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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Ambassador Leonard Meeker
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
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NON-CIRCULATING
YUN INTERVIEW
AMBASSADOR LEONARD MEEKER
JULY 24, 1990
WASHINGTON, DC
INTERVIEWER: JAMES S. SUTTERLIN

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JS So, Ambassador Meeker, I wish first to thank you for agreeing to participate in this Yale Oral History Program on the United Nations and, if I might, I would like to ask if you would indicate what your position was and what your relationship was to developments in Korea in 1950 when the Korean War broke out?

LM Well, it's my pleasure to meet with you this morning. At that time, in 1950, I was a lawyer in the Office of the Legal Adviser and indeed, remained in that Office dealing with UN affairs for several years after that time.

JS Could you give an indication of how the US structure was organized in dealing with the Korean question - that is, the relationship between New York and the various departments in the State Department?

LM Well in Washington the UN Bureau was the center of activity for the State Department, and Harding Bancroft (Director of the Office of UN Political Affairs) was one person who played a very large part in working out the politics and the positions that we were going to take in New York. And as usual, the instructions after they were approved in Washington

were sent to the New York where the US Mission then proceeded to carry them out.

JS Was there a kind of task force at all in which the Legal Office was involved directly with the UN Bureau?

LM Well I'm not sure that anything as formal as a task force was ever set up but there was certainly a group led by Harding (in which I participated) which worked on Korea throughout that summer. And later we continued in New York in the fall.

JS And the liaison with the White House, was Harding Bancroft the main point of contact with the White House also, or was there a different team?

LM Well I suspect that Dean Acheson himself talked with the President a lot about this subject. I don't recall that Harding engaged in any particular liaison with the White House.

JS Looking back then, who would you say were the main figures on the American side in dealing with the crisis - not on the military side but on the political side?

LM The basic decision was made by President Truman, advised by Dean Acheson. Acheson certainly directed in a general way

everything that happened after June 25, but I guess you would say that probably Dean Rusk and Harding Bancroft played very large roles in the State Department.

JS Now from the very beginning it would appear, looking back, that the legal aspects were quite important, especially in terms of the resolutions that were passed at the UN. Was there consultation on the wording of those resolutions (I believe there were three) in the immediate period after the invasion? Was there consultation between New York and Washington? Where was the major drafting done?

LM It was done in both places. The first resolution, June 25, was very carefully crafted so as to have the Security Council find that an armed attack had taken place. The next one, on June 27, was under Chapter VII, Article 40, Provisional Measure. Harding was really a very expert person when it came to knowledge of the Charter. We worked together in that time, working on resolutions. The thought was that the Security Council should first decide there had been an armed attack and then take provisional measures under Article 40 of Chapter VII. The June 25 resolution helped to sustain President Truman's initial response, which was to employ US armed forces in collective self-defense, which under Article 51 of the Charter is permissible when there is an armed attack. So having the Security Council find the occurrence of an armed

attack by North Korea was important from the point of view of our legal position. The next resolution, on June 27, went beyond that. It contained a recommendation by the Security Council to members of the UN that they join with the United States in helping to repel the attack. That decision was not really enforcement action because there were no Article 43 forces which the Security Council could order into action. It was a recommendation to member states that they use their armed forces to help repel the attack. The third resolution, adopted July 7, was a resolution sought by the United States to make that there would be a Unified Command. The Unified Command was not a person, it was not General MacArthur. The Unified Command was the US Government which then through its own military channels - the Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs - communicated whatever instruction it was going to communicate to General MacArthur in the Far East.

JS Because it was at that point he was designated the UN commander.

LM Yes. A designation made by the United States as the Unified Command.

JS In the case of President Truman's action (this was on the 27 of June, I think) he stated that he had ordered US air and sea forces to give the Korean government troops cover and support, he referred to the Security Council resolution, that in fact,

had not quite been passed at that point. Do you recall that?
How did that happen?

LM You know, I'm not sure just how that came about.

JS But I judge that part of the drafting must have been done in Washington again, and he must have known what the resolution was.

LM Yes. It was expected that this resolution would be passed very soon, and indeed it was.

JS Now, I think almost immediately the United States sent a note to the Soviet Union asking for its assistance in bringing an end to this conflict. In New York, of course, Ambassador Malik was not attending the Security Council meetings. To your knowledge was there continuing contact in Washington with the Soviet Union with regard to the Korean developments?

