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Yale-UN Oral History Interview

Ewen Buchanan
July 18, 2001
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
New York City, New York

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Interviewer: Jean Krasno

Jean Krasno: This is an interview with Ewen Buchanan who is the Public Information Officer with UNMOVIC, at the moment and we are at United Nations headquarters in New York. To begin with, could you explain when you began work at the UN and when you began working with UNSCOM, because you were with UNSCOM prior to UNMOVIC?

Ewen Buchanan: Yes, I joined UNSCOM in September 1995. I was with it till the end when it was dissolved in December 1999. Since that time, I have been with UNMOVIC.

JK: Were you with the UN prior to coming to UNSCOM?

EB: No, like most of the people, I was provided by a supporting government. I had been previously working in the British Foreign Office and in fact in the Embassy in Washington. I had quit that and had done a couple of other things. In my case, UNSCOM was looking to replace a person called Tim Trevan and the British Foreign Office were asked by UNSCOM if they could find somebody. It just happened that a colleague that was working in the Foreign Office at the time said to me, "By the way, we've been asked to provide somebody to UNSCOM; would you like to take the job and we'll pay you for it?" So, although, technically I did not belong to the Foreign Service at that point, I was provided by them and paid for by them for my time with UNSCOM.

JK: That leads me right into my first question. I think it is important to clarify the financing of UNSCOM and as you mentioned, your salary was covered by your government. Were any salaries or expenses paid by the UN itself, by the UN member dues?

EB: The original idea was to make UNSCOM funded by voluntary contributions, whether that would be in actual cash, which we did get from a number of countries, certainly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. We had money from the Brits; we had money from the Japanese, the Americans. In addition to money, we were looking for physical help, whether it be with equipment; the French provided us with protective suits, gas masks, equipment. The British provided computers; the Americans gave us laboratory equipment; the Germans provided helicopter support. We were looking for cash, equipment, and people. And all of those were financed by the governments that provided those things. The only thing that was paid out of UN funds was the support staff. So, the professional staff were provided by governments and paid by those governments whereas the support staff, the accounts people, our travel clerks, our secretaries were on the UN payroll.

JK: That is a good clarification.

EB: The only thing that the inspectors were provided with was a per diem payment by the UN to cover the costs of accommodations, basically. If you were an inspector going into Iraq, you would still be expected to be paid by the British army or whoever it was that sent you, but you would get, depending on the exchange rates, about $100 a day to cover local costs such as the hotels where people stayed in Iraq. That was a cost to the UN.

JK: Out of what is paid by Member States dues?

EB: No, it was more complicated than that. Resolution 778 (1992) asked for funds to be transferred from frozen Iraqi assets which governments held. The United States provided roughly 200 million dollars. There was a ceiling set by the resolution that no one country could contribute more than half of an overall total of $400 million. The Americans provided $200 million, of which we got roughly $60 million. We used that money to pay the electricity bill, all the airfares of people traveling to Iraq, the cost of the building here; we have to pay rent, the support staff salaries, all these sort of things. We were financed out of frozen Iraqi assets transferred by governments, in this case from the United States to the UN. That money then ran out after about 3 or 4 years. Then we lived on voluntary contributions, mainly cash money given to us by and large by the Gulf States plus small amounts from other governments.

JK: Then later on the "oil for food."

EB: Yes, by Resolution 986, which was adopted in 1995 but not actually implemented until 1996. There was a complicated formula, but it allocated moneys to various UN operations and UNSCOM received 0.8 percent of the oil moneys which the UN was in charge of [Received from the sale of Iraqi oil].

JK: So, 0.8 percent of the "oil for food" moneys.

EB: The original deal was around 2 billion dollars of Iraqi oil exports every six months. And our approximate cash operating costs were something in the order of 15 to 16 million dollars each six months. That was how we came out with the 0.8 percent. It changed over the years as the Council has adjusted the amount of oil that Iraq was allowed to sell. But it has not adjusted the figures as to who gets what. So, in fact UNSCOM started to take in a lot more money than we were spending.

JK: Because it was still a percentage, not a fixed number.

EB: Yes, but fundraising was a problem in the early years. Ekéus, the first UNSCOM chairman, often complained that he was told when he took the job that he would just have to run the organization. But he spent a lot of his time trying to raise money.

JK: In our interview with Ekéus, he talks about that frustration of having to raise the money. You mentioned that you actually had to pay rent for the office space.

