

**Yale-UN Oral History Project**

Virendra Dayal

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

31 March 1992



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Interviewed by Jean Krasno

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**Jean Krasno:** As you know, we are working on the memoirs for Pérez de Cuéllar, so there may be other times when I'll need to come and talk to you as we get into other topics. Right now we are trying to start at the end of his tenure here, because the people like yourself are still here, and then we can talk about those issues and then we'll kind of work backwards. So, specifically, today, what I wanted to ask you for was some information about your mission to Baghdad--as I understand you did take a trip there. Can you tell me approximately when you went on that mission?

**Virendra Dayal:** Well, I went twice to Baghdad.

**JK:** You went twice?

**VD:** The first time I went Kofi Annan accompanied me. And that had to do with securing the release of foreigners who had been taken hostage as "human shields". Let me see, I forget the exact dates—but it was toward the latter part of August 1990.

**JK:** OK--so shortly after Iraq had invaded Kuwait.

VD: That was the time, the issue was the detainees. You know, the “human shields”.

JK: OK--so that was the issue the first time that you went?

VD: And, that concluded in Amman, when the Secretary-General came there.

JK: Oh, I see--so did you meet first in Baghdad?

VD: No, first what happened was that I was sent ahead to Baghdad, to talk about the people who had been taken hostage. That's the reason I went there. I then met the Secretary-General in Amman, for talks with Tariq Aziz. And the second time, of course, we went to Baghdad, was in January 1991, just before the major fighting involving the coalition and Saddam.

JK: So when you went back in January, were you with the Secretary-General?

VD: I was with the Secretary-General, yes.

JK: So, first let's talk about the time in August 1990 that you were there. Who did you meet with in Baghdad at that time?

VD: It was Tariq Aziz, and his assorted assistants and aides. I had quite a few hours with Tariq Aziz, and under the guise of the humanitarian affair, tried to disabuse him of

whatever thoughts he might have had about the levity of the resolution of the Security Council, and it was interesting because I don't think he realized how the world had changed. He didn't realize the Soviet Union was already on the way to becoming the Russian Federation. I think they just miscalculated, misjudged things, all the way down the line. But even to misjudge things you have to have a mind-set of your own. Why is it that one mind doesn't misjudge a situation and another does? And there, of course, people can have different views of what went wrong in Baghdad and in the minds of people like Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz. I have a feeling they were imprisoned by their own sense of the history of their country, and by their own sense of its historical role. And somehow or the other, they couldn't make the decisions that they needed to make, decisions that would have averted the ferocity of what followed.

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JK: Right. Now, when you went, were you sent by the Secretary-General?

VD: Yes.

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JK: So, it was part of the "good offices" of the Secretary-General?

VD: Well, yes, in a way it was. It wasn't presented as the "good offices" of the Secretary-General because we needed a kind of a thin disguise to get there. So, it was ostensibly on the grounds of the need to release all the people who had not been able to get out, you see--including, of course, vast numbers of UN officials, because they were scattered the length and breadth of Iraq, and many of them were in Kuwait, which was

now under Iraqi occupation. I forget the exact number now, but there were really hundreds of UN people, and UN people of all nationalities including nationalities of countries whose citizens had been taken away as “human shields”. In the event, we were able to get every last UN official out, including those who had been taken away to “protected areas” (and installed) in locations that were politically or militarily sensitive. They had to be retrieved: an Italian from here, a Japanese from there, and Englishman from here, an American from there. They had been taken away from the rest of the UN group, and they had been--I shouldn't say incarcerated--but they had been lost to our people. They had been relocated in areas foreigners of certain nationalities had been detained in order to protect Iraqi installations from being bombed or attacked in the event of war. We were able to get out every last one.

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JK: Now, was this strictly on the Secretary-General's initiative, or was there some approval necessary by the Security Council?

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VD: What happened was this: there had been a series of resolutions of the Security Council, 660, 662, 664, etc. after the Iraqi invasion. More than one of them had referred to the question of foreign nationals, and therefore it was supposedly to talk about the “humanitarian problem of foreign nationals” that I went there. And as a consequence of the discussions we were immediately able to get out all of our UN people and many other foreign nationals. We were also able to set up mechanisms for the departure of an immense number of other foreign nationals who were in Iraq or Kuwait. At the end of our visit, there were still a number of foreign nationals dispersed around the Iraqi

countryside as human shields, but their number was gradually reduced, as a result of the conversations that we had and the mechanisms that were set in place.

JK: So, in other words, there were provisions within the Security Council resolutions that would provide a kind of mandate for the Secretary-General to take this initiative.

VD: Yes, except what we did was, if my memory holds now—the Secretary-General purposely made the announcement that he was sending me, accompanied by Kofi Annan—he purposely made the announcement before the resolution was adopted, the one which dealt strenuously with foreign nationals. He did that so that he could, as it were - I wouldn't say “separate” my mission from the Council resolution - but let the Iraqis feel that we had taken the decision prior to the Council's resolution. He hoped thereby to ensure that, even if the Iraqis were unhappy with the resolution, they would at least be cooperative with us.

JK: And that seems to have worked?

VD: Well, I would say that it was in part because of that, and in part because the Iraqis, too, wished to be seen as halfway conciliatory. Whatever it was, all of our people came out, and many others followed in addition.

JK: I ask that because--perhaps you can clarify this for me also--because I understand Sadruddin Aga Khan had been designated by the Secretary-General to be a special

representative for humanitarian affairs in the Iraq-Kuwait situation. But then he was not allowed in to Iraq, and as I understand there was some feeling that his appointment had been under the approval of the Security Council and did then get combined with their reaction to the resolutions. Is that correct?

VD: The appointment of Sadruddin was subsequent to our mission.

JK: Yes--later, September.

VD: You see Sandruddin's appointment was largely because--I won't say in part because of our efforts, but in part because the way the situation evolved-- vast numbers of foreign nationals, apart from the Europeans, were suddenly able to leave. That included many from the Third World. So, suddenly, the Iraqis decided to lift their restrictions on the movement of people from the Third World, and thousands upon thousands of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Filipinos, Egyptians, and the rest, they were to start coming out. And all along the route it wasn't particularly pleasant. It was hot as hell; it was late summer; the mass exodus was very, very sudden, and they got out helter-skelter, in great disorder. Some walked, with stuff on their back, others crowd buses and trucks and entered Jordan, while some went towards Iran. There was great disorder. But at least they had been able to come out. Our effort to try and get the whole thing "orchestrated" by the UN on the departure front wasn't particularly successful. But we were successful in getting the gates open for those who wished to leave. So they left by whatever means they could: they hopped into their own cars if they had gasoline, and made it to the



border; they got into trucks; they shared things, donkeys, whatever they could. Then, when they arrived in Jordan there was initially an awful mess. Sanitation and sewage had been augmented so rapidly; there was no water, no food; the heat was terrible. There was a vast array of problems, with dysentery about to break out. So, in those circumstances, we recommended that Sadruddin should be appointed. I made the suggestion to Pérez de Cuéllar. Essafi had been handling the situation but UNDRO hadn't been quite able to match things or galvanize the action that was needed. There was a need for a higher political profile, so I went to Geneva with Jean-Claude Aimé to sort out matters and set new arrangements in play.

JK: OK--so you went with Aimé, after your trip to Baghdad in August, but before Sadruddin started?

VD: ... Before his appointment, yes.

JK: ... Before his appointment, so that would be right at the beginning of September?

VD: We went there in order to make sure that no feathers would be unduly ruffled. Stoltenberg at UNHCR was wondering why he wasn't being asked to do it; Essafi at UNDRO was wondering why he wasn't being asked to be the "leader". X Y and Z had aspirations to be appointed Coordinator. But we felt it was better not to have someone from an existing program, because it was precisely those programs that needed to be coordinated. So then, we had a discussion together, secured everyone's agreement,

prepared the announcement about Sadruddin, got him appointed, had a meeting with the agencies and donors and the countries most directly concerned in terms of their nationals, and returned to New York.

JK: And was it felt that he would be acceptable to Iraq?

VD: Well, yes, it was so hoped. Partly because--I mean he was not a stranger to that part of the world, partly because he had excellent credentials on the humanitarian side and partly because he was held in the highest esteem. But then the Iraqis didn't initially let him come. The Iraqi anger against the Security Council resolutions was quite considerable.



