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HISTORY
(02)/J6

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Assistant-Secretary-General James Jonah
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
August 21, 1990
United Nations, New York, NY

YUN TAPE
ASSISTANT-SECRETARY-GENERAL JAMES JONAH
AUGUST 21, 1990
AT THE UNITED NATIONS
INTERVIEWER: JAMES S. SUTTERLIN

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JSS So, Mr. Jonah, I want first to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this Yale United Nations Oral History Project. I'll start if I might by asking you to indicate what your position was at the time that the 1973 October war broke out in the Middle East.

Jonah Well, in fact I was wearing two hats. In one capacity I was still the political advisor to Ambassador Gunnar Jarring who was the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Middle East. In the other, I was the principal officer in the office of Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs which was the Bunche-Urquhart office.

JSS So in effect you had been involved in the Middle East very directly before this war broke out.

Jonah Yes, since 1968 I was deeply involved because I was working with Ambassador Jarring in the talks between the parties and I also was with the Secretary-General on many of his trips to the Middle East or to the OAU.

JSS Well that leads me actually to my first question which is

to what extent was information available to the United Nations concerning Egyptian and Syrian intentions prior to the October 6 attack?

Jonah Not very much. In fact if I may recall there was a feeling at the time that the Arab states were not ready to fight. Precisely I remember I accompanied the Secretary-General to the 10th anniversary of the OAU in Addis Ababa when the Africans were almost nibbling at President Sadat for not doing anything in terms of resisting the occupation. When the Security Council (I think that summer) discussed the whole question of the Middle East they had a request for a full report of the Secretary-General from 1967 to 1973 (I think it was in June or May '73) and then there was a resolution which the United States vetoed. And then [Egyptian] Foreign Minister el-Zayyat, (with whom I worked under Jarring but who had then become foreign minister) made that - well, in a sense significant speech (but we never knew it was significant), when he said that the veto of the United States had left him with no choice but to take back to his people the bad news and that the people had to make now their own conclusion that they had exhausted all diplomatic efforts in the United Nations. No one thought it was anything like a threat because no one believed really that the Arabs were in a position to breach the Bar-lev line.

JSS So, in effect, you as a United Nations observer more or less had reached the same conclusion that the Israelis had reached...

Jonah Yes, definitely, and I must say though that on arrival in the area just after the cease-fire I spoke with General Siilasvuo who in fact had spent some days in our Cairo office prior to that time and he said that when they did visit the Canal Zone they saw a great deal of movements, you know, which to observers appeared like preparing for an offensive but they dismissed it out of hand because this had been done in many previous occasions without any offensive operation by the Egyptian Army.

JSS Right. Now after the hostilities broke out to your knowledge did the Secretary-General take any action in order to seek to bring about a cease-fire, or did he realize that the Americans and the Soviets were in consultation about the matter and simply left the matter to them?

Jonah No, I recall, in fact it was Saturday morning, I got a call at home from Mr. Brian Urquhart who asked me to come to the office. On arrival Saturday morning the first person I ran into was Foreign Minister el-Zayyat. Again we had a kind of informal relations and he in fact said that "you know, James, we have been under attack again." I said, "what do you mean?" and he said "well, you know, we have been attacked by the Israelis around Suez". Yet

we were receiving all these reports coming from wire services and some from the radio that the Arabs had launched an attack. But they never admitted it for a number of hours. So no one knew really what was going on. And you know our observers were not in a position to observe, so the Secretary-General was just waiting to get more news.

JSS I did want to clarify that point - there were observers in the area, weren't there?

Jonah There were observers in the area, yes, on both sides of the Canal, and they were from UNTSO.

JSS What happened to them, actually?

Jonah Well what happened is, the first thing we knew, the first sign that the Egyptians really launched the attack was when we received a message from Cairo that the Egyptians wanted us to remove all observers from the cease-fire line...

JSS That must have been on the 6th of October...

Jonah Yes, we got word that all observers must be removed and then some of them were taken to Cairo and the others were moved more into the desert. At that time we had a system which we have since abandoned - we used two observers in an observation post, plus a liaison officer, which means that on the Israeli side we had two United Nations observers from two different nationalities plus an Israeli liaison officer, and they were all living

together. And we later found out, of course unfortunately, that a number of observers were killed. It appeared to us, and I saw some of the bodies myself subsequently when they were found, that these people were not just shot from a distance but there was some kind of close-range killing of observers, and perhaps, whether they showed themselves as United Nations officials or not. This caused tremendous anguish and I know Siilasvuo protested strongly to the Egyptian army. But some of them were moved, others were killed, you know and those who were on the eastern bank were killed. I think two of them were killed.

JSS Now the resolution was passed then calling for a cease-fire, Resolution 338 which I believe was on the 22 of October. Was the United Nations Secretariat to your knowledge involved in the drafting of that resolution, or again, was it done entirely outside the Secretariat and the United Nations framework itself?

Jonah It was done entirely outside. Again I have a vivid memory of the situation - I think it was a Sunday and those of us who were dealing with the problem were asked to come to the United Nations. So we all came to the United Nations and we were all told that the Council would be convened. And everyone was waiting for this resolution which was worked out in Moscow to be submitted and I could remember the Chinese delegate really furious,

you know, that the United Nations should be in their view so manipulated. We thought maybe they might veto it because of their anger, but at that stage of the game all of the Arabs were urging a cease-fire resolution. It was very strange because a few days before they were all opposed to a cease-fire resolution. So therefore that Sunday afternoon (or evening) the resolution was adopted.

