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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Sergey Lavrov
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
18 April, 2001
New York, New York

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YALE - UN ORAL HISTORY

Interview with Sergey Lavrov

Interviewer: James S. Sutterlin

April 18, 2001

in New York City

James S. Sutterlin: This is a Yale-UN interview with Ambassador Sergey Lavrov in New York City on April 18, 2001. The interviewer is Sutterlin.

Ambassador Lavrov, I would like first of all to thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this Yale University Oral History Project, which pertains to the United Nations in general, but in particular, at this point, to the UN Special Commission, which dealt with the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. My first question is when did you first become directly involved as Ambassador in New York with the operation and with the controversies related to UNSCOM?

Ambassador Sergey Lavrov: Well, I came here in September 1994, and shortly after that there was another crisis in the Iraqi question in the Security Council. It was not directly related to UNSCOM. It was about Iraqi troops moving toward Kuwait in the fall of 1994, and at that time, the Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev undertook an emergency trip to Kuwait and Baghdad and his visit helped to produce Iraqi government statements asserting the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kuwait. That was the first crisis which I encountered personally here in New York. But as far as UNSCOM is concerned, I believe it was the same year, 1994, because UNSCOM was producing the

bi-monthly report for the Security Council, and I'm sure that there was one before the end of 1994, and it was Ambassador Ekéus, who was later moved by his government to another position, and Ambassador Butler was appointed to head UNSCOM. Actually, under Ambassador Ekéus, and before the famous chicken farm episode, UNSCOM reported to the Security Council and it was not a cause of much controversy. UNSCOM, on the basis of information which they had at that time, was presenting a picture of progress in closing down the files, and IAEA, which was headed by Ambassador Blix at that time, was reporting the most encouraging news. And basically, as of 1996, I think, the IAEA part of the job was broadly considered as basically finished. There were two or three questions, which IAEA still had, but they related not to material balance of nuclear programs of Iraq. And it is material balance, I want to stress, which is an obligation of Iraq to eliminate under the 687 resolution. But IAEA, as of 1996, I believe, was broadly satisfied that on the material side there was nothing left. They were quite successful identifying and destroying the proscribed programs in the nuclear field in Iraq, and the questions they had at that time basically related to history of the Iraqi nuclear program. A committee which was formed and which was apparently overseeing the Iraqi nuclear program, the exchange of letters between some foreign company and Iraq, and IAEA had a question whether the offer which Iraq received from a foreign supplier was solicited or not. These sorts of things. But as far as material balance was concerned, IAEA was basically reporting to the Security Council the absence of any evidence that Iraq still had some proscribed nuclear programs. And as I said, UNSCOM was also moving ahead. In particular, on the missiles, and on chemical and biological weapons as well. Then the defection of Mr. Kamal Hussein, and his revelations, of course, gave rise to new

suspicious and the huge amount of material which was discovered at that chicken farm had to be translated, studied, and analyzed, and gave UNSCOM a new reason for rethinking their previous conclusions. In 1994, when I came here, the picture was much more optimistic than later.

JS: Right. And I think it was at that time that Ambassador Ekéus had submitted a relatively positive report to the Security Council in response to considerable pressure from Iraq. In that connection, were you satisfied with the amount of information that Ambassador Ekéus and UNSCOM were providing? Actually, they submitted a report every six months.



SL: There were the six-month reports, which were called comprehensive reports, but bi-monthly they were also reporting on some aspects of their activities.

JS: And I think he kept in close touch with you and other ambassadors, especially the P-5.

SL: Absolutely. Any ambassador of the P-5, and any ambassador of the Security Council or member state were welcomed to UNSCOM and Ambassador Ekéus was meeting with us regularly, either at our request or on his own initiative requesting that expertise be given to UNSCOM, and we tried to be helpful. Well, I think that the amount of information provided did not cause many questions as long as UNSCOM was basically saying that we are making progress, we are satisfied with the Iraqis' cooperation, we are

moving closer to the time when we will announce that all files have been closed. And when you have this type of reporting, you really don't want to ask too many questions, because you believe that the professionals who will do their job, they will know when to raise concern. But I would say that it was after Ambassador Ekéus left that quite a number of members of the Security Council—namely, Russia, China, France, as well as Malaysia, and Egypt, when they were on the Council—began to be much more interested in getting more details as to how UNSCOM was conducting its work.

JS: Right. In that connection, I'd like to revert to sanctions and the attitude of the Iraqis. I wondered first of all, to what extent did the Iraqis seek to maintain contact with you and with the Russian side during these years?

SL: Well, the contacts with Iraqis have been regular, and both on their initiative and our initiative. We have been always conveying to them our conviction that it's only through cooperation with the Security Council and UNSCOM that they can achieve the lifting of sanctions eventually. They have been conveying to us their concerns with some parts of UNSCOM operations. In the initial stage of my posting here, those concerns were not very numerous. They were basically satisfied, I think, with how Ambassador Ekéus was handling his file, and the efforts like these he undertook, I think in June 1996, when he came to understandings with them on how UNSCOM should approach sovereign sites, and how the dignity and sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq should be respected, and he tried to agree on a paper with them, which would basically

translate those general notions of international law into practical terms of UNSCOM operations.

