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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Dr. Joseph J. Sisco
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
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(02)
54

NON-CIRCULATING

YUN INTERVIEW
DR. JOSEPH J. SISCO
WASHINGTON DC
OCTOBER 18, 1990
INTERVIEWER JAMES S. SUTTERLIN

Table of Contents

I. Election of Secretaries-General

UN LIBRARY

Election of U Thant
Assessment of Hammarskjöld
US and Soviet attitudes on selection of
Secretary-General
Election of Kurt Waldheim

NOV 4 1993

UN/SA COLLECTION

II. US Relations with U Thant

The Congo Crisis
Withdrawal of UNEF
Origin of peace-keeping concept
Vietnam
Cuban missile crisis



UNITED NATIONS

III. The Soviet role in the Secretariat

IV. The 1967 Middle East War

Dag Hammarskjöld

LIBRARY

348

JSS Dr. Sisco I want to express appreciation for your willingness to join in this Yale University Oral History Project on the United Nations. I'd like to begin and ask you about the process, as seen from your position of the election of Secretaries-General of the United Nations. To start first with U Thant. I believe that Dag Hammarskjold died unexpectedly in September of 1961. Could you first indicate what your position was at that time in the State Department?

SISCO I was then the Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs

JSS So as such you were very much concerned with who should be the head of the United Nations.

SISCO I was.

JSS Could you tell me more or less what happened when there was the sudden death of Hammarskjold, and the need to select a new person. How deeply were you involved? How much was Washington concerned with this subject?

SISCO We considered the position of Secretary-General of critical importance, and I can put this within the broader context of the evolution of the United Nations itself. In the early days after San Francisco the SYG was Trygve Lie and it was reflective of the entire period of American dominance of the UN. Then Dag Hammarskjold came and during that period of time there was an addition of

some 20 new members to the United Nations. It was also in many ways a rather constant period of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was also a period in which the non-aligned played a major role. So that when the death of Hammarskjold was reported, we were keenly aware that: 1.) there would be a difference of view between ourselves and the Soviet Union. We believed in a proactive United Nations, a proactive Secretary-General, even though most Secretaries-General did not take too many initiatives within the liberty they have under article 99 of the Charter. But what happened was that with the addition of twenty members [there developed] for the first time a balance within the General Assembly in which neither side was able to obtain the required majority. Basically those last few years of Dag Hammarskjold, with the addition of Afro-Asians in particular, reflected pretty much a stalemate. Therefore the phrase developed "give it to Dag", and the reason was it was a reflection of the stalemate. Therefore when he died we were aware there would be a need to find some accommodation between ourselves and the Soviet Union; that's the number one element of the setting of the election of U Thant, and secondly some reflection of the changed composition of the General Assembly.

JSS

That's very interesting. Would you say in that

connection that Dag Hammarskjold had to a certain extent lost his capacity to lead the organization because of the dichotomy that had developed within the organization.

SISCO

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that with the balance that I've described no Secretary-General had the amount of flexibility that he might have had in a earlier period when one side or the other could assure him of support. And therefore the Hammarskjold period in the latter years has to be understood within the reflection of the stalemate; but what is remarkable about it is that with Hammarskjold's initiatives, Hammarskjold's subtleties, Hammarskjold's commitment to the UN and the role of the UN he achieved a remarkable amount of flexibility within the limits of the environment that existed. I felt that he always found a way; for example, he found ways to muster the support of the developing countries behind an approach which would basically accord with the views of the United States at the time. A man less able and less imaginative would have been totally frozen. That was not the case with him.

JSS

I just want to add one more question there. There had been differences with the United States on the Congo question. By the time of his death would you say he had the full confidence of the United States.

SISCO

Yes, I think it was recognized that this was a man of

great ability and that he would not succumb to the idea of establishing a troika at the helm of the organization as the Soviets were prone to press rather than a single Secretary-General.

JSS Yes, that leads me to my next question actually because at the time of the initial negotiations on the election of a new Secretary-General the Soviets were still pushing the idea of the troika I believe and the US was totally opposed to that.

SISCO Totally, and on this the feeling were very very strong from the top on down in the State Department and certainly the Mission in New York agreed fully.

