Yale-UN Oral History Project

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James Sutterlin: Mr. Eliasson, I want to first thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this Yale Oral History devoted to the United Nations. Our purpose today is to discuss your role in bringing an end the Iran/Iraq war. And to begin with I would like to ask when and in what capacity did you first become involved in the subject and the efforts to end the war.

Jan Eliasson: I was, in 1980, Director of the division for Africa and Asia in the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm. I had worked with the Prime Minister before when I had been in the United States; I had been in communication with the Prime Minister's office on Vietnam, which was a big issue, of course, in European politics, not only Swedish politics. Through that issue, and my work at the embassy in Washington, I had personally got to know Olof Palme, or at least met him. So there was a personal relationship between us. Also, I had the function in the foreign ministry that was most closely associated to what was happening between Iran and Iraq. The war broke out in September 1980; Olof Palme was asked to be the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Iran and Iraq in early November. And November 12, he was called by [Kurt] Waldheim and asked whether he would accept this assignment. He accepted it in the evening of the 12th of November, and the following morning, after consultation on his side with the Swedish Foreign Minister - because Palme at that time was leader of the

opposition - he asked me whether I would want to assist him in the mediation efforts and accompany him that very same day to New York where he was going to meet urgently with the Secretary-General and other key personalities. So I accepted that very day, packed my bags, and we had a press conference in Stockholm. And off we went, and then we spent two days or three days in New York, preparing for the mission. We then immediately started the first round of shuttle diplomacy in November 1980 followed by two or three shuttles that year, very intense work, getting along mediation efforts. We continued also the first half of 1981, also intensely, so altogether, I think, until mid-summer 1981, we had four shuttle visits to the area.

JS: And how would you describe your shuttle visits? Some of the people whom you met with are still the same people?

JE: Of course on the Iraqi side it was exactly the same people you would meet today. We spent time with Saddam Hussein, considerable time with Saddam Hussein personally. We spent time with Tariq Aziz, but also his predecessor, Hamadi, I think is his name. He is now speaker of Parliament, he was Foreign Minister then. Tariq Aziz was there, too I recall very strongly. We met also a Vice-Minister, a high official in the foreign ministry by the name of Kittani, Ismat Kittani, who is also around but now in completely different capacities. Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz were the key people on the Iraqi side. They were always saying, bragging almost, during the war, that you would see changes in the opinions and power, people in power in Iran, but never in Iraq. It seems to be true, although the change probably would occur sometime by natural reasons.

Anyway, on the Iranian side, there was quite a turmoil. We met people who were later to be assassinated: Rajai, the Prime Minister of Iran. We met Bani Sadr, who was leading a more modern tradition, more western-oriented tradition. We could always distinguish the Bani Sadr followers from the mullah followers by the Bani Sadr people having ties while the others were dressed in a more revolutionary fashion. Actually, Olof Palme was joking, saying that we actually had two negotiations, one between Iran and Iraq, and one negotiation in Iran between the mullahs and the Bani Sadr camp. The most important person we met who then later was assassinated was Ayatollah Beheshti, who was extremely powerful, enormously respected, and very strong. We met him, he only spoke German as a foreign language, so only I and Olof Palme were allowed to enter his room. He closed the door behind us even by a key. Diego Cordovez and a few others were rather dissatisfied, waiting outside, and he, Olof Palme, and I were talking in German because Ayatollah Beheshti had been a local mullah in Hamburg.

It turned out to be one of the most interesting conversations. This was in June 1981, and he actually then both found a solution – which later unfortunately did not materialize – to the closed ships in the Shatt al Arab, but also actually lined out a solution and accepted the elements that we had developed vaguely on a comprehensive settlement. And Olof Palme was more optimistic than I had ever seen him during the work on the negotiations after that conversation. Approximately three weeks later, I recall, we received the terrible news in Baghdad, actually through international channels, that Ayatollah Beheshti had been killed, and the terrorist act was committed by the Mojahedin camp against the headquarters of the Islamic party. Seventy-two people were killed at one time. So it was on the Iranian side, a varied lot of people that we met. If I look back

today at the people we met at that time, I don't think anybody is still left, except of course Rafsanjani, who was in different periods, playing different roles.

JS: Khomeini was not yet there?

JE: Khomeini was alive. We never asked to see Khomeini, because we were afraid a 'no' from him would end all negotiation efforts. So we never asked for a meeting and no meeting was offered either. We met later Khameini but Rafsanjani was probably the most influential person that we met, and who of course is still around. Most of the others are gone.

JS: Now in the development of the planning of the so-called comprehensive plan, how important were you and Olof Palme in that, or how important was the Secretariat, or for that matter Waldheim?

JE: Well, I think in the beginning we played a very active role. We actually developed both a step-by-step approach and a comprehensive approach. We were all the time aware of the possibility of either going for a comprehensive solution or a step-by-step. Comprehensive was to Olof Palme and I, the preferred option. We worked that out together with Diego Cordovez, Iqbal Riza, and the team. Raymond Sommereyns was a very important one, a lawyer who is still around in the UN. In that comprehensive package, we brought in all the elements for a solution, and tragically, what later came out in 1987-88, Resolution 588, very closely resembled what we suggested in 1981, or even

in the late part of 1980. And it is of course tragic that in the meantime, 700,000 people were killed, 2 or 3 million people were refugees, and tremendous material destruction took place. So the comprehensive settlement was what we preferred and presented in general terms to begin with, and a little more precisely later on. But at the same time, we, of course, realized that if there was no progress on the comprehensive solution, we would have to accept the step-by-step solution, although the problem with the step-by-step solution is the parties have to know where they end if they put the steps in one certain direction. But we felt that this could also be a confidence building process, something we then developed later in 1983-84. Even in the beginning, we felt that the release of ships that were stuck in the Shatt al Arab could be both a local cease-fire and a confidence building measure, and the first step in a step-by-step solution. So we actually proceeded in parallel with discussions on a comprehensive settlement.

JS: And that was a success?

JE: No, it was not a success. There is something in your question that gives me the impression that those ships were released. In fact, they were not.

JS: I thought some were released.

JE: No, well, maybe a small fraction of them, but in fact seventy-two were stuck there, and very few, if any, if I can recall, got out. They were hostages, more or less, and we were extremely disappointed that this solution did not come about. We were under

tremendous pressure to act, not least by Lloyd's Insurance Company in London, who had billions of dollars at stake in those 72 ships. But also it would have been a local cease-fire, a very important step.

Now, it failed for an absolutely ridiculous reason. We discussed in the end of this issue who would pay for it. And it turned out that both sides insisted on paying for the whole operation. I've never in my life, neither before nor after, been in that position, that negotiations fail because both sides insist on paying for the operation. But for both parties, this turned out to be symbolic of who had the sovereignty over Shatt al Arab. By paying the whole operation, both of them wanted to prove that it was they who had the sovereignty over the Shat al Arab. We actually were - I think it was a Saturday morning - sitting with Bani Sadr, and Bani Sadr brought out his pen to sign on to the agreement that we had worked out very carefully. Then he just asked to take a pause and discuss it with some experts, and in the afternoon, it was No. Because he had learned about the Iraqi's strong insistence on paying for it and then he realized that this would have been used against him in a more basic settlement.

JS: You mentioned Shatt al Arab. Could I just skip ahead and ask you, throughout the whole series of endless negotiations, how important did you assess this difference between the two countries to be?

JE: It was not an important issue in substance. It was a symbol of the conflict. The reason for the conflict was much more complex. It had to do with the fear of the Iraqi side for export of revolution and the hatred that existed on the Iranian side for the way

Saddam Hussein had treated Khomeini while he was in Karbala, Iraq. All this fuelled the mutual suspicion of fear. It was a basic confrontation between two different systems, the fear on the Iraqi side that this Shi'a Muslim wave would enter Iraq and throw Saddam Hussein's regime over. This, I think, was the real reason behind the conflict. The reason on the surface was the Shatt al Arab issue because it became an important issue, it became the object of negotiations, and in the end, what we hoped, the place where we could save face. But since the real reasons were much deeper, of course, you came to this conclusion rather soon, that whatever solution you presented would not be accepted unless you dealt with the basic fears and basic suspicions. But it was enormously tragic to see that, like two boxers, we advised them to stop the fighting in the fourth round, but they continued until the 15th when they were two bloody bodies falling over each other. And we knew all the time that they would come to this solution in the end, but it took war-weariness and eight years of war before they realized that.

JS: How did you assess the functioning of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General in this first period when Waldheim was still the Secretary-General?

JE: Waldheim was very helpful. Olof Palme and he had a very courteous relationship, almost of the old Hapsburg Swedish royal traditions. The choreography was very stylish, they showed great respect for each other. Waldheim deferred very much to Olof Palme. Every time he came here, and I was with him every time, he organized a lunch in his private dining room with his closest advisors. Brian Urquhart, I recall, in particular, Diego Cordovez, of course, was closely working with us, and he offered all

assistance. Olof Palme insisted that I would be his closest advisor outside of Diego Cordovez and I was given complete access. In the beginning we worked extremely close together, in fact we developed our ideas together during our trips. We were sometimes out ten days, fourteen days, we shuttled between Baghdad and Tehran a couple of times. So we were working night and day with the issues together, which was a period where it was very close coordination. But we were simply forced to work together.

JS: And Diego Cordovez was there?

JE: Diego was there and was working loyally with Olof Palme. The problems, of course, became more clear when we were not doing the shuttling between 1982 and 1984, for two reasons: One, geographic distance. It's not easy when Olof Palme and I were in Stockholm and Diego Cordovez was here with access to the Secretary-General personally all the time. The second reason, of course, was that Olof Palme in September 1982 was elected Prime Minister in Sweden which gave him much more responsibility at home and much less time to deal with Iraq and Iran. I was extremely impressed by the time he spent on Iran-Iraq while he was in the opposition. I was talking to him practically every day for some periods and I became very close to him. His wife later told me that Iran-Iraq was constantly on his mind, and she told me - I was very touched by that - how close we were and how often Olof talked about me and the Secretary-General and Iran-Iraq, and "I have to call Jan" and I was very moved by that, especially after the very tragic circumstances under which he died. He was assassinated, as you know, on the 28th of February 1986. So that period between 1982 and 1986 was less contact and perhaps

more discussion on who did what, but I had the tremendous help of Iqbal Riza, who was part of our team from the very beginning, and who is still a very close friend of mine. We've been close friends all through the years, and I had always all information, all relevant information, coming from Iqbal Riza to me, perhaps not always from Diego Cordovez, due to time constraints, or other reasons, but with Iqbal Riza I had absolute openness.

JS: So there was no problem there?

JE: In the beginning not at all. In the beginning, we were working extremely closely. Even the period 1982-1984, we had good contacts. I was here frequently when Olof Palme became Prime Minister. I was on mission here often on my own for his sake. I also went to Iran and Iraq, particularly Iran in bilateral capacities, because I was first the Prime Minister's Chef de Cabinet in international issues in Sweden. Then I became Political Director General in the Swedish foreign ministry and that gave me also a pretext to put on the Swedish hat to go to Iran/Iraq. So during that period I had frequent contact with New York. With Cordovez, often, but also very often, as I said, with Iqbal Riza. In 1983-84, we developed the concept of confidence building measures where we built on the ideas that we had on Shatt al Arab which had failed, and the ships at that time were starting to rust, and we developed other such confidence building measures. The most successful one was, of course, the idea that was developed very much by Iqbal Riza and the team around him here, and also Diego of course. Also with myself, and with Olof

Palme's full blessing and very active interest in the idea of stopping the bombardment of civilian targets and the villages, which came to a solution on the 11th of June 1984.

