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Gunnar Jarring
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
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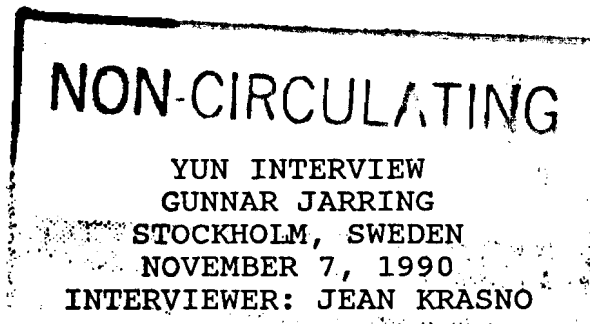
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JK: This is an interview with Gunnar Jarring. Just for the record Mr. Jarring, could you explain your first contact with the United Nations, and then we could discuss your involvement with Dag Hammarskjold and when you first heard that he was selected Secretary-General?

Jarring: My contact with the United Nations started in 1952 when I became the head of the Political Department of the Swedish Foreign Office, and in those days Hammarskjold was Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, so we had daily contacts about things which were happening in the world and which were related to Swedish foreign policy. Then in March, 1953, as far as I remember, he was appointed the Secretary-General. Then, of course, my own contact with him became less until I was appointed Swedish Representative at the United Nations on the first of May, 1956. And I remained as Swedish Ambassador to the UN until the first of July, 1958, when I was appointed Swedish Ambassador to Washington. But I continued to be the Swedish Representative on the Security Council for the whole two years we were on the Council, 1957 and 1958. So I had a double capacity of being Ambassador in Washington and Swedish Representative on the Security Council for the second half of 1958.

JK: That is an interesting way that they did that.

Jarring: Then I was appointed by U Thant as his special representative on the Middle East question in 1967 and

was active until '73, as far as I remember my last dealings with the question was in August '73 and since then I have remained inactive although I still am the Representative. That is the whole story.

JK: So, just to cover some of those things in more detail. When Hammarskjöld was told that he was selected to become Secretary-General were you the first to hear about that?

Jarring: As a matter of fact, they sent him a cable telling him that he had been appointed, but that was just formality, because it came over the line.

JK: What was his reaction?

Jarring: I've given his reaction in one of my memoirs, I've written four volumes of memoirs in Swedish, and I've dealt with the case and his reaction also. His reaction was is there no possibility to get rid of it. His first reaction was more or less how can I ever do it. But, of course, he calmed down very quickly and accepted it without any reservations.

JK: And then he turned out to be a very strong leader. So then you became the Swedish Representative to the United Nations and what things were you involved with at the UN during that period?

Jarring: During our two years, when I started in '56 in May, then came in October all the very great problems about the Middle East war, the British/French attack on Egypt and

at the same time the Hungarian question. They came at the same time and the Security Council was meeting in the morning dealing with the Middle East and in the afternoon with the Hungarian question or vice versa.

JK: Sweden was on the Security Council?

Jarring: No we were not. We came on the Security Council on the 1st of January '57, so we only were onlookers or participated when the question was in the General Assembly which was more or less the whole time. Then, of course, we participated. But we were not on the Security Council until the first of January. And during our two years in the Security Council the first question, I was involved in was the Kashmir dispute in '57. I was appointed the Security Council's representative on that question, so I spent as far as I remember March and part of April in India and Pakistan for the Security Council. Then, of course, the running question the whole time was the Middle East, the aftermath. Then came, of course, the really great and dangerous issue. That was the Lebanese question in '58, Lebanon and also Iraq at the same time.

JK: So a lot was going on in the Middle East. I have some questions about the Suez crisis that I wanted to ask you. In your participation at the UN and the General Assembly at that time, during that summer shortly after you had come to the UN Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal and

the British and French reaction to that was disapproval.

Jarring: We were not involved. Our foreign minister in those days, Osten Unden, was involved in it because he was a member of the committee set up by the Users' Organization of the Canal. He was personally involved in it. We were not involved in the UN in those days, we just followed the debate and had a few things to say but this was not diplomatic involvement.

JK: Were you aware of any informal talks that were going on at the UN between Great Britain, France and Egypt?

Jarring: We were not involved in those days. Because we were outside the Security Council. Everything was done in the Council.

JK: After the crisis then the UN became involved, declared cease fire, and then there was a resolution to establish the first emergency force.

Jarring: Yes, there I was involved. That was before our time on the Council. I've written about it in the Military History Review, our participation in the UNEF and so on. Well, it was as a UN Ambassador I was just a go-between between the Secretary-General and the Swedish government because we set up the contingency for the United Nations emergency force in those days. But that was administration and nothing else.