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JK: Now, did the Security Council ask that they approve his appointment?

VD: No, it wasn't that. It was just that as the resolution was being adopted, the temper of the Iraqis became more and more recalcitrant. It's not that they were particularly--what should I say is the opposite of recalcitrant--it's not that they were particularly "forthcoming" to begin with, quite the contrary. But the reaction to the resolution was not a cooperative one. It--I wouldn't say 'stiffened' their resolve to be difficult, because that was bad enough as it was--but that "dug in" after the resolution and refused to be forthcoming. Every effort to try and explain to them the peculiar circumstances in which they found themselves, in terms of the severity of the reaction of the Council and the fact that it was a kind irrevocable severity failed. They were loathe to listen to that message.

And, in any conversation with them, they would start off on the wrong foot. They would always start by wanting to create linkages of a kind that we knew were patently impossible, but they didn't seem to grasp the reality of the situation. And if they did grasp it, they decided to try their luck anyhow. That was the sad part of it, because all the way to the finishing line, so to speak, till the 17th of January, they hoped to get away with it. Or, if not 'get away with it', they were resigned to the outbreak of war.

JK: Well, I just wanted to back up a little bit again, back to your mission in August. Was it strictly humanitarian, or were there other issues?

VD: Well, these things cannot ever be described as "strictly humanitarian". The purpose of the trip was supposed to be humanitarian, and indeed that was the purpose, and the major purpose of it, the main purpose. But there was another message which we needed to convey, and that was a need for Iraq to understand that the Council resolutions were not negotiable things. These were *mandatory* resolutions, you know. And just because they were unfamiliar with...

[interrupted]

JK: So, in that it was a humanitarian mission, you would naturally get into some political issues.

VD: Of course, of course. Very much so. I spent hours talking with Tariq Aziz, and I tried to tell him that things had changed and that I saw nothing but imminent danger of

the most grievous kind. All the signals were there, and people were not bluffing; they shouldn't try their luck; it wasn't a game of chicken that they were playing. This thing was for real, you see.

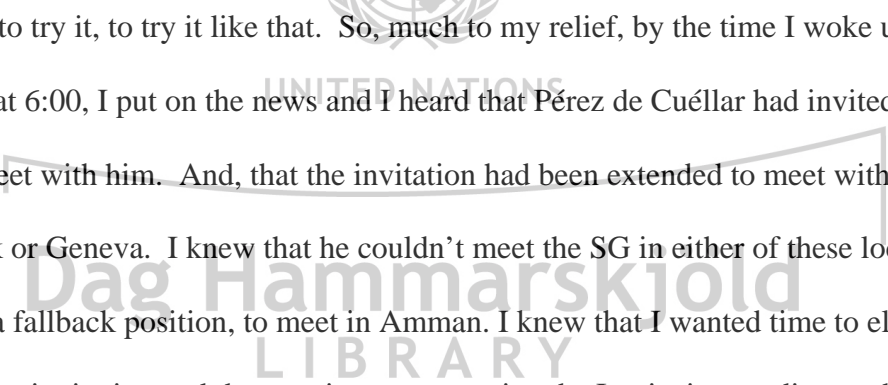
JK: That's right. That's right.

VD: I tried every conceivable way of getting them to understand this. And there was a moment when I was there in Baghdad, in August, when I felt actually that hostilities might be quite imminent. That was because there were suddenly reports that Iraq was moving chemical weapons to Kuwait, and that their siege of the foreign embassies in Kuwait had intensified, despite the resolutions of the Council. There was a night, then--I forget the exact date but I have it in my records--that I had a sense that the Iraqis are provoking the rest of the world just too much. And that, because the Iraqis were moving extra supplies and chemical weapons and so on, into Kuwait, I felt that there might be a very quick, sharp confrontation, and indeed the possibility of imminent conflict. The coalition was already getting into shape, and there was a plentiful wish to get the thing over and done with early on, rather than let time pass. There were pros and cons, you see, for getting it over and done with, by the end of August itself, rather than dallying as we did until January. It was on that night that I sent a message to Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar from there, saying in effect, "Look, things are pretty awful, and may I suggest you invite... Tariq Aziz to meet with you".

JK: I see--OK.

VD: "... Send him a message by return; it's nightfall here now. But I think it could help defuse things here if, by the time we all woke up in the morning, there is a message for Tariq Aziz to see you. And don't ask him to see you tomorrow because, he, for his own purposes, won't come tomorrow. But give him a time about a week away, because that would give everyone time to cool off a little bit in case the hostilities are imminent and it could, perhaps, help to change the atmosphere in which we are functioning."

JK: Yes--sort of defuse the situation?



VD: Yes, to try it, to try it like that. So, much to my relief, by the time I woke up in the morning, at 6:00, I put on the news and I heard that Pérez de Cuéllar had invited Tariq Aziz to meet with him. And, that the invitation had been extended to meet with him, in New York or Geneva. I knew that he couldn't meet the SG in either of these locations, but I had a fallback position, to meet in Amman. I knew that I wanted time to elapse between the invitation and the meeting, so as to give the Iraqis time to digest what was happening, and to buy time, so that hostilities did not erupt without a further effort being made to convince the Iraqis that they were facing a destructive future if they did not comply with the Council's resolutions.

JK: The timing is important.

VD: Not to have a meeting tomorrow, but fix a meeting a week down the road, so everyone would go into slow motion for a while. Otherwise it looked ominous. There was a certain time around the 25th of August when the atmosphere was foul.

JK: You went directly from Baghdad to Amman and met with the Secretary-General?

VD: I met with the Secretary-General and he had the talks with Tariq Aziz on 31 August.

JK: So, then did you brief the Secretary-General?

VD: Yes, of course--I had been briefing him intensively when I was in Baghdad. I was sending him telegrams, very full telegrams, and we had a full review of the situation when we met in Amman.

JK: So, what were your impressions of the Secretary-General's meeting then with Tariq Aziz in Amman?

VD: Well, you see, the Secretary-General went over the whole terrain with him, with all of the care and meticulousness that marked his way of doing things. I mean, he went over the whole thing from alpha to omega with Tariq Aziz, explaining the purport of the resolutions, explaining what was required, trying to convince him that if they went along with a degree of cooperativeness that he would try and help them, to sort of climb down the ladder - even though they didn't deserve this kind of solicitude. But Tariq Aziz was a

smooth but adamant. He just didn't seem to have the capacity to turn the course of events around. And, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar said to him, "Look, if you need instructions, I am prepared to wait in Amman, after all we are not far from Baghdad". Time and again, the Secretary-General gave Tariq Aziz the opportunity to have consultations, but Tariq Aziz came on a short leash, and didn't take up the offer. Pérez de Cuéllar said to him, "Look, if you can't come back here by tomorrow morning, let's meet a week later in Europe". The offer wasn't taken up. There was about the whole thing the sense of a, I won't say a Greek tragedy, but, there was the quality of an Iraqi tragedy. Much the same, I'm afraid. There was a great Mesopotamian tragedy in the making. There seemed to be no way to avoid it, despite whatever you might say. The whole world was telling the Iraqi leadership to shape up, to find a way out before catastrophe struck. Their adversaries obviously were; the Security Council obviously was; the Secretary-General, who was neither friend nor foe, an honest interlocutor, he tried. Their *friends* were begging them to change course. Third World countries were asking them, "For heaven's sake, get off this precipitous course! Turn while there's time; it doesn't have to end in catastrophe."

JK: Well, to use this as a specific example, but to get a general idea of how Pérez de Cuéllar worked, as a person: when he would send you on a mission like this, would he give you very specific instructions? Or would he give you a kind of general purpose and then let you have pretty much of a free hand?

VD: A general purpose. When Pérez de Cuéllar trusted people, he trusted them. And, you see, what happened with some of us who were close to Pérez de Cuéllar, we didn't

really need to exchange an awful lot of words, we really understood each other. Those of us who worked closely with him, we really didn't need an awful lot of instructions from him, because by the time we had worked together for seven, eight or nine years, we knew each others' minds. And, we had the same appreciation of what strain this Organization could take. I knew instinctively where Pérez de Cuéllar would want me to draw the line, you see. Where I would need to be protective of the Organization or him; and where he would not expect me to be protective of him or of the Organization. We knew how far we could go; we knew what he thought, we didn't hesitate to express what we felt to him, but we were very often on the same wavelength, as it were, instinctively, after the number of years we had worked together. There wasn't a need for vast written instructions.

