

United Nations Oral History Project

**Rafeuddin Ahmed
19 October 1990**

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YUN INTERVIEW
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL RAFEEUDDIN AHMED
NEW YORK
OCTOBER 19, 1990
SUTTERLIN INTERVIEWER

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- JSS Mr. Ahmed I want to first thank you for agreeing to participate in this Yale University Oral history project on the United Nations; and, if I might, I'd like first to, since we are going to be talking about the Falklands/Malvinas crisis and war, to ask that you indicate what your position was in the United Nations at the time the crisis became acute.
- AHMED I am very pleased, Jim, to be able to assist you in this endeavor. At the time of the Falkland Islands/Malvinas crisis I was, as I am now, an Under-Secretary-General in the United Nations.
- JSS Right. If I'm not mistaken you had recently left the position of Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General.
- AHMED Yes, a few months earlier I had left that position.
- JSS Now one can take April 1 as perhaps the beginning of the acute stage of the Falklands crisis but my first question relates really to the months before that. Was there an awareness, a knowledge, a concern in the United Nations on the part of the Secretary-General or others about the possibility of violence with regard to the Falkands.
- AHMED Frankly, I was not dealing with this issue in the United Nations at that time but, to the best of my knowledge from my previous position, I could say that nobody, in fact, had been following the bilateral talks between

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the United Kingdom and Argentina which had been initiated some time earlier. In the United Nations, the only department which had some relationship to the Falklands/Malvinas issue was the Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization, because the territory was on the list of non-self-governing territories to which the declaration on the granting of independence applied. And every year, the Department had to prepare a working paper for the Committee of 24 on this subject, and, in that paper, they did make reference to whatever was in the public domain in relation to the contacts between the two sides.

JSS But when the crisis did become acute and when it became evident that Argentina was on the point of invading, the Secretary-General did, I understand, undertake certain contingency measures in which you were involved. Is that correct?

AHMED Well, the Secretary-General issued a statement on the first of April, 1982, calling on both sides to exercise maximum restraint; and then, as you know, on the second of April the Argentine forces invaded the Islands; and the Security Council on the following day, on the third of April, adopted resolution 502, 1982. On the 7th of April, I received a call from Switzerland from the Executive Assistant of the Secretary-General at that time, saying that the Secretary-General had decided to entrust me with the responsibility for following the developments concerning the Falklands/Malvinas Islands. The reason he gave was that the two under-Secretaries-General on the 38th

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floor who would normally be dealing with such an issue were not considered to be appropriate in this case because of their nationalities, one of them, Brian Urquhart, being British, and the other, Diego Cordovez, being Ecuadorian.

JSS And how did you go about under taking this new responsibility?

AHMED Soon after the return of the Secretary-General from Europe which happened on the 12th of April (he had then decided to interrupt his program in view of the crisis and to come back to the UN), he decided upon my recommendation, to set up a task force on the Falklands/Malvinas, in which I assembled representatives of the various departments and offices that could have a role in the eventual UN participation in the finding of a peaceful settlement of the dispute.

JSS So, in fact, this task force was established on your recommendation but it was established by the Secretary-General.

AHMED Yes, it was established by him.

JSS What was the first task that you undertook in this task force?

AHMED The first task that we undertook was to have some of the people on the task force assemble all information that was available on the issue, both within the United Nations, specifically, as I mentioned earlier, in the Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization, and elsewhere in the public domain, so that we could have a fairly reasonable record of what had transpired prior to the outbreak of the hostilities.

From that record, we tried to identify what might be the key issues which needed to be addressed in the search for a settlement.

JSS Did you find that adequate information was on hand in the United Nations at that time, for example information about the dependencies, South Georgia and so forth? Was that available?

AHMED Well, it was not readily available, but the members of the task force did some research, and they were able to bring forward papers non those issues that had not been available in a ready form.

JSS Now at this point the American mediation had begun; General Haig was doing shuttle diplomacy. To what extent could you take into account, in developing an approach, a contingency approach, what was happening in the US mediation effort?

AHMED The Secretary-General was in touch with the US. In fact, immediately after he came back from Geneva, he spoke to Secretary of State Haig, who was, at that time, in Buenos Aires. The following day, he had separate meetings with the ambassadors of the United Kingdom and Argentina. A few days later he again met separately with the ambassadors of the United States, United Kingdom and Argentina; and, on the basis of work done in the task force, he was able to present an informal note to them which outlined the assistance that the United Nations could render, if called upon to do so.

JSS This is the informal note of 19th of April.

AHMED That's the one.

JSS Which is a fairly extensive document in the sense that it covers quite a few functions that the United Nations might be able to perform, if called on to do so. Now, was this seen as possibly figuring in General Haig mediation efforts?