JSS So in effect one simply waited for the news from Moscow where Henry Kissinger was in consultation with Brezhnev - directly, I believe, according to his account. Was there surprise other than the Chinese - were you and the Secretary-General unhappy with the contents of this resolution which again were rather vague?

Jonah No, no, we were not any unhappy about it because that resolution talks about involving the super powers and the United Nations. In a sense since 1971 following the Jarring memorandum we had been trying to revive these talks and had been unsuccessful mainly because the Israelis at that time had expressed no-confidence in Gunnar Jarring, and we couldn't find any modality for reviving the talks. So in a sense this was one means.

JSS Because in fact it does reaffirm 242...

Jonah Because it does reaffirm 242 and asks for negotiations to start. One of the sticking points, there was no call for return to the positions before the commencement of hostilities. So again this was seen to be a very hopeful

sign for negotiations.

JSS Right, because this called for a cease-fire in place and the Israelis were already on the far side...

Jonah No, no not yet, this is the interesting thing, not yet.

JSS I thought they hadn't closed off the road yet, but they...

Jonah Yes, they had crossed the canal but they were in the pockets.

JSS Now, very shortly afterwards in the succeeding days, other resolutions were passed, 339 and 340. 340 I believe calls for the re-establishment of an international military force which I suppose is UNEF II. My question here again is, since a lot of this negotiation was being done outside of the United Nations by the Americans and Russians with the Egyptians and Israelis, I wondered, was there contact with the Secretary-General relative to the provisions for a new UNEF?

Jonah Well, in fact, I do not think the question of the United Nations force was done outside of the United Nations. I think it was not expected. Since the cold war and given the deadlock over the Article 19 issue, there was a general feeling that peacekeeping was passé, that it was unrealistic to expect any peacekeeping operations any longer. This was the general conventional wisdom and therefore most of the diplomatic contacts around the

Security Council were not for a force but for the appointment of a representative. I remember this specifically because el-Zayyat spoke to me a great deal about that, you know, saying how important it was that the United Nations presence be enlarged by the appointment of a representative and I think the question of a force was unexpected. As you know it has now been disclosed there were exchanges between the Americans and the Russians because the Russians wanted a joint American-Soviet military presence and there were all kinds of intelligence information about the Russians moving troops. Then when the Americans went to this emergency alert, the non-aligned members of the Security Council took it on their own and said "we are not going to sit back and..." and they began to talk about it and when they made a move then the Americans had to respond to that. And the Americans responded to that movement by the non-aligned members of the Council for a force.

JSS So in fact the initiative for the force came from the non-aligned ...

Jonah Came from the non-aligned members on the Security Council...

JSS And it was not one of the things which the Americans and Russians took the initiative on.

Jonah Exactly, I think, Pérez de Cuéllar was then a member, you know, of the non-aligned group in the Security Council,

and the resolution came from them.

JSS And I'm just checking here, I believe at one point the then Secretary-General Waldheim did, himself, suggest the possibility of a police force.

Jonah Yes, but it was really in the context of this non-allied initiative. It was in the context of that; they really did it on their own and in fact some of us were skeptical whether it would succeed or not and then the Americans had to react and I think they judged that... In fact the Russians at that time had already sent some observers to Egypt on their own. They had already arrived in Cairo.

JSS And this was the period where the Israelis were continuing to advance, to close off...

Jonah Exactly, exactly, you know so that it was something the Americans could buy with the proviso that the superpowers should not be part of the force.

JSS Yes, and that was at the insistence of the United States. Now going on to the organization of the talks at Km 101, could you give some indication of how they were organized? I want to question you also about what exactly was the United Nations contribution there, but first, if you could just describe - how did they function, how was the thing set up under the tent?

Jonah Well, first of all, there was initial contact at the time of the failure of the first cease-fire. Then there was

a meeting between Egyptian and Israeli military officers at very high level together with the United Nations. At that meeting the Egyptians raised the question of supplying the Third Army. Of course the Israelis were not prepared to budge on that issue. So the whole thing sort of fizzled out and then they went to Washington. It was in Washington that Kissinger was able to work out this agreement, it was a very vague agreement in the sense that he talked about the need for withdrawal without saying exactly where. And then they talked about supplying Suez City and the Third Army. They said, "well all of these things and the POWs will be discussed by military representatives under United Nations auspices". I had gone to Cairo. The Secretary-General began a plan which was totally supported by Mr. Urquhart, which was a very wise plan. We had worked out in New York all the details of the force, all of the negotiations as soon as the Council adopted the resolution. Yes, I was asked to move immediately to Cairo to talk to Siilasvuo and brief them about the political background and help organize the force, taking with me the knowledge of what was happening in New York, which was an excellent move. So I had gone to Cairo for that purpose, not to take part in any kind of discussion. The next day I went to Siilasvuo to the front line, you know, we went to Suez City, the cease-fire was not even yet taking hold so that I could take

back to New York all this fresh experience going on the other side. I was about to leave to come to New York to report back to the Secretary-General when we received that evening a cable. The cable was transmitting to us this agreement which the Americans had passed to the Secretary-General.

JSS This was after Kissinger had been in Cairo, himself, then?