EB: Maybe rent isn't the right word. It was the common services of the building, whether it be the cleaning service, the lights, etc. It is something like 13% of your budget, I think; we paid to the UN for use of the premises.

JK: Like overhead.

EB: Yes, not really rent.

JK: The Intelligence Analysis Unit was started fairly early within UNSCOM. But when was the Concealment Unit started?

EB: I think I should correct you because the IAU was the Information Assessment Unit. Intelligence always has difficult overtones, so we always talk about information rather than intelligence. Intelligence always implies some sort of illegitimate gathering of information as opposed to information, which we have the perfect right to gather, whether it is from Iraq's declarations or from governments, or whatever.

The Information Assessment Unit was set up fairly early on before I arrived, so I wouldn't know the exact date, in 1992, probably. Concealment basically became an issue with the defection of Hussein Kamal, the son-in-law of Saddam Hussein and mastermind of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program. When it was quite clear that the Iraqis had a fairly good, systematic organization, or group of people, who were involved in hiding stuff from us. It was clear to the Executive Chairman at the time in 1995 that if we wanted to get any more out of Iraq, we had to crack that concealment mechanism to get to the heart of what they were still concealing. So, it was probably towards the end of 1995 or early 1996, as best I can remember.

JK: Scott Ritter talked about something called CSIC.

EB: CSIC, yes, the group had a variety of names throughout its life. At one point it was concealment. Capable Sites and Concealment Unit, CSCU. I can find out what CSIC stood for.

JK: So, that CSIC is a slightly different thing than the Concealment Unit?

EB: No, it was part of the same thing. We had three or four disciplines, depending on how you look at it: the nuclear, chemical/biological, and missile. Whereas the "capable site" and concealment, they were supposed to have an overall view of all the disciplines, depending on where the capable sites were. This initiative was started by the IAEA, our nuclear colleagues. We wanted to start looking at sites where we had previously not inspected which we believed were capable or were being used as production sites or whatever else. So, we launched a number of inspections by going to new undeclared sites. And it happened to be that the same people who were looking after the concealment were in charge of running these inspections into these "capable sites." So, it was Capable Sites and Concealment Unit.

JK: This is where we were getting confused because we thought that the Concealment Unit was set up shortly after the Kamal defection, when it became apparent that that was going on. Then Ritter talks about this CSIC unit being set up under Butler, which was then much later. That was our point of confusion. Maybe there was a sort of new element of it being set up under Butler. The idea of it was basically to go to sites that they thought were housing documents that related to the concealment mechanism but also to challenge the Iraqis so that they might actually deny them access.

EB: Well, I think we realized in maybe late 1995, early 1996, about this concealment mechanism [operated by the Iraqis]. It became clear that the people who were involved in concealing things from us were by and large the security services, the intelligence people, the Special Republican Guard. In essence, these were the same organizations that controlled the security of the state, the president, etc. It was clear that by inspecting such organizations, we were going to come up against at a crunch point by inspecting these sites. That certainly started before Butler joined. I think that the first inspections dealing with concealment was UNSCOM 143, which I believe took place in March or June 1996. There were three initial concealment inspections: 143, 150, and 155. We were looking specifically for sites where we believed there were large amounts of [weapons related] documents were hidden by those various security organs of the government. One of the first ones involved was what we believed to be a large stash of documents at a building that Iraq has claimed to be the Ministry of Irrigation. I think that was in June of 1996. That was before Butler was here. The names may have changed over the years or there may have been different groupings, but the concealment work was basically started in late 1995, early 1996.

JK: That clarifies that point then.

EB: CSIC was probably a later designation. Most of the concealment work was run out of here in New York where the analysts were. Whereas later, with CSCU, we actually had people in Baghdad carry out some of the activity and that would have taken place probably in the Butler period rather than during Ekéus.

JK: Oh, that was the difference then. There was the CSCU team in Baghdad.

EB: Where they were largely involved in running the "capable sites" inspections at new facilities or new locations which we had not inspected in the past but that we wanted to inspect to see what their capabilities were. Is this industrial complex capable of producing weapons or is it capable of being used as a hide site; to try to map out more of Iraq to see what could be going on. So some of the CSCU people were in Baghdad.