JK: But then when you would have suggestions, obviously, from what you've said so far, he listened, and then he would take you up on it.

VD: He would listen. He listened. These were relationships of trust that developed. And, because we had worked so long together, I won't say we were of one mind, because then there would have been no fun; we were of diverse minds, but we knew what the end should be.

JK: OK, I also wanted to just briefly ask you this: before August 2nd, when Iraq went into Kuwait, there had been in the news quite a bit about the controversy between the two countries. Had either country, or had anyone, brought this to the attention of the UN? Had there been any UN attempts at negotiation?



VD: Again, I am not speaking to you after having looked at the minutes of the meetings before the 2nd of August, but my recollection is that all of us were very worried about it, that in various ways the Secretary-General had mentioned his anxiety about this to various people, including to Tom Pickering and to others, because we all saw the danger signs. This is why Pérez de Cuéllar said in a speech--he said that there was, looking back on it, there was a terrible failure of collective diplomacy at that time. The messages to Baghdad were not clear enough.

JK: Early on, before August?



VD: Yes, they were not clear enough.

JK: On the part of the US or others?

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VD: Well, on the part, let's just say, of all of us. All of us exercise responsibility in different ways. The U.S. obviously, as the major power, with the largest armed force, which in the event led the coalition in battle, sent ambiguous signals. The Security Council--half seized the matter, half not of seized of the matter--lacked, perhaps, some clarity and ferocity, before the 2nd of August. All of us, didn't add up, in our messages, to a kind of determined stance which might have deterred what occurred on the 2nd of August. Indeed, on the night of the Iraqi invasion, I was at home and Tom Pickering was attending a farewell for a friend. He called me from this dinner, saying, "The most

terrible news: Iraqi tanks have crossed in vast numbers into Kuwait, and I have a feeling that we were all going to be sitting in the Security Council within a matter of an hour and a half, or twenty minutes or forty minutes or whatever it is. Do you know where the Secretary-General is?" And so I said "Look, Tom. I know he's gone out for dinner, but I know where I can reach him. Would you like me to put him on notice?" And he said, "Yes, please do". So I got in touch with the Secretary-General and I told the Secretary-General: "The worst you were fearing has happened: a huge movement of Iraqis across the border. Tom has informed me that American intelligence has information that they are crossing in the hundreds of thousands and are on the move. If you don't mind, may I suggest that we alert all concerned; there'll be a long night in the Council."

[End of Tape 1, side A]

[Tape 1, side B]

JK: OK--we'll continue. This is extremely helpful, and kind of a diplomatic history too. And so, now we were just talking about the night of August 2nd.

VD: ... Within a few moments of my conversation with Tom, the Secretary-General was told about it, the President of the Security Council was alerted. I spoke with my colleague who was Under-Secretary-General for Security Council affairs--I said, "Put your socks on and go back to work!" And we were back in the Council chamber before the night was out. And that started off this train of resolutions under Chapter 7, unparalleled in UN history.

JK: True.

VD: And, set this Organization, as an institution, on a course it had never followed before, which was to discipline a member state that had transgressed egregiously. It had never happened before and God willing it never will be so required again. But it was interesting to watch this from the inside. I felt a sense of exhilaration that the Council had acted promptly that night, but I had a sense of foreboding that we were having to discipline a member state in this manner, because there was something about it which was--what should I say?--it left you pained even as you were making the point that the Charter must triumph.



JK: Was there hope at any time, did the Secretary-General or you or the rest of the staff, have hope at any time that a negotiated settlement could be accomplished?

VD: Well, we very much hoped that. I use the word "hope" in the sense that, yes we hoped against hope that reason would prevail. But we had no illusions about the nature of the Iraqi position. The Iraqis were somehow convinced that they were not entirely in the wrong. Again, they had their own reading of the history of Arabia. They were, in a sense, true to their own reading of their own history. It's another matter that others didn't share that reading of their history. It's another matter, of course, that their reading collided 100 percent with the Charter of the UN. But we can't say that they didn't have their own sense of history. So, in other words, we were up against a kind of an impossible situation. I think this is quite apart from the character of Saddam Hussein. And that's another story altogether.

JK: From your description, it seems as though the intransigence primarily fell on the Iraqi side. Did you feel there was any intransigence on the part of the Five, or of the Security Council?

VD: Well, you see, here we have really a very serious question. I happen to belong to Asia. I believe very strongly, on the one hand, in the need to protect the sovereignty of nation-states. After all, we were subjugated for an awfully long time. But, equally strongly, I believe in the need to live by rules. I've devoted my life to serving the Charter of this Organization. So, faced with the question of Iraqi claims and the defense of the principles of the Charter, for someone like me and for most people at that time, there was no choice. The principles of the Charter had to be upheld. The pity of it all was that the Charter had to be upheld with such ferocity against a person who seemed to understand no other language. That was the pity of the situation. And, in fact, to this day it fills me with pain, that the lesson had to be taught so severely. That was a pity, and at such cost. Terrible cost. That was the nature of the lesson that had to be taught. Now, it's another matter, and I'm not going into the manner in which the war was conducted, and I'm not going into what happened in the Security Council in terms of the adoption of resolution 678, and I'm not going into the question of whether or not the Council lost control of the conduct of the war, and I'm not going into the question of whether or not states in the Council were given an opportunity to express their views: those are all separate subjects. I'm simply going into the question of whether or not Saddam Hussein could have been dealt with another way. And there sadly, sadly, it came to the fact, it came to the point, it

came to the melancholy conclusion that he didn't listen to the people who went to him, as friends, as advisors. He wouldn't listen to threats, he wouldn't listen to blandishments, he wouldn't listen to friends, he wouldn't listen to anybody.

JK: Was the Secretary-General extremely frustrated during this period?

VD: Well, you see, Pérez de Cuéllar never liked to admit to either discouragement or frustration. In fact, that was one of the most moving things about Pérez de Cuéllar. He constantly said to me, and he went through some very bad times: 1982 to 1986, were terrible years, years of great adversity for this Organization. They were above all a test of character, and Pérez de Cuéllar showed extraordinary character in those years. But, I remember in those dismal years, he often would say to me--tired, worn out, fatigued by the end of the day, assaulted by the problems that he faced, the financial crisis or this or that, he would say, "Of course, I do not have a right to be discouraged; I do not have a right to be discouraged." There, he used the word "right" very interestingly. He didn't have the privilege of discouragement. What you and I could feel, shout and scream, and tear our hair about, Pérez de Cuéllar could not do. Pérez de Cuéllar did not have the right to be discouraged.

JK: In the sense that he felt there was so much responsibility?

VD: Right--he could not give way to discouragement. He could not afford to be aggrieved. He could not yield in his resolve.

JK: Right--because the morale of the institution would depend on his morale?

VD: Yes, yes. And his perseverance was required despite any apparent discouragement. He could not let others feel that he would be weakened by discouragement.

JK: That's a very important quality.

VD: It was a very important quality. And that's why I for one, after thirty-odd years in this organization, I am convinced that the attribute of the Secretary-General, above all, that's important, is the nature of the person, is the character of the person. Each Secretary-General's tenure is *nothing* in the final analysis if not an essay on the character of the incumbent. The decisions the person makes derive from the character of the person. The choices a person makes derive from the character of the person. The way in which you read the Charter and your own responsibilities under it, come from your sense of who you are. Pérez de Cuéllar defined himself, you see, as he served in this job, and with each year that he served it, his definition of himself grew clearer and clearer: his sense of responsibility became more and more apparent to those who worked with him and those who viewed him, and then suddenly, miraculously, toward the end of his tenure, this test of character prevailed and he was able to reap a rich harvest of fruit. But the fact of the matter was that he worked as assiduously before the fruit ripened, as he did it at the time when everyone was praising him for the fruit he was harvesting. And there would have been no harvest but for the perseverance in bad seasons.

JK: Well, he seems to have extraordinary concern for humanitarian issues.

