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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Sir David Hannay
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
September 21, 2000
New York, NY

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New York, New York

James S. Sutterlin: Sir David, I first wish to thank you for agreeing to participate in this oral history project of Yale University. We will be discussing this morning various aspects of the UNSCOM exercise. I wondered if, to begin with, you would indicate what your position was at the United Nations when the war with Iraq ended, and the terms of peace were determined.



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Sir David Hannay: Thank you very much. I've pleased to participate in an oral history, which I feel is of great value. I was appointed Permanent Representative, the British Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and therefore, by definition, its representative on the Security Council in September, the beginning of September 1990. That is to say, almost exactly one month after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. I occupied that post until July 1995, that is to say, a very long way down the course of the troubled saga of UNSCOM, but far from the end of it.

JS: We are particularly interested in the whole process through which Resolution 687 was drafted. This is not very well recorded in the various memoirs that have been

written. Could you describe the process as you saw it, as the British representative on the Council?

DH: Well, yes, but only of course from the point of view of New York. I can't tell you what went on in London, I can't even tell you what went on between London and Washington, because I was not party to all those dealings. But seen from New York, it was, in fact, a very surprising sequence that occurred. First of all, you had the authorization for the use of force: that was Resolution 678 in November. After that the UN was really out of it, largely, until the end of the war. There was Jim Baker's visit to Geneva to meet Tariq Aziz, but there was no UN action, because the war, as it were, left the UN on one side. And then when President Bush decided, and agreed with his allies, to cease fire on, I think it was, the 28th of February, that was a sovereign decision by the United States and its allies, nothing to do with the UN. Subsequently, a cease-fire agreement was reached with the Iraqis in that famous tent at Safwan. The UN had nothing to do with that. We were simply given here in New York the text of the cease-fire agreement that was reached with the Iraqis, and cobbled it together and put it into a resolution, which was 686.

Up to that point, there had been no indication from either Washington or London that the post-war procedures would be handled through the UN, rather than from capitals. And then, all of a sudden, and I say 'all of a sudden' because to us, it was all of a sudden. I don't know whether you've got Ambassador Pickering's views, but he would be able to tell you something about this, I think it came as quite a shock to him, too. I seem to remember him appearing one day from Washington and simply saying, "Washington has

decided to throw the whole thing to us.” And that was what they did. Basically, the US administration decided that the best way to handle the post-war continuation of this episode was to do it through the instruments of multi-lateral international law, and therefore to do it through a Security Council resolution. He and I received instructions to put together what was subsequently called “The mother of all resolutions,” which was the Resolution 687, and we duly set to.

Now obviously great slabs of this emerged from Washington and London. We didn't just sit down with a towel round our head and work it out ourselves. But equally, very large sections of it underwent quite substantial change in the process of negotiation—preparation between the British and the Americans, negotiation with the other three permanent members. The non-permanent members of the Security Council on this occasion had a modest role in the negotiation of the text of 687, although there were strange interventions, like the one that led to the Equadorian abstention. The Equadorians, in light of their dealings with Peru over their mutual boundary, could not accept the paragraph in 687 that dealt with the Iraq-Kuwait boundary, because they felt that the language was prejudicial to their own case, so they were compelled to abstain. This was an enormous embarrassment for them, everyone in the Council was very understanding, because we all knew it had nothing to do with Iraq and Kuwait. But I mention that to illustrate the fact that some of the non-permanent members did get in on the act, but frankly, the main negotiation of the text of 687 was conducted between the five permanent members. We met almost constantly for about three weeks to put it together.

JS: That is precisely what Ambassador Pickering also said. If we limit this to Section C, dealing with weapons of mass destruction, and go back to this question of how much was drafted in Washington or in London, does your answer differ?

DH: No, it was broadly the same. Obviously, slabs of this material reached us, and we then had to negotiate it with the French, Russians, and Chinese. We didn't devise it ourselves, but it did undergo quite substantial changes in that process. I'll describe them in answer to some of your later questions that relate to that. But our two capitals were quite determined, that there must be a really substantial section on weapons of mass destruction.



JS: That does lead to this next question, that is, it is surprisingly comprehensive, Section C, including bacteriological weapons. Does this represent a fairly clear conviction on the part of London and Washington, as far as you know, that in fact there was a biological capacity there?