AHMED It was seen as a way of bringing to the attention of the two parties directly involved and the party that was serving as the mediator at the moment what potential existed in the United Nations that could be useful in the search for a settlement.

JSS In particular, the Secretary-General, in his conversation and in this note, spoke about the possibility of providing a temporary United Nations administration. How far had the thinking in the task force, and on the part of the Secretary-General, gone at that point as to how a United Nations administration might be structured?

AHMED The thinking in the task force was that this possibility should be brought out because it could provide a way of ensuring a transition without loss of face on either side. But, we had not worked out the details of how exactly that administration would be carried out. What we did feel was that a role for both the United Kingdom and Argentina should be foreseen in the interim period, alongside the United Nations.

JSS And you were unaware at that point that the American mediator, General Haig, was proposing some form of interim administration that would not include the United Nations.

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AHMED We were unaware of what General Haig was proposing at that time. So, this initiative was taken independently of whatever precise options were being explored by General Haig.

JSS And when this note was given to the American Ambassador, who I believe was Jeane Kirkpatrick, was she able to give any enlightenment to the Secretary-General as to precisely what General Haig was proposing.

AHMED I do not believe so. I don't recall being present at that meeting. But I do not believe we got any feedback from the ambassador.

JSS At this point, who on the Argentine side was the interlocutor with the Secretary-General?

AHMED At this point in time, it was the Permanent Representative, who was Ambassador Roca, and he was the one with whom the Secretary-General had the meetings .

JSS And this was before Ambassador Ros arrived, I believe.

AHMED Ambassador Ros arrived as an interlocutor when the Secretary-General had taken over the mediating role. Because, throughout the period of Secretary of State Haig's mediation, the Secretary-General had made it absolutely clear that he did not intend to come in and try to take over a good offices or mediation role, that he gave his full support to General Haig in his efforts to find a solution. The only initiative we took was, as I mentioned earlier, this informal note, which was presented in the hope that it could be of some assistance to the two parties and to General Haig when they were considering practical modalities in the context of settlement

JSS And was there a response from one or all the parties to this note?

AHMED Well, they took note of it, but, at that point, they did not, if I recall, directly give any formal response.

JSS Going ahead then to the end of General Haig's mediation efforts - well, indeed, just before that, as the Secretary-General was assuming the responsibilities, so to speak. There was another initiatives, namely a Peruvian initiative. I wanted to ask to what extent was the United Nations task force or the Secretary-General cognizant of the initiative of the Peruvian President.

AHMED The Peruvian initiative came a little later, if I remember correctly. I have to jog my memory. What happened was that, on the 30th of April, the Secretary-General met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina, Mr. Costa-Mendez, and, during that meeting, the Minister stated that his Government was ready to abide by Security Council resolution 502 and to accept direct action by the United Nations; and that Argentina was also willing to enter into negotiations, and to take into account the interests of the local population. But he still was insisting that the basic condition for a settlement remained the recognition of Argentine sovereignty over the islands. The same day, Secretary of State Haig sent the Secretary-General a letter providing information on the US good offices and the decision of the United States to impose sanctions on Argentina. That was the end of the

US mediation, although Secretary of State Haig stated in the letter to the Secretary-General that he stood ready to resume his efforts. So the Peruvian initiative, if I remember correctly, came later; but we were not initially, to answer your question, we were not initially informed about it, although, at a later stage, the Foreign Minister of Peru did provide the Secretary-General with an account of the initiative they had taken.

JSS Yes, according to my records, actually, it was on the first of May that the Peruvian initiative was first undertaken, which was more or less simultaneous with the conversation with the Argentine Foreign Minister. Apparently, there was, from publications now available, very close contact between the Peruvian President and American authorities, so that the American mediation formulas were taken into account and made part of the Peruvian. My real question is that this was not known at that point. So that, in effect, as the Secretary-General assumed the leading role as mediator, you were starting almost tabula rasa.

AHMED Right.

JSS Just looking back at it now, could time and effort have been saved if one had known specifically what the formula was that had been under discussion in London and Buenos Aires with General Haig?

AHMED I doubt it very much; because I think that the fact that that formula didn't work could have helped us, by negative example; that, if, by chance, we were going to follow the same approach, we could have avoided

that. But, as it turned out, we did not follow that approach and what we proposed seemed to be in the right direction and eventually could have served as the basis for a settlement, rather than the formula that General Haig was pursuing.

JSS I'm going to come back later to this question of timing, but, for the moment, I'd like to go on to another question. As the Secretary-General assumed the mediation responsibility, he was supported particularly by you and by the task force. How did he go about the mediation process? How would you describe the procedure that was followed in the following days?