The beauty of that agreement was that it was a commitment of the two not to attack, but they didn't have to make a contractual arrangement between each other because they hated each other so much, and they didn't want to give each other legitimacy. So it was actually a cable sent and I remember the phone calls to Iqbal about this cable sent, and we said, "Let's put a deadline for the answer so we have a cable coming back confirming the agreement." So we got first the Iraqi agreement and then the Iranian agreement and Iqbal called me, jubilant, "We have the agreement, and it actually held." Then we wanted to follow that up with restrictions on attacks against the traffic, ships in the Persian Gulf, and also restrictions on the use of chemical weapons which we started to hear about in 1983.

Then, we had more and more evidence that this was taking place. When I wasin Tehran on a bilateral mission, 1983, I think, I was offered to go to hospital and see the people who had been attacked by chemical weapons. Others also were given proof of what was taking place. Then Iqbal Riza was courageous enough to suggest here in New York – and it was approved by Pérez de Cuéllar, also courageously – that a mission had to be sent there. I don't think the matter came up in the Security Council, it was done, I think, within the Secretariat.

JS: I think it came up in the Security Council but the Secretary-General decided that it would be better to do it on his own so it would not be associated with the Security Council.

JE: Right. Anyway, Iqbal went there and it ended up in a pretty controversial report. I think Iqbal himself had to pay a bit of a price at the time for doing it, but it was a very important report. In retrospect, I regret very much that the world did not take as seriously as it should the reports that were so damning against Iraq at the time. Olof Palme and I were very upset, both about the use of chemical weapons and the fact that there was such a lukewarm reaction to the use of these weapons. It was no doubt used first by the Iraqis; it is possible that it might have been used by the Iranians but not at all to the same extent as the Iraqis, as they later proved in Halabja and elsewhere.

JS: Now I want to go back just a minute. You were going to first, really, to have direct contact with Saddam Hussein. What was your impression or Olof Palme's impression of Saddam Hussein at that point?

JE: A ruthless leader. An absolute despot. You could feel fear in the room when you met him. I met him also on my own, when I took over the mediation efforts in 1988. I went to the region and I saw him then alone, and I recall conversations where people turned pale if I did not react the way that normally one does facing Saddam Hussein. I recall moments when he looked at me in a combination of puzzlement, surprise, and slight irritation, that anyone could pose questions of that nature. And the rest of the people in the room were absolutely stunned that anyone could pose those questions. They weren't very tough [questions], but very simple ones. I just wanted to know whether he had any plan of going back to the internationally recognized boundaries and

so forth and he came out with a long story about Iraq's capabilities and that indeed Iraq could stay long in the area but this was only to defend its own territory "once we get Shatt al Arab." Then he brought me into the map room and, with his pointer, showed how far in they were, just to prove his point. And he came back to my question two or three times. He wasn't used to having any searching or probing questions to him. And of course the whole security apparatus was extremely tough. You could hear it in the walls, see it around yourself. It was a very violent society, and the violence very much came from the top.

JS: And that was there from the very beginning, even at the time when - ?

JE: Yes, we heard all the stories which we hardly believed in, about how people and the resistance and also inside the government had been treated, and if only a third of what we heard was true, it was a very brutal society.

But he was also very charismatic. He exuberated power and strength; he was very fit. He had a very determined look, looked well, in the beginning particularly. But he stood up pretty well all through the years, physically I think, he did not allow himself to look in any way or show that he would be shaken by anything. He was, of course, a very strong person.

JS: Others have said that nobody else on the Iraqi side even dared talk when he was in the room.

JE: No.

JS: It was always just – that was your experience?

JE: That's right, I can't recall anyone speaking when he was there. I can say, once, this particular situation where they got pale, there was for once not a translator who was very good, or at least he made a bad translation. He started out saying to me that "Oh, Mr. Eliasson, would you like to give your speech first or am I to give my speech first?" So I got a bit confused, he probably wanted to know, "Are you going to begin?" So I said, "I don't plan to give a speech, I just have a few simple questions to put," and everybody jumped. Well, then he looked at me again with this puzzlement and amusement, "What kind of questions?" Said it off rather abruptly. And then of course, the basic question is the issue whether you are prepared to go back to internationally recognized boundaries. That's when I thought that some people were going to faint! And so we had a three-hour conversation which ended up by him taking me like this by the shoulder and saying, "OK, let's go to my map room and show you were we could have been."

JS: So it was not a very optimistic beginning.

JE: No, it wasn't. We saw all the possibilities of finding a settlement. We knew approximately how the conflict would end, but it seemed to me that either two parties come to an agreement when they are equally strong or equally weak. And in this case,

they were pretty strong. Well, the Iranians were rather weak, but they were not hurt by the war so much in the beginning. We also knew that hatred would increase and the possibilities to come to compromises would be diminishing after every month of this terrible magnitude of killing. So instead they decided – well, not decided - but by the turn of events, they continued and when they finally made up, both were equally weak.

The problem was, of course, that Iran had a moral superiority in the beginning, because they claimed, rightfully I would say, that the Security Council should have been clearer on the issue of withdrawal. It was a cease-fire resolution alone, and nothing about withdrawal, and they claimed that the Security Council was partial to Iraq, in favor of Iraq. Olof Palme and I discussed how we could handle this, because our whole credibility was at stake with a resolution which, also in our own view, was a weak one. Therefore I recalled international law and reminded Olof Palme of the principle of non-acquisition of territory by force. So the line we took with the Iranians already in November and December 1980 was to remind them that even with their criticism (and we couldn't be disloyal to the Security Council of course), we were neutral. We said there was also basic international law, so if you would prove that this is a case of Iraqi aggression as you claim, then of course the principle of non-acquisition of territory by force should be applied and then the territories that are acquired by force would be returned. That made the Iranians more positively inclined towards Olof Palme in such a way that we almost feared a split between Olof Palme and the Secretary-General on the one hand and the Security Council on the other, where the Iranians would preferred to deal with us and not at all deal with the Security Council when they had that resolution which they considered so weak.

Now, *they* then, made the almost fatal mistake of crossing into Iraqi territory in 1982, and by that they lost the moral high ground which they had in their hands. If they had stopped at their border, they would have been doing the diplomacy tremendously well. But they were then almost a pariah nation after the hostage-taking with the United States, and they felt that nobody would care anyway. Whatever they did, they would be put in the doghouse; this was more or less the way they spoke to Olof Palme and myself. Then they went into Iraq and then I think there came a resolution which included the call for withdrawal to internationally recognized boundaries, which made them even more bitter.

That was the time to wake up on the basic principle of international law, I suspect. But in the beginning, they knew very little about international law. We met the revolutionaries 1980-81, and of course they had been there for a year or so after Khomeini came back into power and they didn't know a thing about clinical international law. At least, the people on the mullah side had very weak knowledge of international law. I recall, once we had a negotiation about the withdrawal of troops, we were discussing the principle that Iraq would withdraw and we wanted to just make sure that the Iranians then would allow a three-week period for the Iraqis to withdraw to internationally recognized boundaries. We thought that was a reasonable time for an orderly withdrawal. Then they introduced the shari'a rule, that if you break into your neighbor's house, you are supposed to be punished. So they were talking about giving every soldier twenty or forty whips and we were just shaking our heads. This was not normal negotiation, at least that I had seen or was going to see later on.

But Olof Palme was a very innovative person, and a very patient person - normally, that is not associated with him, if you look at his political style in Sweden and elsewhere. He was asking Iqbal Riza to look for something in the Quran that we could use when we started the negotiations the following morning. It had been an awful negotiation, where we got nowhere because of this strange reflection on the Iranian side. Then the following morning, Iqbal Riza came up, hollow-eyed but jubilant, because he had found a passage in the Quran, I think Sura number 15 or 51, where it says that if the enemy turns his back at you, you are not allowed to attack him.

Now we started that negotiation with those words and the Iranians were touched, almost moved to tears, that we had cited the Quran, had found an opening in the Quran. I still remember the sticky beard of someone embracing me afterwards, a revolutionary saying, "Thank you for showing respect for our religion and culture."

So, in the beginning it was a very strange exercise of talking with Iran, not least because of that lack of knowledge of international law. If they had known international law better, they might have still seen the benefits of not crossing the border in '82. That was revenge, they had to do it, the basic shari'a, the Quran like the Old Testament, in fact, says: Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

JS: And already at that point, were they determined that somebody should declare that Iraq was the aggressor?

JE: They were absolutely convinced that the war had been started by the Iraqis, although they were pretty vague about the Iraqi assertions that there had been artillery

attacks across the border. They did not deny of course, in the beginning, the charge of export of revolution, because in the beginning the Islamic revolution was going to be if not world-wide, at least a region-wide activity. So on those counts they were a bit vague. But when it comes to the organized attack, there was no doubt that it was started by the Iraqis, so they came back to that all the time. Their [the Iraqi's] guilt had to be established, and that they also should be punished for that, pay a price, which later also was discontinued within the framework of Resolution 598. Later, it was my job to implement that resolution.

JS: And was the order of the requirements of 598 that caused you so many problems?

JE: Right.

JS: And that was never resolved until –

JE: We've discussed whether the sequence was a time sequence or just a logical sequence. This was our big problem, and it wasn't solved until after the Kuwait invasion when Iraq suddenly realized, because of the pressures, that they had to agree, and in a way 598 fell into oblivion. It hasn't been fully implemented. What we wanted also to work with, we tried to start with paragraph eight, with regional security, just to get things moving, but we were also stuck in the beginning on the prisoners of war [issue]. Of course the guilt issue was there too.

JS: I wanted to ask you about the regional security concept. Where did that come from and did you really ever have any vision of what –

JE: It's like today in Kosovo, and in the Balkans, where you realize more and more that you have to have regional security in order to avoid explosions within this region. This we finally realized in the Balkans region, that if we don't have stronger regional cooperation, if we don't have a prospect of this region attaching itself closer to European integration, then these explosions will come every third or fourth year. This was very much an Olof Palme concept; we were very much in on the regional security. We had just worked on the CSCE, the confidence-building measures of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe, now OSCE. This is classical Swedish thinking. Gianni Picco was interested too. He saw it as a device because he worked very closely with me in my last four years, 1988-92. It was the concept we thought could be fruitfully developed but…

JS: Did you have any serious discussions about it with either side?

JE: Yes, oh yes, the Iranians particularly Yavad Zarif, Deputy Foreign Minister, every time I see him, he says, you taught me a new expression: Confidence Building Measures. In the beginning we laughed about it, but now it is a good one. Actually the Iranians say that they are working along these lines in the development of the relations with the Gulf countries, except of course – well, maybe they would even in the end include Iraq in that. The war seems distant today. But it was an interesting concept and I wish we could have

worked harder. You know, in negotiations, it is always important to keep something going, to have talks on something, and we had a list, it was like an a la carte menu. I had a little bit of involvement in [Resolution] 598. When you asked me these questions, I actually recall that I was Political Director in the Swedish foreign ministry, 1987. Olof Palme was assassinated in February 1986. In that time, I had no official function in the Iran/Iraq issues between 1986 and 1988, until I was given the Personal Representative role. However, at the funeral in Stockholm, Pérez de Cuéllar asked the incoming Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, whether I could be available for him for advice, since I had been working so hard with the negotiations. So I was in contact with Diego Cordovez and with Iqbal Riza most intensely, during this period 1986-87.