DH: I don't think so, no. I think the state of our knowledge about the advance of Saddam's research and, even more, his weaponization of biological weapons, was vestigial at that stage. Of course there had been public threats by Saddam during the war, that he would unleash terrible things over Tel Aviv, and things like that, so we knew that there was something there, but I don't think we knew very much. If you look at the weapons of mass destruction area, perhaps we can call them "WMD" from now on, there is a tendency, correct in my view, to deal with them comprehensively—all three:

nuclear, chemical, and biological. Of course, we knew that Saddam had huge quantities of chemical weapons; he'd actually used them on a number of occasions, so that was obvious. We knew he had got a lot further on nuclear than we wanted him to get, but we didn't know quite how far, and we certainly had no idea at that time of the huge installations that were subsequently discovered, the fact that he had tried all three routes for enriching uranium, et cetera, et cetera. That I don't think we knew, but we knew there was plenty there. And I think we probably didn't know very much about the biological, but there was no reason not to include it within the scope of the same remit, because we knew there was something, and the remit was in any case drawn up in extremely general terms. So I don't think it was because we knew there was a lot there, that we included biological. It was simply that we knew that Saddam broke all of his treaty obligations, so it was quite likely he had broken his obligations under, I think it is, the 1925 treaty as well.

JS: Right. Let me ask another question with regard to the make-up of the resolution. If you compare it to the punishment given to other aggressors in previous wars, aside from the weapons of mass destruction, it is relatively mild: the army is not restricted, there is no real incriminating evidence posed against Saddam Hussein, even. Why was this?

DH: I think the second question is perhaps easier to deal with, which was why no action was taken against him as a person. There had been some consideration in the autumn of 1990 to move towards some review of his actions in human rights terms, but

that had not got very far. I think the simplistic view, and in the light of what subsequently happened in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the rather outmoded view, was that because we did not control Iraq, and because we did not control Saddam, and we therefore had no means of bringing him to a court of justice, it was not very wise to go down that road. We were not willing to go into Iraq to get him. So it has to be admitted that the approach taken towards Saddam was quite different, and softer, to the approach taken towards Milosevic, where similarly, we don't control Serbia, and we're not going to go in there and kidnap him, but that has not stopped us from indicting him and trying to see him brought before the Hague Tribunal. But the Hague Tribunal didn't exist in 1990, and I think the judgment was that this was just one thing that was not worth piling on to all the other things. After all, 687 contained, I think, something like three or four new international institutions—a huge amount of ground-breaking effort—the Compensation Commission, the boundary issue, Section C, so forth and so on. I think there was just a feeling that we shouldn't go too far on that.

Then you asked me why the others provisions were mild. I don't actually think the rest of it was very mild. I think the provisions on the frontier was very tough indeed, and resulted in effectively the determination of where that frontier was going to be—that frontier having been a casus belli in the past—I think that was pretty tough. It contained also a statement that if anybody mucked about with that frontier the Security Council would take action; i.e., it was a kind of preemptive deterrent warning. The Compensation Commission was also tough. After all, it imposed a set of reparations—not called that—which were very far-reaching indeed, but which tried to avoid the mistakes made at the time of the Versailles reparations by not making the burden impossible to carry, and

setting a limit to the amount—the 30% limit. I think that was pretty far-reaching, and pretty tough, frankly. But to answer your question, no, it was not considered feasible to impose limitations on his conventional forces, among other things, because there was a great worry that if you weakened his conventional forces, Iraq would fall apart. And since that was a serious worry, particularly to the Arab members of the coalition, it would have been very controversial to put something like that in.

JS: You mentioned the importance of the P-5. Was it difficult to get the agreement of the Russians and the Chinese to the various provisions of, especially, Section C?

DH: Not very, no. It was of course the honeymoon of the P-5. The effort the P-5 had jointly made to reverse the aggression had been successful. The Americans, the French, and the British who were part of the coalition had not overstepped 678, and therefore there was no reason to suspect them, as subsequently suspicion has been aroused. The Chinese and the Russians, in their different ways, were very quiescent at that stage. The Russians were in the last period of the Soviet Union, with President Gorbachev giving top priority to his relationship with the United States, and that was reflected in a very cooperative attitude in the negotiation of 687.