VD: Yes, but again, a person is a totality. He certainly had an extraordinary capacity for understanding humanitarian concerns; he was that kind of person. In other words, he didn't suddenly bleed when he saw a child suffering, but he had in himself always a capacity to bleed. In other words, it was intrinsic; he didn't need the stimulus of the starving child to worry about the child who was starving. His actions would be informed in such a way that he would have in mind the starving child even if the issue was not about the starving child. The issue may be about aggression in Kuwait, but in Pérez de Cuéllar's mind, if it was the aggression in Kuwait then it would also be the fate of the civilian population. There would not be a dichotomy there.

JK: The frustration seems to be, from what you are saying though, that there was a kind of an inability to convey the reality of the situation to the Iraqi side.

VD: Well, I would say yes, that was so. But I think what you had over here was an inability to convey the reality to the Iraqi side, but you had a position of the Iraqis in which they were so entrenched that no matter what you tried it didn't seem to penetrate. And someday I might just want to write of this myself, but I am in no hurry. I have my own view about the nature of Saddam Hussein, and I don't want to intrude in your reflections on this matter so I shouldn't be too subjective about these things; but I've got my own sense of that kind of person, what goes wrong, what goes right, what goes

grievously wrong. We make our own judgments about people and why they are as they are. But even after returning from Baghdad, in order to catch the 15th January deadline, even after returning here when he reported to the Council, the Council was in a state about how to proceed - the French were saying one thing, the Americans were saying something else, the British were saying something else again, and the non-aligned were going their own way. The Council didn't quite know how to proceed. They tried to draft something and they failed to do so. The differences, even among friends, were too intense at that moment. They left it to Pérez de Cuéllar to see what he wanted. And then on that night, I think it was the 14th night, or perhaps the 15th, I forget now, he made a very impassioned appeal to Saddam Hussein...

VD: ...which I had a hand in writing, saying to Saddam Hussein, "If you would fall in line even now X, Y, and Z can follow. And the worst can be avoided, and there might yet be a solution with some dignity for everybody. But if you don't, then really God help us because--because something awful could transpire." Of course, that's exactly what happened.

JK: Now, when you met in January, in Baghdad, with the Secretary-General, were you in the meeting when he was speaking with Saddam?

VD: Oh yes, indeed. Yes.

JK: So, what transpired in those conversations? They met for a couple of hours, right?



VD: Yes, it was a long meeting, it was a long meeting. And there was a very full exposition of the situation by Saddam Hussein, of the Iraqi position. There was a very full exposition of the position of the United Nations by the Secretary-General. There was an exchange of views. Saddam Hussein then suggested some ideas, but these still did not add up to compliance, and that was it. And when the Secretary-General tried to probe him a little, he would sort of show a little, and then cover it up again. In other words, the message he gave back to the Secretary-General -- for all his protestations to the contrary afterwards about the clarity of his message -- was that it was an ambiguous message! And it's now all part of the record; you will have seen his notes on the meetings. The Iraqis put out their version, which was not wrong, except in certain instances it appeared Pérez de Cuéllar had been kinder to Saddam Hussein than he had been in terms of the exposition of the UN's position. The Secretary-General came back; we all traveled back, at top speed from Iraq, as far as Paris. Then he came along on the Concorde while the rest of us came along on a regular aircraft that got held up for hours at Paris airport, flight delays and so on. But anyway we worked on the report on the plane, and when we came into New York we drove straight, into the UN Headquarters, had the report typed up and shared it with him. And he went down to the Council that night and reported to its Members. And that report which he gave to the Council, in consultations, was the whole truth.

JK: Now, did Saddam seem to be nervous or tense?

VD: No, he wasn't at all nervous. He is a very composed person, extremely composed. He is extremely well mannered. He was solicitous in small things about the comfort of those there. He knew we had been traveling a long time. He was mindful of all of that. He was extremely polite and even to the point where he sensed that the room was getting too close and the air was getting too stifling; a window was opened, and then he felt that there may be a draft, so the curtains were drawn. In all these kinds of things, he was personally making sure everyone was comfortable. He was, as far as the Secretary-General was concerned, as far as we were concerned in that meeting--his manners were exactly what they should have been. It's another matter that, earlier in the day, the Secretary-General had to hang around for hours on end for this appointment with Saddam Hussein.



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JK: It kept getting put off and put off?

VD: Yes. And I don't think the Secretary-General was particularly amused, because he felt that Saddam Hussein, after all, should have received him first thing in the morning. But the Secretary-General did understand that Saddam Hussein was having a meeting of his cabinet, or his inner circle--the Revolutionary Command Council, or whatever it was called--in order to prepare for the discussions with the Secretary-General, and that's all right. Yasser Arafat was there, running around, and Daniel Ortega was there running around. So, the fact that the meeting wasn't held at 10:00 in the morning or even 1:00 in the afternoon, that didn't worry the Secretary-General. I think he found it a little silly that Saddam Hussein hadn't prepared sufficiently for our coming. But, of course, he

wasn't *offended* in the way the newspapers suddenly wrote that he was offended, because he hadn't been received until the afternoon. No, the Secretary-General was, I think, annoyed that Saddam Hussein hadn't given enough prior thought to the discussions that were going to be held. Again, what it meant was that the man hadn't realized how close we were to midnight.

JK: Yes! That's what I was going to ask you. Did all of this behavior point to the fact that he knew that or that he really did not understand that?

VD: I have never quite been able to fathom that. Either he didn't realize that we were one minute to midnight, or else he was resigned to midnight striking with all that it meant. Now, whether it was the latter or the former, I am not too clear in my mind. I have a terrible feeling that it might have been both--one part of his mind saying, "It's one minute to midnight;" the other part of his mind saying, "So what? Nothing is going to change anything. This thing is going to happen." In other words, there was something about Baghdad in the middle of January; there was something about Baghdad then, which was just all wrong. And that was it.

JK: So, was it sort of strangely eerie? I mean, people had left the city.

VD: Yes, most people had left the city. It was strangely eerie; there was hardly a vehicle, neither a dog nor a cat nor anything. It was just one kilometer away from the airport into town, to the guesthouse where the Secretary-General was staying. There was

hardly anybody around at all. It was strangely eerie. It was winter; there was a fog in the air, and it wasn't exactly a very bustling metropolis.

JK: So maybe there was a kind of resignation to what was going to happen.

VD: Yes, there was. I think there was this curious mixture of this, "nothing was going to happen" and the resignation, "what will happen?" You know, people can be ambivalent.

JK: Do you think he misunderstood his own strength in terms of military strength?

VD: I have another theory on that, but I'll keep that to myself.

JK: OK! That's fine.

VD: I have a very peculiar and complicated idea on the nature of that conflict, but my views are so subjective that I think it wouldn't really be germane to have in Don Javier's memoirs. My views on this are very personal, and I could be quite wrong, but I have my own sense of the peculiar schizophrenia in the air, and for that matter, about the nature of that war. And that's another matter altogether.

JK: Now, it happened unfortunately, or perhaps it was inevitable, that the Secretary-General's initiative had to apparently wait until after [James] Baker [Secretary of State] had spoken to Tariq Aziz.

VD: Yes, yes. Now here again, I don't know what the Secretary-General says about it himself, but I just felt awful that the Secretary-General was in a sense boxed in in his capacities: what to say, and for that matter even when to say it. It was quite clear to me, at any rate, that between the passage of 678, and, if my memory holds, through to the 9th of January, there was a kind of hypnotic dance between the United States and Iraq, a kind of mongoose and cobra act, in which they were fixated with each other, and nobody else was allowed to come into the scene. Neither by the one nor the other. Iraq wanted to talk about all that the United States really didn't want to talk about, intermediaries and all the rest of it. They knew that the shots, if they were to be called, would be called in Washington DC, and not by the European Community or somebody else. So there was this fixation in Baghdad to deal with Washington. And there was this kind of, I won't say this "equal and opposite" fixation in Washington to deal with Baghdad, but there certainly wasn't much encouragement to outsiders to come jumping in, for fear that the messages might get mixed, the signals might get confused, and so on and so forth. Then, from time to time, the European Community started making noises about how important they were, but they weren't exactly encouraged. So, until the Baker/Tariq Aziz talks, which ended we-all-know-where, the fields were closed, you see. Now, those talks finished on the 9th, and there wasn't a great deal of time left between then and the 15th.