Jonah No, no, no, before he went to Cairo. This is what they had agreed to in Washington, you know. Then I was told, "Please don't move, stay and assist Siilasvuo with this thing". So then of course I looked at the draft and I could see that there were many vague provisions so I then advised Siilasvuo that we meet with the Egyptians. We went to see Ahmed Ismail Ali who was then Minister of Defense and then we saw the Chief of Operations, and there we discovered that there was a kind of misunderstanding among the Egyptians. The misunderstanding came about because the Egyptian official who went to Washington was Fahmy and Fahmy had made a deal which he had not conveyed to the military. He was not aware we were going to see Ali, he didn't know about that. Well Ali and others asked me, "well, you have a legal background - you explain". I said "Look, we are not involved. This is what we see". And he was horrified about our interpretation because they had been

informed by Fahmy that what was happening was that the Egyptians were being moved, the Israelis were being moved from the 101 corridor and it seemed they were going to have access. He said it. So the first thing we had a big problem, a big fight that went on between the Egyptian army and the Egyptian Foreign Minister. This almost -- in fact has not been disclosed before -- almost broke down the whole talks. Then there was another meeting convened by Sadat between these two groups to try to solve this problem. Then we were called in to a meeting in the Foreign Ministry where it was Fahmy, the United Nations and the military. As we then decided, well OK, if this is the case we are going to try to use a technique, what we call the proximity approach that would have two tents, three tents. The United Nations tent would be the middle, then on the right hand side, or the eastern side would be the Israeli tent and on the western side would be the Egyptian tent. Based on what we had heard from them we knew it would have to be proximity, indirect talks. We were not sure whether the Egyptians would want to sit in the same tent. We were able to persuade them and they said yes, they would do that, but they would talk only through the United Nations and not directly to the Israelis. So this is the way it was. We had a table where there was Siilasvuo and his political advisor, myself, and then on the right of

Siilasvuo was the Israeli delegation, and on the left were the Egyptians. And on the Egyptian side we have el-Gamasy and on the Israeli side we have ...

JSS You had I believe Yariv ...

Jonah Yariv. So that was the way it was planned. Now we had also envisaged the possibility that if there was a problem we [the UN representatives] would go to each tent, that is the proximity talks, and in fact, we tried to do this at one point but the Israelis did not accept it because for them the importance of the meeting was that there would be direct contact. And therefore they did not want any kind of United Nations intermediary to stop these direct talks.

JSS OK, but now I'd like to go back just a minute to something interesting that you said and that is the trip which you and General Siilasvuo made to the [Egyptian] Third Army while it was cut off. What was it like? Can you describe that?

Jonah Well I must say that here you could see the discrepancy between what happens in the media and what happens on the ground. You know, even though fighting was going on when I left New York, by the time I arrived in Paris there were reports that the Israelis had taken over Suez City, you know, and the next day the first thing I heard was that they had not taken over Suez City. But they were on the outskirts of Suez City, and then we went into -I

think, Siilasvuo was the first to go into Suez City -and what we discovered was that there were a number of Israeli tanks that really went into the center of Suez City, but were disabled and had to withdraw. What happened was, you know, it was a built-up area and the Egyptian Army personnel were using these anti-tank missiles from the apartments and were able to destroy many of these Israeli tanks. So the Israelis withdrew from Suez City and a subsequent study showed that in fact they had the highest number of casualties in the war in Suez city. So that was the first shock. Secondly we also discovered that the Third Army was not completely surrounded because we met with the commander of the Third Army who came to Suez City. We were with the Mayor so that was one of our biggest surprises. It was not an ironclad thing, and they were using certain back roads to get supplies; we saw all of that. From the commander of the Third Army we didn't get the impression that they were short of food, we didn't get that impression. We got the impression that they were fearful the Israelis would attack, that the cease-fire didn't matter, they were going to attack. The mayor of the city was frightened that the Israelis were going to attack because they said, well there was no way the Israelis would accept it because they came in and then they were beaten back. They were convinced the Israelis would come back.

So there was tremendous nervousness on their part and they were talking about lack of water and supplies in Suez City. The morale among the Third Army was not bad, it was not bad; they were not that frightened and we went also to the Second Army. They were much more jubilant because they fought very well. I was particularly interested to see the military disposition because you see what happened was the Israelis - and I talked a lot to many Israeli soldiers and their commanders - what was happening? There was a suspicion among the Egyptians that Kissinger sort of duped Brezhnev; he had made a deal with the Israelis that they should push, but I gathered - talking with many of the IDF officers - that in fact that the Israeli general - what's his name? Sharon - Sharon had on his own realized that at the point of the cease-fire, he had only two options. One, he could not leave his force in the pockets where they had moved because they were completely indefensible.

JSS On the other side of the Canal..

Jonah He had either to bring them back to the Eastern bank or break out. And he did not want to withdraw them so they broke out and first to go to Ismailia and then down to the south because those are the two possible roads. Now by the time they got to the Fresh Water Lake they were stopped in Ismailia. They were not able to go down. They moved down and then they moved from the sea. And

then they dropped a lot of paratroopers to cut off -- because I remember there was not much fighting in between, you know, so that's how they got to kilometer 101. It was not just a ground assault; a lot of paratroopers were dropped. So I sent a cable to the Secretary-General at the time, setting forth my conclusion that this was a stalemate, a military stalemate in the Canal Zone and not of the same dimension as the 1967 defeat. And I said that if the war continued the Israelis were in a position to defeat the Third Army even though it might take them some days. But the way it stopped, it was a stalemate, a military stalemate.