JK: But this was the first time that UN forces had been used.

Jarring: Yes, it was organized by the Secretary-General and his military advisors.

JK: And Sweden offered to send forces?

Jarring: Yes.

JK: And did they also send equipment?

Jarring: Well the forces were equipped with the necessary equipment from the beginning.

JK: And so Sweden must have approved of the UN sending forces?

Jarring: Yes, of course we did. It was a peacekeeping force and it was in the spirit of the UN to participate in peacekeeping forces. We followed it the whole time. We have always been active in that field.

JK: According to your experience at the UN, was Egypt unsure in the beginning about having forces on its territory? In the beginning when it was planned to send the emergency force to Egypt it was agreed that they would be on Egyptian soil and not on Israeli soil.

Jarring: Yes, it was on Egyptian soil, the Israelis have always refused.

JK: Were the Egyptians unsure about it?

Jarring: No, as far as I remember, they accepted it willingly and felt that it was both in the interest of the country itself and as a UN action for preserving peace or at least trying.

JK: So when you became a part of the Security Council in

January of 1957, were there still discussions going on about the Suez and establishing the forces there?

Jarring: The force was already established, but there were so many incidents that happened between Israel and the Arab countries the whole year of '57 and as far as I remember '58, there were all kinds of minor or bigger things happening, so the question came up very often. You can see it in the records.

JK: Were you personally involved in some of the discussions? Israel was reluctant to leave Shamal Sheik, for example.

Jarring: We were not involved in detail because Dag Hammarskjöld organized everything. He had a very wide mandate and he did it himself. I would like to mention that we had a very close cooperation with the Canadians, Lester Pearson was the Secretary of State and Foreign Minister in those days, and we were a group of countries that were active in peacekeeping, Sweden, Norway, Canada especially, and so on. We kept in very close touch.

JK: I've notice over the years Sweden has sent forces in the Congo at various points in time. Is there a particular reason why Sweden has been so willing to become involved?

Jarring: Of course, I will put it this way, we like to believe that Sweden was specially suited for supplying forces because we were a small country, a neutral country, and not involved in the conflicts like the Great Powers. As I said we liked to believe this.

JK: And then you became the Ambassador to Washington.

Jarring: I continued in the Security Council because I was appointed to Washington on the first of July and it was in the middle of the Middle East Crisis about Lebanon Our Foreign Minister felt that it was better that I continue as I had been involved in it the whole time before. So I had nothing to do with the UN except with the Security Council that half year, '58. That was the peak of the Lebanon crisis and at the same time everything happened in Iraq where the King and his government was murdered and there was a revolution. It all came at the same time.

JK: Yes it all came at the same time. And then in the 1967 the Egyptians had asked for the Emergency Force in the Sinai to be withdrawn.

Jarring: Yes, I was not involved because that was before my appointment.

JK: And then at that time U Thant was the Secretary-General and he had asked you to become a special representative. When approximately did he contact you about that?

Jarring: He didn't contact me until the resolution was accepted by the Security Council, Resolution 242, but of course I knew that I was in the picture already months or a couple of months earlier. But not through U Thant. It was only gossip.

JK: That was the gossip that you would be asked to be the

Special Representative, for a few months before that then they had talked about that.

Jarring: I was Ambassador in Moscow in those days. Swedish Ambassador in Moscow. So, as soon as Resolution 242 was taken, I got a cable from U Thant asking me to accept the charge as Special Representative which I did and immediately left for the UN. That was about 24 or 25th of November.

JK: I remember reading that as early as May of 1967 he had suggested that there be a Special Representative.

Jarring: That came in connection with the June war. You remember the war started the 2nd of June, and the Security Council dealt with the issue over the summer and it came up very early about how to deal with it. There were different ideas and so forth. I don't know when he himself thought of sending a special representative but I suppose it was in his mind at an early stage.

JK: Do you have any idea of why he decided to ask you to do this?

Jarring: I don't know what exactly happened behind the scene but I think that Ralph Bunche was active for my appointment because he knew me from the time I dealt with the Kashmir issue in '57. U Thant I knew very well personally. So I suppose that was contributing to my being selected for the job.

JK You began your work as Special Representative

immediately. So you left Moscow, then who did you see? Did you speak directly to both the Israelis and the Egyptians?

Jarring: On my first trip to the area, I don't remember exactly but I think the first stop was Lebanon and then next I think Jordan, Amman, next Egypt and Israel, as far as I remember. I met Nasser, of course, and Riad and in Eban in Jerusalem. I don't remember who was Prime Minister in those days.

JK: Was it Golda Maier?