LM I simply don't know.

JS Now I want to ahead to something that I know you are very familiar with and which has had a long and important history in the UN, and that is what's known as the Uniting for Peace Resolution, which was adopted later to overcome the impasse in the Security Council. Could you give the background as you

know it of this resolution - of the drafting of it, the preparation of it, the intent of it?

LM During the summer when August 1 came and Malik went back to the Security Council to take up the role of President (since it was his turn to be President in August) it was recognized that the Security Council, with the Soviet Union present, would no longer be able to function in regard to Korea. The Soviet veto would prevent any action. There had been earlier discussion about the role of the General Assembly in the field of peace and security and, in fact, a sub-organ called the Interim Committee had been set up a couple of years earlier. As I recall it now, during August of 1950 there were meetings in Washington which included Dean Rusk, Harding Bancroft, John Foster Dulles (who came down from his retreat in northern New York State) and myself to discuss what might be done to put the General Assembly in a position to act in some way in the Korean War. It was recognized that the Security Council at the most had made recommendations. And it was believed by all of us that if you looked carefully at the different articles of the Charter dealing with the powers of the General Assembly, it could discuss questions affecting peace and security and also could make recommendations. So with that set of ideas we began in that month to draft a resolution for the General Assembly to pass which would set up a framework for General Assembly consideration of a peace and security

problem in a situation where the Security Council was unable to act because of the veto. The drafts were pretty well finished and approved along in early September, and I remember going to New York at that time with Mr. Dulles who handled this question in the First Committee of the General Assembly. We had a series of meetings over a few weeks with other delegations to solicit their sponsorship (or at least their support) of the resolution, and ultimately we did introduce a multi-power resolution in the General Assembly which eventually became the Uniting for Peace plan.

JS Was there a good bit of hesitation on the part of some of the other delegations - particularly the British - as to the validity of the legal principles behind the resolution?

LM There was. I would say less on the part of the British than on the part of Mexico and Egypt, two countries that we hoped to have as co-sponsors. The British, as I recall, at the lower levels in their delegation did entertain some worries about this. I think their representative, their principal representative, was Kenneth Younger who was Minister of State in the Foreign Office, and he, as a politician, was able to take a view which surmounted the legal objection of some others in his delegation.

JS The resolution has in it more than just transferring some

responsibility to the General Assembly. It created the concept of having what one might call readiness forces in national military establishments for use in the UN. These all were developed in the same group in Washington.

LM The resolution provided for something called the Collective Measures Committee. That committee was a sub-organ of the General Assembly, which met later in Geneva. Harding Bancroft was appointed to be our representative on it, and the task of that committee was to work out plans for the contribution of forces by UN members to be used in cases where the participation of armed forces might be required.

JS Now, collective measures - how do you equate that with the concept of collective security?

LM Well it's very much related to collective security. The Charter and the UN Organization as a whole were created to support and assure collective security. It was originally supposed that the Security Council would be the organ that would arrange all this, and when it turned out that the Council (because of the veto) would not be able to function in some important cases, then a transfer to the forum was decided upon. The General Assembly (which has in it all of the Members of the UN) would be designed to assure collective security by using the powers which it had - powers of

recommendation - and of course, it could take certain preparatory measures in advance through the Collective Measures Committee by setting up a system of contribution of forces by Member States and providing for their suitable military organization.

JS If I understood you correctly then, really the takeoff point of this resolution was the perception that the Security Council, in the action that it did take, called for a recommendatory rather than an enforcement action, and that in principle, the General Assembly could in fact do the same thing.

LM Yes. That was the position we took, which was very strongly contested by the Soviet representative, Andrei Vishinsky, and there were legal debates in the General Assembly between himself and Mr. Dulles over a period of time. Ultimately the Assembly was willing to vote for the Uniting for Peace resolution and did not endorse the arguments of Vishinsky to the effect that only the Security Council could do this sort of thing.

JS And looking back, of course as you know, this resolution continues to be used. But looking back to the particular Korean situation, do you think it had any of the effect that was desired? Was the General Assembly actually able to act on

the basis of the resolution effectively?