JK: That is an important clarification. Now I think I understand it. Getting back to the UN and the UN staff here in the building, in the UN headquarters, how much cooperation was there initially, or was there throughout UNSCOM with the UN itself, like the legal office, John Scott in the legal office, or the Office of the Secretary-General? Was there a sense of cooperation?

EB: We were a rather unusual organization. We were a subsidiary organization of the Security Council. So, our political masters were the Security Council rather than the Secretary-General. We were not a part of the regular Secretariat. The regular Secretariat consists of departments such as peacekeeping, political affairs, department for disarmament affairs. We were not part of that structure; we were a separate unit with a different reporting structure. We reported straight to the Security Council, not to the Secretary-General. We were independent, almost, of the rest of the house. We shared common services. We would use the services of legal affairs, but we had our own lawyers. There are not many other parts of the UN system that would have a lawyer in house. But it was something we wanted to have. We had a certain independence because of the way we were established, and the ability to ask governments to provide people. We could build up our own in-house capabilities by having lawyers, or analysts, or photo interpreters. These are not the kinds of things we could find within the UN system, so we would ask governments and say, "Could you please provide us with a photo interpreter for six months." So, we had our own in-house capabilities.

We would rely on the rest of the UN for administrative and budgetary support, people who would organize the travel and do the visas. We used all that on a day-to-day basis with the UN. But by and large, we were left to our own devices. Obviously, the Secretary-General and his office had a watching brief over us. The various Executive Chairman maintained reasonably good contact with the Secretary-General's office and would meet every three months or more, depending on what was going on. So, the

Secretary-General's was informed. We are part of the same organization. We are not that remote.

JK: Was there any resentment by the UN staff outside UNSCOM towards these special privileges that UNSCOM had?

EB: Having been on the inside, I am not sure how accurately I can portray this. We certainly believed – whether it was there or not, is another matter – we certainly believed that we were looked at with a certain sense of perhaps even envy by other parts of the system or a certain amount of suspicion because we were independent. We didn't have to follow regular UN recruitment procedures. We just asked people to come and they came. We didn't have to go through the horrendous system of UN procurement, which takes six months to get a photocopier, or whatever. We would simply ask a government, "Please give us some computers," and they would roll up the next day. There was some resentment to the free-wheeling system they we were able to operate. I know there are frustrations in any big bureaucracy and we were able to avoid some of them. There was a kind of feeling, "There they go again, these kind of UNSCOM people, doing what they like." Maybe we didn't represent the UN family as much as other organizations. We were drawn from governments which were interested in doing this type of work. We did have what might be termed a bias toward western Anglo-Saxon teams. But it was because those governments had the people, had the knowledge, had the experience, the background, and the willingness to support the Iraq operation. There were plenty of governments we asked to provide people and they said, "No," they couldn't spare them; they couldn't afford them, or they didn't have them.

JK: Did the debate over sanctions have any impact on people in the UN outside UNSCOM viewed UNSCOM?

EB: Again, I am not the best person to ask about the outside view of us, so it is only a kind of perception on my part. But, yes, there was a feeling that UNSCOM was in some way responsible for the sanctions. The two Executive Chairman tried to turn it around the other way and say, "No, we were the instrument for the lifting of sanctions." We were the vehicle for that. If Iraq cooperated with us, we were the ones who were going to turn the key, basically, and unlock the gates. Nevertheless, there was a view in the media and elsewhere in the general public that UNSCOM was the one who was keeping the sanctions on. I don't believe this, personally, to be true. In fact, in a strict reading of the resolutions and of their origins, UNSCOM's work was actually only linked to the oil embargo: the actual prohibition on exports buying anything from Iraq rather than the general sanctions on exports to Iraq.

JK: UNSCOM had an import/export unit. What were the tasks of that unit?

EB: The woman who just came in, Rachel Davis, she was in charge of the Export/Import unit, and the IAU. That was Rachel. I'm sure you've heard her name.

JK: Yes, I have heard her name, but I had never met her before.

EB: Maybe you should interview her because I think she has been around since 1992-1993.