AHMED Well the Secretary-General, in the first instance, met with Ambassador Roca and British Foreign Secretary Pym on the second of May. During these meetings, he handed over an identical aide memoire to the two sides which had been prepared in the task force on a contingency basis when the reports had started to come out regarding the possible failure of the Haig mediation effort. And, therefore, the Secretary-General was in the position almost immediately to pick up the ball. Of course, not knowing at that stage of the Peruvian initiative, we did not want a vacuum to exist. What we were afraid of was, if there was nobody mediating or trying to use good offices, there could be an immediate exacerbation of the conflict. The task force had prepared this aide memoire, which was then reviewed and finalized and handed over by the Secretary-General to the two sides on the second of May. Advantage was taken of Foreign Secretary Pym's visit, and

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both Ambassador Roca and Foreign Secretary Pym stated that they would give consideration to the Secretary-General's proposals and the aide memoire.

JSS Just as background, as this was beginning, did the task force seek to gather all the information that was available on what was happening both in terms of military developments and also the mediation developments, so that this knowledge would be available to the Secretary-General at least from open sources.

AHMED Yes, I believe from open sources whatever was available we were monitoring very carefully. But, of course, what was not known publicly, we could not monitor. This Peruvian initiative was not publicly known and we didn't have any information at that stage.

JSS Now this aide memoire which was handed to the British Foreign Secretary and the Argentine Representative, again, is a fairly comprehensive document, although brief, in the sense that it covers what might be the structure and content of an agreement; and it refers, among other things, to transitional arrangements to come into effect. These would be arrangements of the United Nations, I think, to supervise implementation of the various steps, such as the cease-fire and withdrawal of forces. I would ask here, again, the same question I asked earlier. How extensive, how complete was the thinking behind this offer at this point? Had the type of United Nations transitional supervision been defined?

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AHMED Well it was, as you say, not defined in the aide memoire. It only referred to the transitional arrangements, including interim administrative requirements.

The main thing about the aide memoire was the approach that we had decided to take, which was that there should be simultaneity. We discussed at length in the task force how we should approach this problem, whether we should have conditions on both sides to be fulfilled, whether there should be a step-by-step approach. We all came to the conclusion that simultaneity might, perhaps, be the best approach. And this is why, in the aide memoire, you see that at each step there is a parallelism and a simultaneity of action required from both governments: both governments start withdrawing; both governments commence negotiations to seek a diplomatic solution; both governments rescind their respective announcements of blockades and exclusion zones; both governments terminate all economic sanctions. Now, as far as the interim administrative requirements, again, at that point in time, we had some ideas, more or less developing on what we had thought earlier, that there would be a UN administration; that there would still be a role for the existing representatives of the people there. And so far as the Legislative Council, was concerned, in some way, they could be associated.

JSS So that, in fact, that is the significance of the, for the United Nation, rather unusual formulation, using a specified "Time T", when all of this was to happen?



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AHMED Yes, all of this to happen at the same time. Beginning at the specified "Time T".

JSS Again, in retrospect, there's one thing that doesn't seem to be covered in this aide memoire which had been a sticking point in the US mediation, and that is the formulation, or any formulation, about the desires, the wishes, the interests, of the inhabitants of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands. Was that already known in the task force to be a very difficult issue in terms of negotiations?

AHMED That was definitely known, because it was on that issue, the issue of sovereignty, that Secretary of State Haig's efforts had eventually foundered. He could not overcome that issue. So we did know about it, but we did feel that, in the aide memoire, we need not refer to that issue but rather to negotiations to seek a diplomatic solution to their differences. We did not define what those differences were or elaborate upon that point. Obviously, we knew that that was an issue, but we felt that it would not be in the best interests of securing the concurrence of the two parties to the approach outlined in the aide memoire if we spelled that issue out in greater detail.

JSS And the next step was the response of the British and the Argentines to this aide memoire. What was their response?

AHMED The British ambassador, Ambassador Parsons, who was a very eminent ambassador, met the Secretary-General on the 6th of May and handed over a message of the same date from Foreign Secretary Pym, informing the

Secretary-General that the British Government accepted the framework provided by the aide memoire. Earlier, the previous day, in fact the Secretary-General had received a similar letter from the Foreign Minister Costa-Mendez, accepting the Secretary-General's approach. So that opened the way for more formal mediatory efforts. And the Argentine Government designated Enrique Ros, who was Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, to be the main interlocutor on their side.

JSS

Can I just depart from the substance for a moment and ask you to give your impressions of the main protagonists on the various sides, that is the Argentine side, the British side, and if you will, also the American side at this point.