In the beginning of 1987, I had an invitation by Michael Armacost and Dick Murphy to come to Washington. I think it was in the middle of February 1987. They said that now is the time to push for a resolution to the Iran-Iraq war, because they had received indications that the Russians - I don't know to what extent they were talking to the Chinese - would not necessarily go against a solution along the lines that they hoped. And then, actually, we sketched together the elements at a two-day meeting. Well, we met one day, then lunch, and then I met Dick Murphy the other day. We discussed the elements that could be part of a resolution, which later turned out to be, of course, 598, and which then of course was very much negotiated with the P5 [Permanent Five Members of the Security Council] and where, of course, Pérez de Cuéllar and the people around him played an important role. But I recall that I was a contact both with one of the P5 on this issue and also the British but less so. And the Secretariat.

JS: That's interesting. And was that before the Secretary-General had his press conference, which I think was on the first or beginning of the year, in which he proposed that the five foreign ministers should meet?

JE: No, it was after that. We all pressed that we follow the issue, that we have to bring it back now, and as conditions were improving – we had, at that time, Gorbachev in power and there were signs of Russia that there was change underway.

JS: Gorbachev was already there?

JE: Gorbachev was there. We had generally the feeling that something was cooking in a positive way, and that perhaps one could actually devise a formula, to establish the Security Council authority in a good and solid way, and also finally get the Iranians to realize that the Security Council, which would in the end be necessary, could bring about peace. So I think there was pressure on Pérez de Cuéllar: I myself from Stockholm, people around him here, maybe some people in the region who felt that this war was indeed dangerous. There were, of course, conspiracy theories that many people would like to see both Iran and Iraq get very weak, there were those who even said so, but I think that it was a general realization that this could not go on. But by the beginning of 1987, there was a strong realization that there must be a strong and determined effort.

JS: That's very interesting, because that was the other question I had. During this period, did you on the Swedish side have contacts with the Permanent Members on this subject?

JE: I did.

JS: It was largely with - ?

JE: The US Our ambassador in Washington was very strong. He had a very strong personal relationship with Armacost. I think they played tennis together and Armacost had heard about me and Wille Wachtmeister who was our ambassador, he was there for 14-15 years, he became dean of the corps. I was one of his assistants when he was Political Director-General. We have a very strong personal relationship. And Wille called me and said, "You know Mike Armacost wants you to come over. You have a great chance now to make a contribution," and I flew over the following day. And we were sitting there, I have a strange feeling it was the 19th of February 1987.

JS: It could be, because the press conference of the Secretary-General was about the third or fourth of January.

JE: Oh really? I didn't recall, but now when you say it, I recall.

JS: At one point, Pérez de Cuéllar went by helicopter to the Prime Minister's country residence. Were you there? Can you describe the meeting?

JE: Oh yes, Olof Palme invited me to come up to his [the Swedish Prime Minister's] country place, which is actually a military protected area. Anyway, he has a pretty simple cottage there. We put out sheets on the field outside for the helicopter to know where to land. So there were these big white sheets out on the field, four, five of them and we saw the helicopter coming down. It was an absolutely beautiful summer, morning. It was summer 1984. Sweden was at its very best, sunny, not too hot, and Pérez de Cuéllar upbeat, happier than I'd seen him before, relaxed. He went in a rowboat out there at the rest of the Prime Minister's country residence. Gianni Picco came in, had been jogging in the morning, and said he'd never got such fresh air and so much oxygen in his lungs. Running the most beautiful passage through a wood, a forest around Palme's country residence, where the air was clean and crisp. We had a light lunch with salmon, I recall, and very good conversation, sitting out on the porch, we were all sitting in the library together. We were upbeat because we had had this little success of the June end of bombings, so we felt that now we were on to something, where a step-by-step approach could lead to a comprehensive settlement. We knew what could be the elements and the solution, but also that we could, in parallel – again, I recall the situation in 1981-82 - that we could devise more steps, so we had to brainstorm on what such steps could be. As I said earlier, it was chemical weapons which we were both very upset about, and on both sides, both the Swedish side and the UN side, and also the possibility of protecting traffic better in the Gulf and a few other things. I was using the phrase that Olof Palme loved, we had to "pull the teeth out of the war". That was what we had our brainstorming about.

JS: To skip ahead, in the end, your question of who was responsible for the war was used by Pérez de Cuéllar in a different context, and that is for the release of hostages in Lebanon. Were you aware of that? You were at that point still Special Representative.

JE: Yes, this was a very sensitive issue. I recognized that there was a new element coming in, and I must admit that my friend Gianni Picco was a bit secretive.

JS: As he always is.

JE: Well, we had a very open relationship, I hope mutual respect for different qualities, although we also saw weaknesses, I think. But anyway, he was a bit more Byzantine than normally. I was asked together with Benon Sevan to go along to Tehran, in September 1991 it must have been, and we were to have a broad range of discussions. That's why, since Benon Sevan came along, he would discuss Afghanistan too. I would be there to give the sign that it was also official talks about the war, about Iran-Iraq, the implementation of Resolution 598. But I realized that something was cooking, because they were going to have a private meeting with Rafsanjani. At that meeting, I was not supposed to be in. Of course this made me upset. I was given some reason that I can't even recall, but it didn't quite calm me. But anyway, I felt that this was happening, and then, although they didn't really confirm that this link was going to be established, but I had the feeling and so did my associate Anders Liden, who helped me here in the mission - I was the UN ambassador. He said that he also had the feeling that something was cooking on getting a deal on hostages linked to Iraq, guilt of aggression. I had no real

problem, because my own belief actually was leaning in that direction, when it comes to who started the war, but of course to tie it to such an issue could damage strongly the credibility of Resolution 598. On the other hand, if this was a way to get a solution, maybe it could be understandable. It was kept in absolute secrecy. I think I was put in a position of what the Americans call "deniability". I was not involved at all in any such discussions but I had a vague feeling that this was coming.

JS: In this connection, I've also interviewed Ismat Kittani and Kittani insists that on the Iraqi side they had no idea about it until Pérez de Cuéllar's book came out, that on the Iraqi side they never totally trusted Pérez de Cuéllar. Did you have that impression?

JE: Yes, I have that feeling too. They really didn't trust anybody in the UN. I don't think they trusted Olof Palme either. I don't know to what extent they trusted Waldheim, Cordovez, possibly, myself, I don't know. They had reason to have a guilty conscience too. So who would they trust, if this person would get the facts out? I don't know if they trusted anybody.

But I must also tell you about the dramatic period in August 1988, after Resolution 598 finally was accepted by both sides. The negotiations started in Geneva, and I want you to know that that cease-fire was extremely shaky. Both parties were, first of all, very nervous, very suspicious of the other side, but also very dissatisfied with the situation and the risks of the outcome for their regimes. They had the option of war as a very real option, both of them, and they also feared the other side – knowing, by the way, that the other side had the option of war. So that negotiation was probably the worst, the

most cumbersome, the most straining negotiation that I've ever gone through. I think Pérez de Cuéllar actually was absolutely exhausted when I came to relieve him in the end of August 1988. He was there himself. He looks frail but he is stronger than he looks, as you know. I like the man so much, by the way, I have tremendous sympathy for Pérez de Cuéllar. Even from what I said, I knew he wanted to put me in deniability on all that, but also I had a very warm relationship, almost a father-son relationship, I would say. He was extremely kind to me. We have been in contact through the years, always passing greetings to each other.

But I felt sorry for him because he called me in Sweden personally and said that, "I am the Secretary-General. This is taking up sixteen hours of the day for me these first three days. I've been in consultation with the parties, I've also been in contact with the P5 informally, and it turns out that you are the best candidate to help me out. Everybody would like to have you, they recall you, you were with Palme." Ismat Kittani particularly, evidently, had supported my candidature. I don't whether this is something I should regret or be grateful for! But anyway, he said, "You are the name that everybody agrees upon, both Iranians and Iraqis want you, and I want to name you my Personal Representative for Iran-Iraq." I was at the Foreign Minister's Meeting up in Kiruna, north of Sweden, and I went up to the Swedish Foreign Minister, and said, "Listen, I got this call and told him about it. Do you think I should take it?" "Of course you should," he said. "But I'm UN Ambassador," I said. "Well, you have to do both," he replied. So in my masochistic work ethic, I accepted it. I went there and this was absolutely incredible, they were so difficult. They were so suspicious. The forms of negotiation were so much reflecting the suspicions, you wouldn't believe it.

We were sitting from nine in the morning often till one o clock at night, either in a meeting or private meeting separately with them. They were evidently trying to exhaust me because I was alone together with a team which was Ralph Zachlin, Giani Picco was still there, Downs-Thomas, and Paul Kavanaugh. We had these unending sessions. I knew they were trying to exhaust me. I'm a pretty strong person, I'm very physical and usually have been (knocks on wood). I was getting up there with a new fresh shirt in the morning, looking as though I had been waiting for them and sleeping eight hours while I in fact had been sleeping three, and this went on and on and on. It was a tremendous strain.

My wife tells me that when I relaxed over the phone, I asked her what day it is, I forgot the date of the week. And it was important to keep them working and giving them new tasks, giving them new ideas, and we even had a connection to the airport. I had a man out at the airport to let me know if they signaled to the delegations that the plane would leave. They had two planes standing there, one from Iran and one from Iraq and there was a non-aligned meeting taking place on the 6th and 7th of September in Cyprus. We were afraid they were sneaking out to go out to that meeting and then go back home and get out of my hands. So I did everything to make sure to give them issues to deal and work with. I gave them a little hope on this and that, and my big job was to keep them there, because I felt very much that there was a very frail cease-fire. The war could erupt very easily.

That went on and on, and the shape of the table was almost Vietnam-style negotiations. First the tables were facing each other, their tables, so they looked at each other. They insisted that those tables were switched in such a way that they were facing

me, us, and for the first week or so, I negotiated with Pérez de Cuéllar, then he left and I continued on my own. But then they were facing not each other but us, so that they were talking through us to the other side. We had walkie-talkies in both side rooms so that they were entering on the first split of the second together, so that nobody would have to wait for each other. We couldn't bring them together to talk directly anywhere.

Then I said to Pérez de Cuéllar, "Why don't we offer coffee and you suggest that we drink coffee at the end of the table?" And when they came in, they looked with surprise at this coffee table which was down at the end of that triangle, and at the end of coffee, Pérez de Cuéllar said, "And now I suggest we take a break and we invite you to have coffee." And they moved like animals in a herd and slowly approached each side, when they picked up coffee from each side of the table, on their side, and then in the end, Ismat Kittani showed his integrity. He walked over and spoke to the interpreter on the other side because he knew him, or he knew the language. So that was a very brave step. I don't know whether it was authorized.

Then I had something which is still known as - its been joked about both in Iraq and Iran, even Tariq Aziz remembered it when I was there for the Secretary-General in November 1997 on another mission with Brahimi and Cardenas -- I arranged something which I call not "continental breakfast" at the Inter-Continental, but "confidential breakfast." So I had a confidential breakfast with Cyrus Nasseri, the brilliant Iranian ambassador in Geneva who was a close advisor to Velayati, who I think was conducting the negotiations on their side. On the Iraqi side, it was Ismat Kittani, who was there on behalf of Tariq Aziz. We had just the three of us, a very important discussion for the first time, together, in rather relaxing circumstances.

