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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Hazem Nusseibeh
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
14 March 1998
Amman, Jordan

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Hazem Nusseibeh

Interviewed by Jean Krasno

March 14th, 1998

in Amman, Jordan

Jean Krasno: So, for the record, would you please explain something about your background, where you were born and educated, and then we will get into the history.

Hazem Nusseibeh: Yes. Well, I welcome you to Jordan, which I understand is your first visit.



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JK: First visit, yes--well thank you.

Dag Hammarskjöld

HN: You came at the right moment, because it is spring now, and if you go around the countryside you will find plenty of flowers and everything else. I was born in Jerusalem in 1922. I had my elementary education at Rawdd College, an Arab national college in Jerusalem, in the old city of Jerusalem, which overlooks the Haram Sharif area--it is a beautiful spot--it is right overlooking the Haram Sharif area. You know the old sacred sanctuary? And we used to go walking to school. In those days there were hardly any cars--you could count them on your fingers--and we used to go walking, but we were healthy. In every season--just walk. And after Rawdd College, I went to Victoria College in Alexandria--it is an English public school, an excellent school--where I had my

secondary education. After that, I went to the American University of Beirut, a wonderful university which I hope will always survive and prosper, in spite of every adversity, because it is well-worth it--it is one of the best institutions in the world in my opinion, and has graduated some of the best leaders in the Arab world. After the AUB, where I got my bachelor's degree in political science, I went back to Jerusalem where I enrolled in the law school. It was a government institution or sponsored school. Some of the best judges in Palestine then were teaching, and lawyers were teaching at that school. I spent five years there.

JK: When was that?



HN: Between 1943 and 1948. You see, I finished Victoria College in 1940, the American University of Beirut between 1941 and 1943; I went back to Jerusalem where I was appointed in the government as a senior program assistant at the Palestine Broadcasting, and this government school was a night school, so it was between five and eight, so I could be both a government employee as well as a student, studying at night. SO, I finished those five years of studies, which ended in 1948. After that, you know we had the catastrophe of Palestine, the dispersal, the exodus. Fortunately, then, my part of Jerusalem had remained in our hands. So I was not dislodged, I had not become a refugee in 1948, even though I became so as a displaced person in 1967. At any rate, I stayed there until 1950. In 1950 we were then working in Ramallah, because the Israelis had occupied the western part of Jerusalem, they had taken over the studios and everything else, so we had the basic transmission installation in Ramallah, just to the north of

Jerusalem where the broadcasting now is--where the seat of the Palestinian authority is now. I stayed there until 1950. I then became the director of the Press Department. And then, I had an opportunity to study in the United States, an exchange program. It isn't the Fulbright, but it is something similar. I don't know what... [the Smith-Mundt].

JK: Well, they have the Hubert Humphrey exchange also?

HN: No, this wasn't it. At any rate, it was a one-year exchange program—the Smith-Mundt—and I went to the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, where I had to squeeze my studies to get my MPA in one year. You will imagine how many hours of work I used to put into my assignment. It was literally nothing else but studying and work. I had been married in 1950, just before I went to the United States. It was work, but I enjoyed it very much; it was very, very enjoyable. The thing I remember in Princeton was that there were two cinemas. There were no TV sets, fortunately, because that would have distracted me! And there was nothing to distract me except the *New York Times*, which is an excellent distraction incidentally. At any rate, I had my MPA (Master of Public Affairs) at the Woodrow Wilson School, and then I moved to the politics department. My wife insisted that I should finish my Ph.D., although I was hesitant, I must say. But then we were really softening up to life in the United States--we were beginning to like it! And then, as I said, I shifted to the politics department at my own expense. Not on the scholarship. And I had my other MA in politics, and then I did my Ph.D.

JK: Also at Princeton University?