AHMED

As far as our contacts here were concerned, they mainly were with Ambassador Parsons, apart from the one meeting that had taken place with Foreign Secretary Pym over dinner. But, otherwise, Ambassador Parsons was the main interlocutor of the Secretary-General and he is an extremely able, very amiable, very personable individual, greatly experienced in diplomacy, very skilled and known at that time to be held in high esteem by his government and therefore able to operate with a certain amount of confidence. On the other side, Enrique Ros was known to us. He had been Permanent Representative of Argentina before, and, in that capacity, was very knowledgeable about the United Nations, had close relations with many Secretariat officials, and had left a very good name for himself in

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the United Nations. All of us were very pleased that he had been chosen as interlocutor, because we could again, in him, find what you might call an interlocutor "valable", a person who, again, could be considered as having the capacity to engage in a dialogue with trust, understanding. The fact that he was at a sufficiently high level in his government meant that he would speak with greater authority than perhaps the Permanent Representative could. But on the American side, frankly, we did not have an interlocutor, because we were not engaged in a mediatory effort with the Americans. But, from time to time, the Secretary-General did meet with Ambassador Kirkpatrick, who was Permanent Representative, and, also, he kept Secretary of State Haig informed on the telephone.

JSS Were there other Argentines in New York seemingly also engaged, perhaps with Ambassador Kirkpatrick, in some kind of effort with regards to the Falklands/Malvinas mediation?

AHMED There was no formal or other contact with us. At least, I don't remember them ever coming to see me and I don't believe anyone met the Secretary-General.

JSS No, the question really was whether there were separate Argentines here dealing with Mrs. Kirkpatrick.

AHMED Not to our knowledge at that time, except what came out in the press. There was a press report about Ambassador Kirkpatrick, but I don't remember if it was at that time or later. Frankly speaking, it was so long

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ago, it's difficult to place when this report came out in the press.

JSS Whatever it was, it was quite separate.

AHMED Absolutely.

JSS One other question about Enrique Ros. He had been Permanent Representative of Argentina before. In fact, am I correct that that was before the Junta took over in Argentina? So you would not have considered him directly related to the Junta?

AHMED I believe that's correct.

JSS I ask that question because I want to ask, in addition, whether, in the course of the intricate mediation, the Secretary-General or you gained a particular idea as to the decision-making process in Buenos Aires.

AHMED We were not sure exactly about the decision-making process in Argentina, but, as I said, we felt that, by sending Ambassador Ros, they were indicating their seriousness in the process. We also felt that he would, therefore, be in a better position to obtain decisions, or guidance as required, not knowing the intricacies of decision-making in Buenos Aires itself.

JSS Now, were there a number of military officers who were associated with him when he would speak with the Secretary-General?

AHMED There was nobody in uniform, at least. Somebody was present in the room in civilian clothes who happened to be a military person? It really never occurred to me.

JSS So as far as you were aware, then, the Junta had no direct representative here in dealing with ...?

AHMED As far I knew, there was nobody separate from Ambassador Ros who had his or her own agenda.

JSS Who seemed to have full authority.

AHMED To the extent that he was able to get instructions and then report back. And what he reported back to the Secretary-General seemed to be the position of whoever had the decision making powers in Buenos Aires.

JSS Now, I'd like to ask in this connection if you could describe the actual negotiation procedure that the Secretary-General undertook. Was it a piece-by-piece, step-by-step negotiating process in terms of wording?

AHMED First of all, the procedure was what you may call formal proximity talks. He held separate meetings with the two delegations, alternating between them, so, for example, on Saturday, the 8th of May, he had four separate meetings: at 9:30 and 4:00 with the Argentine delegation, and at 11:30 and 5:30 with the British delegation. And the approach which the Secretary-General presented to them first was to seek confirmation of their general acceptance of what had been stated in the aide memoire.

JSS As a framework?

AHMED As a framework. Argentina accepted the principle of simultaneity. The United Kingdom was not opposed to that concept but pointed out possible practical difficulties in its implementation. Both

sides agreed on mutual and phased withdrawals of forces. There were differences on the timetable. And then, also, there were discussions of exclusion zones, transitional arrangements and so on. But yes the approach of the Secretary-General, to go back to your question, was a step-by-step approach. As the negotiations proceeded, the Secretary-General hoped that points of agreement would emerge, to be put aside for eventual inclusion in a final paper, and to be able to move on to the next subject, without necessarily trying to have everything settled. But, soon, the British made it clear that, unless the issue of sovereignty was tackled in a satisfactory manner as far as they were concerned, all other issues, even if they were resolved in consultations, would not be enough to achieve a settlement. And, therefore, at one point in time, the Secretary-General decided to focus on that issue as the key issue. If that was resolved, then the other issues on which agreement was not forthcoming would fall into place.