The Chinese had written off Saddam as a man who had broken international law in innumerable ways, and I don't know what their calculations were, but they were pretty relaxed. They intervened from time to time in the negotiation, and they had some issues, which they were absolutely adamant about. For example, that the section on the Iraq-Kuwait frontier must not enable the United Nations on its own to define the frontier,

because that was a matter that only sovereign states could do. They were prepared to allow it to identify where the frontier should be, but not to impose it. The definition then had to be endorsed by Iraq's acceptance of that, which duly came in.

JS: Yes, which raises an interesting constitutional question. Actually, under the Charter, the Security Council is not authorized to impose a solution on a frontier, or for that matter, on a conflict.

DH: I don't know about the conflict, I might disagree with you on that, but I think we're all agreed about the frontier. It [the United Nations] is not allowed to [define a frontier] and it did not in this case. It merely set up an international commission, which conducted cartological work. The cartological work was then clear, and it was made clear to Iraq that they must accept it, and they did.

JS: Let me ask about the influence that you perceived, at least, of various intelligence agencies as this process of drafting and getting the resolution accepted proceeded. There have been many accusations that much of the work on the resolution was done in CIA or in London.

DH: I have no idea. I don't know. I wasn't privy to that, but I would treat that with some skepticism. I think the agencies became deeply involved in implementation. I don't think they were much involved in the drawing up of 687, no. I'm sure they provided material, which led the policy makers to the decisions that they reached in

sending instructions on what should go into 687, but no, I don't think the intelligence agencies were much involved. I have many friends in the intelligence agencies, and I don't think drafting Security Council resolutions is one of their fortes.

JS: No. Skipping ahead a little bit: later, when briefings were given to the Council, which showed very clearly the importance of American imagery from satellites, what was the reaction within the Council to this?

DH: The reaction was completely down to earth, matter of fact. Iraq, it was by then known to everyone, had broken an enormous number of solemn international obligations, which it had freely entered into—the Non-proliferation Treaty, in particular on all these things. They were considered completely beyond the pale. It was also clear, by then, that they were not revealing everything themselves. So in the early stages it was all taken quite calmly, and nobody in the Council that I know of objected to the fact that imagery was being used. Quite to the contrary: they felt, I think, more comfortable, because they weren't just having to do it on the say-so of the United States.

JS: Does the same apply to the United Nations' utilization of U-2?

DH: Yes. There was no reaction in the Council when Ekéus came and told us that he was going to use the U-2. Everyone said, "Fine, go ahead."

JS: One of the remarkable things, I think, about UNSCOM, is its comparative independence, and the independence of its Executive Chairman. Who was responsible for defining this status?

DH: I think it came in the instructions we had from London. I don't expect we contributed very much to that. I'm not sure that at the outset everyone quite understood...

JS: That was my next question.

DH: ...how strong and independent a position had been created. I'm not convinced I understood that, quite frankly. To some extent you can say that its independence was the work of its first Chairman, Rolf Ekéus, as much as the work of what was written in the resolution. Although what was written in the resolution was very helpful to him in securing that independence. But it wouldn't have been secured as effectively as it was if he hadn't used the text to the maximum, but not abused it.

JS: That leads me to a later question, being how would you describe Ambassador Ekéus' relations with the Council?

DH: His relations with the Council were good. He was accepted, I think, from the beginning to the end of his time, as a genuine expert on disarmament issues—he was, he worked on them a lot; as a genuine objective person from a nationality that had not been involved in the war; as someone who was doing a UN task for the UN; and his bona fides

were not much challenged—late in the stage, perhaps a little bit, but on the whole, not much. His briefings were very full. I would say that on occasion he blinded the Council with science, and occasionally, his extraordinary pronunciation of the English language, which made it quite difficult to tell what he was saying, may have helped a little bit. He was very skillful at rendering any report he made to the Council bland. But his written reports weren't bland. He handled his relationship with the Council very successfully. He took a lot of trouble to work with individual members of the Council, outside the Council, to make sure they got proper briefings, and so on. It was a class performance.

JS: And he had some direct dealings with Washington, I know. Was that also true in the case of London?

DH: Sure. He used to visit London regularly, both for briefings by us, about what we knew, and also to tell us what he was up to. He visited Moscow, he visited Washington, he visited a lot of places. He certainly visited Paris. He tended his constituency well.