HN: At Princeton, yes. And my thesis was “The Ideas of Arab Nationalism.” It is a theme which I was keenly... not only aware of, but I believed in this: Arab Unity, and Arab independence and so on, and we had a great deal of activity at the AUB in connection with Arab unity and its pursuit. We were a group of idealists at the university, all of us. And we had some of the top teachers, also, like Dr. Constantine Zurayk and others, instructing us on the various aspects of history and on Arab nationalism. With such a background, I wrote my thesis, which fortunately was published by Cornell University Press as a book in 1956; I had written it in 1954, but then it took them perhaps a year and a half to print. I remember that I was in Jerusalem, in charge of the Mixed Armistice Commission, I was chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission. The Israeli-Arab mixed armistice commission, which had the job of adjudicating all the conflicts that were happening at the demarcation line, the armistice line. I remember Cornell University Press sent me a letter asking me to write a forward to this thesis, and it was published as a book.

JK: What is the title, just for the record?

HN: It is called *The Ideas of Arab Nationalism*. It is not connected with a narrative of events; it is a study of Arab thought, past and present. That’s why it has not become obsolete. It was taught at universities in Europe and the United States and England for at least twenty-five years as *the* book to study on the subject. They asked me then to update

it, but unfortunately I had become engaged in government and I really hadn't the time, so I apologized and that's why it did not remain *the* book, the authority on the subject; there were other books then on the subject, three or four other books. They wanted to print it in paper cover, but I didn't know much about publication so I said, "No--I mean, it wouldn't look nice." Because they wanted students to buy it, but I was short-sighted enough to tell them "No."

But at any rate, when I came back I worked, as I said, as chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission and then as under-secretary for the Ministry of Reconstruction and Development. This is a misnomer because it was the ministry in charge of Palestinian refugee affairs. But the late King Abdullah hated to name or to describe an Arab in an Arab country as a refugee. He regarded the entire Arab homeland as the home of every Arab. So, he called it the Ministry of Reconstruction. To 'reconstruct' their lives, rather than as refugees. But it was the ministry in charge of the refugees. And it was a terrible plight. Then it was only a few years after the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, so we had to cater to them all the way from a loaf of bread to a tent, to elemental health services, building camps, educating. It was extremely challenging, extremely interesting, but I felt we had an acute problem and I gave my all to it. I mean it was the only time when I felt that I over-worked myself because the problems were so gigantic. We had to deal with one million refugees.

JK: Did you work with the United Nations at that time?

HN: Yes. And my opposite number was Mr. Laboisie, the late Mr. Laboisie, a wonderful man. Of course, I represented the Jordan government and he was the representative of the United Nations Relief and Works agency for the Palestinian refugees. His headquarters was in Beirut and there were always directors in the various fields in Jordan, in Lebanon, in Syria, in Egypt, and we used to have conferences to deal with common problems of refugees. So, that was my first assignment in Amman. I had then decided to transfer from Jerusalem to Amman because I couldn't very well commute every day between Amman and Jerusalem. I had finished the highest position in Jerusalem, so then I came to Amman. We rented a house.

After this ministry, I became an under-secretary of the Ministry of National Economy, which was a relatively small apparatus but *extremely* efficient. Ten or fifteen people who were working in that ministry, all of them became distinguished in various pursuits. They became ministers, under-secretaries, and directors of companies. It shows how efficiency can be achieved by having a small rather than a huge operation. And everyone was encouraged to make decisions, to decide on a thing and not just to shuffle paper. So, after that, it was during that period that I started negotiations with the United States aid programs on an administrative agreement to govern the relationships between the United States and Jordan in the fields of economic and technical work. You see, there were political upheavals in Jordan in 1956, 1957, and 1958, after which the United States government came as the principal helper of Jordan in economic assistance and budgetary supplements.

[interrupted]

JK: ... Well, we were talking about that period between 1956 and 1958.

HN: Yes. We were evolving or setting up a new set up called the Development Board which would be in over-all charge of the economic and social development of Jordan, instead of the Ministry of National Economy and then the Public Works Department and so on and so forth. So, this became a mammoth organization. I really had thousands of employees because it contained so many government agencies: public works, the agricultural agency, everything. But then we divested the Development Board of all of these departments, and it became as it is now just a planning agency. I became Vice-President of the Development Board, after being under-secretary of the Department. And it was there that we did the first five-year program for economic development in Jordan.

JK: Oh, ok. The very first one.