JSS How did he go about this sovereignty question, which was the most difficult?

AHMED Well, he listened to both sides on this issue, and then he came up with the language which could, in his view, provide a way out. He presented that language to both sides, to see their reaction, and, eventually, he got the agreement of both sides.

JSS Was a part of this an agreement or an understanding that the entire

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agreement that was being proposed by the Secretary-General was within the concept of provisional measures? That is, that whatever was done would not determine the final outcome of ultimate negotiations?

AHMED Absolutely. These negotiations were without prejudice to the rights, claims or positions of the parties, without prejudgment of the outcome.

JSS So that the question of sovereignty was, in reality, not determined in the formula that the Secretary-General used, or in so far as they got, as far as the British and Argentines agreed.

AHMED Yes, the question of sovereignty was not decided.

JSS There was, though, extensive agreement on the nature of an interim administration that would be established in the islands. Is that correct?

AHMED The nature of the interim administration? Yes, the basic principle of the offer was accepted by both sides. We had, by then, developed the idea that, apart from the UN flag, the flags of Argentina and the UK would also fly. We had also proposed that the advisory council to the UN administrator, apart from the members of the Legislative Council, would include one member nominated by Argentina, so that it would have a presence there, and there was a time limit. The other thing that was agreed was that the interim arrangements and the negotiations would last only until 31 December 1982. So there was a kind of deadline set for reaching an agreement and both sides accepted that deadline. They raised the issue of what would happen if no agreement was reached by that date. That was one of the issues we were in the process of discussing when the

British came out with their own paper.

JSS Which was publicly released, I believe.

AHMED Which was publicly released. Immediately after the acceptance by Argentina of the no-prejudgment clause, because that was the key issue, the comment of Ambassador Parsons was that this was a most remarkable breakthrough, because on this issue General Haig had failed to get an agreement. And there was a feeling generally that now, with this important question being resolved, there may be more give and take towards a final agreement.

JSS If I could just ask you a specific question? With an agreement on this formulation, was it felt that the central issue of sovereignty was put aside, so to speak?

AHMED That's right-that was put aside. And, in fact, Ambassador Parsons said that, in view of the extremely encouraging development on the no-prejudgment issue, he thought that it would now be possible for his government to work on the other problems. He suggested that the Secretary-General may wish to wait for the reaction of the British Government before presenting a consolidated draft. So, we were at that point, looking towards preparing a consolidated draft agreement. It might still have some of the issues in square brackets, or options, but at least all of us were highly pleased, one could even say euphoric, by the fact that we had made a breakthrough

which was recognized as such by the British. Then, you know, the following day, this happened on the 11th of May, on the 12th of May, when the meeting with Ambassador Parsons took place to look at some of these other issues, he informed us that he had been asked to go back to London. So, he returned with the position of his government on a number of issues, which indicated a hardening in its position, rather than a more flexible attitude, after getting this major, one can say, concession from the Argentine side that they were ready to have an agreement without a specific reference to their sovereignty. This was not very encouraging from the Secretary-General's point of view, that this hardening of position had taken place which could perhaps provoke an equally hard reaction from the Argentines.

JSS At this point, though, it was still confidential; is that right?

AHMED It was still confidential.

JSS I wanted to just ask in that connection, how great an emphasis did the Secretary-General place on the need of confidentiality as these negotiations continued.

AHMED Well, the Secretary-General, from the very beginning, felt that his role could best be discharged through what is known as "quiet diplomacy," and one of the essential ingredients of quiet diplomacy is confidentiality. One works with the different parties, shares thoughts with them, comes up with possible alternatives. All that has to be kept confidential, because this is the process of looking for the right

formula and, if such a formula or alternatives were to become public, it would open up debate which could be detrimental to the search of that kind of formula. So, the Secretary-General's approach, not only, in fact, in that case, but throughout his term as Secretary-General has been to maintain confidentiality in negotiations but be very open when it comes to the final positions. He does not to mince words when the time has come to make things public.

JSS And how successful was he in maintaining the confidentiality in the course of these negotiations?

AHMED I think he was quite successful in maintaining confidentiality. I think it was one of the surprises that, while there were quite a number of people involved in the UN, also through the task force, the confidentiality of these talks was essentially maintained. Even until today, I think very little is known publicly about what the UN did or did not do. I think our conversation, perhaps, is the one which is revealing for the first time some of the things that were going on inside the house during these talks.

JSS When the British did come back with the statement of their proposal, actually it was publicized. So this moved things from the confidential plane to the public plane. What was the reaction in the United Nations and what was the Secretary-General's reaction at this point?