Jarring: No, that's much later. Anyhow, the persons of my encounter were the Foreign Ministers of the three or four countries. Abba Eban, Mahmoud Riad, and in Jordan it was the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister and the King himself.

JK: And then in your dealings, what issues did you discuss with them, what were the primary issues?

Jarring: I was not the mediator because Resolution 242 doesn't speak of mediation, it speaks of, well, I would say I felt my appointment more as a go-between who had to try to find ways to solve the conflict, optimistically, or to find a way out, anyhow, to calm it down. I started as a matter of fact with trying to find ways of appeasing the situation in the Middle East by, for example, the exchange of prisoners of war and so on, which was more on the humanitarian side. And parallel with it, of

course, I discussed the implementation of Resolution of 242 with the parties concerned. I took that humanitarian approach in order to soften their minds. And then it continued with endless conversations, endless meetings with the parties. It is a very very long affair with hundreds of meetings without result in a way. On the other hand, I always defend myself by saying that at least I didn't make things worse than they were.

JK: What were some of the stalemate issues that there just couldn't be agreement on?

Jarring: You mean main issues? Well, of course, from the Arab side they insisted on Israeli withdrawal of their forces from the occupied territories. On Israel's side the main question was perhaps to get the Arab side to the negotiation table, to get them to negotiate about peace.

JK: The Israelis wanted face-to-face negotiations? Was that correct?

Jarring: Yes, they wanted to sit at the same table and the Arabs refused. They would have done it they said the day when Israel declared that they were willing to withdraw their forces from all the occupied territories. And again from the Israeli side they insisted upon secure and safe boundaries which was a very complicated affair.

JK: So that was written into 242.

Jarring: Well, 242 speaks of secure boundaries for all the countries concerned, not only for Israel but for all of

them.

JK: But it isn't exactly clear in 242 what those boundaries are.

Jarring: No it was not defined and that was one of the headaches to find out what was a secure boundary. There you had to take into consideration the changing technological world because a boundary might have been safe 500 years ago, but not today with the modern military science. And so on.

JK: With the use of missiles and aircraft. So the Israelis defined a secure border differently than the Egyptians?

Jarring: Neither side did. We never got a definition of what a secure boundary is or was, it was impossible. We never got it, and it remains the same today. It is still not defined and it probably never will become defined.

JK: The issue of the exchange of prisoners of war, that was more easily resolved?

Jarring: It was resolved in a decent way after a couple of months and very many Egyptian prisoners of war were returned home with some missing, of course, because some didn't come back, and the few Israeli prisoners of war also were returned. Another problem we had was to open up the Suez Canal after the bombardment where so many ships had been sunk. We dealt with that also but, it was much later they found a solution to that problem and I was not involved in the final solution. But in the beginning I

was very much.

JK: Was the other issue freedom of passage through to the Gulf of Acaba?

Jarring: No, I didn't have anything to do with that. No.

JK: Were you involved at all with the negotiations with Syria?

Jarring: No, Syria didn't accept me because they didn't accept resolution 242 in those days. Syria was the only country that didn't accept it. So I could never, I had no contact at all with the Syrians. I was permitted to fly over their territory to Jordan but that was all.

JK: You did meet with the Jordanians and King Hussein and the Foreign Minister at that time?

Jarring: The Prime Minister in those days was Talhuni and the Foreign Minister was, I don't remember. He is not alive any longer.

JK: We can add it later. You were also meeting with the Jordanians on the Middle East question. What were the issues as far as Jordan was concerned in the Middle East?

Jarring: The issues were the same for all the Arab states concerned except Lebanon which was a very quiet place in those days. Lebanon was almost never involved in the beginning of the conflict. In Jordan it was the question of occupation of the West Bank which was considered to be Jordanian territory which the Israelis didn't accept, of course. Any how we had to go back to the Resolution of

'47 where Palestine was divided into one Israeli part and one Palestinian part which were expected to co-exist. But that was the '47 Resolution. After that, of course, the war came in '48 and Jordan occupied the West Bank which was incorporated into Jordanian territory.

JK: Was the Palestinian issue involved in your discussions?

Jarring: Well, the Palestinian issue, if you put that label on it, was not involved because it was the Palestinian Refugees, but not Palestinian question as it became to be known later on. As far as I remember in '68 or '69 the Palestinians tried to have the Palestinian question included in the Resolution 242. I, of course, had to explain to them that it was impossible. I can't deal with the Palestinian political question because it is not inside the Resolution 242 and if I did, I said, the Israelis would declare me persona non grata. So, I never dealt with the Palestinian question.

JK: But with refugees?