JSS Now was there a reluctance in Washington to move toward U Thant, given his association with the non-aligned group?

SISCO There was understandable anxiety. I, for example, personally knew U Thant because U Thant had been the Burmese Representative to the UN and we viewed him as a man who was generally sympathetic, but we also felt that he paled by comparison to Hammarskjold in terms of strength and capacity. This was basically a diffident man, a man who was not apt to flex his muscle in the same way in which Hammarskjold did politically. So that yes, this represented a transition for the United States from Secretaries-General that were fully committed, coming out of Western civilization, if you will, and the old

traditional UN. Here for the first time there was this most important institutional recognition of the increasing importance in the changed composition of the UN itself. And mindful of the fact that we no longer had the 50 to 55 votes we had in the days of Trygve Lie.

JSS Was it really essential that the United States and the Soviet Union find an agreement in order to elect the Secretary-General?

SISCO We felt so because despite the fact that the institution of the Secretary-General in most respects has to be a reflection of the political environment that exists within the institution. We were still committed to the UN as an institution per se and cognizant of the fact that it never worked the way it was originally conceived simply because of the of the cold war. We did feel that it was important to find some accommodation between ourselves and the institution because we continued to view the institution as a useful diplomatic vehicle and that if there was not an agreement then Soviet policy would have gained and would have succeeded because at that time the Soviets did not view the United Nations as a positive instrumentality of their policy. Therefore the weakening, the disillusion, the failure to appoint a chief executive would have meant, in our judgement, given the political environment, a Soviet victory.

JSS At that time the Soviets were still insisting, if not on

the troika, at least in having a say on who the deputies would be to U Thant. I think they had in mind deputies from four regions of the World. Did the United States agree that in being elected U Thant should designate his heads of various bureaus?

SISCO As I recall we agreed that this was the reality of the situation. We had been committed particularly during the whole era under Ralph Bunche, to the original concept of the UN itself, to the fundamental notion of international civil servants serving as such. This was obviously not the Soviet view. And therefore the apportionment at the under-secretary level, we felt, was a kind of quota system, if you will, but more importantly it tended to abridge the basic principle that the individual should be selected on the basis of the commitment to the institution as an international civil servant, despite the fact we knew the Soviets didn't play that game.

JSS And in fact it posed no great problem for the United States since I assume that you were fairly confident that U Thant would keep Ralph Bunche in a senior position.

SISCO We did, and that was one factor and we also felt that we could deal with U Thant directly. The very power of the United States politically as well as its status as prime financial supporter was basically inherent in that situation and therefore we did feel that, while U Thant was a reflection of the new sort of UN, he was an

individual with whom we could have a dialogue and with whom we could deal. Our principal concern about U Thant, and it was borne out subsequently, was that he would not be strong enough to resist Soviet pressures.

JSS

Now I want to go ahead a little bit out of the area of the election of U Thant to pose a couple of questions about the relationship between the United States and U Thant during the course of his tenure. The first question pertains to the Congo. In another interview it has been suggested on the American side that U Thant cooperated very closely with the United States in dealing with the Congo situation and that in fact the so-called U Thant plan which was ultimately the plan that brought about the resolution of the Katanga question was drafted mainly in Washington. Is that your recollection?

SISCO

The recollection I have is that there was kind of a two phase sort of dialogue, let me put it that way. In the beginning, as I recall, there was some disappointment as to how U Thant was acting or not acting, not with the kind of strength we had hoped. But near the end we were quite satisfied that basically what came out, regardless of all the pressures, that his commitment to the institution achieved a certain priority even though it may have been a rather thin margin. We certainly injected our ideas as they related to the whole Katanga matter. To say that we actually produced the plan in the

State Department I can't recall in explicit terms but we were very influential in shaping it.

JSS

Going ahead, one of the perhaps most important decisions, and the one with the longest repercussions, that U Thant took pertained to the removal of UNEF from the Sinai and the Gaza strip. The United States was not in the Advisory Committee that U Thant consulted - but were you in a position to make your hesitations known to the Secretary-General?