JS: And did you have the feeling that Ismat Kittani had the full confidence of the Iraqi side?

JE: I think there was a tremendous respect of his professional competence. They knew he was a master diplomat, but of course they also knew that he was a Kurd. I, myself, discovered in Ismat that there was something in the eyes, and at some instances, also when I saw him later, he was extremely relieved to live in New York, although he never crossed the line. It could cause him or his relatives many problems. But I always entertained the hope that he knew what kind of regime he was dealing with, that he would feel better in New York or Geneva. But he was of course a tremendously good professional, one of the world's best. I would rank him among the best diplomats I have dealt with.

JS: And he's the one who brought the word of Saddam Hussein's acceptance of the cease-fire to the Secretary-General?

JE: Exactly, and he suggested that I take over the Personal Representative role. We have a mutually warm relationship.

JS: He had said that, by the way, on tape.

JE: Well, we had a little bit of a cumbersome relationship because he was Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Somalia, and I didn't quite share the views of Boutros-Ghali and Ismat Kittani on our humanitarian work. I want to do more in humanitarian and less in military.

JS: Why did you agree to accept the Special Representative job when the prospects did not look very good?

JE: Well, first of all, it was the classical duty syndrome, of course, and also I was honored that I was asked to be in this position. I always wanted to mediate and I did it helping Palme and Pérez de Cuéllar and Waldheim, and in this, I would be on my own. I was in my forties, so I felt that this was a challenge, and I also really felt that I had a good idea of how it should be wrapped up. But of course, it was a very difficult job. No, there was really no decision-making process in this, except going to the Swedish Foreign Minister, having him give the blessings for the government.

JS: And in this long period of negotiations, can you identify any one thing that you feel was accomplished?

JE: Yes, I think the model that we developed both for the comprehensive approach and the step-by-step approach was the model that was adopted later on.

JS: Well, I meant when you were Special Representative, in carrying on these fruitless negotiations in Geneva mostly, was there anything…?

JE: Well, the prisoners-of-war exchanges that came about later on, and the contacts with the Red Cross – and the fact that the war did not break out again. The humanitarian aspects, I think, were the ones I was most proud of. We brought about contact with the Red Cross. I myself visited a prison camp, a POW camp, in Iran. The big release came, of course, as you know, after the Iraq-Kuwait war. And then there was a wholesale release.

JS: And your relationships with the IFCRC [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies]?

JE: Very close.

JS: Okay, because at that point, I think there were some difficulties between the Secretary-General and the president of the IFCRC.

JE: Yes, I recall that, but I had very good relationship because I had helped the Red Cross in Angola before. So I had very close contact, and I think we prepared the ground for the big release, of course, in 1991, but also that we had a few releases of sick people, I can't recall now, but also contact letters and my visit to a camp were important. We also introduced the idea of confidence-building measures. That's when we had the long

discussion about how Iran-Iraq could develop a confidence-building measures system, although very little was done.

JS: But you did discuss those at that point?

JE: Yes, but I think at least in the beginning the main contribution, and its not for me to say this, but the main contribution by Pérez de Cuéllar and myself was to simply see to it that the war did not break out again. Those three four months between August 1988 and November, December 1988 were very, very shaky.

JS: He has said the same thing.

JE: Yes, we were very worried. That's when I developed a very close relationship with Pérez de Cuéllar because he was so tired, and I was tired, and when you are two very tired, you tend to be very open. He showed to me, really, the concern that this would explode again. And he said, "Jan, you have to be strong now, you have to be creative and I trust you so much." We had developed a very strong relationship and that's what I recall, perhaps being the biggest contribution that we kept a structure there, a credible structure, of negotiation. We kept them busy. And also, of course, I can tell you, a very important part of the job was to always keep the P5 in the picture. I had constant briefings; I had extremely good relations with the five ambassadors here and also through other channels, with their ministers. They asked to see me, so I ensured that

they were behind and I was working very closely with them. I didn't like to see a return of that split that I saw in the early part of the mediation with Palme.

JS: Did you do that mainly here in New York?

JE: Yes, yes, I was UN Ambassador here, so I had constantly contact with the ambassadors here, very close ones with Tom Pickering from the US, later on Lavreaux, was it Lavreaux? Like the Chinese, he was very glad that I always briefed him. And I also asked them to put the Iranians and Iraqis under pressure, to tell them, this you will not get away with. So there was both the work between them and then us behind the scenes getting them to stay in line.

JS: And a final question: did you, from a Swedish perspective – this would go back to Olof Palme as well as yourself – see this as a turning point in international relations, that is because the Iran-Iraq resolution was in fact the first cooperation of the P5? Did you perceive that at the time as being significant?

JE: Yes. First, in my speeches, I quoted that as the first sign that the Cold War is coming to an end. I had a tremendously happy period as Permanent Representative here in New York between 1988 and 1992, because there was a whole period where the whole Cold War situation loosened up.

I recall Gorbachev's speech on the 8th of December 1988, that had unfortunately almost too much agreed upon in the Security Council, and references to Chapter Seven

wholesale, and in fact, as you know, Jim, the UN always took upon itself too much during that period. We had problems of digestion and we went into everywhere. For peacekeeping there was no problem of finding hoops, although the problem was we didn't quite know how to deal with the civil wars, we didn't get the right mix on the interventions.

Now when I later entered the UN and saw the Somalia operation, I was almost desperate about the bad mix, that civil wars had to be dealt with in more sophisticated manners. Not only sending 30,000 troops; you have to have a comprehensive program, a civic society program, you have to bring in other elements. If there are complex crises, you have to have complex responses, and we didn't do that. But I always said that in my speeches the first sign was, actually for me, the first sign was – I recall when you said to me in these questions about my visit to Washington in February 1987 – that's when, on my plane back, I said to myself, "My god, finally we get away from this myth that the UN was so effective earlier. We had gone through all these years with a veto either from the West or from Russia, 50s, 60s, 70s, maybe now the Security Council could become a negotiation body.

JS: You would go through –

JE: Yes, definitely. It was extremely – no, I used it always as an example and it actually opened up for what then happened in 1987, 88, 89, 90. Of course then came the whole setback, Somalia, on 3rd October 1993, when eighteen Americans were – when one American was dragged on the street. The same way CNN got the US into Somalia, the

CNN also got the US out, I would say. For me, that date is a very tragic date. That was the beginning of the end of the operation. We never finished the job in Somalia, we're still paying the price for that. And it also meant that the UN became much more than it should have been, a scapegoat for what happened, and the positive trend in terms of US opinion and support for it, the UN, waned and disappeared. I actually came to the conclusion that I would be doing more useful work back in Sweden, in the beginning of 1994 when I left the UN.

You asked about the role of the Secretariat. The Secretariat played an important role in preparing for the rounds of negotiations and as the channel to the Secretary-General during the period I was Personal Representative. All ideas which were put forward were previously discussed with the Secretariat, and the Secretary-General himself, if they were important points. Texts were usually prepared in advance and discussed with both parties in search for a common ground for agreement. Proposals for some confidence-building measures, including the release of POW's were also put forward to both parties. There was a tendency on both sides to seek positive signals as signs of weaknesses, which made it difficult to move ahead with confidence building measures. The reports to the Security Council were usually drafted in cooperation with the Secretariat and the final version accepted by the Secretary-General. The negotiations were held in plenary meetings in Geneva in the beginning, usually chaired by the Secretary-General and myself, sometimes, and indirectly through my travels to Baghdad and Tehran as well as through numerous contacts by me or the Secretariat with representatives of the parties in New York or Geneva. I also tried to involve the Security

Council, to make it back up certain principles that we tried to establish with Resolution 598.

I felt I had the full support of the Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar throughout my assignment as his Personal Representative. Perhaps I would have preferred a more direct contact, for the communications for the Secretary-General often went via his staff and Secretariat; but the important discussions, the most important ones, took place with him.

The insistence of Iran to identify Iraq as the aggressor complicated the effort to find agreement and to build confidence between the parties. The Secretary-General's report came after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and Iraq's withdrawal from Iranian territory.

I was not involved in the drafting of this report, whereby the Secretary-General took the unilateral decision to implement one of the paragraphs of Resolution 598. The international situation and the isolation of Iraq in the world community made this possible without any questions being raised. The decision of the Secretary-General was taken without my participation and without my knowledge, although as I said earlier, I had no problem with the substance of this decision.

The end of the war was primarily the result of war-weariness on both sides and a concerted effort by the Permanent Five members of the Security Council to put pressure on the parties. The Swedish contribution, through Palme and later by myself, was mainly to keep the dialogue, even if indirect, going between the parties. That led to the saving of many lives through, among other things, the end of the bombing of the two capitals and border cities, after the cease-fire, to a consolidation of the cease-fire and to the release of sick and wounded prisoners of war.

JS: Those are all important points.

Yale-UN Oral History Project
Jan Eliasson
James Sutterlin, Interviewer
November 9, 1999
New York, NY

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YALE-UN ORAL HISTORY

Jan Eliasson
Interview II
April 11, 2000
New York, NY

Interviewer: This is an interview with Jan Eliasson, State Secretary of the Swedish Foreign Ministry. You have long worked with Iraqi issues. What role did you play in bringing the Iran-Iraq war to an end?

Jan Eliasson: I was serving with Prime Minister Olof Palme in the early eighties as his assistant when he was Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for the Iran-Iraq war. We negotiated with the Iranians and the Iraqis for several years. It was a tense period. It was between 1980 and 1982 that we conducted shuttle diplomacy between Baghdad and Tehran. Olof Palme, as we all know, was assassinated in 1986. In 1988, I was asked by Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar to be his Personal Representative on the Iran-Iraq issue, after the cease-fire had been agreed upon between the parties, and after Resolution 598, which regulated the peace later on between Iran and Iraq, had been agreed upon.

The Secretary-General found, after arduous and long negotiations in Geneva, that he could not spare the time to do this negotiation himself, so he therefore asked me to join him in Geneva in August 1988. I spent parts of fall 1988 in Geneva, and also conducted shuttle diplomacy to bring about the implementation of Resolution 598. Intensely in 1988, but I continued till 1992, when I entered the United Nations in another capacity. At the time I was UN ambassador, but in 1992, I became Under-Secretary

General for Humanitarian Affairs. In that context, I changed perspective on Iraq, because up until then, I had been dealing with war between Iran and Iraq, the regulation of Resolution 598. But after 1992, I worked with Iraq from a different perspective, namely the humanitarian perspective. At that time, as you may know, there was quite a difficult situation for the Kurds in the north. They had been organized into special areas, and we had to conduct special humanitarian programs in the North.

I: Did this only concern the Kurdish or was this also with the Shia's in the south?

JE: It was supposed to be all of Iraq, but the emphasis of the program was on the Kurdish situation. It was also easier to work in the north, because in the south there was considerable repression by the regime in Baghdad. There had been an uprising in the south by the Shiite community and it had been very harshly repressed and therefore our programs were difficult to conduct. I want to tell you that I very much wanted to expand the program to the south, but it wasn't easy. I kept perspectives then on Iraq from the humanitarian side. For two years I stayed as Under-Secretary-General. My last contact with Iraq was 1997, when Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked me, together with former Foreign Minister Brahimi and the former UN Ambassador of Argentina, Cardenas, to go to Iraq to try to persuade the Iraqis to cooperate with us. Those were my three areas of cooperation with Iraq.