Jarring: With refugees, yes, that is another question. It was inside the Resolution.

JK: As far as that was concerned, what were the issues for the refugees?

Jarring: We studied the whole question thoroughly, we did that in the UN headquarters in New York. We made a study of the whole refugee question which never came to anything because there was no way of putting it into an active

phase, it was just a theoretical exercise. It has remained unsolved to this day.

JK: Were there any alternatives suggested at all that came out of the study?

Jarring: I have to rely upon my memory from those days, but we were thinking in the terms of what we could do for the refugees if we ever got to a solution of the whole problem. We had the United Nations, the UNWRA, which was working parallel with us and which took care of the refugees. They had all the registers of the people who had left, were lost and so on. It was such a complicated and complex situation that we understood that we would never be able to solve it. If we had ever reached the point where we could think of a solution to the refugee question we would have had to form a special committee to deal with that. It couldn't be done by our mission. We were three or four people in my mission for the Middle East.

JK: Who were you working with on that Mission?

Jarring: I had a political advisor, Ian Berendsen, and he was with me the whole time. Now he's living in the US. I had a military advisor, a Finnish Colonel, Kaho. He is a retired General now. I had on and off some administrative personnel -- we were four or five -- that was the whole group. So you can imagine that we were not able to approach such a problem as the refugee question,

more than to get an idea of what it would be like.

JK: Did you report directly to U Thant?

Jarring: You can see from the records we reported to U Thant and to the Security Council, short reports, most of them. But it culminated with my memoir in 1972 as far as I remember, my memorandum, addressed to Egypt and Israel about the solution to the whole question which was accepted by Egypt and not by Israel. As far as I know, when it later on came to Camp David, I think my memorandum was in the picture in Camp David, too.

JK: Were many of your suggestions in the memorandum eventually incorporated into the final solution?

Jarring: I think you should take my memorandum and compare it with the document from Camp David. I leave it to you.

JK: And your memorandum you presented that in 1972?

Jarring: Yes, I think it was 1972.

JK: And that would be in the archives in the UN?

Jarring: Yes, it's printed.

JK: It did actually come quite close to the final solution.

Jarring: It contributed to the final solution which came with the Camp David Agreement.

JK: Did they work from the memorandum and take parts of it to use for the?

Jarring: You should ask them.

JK: That's very interesting. A lot of your work and your thinking eventually did pay off in a final solution.

Jarring: It was a part solution I was aiming at, to have agreement between Israel and Egypt and I my intention was to follow up with Jordan as the next step. But I never could continue as Israel did not accept my memorandum.

JK: What were Israel's reasons for not accepting it, what were their objections?

Jarring: Again, I suggest that you ask Israelis about that.

JK: Was it Abba Eban that you were dealing with at that time then?

Jarring: Abba Eban was Foreign Minister in those days, and Golda Maier was the Prime Minister.

JK: They didn't have any specific things that they mentioned to you?

Jarring: It's a long story and it's not easy to give a judgement on what happened, but Israel considered that I went beyond my mandate with this memorandum and so on.

JK: So they objected to the idea of it.

Jarring: They objected to it vaguely more or less, but anyhow it contributed to the impossibility for me to continue with my mission.

JK: Were the objections primarily having to do with territory that was laid out?

Jarring: I don't remember exactly now, I have to look up my notes, but it was the old question that Israel wanted to sit down with the Arabs, at a negotiation table, to have everything negotiated, a negotiated peace. So this was

not exactly what they wanted to have. Of course, my memorandum included withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula.

JK: And they were not ready to do that yet.

Jarring: No, not in those days. It was for me an unavoidable thing to include withdrawal because Resolution 242 speaks of the inadmissability of acquiring territory by force. It is a basic point in the UN charter, that you cannot take away territory from another member state.

JK: So that eventually in the Camp David negotiations they did sit down face-to-face.

Jarring: There I think you should interest yourself in the Camp David negotiations because they are anyhow related to my memorandum.

JK: Just in general what I would like to ask you to make some comments on is the UN's role in the Middle East and how effective it has been. Were there mistakes that the UN had made or what were some of the things that the UN has accomplished successfully, the use of the good offices of the Secretary-General, the peacekeeping forces, and so forth? What I am wondering is in your opinion in what way has the UN been successful or unsuccessful?

Jarring: Well, success of the UN in those days, I don't know if you can speak of success. Today, in 1990, you can speak of success when you can have all the five permanent members agree on a Resolution on the invasion of a

country, or on the tense situation in the Middle East between Iraq and Kuwait and so on. In those days I would say it was impossible to speak of success for the UN, because you never could get agreement, you had a Cold War going on with the United States and the West on one side and the Soviet Union and their satellites on the other side, so it was very difficult to have agreement on anything at all. I would say that if you substitute the word successful against useful then I think that the United Nations was very useful in many situations. If they couldn't solve a conflict, they could at least control it and I think that was the success of the UN in those days.