JSS Now that leads me to something that you said in an article you wrote recently where you mentioned that a knowledge of how the war began and how the systems of armaments were used by the armies was a very useful thing for the third party persons in the talks at Km 101, that this is an important element for a third party, in this type of negotiation. I wondered if you could elaborate on this - you had this knowledge and so did General Siilasvuo - how was this useful to you as the third parties in this negotiation?

Jonah Well there are two things. One there was the earlier period of 1970, the so-called standstill agreement. You see, the Israelis have always been sensitive about missiles because the war of attrition was a missile war.

The standstill agreement which the Americans worked out was that no missiles would be moved. But the Egyptians were always moving the missiles which the Israelis didn't like; they said it was destabilizing. So that was one thing. During the war the Egyptians used a new system which caused the Israelis enormous difficulties. They used missiles in an offensive role as an umbrella and they used three types. So the first wave - you see this is the whole question of whether the Israelis won or not. The Israelis had at least 6 hours warning that the war was going to start. That is beyond any doubt. But their calculation was that they would destroy the bridges in a matter of hours. What they did not realize was this missile as an umbrella tactic so the first wave of Israeli aircraft power was destroyed. The Egyptians were moving their forces under this umbrella, thereby limiting Israeli air power and making the ground forces of Egypt very effective. In fact the reason why the Egyptians did not break through the passes which they could have done was that it was beyond the limit of the umbrella. So therefore the Israelis in these negotiations were very much insistent that the deployment of the missiles would be way back in the rear and the Egyptians didn't want to, and said "you cannot tell us where to deploy our missiles, no, you cannot do that, you cannot tell us, these are mobile missiles". The Israelis said, "no we

have to, it must be so many kilometers away from the front line. So they did not want any longer to have this kind of missile as umbrella. And the talks almost broke down on this missile question. Now we knew, and we told the Egyptians, "look, you are not going to succeed in this. You have to agree. The Israelis are not going to agree because it's the way they have always fought." We tried to explain to them. I know el-Gamasy spoke to me outside the tent and I said, "look, they are not going to give in, this is very very important to them because the way you used these missiles". That made an impression on el-Gamasy. This is why they agreed and said, "okay, you cannot put it in the agreement; we'll agree but it has to be in a separate secret protocol, a chairman's statement. "

JSS And was that done then?

Jonah That was done.

JSS Because that was somewhat parallel then to the separate statement that the Americans gave with regard, later, to disengaging ...

Jonah Exactly, so we began this idea of a chairman's statement which was not published and still has never been published. It was done also in the Israeli-Syrian thing in '74 and also '75. So all the things which would be embarrassing to the Arab public were never included in the published agreement, were all contained in the

chairman's statement.

JSS In the chairman's statement, which was made...

Jonah Which was kept by the United Nations, but these statements were very important in operating the force because they set the conditions. So they were always consulted by the force but never publicized.

JSS Now, what was your reporting procedure? Henry Kissinger mentions in his memoirs that he never knew what was happening in the talks at Km 101 and that there were three versions that he seemed to have access to - the Egyptians', the Israelis' and the United Nations' - and that none of them was sufficiently timely. How did this work, you reported to the Secretary-General...

Jonah Yes, I followed the course of extensive reporting because I felt obligated to give the flavor of what was happening. I was also aware that what we do in the desert, in Cairo, in Tel Aviv is nothing compared to what else the Secretary-General could do here in New York with the parties. Therefore he must know exactly ... I know there was a big debate between me and a man called Gorget, you know, who was saying "no, no, we shouldn't be going into details." I wanted them to know the flavor of this, so these were very extensive reports and I always made the point of as soon as we got back to Cairo that we sent a cable immediately. Given the difference of time therefore within a few hours after we finished the

Secretary-General would have it which was about midday here so they could use it and they used it very well. No I must say that it's true because I know of an incident which again has not been known by many people. Because of these detailed reports, in one case Waldheim went to Washington and he took Mr. Guyer with him and he took a batch of these cables into the talks. According to what was passed on to me by Guyer in the meeting with Nixon, Waldheim was talking about all of these plans, what we were doing, and said "look we're making progress" and then handed over to Mr. Nixon one of these cables which was very extensive about the plans by Gamasy and Yariv and then Nixon possibly said that he was surprised and passed it on to Kissinger who was completely confused. It was out of that meeting that he stopped the talks. That is how the talks were stopped because Kissinger said "my God, they're going too far".

JSS Because at that point I believe Yariv had put some ideas...

Jonah Exactly, you know, disengagement, we're talking about very extensive withdrawal in the Sinai and it was a very extensive one, very extensive. And at that point, Kissinger stopped it. Now we did not know, we thought it was a tactic of Yariv and we didn't know until a book came out in Israel disclosing that Kissinger stopped the talks. It took me about a year to discover the link with

Kissinger - that is, Waldheim handing over these documents to Nixon and Nixon passing them on to Kissinger.

JSS Where he saw for the first time the extent...

Jonah The extent, yes, and then he moved immediately to stop it.

JSS Although in fact it was technically the Egyptians who stopped the talks...