HN: We had the assistance of the Ford Foundation. They funded the experts who came from America. Some of them were very distinguished scholars, professors. For example, I am trying to remember some of their names... one of them, Mr. Heller, became the chief of the economic advisory council at the White House. At any rate, we wrote the first five-year program, 1962-1967, and unfortunately we never had the chance to write another five-year program under this umbrella because the war of 1967 came upon us and we lost the West Bank.

I forgot to mention that after the Development Board I became the Foreign Minister in 1962 and I held this position in several administrations. Between 1962 and the end of 1966, more or less. And I became also the Minister of the Royal Court for some time in 1964; I remained there about 18 months; two years, only two years at the Royal Court. [It is the equivalent in the U.S.A. of principal political advisor to President or Chief of Staff at the White House.]

JK: Well, let me ask you some things then about the period around 1967, because you are definitely intricately involved in that so we could ask some questions on that. There were a number of events that were leading up to the actual conflict. I understand that there had been reports given to Nasser that there were Israeli forces building up on the Syrian border. Had Jordan been receiving the same reports?

HN: No. I don't think so. Even though I was not in government, but I was in close touch with the government, and with the Palace, I was very close. I used to go every other day, more or less. No such reports about this. This I think was the beginning of the disastrous development of events. In my opinion this was *planted*, planted by people who wanted to trigger a war for some reason. I hate to talk about 'conspiracy' but it seems that some Russian general--he may have been... I don't know...--in whose service I don't know.

JK: Because, I had understood that it was Soviet reports.

HN: It was a Soviet report. I said once, to the Russian ambassador, “How could you have told us that there were masses of troops, and so on?” and he couldn’t explain. Nobody can yet explain who did that, not even the Soviet government. I don’t know. This colonel, who was a military attaché, simply wanted to put over a point, a message, and it is still a mystery. It led to such a disaster for so many people, so many people.

JK: But I understand that UNTSO was asked to go up and have a look and see if the reports were true and did report back to the UN that they saw nothing. Did any one receive the reports from UNTSO that there was nothing there?

HN: No, I don’t think that the Jordan government was dealing directly with this. You see, our relationships with Syria then were at zero level, or sub-zero. It was, you know, the Syrians who instigated the whole thing, and they also got President Nasser involved. It is a mysterious kind of... it is almost like trapping somebody. We were not in on the information because, you know, even two or three days before the 1967 War, a week before, a big explosion was placed by the Syrians, exploded at the Jordan-Syrian border and 23 people were either killed or wounded.

JK: That was taking place at the same time?

HN: At the same time--imagine! And a day or two after we had to find ourselves entering a war. With Egypt, the situation was slightly better because his majesty, the King, had developed a special relationship with President Nasser so there was some

communication between them. But even then, President Nasser then did not feel perhaps that he had to be privy to his information with King Hussein. It was still between Egypt and Syria, and General Mohammed Fawzi was sent by President Nasser to Damascus to investigate, to ask them, "True or not true?" and what assistance they wanted. So, they seemed to have convinced him that the reports were true, and so Egypt acted on the basis of this information, or should I call it 'misinformation.'

And then we got ourselves involved. As a matter of fact, on more than one occasion I told his majesty, "Why did we have to get into this war?" And his answer was "Well, what else could we do?" We knew that public opinion was totally mobilized, that it was 'we' versus expansionist Israel, and that we had to stand by Egypt if attacked, otherwise we would all be swallowed up one after the other. It's like being a member of NATO, and if France was attacked, the United States would do what? The United States would immediately respond by entering the war. So, we had the Arab collective security then, under which we were obligated to come to the aid of an Arab country that fell under attack. Which is what happened on June 5th, 1967. I mean, the Israeli air force came out of the clear blue skies; they bombarded Egypt, they destroyed its air force. And this was really... the war was finished in two hours. These two hours where the Israeli air force destroyed the Egyptian air force on the ground. I think our biggest mistake was that at those crucial hours between eight and ten, because apparently the United Nations General, what's his name, came and said, he conveyed the message saying the Israelis would not attack if Jordan does not attack. But of course this would have created an impossible situation because the King had already met President Nasser in Cairo, two or three days before the war, they signed an accord to come to each other's assistance--so

when Jordan heard that Egypt was attacked, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Jordanian forces was a well-known Egyptian general, Abdul Mun'im Riyadh, it was a unified command. So, automatically we found ourselves involved in this terrible war, for which we were not prepared in any way. I mean, all the staff, the military staff, in Cairo, representing Jordan, Syria, Egypt and so on, and commanded by General Ali Aāmer, a very well known Egyptian commander...