AHMED We were taken by surprise. We had, as I mentioned earlier, been working on the assumption that, once the various pieces of a settlement were

identified, they would be put together in the form of a comprehensive draft. We were therefore surprised by the fact that the British went ahead and presented a comprehensive text which included some things that had been worked out during the course of the Secretary-General's mediation. But, on the other issues that were still being discussed, where we had the impression that the British were not closing the door, that they... After this famous meeting that was held at the country house of British Prime Minister Thatcher, they put out this text and presented a "fait accompli," not only to Argentina but also to the United Nations Secretary-General who, more or less, was left then just with the option of trying to convince the Argentines to give a reaction which would not close the door or, perhaps, reopening some of the issues in a way that a mutually satisfactory resolution would come out. But it was definitely at that time felt by me to be a major setback, when our hopes had been so high.

JSS

From the psychological point of view, the Secretary-General had a certain rapport with the Argentine side. I believe he had talked to General Galtieri several times by then. Was it his sense that, psychologically, the presentation of that kind of a "fait accompli" by the British side would make it difficult for the Argentines to respond?

AHMED

That was the sense of all of us, the Secretary-General and myself and, if I remember correctly, you - all of us that were involved, Alvaro de Soto. We all had this feeling that, in this way, it was surely a negative reaction that could come from Buenos Aires; and it was a great pity,

because it had seemed to us that the positions had narrowed to an extent that it was a matter of a little bit more give and take before a final document acceptable to both sides could have been worked out.

JSS And, if I can now bring in the time factor again, the British landing force was by then getting fairly close to the Falklands. My question, really, is did you have a sense of great time pressure at this point?

JSS So that in fact the receipt and publication of the British position was a seminal point in the Secretary-General's efforts.

AHMED Absolutely, because it sort of closed the door to the efforts to find mutually acceptable formulas on the remaining issues. Considerable progress had already been made, as I mentioned, and some of that progress was included in the British paper. But you had asked me the question about the time factor and it is true that, from the word go, since we started the mediation of the Secretary-General, we were under pressure, knowing that the British fleet was in the south Atlantic and that the winter was approaching fast. It was not possible to expect that the fleet could keep bobbing in the ocean indefinitely and we know that there would come a moment when the British would have to take a decision as to what should take place. As regards the timing, it could be argued that it could not stay for very much longer. But it cannot be argued that - don't forget that, when Tony Parsons left, we lost a number of days We'd been working over weekends, every day, and, if he had not gone to London maybe

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in the next three or four days, by the time they put out the paper, we would have had a paper ready, too, on the basis of a mutually agreed text. So it cannot be argued that the UN had somehow delayed. The UN process had been delayed because Alexander Haig took a long time, and then we only started, in fact, after they accepted the aide memoire. Within a week, we practically obtained a breakthrough on the sovereignty issue and agreement on the simultaneity approach and agreement on a number of other issues. But there were a few other questions to be resolved, i.e. the question of whether or not South Georgia should be vacated by the British or not and the question of how far the British fleet should move, things like that. But they were not insurmountable problems, in my view.

JSS

So that time assumes a great importance in your mind. Going back, then, to the period of the Haig mediation, this is a hypothetical question, but, if the UN effort had begun earlier and the time had not been lost in what turned out to be the futile US effort, do you think that the outcome may have been different?

AHMED

I don't know. Because as I say in my view there was time. We had come pretty far, and we lost time because Tony Parsons went away, and they could have certainly waited for another few days. As I said, we knew the urgency of getting a solution and we were working on that premise and the Argentines certainly would have known that there was a kind of deadline

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beyond which the British could not be expected to wait for a peaceful solution. And I'm sure we would have been able to deliver within that deadline. But we were not given that opportunity.

JSS One might hypothesize that the delivery of the British response, which I think was on the 17th of May, and the publication of that response may have been the time when the final British decision was made to go ahead.

AHMED Yes one can maybe... We don't know, and we don't have any information on that. It's a hypothesis that can be made.

JSS I mentioned the contact which the Secretary-General had with the heads of government in London and Buenos Aires. How important do you think these contacts were?

AHMED Well, certainly, they were useful, because, anytime you talk to the leading figure in a government, you know that you are likely to get responses which would be backed up. Of course, we did not know the decision making process in Buenos Aires, so that was always a little bit of a question mark.
As far as Prime Minister Thatcher was concerned, certainly, if she said something to the Secretary-General, then we knew that this was the position of the British Government. There was no doubt on that question.

JSS Did the Secretary-General seek to utilize the influence of the United States, to be specific, in bringing the British and the Argentines, one or the other, to agree to the proposals he was making.

AHMED I don't think that was, to my knowledge, the situation; because, as I

said, we were working on this key issue of sovereignty and how to finesse it in a way that neither side would feel it was giving up a position of principle. We did not vet it, or ask the Americans whether they would agree on the approach we were taking.