I: To go back to the role that you had in ending the Iran-Iraq war, how did you prepare for it?

JE: Well, to tell you the truth, we had a very short time to prepare. Prime Minister Olof Palme received a call by the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, who asked him to come to New York the following day. He called him in his suburban house and Olof Palme told me that he was actually on his way over to bring a bottle of wine to his neighbors; they were having a little dinner. He was back in the house to pick up this bottle of wine. When he was there, the phone starts ringing, and he says to himself "Should I answer or not? After all, I have dinner with friends." But he picked up the phone and there was Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, asking him to go as Personal Representative for Iran-Iraq.

The war had started in September 1980. This was the 10th of November 1980. He took one day to consider the issue and decided to accept the following evening, the 11th. He called the then Foreign Minister Ola Ullsten and asked whether he could have a person from the Swedish Foreign Ministry to help him. I was then newly appointed head of the African and Asia department, and the two, Ola Ullsten and Olof Palme agreed that I would be the one to be asked. But the call did not take place until the following morning at 7 o'clock. So 7 o'clock in the morning, Olof Palme called. I didn't know about this at all. So he said, "I've been asked to be the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on Iran-Iraq. I need someone to help me. I've talked to Ola Ullsten last night. I didn't want to call you late last night. I want to ask you now. Could you join me?" I said, "Do I have time to decide?" "Well," [he said], "The press conference starts at 9:30 and the flight leaves at eleven o'clock for New York." I said, "New York, so we don't go to the area?" "No," [he said], "We must spend some days in New York to

prepare for the mission and discuss with the experts at the UN." I decided that same morning, and we left. To tell you the truth, it was a very difficult preparation. I had followed the conflict, of course, from my profession. Then we spent three or four intense days discussing with everybody who knew anything, including the parties, knowledgeable ambassadors, including the five Permanent Members of the Security Council. Then we went out, because we had a very clear mission to try to stop the fighting and we also had a Security Council resolution to base our work on.

I: This is my second question here. How did you and Olof Palme work together when he was the Secretary-General's Personal Representative?

JE: We worked very closely together, of course, but we also had a team. We were not a completely Swedish team. There was a colleague, Diego Cordovez, who later became Under-Secretary-General and then dealt with Afghanistan. Diego, by the way, is Ecuadorian. Then we had Iqbal Riza, who was a Pakistani, and who is now Secretary-General Kofi *chef de cabinet*. We had later Giandomenico Picco, an Italian. We had an international team. We were working very closely with not only the Secretariat, the Secretary-General and his staff, but also with the Permanent Five. There was a Security Council resolution which was the basis of our work and we were in constant dialogue with the five Permanent Members of the Security Council in New York and Geneva.

We had a problem. The first resolution of the Security Council only asked for a cease-fire in place; it did not ask for the withdrawal of troops from the international border. That gave us considerable problems with the Iranians, because the Iranians

claimed that of course if there is a cease-fire, there also has to be a requirement to go back to international borders.

I: But at that time, weren't the Iraqis the only ones who were outside the borders?

JE: Yes, the Iraqis were far inside Iranian territory and the Iranians, in order for them to agree to a cease-fire, wanted to have guarantees that the Iraqi troops would withdraw to the Iraqi border. In fact, this was our biggest problem in order to have credibility with the Iranians, who had a tremendous suspicion toward the outside world. You must remember that the background was the hostage-taking of Americans and the great fear that the Khomeini regime would export revolution to the outside world. In fact, most of the world's sympathies at that time were on the side of the Iraqis, so the Iranians were very suspicious that the world would accept the Iraqi invasion.

Therefore they absolutely insisted on the withdrawal of the Iraqis troops to the border. Olof Palme and I discussed this in depth, how we would deal with that problem. We came to the conclusion that, yes, there was no mention of the withdrawal in the resolution – which, in fact, was a disadvantage for the credibility of the Security Council at that time – but we also could make reference to international law. According to international law, you may not acquire territory by force. It's a rule of international law that was not written into the resolution.

So we said to the Iranians that it may not be part of the resolution but in fact we are all bound by international law and that you may not take territory by force. That helped us to establish dialogue with the Iranians. They accepted our negotiations but

they also saw a certain split, a distance between us and the Security Council resolution. It was a fascinating period, particularly in the beginning when the Iranians had so little experience with international negotiations.

I: So you mean that the Iraqis had more experience?

JE: The Iraqis were more experienced. The Iraqis had much better prepared dossiers. You might even have thought that they knew that this was coming. They had maps, they had arguments and we met of course always Saddam Hussein. We spent several hours, over 20-25 hours with him. We spent a lot of time with the then Foreign Minister Hamadi, and the later Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, who is extremely skillful and very sophisticated, and knowledgeable, and with a tremendous grasp of details which I am sure you will hear about from Hans Blix, Kofi Annan, and Rolf Ekéus later on.

They were also very proud of never changing their views and positions. They said, "You go to Iran, you hear one thing from the mullahs, and then you hear another thing from President Bani Sadr, but from us you will hear the same thing. If you trust us, if you make an agreement with us, it will hold, but for the other side, you will never know who is in charge." At the beginning, the Iranians were less knowledgeable, less sophisticated, didn't know much about international law. They were bound by shari'a law and the Quran, and not by international law. But later, it changed. The Iranians have tremendous potential, they are educated people, and they came in, and later proved that they had similar skills.

I: You have long worked with Iraqi issues. How would you describe the necessity and efficiency of UNSCOM inspections during that time?

JE: I think they did a very effective and useful job.

I: It was hard since it was the first time it had ever been done.

JE: Yes, of course it was the first time ever that this type of forced disarmament had taken place but in fact, it was an almost remarkable success. They were definitely successful in almost bringing about the elimination of nuclear capacity. It is hard also to conceive that the Iraqis could still keep the long-range missile capacity. Of course the most difficult area is, as you know, biological and chemical weapons, which are difficult to detect and also easy to conceal, and very easy to produce different combinations in different places. Therefore, with the issue of biological and chemical weapons, there has to be a much greater trust in the intentions of the Iraqis and that trust hasn't really existed. That's why the inspections are still needed as we will now see with Mr. Blix's experience with this task.

I: Yes, exactly. Would you like to see them operate or work differently from the way they did?

JE: I was there in 1997 for the Secretary-General and at that time, the Iraqis showed us videos of inspections taking place, where perhaps the manner in which the inspections

were taking place was not correct. Even if we deal with a country that has been guilty of war crimes or atrocities – in this case, they used chemical weapons against their own population and definitely against the Iranians around 1984 – I think there is a minimum standard of correct behavior. At least, the video portions they showed us, which of course were also part of the Iraqi propaganda, showed that some of the inspections were not done in such a way that inspired confidence. I think there has to be an element of correctness and that was not always there. But all in all, I think they did a good job. I was impressed by the skill and professionalism of the staff. It is important that the recruitment is as international as possible, and I hope that Dr. Blix will be successful in having a truly international recruitment for this important task, which is a common task to the United Nations.

I: Do you think that UNMOVIC should work differently from UNSCOM?

JE: Well, the Security Council had a long, and I would say to some, painful, discussion about the mandate for UNMOVIC and there were certain changes in the mandate. I still think that you cannot get away from the fact that there has to be on-the-ground inspections. You have to, by your own eyes, by your presence, see that things are in order, and I would hope that the Iraqis would realize that it is in their interest to have inspection on the ground. Unless this inspection is done on the ground to confirm that no weapons of mass destruction are produced, only then can the sanctions be lifted, and we all know the tremendously painful tragic effect of the sanctions for the Iraqi people. I

would hope that they would realize that there have to be pretty detailed inspections but that the good thing coming out would be the lifting of sanctions.

I: How were the operating procedures changed for UNMOVIC in comparison to UNSCOM? For example, now the Iraqis know how UNSCOM and the West work, and they know how to find a way around it.

JE: Well, the problem is, of course, that if there are bad intentions, it is very difficult to get anywhere. That's why there has to be, also on the Iraqi side, a realization that they cannot continue this game. Some years ago, it was absolutely clear that they had concealed and that they had deceived the international community. Mr. Ekéus and his team found that it was obvious that they had given false information, and you can't do that because, if that is done, you ask yourself, "What else do they hide?"

Especially when it comes to, as we said earlier, biological and chemical weapons, it's hard for anyone on the outside to have a hundred percent certainty of what you think is the case. In the case of nuclear weapons, you know that there is a need for so much equipment, that you can indeed prove it. With biological and chemical [weapons], there has to be an element of faith, and that unfortunately has been sadly lacking.

I: During the work of UNSCOM, many countries were working very closely, and sharing sources of information and intelligence. Do you think that this could lead to a danger in a future situation, that actually these countries, between each other, know too much about each other?

JE: I don't think so. I think that it's important for the United Nations to have a system of receiving classified important information to deal with crises. The ideal case would of course be that the United Nations itself had this capacity, but you can't expect that the United Nations could have the sophisticated equipment and also perhaps the methods to bring in the information that exist within countries like the Permanent Five (the United States, UK, France, China, and Russia).

I would also think that it would be a good thing if one could receive information from different countries. Then of course it's up to each country to decide whether they're willing to take the risk of sharing this information with the United Nations. It's up to them to make that calculation. I think its important that if you receive information from one country, you should also ask for information from other countries, because otherwise there might be suspicions that you have special relationships with one or two other countries and have special channels of communications with them.

I: That country would be more vulnerable than the other countries.

JE: Exactly, and I think it might sound paradoxical, but you have to be transparent and open about dealing with classified information. If you receive classified information from let's say, the United States, one should be able to say to Russia, We have asked the Americans about information, we asked them to provide what they know, now we ask you, what can you help us with? Then of course the calculation that they will have to make is, Is this a risk that this will come to the other side? Fortunately, we live in a time

which is not the Cold War, so relations between Russia and the United States have improved considerably in the nineties as compared to the eighties and seventies. But I think that you would get a better answer to this question, from first Rolf Ekéus, and later on from Hans Blix, who is going through exactly this problem.

I: Iraq is very divided in terms of its people and religions and so forth. How was the national stability during the time of the inspections and do you think that the tension on Iraq actually led to domestic peace, or more stability than there was before?

JE: In Iraq?

I: Yes.

JE: Could you repeat that question?

I: I think it [Iraq] is pretty unstable, when thinking about the situation with the Kurds and Shiites, and when the severe tension was actually on Iraq [from abroad], did that lead to increased domestic stability within the country?

JE: I see. Well, I think the fact that the world's eyes were directed to particularly the Kurdish situation, led to a restraint and a caution on the side of the Baghdad government. They had of course paid a very a high price, with the invasion of Kuwait, and Saddam Hussein was saved by his skin at the end of that war. He knew that he was going to be

very hard-pressed. The Americans and the British were conducting the operation, and also to make sure there were no flights over the Kurdish area, and this was a reminder to the regime, that there could be also very concrete reactions. So they were watched. On the other hand, Iraq is a tremendously close and isolated society. First of all, because of the character of the regime, but also, perhaps tragically, by the sanctions. This means that the population is receiving only the official news, that if anyone dares to suggest something different, I wouldn't want to sign on their life insurance. So, it was a very sad form of stability, stability under repression, and under the fear of another military confrontation.