It was always perceived that monitoring would have two things; there would be an internal element in Iraq by having inspections, going around checking on dual use equipment to be sure it was being used for legitimate purposes. But it was always envisaged early on, in 1991, that there would be an extra component that would help our monitoring of Iraq's capabilities by knowing what was going into the country. In the early days after the sanctions were imposed, there was virtually no trade with Iraq. Iraq was not exporting oil and in essence not much was going in, other than food and medicine and a few humanitarian things. The export/import mechanism was not brought into being until 1996. Security Council Resolution 1051 was the one which brought it into being. This started up a new notification system. I do stress that it was a notification system, not a licensing or permission scheme. It was to allow us to have a handle on what equipment and material was going into Iraq and where it was being used. Supplying governments and the receiving government, Iraq, had to notify us of transfers of dual use goods. We had lists so that a government would know that if, for example, they were exporting laboratory equipment (which may have a perfectly legitimate use in a public health laboratory in Iraq) the government concerned would notify us that "We have done a deal with the Baghdad central public health laboratory. We are supplying them with a, b, c equipment, which we, the UN inspectors, would then be able to go and inspect in Iraq. We could determine that indeed this shipment of glassware or laboratory equipment has arrived. It is as stated and we know that it is being used for legitimate purposes in Iraq.

We had a specific export/import monitoring team who would go out [on the ground in Iraq] and check the details of the notification that we had received from the government and from Iraq. They were correct and the stuff was there and being used properly. As necessary, we had an elaborate system of tagging equipment by putting sealings or bar codes so that we could keep track of the stuff. If a particular facility had a piece of tagged equipment, they would have to report to us on its whereabouts. If they sold it or moved it, they would have to tell us. The export/import unit was to give us a better handle on stuff going into Iraq so we had an idea of what Iraq's capabilities were.

JK: Is that still in place?

EB: Yes, we established what we called the "joint unit." We had cooperation with our nuclear colleagues in Vienna, the IAEA. For most of our UNSCOM period, we had an IAEA person seconded to us from Vienna, working with us here in New York. That fell away probably about two years ago. The unit still exists and we, UNMOVIC [United Nations Monitoring and Verification Inspections Commission), are still receiving notifications from governments of their export of equipment to Iraq. We are not receiving anything from the government of Iraq. The last thing they sent us would have been December 1998. They are still in theory under an obligation to notify us.

JK: So, the "joint" part of the title means between IAEA and UNSCOM.

EB: Yes, not Iraq.

JK: It has been pointed out that Ekéus and Butler had different working styles. From your point of view inside, what was your perception of the differences between the two Executive Chairman?

EB: They are very different characters, obviously, and I enjoyed working for both of them. They had very different styles.

JK: Let me ask you a more specific question that I think will be easier to answer. In the research that we have been doing, we have come to the conclusion that the independence of UNSCOM was really the key factor in maintaining the pressure and leverage on Iraq. Perhaps you could comment on how Ekéus and then Butler exercised and maintained the independence of UNSCOM.

EB: Independence from?

JK: Independence from governments, from influence of other parties within the UN, from the General Members, like the General Assembly, the Office of the Secretary-General; any way in which Iraq could succeed in going around UNSCOM; to keep the Executive Chairman the authority for dealing with Iraq.

EB: Yes, in the early years the Council was quite happy almost to say to Ekéus, "It's your baby. You go away and deal with it and don't come running to us with your problems. You fix it. We'll give you all the rights." And they did; the Council gave UNSCOM tremendous rights. It was noticeable that whenever we would go to the Security Council with a problem we were having with the Iraqis, there would be a general, "Oh no, not you lot again, coming here to complain about yet another transgression by the Iraqis. Why can't you just sort it out with them? Why do you need to come whining to us?" There was a hands-off approach, particularly in the early years from both the Security Council and the Secretary-General's office. That changed later on, as perhaps the whole UNSCOM project did. It was never intended to be a ten-year experience. It was all supposed to be over in six months. The concept was that Iraq would give up the weapons and get back into the international community. The whole politics of the thing changed. It was originally about weapons and non-proliferation and then it started to become other things. Other aspects crept up, whether it be the humanitarian situation, the general political situation in the Middle East, which was perceived as biased. While this was going on in Iraq, why was the UN not tackling other problems in the region, whether it be Israel, or the peace process? You had other proliferation issues going on, India and Pakistan. Many more factors came into play which caused the Council, the Secretary-General's office, and others to take a much closer interest.

Governments were interested from day one; we could not have done anything without involvement on the behalf of governments. It was a delicate balance of trying to get the best from governments but then keeping them at bay. "Yes, we will take your expertise and yes, we will take your information, but thank you very much, we will do without your advice." It is a very difficult balancing act for both Executive Chairmen to have done, to have gotten everything out of the governments, but then to keep them at arms length when it came to actually deciding policies. All of the Security Council members had their views and they would come around and make them known. The Executive Chairman would have to decide how much to take this into account. Both of them [Ekéus and Butler] realized that we were not working in a vacuum. The Council members are powerful players.