SISCO

We certainly were. And here I can be very explicit and very categoric. We considered then, and I consider now, that to be one of the major mistakes that U Thant made. And, in having had an opportunity over the years to read peoples' memoirs and so on it is clear that even the Egyptians didn't expect this kind of a positive response. Secondly, I regret to say that I'm not at all certain as to what my good friend the late Ralph Bunche, gave by way of advice. The principle that, as I recall, U Thant expressed was that whenever there is a UNEF it's really at the beck and call of the host government. That is certainly an important principle, i.e. the consent of the country on whose territory a peacekeeping force resides. But I also recall that when UNEF was established during the earlier period we dealt with the question in the Security Council and there was a question as to whether UNEF could be removed unilaterally by the host

government. I can recall that we had discussions with Hammarskjöld about this as well. And this fact was in some kind of a report that was submitted by Hammarskjöld to the Security Council. Therefore the bending of U Thant to the Egyptians in my judgement took care of one principle but really abridged, at least, the commitment that we felt we had that there had to be prior consultations before any division or removal is taken. And, moreover, what is important, and on this the Israeli view is absolutely correct, is the fact that its removal would be subject to subsequent consultation, that was a point that was a factor that helped bring about the Israeli withdrawal after the 1956 encounter. And therefore there developed a situation whereby Nasser said remove UNEF so I can move forward; and then a few days later he coupled it with the establishment of a blockade. I think in that particular instance the Secretary-General should have played for time and he didn't. Quite frankly, his performance contributed to deepening the crisis. I might say reinforced the strongly held views of the Israelis, years afterwards as well as their concern beforehand. It certainly contributed to a long term distrust on the part of the Israelis of the United Nations.

JSS

Yes, actually in an interview with Ambassador Eban he strongly emphasized that. I was going to pose the same

question to you. To what extent did this experience affect attitudes in Washington not just towards U Thant but towards the United Nations?

SISCO Well, first of all, we were one of the prime supporters of UNEF and the basic idea was discussed between ourselves and the Canadians even though the Canadians were in the forefront. Cabot Lodge was very fond of saying "well you know I looked around in the corridor and I had this piece of paper that established UNEF and I bumped into the Canadians and handed it to Lester Pearson and he won the Nobel Prize. This is roughly the way Cabot Lodge put all this. Now that is obviously overdrawn. We had a lot more to do with UNEF than is normally indicated.

JSS Well, I wanted to ask you that because Ambassador Eban recounted this same story. He wasn't sure whether it was true or that perhaps the idea actually originated not with Lester Pearson but with Washington.

SISCO In my judgement it originated right in the International Organizations Bureau. That's my judgement. Ideas, I'm sure, crop up at the same time in various places. As far as we were concerned that was Chapter 6 and a half. And the phrase Chapter 6 and half, which I now have read in the literature, was a phrase that was coined in the IO Bureau way back. But be that as it may, I think I can give you a very good answer to what you asked. I think

our view was more directed at what we perceived to be the weakness and the failure on the part of U Thant to handle it properly rather than an attack on the concept of the institution of peace-keeping as such. We continued to believe the UN and peacekeeping were useful, and I think the proof of the pudding is that the United States continued to support peace-keeping operations all over the world.

JSS Going ahead in U Thant's tenure, I believe there were serious differences in connection with Vietnam and that this led even to some hostility between the Secretary of State and U Thant can you comment on this? Can you give any details?

SISCO Yes, there was a deep feeling on the part of the Secretary of State. The feeling was that from time to time the Secretary-General made unhelpful public statements. He was not as bad as the moralisms emanating from Delhi, as the leader of the Non-Aligned. But certainly it was felt that U Thant did not give the United States the benefit of the doubt and tended to reflect what might be an Asian point of view rather than staying out of it simply because of the fact that the UN was not formally seized of the question. I remember that episode very well, but the Secretary-General had not been voted any role on the Vietnam issue. What was preferred

in Washington was a benign standing aside rather than these public statements. On the other hand one has to say, as the leader of the UN, I'm sure U Thant, both as he viewed his commitment as the Secretary-General, as well as behind the scenes pressures on him, felt that he should make statements of one kind or another. But, yes, I would say people in Washington were not happy with the Secretary-General's pronouncements on Vietnam.

