soldiers coming over to fight it. On the other hand, he was a pro. And on the many things which we dealt with him, for the most part, he was willing to be a pro and to be discreet. For several months he held on to the secret of the Rangoon meeting that never happened; he held that until he just had to blow it. But he didn't blow for weeks and weeks and weeks, and he didn't blow for a couple of weeks after Stevenson got back from his vacation and told him what the answer had to be, which was no. When he did blow, that was really deeply offensive to Rusk. In my presence Rusk said to U Thant personally on the telephone, "Who do you think you are, a country?" And the fact that LBJ or his spokesman said that there never had been such a proposal -- that was just a misunderstanding as to what was meant by proposal.

They meant no substantive proposal, whereas U Thant was only making a procedural proposal. But to U Thant, for whom it would have been wholly inappropriate to make a substantive proposal, he had gone the limit in making a procedural proposal, and even picking Rangoon which was his own country.

JS

There was one other -- and I realize that this happened after you had left the Department to go to NATO -- one other action, though, that U Thant took which had an effect, I think, well I would like to ask you from your somewhat distant posting in Brussels, and that was his decision to authorize the withdrawal of UNEF on Nasser's request.

HC

Well, I followed that rather closely because of professional interest. I thought, at the time -- and even said, I even sent telegrams about it in my capacity as an alumnus, sort of, of UN affairs -- that it was wholly unnecessary, that it was a very bad precedent to withdraw because only one side had asked him to. U Thant undoubtedly said to himself, "Well, only one side is relevant because the other side never agreed to it in the first place -- never agreed to have any soldiers on the Israeli side." So if Nasser didn't want them on the Egyptian side of the border, it really would be unfair not to withdraw them. But I was afraid that that would be such a devastating precedent to the UN's "capacity to

act" as peacekeeper that it was a bad mistake.

JS And that seems to have been the general impression, certainly in the White House -- the Johnson White House was dismayed, I believe, if I'm correct, by that decision.

HC Because again, you see, these things keep recurring, as in the Congo case and others. The problem for the United States, because of its position in the scheme of things, was so often that if the UN didn't act, we would have to act and that would strike all kinds of sparks that wouldn't be sparks if the UN acted. And that was the philosophy that we had at the time of why the UN's capacity to act was in the vital interest of the US. It was a hard sell in Washington, you know, but I kept trying to sell it and, indeed, I made a number of public speeches about it. They were spread all over the State Department Bulletins, because I was trying to get the whole community of people that were interested in the UN to catch this point that the UN isn't just a talk-place.

JS I ask this question rather frequently because I think it's important to try to identify that point where American confidence in the UN as a viable organization in the maintenance of peace and security occurred, and this is one of the places that you can at least postulate is such a point. That leaves aside entirely the question as to whether U Thant really had any choice or what would

have happened if he had, in fact, referred to the General Assembly. Nonetheless, the perception, I think, in a good many places as a result of that action was that the UN is not reliable. Certainly that had an effect on Israel.

HC

Of course the fact we were disappointed late because we went on so long using the voting arrangements we had contrived, and because they turned out so well in our own interest, because of course we had an "automatic majority." Then we began having the same kind of votes except that we were on the minority side. The way I described it at the time was that all of the UN General Assembly votes are the same kind of thing (except for the ones that are unanimous, which were some very important ones like the World Weather Watch). All of the disputed votes are the same: it's the majority telling the minority how it should behave and the minority is voting no. That's what we did to the eleven votes of the Soviet bloc for years. Then the "Group of 77" started doing it to us. They started telling us what we should do, how much we should contribute to them. Those majority votes never included a clause about how the majority should behave. But the interesting thing to me is that the UN, whenever the nations get together on the assumption that they're going to have to do something together -- whether it is the Law of the Sea or world weather or dividing the

radio frequencies or whatever -- they act by "consensus." I find that most audiences that I talk to tend to think that "consensus" means "unanimous consent," and everybody has a veto. So I finally developed a definition of consensus which I'd be interested in your reaction to -- that on any given issue consensus is "the acquiescence of those who care supported by the apathy of those who don't."

JS That's a very good definition. I remember that you wrote an article, I think, for the NY Times Sunday Magazine on consensus.

HC That's right. You have a good memory because that was 1960.



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