JK: What is his name again? General...

HN: Ali Ali Aāmer. I attended the summit conferences where he said, "The West Bank is militarily naked; the West Bank is militarily naked. Don't do anything--not before 1970, 1971, when at least we will have made some rudimentary preparations to defend the West Bank." So the West Bank was open, it was sacrificed. We should never have entered this war. Never. Some people tell you, "Oh, well what would have happened--there would have been a revolt?" Well, a revolt would have been much more merciful, I think, than entering the war and losing that area. I don't think there would have been a revolt. There would have been some disturbances, there would have been strikes, there would have been all kinds of protests. But then in twenty-four hours, those people who were protesting here in Jordan would have discovered that Egypt had already lost the war, and then they would have said, "Thank God, we did not take the plunge." In the same way as in 1956--in 1956 His Majesty is a patriotic man and he felt an urge to help Egypt. Egypt was attacked in 1956--he literally called up the army to join, to join the war. And he gave orders to the army to be ready to enter Palestine, I mean to enter, to

join the war. And I knew this from Sayyah al-Roussān who was under-secretary of the Ministry of National Defense, and he sent Mr. Bahjat Talhouni, the chief of the Royal Court to tell the government to declare this war in support of Egypt, when Egypt was under attack. But the Prime Minister then, who was an ultra-nationalist, and who had connections with Egypt and President Nasser, told the Chief of the Royal Court, "No, I am not going to take orders from you; I am going to seek orders from the Commander-in-Chief who is Abdul Hakim Aāmer." He had received cables from Egypt, from Cairo, advising him; they said, "Please don't enter the war. Thank you for helping us. Because the war involves much more than Israel." You know, it involved England and France, two major powers. And President Nasser then had the decency to tell us, "Thank you very much but please don't get involved." Unfortunately for some reason he didn't have the same opinion in 1967. Either he did not know, some of his aides--I mean, I was Ambassador in Cairo, and I was a friend of all the Vice-Presidents, including Shaafe'i who told me how he was the first to tell President Nasser what happened. He bade farewell to the Prime Minister of Iraq, and then on his return he saw the destruction of the airfields and he told President Nasser around noon, "the whole plan." You can read all the books about what happened, but I am telling you my own personal recollection--that they feel that President Nasser did not know what had happened, that his air force had been destroyed, that literally the battle had been lost. What is the use of infantry in an open desert like Sinai when your enemy has total superiority of the air? The Egyptian soldiers were literally massacred; they were butchered. So unfortunately the Jordanian army, also without any air support, had no chance whatever. They fought very bravely but whenever

there was stiff resistance, you would find a couple of aircraft coming over again and lobbing a rocket, which would destroy the camp. So, there was no military balance.

JK: There were two things that Nasser did that made the world believe that Egypt was planning an attack, and that was asking for the UN peacekeepers, the UNEF, to be removed, because people interpreted that as getting them out of the way in preparation for an attack.

HN: By Egypt.

JK: ... by Egypt. And the second was the closing of the Strait of Tiran for Israeli ships.

HN: I will give you a different story and I believe in it. I think this is not a true story and I think we--and I mean by 'we' the official media of Jordan--were instrumental in getting President Nasser so fed up, because we were telling him, "You are hiding behind the United Nations--that you are more or less a coward, that you are now telling us about patriotism--while you are hiding behind the United Nations." And he was so taunted by this that... you know President Nasser was very sensitive to these remarks. He would receive reports about what somebody, smoking a nargila (water pipe) in Algeria, in Sidon, at the seashore, was saying about him. He was this type of leader, who always had his ear to the man in the street. And we were telling him this because we always had those political wars in the media with the propaganda machines of Egypt and Jordan and Syria

and so on. So, when it came to this mobilization, or the alleged mobilization of Israeli troops at the Syrian border, he sent General Muhammad Fawzi to Damascus and Egypt decided to mobilize, then he asked--and this is where perhaps he may have made a mistake--for a partial withdrawal of some of the United Nations troops, I think, from Gaza or Sharm el-Sheikh.