LM Well I don't believe it really did in relation to Korea. Once the initial three resolutions had been adopted by the Security Council - June 25, 25 and July 7 - the UN had essentially done about all that it was going to do with respect to Korea, and it passed the baton to the United States which from that point onward managed the war on the UN side. I don't think that the passage of the Uniting for Peace resolution empowered the Assembly to do anything further regarding Korea that was really significant. I think the Uniting for Peace resolution really became significant only in later cases involved other areas.

JS You're thinking particularly of 1956 and the Suez War. Going back then, yes - as you say the baton was passed to the Americans, which brings me to the next question. And that is the relationship between the military in the field - the US military, the unified command, and the State Department, and particularly New York. Was the Security Council in any way kept informed by General MacArthur headquarters of the military planning, of the military progress?

LM I don't recall any reports ever going from General MacArthur headquarters straight to the UN. The US government as Unified Command made occasional reports of what was happening in the

field during the summer and fall of 1950.

JS There has been a suggestion that the Military Staff Committee - that is, the American member of the Security Council - did have some direct channel of communication between the military and the Secretary-General. You're not aware of that?

LM That may be. That's something I don't know about.

JS The next point I want to get to is something that I suppose was centered in New York, but it's the relationship between a resolution of the Korean conflict and the entry of the People's Republic of China into the UN to take the Chinese seat. In Washington, were you concerned with this relationship, was it studied, what conclusions were reached, and so forth?

LM During that fall, from September through December, I was myself in New York and working with the delegation rather than the State Department. Of course this was a subject which the delegation thought about a great deal because the question was raised in a very direct manner in New York. One thing which was interesting that year (in the latter part of the Assembly session) was a Security Council debate on the question of China. There was an issue as to whether a representative of the new government in Peking would be permitted to come to the

Council and address it. The United States took that position that, yes, there should be such a possibility for the representative of Peking. Then came the question whether that issue was subject to the veto. Clearly it was a procedural issue, not a substantive resolution, because the question of who is allowed to speak, I think, was considered to be procedural by everyone on the Council. But if you went back through the San Francisco records you found a Four-Power statement which said finally that, when it came to deciding if a question was procedural or substantive, the veto could apply and would apply there. So there was an issue as to whether this would be veto-able by the Chinese Nationalist representative at the Security Council, who did in fact cast a vote against the motion to hear the representative from Peking.

At that point the Council did something which we felt was quite justified when you went through the Charter and through the history of the San Francisco conference, and the Council simply overrode that double veto as being a preposterous and insupportable action. So in fact a Chinese representative from Peking did come to the Council and participated in the debate. Now that was not a question of who would represent China in the UN because neither the Council nor the Assembly made any change in the representation of China. There were many countries who wanted to make a change and who argued very strongly that in view of the Chinese intervention in Korea it

was very imprudent not to have them occupying the Chinese seat when they were in control of the mainland as well as also being a principal military participant in the war.

JS So pursuing this question, as you saw it was there any indication, any inclination, on the part of the American administration to be at least neutral on the question of the representation of China in the UN if this would contribute to an end to the conflict in Korea?

LM I don't recall any discussion or anything in writing which suggested that sort of attitude on the part of the United States in the General Assembly. This question has been a very sensitive one ever since the Chinese Communists came to power in the Mainland in October of 1949, and it was very sensitive in Washington both for Dean Acheson and President Truman. My recollection is that the United States maintained a very firm and unchanging opposition to the seating of Peking as the representative of China.

JS Now at that point, I believe that the British, Indians, perhaps Lester Pierson in Canada, were all involved in trying to find some kind of a solution, and I think the Chinese case was part of that always. Were you familiar with this and how was that seen from the American perspective?

LM Well at a reasonably late stage after the Chinese Army's intervention in Korea, there was established a small group which was known as the Entezam group, named after the representative of Iran who was chairman of the General Assembly's Political Committee at that time, which was designed to explore the possibility of a negotiated solution. Naturally the United States was interested in any progress which they could make by which the fighting could come to an end. But the United States was at all times concerned that the terms on which there would be a ceasefire or armistice should not sacrifice South Korea. There should emerge from the discussion a South Korea in essentially the same shape and size that it had been before the attack. And I do not recall that in connection with those discussion the United States was ever disposed to do anything which would end up with the Chinese Communists being seated in the UN as the representative of China.

JS I see. This ceasefire of the committee three men, were there differences, real problems, in terms of what they were suggesting and what the United States was prepared to accept?