JS: Now could you comment on the negotiations within the Council on the role of the IAEA?

DH: Yes. It was one of the areas, in fact, where the resolution looked quite different at the end from the way it looked at the beginning, because if I remember right, we originally started with an approach which simply lumped all WMD areas together. And Tom Pickering and I, who both of us had some passing knowledge of the IAEA's charter

and its responsibilities, came to the conclusion—prodded along by the French and the Russians and others—that it simply wouldn't do that way. That, in fact, we would damage the agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency, if we cut it out and handed everything in the nuclear field over to UNSCOM; and that since the basis for all this was Saddam breaking his obligations under the Non-proliferation Treaty and other nuclear treaties, which it was the job of the agency to police, that would have been very counter-productive. So we managed to persuade our capitals that without changing the overall remit, the mandate, at all, we should break it out in such a way that the agency was given a proper role in handling the nuclear aspects, although UNSCOM would have an oversight role even in that field. That led to some friction—there was always a certain amount of amusement in the Council that two Swedes managed to get on so badly—and the Blix-Ekéus relationship was not always of the most harmonious...

JS: That was known in the Council?

DH: Oh, yes, sure. But we took it that that was rather endemic of international organizations that tend to have turf fights, and in any case, the structure of 687 was fairly complex, and did leave itself open to a certain amount of turf fighting. But the answer to your question is yes, the shape of the resolution, and the way that nuclear issues are dealt with a little bit separately, was largely due to negotiation in New York.

JS: In fact, at least one of the interviewees has suggested that it was the French.

DH: No, that is untrue. We British had every bit as strong a view on not undermining the agency. We have always stood by the IAEA. I know that it's never been the most popular agency in Washington, but in London, it has always been considered a fundamental bulwark of the non-proliferation regime, and we were every bit as interested in that as the French were.

JS: That's interesting, and different from what we've heard elsewhere. You mentioned earlier that the United Nations had nothing to do with the conduct of the war, and that's certainly true. Now let's get down to the drafting of the resolution and the role of the Secretary-General, who was Pérez de Cuéllar at that point. Did you or any other members of the Council try to keep him informed of what was going on?

DH: I think we kept him informed, yes, but he didn't play a big role. He had, frankly, stood back from the whole Iraq-Kuwait situation from the very beginning. He had considered that it was a matter for the member states; he knew that the Security Council was seized of it, and was making the policy. He only, with the greatest reluctance, allowed himself to be persuaded to go to Baghdad at the last minute. He hated that experience, reasonably enough, since he was treated like dirt by Saddam Hussein. But that didn't encourage him to get involved in the aftermath of the war, either. So he stood well back from all this, and was not involved in the negotiating process at all.

JS: Was any difference detectable when he was succeeded by Boutros-Ghali, in terms of the role of the Secretary-General in the negotiation?

DH: No, because of course, by then 687 had been adopted, it was UN law, as it were, and it gave the Secretary-General an important number of tasks to carry out. And to be fair to Pérez de Cuéllar, what I said about him there related to the negotiation of the resolution, it didn't relate to the implementation of it. The implementation began in a big way under Pérez de Cuéllar with the setting up of UNSCOM, the setting up of the Compensation Commission, the first Oil for Food program, and so on, and Pérez de Cuéllar was much involved in all that. And Boutros-Ghali carried that on; Boutros-Ghali was a totally loyal executant of 687 throughout his period in office, and anyone who says to the contrary is only reading history backwards. He did a tremendous job in administering 687. He particularly spent a lot of time trying to persuade Tariq Aziz to accept the various Oil for Food schemes that were endorsed in the Council. He never tried to influence the Council's policy in a particular direction. So both Secretaries General were very honorable executives in their respect. I can't speculate what Boutros-Ghali would have done if he'd been Secretary-General at the time 687 was negotiated, because he wasn't.

JS: What was your impression of the selection of Ambassador Ekéus? How was that done?

DH: My mind is a complete blank, I'm afraid, I can't help you. I just can't remember. He just emerged. I imagine it was done between capitals, but it was not done, I think, in New York. I don't remember playing any role in it.