JK: Sure--a few days!

VD: There were six days left. In those six days, Pérez de Cuéllar went on the third day to Baghdad, meeting Bush before he went from here, meeting the European Parliament

representatives in Geneva, on his way to Baghdad, and arriving in Baghdad from Amman.

JK: The purpose, then, of meeting with the “European twelve,” was what?

VD: It really was to make sure we’d all be talking in some coherent manner.

JK: Were you there at that meeting?

VD: Yes. It was very important that the people involved with the whole thing should be in reasonably good shape in terms of each other. You know, the Secretary-General was very keen that the messages he conveyed to Saddam Hussein would be authentic. He didn’t want there to be the slightest confusion about the nature of the messages. He made a point of seeing George Bush, and he had Bush’s words down pat, so that if Saddam Hussein were interested in hearing and knowing where he stood vis-à-vis the United States, he wouldn’t get one message from Baker in Geneva, one from Pérez de Cuéllar, a third from somebody else, and a fourth from somebody else. So, Pérez de Cuéllar who was extremely meticulous on this kind of thing, didn’t want there to be any area of confusion. The same with the Europeans. He wanted to make sure with them; he wanted to test out with them what he was going to say to Saddam. He wanted to make sure with them that he understood exactly where they stood, the European Community president and the rest of it. So that again there would be no light between his interpretation of what was their position and what he would express it as being. He wanted Saddam Hussein to

know that he came not just, so to speak, “solo,” but he came on behalf of the nations of the world, large and small, great and little, the most powerful and the least powerful; he came on behalf of the nations of the world! So, he was able to say to him, “Look, I’ve come here as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I’ve come here as someone who is not an enemy of your country but one who wishes you well. I’ve come with the endorsement and the blessing of everybody, and what I’m going to tell you derives from my conversations with all of them. So will you please listen?”

JK: ... So it would be much more effective.

VD: That was the point. And he made this explicit when he met Saddam Hussein. He told him who all he had met.

JK: Now, he met with Mitterand, briefly, shortly before he went to Geneva?

VD: Yes.

JK: The night before.

VD: No--in the morning, the same morning. That was an awful mess. We had traveled from here overnight; I mean it was hideously tiring.

JK: Yes. The night of the 10th, I think you left.

VD: Yes. It was awful. We got to Paris in the early hours, and from the airport he went straight off to the Elysée Palace.

JK: The incredible stamina that's required of this kind of work. It's unbelievable.

VD: Oh yes, indeed. Indeed. He saw Mitterand early in the morning in Paris; he went straight to the Elysée Palace. He went solo to meet Mitterand... The rest of us went to the Quay d'Orsay, we waited for him there. Then, we went from there straight off to Geneva, a short hop. Thank God the French gave us a plane or somebody gave us a plane. And then, met with the "twelve," barely had time to shower and change, and off we went on the long road to Amman.

JK: Now, as I understand it, the French were more willing to give Pérez de Cuéllar a free hand, somewhat, in negotiating with Saddam Hussein. Is that correct?

Dayal: Well, you know, I forget now. I'd really have to look back at notes from the time. The five appeared to be monolithic, but no two countries have identical views. There are always nuances that are different. But a free hand is not the right term to use, in relation to resolutions that are adopted under Chapter VII.

JK: OK.



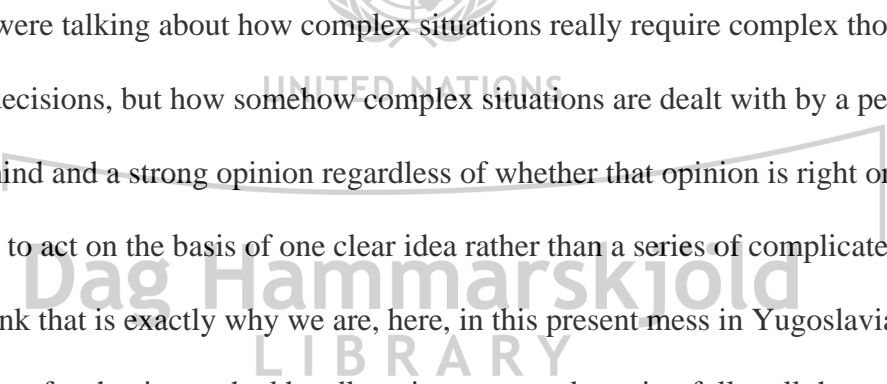
VD: But yes, the French have always, with Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, have always, what should I say, the French had a very special relationship with Pérez de Cuéllar. Well, I won't say he was one of them, but they had a sort of very special relationship with him. They trusted his judgment immensely.

JK: Well, he speaks French fluently, because he was ambassador to France.

Dayal: Of course, but you know, they just had this very particular kind of feeling for each other.

[End of Tape 1, side B]

[Tape 2, side A]



VD: We were talking about how complex situations really require complex thought and complex decisions, but how somehow complex situations are dealt with by a person with a strong mind and a strong opinion regardless of whether that opinion is right or wrong. It is easier to act on the basis of one clear idea rather than a series of complicated ideas. Now, I think that is exactly why we are, here, in this present mess in Yugoslavia. It is a typical case of us having rushed headlong into a mess, knowing full-well that we would end up in a mess, because of the determination of certain countries to go ahead with the premature recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. Don Javier never said that we shouldn't recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, but he made a point of saying, in a Council document, in a report, and, in a letter to the European Community, that if we proceed without wrapping up the whole package on Yugoslavia, with independence of Slovenia and Croatia, then we will have a bloodbath in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He has said this in writing in December, in a report to the Council and a letter to the Presidency of the

European Community, and he was overruled by Mr. Genscher who got the European Community to act in a precipitous way on the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. It's not that Mr. Genscher was wrong. Mr. Genscher was absolutely right in saying the Serbs are going too far, and so on and so forth, and saying Slovenia and Croatia should be recognized and granted independence. There is no problem with that. But, the way in which it happened, was inevitably going to lead to a first-rate bloodbath in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had the honesty to say so publicly and openly, and to say this as part of his preventative diplomacy, in December.

JK: But, it wouldn't necessarily be a popular position.

VD: It was not a popular position to take, but do you see what has happened? And do you see what has happened in that case in terms of the Secretary-General's preventative diplomacy? It was set aside by people who knew in their hearts he would probably be right, but they had their own political compulsions, which added up to "let's proceed," for all kinds of reasons, which had more to do with the nature of their own compulsions than with the nature of how to deal with this very complex problem of Yugoslavia.

JK: Which really needed a solution.

VD: And I really think that when you are writing up this last phase in the Secretary-General's tenure, and you look at the Yugoslavia thing, I would urge you to look again at that Council document. I'd look at the letter that he sent to--it was then at that point still

Hans Van Den Broek - though I forget who was Chairman of the European Community-- asking the Chairman of the European Community to bring this letter to the attention of the members of the European Community, cautioning them--not opposing the independence or the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia--but cautioning them that if this is done in a precipitous way, in a manner before the whole package on Yugoslavia is thought through, there is going to be blood on the streets, and that that tragedy is going to strike in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Have a look at it. Now we are sitting here at the end of May, more thousands of people dead. People say, "Why doesn't the Secretary-General exercise preventative diplomacy?" And when he does? Do the most powerful listen, if they have another agenda?



JK: If they have another agenda, no they don't.

VD: That is the question and the answer. Now, again, I am being brutally honest, but I think that the facts of the past months speak for themselves. Especially if they are set against what Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had the honesty to say, and the courage to say, in December. Everyone was astonished that the Secretary-General had, as it were, taken on an entire group of nations, but he was still telling them before they had taken the formal decision as a totality, as the twelve, to just think carefully about this. And in this, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was fully of the same view as Cyrus Vance, another person who was involved in this. But Cy Vance, who also has a great mind for the complexity of situations, and not driven by an agenda of his own, could see what was going to happen. Cy Vance cautioned Don Javier on what would happen, and the Secretary-General

completely agreed with Cy Vance's analysis. And the two of them went out, jointly, on this matter, and the Secretary-General went on record, publicly, on it.

JK: Yes. I think that's a very important point, and I will try to get those documents.

VD: Have a look at it, Jean, because it speaks volumes.