LM I think that certainly India wanted to go farther. Pierson was personally disposed to go farther, but was not going to press the United States too hard. I think his view was, the United States has a huge responsibility. It is the main

military actor on the scene, and he didn't was to press the United States too hard. Entezam, I think, was a more neutral figure. He was perfectly willing to go farther in the direction of some accommodation with China if that were acceptable to both China and the United States. But he was not disposed to press in the same way that India was.

JS Until now I haven't mentioned the Secretary-General, Trygve Lie. He took a very, almost forward, position you might say in considering that the repulsion of the North Korean aggression was essential to the future of the UN. Can you say anything about the closeness of the relationship between the American side and Trygve Lie especially during the early stages of the Korean conflict?

LM I think it was a close relationship, and the fact that there was really a cooperation between the Secretary-General and the US government on this whole issue helped to insure that Lie would be completely unacceptable to the USSR for reelection as Secretary-General.

JS Was there almost a bilateralism between the US side and the Secretary-General during these months?

LM It was certainly a very close harmony of views and cooperation in all activities.

JS Now going on, after the Inchon landing and the restoration of the strength of the unified command in Korea, the General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a unified, independent and democratic government for all of Korea. Do you recall, was the United States directly involved in the drafting of this resolution?

LM Yes it was.

JS Because the intent of the resolution has been (or was at the time) under debate, I guess. General MacArthur interpreted that as meaning that the unification of a democratic Korea should be obtained by military means. Was that the view of the State Department's side of the US mission? How did you interpret this? What did you think this resolution meant?

LM The State Department did not really endorse that view. It regarded the General Assembly resolution as a recommendation as to where everything should come out but did not regard it as a mandate for military action, the use of military means, to accomplish the objective. If the hostilities - the course of them and the progress of the war - developed in such a way that it would be possible to have a unified Korea in accordance with the General Assembly resolution, I guess the State Department thought that that would be a highly desirable outcome. But it did not regard that resolution as a mandate,

calling on the United States as the Unified Command and calling upon General MacArthur to occupy the rest of the Korean peninsula and to unify the country by military means.

JS In fact if I'm not mistaken, before that resolution was passed the Interim Committee had adopted an Australian proposal on Korea which said, in effect, that the UN should administer any territory above the 38th parallel that was taken over by the Unified Command whereas the authority of the Syngman Rhee government would be limited to the area that he controlled (that that his government had controlled before the outbreak of the war) and according to the information that I have, this decision was actually sent to General MacArthur, but I judge it had no effect.

LM He evidently did not regard that as having any bearing on his military operations. That, I suppose, he would have regarded as a political disposition which might take effect after the military operations were successful. There is a very cloudy history as far as I can tell, going back through my files, as to what the State Department did during the period before the Chinese intervention and what the Joint Chiefs did. I don't have any information as to whether the State Department (at the very top, Dean Acheson) expressed any particular views, either to the President or the Defense Department as to what General MacArthur's next action should be. I believe from all

that I can tell that General MacArthur did let the Defense Department - the Joint Chiefs - know what he was planning to do, that he was planning to go on northward and to occupy the whole of the peninsula. Some members of the Joint Chiefs may have had some worries and hesitations about that, but they never formalized them, and neither gave any instruction nor sent any messages to him saying "don't do it" or "be very careful". I guess the situation was one in which General MacArthur's reputation and his political position as a very large political as well as military figure caused people in Washington to be most hesitant to try and tell him what to do and what not to do - especially after what had been considered the brilliant stroke of the Inchon landings.

So we got into very big trouble letting General MacArthur make the decision. And this all happened at a time when warning signals were coming from the Indian Ambassador in Peking, and I believe also from the Netherlands. At least those two sources said that the Chinese would intervene "militarily if you go much beyond the narrow waist".

JS I wanted to ask about that because the warning was very clear, I believe, especially from the Indian ambassador in Peking - directly from Chou En Lai, if I'm not mistaken. But this was apparently discounted or ignored on the American side. Why how do you explain that?

LM The only explanation I can think of is that the US government in general did not have much confidence in the Indian government, didn't like some of its figures, particularly Krishna Menon, was rather distrustful of Nehru, and thought that perhaps Ambassador Panikkar may have been exaggerating what he was told. I guess the ultimate conclusion was that this was a diplomatic effort by the Indians to stop the progress of US forces in Korea and therefore it was discounted as a political effort and not taken seriously as a real intelligence message.