Jonah No, no, no - this one was stopped, you see, now, he stopped it not the talks themselves, stopped the process and when the Egyptians saw that, they stopped the talks.

JSS Yes, because it was after that that General Yariv withdrew some of the ideas he had put forward.

Jonah Yes, exactly, then the Egyptians got mad.

JSS Then that explains that.

Jonah This is what is important - it was very extensive and I subsequently learned that in fact Brian [Urquhart] was sharing the information with some of the British because once in a very accidental way I was in London and I was invited to lunch and a man walked in, a senior official walked in, and said "oh you're the man with those excellent reports from 101". And I looked at him, you know, and I realized that they had access to all these reports, so it seemed that these reports were all shared by Brian with a number of people.

JSS Now these reports of course came from Km 101. When the

talks did move to Washington and then at a later stage to Geneva, what was the United Nations role then? I mean, did General Siilasvuo go to Washington, I haven't seen that in the record...

Jonah No, in Washington we had nothing to do with it. I just was about to reconstruct the Washington part, I had nothing to do with it. In Geneva, yes, and in Geneva it began, we went to the Geneva Peace Conference and again, it was also funny. I had come back to New York but Waldheim wanted me always to go to the area every few weeks and come back; he kind of valued this kind of political reporting. So we had finished this phase at 101 and I came back; then he said "look, I want you to go back before Christmas" so I went back and while I was there, we were aware of some moves toward Geneva. And Gamasy disclosed to me the detailed plans for Geneva which I cabled immediately to New York, "these are the plans that they have, this is what we have gathered" and then I went to Gamasy and Fahmy gave me more the political side. So I was told, "stay in Cairo." Then again I was worried about Christmas, I wanted to come home. Then I got a cable again, sent by Secretary-General, transmitting a letter that he had received from, I think it was a joint letter from the Russians...

JSS From the Russians and the Americans.

Jonah Yes, you know, and then I was told "please proceed to

Geneva". So I went; then the next day Brian Urquhart came. There we discovered there were no plans. No one had made any plans for Geneva. So Brian and I started to talk about tables, seating arrangements. Then we were in his office once when a call came from Sisco who was somewhere in Paris or something and said, "Look, Brian, what do we do?" And Brian said, "What do you mean, what do we do? I thought you were arranging it, look, we don't know a damn thing that's going to happen".

In that meeting in Geneva it is very hard to know what was Kissinger's scenario but I know for certain that the Israelis went to Geneva for a long stay; I know that without any doubt. I know that because their representative was a good friend of mine and I know they were renting houses, renting office space, talking about how to move the documents. What Kissinger had in mind we don't know. But they agreed that there would be a working room and of course Siilasvuo was not a member of our delegation to Geneva. So we decided that we would ask Siilasvuo to join us. What the Secretary-General said was that Guyer and I would represent him in the Geneva Peace Conference. The delegation would be led by Guyer and I would be the assistant and then Siilasvuo would come for these military talks. So they finished on the 23rd of December, and I was told you can go for a day to New York and then you come back on the 25th which I

did. Then immediately Siilasvuo came. So then we began the working group. The question which came up immediately was, was this a continuation of 101 or not? The Israelis insisted that it was a continuation of 101. The Egyptians were sort of ambivalent, but then they agreed for the continuation. So we followed the same pattern; we had the chair, we had the same kind of arrangement that we had at 101, but in the conference room. And we just continued with what we left off in 101. So it was more or less the same, but just a different site, that's all.

JSS And the United Nations was still able to play the same role, the third party role..

Jonah And I must say that the Israelis were even using us because what happened was that in 101 the Israelis gradually gained confidence in us, and I say gradually, gradually and because they saw from the missile thing, they realized, you know, when we talked to the Egyptians they seemed to soften. And quite often I can tell you they would come with ideas to us and say "why don't you suggest this if you think it's right?" and we would look at it and we would do it, and it was easier for the Egyptians to go along. So we did exactly the same thing. Now the difference in Geneva, the big difference, is that there was an American presence in Geneva, so all the parties were talking with the Americans so we were aware

of the back channel communication that was going on. So that was a different thing, and it was very useful.

JSS Ambassador Bunker was there, is that right?

Jonah Yes, Bunker was there, later we had our friend, two people were working with Kissinger at different times. The name skips me, two ambassadors who were working with Kissinger and on different occasions they were there. So we worked together as a team in a sense. It went very well. The difference in 101 compared to Geneva was that we had the American component.

JSS Now I'd like to go back to 101 just for a minute. We didn't talk about the exchange of prisoners of war, and that occurred I believe already on the 15th of November. What was the United Nations role in that?