JSS

And beyond the pronouncements, there was also the particular circumstance that U Thant endeavored to arrange a meeting between the United States and Vietnamese representatives which would take place in Burma I believe. Were you, in the IO Bureau, aware of the seriousness of this undertaking, because apparently the Secretary of State did not take it seriously.

SISCO

Well I was aware of it for the following reason. First of all, Ambassador Goldberg was then our representative to the UN and Ambassador Goldberg was the most active high level official seeking a peaceful accord of the Vietnam issue. The file is absolutely rife with proposal after proposal which in some instances I helped him write, but his initiatives were amazing in this regard. Therefore, in a sense, his views, and I don't want to be misunderstood here, tended I suppose to affect how the Secretary-General saw the overall environment, the very

proximity of our US Ambassador to the UN and to the Secretary-General, in particular. So the fact is my files at the time were constantly full of Vietnam and here I was the head of the UN Bureau, involved in Vietnam policy, even though the UN had no real direct responsibility. The other reason is I frequently went to the Seventh Floor at seven and eight o'clock at night and joined in with George Ball in some of the drafting that he did. And that was hardly in my IO capacity but that was at their request, Goldberg's request and Ball's request. For example, there was a period of time when Goldberg was insistent that the UN become involved. I had just been appointed Assistant Secretary - and that would be in 1964- and I went to Goldberg, he had just been appointed the Ambassador to the UN, I didn't know him- and I offered to resign so that he could appoint his own Assistant Secretary. He said no he didn't want that. But the very first month I was confronted with a recommendation by Ambassador Goldberg that the Security Council should become seized with the Vietnam issue. I tried to talk him out of it saying that : a.) It wasn't right; b.) that we would end up with a proposal in the Security Council that we would have to veto and therefore it would be a set-back rather than push matters forward. I made that view known to him and I made that view known to the Secretary of State because one of the big jobs of

the Assistant Secretary for IO is to try to keep the Secretary of State and the US Ambassador to the UN pointing in the same direction. That was reported to President Johnson and so President Johnson called me on a Saturday afternoon and said that Goldberg wants to go to the UN what do you think of it? I told him here's what I think and so on. I did not favor taking the matter to the Security Council. He said I want a memorandum. We are having an National Security Council meeting at Camp David tomorrow morning, I want a memorandum before tomorrow morning at ten o'clock which puts down your views. Rusk was out so I called Ball, the Acting Secretary; I said look, I'm in a terrible position, I've told Goldberg the reasons why I'm against going ahead in the UN, there's this National Security Council meeting tomorrow morning and the President now wants my views. Ball said just put them down and give them to him. And I must say to Goldberg's credit even though my memorandum against going to the UN was read before the whole National Security Council, and it delineated why we shouldn't go to the UN. We did ultimately go, but in a very limited way, we were going to seize the Security Council with the Vietnam items but not seek any kind of action. That's where we drew the line on the thing. Much to Goldberg's credit he never really held it against me that I took a dramatically opposed view to his in his

very first policy dispute after becoming an UN Ambassador.

That was my first exposure on Vietnam, and as a result of that, I was put on what was then called the Harriman Committee. There was a Harriman Committee which eventually developed that considered Vietnam issues. In all candor I was following Vietnam more closely than any other policy in the State Department.

JSS Do you think that Ambassador Goldberg encouraged U Thant to try to be an intermediary?

SISCO No, I do not believe that. I have no evidence of that. Ambassador Goldberg was strong-minded about his views on Vietnam but he was even more strong-minded about principles - being a player and playing it straight. In the years that I worked with him I never saw him do anything that was an attempt to go around the State Department. He and Dean Rusk enjoyed a very good relationship. There was trust and at no time did I ever see Goldberg do anything that would be cutting of corners, that would be untrustworthy in any respect. And he would not have pursued a dual or a duplicitous approach policy in this regard.

JSS And when U Thant did make his trip and when he did make actual arrangements for emissaries to meet, was this fully reported to the State Department?