JS: During this whole process, was it your impression that the Iraqis were so totally defeated that they were unable to exercise any influence here in New York?

DH: Yes, in the period of 687 they had no influence. It was not just that they were defeated, it was that they were pariahs, that the whole world believed that they had committed an aggression, that they had brought the UN action upon themselves, and that they were a regime with whom nobody wished to do business that stage. And they didn't try to; they were very passive in those early months after 687.

JS: I ask this question because in the course of the Iran-Iraq war the Iraqis were far more skillful than the Iranians, and they exercised considerable influence. Did that ever, during your time, become again true?

DH: Oh yes, because the man who was the principal instrument of that, Nizar Hamdoon, came as ambassador here. He had been ambassador in Washington during the Iran-Iraq war. Nizar Hamdoon, together with Tariq Aziz, these were the two front men for Iraq's very successful propaganda campaigns during the Iran-Iraq war. And when Nizar came back here—took over from al Anbari, I can't remember exactly when it was, it was sometime in '92, I think—yes, their public campaign did step up one or two notches, although the receivability of that in this country was pretty slight, so it didn't get very far, it certainly didn't get to the situation in the Iran-Iraq war when Tariq Aziz and Nizar Hamdoon were the darlings of the networks.

JS: Another reason I asked was because in looking at the history of these years, '92, '93, '94, the degree of agreement within the Council is quite stunning. There's one after another decision by the Council condemning, demanding, and so forth and so on. How was this solidarity maintained?

DH: Well, it held up very well, as you say, and it was largely maintained by the skill and professionalism of Ekéus. The fact that he produced extremely detailed and important reports, which documented very clearly the shortcomings of the Iraqis; the fact that everyone believed that it was in our collective interest to implement 687 fully, and that Iraq should not possess weapons of mass destruction; and the evidence was that it was not cooperating in the work to remove that potential. So for a long, long time, the unity of the Council held up, despite the fact that there were members of the Council who didn't like the action taken to deal with the Kurdish situation, the Shi'ite situation. There were members of the Council who didn't like the no-fly zones. But the action on weapons of mass destruction, which was firmly based on detailed application of international law to the satisfaction of all members of the Council, that continued to get solid support for a long time.

JS: As far as the P-5 were concerned, when did you at all, during your tenure, detect any signs of serious division arising with regard to...

DH: The French and the Russians became progressively more difficult from—I'm sorry I haven't got the documents, but—my guess would be either from 1993 or at latest 1994. And on all issues relating to sanctions, on all issues relating to the no-fly zones, they became very difficult indeed. Gradually this began to contaminate a bit, also, their support for UNSCOM, although, as I've said in an earlier answer, that held up much longer than the rest of the policy.

JS: Yes. Now I wanted to go to a perhaps somewhat secondary question, but in various interviews the role of the Israelis has emerged—their cooperation in providing or not providing intelligence. Was this an issue in the Council, was it known, were there rumors?

DH: It was not an issue in the Council; it was neither definitely known nor documented, but of course there were rumors, yes. I think it would have been rather difficult to raise in the Council, because there was no reason to argue that information obtained by the Israelis was any less valuable than information obtained by anyone else. The origin of the information is not particularly relevant. So the argument that the Israelis shouldn't have been involved was a highly political argument, and a not very respectable one, either. So it's not the one that most people would have been very comfortable with raising in the Council. But the answer to your question is no, it was not raised in the Council.

JS: They didn't raise it. Were you concerned, or did you find others to be concerned about the possibility that UNSCOM was being exploited for national intelligence purposes.

DH: No, I was not aware of any such pressures or problems, but then one of the things that people I think insufficiently realized is that diplomatic missions to the UN are not cut in on intelligence work. We don't see, we British, anyway, here don't see a huge amount of the intelligence material, and it's quite right that we don't—any more than we would have seen anything or did see anything of the military side of the Gulf War. I saw what I saw on CNN, and what the government occasionally sent round in a guidance telegram. But I wasn't part of the military aspect of the campaign any more than I was part of the intelligence aspect of it.

JS: This is an interesting point, because all that you say is true, and yet, for the first time, really, the United Nations had an operation in UNSCOM that was essentially an intelligence operation. Did you sense, or did you feel others sense, that this was setting a precedent, that this was something of a real departure?