For the people of Iraq to talk about this period as a positive period is very difficult; they had a combination of repression and, as you know, a very low standard of living, as compared to how the Iraqi lived when I came there at the beginning of the eighties. Then there were boys and girls in school uniforms, very well fed, in good housing districts. In fact, one of the good things about that regime was very little corruption. Health clinics were built, schools were built, roads were built, the oil riches were pretty well distributed. That Iraq is the Iraq of the past. I was there in 1997, after 17 years – well, I'd been there all through the eighties, but I hadn't been there between 1992 and 1997 – those five years, I saw a serious deterioration of the physical conditions. But also sadly, in the eyes of people, an emptiness, a situation without hope. Therefore it is important that, in the future, of course, Iraq would be allowed back into the international community, because this could be a very dangerous type of society that could be developed. But that's another story.

I: France has always treated Iraq differently from what the rest of the Western world has done. Why is this so? Was it something to do with their nuclear weapons policy, or is it mainly because of treaty relations?

JE: I think it has nothing to do with their nuclear policy. I hope to God not…no, I think it has to do with historic relations. It has to do possibly with economic and commercial interests. I said earlier that most of the world had sympathy for Iraq at the beginning of the war because Iran was seen as the culprit although, in retrospect, that picture should be rectified. At that time, there were also very substantial deliveries of arms to Iraq. Those deliveries came, to a large extent, from Russia and from France. So today, one of the greatest debts that Iraq has to the outside world is to France. So France, and also Russia, have an interest in bringing Iraq back into the international community, to be getting enough oil to pay back their debts. Iraq and France have had this long term economic and commercial relationship which I think perhaps played the most important part. Plus, in the beginning, there was sympathy with Iraq vis-à-vis Iran.

I: Besides Russia and France, China has also been very friendly. Does that also have to do with the same thing?

JE: Well, with China, I think it's also that they don't have the same sensitivities as some others about the democratic character of the society. China has always been negative to the actions of Western powers, especially if it is done on their own, and not [through the] the Security Council and the United Nations. It would seem that also in

issues related to Kosovo and other areas, China has stood for respect of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and shown a reluctance for military action. They have agreed or abstained in certain situations, but the picture is clear. Iraq has met with the greatest sympathy in the Security Council by China. For some periods also, with Russia, and on sanctions with France. But when it came to the invasion of Kuwait, I want to say that it was striking how unified the international community was. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, everybody took a stance on that. There was no hesitation. China did not hesitate. Russia did not hesitate, and of course France did not. Then there was a complete support for the action, which was one reason for the success – well, it's never a success to see people die – but after all, the invasion was turned back and he [Saddam Hussein] had to get back. That was also a result of the unified UN position. Not only was the Security Council unified, but also the General Assembly.

I was at that time UN ambassador, and I was traveling around the States, giving speeches about negotiations between Iran and Iraq which was a special subject of mine. I remember one time, after the invasion of Kuwait, and after the UN took this stand, and after the operation had succeeded and the Iraqi troops had withdrawn to Baghdad, I received a standing ovation. I was representing of course the UN and someone who had dealt with Iraq, in the United States, as you know, where there is a pretty UN-skeptical attitude. So there was unity when it comes to clear cases of breaches of international law.

I: It's not often that it happens.

JE: There was a problem later on, when it came to the reaction to the Iraqi action against UNSCOM. There was always a very difficult discussion with Britain and the U.S. on one side of the Security Council, France usually on their side on the key issues, but still on sanctions, not taking the same view. Then Russia and China particularly being very skeptical of UNSCOM. That weakened the United Nations vis-à-vis the Iraqis and the Iraqis could of course use that, take advantage of the split in the Security Council.

I: Do you think that was the reason why it was so important for Rolf Ekéus to keep it as independent as possible?

JE: Definitely. He was still met with suspicion, as he will probably tell you. And of course, Butler was received with even more suspicion.

I: How willing were the Iraqis to negotiate?

JE: In the beginning of the war in 1980, they were very reluctant to negotiate. They felt that they had the military initiative. They also felt that Iranian society was in disorder. They also felt that there was a risk of Iranian export of revolution of a religious character, and as you yourself have said earlier, there is a large Shi'a community in the south of Iraq. Very few people know that the holiest places for the Iranians, or the Persians, or the Shi'as, are two places in Iraq [the cities of Najaf and Kerbala], where in fact Khomeini spent time. The Iraqis threw him out. Khomeini was there in the middle of the seventies; he was there for a long time. He was thrown out by the Iraqis because

he was considered a nuisance, I think, inside their own society. He was at one of the two holiest places and he was thrown out. In fact, he was thrown out to France, where he stayed. When Khomeini arrived in Iran, you may remember, he came by a flight from Paris to Tehran. But the point is simply that the Iraqis were feeling at the time that yes, they had the military initiative, yes, Iran was dangerous, and they were in fact hoping for some type of military victory. Even there were those who were speculating that Iraq wanted to take the southern province of Iran, which is called Khuzistan.. They call that province by an old Arab name, Arabistan, and the Iranians always said, "Look, they are changing names. They want to invade, they want to occupy this territory."

I: They actually warned you?

JE: The Iranians were extremely suspicious. They of course said, "Yes, they want to occupy us;" that they will not hand over territory. That's why we had to remind them about international law, the non-acquisition of territory by force. If the Iraqis had attacked them, which they claimed, and they had a good case to say that, then in the end, by international law, territories should be returned. That's why we had a negotiation basis with them. Now I come to your question again: in the beginning they didn't have any, or very little interest, in negotiation. We went through the motions. Later on, when the Iranians took back the territory, sometimes with tragic elements, child soldiers and so forth, and when the Iranians came to the international border, they unfortunately decided to go into Iraq, to punish the Iraqis. By that, they lost the moral high ground. They could have gained a lot, in my view, at that time to say, "Here, we have thrown them out but we

will stop at the border." That could have given them a tremendous boost internationally, but instead they continued into Iraq. Then the Iraqis became interested in negotiating, then the attitude changed.

We had two methods of negotiation: one was to try to have a comprehensive settlement, a settlement with all the elements which later turned up in Resolution 598. But when that failed, we also tried something which we called a step-by-step approach, which I would call with a metaphor like "Pulling out the teeth of the war."

I: Make it weaker.

JE: Make it weaker, to ban attacks against the other side by artillery that could hit civilians, to ban attacks against traffic in the Shatt al Arab, in the Gulf area, to ban the use of chemical weapons – which should be banned anyway. To pull the teeth out of the war so you would reduce the level of warfare, and then negotiate in a calmer climate. We also suggested something which was a joke to begin with, but then turned out to be pretty serious. We suggested that the parties should respect or accept what we called a "verbal cease-fire," in other words, tone down the propaganda in the words. Don't hate each other so much in the press, don't condemn too much, lower the tone. Why don't you have a cease-fire in words? And this was half a joke, and then both of them realized it was very important, because it's only when you reduce the level of hatred that you can make a compromise.

So, in sum, a long answer to a short question, in the beginning, very little interest in the negotiations. After a couple of years, greater interest. In the end, I think the

agreement on 598 was brought about by a combination of a realization that nothing could be gained by either of the sides, and simply war-weariness. They had paid a tremendous price, maybe 7-800,000 people had been killed, maybe 3 million refugees had been out on the roads, and the material destruction was incredible. But here is a point. I compared the end results of Resolution 598 with our proposals in the early eighties when we went to the area, and the tragic conclusion is that there was a minimal difference in the proposals that we made in the early eighties and the end result in 1988. In the meantime, during seven years, 700,000 people had been killed, 3 million refugees, enormous material destruction had been produced. What was the point? They could have agreed to this in 1981 or 1982.

That's the tragedy of war. But you know, when war starts, it's like the genie getting out of the bottle. You can't get it back, and the war creates mechanisms of hatred within a population. You have to make legitimate the sacrifice to your own population. You have to punish the other side. If your brothers and sisters have been killed, then in another month, it's even more brothers and sisters killed, and then in a year, it's hundreds of thousands, and then the longer the war goes on, the more difficult it is to back down. One tends to become philosophical about this.

I: Do you think that the Iraqi inspection question has been handled through the right means?

JE: Well, we talked about that earlier. I think the first step, the decision on UNSCOM, was a very firm and good answer and I think in world history, it could turn

out to be important that you find a method of really dealing with the basic ills. So the resolution was good, and I think Rolf Ekéus did a very good job, but as I said earlier, there were some problems with the way the inspections were taking place, the manner in which the inspections were taking place. That, I think, could be rectified. I also think it's important that the members of the Security Council see this as a common task, that they all, all of them, work united. There was a tendency that this was considered an American issue, or a U.S./U.K. issue. That is not right, because this should be an international concern. So I think, I hope, that the Permanent Five in the Security Council see this in the future as a common task. Otherwise, it could be exploited by the Iraqis. So the more you can have unity in the Security Council, the better.

I: This is very difficult.

JE: It's very difficult. But after all, they agreed on the resolution, and the resolution is now the basis for UNMOVIC. The key question now is whether Iraq will cooperate.

I: Should one have been careful from the very beginning? But as you talked about the question in the situation between Iraq and Iran, you were a little more pro-Saddam.

JE: No, I think you are right. There was a period where the work was too much influenced by the Iranian hostage taking, which was of course, a terrible action, and a very grave mistake by the Iranians. I think also there was a fear, probably at the beginning justified, about the export of revolution. The character of the regime was such,

when it comes to human rights and treatment of minorities, that there was a feeling of repulsion and definitely strong criticism, and rightly so, from all over the world. I think this influenced the judgment of the conflict, which was in fact another thing.

I: But it took so long for –

JE: It took so long, and even when it became clear, around 1983-4, that chemical weapons were used, in my view, in the beginning first by the Iraqis - possibly later on by the Iranians, which is not to be condoned either - but it was started by the Iraqis. The Iraqis talked during our negotiations about terrible weapons that they could use.

I: You mean, threatening you?

JE: They were threatening not us, but the Iranians. They were saying that they may have human waves, they may have hundreds of thousands of young soldiers, or even children, but that will not help. We [the Iraqis] will have something to reply. That was always, by us – we thought in terms of them developing some type of weapon. It turns out that it was possibly, probably, chemical weapons, possibly also biological weapons. There were rumors already at the time of nuclear capacity. But, in retrospect, yes, I think we condoned the Iraqis too much. There was some type of irrational sympathy for Iraq who were fighting the Iranians, so that we nurtured the phenomenon, a regime which was on its way to develop weapons of mass destruction and not only develop them but also use them. I think we have now paid a tremendous price in seeing those weapons in the

hands of a regime which was also willing to use them against its own population. I think that says it all.

I: What are the main reasons and motivations in the development of all the weapons programs?

JE: I think, in the beginning, I'm almost convinced that it was the fear of the survival of the nation. They were fearful that Iran would, with a larger population and greater mobilization capacity, win the war.

I: But did the Iranians have any intentions?

JE: Well, the Iranians, according to shari'a law, were thinking always in terms of punishment. If you attack someone, there has to be a punishment. The punishment was not the classical view, but also punishing them physically. We had a situation once where we suggested they withdraw to the international borders. Then they said, "Yes, and then we have to punish the soldiers." [We asked] "What do you mean, punish the soldiers?" [They said] "Well, according to shari'a law, they should have lashes." This was at the very beginning, they didn't have much of an international law. But then, they claimed that if someone breaks into your house, there has to be a punishment, they have to be punished, at least the officers. And of course this was not possible for us. But then the following day we found a quotation from the Quran, thanks to our friend Iqbal Riza, who is Muslim. He found a quote with which to open the negotiations saying that, "If the

enemy turns its back at you, you are not allowed to attack him." So we told them, in the Quran, it's also this recognition, so then they changed their attitude. But what was the question?