SISCO As I recall it the reports we received were from two

sources: 1.) embassy sources out in the field and 2.) through the UN. It was not the US Mission being the exclusive source although U Thant, if I recall, came back and gave a full report to Goldberg, which was duly reported in detail. But we had gotten things as we went along.

JSS The reason I ask this is that he suggests in his memoirs that the report of what he had arranged didn't reach Washington until several days later.

SISCO I don't think that's true. I think that this is probably a reflection of U Thant believing that the report had not been given sufficient seriousness, if I could put it that way. Candidly that move was not welcome and secondly as viewed from the Seventh Floor a.) there existed (this is an overstatement but not too much of one) kind of a siege mentality if I can put it that way and b.) every other day there was a new initiative. Now it was different when, after all, it is the Secretary-General of the United Nations who takes the initiative. But there were so many would-be negotiators and mediators, French sources, private sources. In the months that I spent with that Harriman Committee we were sifting out all these proposals or so-called proposals and Rusk was very fond of saying, and I think he was right, "there was no lack of communication, it was just what was communicated."

JSS Is it accurate to say that this experience increased further the rather negative attitude toward U Thant, especially on the part of President Johnson?

SISCO Yes, President Johnson felt very strongly, in my judgement. I heard him at meetings critical of the UN and the symbol of the UN was the Secretary-General taking the kind of initiative that was not welcome. Moreover there was another feeling, and that is that the reports that were coming back tended to accentuate the positive of the positions of the other side when in fact, the feeling was that there was no real change in the position. And, of course, that's the tendency and I don't make this judgement about U Thant yes, or no - it's the tendency of all people who to want to play a third party role.

JSS Which takes me back a few years to another more serious incident and that was the Cuban Missile Crisis. At that time U Thant addressed letters to the American President and to Khrushchev to which the Soviet side replied rather quickly and the American side a little later. My question is this: in another interview it's been suggested that the dispatch of these letters was worked out in direct cooperation with the United States. What is your view on that?

SISCO My recollection is that we came to a conclusion at some point that the conduit of the Secretary-General would be

useful in information back and forth between ourselves and the Soviet Union. And in that sense we made it very very clear that we wanted the Secretary-General to play a role and in fact, it was through the Secretary-General that we got the first word that the Soviets had decided to turn back their ships. I could elaborate something in this regard, some day I hope to write it. The most dramatic part was Stevenson and the exposure of all those aerial photographs and culminating in his famous retort in the Security Council that he was willing to wait until hell froze over for Mr. Zorin's response. Adlai Stevenson had prepared, we (Arthur Schlessinger, Tom Wilson and myself) had prepared, a 65 page speech for Adlai Stevenson. I had flown to New York on the night before with military people on a military plane with all of those aerial photos. We had written a speech on that basis. Stevenson was scheduled to give it at 3 o'clock. Whatever that day happened to be the record will show. At about noon I had informed Harlan Cleveland that Stevenson was very firm in wanting to make this speech and that we felt that we should not make this speech at this time because we were waiting word from the Secretary-General as to the Soviet reply as to whether it would back off. The Secretary-General was playing a positive role in this regard. In fact U Thant recuperated part of his position with the US Government

as a result of the role he played at that particular juncture. So Cleveland called President Kennedy and Kennedy was absolutely convinced that Stevenson should not make the speech. I was instructed by the President, who was watching everything on television, to tell Stevenson he was not to make that speech. Walking over to the Security Council chamber, I said, "Governor, the President does not want you to make the speech, and the reason is that we are awaiting word from the Soviets, and we don't want your speech to become the pretext for the Russians saying 'no'." Well, he blew up and said he was going to make the speech anyway and I said, and Ambassador Dick Pederson said, you can't do that Governor. When we got to the Security Council chamber, outside the Security Council chamber there's a battery of two or three telephones. I called Washington and I said to Cleveland, "He's going to go ahead and there's only one way in which we can prevent him from doing it. You've got to get the President on the line." I said, "I'll go get him." He said, "All right, we'll get the President on the line." I went into the chamber (it was just then 3 o'clock) and said, "Governor, the President wants to talk to you." And he says, "God damn it Joe, tell Kennedy I can't talk to him; the meeting is about to begin." And I said, "I can get the meeting postponed for 15 minutes; you can't turn down talking to the