DH: Well, we had always taken the view that if you set the United Nations certain jobs, which required the use of intelligence, and UNSCOM was not the only one—there are certain peacekeeping operations that come into the same category—that the member states must try to cut whoever in the UN is carrying it out in on the intelligence available. It is not sensible to send a peacekeeping operation into a difficult situation and deny it

intelligence that you have about the threats against it, and so on. And so I, while I was here, spent a lot of my time trying to ensure that we did provide national intelligence where this was really helpful to UN operations, not just UNSCOM. But none of that was done by me; for example, I knew perfectly well that Ekéus was getting a flow of intelligence material from London, from Washington, but it didn't pass through me, and I didn't see what was given to him, and I wasn't concerned with it. I was just happy that it was being done, because, as I say, our general view was that if you set the United Nations tasks that require the use of intelligence, then you had better make it available to them. Otherwise, you're sending them in with their hands tied behind their backs to do a job that is in our interest.



JS: Yes, but to carry that a bit further on a philosophical lane, I think the Brahimi report suggests that at least the peacekeeping operations should have some intelligence capacity of their own. What do you think of that in light of the experience...?

DH: I think it's an admirable thought, but it's extremely improbable that it will occur. I'm afraid that I think the reality is that most of the obtainable and available intelligence will remain in the hands of the governments, nation states. And the question is can you, first of all, persuade them to share it with the United Nations where it's relevant, and secondly, can you adopt certain safeguards to make sure that the provision of intelligence is not manipulative—that's the question that arose over UNSCOM. Now since I retired, and I'm allowed to make speeches from time to time, I make speeches about this, and I argue that there should be some kind of oversight committee or wise-men, or something,

which should try to ensure that the provision of national sources of intelligence to the UN is carried out in an objective and unmanipulative way, because the objective should be to ensure that the flow continues and increases. Now I don't think much of the idea that the UN should get its own capacity. For a long time, there was a campaign in the press to get the UN a dedicated satellite; a way of spending enormous sums of money to no great purpose, because of course nowadays most of it can be obtained through commercial sources anyway. In any case, where was the UN going to find the large number of personnel required to interpret this material? It all seemed to me to be cloud cuckoo land, frankly. The reality is, in the real world the thing to focus on is how to get member states to help the UN, and then secondly, how to make sure that that help is help, and not distortion.



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JS: Which was admirably done, you would say, in the case of UNSCOM?

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DH: I believe it was admirably done in the case of UNSCOM, yes.

JS: I want to skip ahead now, because I know we don't have too much time.

DH: We've got about ten minutes.

JS: I wanted to go to the Oil for Food program. Can you describe how this was developed, how did you see the thing come about?

DH: Well, the Oil for Food program was devised very soon after the war. At the end of the war, the sanctions regime in 687 was adjusted a bit, so as to remove sanctions not only from medicine, which had never been covered, but also from food. But it became clear within a very short time that the regime was very onerous, and that there were great problems in Iraq, and particularly that the war had created serious problems, which needed alleviation: the Ahtisaari report, and the work of Sahrudin Aga Khan. So we and the Americans working, as always, together, put forward the first Oil for Food program in, I think it was, August 1991.

JS: You and the Americans did that?



DH: Yes. And that was passed through the Council—two resolutions, if I remember rightly, were passed, and they remained dead letters, because the Iraqis refused to cooperate. So we perceived the problem early, we produced a very important response to the problem quickly, and the Iraqis stiffed it for their own purposes. But that is one part of the record that is frequently overlooked.

JS: So then it really was a US-UK initiative to start this program?

DH: Yes. Of course, there was pressure from public opinion, there was pressure from the Ahtisaari report, and the Secretary-General himself, but the lead in drafting these resolutions was taken by the US and the UK.

JS: And how soon did you begin to feel the effect of pressure because of the sanctions that were imposed?

DH: Well, of course, the Iraqi rejection of the Oil for Food scheme meant there wasn't very much pressure for some considerable time, because the answer was very simple: here's the Oil for Food scheme, just use it. And they didn't. So the pressure didn't really build up very much. Iraq was transgressing in a whole number of ways, both in its dealings with Ekéus, in some of its dealings with Kuwait, in some of its dealings with the boundary commission. They were always putting the ball into their own goal, and so the pressures didn't actually build up very much. And then, in 1995, we adopted, again on UK and US proposal, a more generous Oil for Food scheme, which is the one that eventually, after an enormous number of taxations, was implemented. So the pressure didn't build up very quickly.