Jonah I would say that it was decisive, very decisive because the way the agreement was signed - first, when we started it of course the Egyptians were using the prisoners for a bargaining chip. Their main concern was to get unimpeded access to the Third Army, that was their main objective, and the Israelis were not going to give it to them - no way they were going to do that. And therefore the Egyptians were not going to give even the least of the POWs to the Israelis and for the Israelis it was a very difficult issue back home because they needed for the POWs at least to get the Red Cross in on it, and they refused. We had several meetings and we realized that

this thing was a stumbling block. I then proposed - and again Mr. Gorget was against it - I said, "look in this case where there's a deadlock, we as the United Nations must play our own independent role. The independent role in the agreement is that we will establish checkpoints and there is no linkage here with anything else." I said therefore, "why don't we go ahead, since this whole thing for the Egyptians - and I have already told you of the meeting with the Defense Minister Ali; we had already seen the confusion between his perception of the agreement and what was Fahmy's knowledge of it. So we had that as background. So we decided to tell them, "Well look, if you don't agree we are going to establish our checkpoint" which of course Yariv objected to because he saw immediately that this threatened their position. But before that, before that we had gone through this proximity talks procedure, we had gone to the Egyptians and said, "look, you have to give that list, you cannot continue to withhold the list, to break out of this you must give us the list". They say, " what is in it for us?" We say "OK, if you will give us the list [of POW's], we will make sure that we get from the Israelis a commitment that they are going to be forthcoming on the issue of supplies to this whole army. If you don't want to give it to them then give it to us." And they agreed. So they gave us the list of POWs. We then went to Yariv,

Yariv said "we want to talk to the United Nations". And according to our understanding, I said to Siilasvuo, "we must maintain our credibility, we must turn over the list, but there was no time for the drill because we had been moved from the Israeli tent to the United Nations tent. So throughout the meeting Gamasy did not know whether we had given it to the Israelis or not, but he noticed there was still this old controversy and everything. I told Siilasvuo at the end of the meeting, "we will give back the list to Gamasy but we will extend our own checkpoint" which we did that day so it was all in the scenario. And I knew it would be and Yariv said there would be bloodshed if we do this. But on this one thing I gave Siilasvuo credit for courage; he said, "General, there will be bloodshed, but I must carry out my duty". We left that evening and we went out and we gave instructions in front of Yariv that we were going to institute our checkpoints which is what this whole clash was about. Luckily we had given full reporting to the Secretary-General. I mean, full details about all that had happened, and what our scenario was. He and Brian Urquhart immediately began to contact all the Americans, giving them our version and they were all very mad, they were furious with the Israelis. So with all of this bad publicity for the Israelis they came back the next day you know and Yariv realized he made a blunder and he did

apologize to us. The important thing is that with all that we had done, Gamasy was very pleased, was extremely pleased. He said "the United Nations has done a good job". I told the Israelis when we went to Dayan. I said you have been criticizing the United Nations for not standing up; we went away in 1967 and we are now standing up. We are not going away. I noticed that made some impression on Dayan. He laughed and said, "Well, you know, this is a different United Nations." So when we came back the atmosphere had changed and that very same day all the thing was solved.

JSS And from then on the prisoner exchange went smoothly?

Jonah It went smoothly; as soon as we came back the whole thing was solved.

JSS You mentioned the 1967, one might call it the 1967 trauma, I guess. Your impression was that that still was much on the Israeli mind...

Jonah Oh yes, no question about that, no question about that. It was very very much on their mind - that the United Nations was unreliable - and this I can assure you made a tremendous impact on them. The determination of the United Nations to stand up and not be pushed around made a tremendous impression on the Israelis.

JSS Going on now to the actual disengagement agreement that was worked out primarily during Henry Kissinger's shuttle, was there a United Nations contribution?

Jonah It was not done during the shuttle. You see the first agreement said that the talks should work out the disengagement of forces.

JSS Yes, that was to be the fourth item.

Jonah So that was that, so we began once the POW thing and the question of supplies was worked out and it all began. We then turned to that aspect... And I think the first draft, the first presentation came from the Israelis. Yariv and Zion, who was the son-in-law of Dayan, made a very lengthy presentation on what was called the principles of disengagement.

JSS And did that include the idea of the movement back of the Israelis?

Jonah Yes, everything, I mean they must have given very serous thought to it. And again, that was very interesting because the Egyptians were caught off guard. While they were talking I noticed immediately a great deal of input from Shelling's writings.

JSS You mean, Tom Shelling?

Jonah I saw a lot of things, you know, so therefore when they would seek clarification I would intervene, and then Yariv would say, "who is this guy?" In fact he did ask. But I knew a lot came from Shelling's writings - confidence-building measures, all of these things were. They said, "Okay, we'll listen to you." They came back the next day with questions. It took about 3 or 4 days

to build up these principles, there were 10 principles of disengagement that they put on the table. I don't know the basis of it. Now as to what Kissinger worked out, there was a problem of what do you do with Canal cities - the rebuilding of the Canal cities. These were political issues which Gamasy said he was not authorized to negotiate about. Kissinger dealt with those. That was the only thing. But not the details. He had nothing to do with that part of the plan. He was able to get Sadat to agree on the rebuilding of the cities in the Canal Zone which the Israelis considered a confidence-building measure because if you come back to the Canal Zone then they know you are not preparing for war. This is what they did, not the plan - the plan was worked out completely at km. 101.

JSS You think that on the Israeli side they consciously were aware of the desirability of confidence-building measures as we know them in the academic sense, that is, in Shelling's writings and others?

Jonah I think so; I think they were very sincere. My own impression was that this war was a sobering experience to the IDF. They had seen a fighting quality which they did not expect from the Arab armies. They really believed that this was the time for them to make peace, I mean, I really believe Yariv was very very sincere. This man was head of intelligence, you know, he knew a lot of things

and he had tremendous respect for Gamasy. What they achieved in reaching the bilateral [agreement] was phenomenal. They were really impressed. As military people they had tremendous respect for each other. I think they were sincere. Psychologically they were prepared for peace, I have no doubt in my mind.