President." He grumbled and he went out. So I went to Zorin, who was Security Council president, and said, "Mr. Ambassador, as you know our two governments are in communication with one another on this matter and the President is now speaking to Governor Stevenson, would you mind delaying." Oh, he said, take whatever time you need. I will not start the meeting until you give me the signal. This was his response. Well, while Stevenson was in the booth, I took that 65 page speech and excised out about 40 pages, wanting him to be able to give something so he could make some sort of speech. So he came back grumbling and I said, "Governor I've excised a good deal of it and I think if you just make this statement as cut back you won't fall into the trap. I'm sure it's consistent with what the President had to say." He grumbled, and I gave Zorin the sign he could start the Security Council meeting. Stevenson made a very brief statement, the record will show - a few pages whatever it was. Then while this was going on we got word - we suspended the Security Council - we got word that the Russians had responded and they had responded favorably. They would turn back the ship with the missiles. And we got this through the Secretary-General. So we then, Pederson and myself, went into the side room and we said to him, now Governor, you can pull out all the stops, everything you got in this speech. We restored the 40

pages. Get all of these photographs out and just go right ahead and above all create a lot of tension in the Council Room, absolutely crisis atmosphere is what we want from you, is what we told him. So he did precisely that, and using, but on his own, those famous quotations. None of that was in the text. He did that on his own. And that's the story of the Secretary-General. We felt he had been very helpful in the Cuban Missile episode and that's from the top on down because Kennedy, himself, was very conscious that the focus was on U Thant at that moment. I didn't know if you had heard this story or not.

JSS

Harlan Cleveland had told us something of a somewhat different stage.

SISCO

Harlan was in Washington I was in New York.

JSS

He said at one point he was holding the phone more or less and the President was watching.

One more question in this connection. It has subsequently become known, just really in the last couple of years, that a letter was prepared in Washington for U Thant to send in the event that the crisis was not resolved. That the letter was never used because the crisis was resolved but it would have been another opportunity for U Thant, as a third party, to prevent the worst from happening. It's not clear where that was done. Was that done in the State Department?

SISCO It was done in the State Department and the reason for it, Jim, is very clear. It was resolved, as you say, and largely in picking out the best of the two letters that Khrushchev sent and the contacts between Scali and Kennedy and Dobrynin. But earlier as we were developing contingencies even if that direct attempt between the United States and the Soviet Union failed, we were all looking for something else at least by way of perception and therefore the UN as an institution in that regard would have provided additional time. That was contingency on contingency so to speak. We never had to resort to it because it got resolved.

JSS But the draft letter was prepared and sent up to New York.

SISCO I don't know about whether it was sent to New York. I don't recall who helped put it together and so on, but it was there.

JSS And it was a further indication that there was a recognition of the utility of the Secretary-General in a crisis like this.

SISCO It was an ace in the hole, not that we felt that if the situation had failed bilaterally the UN could resolve it. It was that the instrumentality would give at least the perception of an on-going diplomatic process and therefore ease the need for military confrontation at that moment. It is much to the credit of the United

States as evidence of how far it was willing to go to avoid what would have been world war III.

JSS Now I'd like to go ahead from U Thant to his successor and to the selection of Kurt Waldheim. Could you just give the background of how again Washington approached this election.

SISCO We felt that we wanted a stronger Secretary-General. We were still deeply committed to the notion of the active role of the institution despite the fact of the changed composition. We also were looking for someone we felt we could work with and who was not necessarily orientated by experience to the third world posture. There was some good, some bad. The hope was that you could get a man in the position that could stand up to pressures. In this regard, there were candidacies that came forward and our strong choice was Ambassador Max Jacobson of Finland. Waldheim was not our first choice. But coming out so would be the kiss of death for Jacobson because he had to work this out with the Soviets. Therefore our whole strategy at that time, as it was previously, was to allow the candidacies to come forward knowing that there would be, as there was with respect to U Thant, informal consultations between the Permanent Members which is the normal procedure in this regard. And we played Max Jacobson very very carefully and really allowed the Soviets to make their own decision without our making him

our candidate. We always had serious doubts the Soviets would allow a Finn to become Secretary-General. Well when that didn't work out the name of Waldheim came up.