There were still some complaints on the part of Iraq about Ekéus, but they became more and more critical of UNSCOM when Ambassador Butler became Chairman. And basically, they were challenging his concept that the onus is on Iraq, and that UNSCOM doesn't have to present any information they had to Iraqis for verification. UNSCOM was just saying, "You must give us your account of the biological program, or your account of the chemical program, or missiles, for that matter." And then, UNSCOM would read this account, and compare it with its own confidential information, and then would just tell Iraq, "No, this is wrong. This is not true, what you are giving us. Go back, do your homework again, because we know something which you don't know we know, and what we know does not correlate with what you are giving us." And the Iraqis were saying, "We are sorry, but what we gave you is everything we have, so please, if you have any suspicions, tell us in what area you have your suspicions, and we will try to remove this misunderstanding or this suspicion." And Butler would say, "No. If I tell you about my suspicions, you will know where I get my information from, and you might then tailor your answer in a way which will still hide the truth." That's how and that's when Ambassador Butler introduced in UNSCOM a new operation, a new division in UNSCOM headquarters, which was dealing with concealment.

But we had been trying in our regular conferences with Ambassador Butler, with whom I was very close during his time as Ambassador of Australia, and [I] kept these good personal relations when he became Chairman of UNSCOM, we had been trying not to impose on him but to explain to him that some of the Iraqis concerns on procedures

were legitimate. And even from the point of view of the Security Council, if UNSCOM tells Iraq, “No, what you gave us is a lie,” well, in more diplomatic terms, and Iraq would say, “We’re sorry, but that’s what we have. We don’t have any other evidence of what was going on, and that’s all we have.” And then, if UNSCOM just says, “No, this is not what we want from you,” then we are deadlocked. So we were encouraging him to find ways to indicate to the Iraqis, without disclosing the sources of his information, that what they gave him was not complete because they should also look into these and these areas of biological or chemical files. My point is that even in the court of law, you have to prove that the guy is guilty. Of course, Security Council Chapter VII resolutions are not something to be entirely compatible with the legal procedures in a normal court, but from the practical point of view, Butler’s approach was certainly a way nowhere.

I think there were two specific cases when we really were very concerned that UNSCOM was reporting to the Council a total lack of Iraqi cooperation, and the US and the UK were demanding some action. At that time, we started to be much more specific as far as UNSCOM presentations were concerned. Until then, UNSCOM would just say, “Well, we asked the Iraqis about something, they told us something, we considered it, and this something was absolutely not true, so we demanded from them another reply.” And then, when this type of report was used to ignite confrontation in the Council, we, together with China, France, and Egypt, at that time, then Malaysia, and some other non-aligned countries, started to press UNSCOM to be more specific in explaining to us what it was all about. As we proceeded in that way, there were a couple of cases, one of them I remember, UNSCOM said at some point, “Okay, we will tell you what it is about. We have a picture of a biological bomb, and we have been, on the basis of this picture—

which we didn't show to the Iraqis—pressing them to accept that they did have this type of biological bomb developed.” And the Iraqis were rejecting any accusations of that sort. When we pressed UNSCOM, and said, “Look, this is serious. A biological bomb is a serious matter. You really have to make sure that the Iraqis don't have it. And for this, you have to present your evidence. And when they did eventually present this evidence at a seminar in Germany—I don't remember the date—the Iraqis said, “Fine. We have to send it to Baghdad for comments.” They sent it to Baghdad and the next morning they received a reply saying, “Yes, we have this bomb. We have this bomb, but this is a chemical bomb.” But because of the quality of the picture, which was taken from a videotape probably, a special marking was not visible. Had this marking been visible, it would be immediately understood that this was not a biological bomb, but a chemical bomb, and this particular chemical bomb had been accounted for by a chemical inspection by UNSCOM six months earlier. Which also touches upon the problem of the very high compartmentalization of UNSCOM's activities at that time, maybe for good reason because of the need to keep confidential the information on which they were acting.

But in that particular instance, it was accepted by UNSCOM that they were wrong. So just on this example alone, I spent quite some time with Richard Butler saying, “Look, now we understand that mistakes can happen, and that because of the quality of pictures and whatever, you can be misled in your suspicions. And if you keep everything confidential without trying to give information which would help clarify situations like this, you may be having your suspicions forever, and maybe for no good reason.” So it was then that we started to really ask UNSCOM, without compromising

their sources of information, to find ways to share with the Council their suspicions in more specific terms, and to share with Iraqis, at least to give them hints of what problems UNSCOM still had. He accepted this approach, reluctantly, but it was not applied consistently.

JS: I think that was when he introduced a little later this idea of seminars, where the two sides met together.

SL: Well actually, this episode relates to one of the first seminars of that sort. And I'm not saying that Iraqis were always cooperative. We were asked by UNSCOM, privately in our contacts and when Butler visited Moscow, to help influence the Iraqis to be more forthcoming. But by that time, more and more problems had accumulated on UNSCOM's part; more and more evidence of UNSCOM's bias, I would say, were accumulated. And Iraqis were very jumpy about this, and they didn't like this UNSCOM trend, so whenever we would be making the point, which was part of our position in principle that they should fully cooperate, they would present us with their reading of the facts, accusing UNSCOM of being biased. In quite a number of cases, we didn't have any arguments to deny those accusations. So it was becoming more and more difficult to persuade the Iraqis to cooperate with a body, which was not proving itself in our eyes as an objective work.

JS: What did you think was the principle Iraqi motivation? Were they, in your impression, primarily interested in getting rid of the sanctions, or getting rid of UNSCOM?