JK: There was actually a letter sent from General Fawzi to General Indarjit Rikhye, who was the commander, and that was how the message was given. It wasn't ever given to U Thant directly. It was through the General.

HN: Yes, but I thought that U Thant, if he had been Mr. Kofi Annan, the present Secretary-General of the United Nations, perhaps things may have changed, because President Nasser never wanted to have the whole, entire UN force withdrawn, but U Thant said, "No. You either withdraw the whole UN set-up, or else we keep all of it." So, he put Nasser in an untenable position. You must remember that President Nasser had a big ego, because he was a leader of the Arab world, whenever he talked 200 million Arabs were tuned into their radios to listen to him. So, he was put on the spot. In my opinion it could have been worked out differently; he wanted to send his Vice-President, Zakaria Muhyiddin to Washington to work things out. He didn't want the war. But he was placed in an untenable situation by U Thant. They asked him to... he had to mobilize on this false information. And when he wanted to have the UN forces removed partially he was told "No, you either remove the whole UN forces or else they will stay."

I don't know if Kofi Annan was Secretary-General if he would have acted in a different way. You see, the strategic backdrop to all of this was--and let's face it, the United States and Israel were out to get President Nasser, full-stop. Since 1965, when President Nasser told President Johnson to drink the sea--I didn't know whether it was the Red Sea, or the Mediterranean...

JK: ... but it's salty!

HN: It's salty all the same. If he had told him to drink the Nile River, Johnson might not have minded things. But to drink the Mediterranean is a terrible punishment. So, he got all his people and he said, "Now, let's get Nasser." And they started preparing; the Israelis were preparing for this war, which had strategic goals. They wanted to seize the West Bank. They wanted to take over--and primarily Jerusalem. We were always saying, as a government--I as foreign minister was always saying--"If Israel attacks, it doesn't care very much about Sinai or Syria, we are the target. We knew it was Jerusalem, before everything else." And now everybody realizes that the war was to take over Jerusalem. Even the rest of the West Bank would be for bargaining purposes. They might be willing to surrender parts of it. So, a trap was there for President Nasser, he drove into it, and we all had to pay the price. We all had to pay the price.

JK: What about the strategy of closing the Straits? Why was that?

HN: It is a part of President Nasser's, or any other big leader's, super-ego. He had to close the Straits because he could not, after putting his troops, let them see Israeli ships carrying the Israeli flag, pass through the Tiran Straits, psychologically. You see, you are asking a question that would have been understandable in the mid-1960s when President Nasser was at the peak of his prestige, the peak of his power, the peak of everything. And there his forces have to see the Israeli flag coming through what are really Egyptian waters. So, that was his dilemma. I wish he had conceded this, because we might have been able to avoid war. Because after all, how many ships were going to the Far East via Aqaba? Very few. But Israel wanted to get us into this war. In fact, one of the Israeli newspapers, one week after the June 5th war wrote, "We laid a trap for King Hussein, and he fell right into it." Immediately after June 5th, the Israelis were opening up all their books, because they thought that it was the end of the world; they had won a decisive victory, so they can afford to speak. They said it point-blank: "We have laid a plan to trap King Hussein and he fell right into it." And therefore the same applies to President Nasser. The Syrian Ba'ath Party--I don't know whether they believe their own propaganda or not--they thought that in spite of losing the Golan they had not lost the war because the leadership of the Ba'ath party was still in power, as though the Israelis cared less whether Mr. So-and-So was in charge or not.

JK: What I was wondering was what you were leading up to--was that the media accounts, because it seemed as though for a while the media was reporting that the Arab forces were winning. Why?

HN: This was also a part of the trap. It was a part of the trap. The Israelis were confessing to our people after the war that it was a trap. They were afraid that Jordan might change its mind, that it might join the war, the 1973 war. At any rate, the Israelis were afraid that Jordan might... if they knew that Egypt had been defeated might hold off joining the war, so they kept their propaganda machine operating and informing everybody that the Arabs were winning, that we were destroying, including our Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador el-Farra. When he was told...

JK: That's right--that's what he was telling me yesterday.