I: What were the reasons and motivations in developing the main weapons programs?

JE: In the beginning, it was no doubt that the Iraqis felt that they had to have a capacity to deter the Iranians from invading Iraq. That gave them a great motivation to develop the weapons. Later on, after the war was over, there was another motivation. It was to achieve a superior power position in the Middle East, to develop a regional leadership role, and possibly also the factor is not only the relationship between Iran and Iraq but also between Israel. They saw the capacity that they had developed during the war as an instrument to develop their great power as a nation. Those are the two reasons. The first reason was because of the war, and perhaps the legitimate fear that they were going to be invaded. But they of course used a method which is absolutely unacceptable. They broke all international conventions. But I would be interested to hear from Rolf Ekéus how it's done, have him answer the question politically.

[end of Side One, beginning of Side Two]

I: With whom did you go to Iraq, and what was the main purpose?

JE: Well, I went in three capacities: the negotiations with Olof Palme and also later on, when I myself was the Personal Representative, with the UN team in both cases. I went to Iraq also in 1997, for the mission for Kofi Annan, to try to get the Iraqis to cooperate with UNSCOM. The third function was between 1992 and 1994, when I was Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and we established the program, the humanitarian program, mainly in the north, in the Kurdish area. We also tried to establish the program in the south for the Shi'a groups, but unfortunately it was more difficult. We had great cooperation from the Kurdish authorities and it's no secret that we also sent in much of the material, the food, the medicine, from Turkey, which was a very difficult issue vis-à-vis the Iraqis. It was of course not quite in conformity with what they considered respect of their territorial integrity. But I opened up an office in Baghdad, I established an office there. I was careful to have the office in the capital, although we had local offices of course also in the north. The program in the beginning was stumbling. It was very difficult because we had to get money from voluntary contributions. There was no Food for Oil program, so we could not get the sale of oil and by that get food, as was established in 1995. So we had to get a quarter of a billion dollars every year, 250 million dollars, by voluntary contributions.

I: And this was mainly governmental?

JE: Yes, mainly governmental. There were some NGOs [non-governmental organizations] establishing themselves slowly. The most active ones were CARE Australia, who took care of the food distribution, World Food Program UN was very

active, UNICEF was there, different UN specialized agencies. Later, more NGOs came in; I think also Save the Children and others. They were working also through Turkey, but it was a period when I noticed the slow deterioration of the situation among the people, the humanitarian situation, a situation which has deteriorated even more during these recent years. Although the Food for Oil Program meant quite a relief, not only when it comes to fund-raising but also to the situation on the ground, there were still deficiencies. To feed a population of 22 million of this nature, with this program, is not possible, and the program took some time to expand to the sites that were needed, and also to get rid of some of the bureaucracy. For instance, we couldn't send tires for ambulances or spare parts to the oil industry, because they could be used according to some for dual-use [for weapons].

I: Who actually decided what could be used as dual-use?

JE: It was a Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council, which was set up, and the Sanctions Committee worked by instructions from the fifteen governments of the fifteen members of the Sanctions Committee. In other words, UK had to go back to London, and U.S. had to go back to Washington, and so forth. Then they came back and it was a rather difficult bureaucratic exercise.

I: Did you have people stationed there?

JE: Yes, we had an office in Baghdad and we had local offices, particularly out in the Kurdish area. We tried to establish offices also in the south and for a limited period of time, I think we had UNICEF and the World Food Programme in Basra, but they couldn't work very well. So our main presence was in Baghdad and the Kurdish area.

I: Was transportation mainly done by cars or was it by air?

JE: No, mostly by cars, by trucks going in from Turkey. There was a considerable trade from Turkey to Iraq, and of course back. Some material came from Baghdad but mostly via Turkey, by road.

I: Your trips to Iraq to negotiate, you wanted to get very many different things out of each of the trips, but did you get the answers that you wanted? Did you get out of it what you wanted?

JE: You mean the first part of the negotiations, the early eighties? Or do you mean later on?

I: I was actually thinking about all three of them. Did you reach your goals, and was there anything that surprised you?

JE: No, in the beginning the Iraqis were not very cooperative because they felt they had military victory within reach, and they also were extremely fearful of the export of

revolution. So there was not much cooperation, although they were courteous and logical as they said all the time.

I: They said that they were logical?

JE: Logical, yes, they were logical, and you could trust what you hear from the Iraqi side. In other words, they were implying that from the Iranian side, there was a change of leadership and you never knew if you talked to someone who could decide, was it the mullahs or was it Bani Sadr, the president in the early stages of the revolution. So they were courteous, they were well-organized, but when it came to real political will to find a settlement at the beginning of the war, no. This changed when Iran took over, when the Iranian initiative led to the withdrawal, led to bringing the Iraqis back to the border, and of course when Iranians entered their territory, it was a different thing. We tried also to get step-by-step solutions, but it wasn't easy. We got something important though. The bombardments of the civilian population that took place were ended by an agreement on the 11th of June, I think, 1984. This was interesting, because it was one of the successes actually of negotiation. We had a pretty somber picture when it comes to success, but in 1984, we took the initiative of asking the two sides to stop the bombardment of the border areas, which had hurt civilians to tremendous and tragic degrees. Both sides accepted. We sent a cable Friday to the two sides. We asked them to respond by Sunday, not to each other, but to us, so that the commitment was made not to the other side, because they refused to have anything to do with each other at the time, but they

could of course accept us. So they sent the cable to the Secretary-General of the UN, and said that yes, we would respect not bombarding civilian targets across the border.

I: What made them accept this?

JE: Well, I think that they both paid a heavy price for this, and it of course led to the suffering of a lot of people and I think both sides saw the disadvantages of these rockets coming into their land and their villages. So it was in both sides' interest. But the negotiation construction was interesting. I think it should be kept in mind for other conflicts when parties don't want to have anything to do with each other, that you don't ask them to agree between each other, but you ask them to agree with a third party. This takes off the political burden to make a "deal" with the other side. They responded to our humanitarian requests that the civilians should not suffer. So they said, Yes, due to your humanitarian reasons, we will accept. In the later stages, the Iraqis were very reluctant. They didn't like our humanitarian program, because the Iraqis wanted to have the lifting of sanctions immediately, so they were very suspicious of us. If we had a well-functioning humanitarian program, the world would not notice that the Iraqi population was suffering. In fact, the Food for Oil Program was not accepted until 1995. It was devised in 1993, but it took two years for it to be established, partly because the Iraqis feared that it would take away the pressure of world and public opinion to take away sanctions.

I: That's why it took so long?

JE: Right, plus also some negotiations among the fifteen [on the Sanctions Committee], not quite similar views between, lets say, the United States on the one hand and China on the other. The last part of cooperation was of course when we came at the end of 1997, to persuade Tariq Aziz and the Iraqis to cooperate with UNSCOM. That was very tough. I think, on the surface it looked like a failure, our mission, but it was not a failure. We sent a very strong message to them that they had to cooperate, and I think a couple of weeks after we had visited, after the mission, the Russians put in a great push – I think Ivanov and Primakov – told the Iraqis to cooperate – and then they agreed. So this was the first crisis vis-à-vis Iraq, though there was another one in February, which we also overcame it. But then came the third one, when the bombings took place. Three times we attempted. It looked like a failure in the beginning, but I think it was a success from the point of view that they, in the end, did agree to cooperate. But it took some time.

I: Interesting, actually, that it took Russians to do the final –

JE: Yes, I think that without the Russians pushing in the end, I don't think it would have worked. There's an interesting parallel to Kosovo, where also in the end, when Ahtisaari went to Belgrade, remember that the most important person in his group was of course Chernomyrdin, the former Prime Minister of Russia. When Milosevic saw Chernomyrdin on the side of Ahtisaari, he realized that Russia was not on his side. In the same way, Saddam Hussein also felt that he would not be saved by the Russians. That

shows the importance of unity in the Security Council. Remember, we talked about Kuwait earlier, the invasion of Kuwait and the unified response and how solid the UN was. If you are split, it's always exploited, by Milosevic or by Saddam Hussein.

I: We touched the subject about the bombardment of urban areas. What role did you and Palme have in this period?

JE: We were very instrumental. I remember phone calls to Iqbal Riza and from Iqbal Riza, who was then the contact point to the Secretary-General, and in fact I think Iqbal and I worked out the formula, together. Of course, I discussed this with Palme. We also had this firm deadline. We didn't want to just put in a request. We said, You have to answer by Sunday night at six o' clock, to put a certain drama in the initiative. Then, of course, I don't recall who thought of this, but whoever did had a brilliant idea, and I won't take the credit myself, but it was very smart that we didn't want them to respond to each other. They should respond to us, to Olof Palme and to the Secretary-General. We were very instrumental.

I: I know that you had a big role in drafting Resolution 598, but what were you actually doing? What was your direct role in it?

JE: Well, Olof Palme had died on the 20th of February, 1986. I started as UN ambassador in March 1988. I took on the new task as Personal Representative of the Secretary-General in the end of August 1988. The resolution was being discussed, or

rather an action was discussed in the beginning of 1987. At the time, the Cold War was coming to an end, at least some wise people felt that this was in the air. One of them was Pérez de Cuéllar and he took the initiative to suggest the Foreign Minister's meeting in the beginning of 1987. At that meeting [which took place later], there was a high degree of consensus that one would indeed make a common effort and really put pressure from all five members and the Security Council on both sides to end the war. Capitals were working, Pérez de Cuéllar's office was working, I was contacted by some members of the Security Council, and I went to some capitals to discuss the elements of the resolution, because I had six, seven years of experience with the issues and Palme and our team had presented comprehensive settlement ideas back in 1981 and 1982. Those elements were indeed very useful and they were put partly into the resolution later on. The main work was done in May/June of 1987, and the resolution was adopted by one of the sides in 1987 and by two of them in July 1988, and the cease-fire came into place. Very much also thanks to Saudi Arabia, which played a very constructive role in the end. And then of course, the negotiations about the implementation of Resolution 598 started in the end of August in Geneva.

I: You talked about Saudi Arabia's importance. What kind of importance? How could they have been important?

JE: Well, Saudi Arabia is of course a very prestigious nation in the area, but they had also supported Iraq considerably during the war. Iran was for most of the period of the war also a threat to Saudi Arabia. The export of revolution to Sunni communities, Sunni

societies, was a real threat. Therefore, Iraq was given considerable support from Saudi Arabia, and if then the leadership of Saudi Arabia required Iraq to end the war, this was in their interest, too. I think it had an impact. Even some Iraqis have admitted that the Saudi influence in ending war was instrumental in making them agree to the cease-fire and Resolution 598.

I: And isn't it also that the Iraqis owed them a lot from the war?

JE: Indeed, quite a lot, both politically and above all financially, billions of dollars.

I: Could you describe the problems you encountered trying to bring the two parties together in implementing the provisions of Resolution 598, and what was each side trying to achieve?

JE: There was a tremendous degree of suspicion between the two, after this war, with all this hatred, also the historic hatred between Arabs and Persians, or at least the distance between the two. But then, the whole personal element - Saddam Hussein, Khomeini - feelings were running very high. The negotiations at the end of August, beginning of September, were extremely difficult, extremely tiresome. I felt all the time that we were going to have a negotiation breakdown. I was keeping them busy all the time, because I didn't want them to have any excuse to leave. So I invented new questions, and I told them that the Security Council would eagerly wait for their answers. I kept them working from early morning to late in the night, and still I tried to look fresh in the morning to

receive them and give them the impression that we were prepared to be there forever, if needed, and we were prepared for every session and negotiation.