JSS It was a momentous day when the disengagement agreement was actually signed at 101. What was the atmosphere then, how do you recall that situation, how it happened?

Jonah Well it went so fast. I mean, I never knew what God gave me that day to write so fast because I had to record these things so fast. It was like a log jam had broken. It went very very fast and I was to read [my record] out when it was finished. I will never forget that day in my life. You know, Gamasy jumped and Yariv! It was unbelievable, unbelievable.

JSS It was a scene of real joy..

Jonah Unbelievable. You know there had been big acrimony; there had been fighting with the United Nations; and this was unbelievable.

JSS Now was there already a sense that this could lead to greater things in terms of....

Jonah No, it was not. It was just that there had been this problem with the POW exchange and the supplies and there was always a threat by the Egyptians that they would not allow their troops to starve, they would resume the war.

They said, "if we don't get supplies, we will find a way to supply our forces". So it was always realized that there would be something unless we solved this problem. So it was, it's very hard to explain, it was unbelievable.

JSS But it was one of those events that seem to change history.

Jonah Yes. You have to see the pictures to realize it.

JSS Now going on to the next stage, were there any particular problems encountered then in putting UNEF II in the field in accordance with the disengagement agreement?

Jonah No, that was not difficult because there was time. There were certain concepts that were introduced and I learned a lot from the military in [developing] these. You know you think that redeployment was an easy thing but I sensed that the military were very conscious of not leaving their flanks defenseless. Even with an agreement they, on both sides, just don't like it so we built in the idea of buffer time and buffer space. The concept was that at the beginning of the various phases the United Nations would be deployed between both sides which is a form of confidence to the other side because when they start to redeploy they have to disorganize their forces. So that when they would move to the next phase, then there is a buffer time of about 6 hours. So there are no stragglers, no. The United Nations will go into

the area, make sure it is very clean, that there are no hostile forces left behind. At the end of the buffer time the new forces would come into the area. So we did this again by going with three tents. At every phase we built three tents - the Egyptian tent, United Nations tent and the Israeli tent as liaison so everything was checked with each one. It was a moving thing.

JSS As each area was vacated...

Jonah Yes, yes, yes, so these tripartite tents and the buffer time and buffer space, it went very well. It was all written down, very detailed, the time - you know, everything was detailed, there was no question, no problem...

JSS And was that done in the field?

Jonah It was done in the field. A liaison man was appointed by the United Nations, a colonel, a Finnish colonel who had been with us on km. 101; so he knew all about this. And the Israelis appointed a colonel and the Egyptians appointed a colonel and they always met. They were in close proximity so they were always checking with each other at every phase. When they moved, the tents moved, so there were no problems.

JSS Now back here in NY, Brian Urquhart was already supervising the operation from here, together with the Secretary-General?

Jonah No, no, he was not, because in peacekeeping, the most

difficult part is the first few weeks. So long as they get proper reporting [in New York] there is nothing they have to do. All they have to do is report to the Security Council. If there is no hitch in the operation, New York has very little to do. It's when you have a crisis then New York needs to intervene, but there was no problem, you know. There were tense days during the fighting and they [New York] were very much involved because they were contacting governments to try to calm down the parties. For example, Mrs. Meir came under tremendous pressure from many governments - the Americans, the British, the French - based on the contacts which were being made here in New York to the various missions for them to use their good offices. But the [peace-keeping] process was done on the ground and there was nothing much New York could do. The Council was informed about these various processes and their agreement obtained and that's about it. So long as they were kept informed, nothing they could do, nothing they could do, you know, it was all done on the ground. This is the normal way to run a peace-keeping force. Headquarters comes in only at the very beginning and otherwise, once you pass that stage it doesn't entail many difficulties at all.

JSS Now actually the Israelis were moving back into the Sinai which was not really Israeli territory but in this case

they had no objections to the peace-keeping forces being there...

Jonah No, they found them very essential. You see, the Egyptians were psychologically against being told they must withdraw from their own territory. That's why we didn't use the word "withdraw", we talked about "redeploy." Then the Israelis had another objective which was - even if they accepted that elements of the Third Army would remain - to gain a so-called thinning out of forces which both sides agreed to. So even though the Egyptians would never accept withdrawal from their territory they agreed to thin out their forces. They were thinning out forces from both the Third and Second Armies so they were reduced to a point which would be of no threat to the Israelis.

JSS Now I'd like to switch just for the last few minute to the Syrian disengagement. If one reads Henry Kissinger's memoirs, there's practically no mention at all of the United Nations as having had any role in that particular operation and yet the United Nations, again as in the Suez area, was expected to mount a new peace-keeping operation. Could you describe what was the contact between the United Nations and the American side, and for that matter, the Syrian side as this particular disengagement agreement was being developed?

Jonah Well in my own judgment, this was one of the few

agreements for which Kissinger, I would say, has the full credit. It was the most difficult agreement to reach and the United Nations had a minimal role to play with the signing of the agreement itself. And as I said it was very difficult because it was a major thing for the Israelis to pull out because there was this terrible hostage situation where they were killed. I never thought the Israelis would pull out. But again you also had an attrition war that was going on in the Golan Heights, a very difficult war because it was all fought in the mountains. I would say this is the only agreement from my academic analysis where the Israelis were forced to accept something that they did not want to accept. Everything else, it was more or less what the Israelis wanted; but in this case they did not want it because they were against withdrawing from Quneitra, completely opposed, but I think Kissinger by whatever means .... this is really one place where he gets full credit.