JK: You mentioned that at the time you were the Special Representative to the Middle East you had been the Ambassador to Moscow.

Jarring: Yes, I came to Moscow in '64.

JK: So, you had been there for quite a while.

Jarring: I had been there for three years.

JK: So, did your experience there help you to play a role in terms of the Soviet involvement in the Middle East, your understanding of their point of view?

Jarring: I knew, of course, Soviet diplomats quite well from my three years in Moscow before I was appointed here and afterwards also I had close contact with them in New York and elsewhere. As a matter of fact the Russians were

very helpful. I think in a way all the five members in the Security Council cooperated quite well. They had a special committee to support me in my mission in the Middle East.

JK: Did you discuss with the Soviets the Middle East question?

Jarring: I didn't discuss it, not with the Soviets, not with the Americans, not with any single nation. I discussed everything with U Thant, the Secretary-General, because I was his representative and I didn't go beyond that more than, of course, when the Soviet Ambassador came to see me in New York and the American Ambassador came to see me. I kept them informed of what went on and that was all. That was inside the Security Council, but it was not in Washington, it was not in Moscow and so on. It was all inside the Security Council, we kept the fence around the Security Council.

JK: What Soviets did you meet with or discuss things with just informally?

Jarring: The issues, as I said, were withdrawal, secure boundaries, solution to the refugee problem, and so on, but it was an endless affair. You have to remember it went on from '67 to 73 when I quit and then after me came Kissinger, and after Kissinger came Carter, and after him came I don't know who, and it is still going on.

JK: I'm just wondering with your experience in Moscow if the

Soviets had a particular point of view or interest.

Jarring: When I took over in my capacity of Special Representative and had the text on the resolution as my leading light I didn't discover immediately all the problems involved in what we called the missing definite article; the missing definite article in withdrawal from territories occupied or withdrawal from the territories occupied. There is no definite article, it speaks of withdrawal from territories occupied. It meant that it was understood in different ways. The Arabs understood it complete withdrawal from all territories occupied; the Israelis understood it withdrawal from some territories occupied.

JK: Do you think that 242 was written specifically vague in that way because there was disagreement?

Jarring: I guess it was, because otherwise it would never have been accepted by all the 15 votes.

JK: So they passed it and then hoped that you would work it out?

Jarring: So you can write a special chapter called the "Missing Definite Article".

JK: In order to know if it was all the territories or some of the territories. In looking back, were there any times where the UN could have acted and missed an opportunity to act and create peace in the Middle East or was that not really possible?

Jarring: To create peace in the Middle East? I think we're

sitting here now in 1990 and there is no peace in the Middle East. How could we have created peace in '67, when you say that it might have been easier to do it in '67 than it is now. On the other hand, we could never get agreement on the technicalities, I mean the question on direct talks or indirect talks. Israel insisted on direct talks, the other side said until we feel assured that Israel is going to withdraw from the occupied territories we cannot accept any direct talk, so we continued with indirect talks. That was the so-called Rhodes' model, after 1948 when Count Bernadotte and later on Ralph Bunche negotiated the agreement. So we couldn't get any further.

JK: Would it have been possible to keep the emergency force in the Sinai in 1967?

Jarring: I don't know. I think that you should ask, the best source you could have for an appreciation of this namely, Brian Urquhart, who was really in the center of the discussions. I think U Thant was in a very difficult situation because the Egyptians wanted him to take them away. But I can't tell you because I was never involved. I think that Brian is the best of them on that subject.

JK: If U Thant had not removed them and had kept them there, there was a Swedish contingent there, then would they have ended up being caught in the middle of the fighting? How would Sweden have reacted to keeping forces there?

Jarring: I don't know. I never discussed that with anybody because in those days I was not involved. From our point of view we would have followed the decision of the Secretary-General on that. There were dangers involved. The Egyptians had gone into military action to remove the force and that could have meant victims and so on. But that's, again, a theoretical affair.

JK: At this point, yes. Are there any comments that you would like to add? I don't have any more questions for you, but if there is anything that you would like to put on the record.

Jarring: No, I have no special comments because I follow what is happening in the Middle East and I don't know how to find a way out of the problem. It is getting more and more complicated and the new problems are getting connected with the original problems of 1967. I don't know. I have no special comments to make.

JK: Well, thank you very much. We appreciate your helping us out. Thank you.

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