JS And you had mentioned the Indian side and I think in fact that in his memoirs Dean Acheson suggests that when he went to New York there were two people he worried about: one was Krishna Menon, and oddly enough, the other was Lester Pierson because he wasn't quite sure where they would end up. But on the other hand, Sir Benegal Rau was the Indian Representative for a good part of this time and I believe the relationship there was one of confidence, is that your recollection?

LM He was the representative in the Security Council and was very highly regarded by all of the Americans who had any dealings with him. Krishna Menon was there as the leader of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly which was a different position, and when he was there, he was really in charge of the representation of India on these matters.

JS So he was superior to Benegal Rau, then?

LM Yes.

JS Now in these discussions and in a lot of the material one reads, there is surprisingly little reference to the role played by the representatives of the Republic of Korea, South Korea. How did they fit into the deliberations on the US side as to what action should be taken politically in the UN and elsewhere?



LM Well they were certainly consulted. They were, of course, in a very weak position, and the Rhee government was so unpopular that members of the General Assembly for the most part had little sympathy for that government and didn't pay terribly much attention to what its representatives in New York said.

JS So it was the reputation of the Rhee government that really inhibited, you might say, the influence which....

LM I think it prevented the Korea representation in New York from being really effective.

JS I think that at two points, once in the speech and later in a proposed action at the UN, Dean Acheson suggested the possible

establishment of a constabulary force within the UN to deal with situations such as those that had arisen in Korea. Are you familiar with the background of this early thinking on this? Now let me say I believe that Trygve Lie had already suggested something similar in the Middle East and Palestine and it had been rejected by the General Assembly. But are you familiar with early thinking on the American side in terms of the establishment of some kind of a permanent military force other than the one foreseen in Chapter VII of the Charter?

LM Not except as something contemplated to follow on the work of the Collective Measures Committee.

JS I think that probably was the context in which it was seen. But, to your knowledge, no great amount of work was done on that concept on the American side at that time?

LM I don't recall it.

JS Because by that time, had you on the legal side, more or less given up on the credibility of article 43 of the Charter?

LM We regarded it as simply impractical and could not be implemented because in the discussions which had taken place in the Military Staff Committee over many years, they had come to a complete impasse, and it looked as if no article 43

forces would ever be contributed and therefore, some other line of activity would need to be pursued.

JS Departing just a bit from the Korean question, what were the main obstacles, what were the main differences that prevented the establishment of the military force that might have been available to the Security Council? Was it merely the technical questions of whether there should be an air force, or not an air force, or whether there should be small units stationed around the world, or not, or were there larger considerations that stood in the way?

LM I think there were larger questions as to who and what agency would be in charge of this force. I think that the Soviets throughout were very skeptical and distrustful of any force that would be brought into being and turn out to be under the command of either the United States and indeed, the Secretary-General, because at that time the composition of the UN was such that the United States had a very strong, really a commanding, influence and I think the Soviets were not happy about the thought of that being extended to a military force.

JS Yes, going back earlier, I have interviewed one of the Soviet advisors who was present in San Francisco - this is just an aside - but he indicated that even by the end of the San Francisco conference the Soviet side did not really believe

that provision in the Charter would ever be implemented. So I guess both the American and the Soviet sides had very little confidence in this.

LM I think there was no belief that it would lead to a definite positive result.

JS Coming to the point of the Chinese intervention, there are some references in the literature to a panic in New York. What was your impression of the reaction of the other members of the UN to the situation on the news of the full Chinese intervention in the war?

LM They were certainly very concerned at such a development which turned the fortunes of war around completely in late November. It seemed to me that some felt that the United States had been imprudent, had pursued the war militarily beyond the point where the United States should have been, and that this reaction from the Chinese was to be expected. I don't recall any sense of panic on the part of anybody. I do remember someone reporting a remark from General Marshall (who was then Secretary of Defense) to the effect that "we may be coming in for a crash landing". Those were the words that were reported up in New York but I think that everyone there in the US Mission (and in others with whom we were in close contact) felt this was indeed a very serious situation and that it

should be addressed in every practical way that we could in New York, although realizing that there was very little that diplomats (some thousands of miles away) could do in relation to a military rout.