HN: When he was told to ask for a cease-fire--"What do you mean a cease-fire? Never." He was under the impression that we were winning. It was differently inculcated, I mean. They said "Well, we can afford to let the Arabs rejoice for three or four days until they will discover the terrible truth that they were defeated." So, why not? They knew, the Israelis knew.

JK: Well, you had said that actually the Egyptian air force had been decimated, basically, in a couple of hours. What was the timing of the situation on the Jordan side?

HN: Unfortunately, it was very bad timing. I wish our entry had been delayed for two hours. I remember on one occasion...

JK: So, it's just a matter of hours...

HN: Yes. I remember once telling his Majesty, I said, "I wish, if we wanted to enter, why didn't we just delay it for two hours? We would have known from our military attaché in Cairo about what happened to the Egyptian air force." And he looked dazed, himself. He said, "But the big man himself was with us and he didn't know. You want our military attaché in Cairo to know?" Because we had Riyadh who was one of the top Egyptian commanders, and he didn't know what happened to Egypt. And one of the paradoxes, which still puzzles me, is that immediately after the Israeli aircraft started taking off, we had some radar equipment at [?], which can uncover all the airfields in Palestine. We immediately saw the masses of Israeli planes taking off. So they sent a message to Cairo. I don't know to whom they sent it, to the Secretary of the Minister of War or the Minister of Defense; the code was "the apples are on their way to you." Meaning the aircraft. That Secretary of the Minister of War was afraid, apparently, to wake up his boss. So he did not communicate the message. This is how the story goes, but he had reluctantly sent a word to Cairo that the planes are on their way to you. They were twenty minutes...

JK: What time of day was that? In the middle of the night?

HN: In the morning. When they saw the planes taking off from the Israeli airports. If the message had been given to the Minister and he had given orders to the Egyptian air force to be airborne then the whole disaster might have been averted.

JK: That's right--they took off at about three a.m. or something like that.

HN: No. They took off at 7:30 in the morning. Or 7:00, 7:30. It was morning. But the Minister apparently--was he tried or wasn't he?--I don't know. The Minister of War. You will find this all documented. I am telling you just personal reflections.

JK: But it is interesting because you put it all together and mix it with the analysis.

HN: Yes, with the complete information that you will find in books.

JK: What was Jordan's view of Resolution 242?

HN: Incidentally, before that, to be fair to the American diplomats, you had an Ambassador in Amman who was a very honorable man, and I was invited to dinner in his house with a few friends and we were sitting alone at the table, having a little wine and talking, and he said, "Be careful, because our President can be mischievous" or something like this.

JK: Meaning President Johnson?

HN: Yes. "Be careful," he said, "Be careful." He knew that the trap was there.

Another American diplomat, it may be that he is a friend of Ambassador Abdulla Salah,

Ambassador Murphy. We were three, the late Mr. Rifai and Mr. Fayez and myself, we were a trio, politicians in the same government who had been ousted from government and therefore were still active politically--and when this crisis flared up, we were going from one place to another, conveying messages, asking, you know... Ambassador Murphy asked to come and see Abdul Mun'im Rifai, the former Prime Minister, he was then I think Foreign Minister or something, and I was there, and he advised both of us, he said, "Why don't you advise his Majesty to patch up with President Nasser."

[interrupted]

HN: What was I saying.... Yes, Ambassador Murphy advised Mr. Abdul Mun'im Rifai in my presence, he said, "Why don't you advise his Majesty to patch up with President Nasser?" We were in a very bad relationship with President Nasser, with Egypt, generally.

JK: When was this period?

HN: In the week leading up to the 5th of June 1967 war, just before the war, two or three days before...

[end of side 1]

[side 2]

HN: We had a former Prime Minister, he was the foremost nationalist Prime Minister, Mr. Nabulsi. He always had guests around in his saloon discussing politics every afternoon, and when I entered he said he was trying to prove to everybody who was sitting there that there was a conspiracy in which the United States was involved with Israel, etc., to get this war and to get us into this catastrophe. And so he said, "Ask Dr. Nusseibeh, didn't Ambassador Murphy, who was in the embassy, didn't he tell you and Mr. Abdul Min'im Rifai to advise his Majesty to patch up with President Nasser a week before? Why were they trying to make us fight with President Nasser, until a week before the war because they wanted us to get into the war and to lose the war?" And so I told him, "But Mr. Nabulsi, I never said a word to the Majesty about patching up. Nor did Abdul. He said, "Well, I know, I know, but I am sure he must have said it to other people who advised his Majesty to patch up." This is how it ran. I told him, "I never advised his Majesty." He said, "Yes, but--he said this to you, and I am sure he said it to others who did advise his Majesty." At any rate, we had to pay this terrible price. But it was wrong.