JS: And when it was implemented, then the Security Council did come under some criticism because of the alleged ineffectiveness of the committee on sanctions. What was your impression of that?

DH: Well, it was a very vexed subject, that. I think we all know perfectly well that in the modern world dual-use items abound, that there are innumerable items of equipment, which can be used for totally innocent purposes, and can be used for less innocent purposes. Certainly, in the manufacture of chemical weapons, that is true. All sorts of pesticides can be turned into very nasty chemical weapons; all sorts of machinery to

produce those pesticides can be used to produce chemical weapons. So dual-use is important, and a worry. Equally, dual-use on say, telecommunications, can be used for military purposes. So there was a need to be very restrictive. That was clear, if Iraq's war-making capacity and its capacity to make war with weapons of mass destruction were to be really kept under control. On the other hand, when you hand over to a lot of civil servants passing huge numbers of requests through, you do probably tend to get a rather rigid approach, and there were cases, which have been well documented, where, frankly, I think it's not very easy to defend—the fact that the committee blocked things.

I seem to remember one occasion we found ourselves blocking a consignment of pencils for use in classrooms or something, and I never did understand, though I'm sure you can write military orders with pencils, but I expect you can manage to find something else to write them with if you don't get a pencil. So I think there was some legitimacy in the criticism, but the work of that committee has been caricatured by those who have a political agenda in relation to sanctions, and who wish to show that the whole sanctions regime is a terrible thing.

JS: Which included the NGOs, I believe. Did you, on the British side, feel much pressure from NGOs?

DH: Oh yes, we had lots of British NGOs who'd been very active, some of whom are close to the Iraqi government, some of whom are totally innocent of that. But I would suggest that the word "innocent" does apply to their approach to this problem, as well.

JS: I want to go back just a minute to the summit meeting of the Security Council that the UK really inspired. Did this have any relationship at all to the implementation of 687 to the whole weapons of mass destruction question?

DH: It didn't have any relationship to Iraq. We all agreed the Council that this summit must not be just another Iraqi-bashing session. Iraq had been overcome, it had disgorged the fruits of its aggression, it had been set some very heavy tasks under 687. There was no need to say any more. There was only the most vestigial reference to Iraq in the statement that was adopted at the end of the summit, It was all our intention to switch the emphasis away from Iraq, which was work that was in hand, had been well done, and on to other issues. One of the other issues was weapons of mass destruction, but not in the context of Iraq. We were very pleased that the final declaration did, for the first time, flatly... describe the proliferation of WMD as a threat to international peace and security.

[End of Side 1; Beginning of Side 2]

DH: ...And I think the declaration has stood the test of time rather well, although it hasn't, of course, been applied on each and every occasion. The summit was also an occasion on which, for the first time, it was stated flatly that the encouragement of international terrorism was a threat to international peace and security. In the period that we held that summit policy towards Libya was much more in the minds of everyone in the Council than policy towards Iraq, because the Council was moving towards decisions to demand that Libya surrender the two indicted men in the Lockerbie case. The first resolution on that was adopted one week before the summit, and the resolution imposing

sanctions was adopted six or seven weeks after the summit. So Libya was much more on people's minds than Iraq.

JS: I want to go, while we still have a few minutes, to the really philosophical question. What lessons do you think can be learned from the UNSCOM experience? Is it transferable?

DH: Well, I think it would only be in the most exceptional circumstances, and Saddam Hussein is certainly an exceptional circumstance, that it would be justified to go to the extent that we did. That is to say, a man who committed serial aggressions against his neighbors, who had committed serial breaches of his international obligations on weapons of mass destruction, a man who was clearly a threat to international peace and security in a wide number of ways, and who had crowned it all by removing from the face of the world a country. All that doesn't happen every day of the week. One of the reasons it doesn't happen every day of the week, of course, was because we did find the right response, and because even now, years later, when everything hasn't gone that well with Iraq, there are still people around the world who would think twice before doing what Iraq did, because they fear that the consequences wouldn't be that different. But I think, simply because of having dealt very firmly with Iraq, it is less likely that will happen, and because it is less likely to happen, it is less likely that UNSCOM will be replicated. I think it could happen again. It would be difficult to achieve. And I hope it won't happen. And I don't think it would happen very often.