JK: Sure. I wanted to ask you about a couple of issues, but now going back a few years to the Iran-Iraq conflict, and the war had been going on for years and years, and a solution was not forthcoming. In January of 1987, the Secretary-General, Pérez de Cuéllar, had a press conference. It was, I believe January 14th, and in that press conference he suggested that the five permanent members of the Security Council meet at the foreign minister level to try to come together with some kind of a solution to the Iran-Iraq conflict. What I'd like to ask you is: this particular initiative, to bring the five together, and also at a particularly high level--how did this idea form? Was this press conference the first time it had come out, or had this been discussed before that?

VD: Now, my memory on this may not be as good as it should be, but I think the idea grew in the Secretary-General's mind as the only way of dealing with this. You see, as I recall it, he felt increasingly, should I say, sorrowful, really, about the serious war which seemed to have no end. It was already many years since it had started, and it was acquiring all the characteristics of greater and greater savagery and slaughter, the death of innocents, the death of children, by the hundreds of thousands, the use of chemical

weapons. This war was taking on a quality that was, let's just say, far above and beyond the constraints, even of dignified battle. Every convention was being violated--the laws of war--in what was going on. The thing was weighing extremely heavily on the conscience of the Secretary-General. If you read the minutes of his meetings--in the months preceding that January press conference--of his meetings with various interlocutors who came to see him, you would probably have found him saying more than once that this was weighing on him, and weighing on him like a ton of lead, you know. He was really wondering what on earth to do, because it was quite obvious that the way in which the Council had been going--it had already passed a number of resolutions--was not adding up to anything. There were some times the Council would tilt this way; some times it would tilt a little that way, but mostly it would tilt in one way. And we saw what was happening. Nothing was coming of it.

Now, the Secretary-General had all along felt, and this was since 1982, since his very first year--he had felt very deeply that the motor for this sort of action, has to be the Security Council, and that the motor of the Security Council has to be a commonality in some manner or form amongst the permanent members. Otherwise you are forever stuck.

JK: Yes.

VD: In the earlier part of the 1980s, this was the position. 1982 was a brutal year; there was the Lebanon war and you saw what happened: death and destruction, and the Council incapable, really, after a while, of doing anything. So the Secretary-General was, what shall I say--he felt really aggrieved by the incapacity of the Council to bring things under

control. In his first annual report, he made this the sole point of his annual report! And the next day he said, “Look, isn’t it time we at least focused on just one or two questions, to resolve them?” So, you see, the thing was building in his mind. In the meantime, also, the Secretary-General was increasingly feeling that he has got to try to get the five together. He had been trying to draw them into these lunches with him, but the first year, there was no such lunch; the second year, there was no such lunch. But gradually he was creating a situation in which it would be possible to get the five together. And, I think from his point of view, the circumstances began to change in 1985, when Gorbachev came in.



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JK: Yes, when Gorbachev came in.

VD: He developed new--what should I say?--new encouragement, he got from that. And he decided to press ahead, saying, “Maybe now the time has come.” It was logical, in such an evolution of his thought and his ideas that he should say to them, “Look, look, for heaven’s sake, let’s get on with it.” And when in his press conference, he threw down the gauntlet at the five, and said, “I challenge you to do something,” it wasn’t as if the thing was an idea out of the blue. That is, it was the way in which his mind was evolving. And I wouldn’t be surprised if he hadn’t already been saying privately to them--if I would look back to the notes of the period, [I wouldn’t be surprised] if the idea had been coming up in one way or the other earlier--not specifically in relation to the Iran-Iraq war, but [Pérez de Cuéllar] saying, “Look, for heaven’s sake, why can’t we get going?!” I do remember that that winter, when he came back after his Christmas holidays, and we

discussed how to proceed on this, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar said, “The time has come, now, to publicly hold the five, I would say, loosely responsible, to hold the five to a standard of expectation that has to be very special in this circumstance. This has gone on too long and it is time for all of us to pull up our socks and get on with something.” He said to them, “Do this and I’ll work with you.”

JK: So, it was evolving to the point where he wanted to hold the five responsible?

VD: Well, I think he...



JK:...And to focus on some particular issues?

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VD: Well, I think he wanted the mechanisms of the Charter to get a move on. And there could be no movement on the lines of the Charter unless the five were at least, if not of one mind, at least they wouldn’t cancel each other out. We mustn’t forget how deeply some of the five were involved in the Iran-Iraq war. I’m not saying this in criticism of them, but we have to be honest: the five were very heavily involved in their various ways, in arms supplies. And we all know that while the tilting was going on; we all knew who was tilting in whose direction. It was going on and on, year after year.

JK: With a certain view of what was going on that people preferred to have.

VD: That's right. That's right. In other words, it was quite evident to Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar that this thing was not going to be brought to heel unless the energies of the five were engaged in working together at a level and with a seriousness that had not until then been possible, not only on this issue but on any issue.

JK: Now, I wanted to try to clear up a point, because soon after this press conference in January, the new President of the Security Council was the British, and it has been explained to me by some sources that it was the President of the Security Council, the British, who had initiated this idea of bringing the five together for a lunch and focusing on this issue.



VD: That was probably moderately fanciful, because the normal thing is that when there is a Presidency, there is a lunch; the president gives a lunch. It just so happens that the Secretary-General's announcement was just before the lunch. Since he had, as it were, challenged the five to get on with the job before the lunch, it's not unexpected that at the lunch the matter should come up. I'm glad that it was under the roof of the British ambassador, and I'm glad that he considers himself the author of the idea. It was a good idea; it worked, and it's not the first time in history that a good idea has many fathers, and one which doesn't, isn't really going to work.

JK: And when it's coming of age, then...?



VD: There are plenty of claims to patrimony if the child is a genius, and not so many if it isn't. That is where we are.

JK: Right. So, at that time, the significant point of all of that was that the five were able to come together?

VD: That was the significant point. And, for that, there were many reasons. There was a change in Moscow, but there is also the manner in which the Secretary-General had been assiduously cultivating the five with a view to them getting on to working together. This is where my view of Pérez de Cuéllar as a good farmer really comes in again. Because in bad seasons he made sure that the house wouldn't collapse, and he measured his plot, so to speak; he measured his territory; he looked after it. So that when the opportunity came, it was in a position to assume the responsibility that was necessary for it to assume. Through the lean years, he made sure that a kind of a reasonable level of cooperation continued in spite of everything, that a reasonable level of civility continued in spite of everything, that people's minds should be focused on the day when they could work together, and that in the long run that it was necessary for them to work together. He never ceased to remind them. So that he was fortunate because this was also the wish, in some subliminal way, of the five: to be able to get over their problems, but by the time that January came, there had been sufficient change in the international scene for this to be made a test-case of whether the five could work together.

JK: Now the other part of this that I'd like to get some background on is, as you were saying, that there had been a definite bias or slant on this issue. And it seems, from going through reading the documents, that Pérez de Cuéllar was able to keep a more neutral position in this in terms of being a good mediator, when one has to at least have the appearance of impartiality.

VD: Well, this was the essence of Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar. This was the miraculous thing about his tenure as Secretary-General: he always was perceived as being, as it were, impartial between combatants. It's not that he didn't know who was doing right and who was doing wrong; it's not that he didn't know that one was being less tractable than the other, but as between them, he was prepared to listen and listen again and listen again, and yet again. So that even if one was more deserving of support than the other, neither of them felt that he would tilt on the side of one or the other. This was the extraordinary thing about the way in which he functioned. And more than once, those working with him were perceived as tilting this way or that, and then the parties would say, "Look, you know, we feel comfortable with you;" and they were comfortable with the Secretary-General if they felt that one of his so-to-speak agents or representatives was being perceived as having gone this way or that.

JK: And there was a remarkable way in which he maintained that sense of impartiality.

VD: It was remarkable.

JK: ...In light of the atrocities that were taking place.

VD: That's right. But you see at the same time, Jean, he had to pay a price for it. One of the great tragedies of the Iran-Iraq war was the use of chemical weapons. And, what happened during that war was that the Council, with all due respect to it, did not have the courage to come out frontally against the use of chemical weapons, itself. It invariably expected that the Secretary-General would take the initiative to send a team to investigate the use of chemical weapons.