JSS Now a similar question with regard to Security Council members. It was remarkable that, during this brief but important period of the Secretary-General's negotiations, the Security Council did not meet in formal session. Were there contacts between the Secretary-General or his staff and the individual members of the Security Council in terms of what the Security Council could most usefully do, in this case, perhaps, not meet.

AHMED The Secretary-General kept a continuing contact with the Presidents of the Security Council during April and early May. He also, if I remember correctly, met them informally in consultations, to brief them about the status of the negotiations without going into any detail.

JSS I remember that Ireland was particularly anxious that there should be a meeting of the Security Council. The Secretary-General was able to maintain the confidence of the Council during this period, without a meeting.

AHMED Absolutely right, because he was able, and on good grounds, to assure them that the negotiations were proceeding well and they should give him the time to try and complete the process.

JSS This is perhaps an embarrassing question for you, but how would you assess the support that was available to the Secretary-General from

his own staff in dealing with what was his first real challenge in a sense?

AHMED All I can say is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. I think what the Secretary-General was able to achieve...Even in that very short period and through a rather ad hoc arrangement, it served him well.

JSS Was there ever an indication that one or the other of the parties, the Argentines or the British, distrusted in any way the Secretary-General or the staff working with him?

AHMED I did not have that feeling. I think that, at the earlier stage perhaps, there was a certain amount of doubt that the Secretary-General would be able to achieve what the Secretary of State of the United States had failed to do, or whether this was an exercise in futility. But, as the process unfolded, there was growing confidence that the Secretary-General's efforts were genuinely making progress. As I said, even the British final document did rely upon the progress which had been made. If that document of the British had been accepted by the Argentines, there would have been a role for the United Nations. The British paper did provide for the UN role in the transitional arrangement and relied on the UN also to supervise some of the implementation provisions in the document. So, I think both sides did see the utility of the UN role. Whatever the final outcome was, I think that the Secretary-General did have the confidence of both sides and that that confidence remains even until now. You know how highly Mrs. Thatcher speaks of the Secretary-General because she saw he was playing the role

of an honest broker and that he was trying his best to find a solution which would not be injurious to the interests of either party.

JSS Would you say this was the main advantage that the Secretary-General brought to the negotiations?

AHMED I think that was definitely the main advantage, his objectivity, his lack of any personal or institutional vested interests. It was a role of, as I said, an honest broker, trying to see how he could be helpful to two founding members of the Organization, one being a Permanent Member of the Security Council, in getting out of the very difficult situation which had arisen.

JSS Now, even though, with the publication of the British proposal, the prospects of the Secretary-General's mediation declined; nonetheless, he went ahead in what might be called a final effort, with a further aide memoire, which was even more detailed. He made certain suggestions as to how the remaining disagreements might be overcome. Had these been worked out well in advance on a contingency basis, in the task force, these alternate arrangements?

AHMED Well, we had talked about them, but we had not put them forward at that point in time, because these were the issues which were pending, so we had ideas about them. When the British paper came out, we felt we should make a last attempt to bridge the gap which existed between the Argentines on those points, and the British paper, which had not been

acceptable to the Argentines, in the hope that the possible solutions that the Secretary-General suggested for them could be acceptable to the two sides. He put it to both the sides, as you remember, and gave them a certain deadline, because he was aware that the British could not wait for too long. It was a 24-hour deadline. Sir Anthony Parsons telephoned the Secretary-General within that time period and said he had received instructions. But he was also instructed not to communicate the response until he was told that the Secretary-General had received a response from the other side. Unfortunately, no response came from the other side.

JSS Did the Secretary-General at that point try to reach General Galtieri directly?

AHMED I think he did, if I remember correctly, but still there was no response. Finally, the Secretary-General decided he could not wait any longer and that it would not be fair also to keep the British waiting indefinitely for that response. Whether that response would have come the next day or the day after we do not know. Some people say that, if another 24 hours had been allowed, perhaps a response would have come. But the Secretary-General, in all honesty, did not think that he could extend the deadline without any clear indication from the Argentine side that a response would be forthcoming.

JSS And again, to the time factor. At this point, had you made an assessment that the British landing would take place in a matter of hours or, certainly, days?

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AHMED Yes, it was clear that the British could not keep their forces in the south Atlantic waiting very much longer and that the presentation of the British document was intended to bring the question to a head and to find out whether the solution was possible, peacefully or not.

JSS The proposals that the Secretary-General included in this aide memoire, as a means of resolving the remaining differences, were never published, is that correct?

AHMED Yes, that's correct.

JSS In effect, did you ever know what the British reaction to them was?