JS It was more or less at this time also that President Truman had his press conference in which he referred indirectly to the possible utilization of an atomic weapon. Did that come as a surprise in the State Department? What was the reaction there?

LM I wasn't in Washington at that time. Certainly people in New York thought this was a terrible idea and hoped it was just a bluff.

JS Right. And it was at this point that the British became extremely exercise, I believe, and Mr. Atlee came to Washington for consultations with President Truman. Were you in New York at this point?

LM I was in New York.

JS So you didn't participate in those conversations?

LM No.

JS But in general, I believe the major British concern was that this should not become a war between Asians and Europeans, so to speak. Was that your impression? Was that also a concern in the State Department?

LM I think it was. We wanted very much in the State Department to have this treated as a war in which the international community, organized in the UN, was turning back an armed attack by one country in Asia against another. And we certainly did not want to give any currency to the idea that this was Europeans against Asians.

JS One resolution that was eventually adopted in the General Assembly, and I suppose one might say as a result of the Uniting for Peace resolution, was the one calling for sanctions against the People's Republic of China. This was not very effective, I judge. What is your interpretation of that?

LM It was a resolution to set up something called the Additional Measures Committee. The theory of it was that just as the General Assembly could recommend that countries use military force to repel an attack, the General Assembly could recommend economic measures to try to induce an aggressor to draw back.

JS Who were seen as the major figures in the UN on the Korean crisis?

LM Certainly Pierson, also Menon, in New York in the UN context (which was quite limited) , certainly Nazrollah Entezam of Iran, Carlos Romulo of the Philipines I think was a quite active figure, and so was Luis Padilla Nervo of Mexico.

JS Romulo, in what sense was he seen as a supportive figure?

LM He was seen as supportive, being an Asian and being from a small country which had recently acquired its independence and which was certainly sympathetic with the independence of South Korea.

JS With regard to the UN itself in the Secretariat in New York, what was the impression on the American side of the effectiveness of this organization ?

LM There were, of course, a lot of different players in the UN. The Department of Security Council Affairs in the UN Secretariat was not terribly cooperative. It was run by a Soviet national, and I think that Trygve Lie essentially felt that he had to act independently of it, and he did. His principal assistant and advisor, I guess, was Abe Feller, who was very active during the early period and I guess that the

US attitude was simply that Lie was fine and anything which was under his control, under his auspices, worked pretty well and the Department of Security Council Affairs just had to be left to one side.

JS I believe there was a Russian named Zivchenko who was at that point the Under Secretary-General, or at least he was in the Secretariat, he was a senior Soviet then. And even when the Russians were officially absent from the Security Council, since the Department of Security Council Affairs was headed by a Russian, there were Russians in the Security Council on the Security Council's side. Did you see that as a problem, was that seen as a problem on the American side, the fact that there were these Russians there?

LM No, that didn't seem to be a problem at all because everybody knew what the Soviet position was and what the US position was, and with the Soviets absent from the Council it was possible to go ahead and take some very useful steps, and the presence of Soviet nationals from the Secretariat had no inhibiting effect.

JS I believe there was a man named Protitch who was in charge of Security Council affairs.

LM He was a Yugoslav.

JS He was a Yugoslav, that's right. But the records show that a lot of the UN reporting from Korea on the progress of the war went to him rather than to the Assistant Secretary-General. Are you familiar with the relationship between the Americans and Protitch at that point?

LM The relations were good. He was cooperative and helpful and respected as a careful international civil servant.

JS Looking back now, I want to ask a philosophical question. What conclusions did you personally draw from the experience of the Korean war in terms of the effectiveness and particularly the future role of the UN in dealing with conflict situations?

LM I thought the experience was remarkably positive in showing that the world community organized in the UN, meeting at UN headquarters, could and did respond to a clear case of armed attack. The facts, I think, were undisputed and the Organization, through its Members, responded very well by determining that there had been an attack and who was the attacker, and then went on to recommend that everybody rally round and repel it. Naturally it was realized that this had been possible because of Soviet absence from the Security Council, and it was also realized that if one tried to play this kind of action over again in the General Assembly, it

would be far more difficult because there are far more members whom you have to consult and bring along and who must join in any resolutions that are going to be adopted. However, it was true later in the case of the UNEF dispatched to the Sinai Peninsula that the General Assembly was able to act, and act effectively. I think, looking ahead from here, perhaps we should look forward to a time when the UN may be more active and more successful. After the death of Hammarskjöld, the Organization went into quite a decline, and perhaps now it is just starting to emerge, that would be my hope.