SL: Well, I wouldn't be able to answer this question, because I cannot read other people's minds. I do think that Iraq was, still is, and should be interested in lifting sanctions. And I do think that many factors, many factors played a role in creating the crisis, which blew up the entire situation in December 1998. One of the first mistakes by the Council was—I think it happened in July 1996—when El Baradei was already the IAEA Director-General, and he presented a report to the Council in response to a presidential statement, on which we managed to agree by consensus in May of the same year. I think I am correct about the dates. That presidential statement basically said that having received IAEA's previous report, and having considered that as far as material balance is concerned, nuclear files aren't presenting any danger, but that IAEA still had two or three questions, or five questions at that time, which as I said related not to material balance but to history, encouraged IAEA and Iraq to continue discussing those questions, and asked IAEA to report on the outcome of those discussions in July 1996, which IAEA did. The report basically said that they still have these questions, or some of them are still relevant, but at the same time, he clearly stated in his report that the ongoing monitoring system for nuclear sites in Iraq is functioning, and that these questions can be handled in the context of the ongoing monitoring system. And 687 and subsequent resolutions clearly, mean that as soon as you shift the disarmament files into the phase of ongoing monitoring that's the cut-off date for declaring that this particular

file has been closed. And we, together with the French and the Chinese, Egypt at that time, some others, suggested that the Council should adopt a very simple resolution saying that we received this report, we take note that as of today the nuclear file has been shifted into ongoing monitoring phase, in the context of which the remaining issues would be clarified. This would not have had any effect on sanctions.

JS: No, because it's only one part.

SL: Yes, it's only one of the four parts. But this would have been a political signal to Iraq to move in this direction, to cooperate in the same way with UNSCOM on all three remaining files and you would get it. And then this resolution, which as I said had only political meaning and no practical outcome, no practical potential, was blocked, basically by the US and the UK. This was the beginning of the Iraqis' rethinking of the entire situation, and that's when they decided for themselves that whatever they do, as long as Saddam Hussein is in power in Baghdad, they're not going to get it. And of course, since then, they have been strengthened in this conviction by the policies of the United States. The previous administration started the special program to support the opposition, a special court to try Saddam Hussein was discussed last year in Washington, and this is the policy of the new administration as well. Iraqis' logic is, why should they cooperate with the UN, while they know for sure, they are convinced that as long as this current government is in Baghdad, they will not get any lifting or even suspension of sanctions.

JS: Yes, and you identify that.... Just in the way of background, Mr. Duelfer, who was the...

SL: I just saw him today. He was in New York.

JS: He has said almost the identical thing. He identifies the dates a little later, in 1998, where the Iraqis decided there is no longer a point, that the position will not change, and there are other ways to proceed.

SL: Of course, you know we could discuss for a very long time the actual chain of events in 1998, when Iraqis refused to continue dialogue with UNSCOM in August, and they severed all links with UNSCOM, and then there was a crisis and the threat of use of force by the US. And then last-minute negotiations, and it was described by Butler in his articles how I was sitting with Nizar Hamdoon, the Iraqi Ambassador, and redrafting the letter which he was supposed to give to the Security Council to avoid the air strikes. And this all was true. The crisis started in August when Tariq Aziz told Butler, "I don't want to continue with UNSCOM." I'm not saying that this was the right thing to do. I was not there. And in these types of situations very much depends on atmospherics. From this point of view, I can only testify that Richard Butler was not always diplomatic enough to remain within the framework of his position, the Chairman of a United Nations' Security Council subsidiary body, as an international civil servant. Knowing the Iraqis, knowing Arabs, knowing their national pride. Of course this shouldn't be the only criteria when

handling disarmament issues. But if you are in the business of diplomacy, you certainly have to take this into account.

JS: There were from the Iraqis, in particular, but also from one American, at least, accusations that UNSCOM was being utilized by national governments for national intelligence purposes.

SL: Well, it was in the media.

JS: Of course it was in the media, and Scott Ritter made some very strong accusations. What was your attitude on that? Were you concerned? On the Russian side, did you feel there was validity, or did you feel that, in fact, every government was getting a little bit of information from UNSCOM?

SL: Maybe all governments cooperating with UNSCOM were getting a little bit of information. It was no secret that intelligence officers, special services officers, were represented in UNSCOM.

JS: They had to be.

SL: Intelligence communities of different countries were providing information to UNSCOM. Yes, according to what I know, and what is made public, most of this information was provided by the US, the UK. But a lot was provided by France, and

something was provided by Russia, to UNSCOM, of what we knew. By the way, what is available clearly indicates that if you take the bulk of Iraq's programs on weapons of mass destruction, the percentage of the Soviet Union contribution really was meager compared to Western contributions. It is not to say that "they" are responsible or "they" are not responsible, it is not about this; but when people try to present the Soviet and then Russian position as trying to preserve these linkages, this is wrong. The famous case when the gyroscopes were found in the river, dropped from the bridge, yes, they were of Soviet origin. But this doesn't mean that the Soviet Union or Russia supplied them to... You know, now you find Soviet and Russian weapons in many places, but the routes of those weapons are numerous—they are licensed in many countries in the world.

You ask about this spying aspect. We deliberately made a point in the Security Council and in our public comments in Moscow and New York just to ignore this. Not because we believed that this was right, but because we believed that this would be shifting the focus from the real problem. And the real problem was that the crisis created in December 1998 was artificial. After that episode in August 1998 when the Iraqis said that they would not have any dealings with UNSCOM, and UNSCOM left, the tension in the Council increased. At some point, as I remember, it was November, when Americans already had threatened with air strikes unless Iraq resumed cooperation, there was this hectic negotiation over the weekend with Ambassador Hamdoun, present in the Quiet Room next to the Security Council, and us, the French, and the Chinese, talking to them and talking to Americans and other members of the Security Council, trying to avoid the use of force, but on the condition of UNSCOM resuming its work. Eventually, that letter was approved after two or three redraftings, and President Clinton decided to call off the

use of force, and UNSCOM came back. It was agreed that by mid December, UNSCOM should report whether Iraq has been fully cooperating.