I even had contact with the airport in Geneva. There was at the same time, the 6th and 7th of September 1988, a non-aligned movement meeting in Cyprus, and we were fearful that they would sneak out there and go out as a pretext that they would go to this non-aligned meeting and then we wouldn't see them [again]. So my office was even in contact with the airport. We had an agreement that if the engines were warming up, or if they asked for permission to leave, we would be informed. So that showed the nervousness around that negotiation.

Their suspicion took many forms. I can tell you even some funny parts about the sensitivities. They [the parties] had to enter the room at the same time, so we had security people in both side rooms with walkie-talkies to make sure that they entered the room at exactly the same second, so that one side would not be put in the position – a humiliating position, to them – of waiting for the other side.

I: Everything took place in Geneva?

JE: In Geneva, at the Palais des Nations, the big palace. Majestic rooms, I remember. Another funny example was the shape of the table. It's classical diplomacy negotiations that the shape of the table could be an issue of dispute. But it was. We had, in fact, the meeting organized to begin with in the form of a table of the form of a "U", with us of course connecting the two. They realized that if they have a "U", you would have to look at each other straight into the eyes, and they then suggested – it was both sides who

wanted this – that the table should be changed to a triangle so that the two sides would not face each other, and they could talk through us, the third party. They still wanted to give the impression that there were no direct negotiations, but through us. Pérez de Cuéllar and I joked about this sensitivity: "How do we bring them together?" We came on the idea that we should have a coffee table at the tip of a triangle, where the two sides were to meet. We had brewed coffee coming in, waited long for the pause to break, good cookies were brought in! Then we broke it [the pause, tension], and the Secretary-General said, "Now I invite you to the coffee table." They reluctantly approached the table, moved like cats around it. And then they started talking. That was the beginning of contact.

I: Around the coffee table?

JE: Yes.

I: Do you think they liked it? Liked the coffee [break], I mean?

JE: Yes, indeed. There were at first discussions between the interpreters, then between delegation members who knew the language. There was one other story though. I just thought about it. There were two people in the delegations who were very open to contacts and discussions. One was Ismat Kitani, who later worked with the UN, Iraqi. The second one was Cyrus Nasseri, who was the Iranian ambassador to Geneva. I invited them to something in my hotel that I jokingly called "Confidential Breakfast." Let us

have a "Confidential Breakfast" together! So both of them accepted after a couple of weeks of these types of talks, because I needed to have them sit with me and discuss between us. We couldn't do it in the negotiation room.

I: Do you mean that you were alone during these negotiations?

JE: Yes, at that time I was alone. With the Confidential Breakfast, it was the three of us, so the three of us had breakfast at the Hotel Intercontinental. We all three of us refer to this as the "Confidential Breakfast of October 1988." This was the first time I could sit in the same room with the two parties, with people in responsible positions, and discuss the different formulas of negotiation. This shows the sensitivities in the beginning.

I: Great stories!

JE: I hope it comes out on the tape recorder!

I: How did you assess Iraq's chemical warfare capacity on the basis of your observations during the Iran-Iraq war?

JE: Well, we had reports about the use of chemical weapons, already I think in the end of 1983. We took it very seriously but we felt that it couldn't be a negotiation issue, because it was a very serious charge, of course by the Iranians, which had to do with the respect of international conventions and humanitarian rules of warfare.

I: So at that time it was just rumors?

JE: It was rumors till the end of 1983. Then, in 1984, a mission was sent by the United Nations to the area. This mission was led by Iqbal Riza, who did a very good job, not surprisingly, but he did a very good job. This report, I think, puts a rather clear burden of responsibility on the Iraqis. So though it did not exclude also chemical weapons used by the Iranians, it gave certainly the impression – which was the right one – that Iraq has started the use of chemical weapons. At that time it was obvious that it was not only rumor, because there were Iranian soldiers brought back from the front to the hospitals in Tehran. I was there myself in 1983-1984, and I didn't go there physically myself, but we had people who had been visiting these hospitals. There was no doubt in our mind that, in fact, chemical weapons had been used against those soldiers. There were terrible, terrible, terrifying sights. They died, of course. But there were those who were in great pain, and the effect of those weapons was obvious. Anyway, the UN report came out and interestingly enough, Iqbal Riza came into trouble. He was criticized by Iraq for the report. There were also some other actions that were taken against him and he was not working with Iraq-Iran issues for some time after that. Which was of course not fair, because he did a very good job. So we saw it [chemical warfare] coming, and this was another example of the world's soft and rather unclear reactions to the Iraqi side. You asked earlier about whether we should not have been tougher. If you get a report which puts a rather strong burden of responsibility on one country about the use of

chemical weapons, I think there should be a very strong international reaction. Unfortunately, it did not come about.

I: And you want us to be aware of it for the future?

JE: Yes, of course! How could you imagine, how could you in the future deal with other conflicts if you make a judgment that you like one party more than the other? That's why he [Saddam Hussein] could use methods that are not in conformity with international law. It doesn't make sense.

I: Could you briefly describe your working experience with Iraqi and Iranian representatives? What was your impression of Saddam Hussein, Tariq Aziz, Rafsanjani, and Velayati?

JE: Well, there's a story on each. Saddam Hussein, the undisputed leader, tremendous sense of unlimited power, a respect that almost entered the area of fear, and obedience, a combination. You could almost feel the fear in the room. He was not used to informal remarks or direct questions. He looked at me in a combination of amusement and irritation as I asked some very basic questions about their intentions, going back to internationally recognized boundaries. Questions that had never been posed to him, evidently. We had long negotiations.

I: Why do you think that was? People didn't dare to [ask him questions]?

JE: No, in certain political cultures, the leaders don't get the difficult questions, don't get the bad news. You know, as with the Greek messengers, you share bad news, your chance of survival is not very high. That's the beauty of democracy, that you are sometimes beaten up, but you are not surprised at criticism. Apart from the cultural gap, you have to sharpen your arguments, and he didn't know the answers to some of the basic questions. But I spent hours and hours with him. I remember he walked me down to his map-room, where he showed me with a big stick where the troops were, that they in fact could invade all of the area but they were restrained, they only need a buffer zone from Iranian aggression. He took great pains in describing the situation to me and I felt there was a lack of information, lack of critical questions, posed to him, that I was probably the first one to pose these questions. I had a similar experience when I was there with Olof Palme in the early eighties. I met him alone, of course, once when I was also implementing 598.

Tariq Aziz is extremely skillful. He is tough, he's knowledgeable, he is shrewd, smart, has a tremendous power of details but also good political sense. So as a negotiation partner, he is respectable but very difficult. Professionally, I have sympathy for him. He is a Christian. We spoke much about our children. He had a twelve-year-old son at the time. The son must be thirty now. We spoke about not being with the family. You have to connect sometimes; even with the most difficult partners, you have to develop a human relationship. We developed in a strange way a rather close relationship. Rolf Ekéus could tell you more because he spent more time with Tariq Aziz than I did. I spent hundreds of hours with him, but I think Rolf spent even more. The

others that you mentioned: Rafsanjani was always there. He was the one who stayed. Everybody was leaving, Bani Sadr left, some other leaders were killed, Rajai was killed, Beheshti was killed. Rafsanjani was the Speaker of Parliament. Later, of course, he became President. He was the survivor, he was very smart. Very shrewd, very pragmatic. He kept the nation together after the divisions of the early eighties. Very intelligent, and also a person for whom you could feel a reluctant admiration of dealing with situations. Velayati is a pediatrician, children's doctor. He was impressive with his working capacity. He worked forever, always. He slept three hours a day. He was working on his thesis, because he was also teaching at Tehran University.

I: At the same time?

JE: At the same time. Not all full-time, of course. He was writing lectures, he went to international conferences in the Hague and in Switzerland on pediatric practices. Once, he told me he was playing tennis, and I said I was playing tennis too, and he said, "OK, let's have a game." So I said, "What time?" He said, "five o'clock." And so I said, "Of course, five o' clock in the afternoon." [And he said], "No, five o'clock in the morning, after prayers!" He has now left. He is closer to Khameini than he is to Khatami. I had hoped that he would be on the reform side, but I'm not sure now.

I: How effective was the UN in monitoring the cease-fire?

JE: I think we really didn't have a headache with any of the two sides. They were so sensitive to the cease-fire. They knew that a breach of the cease-fire could lead to war, and we really didn't have serious problems with the cease-fire. It was also relatively easy to supervise because the great part of the cease-fire line was the river Shatt al Arab, and the river is of course easy to supervise. There was also a tremendous war-weariness after this war. They had paid such a heavy price. It was pretty easy.

I: Pretty much both of them wanted to have a cease-fire?

JE: Yes, after some time. I told you about the difficult period at the beginning. It could easily have been broken in the first three or four months, but after half a year or so, it was stable. From then on, the focus shifted. The Iraqis saw their enemy not in Iran but in Kuwait, more and more. Remember how they shifted their attention? They got so aggressive about Kuwait. They felt that Kuwait had not contributed enough, they had oil, that this was a former part of Iraq, so the focus shifted from Iran to Kuwait.

I: I hope I have time for one more question, about Sweden gaining insight on the nature and intentions of the Iraqi regime from the assignment of two senior Swedish diplomats on the Iraqi disarmament effort.

JE: Well, it was actually three. You have Rolf Ekéus of course, who was asked in 1991 to do UNSCOM. Hans Blix did the same job but for the nuclear sector, since he was the Director General for IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. We had also

other Swedes. We had experts on chemical weapons, who were in Iraq. We had officers in UNSCOM, Swedish military officers. We had a diplomat Johann Molander, who was helping both Blix and Ekéus. I have a colleague Elisabeth Borsiin-Bonnier, who worked on chemical weapons, so I would say we had 15-20 Swedes. The most known people are of course Rolf and Hans. But Sweden, including myself, has of course, spent twenty years following Iraq from different perspectives. It seems as though we never end working with it. I hope one day we can see a peaceful, prosperous, democratic country. It's been a high Swedish priority. We have long traditions, of course, in the Middle East, and I think one should continue to develop knowledge of the Middle East. I think it's important that a country in the northern part of Europe shows an active interest and shows that it wants to do something. It sends a very important message, that Sweden is not looking inward, that the European Union is not looking inward.

So I really hope that my colleagues in the Foreign Ministry and others keep an interest in this area, because too often in history, a lot of tragic developments have started in that area and spread. Conflict in the Middle East, conflict in the Gulf, would have serious effects on the whole international atmosphere, on the international economy, and of course on the degree of fundamentalism in the Islamic faith.

I: Mostly in Iran?

JE: Not only in Iran, because you have fundamentalists in many Arab countries, also in North Africa.

I: But I thought in the Middle East area, it was mainly Iran.

JE: Yes, of course Shi'as are mainly there [in Iran], but there are fundamentalist movements also in Sunni communities. If you have a conflict in the Middle East, where the Palestinians would be the victims, or if you have an explosion in Iran-Iraq, you would have immediate effects, politically, economically, and socially all over the Muslim world. That's why I think it is good that Sweden put these resources into the Middle East and Iraq-Iran, and I hope that we will continue to follow this road.

I: Thank you so much.

JE: Thank you.

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