JS Yes. You could say that the Korean war was one of the first and most bitter experiences resulting from the Cold War.

LM Yes, it was.

JS I think that answer is clear. But the general and convinced assumption on the part of all Americans at that point when the invasion took place was that the Soviet Union was behind the invasion in full support of the North Koreans. Is that correct?

LM I think people did believe that, and certainly with the Government there was the belief that Stalin knew about the intended attack and, in effect, gave it his blessing.

JS The one thing that raises a question in this regard is the absence of the Soviet Union from the Security Council at the critical point because, in fact, the Security Council would not have been able to take the actions it did if the Russians had been there.

LM That's quite right. They would have vetoed all three of those resolutions and those vetoes would have stuck.

JS They would have stuck.

LM Yes.



JS And do you think then, looking back, that this would in fact have prevented any UN action, and would have been entirely up to the US then to act alone?

LM It would have made the situation much more difficult because the attack occurred in June and the General Assembly was not going to meet until September. At that time there were no procedures for calling an emergency special session. If in September, when the Assembly did meet, there was an effort on our part to organize a collective resistance to the attack, it would have been a lot more difficult because the war would have been going on for three months, and other countries might have taken the attitude, "well the United States has taken

this into its own hands and let it go ahead, we're not going to get involved." I think it would have been very difficult for us to do anything effective in the UN and we might not even have secured the passing of the Uniting for Peace resolution.

JS So in your opinion, the UN role was a very important role in the conduct of this war?

LM I think that politically it was of the greatest importance.

JS Those are the major questions I have to ask with regard to Korea. I wonder though - if there are things which come back to you as being of importance that we should record at this point in your recollections of the experiences of those days?

LM Well I think you've gone over the field pretty thoroughly. Having looked through my files recently, I don't think of any further points that need to be covered. I do remember that in November of 1950, Ben Cohen who was then a member of our delegation to the General Assembly, at the time of the Chinese intervention wrote a memorandum to Phil Jessup strongly urging that there be a very careful consideration of US policy to decide what we really wanted to do in the Korean war - what our objectives were. That was certainly typical of Ben to ask thoughtful questions at a difficult time because at that time,

there was no evident thinking or planning as to what the United States really wanted now that the war had come to a sudden, very difficult stage of the Chinese intervention.

JS Yes, well that was why I asked the earlier question. In effect, there was no planning for a unified, democratic Korea extending to the whole peninsula.

LM That's right and this was one object of Ben Cohen's memorandum to Jessup. He said "we need to have a plan, we need to have objectives, to know what it is we want to do in Korea, and how we are going to go about it without involving ourselves in an endless Asian war."

JS Let's stop there. I would like to change the subject now, Ambassador Meeker. If we may, I want to move to the subject of the establishment of Israel. There were very important developments in this regard at the UN, actually beginning before there was a decision on partition in the form of a UN resolution. I wonder if you could describe some of what was going on in the State Department at this early period when it was clear that the British were going to abandon their mandate and the future seemed a little unclear?

LM Very soon after the Assembly's adoption of its resolution of November 29, 1947, there began to meet at the State Department

a small group under the chairmanship of Rob McClintock, who was then special assistant in what was then the Office of Special Political Affairs and which became the Bureau of UN Affairs. This group included (besides UN people) people from the Near East Bureau, and I attended from the Office of the Legal Adviser since there were questions having to do with the mandate: what were the rights and duties of the mandatory power, what was the effect of the General Assembly's resolution? Above all, the group was addressing the question of how effect can be given to the partition resolution, which was the General Assembly's decision as to how Palestine should be disposed of.



JS Which, if I may interrupt, the United States had supported.

LM We supported strongly the partition resolution. This in effect endorsed the report of the UN Palestine Commission which had met earlier and gave its report to the General Assembly, and the General Assembly basically adopted the partition plan of the Commission. The small group in the State Department, for a little time, was hopeful that the British could be persuaded to take actions which would be conducive to implementation of the partition plan. But as time went on it became clear that the British were simply concerned to get out of Palestine, and they made it plain that they would simply lay down the mandate. The General Assembly

having decided what to do with this mandated territory, the General Assembly could figure out how to do it.