JS: Yes, that pertains to the presidential sites, I think.

SL: No, presidential sites were before that.

JS: Before that?

SL: Before that, earlier in 1998. Presidential sites came after Kofi Annan visited Baghdad in February 1998, and produced his memorandum of understanding on presidential sites.

JS: Ah, right.

SL: Then the delegation from the Council, together with UNSCOM experts, visited Iraq and visited the presidential sites.

JS: Right. It had come up before, actually.

SL: It was earlier, in the first half of 1998. Then this standoff took place in November, and it was diffused. UNSCOM came back, and it was given about one month to resume its monitoring and its inspections, and to report by the middle of December

whether Iraq was fully cooperating. At the end of this period, in this month or so they made about 400 visits to various sites, and they encountered problems in I think five cases, some of which were really not Iraq's fault. For example, in one of these cases, reported by UNSCOM as proof of lack of full cooperation, related to the Iranian opposition camp inside Iraq, which is guarded by Iranians—and there is also an outer chain of guards offered by Iraq—but internal protection is by Iranians themselves. So UNSCOM came to this site and said that they had a suspicion that this site might contain some proscribed material. Iraqi guards said that Iraqis only have access to this outer zone, and that beyond that zone it was Iranians who were guarding the site. The Iraqis said, “You can go through the Iraqi cordon, but then you have to talk to the Iranian opposition leaders who run this site.” And the Iranians didn't let them in. This was cited as a proof that Iraq didn't fully cooperate. There were a couple of incidents like that.

Butler was presenting an interim report to the Council at the end of November saying that yes, in most cases there is cooperation, but there are signs that they are not fully cooperating. He cited a couple of examples, including this one, and then we checked with Iraqis, we double-checked with our ambassador in Iraq, and then we told Butler, “Look, these cases have explanations, and you cannot really expect that each and every visit would be one hundred percent smooth. When you do have objective reasons, like the one with the Iranian camp, you really have to be objective.” He basically agreed that yes, he would take this into account in presenting a final report.

Then he went to Moscow in very early December 1998. Primakov was Prime Minister. Butler met with Primakov, he met with Foreign Minister Ivanov, and said, “Look, we are not interfering with your business but the responsibility which you have on

your shoulders is tremendous, and we hope that your report will be objective.” Butler said clearly that—this is our record of the conversation—that on the basis of what he had received from the ground, from his team, “Please don’t worry, the report is going to be positive for Iraq. They have been cooperating.” Then he writes the report, which says that Iraq was not fully cooperating, and of course in brackets I must say that whenever we use the phrase “full cooperation” it is really nonsense; there is really no such thing as full cooperation in anything. I mean, it depends on interpretation. And if somebody wants to make sure that there is no full cooperation, you can always explain that any single misstep is a proof of the absence of full cooperation. So we also had to draw lessons for the future wording of resolutions.

But anyway, he writes this report, and before this report gets to the Council, CNN announces that the American planes are airborne. Then we read in the papers—and I have all these files, Butler’s interviews, the Australian press, testimonies of many people. And if what they said was right, then just as Butler was telling Primakov in Moscow that according to his information he received from the ground the report would be positive, at the same time he was telling Sandy Berger that the report would be negative. It is not challenged by anybody, including Butler himself. Three days before the report was out in the press and on its way to the members of the Security Council, it was made available to Washington. And that’s why it so happened that before we read the report, the planes were airborne, and as we asked, having received that news, asked for an emergency meeting of the Council, the bombing started. And the UNSCOM personnel had been withdrawn, and the humanitarian personnel were not even warned.

So after that, our government made the assessment, and made it public, that the air strikes, the use of force, had been provoked by UNSCOM and by Butler personally. We stick to this assessment, and given that, it was really irrelevant to spin this spy topic in the Security Council and the UN. Because this spy theme emerged early in 1999, and I was always replying to questions from the media that we do believe this is irrelevant, and UNSCOM is dead, and UNSCOM signed its own death sentence. UNSCOM did withdraw itself, on its own; it was not expelled from Iraq, like it was in August 1999. The last truth about UNSCOM's presence in Iraq is that this presence ended not because UNSCOM was expelled, but because UNSCOM left Iraq having produced the pretext for the bombing.



JS: Mr. Ambassador, this question was not on my list, but I'm very impressed with how well you are acquainted with this file. And I just would like to ask, this was considered a very important topic from your perspective and from Moscow's perspective.

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SL: Yes.

JS: Why?

SL: Well, I've been asked many times why Russia is trying to protect Saddam Hussein, who is violating Security Council resolutions, just for the sake of getting money back, having the debt paid back.

JS: Right. Yes. Butler said Primakov said that.

SL: Yes, and I was not shying from the question. I said any country, or any person who was owed something would be a fool if he or she wouldn't like to get the money back.

[End Tape 1, Side 1]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

And we have never been trying to get this money back through illegal means. We have been stressing that we want sanctions to be lifted through Iraqis' implementation of Security Council resolutions.



JS: That's an important statement.