Now what was the problem? The problem we discovered for all the agreements in the Middle East was that you had to renegotiate every term because there were so many vaguenesses in them. So we had problems because he was able to get this nice agreement but in Geneva we had to spend two weeks to renegotiate and refine all the terms. That was very difficult, very very difficult because what I call this question of constructive ambiguity means that

each side has to fight to gain the maximum. The first thing we discovered when we went to Geneva, was - and there of course the Americans were present which was very good. The Syrians refused to sit down with the Israelis, completely refused, and said they would never never sit with the Israelis. The Egyptians were represented there because the [military] working group was an Egyptian-Israeli working group. The Syrians were not in Geneva for the Geneva Peace Conference. So we worked out that there would be an Egyptian-Israeli working group and the Syrians would join the Egyptians. That was agreed. So the Syrian delegate was not really negotiating, it was under the Egyptian. And it worked out that way. Then secondly on the agreement, you know there was a big problem when in the signing ceremony the whole thing had to stop because the Syrians objected. So that was one thing, we had to work out the details. Then we had to go through the agreement because the parties had a misunderstanding. Here again the United Nations played the same role that it played at km. 101, particularly with transferring the agreement to a map. In fact it was the same concept which was transferred from the Sinai to the Golan Heights. The same concept, the same limitations, and of course, what we used to call the team of the United Nations which has been there was very very instrumental indeed.

JSS Now which team was this in the case of the Golan Heights?

Jonah It's the same United Nations team. Siilasvuo, myself and one captain from Ireland. On the Israeli side there were the same people who were with us at 101, just the head was different, and of course [Gamasy] who was with us in 101 plus the Syrians but they did not want to talk. So the Syrians were more or less listening to us.

JSS At that point the Syrians talked to you at least...

Jonah Oh yes, everything was through us....

JSS They did not even then talk to the Israelis?

Jonah No, no, they didn't talk. Everything was through us, and then of course and we had these teams of Americans and Russians and we were always consulting with them. But mainly with the Americans because they had been the ones who were involved so we tried to say, "look, in this agreement on this, what is your understanding about the agreement?" Kissinger did not spell out everything in detail. The United Nations played a tremendous role in that two-week period in Geneva in trying to put into concrete form the agreement. But the agreement itself which was signed was solely Kissinger's....

JSS But by being involved at that stage in Geneva then it was fairly easy for the United Nations to know exactly where UNDOF would be deployed?

Jonah Oh yes. Again, as I said, the chairman's statement was worked out in Geneva and that is what governed the

operation of the force. So again the same thing happened. We left Geneva, Siilasvuo and I, then we came directly to Damascus and set up the same type of team - the three tents, exactly the same thing was done and now I stayed again there for about I think two weeks until the process was almost finished, and then I came back to New York.

JSS One final question that really is a general question. Henry Kissinger does refer fairly frequently to contacts that he had with Secretary-General Waldheim, not always in the most flattering terms. What was your impression of the American attitude and the Kissinger attitude to the extent that you could see it toward the United Nations? The United Nations was very much involved in both the south and the north - did you feel that there was a respect, a concern to keep the United Nations informed or not?

Jonah I feel there was complete respect. I really am convinced that this changed Kissinger's whole attitude toward the United Nations because of the role that we played. I think Kissinger realized that these agreements could not stand without the United Nations. First of all the supplies, he realized that the United Nations bailed them out because we supplied the Third Army. We used our trucks, we used our drivers, because the Israelis would not permit the Egyptians drivers to come in. We did the inspection in Suez City. So he realized that that

agreement couldn't have stood without the United Nations apart from what the part we played under the tent. Then he realized when we were dealing with the Golan Heights similarly because the key was what was the role of the United Nations. The Israelis wanted a large United Nations force, the Syrians wanted only observers. And they compromised by calling it UNDOF and they found that this was sort of a key element in the whole thing. Then in the whole question of how you man the various disengagement zones, the inspections, he realized the United Nation's importance. Then in 1975 he realized even more because Congress was against American deployment in the Sinai and Kissinger was able to argue that it's not the United States, it's the United Nations, we are guests of the United Nations, that was the argument he was making in Congress. Then it came to the Coastal zone in the Suez and there was a key ticklish point. There were oil fields, and there is one road that goes from Suez to Sharm el-Sheikh and there had to be a joint use of the road. The United Nations had to come in to provide a buffer time for sharing of the road bank. Kissinger was convinced the United Nations had a maximum role, and how do I know this? You know when we were short of money, I said, "look, we have been so helpful to this man." So we asked him for 10 million. The next day he said, "you have 10 million." Anything we asked

Kissinger, he gave us. And then to clear it up, I have a testimonial which Waldheim asked me to frame. I have it here, which I think for the first time Kissinger gave credit to somebody else for doing something, I still have it here in my file.

JSS A personal ... from Kissinger to....

Jonah I'll show it to you when we're finished. Waldheim called me and said, "James you have to frame this because this is the first time I've heard Kissinger giving credit to anybody for anything".

JSS Thank you very much, I think this is the end of the tape here.

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