There was, I think, a good deal of disappointment, and more than disappointment, at the British attitude. The group continued meeting at the State Department quite frequently, very frequently in fact, between the beginning of 1948 and May 15 when independence was declared by the provisional government of Israel. A lot of different proposals were entertained. We looked at the possibility of some sort of interim administration, somehow under the auspices of the UN, with the thought that this could lead to ultimate implementation of the partition plan. The plan was very difficult because it divided Palestine into six triangles: the three Jewish state triangles being tangent only at small pointed corners, the rest being the Arab state, with Jerusalem treated separately. We didn't really come to any satisfactory conclusion as to how, in a practical sense, this plan could be implemented. Fairly late in the game - I guess along in April, the idea emerged of a UN trusteeship with the UN as the administering authority. That idea was brought forward, and indeed a draft trusteeship proposal was prepared in New York, and it was about to be submitted to the General Assembly when the provisional government of Israel declared the independence of a new state of Israel, and on the same day President Truman accorded recognition to the new state and to its provisional government.

JS In addition to the problem of the territorial integrity of a new state, at least Ambassador Eban has suggested his feeling that in many quarters in Washington, at that point there was a sense that the Israelis could not win a battle, and that this was one of the reasons why the State Department backed away from partition, that the military situation was too hostile to the survivability of a Jewish state.

LM I don't recall anybody in the State Department expressing that view.

JS The other question that often emerges in this connection is the very strong support that the Soviet Union gave at this point to the partition plan and to the establishment of the state of Israel - a rather constant support for a couple of years, at least.

LM It stopped in 1949.

JS Right. In contrast to the wavering US position, was this taken into account in the meetings that you had? Were you following what the Soviet Union was doing and trying to interpret this?

LM I don't know that we spent a great deal of time even talking about the Soviet position because that didn't seem to be very

operative in the area. What was operative was British policy and British action.

JS Actually, again, Ambassador Eban has suggested that votes of the Soviet Union and of those states that were already allied with the Soviet Union were critical in the adoption of the resolution.

LM I'm not sure what the outcome would have been if they had been strongly on the other side in support of the Arabs, for example. I don't know what the outcome would have been. It might have been different.

JS Going back to the UN side, Trygve Lie, the Secretary-General, has suggested in his memoirs that the change in the US position from support of partition to favoring some kind of trusteeship was so sudden and so severe that it caused him to feel betrayed and that he considered resignation. Were you aware of this at the time?

LM I was certainly not aware of his having that reaction. My recollection is that the trusteeship idea was brought up at a late stage when all else seemed to have failed, and this was considered as a possible interim measure to be taken until something better could be worked out along the lines of the partition plan.

JS Ralph Bunche, I believe, was a member of the Secretariat group that accompanied the Palestine commission, and so was Mr. Garcia Robles, who also late won a Nobel Peace Price, and so was Abba Eban as the representative of the Jewish Agency at that point. Were you following this in Washington? Were you aware of the makeup and the potential importance of the people who were involved in this particular commission?

LM Actually I didn't start following this subject until the end of the Assembly that year. That was the point at which I began to work on UN subjects. So while I heard about and read about some of what had gone before, I did not follow it during 1947.

JS Well I was particularly interested and, in fact, that's the last question I'll ask as to the organization in the State Department and how you did consider it. It's very interesting that there was this group. Apparently you were working independently from the White House.

LM Yes, we were working independent in the State Department, although I think Rob McClintock and probably Dean Rusk from time to time spoke with Clark Clifford and others in his office. Mike Feldman, I believe, was the person who was following this on a day-to-day basis in the White House in Clifford's office and I think that Rob McClintock talked with

him fairly frequently. That's my recollection.

JS The State Department and certainly the US Mission in New York had no prior indication of the President's intention to extend recognition immediately?

LM No, it was a complete surprise.

JS And there is indication that this had been communicated to a Judge Rosenman, I believe, in New York. So that on the Jewish side there was some expectation - in fact, knowledge - that this would be done. But you had no indication?

LM None whatever. And I think that Phil Jessup and those in New York were in exactly the same position. They were flabbergasted when they heard that afternoon what had taken place.

JS And some of them, I believe, contemplated resignation because of the feeling that they had not been involved.

Thank you very much for this.

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