SL: And we have been always stressing this, because we were accused that we want to just say, "Enough is enough, forget about disarmament requirements, just leave sanctions because Russia needs the money back." This was never our position; even now when we say that we need a new approach to Iraq, and in a new approach, "new" means not new goals, and not even new means, because the means would still be the same: disarmament and monitoring in exchange for suspension of sanctions. And lifting would have to be later down the road. What is new I the need to specify criteria for suspension which was left very vague in Resolution 1284 on which three permanent members abstained. But we still say that this suspension of sanctions and the eventual lifting of sanctions can only be possible in the context of implementation of the Security Council requirements. As

far as the basic goals are concerned, no weapons of mass destruction for Iraq, no missiles with range of more than one hundred fifty kilometers, no threat from Iraq to its neighbors, et cetera, et cetera. Those are the overwhelming goals. The means are disarmament and monitoring. No one is changing this. And even our minister said just yesterday, once again, that we are not considering in any way unilateral withdrawal from the sanctions. Sanctions could only be suspended and then lifted in the context of implementation of resolutions.

So this is as far as our economic interest is concerned; but our position on Iraq is certainly more comprehensive than just the desire to resume economic ties, which are beneficial to both countries, no doubt about it. We are interested in the period after sanctions, when we will be able to resume large-scale economic cooperation with Iraq—the oil exploration, the trade. There are also security concerns and political concerns of Russia. We are very close to the region, and we have interests in the Persian Gulf and in the Middle East, including economic interests in our relations with other countries. We have been developing economic relations with Kuwait, with the United Arab Emirates, not to mention traditional partners in the Middle East—Syria, Egypt, you name it. The Persian Gulf countries with which the Soviet Union had little relations are more and more developing bilateral ties with Russia. So for this reason, and also for the reason of our concern for geopolitical stability, we need stability in the Persian Gulf. Our latest proposals, which we have been promoting since last fall, clearly link the Iraqi settlement with the need to normalize the situation in the Gulf, which must include normalization of relations between Iraq and Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and regional approach to confidence building.

JS: So you see it still as a central issue in the whole complex of the...

SL: Absolutely, and of course it is linked to the Middle East settlement in a very direct way. Resolution 687, paragraph 14, speaks of the Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, and it's something which Egypt, when it was on the Security Council, always insisted upon. And then through this aspect, you get into the problems in the Middle East settlement and the substance of the problems that take place in the occupied territories and Lebanon.

JS: There's a question again, perhaps a delicate question, I'd like to pose. Ritter makes many accusations, but one of them is that Madeleine Albright was in fact instrumental in discouraging Butler from making too intrusive inspections. I wondered, were there conversations between Russia and the United States, which perhaps did in fact help persuade Madeleine Albright that the inspections were overly invasive?

SL: Well, we had been having regular contacts with Madeleine Albright, and with Bill Richardson, and with Ambassador Peter Burleigh who unfortunately left the Foreign Service, and regular contacts with Iraq being on the agenda always, and we had been raising the issue regularly about the manner in which inspections were conducted. We were not challenging the right of UNSCOM to visit any site. There was an exception for presidential sites, but that was an exception basically acquiesced in by the entire Security Council.

JS: You mean under Ekéus?

SL: No, no, these were presidential sites...

JS: Well they were the same. Ekéus made the...

SL: Yes, he made this June 1996 paper with Iraqis...

JS: Yes, regarding sensitive sites.



SL: ...and then it was developed into the memorandum of understanding that Kofi Annan signed with Tariq Aziz in February 1998. So the presidential sites' exceptional nature was recognized by the entire Council in a way, because we did acquiesce, although the Americans were not very happy after that visit by Kofi Annan, but eventually it was accepted that a delegation of the Council would accompany UNSCOM experts to visit all these sites. The only dispute that remained was about whether this was a one-time operation of this group or a repeated one. But this is irrelevant for the purpose of our discussion. We never challenged UNSCOM's right to visit any site, and we had been voting for many resolutions after 687, as late as 1998 itself, which were repeating the language which would say, "any site, any person, any material, anywhere, anytime, et cetera."

But then we were also saying that this very intrusive mandate should be implemented in a delicate manner. UNSCOM would very often go with surprise inspections on Fridays, and this was something that Iraqis protested about. UNSCOM would say, “We do it on Friday because Friday is a day off in Iraq, and we don’t want to embarrass too many people.” But then they were reporting a lack of cooperation, that they had to wait for one or two hours before they could get in, and the Iraqis were saying, “You know, this is a holiday, and there was only a guard who doesn’t understand English and who cannot do anything without getting instructions from his bosses, and the bosses are resting, so before he can get through the hierarchy to the guy who has the authority, it takes time.”

There were many instances when UNSCOM inspectors were really acting in a very rude manner, starting with their appearances: visiting sites not shaven; in t-shirts; some of them wearing t-shirts with anti-Iraqi abusive language or pictures; being rude with lady secretaries in some offices, asking them to open up their purses, going through them. This is documented, not only by Iraqis, who made some pictures and videos of these and circulated them, but also by some of the inspectors, who quietly complained about this. So it was these type of thing that we really were concerned about, and I think Americans at the end of the day understood that this was wrong. Originally, they didn’t pay much attention, saying, “Well, this is a country under sanctions, Chapter VII,” but then the Security Council, even in those Chapter VII resolutions, repeatedly recognized the need to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and later, the dignity of Iraq. Dignity was added exactly because of this UNSCOM experience, and when, I think it was Kofi Annan who said Iraq was not a protectorate.

So yes, we did discuss these things with the US during our regular bilateral consultations. Frankly, I wouldn't know whether Madeleine Albright gave any signals to Butler for him to be less intrusive or more intrusive. We all talked to him, and we all conveyed our messages. I was clearly on instructions conveying repeatedly the need for his teams to be more polite, basically. I was also conveying some other ideas, which we had on the basis of discussions with Iraqis, and when Iraqis expressed concerns to us that they cannot produce more than they produced unless UNSCOM indicated to them what else, specifically, they want—this famous topic which we discussed already—I mean this “information sharing”, as it was called. And we conveyed all these things to Butler, so I assume that Americans as well as other P-5 and other members of the Council who had any feedback from their capitals on Iraq were doing the same. But whether, what Madeleine Albright was conveying to him was an attempt to reduce the level of his intrusiveness, I cannot say.