JK: OK, then I was going to ask you what was Jordan's view of the Security Council Resolution 242, when it was being written?

HN: When it was written I was not in the big chair-- oh, let me see, was I? I remember from my point of view, Mr. Rifai at one time... I may have been a Minister or Ambassador. Anyway, I went to New York, it was 1968, if I am not mistaken. And I went to his house and I asked him, "Why did this vagueness get in this resolution? What

do you mean by 'the withdrawal from Arab territories?'" Believe me--this was my first impression. He said, "Of course, everybody knows that it means 'from all the territory.'" "So why didn't they put 'from all the territory?'" I said, "No, no, no. We were agreed that this is the meaning and the French ambassador explained that it means in French from '*the* territories,' all the territory." And I persisted in asking this question, not only from Mr. Rifai, who got us into this agreement, but also from the author of this resolution, what's his name, our friend Lord Caradon. Lord Caradon, who had come to New York when I was Ambassador in New York, he would come to New York and lecture at universities, at Princeton and Harvard, etc., and he would make a point of visiting me in my office at the Mission, drink coffee and talk. And every time I saw him I would tell him, "Lord Caradon, why is it that you have written in this vague manner, to put us into this boat, in the same way as the British have been doing in all the politicking?" And he would say, "Well, you know, the great powers wanted this or that." And finally I was walking to the UN and he was walking out of it, and he stopped there and I asked him the same question. He said, "You have been discussing this with me every time, so I wanted to tell you why it was. You have been defeated in that war, and this is the best wording that we could have gotten out of the situation." He admitted that it was made vague because this is best that they could have gotten.

JK: Because they couldn't get the other five permanent members to agree to anything more specific than that?

HN: Yes. Well, it would be, of course, the United States and its friends, unfortunately this was not the case before, before we could get the American government to support us in many, many things. From my own experience, even as a Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 1960s, but things have shifted, and after 1967, the American attitude and the Israeli attitude were always found identical. Unfortunately, we could never separate one from the other.

JK: That was one of the things I wanted to ask, actually: Was there a shift after 1967?

HN: Yes, yes. There was a shift. It maybe also concurrent with another shift in the United States itself. I was a student in the United States in the 1950s, and the Israeli influence was minimal. There was always Israeli influence, but it was minimal. At Princeton University, it did not exist then. But during the past two decades they seem to have gotten the ascendancy. I mean, there were always people in the State Department who were pro-Arabists, distinguished ambassadors whom we liked very much, we liked many, many of them; very friendly, and they kept the close relationship between the Arab world and the United States. We could start all the way from the American University of Beirut with all its professors and so on, doctors and so on, and this could apply to the US ambassadors throughout the Arab world. Now, there is no longer such a thing as Arabists in the State Department. We feel that the American government is now in the grips of the Israeli lobby.

JK: Did Jordan ever consider having UN peacekeeping troops on its borders?

HN: We never had to have peacekeeping troops because what we had was the United Nations military observers. I mean, what it means to me, the armistice commission would be always surrounded in the room of our meeting by twenty-five officers, representing various nations, who were all very capable officers but they were observers, not troops. When did we need to have troops? We never did need to have troops. In 1967, we would have loved to have UN troops, but Israel withdrew them. Israel would never let them in. If your question is, "Would you have agreed to have UN troops in exchange for the Israeli withdrawal?" I would say, "Of course we would have welcomed them." But the question never arose.



JK: It never arose... OK. Well, maybe we should skip ahead a little bit more--should we discuss for a few minutes the 1973 war?