JSS

Did the Soviets indicate why Jacobson was not acceptable?

SISCO

No. Our own feeling was that it was not so much any negative feeling about Jacobson per se as an individual. It had to do more with Finnish-Soviet relationships although, secondly, at the time there was a strong anti-Israeli vein in Soviet policy. One of Jacobson's grandparents was Jewish and we felt that that was influencing the Soviet Union at the time.

JSS

Were you aware of a fairly strong Arab disinclination?

SISCO

Yes, and the Soviets were playing that particular game. So I think it's unfortunate. I think that Ambassador Jacobson felt we had not pressed the Soviets sufficiently on this matter. In actuality if we had, it would have been even worse because they would have had a third reason to turn him down, namely he'd become the American candidate. And he was our candidate; he was our number one choice. I can remember the discussions with Secretary Rusk on this whole matter. Waldheim was always down to the number two category. We knew Waldheim because he had been for a long time the Austrian Representative to the UN. And he had certainly made himself known to us throughout that whole period beforehand.

JSS Now of course, the inevitable question. To your knowledge were any checks made with regard to any records on Mr. Waldheim? Why not?

SISCO I was not aware of any.

JSS Why not?

SISCO Well, I don't know why not - checks in the sense of the normal kind of checks. I think the general feeling was that these people were known and I'm sure in some part of the intelligence agency people were looking at it from an intelligence point of view. But I'll be very candid with you, I was not made aware of anything but this does not preclude that at the Secretary of State's level, at the National Security Council level, some intelligence assessment was made. But in any event our intelligence services didn't unearth the problem that arose later on. There was no evidence of an unbalance on the part of Waldheim. Waldheim was a very careful diplomat in that pre-Secretary-General period. He was viewed as an individual who had open lines both to the Soviet Union as well as to the United States and above all there was the neutrality of Austria. Austria was a friendly Western state. Waldheim had a good many thing going for him. But I can't answer the question as to why there weren't checks of the kind that might possibly have exposed his past.

JSS And what was your ongoing assessment of Waldheim as

Secretary-General?

SISCO You mean once he became Secretary-General? One, he sought to balance between the US and USSR. Two, we felt he was subject to pressures from the Soviet Union, but we also felt he was subject to our own pressures as counter pressure; that he was the kind of man who was responsive to this kind of thing, and that his whole approach was largely pragmatic in the sense of the survivability of the Secretary-General. He did not have a strong independent commitment to the institution per se as a Dag Hammarskjold - a sharp contrast. Now granted it was a different period of time in the evolution of the Organization but no, one didn't detect that sort of thing. It was more, on the whole, a classical 19th century traditional diplomatic approach.

JSS And there was never any real evidence of his leaning particularly toward one side or toward another.

SISCO No, there were times when we felt he succumbed to Soviet pressure more than he should have but basically he was down the middle somewhere.

JSS I wanted to ask a question related to this question of the Soviet presence in the Secretariat which has, actually after you left the State Department, caused a great deal of trouble in terms of financial support. My question to you is in your years how did you view this, starting really with Dobrynin who started in the

Secretariat. Did you view this as a real problem in terms of the United Nations, as jeopardizing the confidence that you placed in the Organization or not.

SISCO

We felt that first, it was a major problem in perception particularly related to the American Congress; secondly, it became an increasingly greater problem as the UN, particularly in the very bad votes we experienced in the General Assembly. It became more and more the instrumentality of the non-aligned and i.e. in the eyes of others, of the Soviet Union itself; and third, we went through a difficult McCarthy period in the earlier days, the question of the use of the UN for purposes of espionage and counterespionage. We had long been aware of KGB plants at the UN. The US felt there was no real classified information available there, but that which was available was very tightly held at the Secretary-General's level. Moreover, whether it was under U Thant or whether it was under Hammarskjold, and I'm less in a position to make judgement on Waldheim in this regard, but even with Waldheim we, at my level, did not have the knowledge that classified information was being spilled to the Russians from that particular level. Each Secretary-General was careful in his day by day operations. He dealt with the under-secretaries on an individual basis. Whenever there was a collective staff meeting little of any real sensitivity took place. And