JS: That's an interesting point. In that connection, did you feel that under Butler, UNSCOM did become overly under the influence of Washington?

SL: You know, the events of December 1998, they speak for themselves. I mean, it's still to be denied by those who were involved that he did make this report, which was a trigger for the use of force, that he did make it available to Washington before it was even printed, and before anybody else in the Council had read it. And the report clearly was used as a pretext for the strikes, as a reason for the strikes. And the order to get the

planes in the air had been made before the report was formally received in the Security Council. That's all I will say.

JS: Why do you think the U.S. did that?

SL: Well, it's not for me to judge the motivations, but it was no surprise to anyone. The U.S. had repeatedly before that made its position clear that they would not stop at using force if Iraq did not cooperate. So it was no surprise, you know, that the U.S. used force. It was the manner in which UNSCOM had done it, which really was not acceptable to many countries.



JS: I want to go back just for a minute to the Secretary-General's trip. First of all, did you encourage him, and did others particularly encourage him to go at that point? Or as far as you could see, was this totally his own conviction?

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SL: I think it was both; I believe by his political instincts, and by the virtue of obligations of his office, he decided for himself that it would be something that must be tried. But at the same time, he understood clearly that unless he gets support from the Security Council, at least agreement from the Security Council that he should go and achieve some agreement with Iraq, this would be futile. So the visit was preceded by his coming to the Council, and he really did it on his own initiative when he first came and said, "There is a crisis, and under the circumstances as Secretary-General I have some duties, and I believe that my duties require me to try personally to get involved and to try

and solve it.” And then he presented the outline of his mandate as he believed should be, on the basis of existing resolutions. He met a couple of times with the P-5, with the non-Permanent members, and he came to the Council when it was clear that the basic elements of the mandate were acceptable to everyone. But then there was an attempt to micro-manage the mandate, and to really start discussing commas and definite and indefinite articles in the language that was never voted. He, himself, read out some language, which he modified on the basis of consultations, and then when this discussion started to go into tiniest details of the text, which frankly would never be used in his conversations in Baghdad, it was maybe one of the only times when I saw him lose his temper, but lose his temper in a very dignified way. It never showed in his face. He just got up and said, “Thank you very much, dear colleagues, I believe I’ve got the sense of the house. I’m leaving tomorrow, good luck.” And he left us discussing those commas and tiny things. It was a very dignified and statesmanlike gesture. So yes, I think he certainly decided himself that he must get the Council’s support, or at least its agreement, for this trip. But he was clearly in the lead on what this support should look like. He himself presented the mandate, which he believed was realistic and right, and he eventually won the Council.

JS: How did you judge the outcome?

SL: I think it was maybe even more than anybody’s expectations had been. I hear some views that whatever he had believed collapsed in August when Iraqi severed their relations with UNSCOM. But again, there were too many complications.

I am sorry; the episode about the IAEA report, and the failure of the Council to recognize that nuclear file was closed, this happened in 1998, not in '96. That was also, you know, working in the direction of building up Iraq's irritation with lack of results. '98. Charles Duelfer was right, it was '98. I was mistaken. In '96, there was a previous report of IAEA, which already made a statement that basically they can do the rest within the monitoring phase. But the attempt to adopt a resolution of the Council was made in July 1998.

JS: That's when Charles Duelfer says it was made.

SL: Absolutely. So I'm sorry, you will have to correct it. But it just occurred to me that this was the first reason why the Iraqis became more and more irritated, and then Butler's negotiations with them in August were aborted.

JS: Right. As a final question, because you are so well briefed on the whole subject, what do you think the final result, as we witnessed? Number one, this is, at least I think, the most effective disarmament that has ever taken place. It may not have been totally successful, but many more arms were destroyed than were destroyed in Desert Storm. The Security Council, in fact, has played a major disarmament role in this particular case. Do you think this has significance for the future?

SL: First I agree with you that the disarmament results should be really considered not from the point of view of one hundred percent achievement of "cooperation," because the

language itself was unprecedented. By the way, when I periodically was meeting with Richard Butler one-on-one, in a bar, for a very private chat, I would ask him, “Richard....” You know, it was the time of euphoria, not just because the Iraqis’ occupation of Kuwait was rejected by everybody, was not accepted by anybody, and was outrageous. But it was also euphoria of the end of Communism, which prompted maximalist demands in the resolutions, and maximalist language, like “full cooperation,” “one hundred percent,” whatever. This would never be the rule in any future disarmament exercise. He recognized this, being a disarmament expert, and I told him, “Well, you are a disarmament expert, and yet you are complaining that the Iraqis are cheating. You have been in the disarmament game. All these monitoring mechanisms, bilateral between USSR and USA, multilateral in the context of the chemical convention, and eventually in the context of the biological convention, all these monitoring mechanisms take the longest time to negotiate because it is about cheating. Because disarmament will always involve an element of suspicion, because parties would like to be more protected. This is not to justify cheating, but the entire history of disarmament negotiations shows that cheating is an integral part of the thinking; that another side might cheat is always a concern.

JS: That’s right.