AHMED No, we never came to know that, because, as I said, the British Ambassador said he was only going to give the response of the British Government if he were told that the Argentine response was also in. And it would be very interesting to find out what their response would have been.

JSS The Secretary-General did then report to the Security Council on the 21st, I believe. What was the time pressure to report to the Security Council at that point?

AHMED Well, he had committed to the Council Members that he would report to them on the negotiations. So, he had to, at that stage, give a report, as he did.

JSS Before the British actually landed?

AHMED Yes.

It's my recollection that that was an important consideration. The Secretary-General felt he wanted to be on record

AHMED Before the actual landing took place.

JSS After that, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts toward a cease-fire. What was the reaction on your part, and the Secretary-General's part, to this request of the Security Council, which was the first request they had made actually since the beginning?

AHMED As is normal, whenever the Security Council requests the Secretary-General to undertake a mandate, he is duty bound to respond, and he did. He did immediately contact the two sides, tried to explore the possibilities for such a cease-fire.

JSS But with any hope?

AHMED At that point I don't think we had any hope there would be an end to the British attempt to retake the islands. But the hope was that, somehow, perhaps not knowing what might be the exact outcome, there could be some sort of an agreement which would facilitate the ending of the conflict without undue bloodshed.

JSS In contrast to General Haig's mediation efforts, all of the Secretary-General's efforts were done in New York with the representatives of Britain and Argentina coming here. Did the Secretary-General ever contemplate the dispatch of a special representative to the two capitals to ensure full understanding?

- AHMED I recall there was talk of the possibility of sending a special representative, but then, once the breakthrough came on the issue of sovereignty, we, as I said earlier, felt that, after that, it would be possible to resolve the other issues without too much difficulty, that the crux of the issue was how to go about this question of sovereignty. If that issue was resolved, then the others could also be resolved through the talks in New York.
- JSS If the plans that were developed in the task force for an administration and for observation of the withdrawal of the British and Argentine forces had actually come to fruition, was it your impression that the United Nations had the capacity to fulfill the new responsibilities, especially on the sea?
- AHMED In all the UN operations, the fundamental premise is co-operation of the parties involved. We were fairly confident that the parties in this case would co-operate. Therefore, the kind of supervision or observation that would be required would not entail too much, because there was a feeling that they would go along with whatever had been agreed upon, and there would be not too much difficulty in certifying that the commitments that they had each undertaken had, in fact, been fulfilled.
- JSS How much planning could you do in terms of naval peace-keeping, because this had not been done before.
- AHMED Not much planning on naval peace-keeping, but we had already alerted some of our existing peace-keeping operations to identify military observers who would be on land. We had also designated an individual who

would act as the United Nations interim administrator. He had been chosen and alerted. We had in place some contingency plans to move immediately. As far as the naval side was concerned, on that we had not done a great deal of contingency planning. We thought that if it did come about, with the co-operation of those Member States that would be in a position to assist, we could undertake that task also.

JSS Looking back, what would you consider to have been the main hindrances to the ultimately successful outcome of the Secretary-General's mediation?

AHMED I don't know. In the substantive sense, on all the issues, at least, I felt we could come up with options satisfactory to the two sides, that this was a package which would have certain elements not entirely to the satisfaction of one or the other side, but, as a package, it could be a satisfactory deal.

The only point which was perhaps a question mark was how long the British could wait for a settlement. I think, in the end, it must have been a decision by the British Government that the time was running out and they felt it was necessary to pin down the agreement without waiting for any more time to be spent on the negotiations. But that's a judgement that was made in London based upon the information they had about their own fleet and about the military requirements for the eventual action that they would have to take. But we were not privy to all this, so I do not think that there were any insurmountable constraints, as far as we were concerned, on the substantive issues. Once we had the breakthrough on the sovereignty issue, that was the key. If we had failed to find a

a formula to cover that issue, then certainly one would have felt that there was no point in going forward.

JSS There was one seemingly minor issue, namely the freedom of movement between Argentina and the Falklands; that is, the freedom of Argentines to go there, and perhaps to settle, which the Argentines were insisting on for most of the negotiations. Your sense is that the final suggestion made by the Secretary-General, which I believe foresaw putting this up to the decision of the UN administrator, would have solved that problem or could have solved that problem?

AHMED I think it could have solved that problem, because the UN administrator would have been given that discretion on the assumption he would only exercise it if he felt that it would not prejudice the outcome of the negotiations.

JSS Which would have meant considerable restriction on it.

AHMED Considerable restriction.

JSS Those are the main questions I had to put to you this morning. Are there any other points that you would like to put on record at this point, in terms of your assessment and recollections of this extraordinary period?

AHMED I think we have covered the ground fully. There is not much left for me to add.

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