that was a standard operating procedure for as long as I can remember. But it became an increasing problem simply because of the more negative environment that had developed with respect to the UN within the United States, which was the prime support of the Organization. And moreover, whereas in the earlier period Americans occupied most of the important positions, pretty soon the thing evolved in such a way in the personnel end, around the information department or whatever it might be, there was a distribution more reflective of the changed composition of the UN itself. There developed less of the commitment to the international civil servant concept, but largely a place where nation states put old diplomats to rest.

JSS

Now we don't have too much time left but if I may I'd like to move very quickly to the 1967 war in the Middle East and ask you a couple of questions on that. It's often said that there was a remarkable series of mistakes made by the different parties which perhaps led to the outbreak of the 1967 war. So my question is a general question first - what was your perception from the vantage point of the State Department of the situation in the Middle East in the early months of 1967 leading up to the outbreak of the war?

SISCO

Well our perception was that a.) there was a tremendous increase in tension;b.) there was a war of attrition that

presumably was being pursued by the Arabs against Israel and a situation whereby the Israelis felt that they were being more and more cornered. That was the general environment of the whole thing. Nobody expected the result of six days but I can recall being in an National Security Council meeting before that occurred and our military assessment was that in the event of a war between the Arabs and the Israelis that the Israelis would win.

JSS You did make that assessment?

SISCO Yes, that assessment was made by our military and conveyed to the President at a National Security Council meeting I attended.

JSS Now immediately before the war broke out the Soviet Union conveyed information that was clearly false.

SISCO Yes, that they claimed Israel was massing along the Syrian border. The Soviet ambassador conveyed or made a public statement to that effect.

JSS Made a public statement but it was also conveyed privately to Nasser who was in Cairo and to Sadat who happened to be visiting Moscow at the time. To what extent did the United States make an effort to counter that information that was going to the Egyptians?

SISCO Both Israel and the United States at that time denied the buildup, conveyed this to the Secretary-General and had it conveyed all the way around, that there was nothing to

this. The Israelis at that given period were very straightforward; they laid it all out and the impression I have looking at that event in hindsight after these years is that Nasser really didn't want to hear that. He had a strategy and that was a part of the overall strategy unfortunately, and the Soviet's were part of that game one way or another, either inadvertently or otherwise. But the Israelis were at great pains at that time to make it clear that was not the case. And it was not the case. We, if I recall, had checked it out on the basis on our own sources and were perfectly satisfied that no such Israeli buildup was occurring.

JSS

It has also been suggested Nasser made a mistake and I'd like to ask what the assessment again was on the American side. His initial request or at least that of his chief of staff on the withdrawal of UNEF was only for a partial withdrawal. It didn't seem to cover all of the observation posts. At that time and also in retrospect was there a sense on your part and in Washington that Nasser had not really intended for this to lead to the war that it lead to.

SISCO

I would say that Nasser's calculation was that UNEF would be removed and that this would give him a freer hand. Combined that with closing of the STRAITS, then one had to conclude that he was prepared to face the worst because certainly the Israeli had made it very very clear

such an action would constitute a causus belli.



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NAME INDEX

Ball, George	13, 14
Cleveland, Harlan	18, 19, 21
Dobrynin, Anatoli Fedorovich	22, 27
Eban, Abba	10
Goldberg, Arthur	12-16
Hammar skjold, Dag	1-4, 9, 26, 27
Jacobson, Max	23, 24
Johnson, Lyndon	14, 17
Kennedy, John F.	19-22
Khrushchev, Nikita	17, 22
Lodge, John Cabot	10
Nasser, Gamal Abdel	9, 29, 30
Pederson, Richard	19, 21
Rusk, Dean	14-16, 24
Scali, John	22
Schlessinger, Arthur, Jr.	18
Thant, U	1, 2, 4, 6-12, 15-17, 19, 21, 23, 27
Waldheim, Kurt	23-27
Wilson, Tom	18
Zorin, Valerian A.	18, 20



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