SL: So to say that because they tried to cheat they are an outcast is missing the point. They made themselves an outcast when they invaded Kuwait, that’s right. But to say that Iraq does not have legitimate security interests, and to deny that they cannot, given their

surroundings, defend their security interests by conventional forces—and of course this is not to justify that they should have weapons of mass destruction—but I mean then, if we recognize there are legitimate security needs, then let's have a regional discussion. Let's promote some regional cooperation and confidence building, disarmament, security, reduction of armed forces, with guarantees of the great powers. But to deny that they had legitimate security concerns, and just call them cheaters, would be not very far-sighted.

I don't think it would be repeated, this type of disarmament regime. It's not realistic to make these sorts of demands. And if you read the following sanctions resolutions including those addressed to Milosevic, the Taliban—they are not that categorical.



JS: Or North Korea?

SL: What you said on the success of the disarmament exercise in Iraq, I subscribe to. The fact is that the nuclear file has been closed quite some time ago, and Iraq cooperated. They never had any complaint vis-à-vis IAEA. Some people say, "Well, you cannot hide nuclear facilities, and therefore Iraq just had to present them to inspectors and to close down whatever was not within IAEA standards for peaceful uses of nuclear energy." The same is said about the reasons why the missile file was practically closed except the lack of information on two missile bodies. But the engines, as Butler himself testified in the Council, had been all accounted for, so even if these two bodies are lying somewhere, there are no engines, according to existing data. They also say that missiles are difficult to hide because you need silos, you need some special facilities to keep them, which are

easily detectible by satellites, et cetera. And the relative progress on the chemical file is also described by the fact that the chemical weapons facilities are relatively sizeable. On biology, they say you can do it in any kitchen; therefore there is no progress, which is used as a proof that they are cheating, and had they had the chance to cheat on everything else, they would have cheated, but because of the size of the production, it's only biology, which they still keep very closed.

Certainly, nuclear weapons are much more visible than some kitchen production of biological agents. But you really have to address the problem from the point of view of the original 687 words: whether Iraq represents a threat. If they still might have biological weapons potential, do they have the means to deliver those? The answer is no. I am also very much concerned by the approach that Butler was taking in some of his reports. When asked directly, whether Iraq is still a threat to its neighbors from the point of view of the weapons of mass destruction, he once said that on the basis of what had been destroyed, and what had not been yet clarified, he cannot be sure that Iraq doesn't have weapons of mass destruction potential from the point of view of material and intellectual resources. This intellectual resources part should never have been mentioned by him, because he was, in fact, saying that as long as there are people in Iraq who know how, sanctions cannot be removed. So what is the way out? To wait until they are all dead, or to put them all in prison and to guard them? You cannot deny that any country which is developing its science and technology would have people who know how to make nuclear weapons.

JS: What it does suggest, though, and I think that's what you are suggesting, is that there remains a necessity for monitoring.

SL: Absolutely.

JS: That is your position?

SL: Absolutely. I am convinced that the worst outcome of the bombing in December 1998 was that we, since then, cannot bring the inspectors back. We would be the last one on this planet not to be interested in the Persian Gulf being a safe place. We would be the last one to be willing to see the countries of the region possessing weapons of mass destruction. So we are interested in making sure that resolution 687 and subsequent resolutions are implemented. We don't know what happened on all those sites in Iraq—I mean the UN doesn't know—since December 1998. IAEA was there on their regular inspections, visiting Iraq as a member of IAEA, not as a Chapter VII country.

JS: No, they were doing peaceful uses.

SL: Yes and in their report, they mentioned that of course this was just a regular IAEA inspection, and it was not under the Security Council mandate, which would have been broader. But they said that still they have not seen any evidence that any nuclear programs have been resumed. First we want to make sure that IAEA is able to monitor permanently; the same would be the case for missiles, chemical, and biological files.

UNMOVIC should come to Iraq, should restore the monitoring system, should make sure that all those cameras which were installed would be operational. They should decide, having analyzed the situation, whether they need some more sites to be put under the ongoing monitoring system. But as soon as they report to the Council that they have deployed in Iraq fully, have restored the ongoing monitoring system, and have tested it say for two months, it is functioning, and haven't encountered any problems in their relations with Iraqis, then such a report should be a trigger for suspending sanctions. And then the lifting should take place later, when disarmament requirements, which are still to be specified, have been fulfilled.

Last point on this theme, which we are promoting, is that before we suspend-and for this, ongoing monitoring must resume and maybe expanded or strengthened-but before we suspend, there must be clarity on what are the financial parameters of suspension. The current way of thinking in the U.S. and U.K. is basically that you call it suspension, but you keep the UN escrow account, and it would be the UN who gives permission to spend Iraqi oil money deposited to that account. It's a very interesting point. When 1284 was negotiated, the French and us and the Chinese tried to negotiate the financial modalities of suspension, because if you keep the escrow account, Iraq would not have any access to its own money. If you call this suspension, it will be just a change of name, not a change of substance. There is no incentive. So the French and us were saying that let's discuss some new arrangement for the period of suspension, which would involve reporting, providing trade statistics on the part of Iraq and on the part of its trade partners, but *post facto*, and in a way which would allow the United Nations to detect any violations, and of course keeping the arms embargo and export-import control

arrangements under resolution 1051. But making all economic, non-dual-use items just subject to regular dealings, with Iraqis receiving cash for their oil, and Iraqis using this cash to buy non-prescribed goods and develop the economy. And all countries would be obliged to provide trade statistics on their trade with Iraq.

JS: The sanctions would be suspended.