HN: The 1973 war, I will give you a little synopsis of my recollection. I was, as I mentioned earlier, helping our mission in New York with a few other ambassadors like Mr. Rifai, a very distinguished Prime Minister whom I am sure you will see, I don't know. He is now president of the Senate. So, just before the war: imagine the war happened on Saturday, if I am not mistaken, the Yom Kippur war, the October war, and the American Secretary of State, during the session of the United Nations, usually comes to New York and he meets thirty, forty, fifty foreign ministers, representing all the friendly countries of the world, or even the unfriendly.

JK: This is the opening sessions of the General Assembly, yes.

HN: He utilizes the presence of so many foreign ministers under one roof to meet them one after the other. And there has always been, in my recollection, a meeting between a Jordanian and the Secretary of State. I met Mr. Dean Rusk when I was Foreign Minister in 1962 and 1964. So a meeting was set up for the Jordan foreign minister--I was not then foreign minister, I was Ambassador at Large, with Mr. Kissinger. It was the Friday, if I am not mistaken, just the day before the Yom Kippur War. We met, there; Mr. Kissinger knew Mr. Zeid Rifai, so he started his meeting by welcoming us, welcoming the Foreign Minister, and Mr. Rifai was one of his students at Harvard.

JK: He was one of Kissinger's students at Harvard? I didn't know that.

HN: Yes. So, he told him.... He knew him, anyway. He told him, "Well, how is his Majesty?" We were four or five of us. We went to see Kissinger. And he also had three or four assistants. To start with, as we entered the US mission, Kissinger in a gesture--which I did not at all appreciate--there was the public press and so on, he said, "You know, its good to be among such distinguished people that would be on TV, and so on." He was glad that we were there so that they would take his picture with us, and so on. So they took our photograph and then we entered the room, and he said, "How is his Majesty?" Mr. Rifai said, "Well, he's very well." And then he said, "I am planning to see him sometime," the 20th of October, or was it? I forget the date... So Mr. Kissinger started talking. He said, "Let's now talk about our problem. We have to do something

about peace in the Middle East and so on.” He said, “What do the Israelis care if they stay at the Suez Canal for the next ten years?” He said it so literally. We said, “What do they think, they can stay there for the next ten years?” In other words, who can dislodge them? “So, let us make some effort at peace and let us do this, and let’s do that.”

Incidentally, earlier, a few months earlier, the Egyptian government sent Dr. Zayyat, who was foreign minister, to the Security Council to alert them, to tell them to move forward. It seemed that Anwar Sadat sent him in preparation for the eventuality of the war, in case the Security Council did not act. And he quarreled with the late Abdul Hamid Sharab, so the government sent me to patch it up, which I did. So I went there and I remember him saying at the Security Council, “What shall I go and tell my people when I go back to Cairo? I am returning empty handed. We are asking, we are extending our hand for peace, and nobody is responding.” The Israelis were rude, I remember they were very, very rude in the Security Council, had no response whatsoever. And that ended.

And then I came back to the October War and Kissinger. So, he said, “The Israelis stay there for the next ten years.” We ended our meeting and we went to our hotels, and the next day, early in the morning--I used to buy a little radio because I like the music in the hotel, and when I heard that some suspicious troop movements had been observed in the Sinai. So it was early in the morning. I awakened my colleagues at the Waldorf Astoria and here and there, I told them, “It looks as though war is on us.” And then it was war.

The important thing is, the question is, you probably might provide an answer to it better than can I--did Mr. Kissinger have any idea at all that war was going to be launched the next day? When he was telling us the day before that, “What does Israel care--it can

keep its troops for the next ten years at the banks of the Suez Canal?” Was he totally uninformed about what was impending? Or did he have any inkling that the war was going to happen? I mean, he told our delegation--was he acting when he told us, “What does Israel care if it remains for the next ten years?” He said it to me, to Mr. Rifai, to Mr. Mufti, and I forget who else was there. We were told. I thought he was with us.

HN: So, I am surprised, you see. It was a real surprise to see that the war came as a surprise even to the United States.

JK: I think from all information that I have been able to put together, it was an absolute surprise.



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HN: Because it is himself Kissinger--it was by accident that our turn came on a Friday, just the day before the war, which began on Saturday.

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JK: Thank you very, very much.

HN: Not at all.

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Hazem Nusseibeh

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 14th, 1998

Amman, Jordan

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