JK: Which he did.

VD: When he would report back to the Council they would say some things, "tut-tut," about the use of chemical weapons. They would remonstrate against the use of chemical weapons; they would complain; they would say "condemn it!"--all this. But they never grasped the nettle themselves. Now, we were talking about the price that Don Javier had to pay. My own feeling is that the Iraqis developed a resentment of that, which was very deep, and after January 1991 broke, the Iraqis were exceedingly bitter in their attacks on Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, exceedingly bitter. It wasn't just a question of the 17th of January war, and the coalition's action against Iraq; it wasn't just resolution 678 and all of its aftermath. But in the Iraqi attacks on Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, there was the evocation of the idea that he had not been impartial *ever* in dealings with Iraq, that he'd been responsible of the perpetuation and the continuation of the Iran-Iraq war, when it could have ended earlier. It is there, if you read...

JK: That was their view?

VD: I'm not saying it's their view, but you read attacks against Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar after the 17th of January, 1991, in the Iraqi press and by Iraqi spokesmen; it was an extremely painful set of attacks. The resentment against Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar was that they were at war with the coalition; there was nothing they could do about the coalition. The coalition was bombing their brains out. But they had to attack someone, and they chose to attack Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar very, very harshly; and to my mind, he was the wrong target. But that's another matter. There remained in the Iraqi mind, in the leadership of the Iraqis, a bitter resentment about the way in which the Iran-Iraq war ended in this inconclusive manner. They felt cheated of the victory in the Iran-Iraq war, somehow, and in the pursuit of that victory was the use of chemical weapons, but somehow or the other that didn't happen. The war ended up in a no-win, no-loss situation. UN troops arrived there, resolution 598 and others, and there was nothing... and the whole thing was awful. In other words, the inconclusive quality of the Iran-Iraq war was, I think, one reason why Saddam Hussein tried his luck to get around the Shatt-al-Arab by going into Kuwait. But the problem was that the Iraqis nursed resentment against the Secretary-General, and I think it went back to the fact that it was he who every time had to point the finger, through his reports, about the use of chemical weapons. And even though some of his reports were not explicit that they had used chemical weapons, and sometimes his reports said it was uncertain who had used them first or who had used them, there was no doubt in one of the reports who had used them.

JK: It's pretty hard to cover up the fact!

VD: It's pretty hard to cover, and yet the truth had to be stated.

JK: The truth had to be stated. If you're doing an investigation, you have to state the truth.

VD: The truth had to be stated. And the conclusions were drawn, and so I think if we talk about the impartiality of the Secretary-General--sometimes even that impartiality, let's just say, had its own difficulties for him.

JK: It had its difficulties. But, what I wanted to say about reading through the reports, though, is that there was not finger-pointing, as such.

VD: Oh! He was scrupulous.

JK: He was very careful, very, very careful.

VD: He was extremely careful.

JK: But, then, in terms of the Iran point of view, one had to bring Iran on board in order to get a resolution, or some kind of solution.

VD: But that's what he did.

JK: And because he was willing to do these investigations, when Iran would complain that this is going on, they developed a kind of trust in him that enabled them later to have some faith in the Organization.

VD: That is right. That is right. But now the interesting thing is this, when we look at that, the Secretary-General, to the best of my recollection, would not say that he was making an investigation because Iran wants him to make them. There was a certain irony there, because when Iran would make allegations about the use of chemical weapons by Iraq, the Iraqis would do the same.



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JK: ...Would do the same. The letters were constant from the beginning.

VD: The areas where they were used, the areas of conflict, with fighting going on. But Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, again if my memory holds, took the position more than once that he was making the investigations because he had a responsibility under the Charter, a humanitarian responsibility under the Charter, quite apart from any other, and therefore he, as it were, took the burden of the responsibility on his own shoulders. This was an immense relief to the Council...

JK: Exactly. Right.

VD: ... Which was looking to him to assume this role, knowing that criticisms were to be launched, that he would be the recipient of them.

JK: Just to go a step further, with this particular issue, though--I think there is a relationship with this and other events in Iran-Iraq and the release of the hostages, in that the relationships that he had been able to cultivate, as I understand, during these negotiations, then later on were helpful.

VD: Yes, I'm sure of it. I'm sure of it. Certainly, certainly. Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had the, I won't say the "foresight," but again because he had a very impartial mind, he was prepared to deal with everybody. He was prepared to see every person's, every country's problems. He was prepared to put himself in their shoes, however unpleasant their shoes might be. However tortured their reasoning might be, he was able to put himself into the minds of people. Because he had this capacity, he was viewed not as an adversary of theirs, on more than one occasion he was even viewed as a friend of theirs, by a variety of people, even people who were deadly opposed to each other.

VD: The reasoning might be that he was able to put himself in the minds of people. And, because he had this capacity, he was viewed not as an adversary of theirs, on more than one occasion he was even viewed as a friend of theirs, by a variety of people, even people who were deadly opposed to each other.

JK: ...By an incredible variety of people.

VD: He was the interlocutor between them. But still, you know, mercifully, he was able to maintain this position of impartiality. This was really his strength.

JK: And its interesting how you can even see this in the documents, because as his staff were requested to prepare notes, the detail with which the issues were covered before every meeting... He took everything very seriously and wanted to do his homework.

VD: But you see, it was more than doing his homework, because in the final analysis, Jean, this question of being trusted, it is one of those intangible things. Some people convey a feeling that you can trust them, and others don't. You can read all the books you want, and you can read as many briefs as you want; you can be given as many briefs as human beings can produce for you, but in the final analysis it is a question of whether you as a person are considered worthy of trust. That's the kind of intangible. It's utterly intangible.

JK: Important point.

VD: Cy Vance has that quality. Cy Vance, in the Yugoslavia imbroglio, when he was helping Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, had that quality. I wish I could say this for all of those who worked for this Organization; I wish I could say this for all of those who are involved in international affairs--but that isn't necessarily so! In fact, it's more the exception than the rule. Diplomatic history is littered with instances of mediators or purported mediators or



purported keepers of good-offices missions who ended up *persona non grata* with one or the other party in a dispute. In fact, it is more likely than not. It's not necessarily that they are bad, or they aren't intelligent, or they haven't done their work well; it's just that sometimes people in a situation of conflict are excessively critical of those who try to help them. I mean, it's almost as if when you try and help people in a situation of war, they are likely to both turn on you!

JK: Well, they are fearful. They don't want to be judged and prejudged.

VD: They are fearful. That's the thing. That's the thing. And Don Javier, thank heavens, has the strange quality, a rare quality, of being able to continue a conversation with parties who resent each other bitterly.

JK: It's incredible.

VD: It was an admirable quality.

JK: Meeting with them day after day, or even several times during a day.

VD: He very often said to me...

[End of Tape 2, side A]

[Tape 2, side B]

VD: ... Let's continue on the same subject. The Secretary-General was very, very quick in perceiving when one of his staff was tilting this way or that. He had extremely sensitive antennae for that.

JK: And in a situation like that, how would he handle it?

VD: Well, what he would do is, he would, as it were, rehearse the conversation to himself for a while, while the dust was allowed to settle. The files of the Office of the Secretary-General are full of interlocutors or people involved, if not directly then indirectly, saying, "Secretary-General, this time you've got to get into this personally." It happened time and time again, on almost every issue. On almost every issue, at some stage, the parties to the dispute, or those directly involved, or those supportive of one side or the other, said to the Secretary-General, either orally in his room, or even in letters, "We would like you to get personally involved in this." Now, that is a soft way of saying, "We are having problems with your official who is handling this matter. We are not prepared to say he is *persona non grata*, but could you please just take this in hand for a while?" And you will find that over and over again in the files of this period. There what the Secretary-General did was two things: he didn't junk the people who were working for him, but he by his personal intervention at critical moments brought the thing back on track. He supported those who were working for him; he gave them the cover of his own personality when they needed it. When there were sort of half-muted complaints or half-muted concerns, about whether one or the other of them was tilting, he would just lift the thing to himself for a while.

JK: Then would he discuss that with them?

VD: He would either discuss it or he would hint it, or he would imply it, or he would handle it differently.

JK: And he would just handle it differently?

VD: He would handle it differently, put everything back on track, and the train would start running again. But this happened--and I won't mention names and I won't mention instances--but this happened time and time again on almost every issue.