SL: Yes. If need be, we were saying with the French, let's have international monitors on the borders. But there must be a real incentive for Iraq, and they must know that suspension would mean suspension, not just keeping the same mechanism in place under a different name. Our proposal was blocked in, the Permanent Five, and come back to the issue of whether it would be ever possible for the Americans to accept suspension—real suspension—as long as the current government is in control.

JS: Right. The system is almost in effect now, because the sanctions—they can sell as much oil as they want.

SL: We have been making this point, repeatedly trying to start discussing financial modalities of suspension thus creating an incentive for resuming disarmament monitoring. It's two and a half years since UNSCOM left, and was disbanded since, and UNMOVIC was created—but two and a half years there is no monitoring in the disarmament area.

JS: You are one of the P-5, one of the very important P-5, and there really are two issues that I think caused the unity among the P-5 to disintegrate. One of them is this, the other is Kosovo.

SL: Kosovo is no longer a divisive issue.

JS: No longer, but it was.

SL: It was, of course.

JS: Now that the United Nations has the...the P-5 has agreed to what the United Nations...

SL: We still have differences on, you know, whether to have elections in November or early next year, but those are tactical things.

JS: Right, but my question is really more a political science question. How significant is this in terms of the future functioning of the Security Council? There was the great expectation during the halcyon days that the unity had been restored, and that the Security Council was an effective decision-making body. This was somewhat fractured by the Iraqi experience, especially relating to sanctions, and also Kosovo. Now if, in fact, as you say, the Kosovo [conflict] has been overcome, and if the Iraqi problem

is overcome in one way or another, do you think that the Council can become again a very effective organization?

SL: Yes, I do think it's possible, and actually on quite a number of other issues the Council is acting effectively, at least in what concerns reaching consensus on paper. Sometimes this consensus is papering over differences. For example, on African peacekeeping, where there is a very strong pressure on the part of Africans to have more peacekeepers in DRC and, in Sierra Leone. But there is also concern on the part of other members of the Council that we are sending people in harm's way in the absence of actual compliance of the parties on the ground with their own commitments. This would inevitably be present in any dealings of any international institution. The Council has been efficient on quite a number of things. On Kosovo, my expectation is that we are moving in the right direction, and yes, if we manage to overcome the Iraqi deadlock, and find some common ground, there will be no single issue that would be insurmountable for the Council.

I would like to make one point. Indeed, Kosovo and Iraq were the two issues which prevented the P-5 cooperation in the Council, which prevented Russian-American cooperation on global issues, and which prevented the Security Council from playing this role.

JS: That's right.

SL: But in both cases, the problems started not in the Council. Kosovo was not originally a problem. The former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, were a subject of consensus, though a very difficult one, in the Security Council before and during Dayton, after Dayton. And Iraq was not a problem originally to the P-5 unity. In both cases, the real problems started basically at the same time: December 1998 and January or February of 1999. Right?

JS: They were contemporary...

SL: In both cases, the problems started because of unilateral actions outside the Security Council. In the case of Iraq, it was the U.K. and U.S. use of force; in the case of Kosovo, it was NATO's use of force. Both were outside the Security Council. In both cases, there was a report which triggered the use of force, and which was used as justification. In the case of Iraq, it was Butler's report; in the case of Kosovo, it was Ambassador Walker's report. He was the head of OSCE mission, and he came to Racak, to massacre site, and declared on the spot that that was a genocide act, and he withdrew the OSCE, which he didn't have the right to do, because he should have reported to the OSCE Permanent Council. By the way, we still tried to get the report, which the Finnish forensic experts made at the request of EU, on the Racak massacre. The content of this report was leaked last May, almost a year ago, to the German press and later to the Japanese press, and the newspapers assert that what they have seen does not contain the proof that that was a massacre—that most of the bodies found were killed in action. When we read this, we asked the Secretariat to give us the report, and we have exchanged

about five letters with them. The state of the play now is that we were informed that the report had been submitted to Carla del Ponte in The Hague, and that Carla del Ponte in her response to the Secretariat request to provide this report for the Security Council members, said that she cannot provide the full report, that she can only provide a summary, which we didn't accept. First, the Tribunal is a subsidiary body of the Security Council. Second, Racak was the trigger for NATO action, for the mobilization of public opinion in the West in support of NATO action. So we do have the legal and moral right to read this report. And we still don't get an answer.

So my point, in answer to your question is that, in both cases there was a unilateral action, which undermined the unity of the Security Council and of the P-5. In Iraq, before December 1998, on most occasions, we have been, as Russia, if not on all occasions, we have been joining consensus. Yes, after laborious negotiations, after give and take, after being accused that we are trying to protect Saddam Hussein, while we were trying just to avoid the language that would be used later to justify the unilateral use of force. Still, there was always the possibility to reach consensus, and had Butler not presented five tiny cases out of four hundred to justify the lack of full cooperation, I am sure that the cooperation on Iraq and the joint pressure on Iraq by the entire P-5 would have continued.

In Kosovo, just before Racak, at the end of 1998, there was a problem of OSCE mission getting some protection unit, and we were considered, as Russia, by the West as being totally against giving any arms, even light arms, to the OSCE mission because the Yugoslavs were against it. But I can assure you that had the attempt been made to continue pressing this point in the Security Council, Russia would have eventually joined

consensus, even on sending some military units to support the OSCE mission. I can assure you that it would have been possible to persuade Belgrade to accept it, but it would have taken time.

JS: Right, and from that I deduce—this is beyond our conversation here, but your views are important to me—that basically you're not as cynical about the future of the Security Council as many are.

SL: Well, I still have about, I hope, not less than ten years to go before my retirement, so I cannot be pessimistic about my job. Not necessarily here, but in diplomacy.



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