JS: In this connection, when did you perceive the first serious breakdown in solidarity among the P-5, and what was the cause?

DH: Well, it began to be eroded, as I say, during my time here, and it got worse after 1995, when I left. I think there were many causes. The French and the Russians do have their own national agendas, which relate to the resumption of trade, which relate to the payment of debts, which relate to their perception of Iraq as a key player in its region, and that played a role. The passage of time played a role. I'm afraid the international community gets bored; it isn't very good at persevering with a task if that task lasts a long time and requires disagreeable decisions over a prolonged period. And then I have to say that in my view, the ambiguity that both the British and, to a much greater extent, the United States allowed to play over whether or not they would actually suspend the sanctions regime if Iraq did fulfill all of its obligations was unhelpful. It definitely influenced a number of people on the Council to feel that their support was being taken for granted, and that they were being harnessed to a policy which they didn't believe was the right one for the United Nations, i.e., getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

JS: What was your personal interpretation of the resolution in this respect?

DH: Well, my interpretation of the resolution was really very simple: firstly, that it was not directed to getting rid of Saddam Hussein, but secondly, that Iraq would never fulfill the resolution while Saddam Hussein was ruler of Iraq. So I thought it was academic, frankly.

JS: I see. So you did not reach a decision then, in your own mind, as to whether if, by some chance, the UNSCOM was able to say to the Security Council, "Yes, there are no more weapons, and monitoring is in place," the sanctions would automatically have been lifted, or not?

DH: I was quite clear that that was what the resolution said should happen, yes. I was also clear that I did not think it would happen, because of Saddam Hussein's presence as the ruler of Iraq. And I don't mean by that that we would be justified in lifting sanctions so long as he was ruler, I mean by that that he, as ruler of Iraq, was not going to comply with the resolutions. So I'm sorry, I didn't come to an operational conclusion other than I am clear about what the resolution says, yes.

JS: But just to repeat something, the US certainly, on its side, did obfuscate this question for a long time?

DH: Yes, that's right, and I don't think that was helpful. I believed, myself, and said so publicly on a number of occasions after I retired, but I said so before I retired, privately, that I thought we should have set out, long before, what we would have done with a successor regime in Iraq; how we would have treated it. I think we should have set out roughly what we've done in Serbia now, where the Europeans and the Americans are saying quite clearly all the things that they would do with a Serbia if they chose to elect somebody other than President Milosevic as their leader. I would have liked to have

seen that done with Iraq. However theoretical, I would like to have seen it said quite firmly that for an Iraq that had got rid of Saddam Hussein, and that was implementing the resolutions, the embargo would have been suspended.

JS: My final question, because the time is up, I know, pertains to the Commission itself. What was your impression of the role that the members of the Special Commission played?

DH: I can't help you, I'm afraid. I didn't get involved in its discussions, I didn't see very much of the British member, who came in and out—Teddy Taylor, wasn't it, I think, in the early years—so I really can't help you, I'm afraid, on that. I wasn't privy to it. I had my own dealings with Ekéus, but I didn't conduct them through the members of the Commission; I dealt with Ekéus directly.

JS: Let me then, at the end, ask, are there some points that you would like to make that you feel are useful and important to get on the record with regard to your experience?

DH: No, I don't think so; I think I've covered everything pretty fully in this interview. I have nothing particularly more to say, other than to say that I do not, myself, think that because the UNSCOM experience has ended in an outcome that is less than completely successful, one should draw negative conclusions about it. Quite to the contrary, I think it was one of the most important and innovative developments in modern times; I think we have lessons to learn from it. Mistakes were made, but enormous progress was made,

too. I just hope that we can build that in as one of the building blocks for the rule of law internationally, and not simply concentrate on some of the negative outcomes, which in my view are inevitable in international affairs. You never get complete victory in international affairs, you always are somewhere in a gray area between a complete success and partial success. I think myself that UNSCOM was an important success, but not a total one.

JS: Thank you very much, Sir David.

[End of recording.]



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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Sir David Hannay

James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer

September 21, 2000

New York, NY

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