JK: That's a very interesting style of handling that kind of situation. Because other people might just get rid of the person, but then you would have to bring in someone else, re-educate them.

VD: Yes. This was the whole issue. This was the whole thing. This is why in Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar's period, you didn't have a string of UN people being changed. It was an extraordinary situation, that in the inner circle of Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, in the ten years of his two terms, we had no major changes, except when people left for other reasons. But Don Javier didn't kick people out.

JK: You see the same names of people handling particular issues over and over and over again.

VD: But also what happened was that was his way of functioning. If he gave you his trust, then he sort of then expected it reciprocally that you would function in a way that would be sensible. If you got slightly bizarre, then he would lift the thing through himself for a while, so the person dealing with the question would understand, "I'd better shape up; it's quite obvious that the Secretary-General is having to do this himself and there's a reason for it." And the parties would be approaching the Secretary-General excessively--the staff member dealing with it would realize "how come?" They would begin to see what he was doing to bring the mission back onto track.

JK: So, it's a great leadership quality.

VD: Well, I would say it was a very refined leadership quality. Leaders have different ways of doing things: some hire and fire; some keep changing; some... But this was his particular way, you see. It was very much a kind of a patriarchal way of doing things, in the sense that it was the head of the family's way of doing things.

JK: But if you have that trust, and those expectations that the people will perform at a certain level, then you almost have to live up to that.

VD: But this is the thing: just as you don't excommunicate a son or a daughter of yours, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar didn't excommunicate staff members. When the need arose, he just took the thing himself and ran it under his own auspices, and then we would see the thing would be moving again in the manner accustomed.

JK: It's really an interesting, and I think a very admirable, means by which to deal with that sort of problem.

VD: But I must say that he has his critics because he didn't shake up this place all the time. And yet, let's face it, I mean, after the Group of 18 report he shook up this place more than any Secretary-General ever has. The changes that were made in the post-Group of 18 period, in terms of staff reductions, top echelon changes, and all. It was not an easy affair, and there was a great deal of it done. But his manner was not to use a bludgeon on people.

JK: Yes, he was sensitive.

VD: He was very sensitive to the feelings of people. And, on that I can speak with some authority because I did work with him all these years, in fair proximity. Sometimes I would say to him, "Secretary-General we have gotten an awful personnel problem, that X or Y is behaving terribly, and the way in which he is carrying on is bad for you, bad for the Organization, and bad for the whole situation." And he would just sort of say "Yes, yes, I know what you are saying." But his way of dealing with it, would be his own.

JK: Now, the other issue that I wanted to talk to you about, and this is a completely different issue, is the transition in the five permanent members of the Security Council from the Soviet Union holding that position, to Russia holding that position as a permanent member of the five, on the Security Council. How did that evolve? What were the controversies as far as that was concerned? Was it totally accepted by the others?

VD: Well, the way it was handled precluded the possibility of controversy. I think that amongst the five, there had been a lot of private consultations, leading up to the letter from Yeltsin on Christmas Eve. So that the ground had been prepared amongst the permanent members as to the way in which the succession should take place. Even the letters that were written by the Soviet President, in his last act as the Soviet President, were, so to speak--the wording had been the subject of prior discussions, so that it would not pose a kind of a huge controversy on the night before Christmas in New York. Now, that night the Secretary-General was not in; he was at home on Christmas Eve, and he phoned me from Sutton Place to say that he had had a call from Yuli Vorontsov and he would be getting in touch with me.

JK: He got a call from whom?

VD: From Yuli Vorontsov. [He said] "... And that he would be getting in touch with you, and please, it's on this subject." So, soon after Vorontsov called me and said that he

wanted to see me and that he had been told by Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar that while Pérez de Cuéllar couldn't come in, because I think he had the flu or something that day.

Vorontsov said that Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar told him that, "If I see you, it is as if I have seen him, and that I could tell Moscow that the letter has been given to the Secretary-General."

So, Vorontsov came, and he brought this letter from Yeltsin, which was the last letter that Yeltsin produced as the president of the Soviet Union, more or less, and certainly the last letter that Vorontsov delivered to anybody as the ambassador, the permanent

representative of the Soviet Union. But when he brought the letter, he also brought the

flag of the Russian Federation, and he gave it to me--I had asked Carl Fleischhauer to join me for the meeting--he gave it to me in a meeting that will resonate in my mind

because there was about it, of course, truly a sense of history. There was a sense of

history about it. And Mr. Vorontsov, after he came with the letter, said to me with deep

emotion, "Now, Mr. Dayal, this is my last act as the Soviet Ambassador". I couldn't help

observing to Mr. Vorontsov at that time that countries change their names, but the people

of countries, and the families of countries, continue, and that the Vorontsovs had done

great service in Moscow long before the Soviet Union was ever created. It is, after all, a

family that has, for many generations, served Russia, so I said to Mr. Vorontsov that "I

am sure that will continue to be the case in the future". Yuli Vorontsov was, I think,

quite touched by this observation, because the drama of the moment obviously hadn't

escaped him.

JK: Of course.

VD: But that in essence was it.

JK: But it was symbolized also by bringing the flag.

VD: Well, it was symbolized also by the bringing of the flag. That night, I prepared for the Secretary-General a letter to the President of the Security Council who, ironically, was Yuli Vorontsov, and a letter to the President of the General Assembly, indicating what had transpired, and I prepared a telegram from the Secretary-General to all executive heads of agencies and programs, to inform them, so that the transition could be without confusion. The Secretary-General was kind enough to agree to the text. We sent the letters home and he signed them at home, and we had them all dispatched before Christmas Eve turned to Christmas Day. When the office opened on the day after Christmas, the new flag was put on the mast without a ceremony because it wasn't a new member-state.

JK: That's right, yeah.

VD: Now, in other words, the confusion that could have resulted from one hell of a battle about the Charter, that the Soviet Union was mentioned and not Russia, and all the rest of it--it was avoided.

JK: Yes. So, amongst the other members, the other four remaining permanent members of the Security Council, there was no objection to that?



VD: No. There wasn't. And I have reason to believe that the matter had been discussed quite carefully between them.

JK: What about the other republics of the Soviet Union?

VD: Well, you must remember that they had already agreed more or less, or either they agreed before or they agreed soon after that in this matter that the whole thing had been sorted out. They had been having their meetings, variously in Minsk, and in the other capitals and so forth. So that this matter had been sorted out over there.

JK: Oh, OK. So there wasn't really any talk about having some kind of rotation?

VD: No, no. If there was such discussion in what was the Soviet Union at some stage, I don't know, but I do not believe it happened.

JK: That did not become an issue, then?

VD: It did not. It did not become an issue. What could have become an issue, though, was to raise the whole question, as it were, from scratch as to the composition of the Security Council, but I don't think the world was ready for that at the time. For one thing, it was Christmas Eve, and it was supposed to be the season of peace. Also, there was the question that the UN was so deeply engaged in so many serious undertakings at

the time, that--I won't say the frivolity, but the added burden of confusion, and a mad discussion at that moment of the composition of the Council and the permanent members and all the rest of it--would have thrown the whole Organization into a kind of a whirlwind, from which it would never have been able to come out in a hurry. The fact of the matter is, that the review of the membership of the Council is going to be an increasing issue, but again it has to be settled; it has to be discussed in a rational way, on the basis of thought, of papers, of ideas, and not just a pressure that "at this moment, this has to be done!" It is too serious a matter.

We were talking earlier about will, and the pushing of one's will. Well, in the case of the Security Council, this is one issue which should not just be solved by the pressure of one country's or two countries' will. In other words, in this one, it will be very important for the Organization that the review of the Charter and the membership of the Council be thought through carefully.

JK: Because it goes back to the Charter itself...?

VD: Yes. That this should be done with utmost thought, with utmost care. My own feeling is that it is necessary to review the membership of the Security Council; that is just my personal feeling. But the way in which the Council membership is reviewed, and the rules of permanent members and the number and so on and so forth--that process has to be one of great profundity.

JK: It is a complicated issue. Well, I thank you very, very much. This was very enlightening, and I appreciate your going into the details of the issues in this manner. It is very helpful. Thank you.



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Virendra Dayal

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

31 March 1992

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