JK: Were there any differences on how either one managed that?

EB: I joined in 1995 by which time I had the impression that prior to that point, Ekéus by and large had been left alone by the Security Council. There had been a stormy initial period, then a relatively tranquil 1992, 1993, 1994, where we were getting on with the obvious, as people would say. We were destroying the things that Iraq had declared. We were doing the chemical destruction group. Things like that were being done. But when that was all done, then we came to a crunch time, "what next?" Then there were all these other factors, the price of oil, the humanitarian issues. So, I think there was less pressure on Ekéus, probably, than there was on Butler. Both of them had to maintain fairly close relations with all the Security Council members and both would visit at least annually most of the capital cities of the P5. The Chinese didn't really start to get interested in UNSCOM until probably about 1997. I know that Ekéus had always wanted to go the Beijing, wanted to involve the Chinese, but there had always been a distance between us.

It was only when Butler came on board that China started to offer us experts. That was something which they had never done before. China became much more of a player than they had before. There were changes in the wider political environment that caused more pressure to be put on Butler.

JK: I told you that I had just seen this documentary film that Scott Ritter had been involved in which brought up the whole relationship of Butler with the Americans. He proposes that Butler felt much more that he had to accommodate the Americans ultimately than the Ekéus had done originally. Was that ever felt by other people here?

EB: Again, I don't have the full history, but I suspect we were closer to the Americans during the Butler time than during Ekéus. Although that is not to say that there wasn't a close relationship before hand. Have you interviewed Butler?

JK: We have requested interviews with Butler. And he has agreed but we haven't been able to make the appointment. I think it is fair to ask him these questions. [The interview with Butler took place July 25, 2001.] In terms of the ending of UNSCOM, after December 1998, UNSCOM was never able to go back into Iraq. It was punctuated by Desert Fox, which was the bombing that took place, I believe, on December 16th of 1998. The question that I have is, what came first, the chicken or the egg? Did the bombing end UNSCOM, or did UNSCOM basically end and then because of the denials of Iraq, which seemed permanent at that point, the bombing took place as a kind of punishment for what was deemed to be the end?

EB: I am trying to think back to the summer of 1998. It is said that the Iraqis were particularly frustrated by the fact that the Security Council took no recognition, from their point of view, of the progress that had been made in particular in the nuclear area. It is said that they were very frustrated that while everyone acknowledged that there had been great progress, nothing happened. Iraq was not "rewarded." They took from that or gained the impression that, no matter what they did, they were never going to get out of the situation they were in. They decided, in essence, that "Why should we cooperate with this lot UNSCOM? Look where our cooperation landed us with the IAEA. They have basically said they have a full understanding of the program. There are only a few question marks left and we haven't gotten anything out of this. So, why the hell should we cooperate with UNSCOM?" From then onwards, the Iraqis took a number of measures [against UNSCOM] such as throwing the American inspectors out of Iraq. Then they, Iraq, refused to do any more of the disarmament work with us. They refused to give us documents. They eventually even said no more monitoring inspections. There were various things where they upped the stakes and just simply said, "No more, no more." Something was going to come to a head. Did the bombing kill UNSCOM or was it dead anyway? We had been unable to do any substantive disarmament work, even with the Iraqis refusing to speak to us, almost, since August of that year [1998].

It has been said publicly, even by President Clinton, that the bombing was designed to reintroduce the inspectors into Iraq, to get the system going again.

JK: Because, in fact, military action in the past had reinstated UNSCOM.

EB: Yes, by and large, things would get to a head, and the threat of military action, not necessarily the actual use of military force but the possible threat of it, usually caused the Iraqis to back down or change their mind or find some compromise or way that the situation could be resolved. Then we could move on. I remember at the time that both President Clinton and Sandy Berger did say that the action they were taking was to restore the integrity of the inspection process in Iraq.

JK: There had been an example early on in Ekéus' tenure where the airplanes coming from Bahrain were not allowed to come directly to into Baghdad. And there was all kinds of discussion over several days – there is a whole series of letters and dates that are in the Blue Book on the situation – where they continued to refuse. Ekéus felt that it was very important for that plane to fly directly from Bahrain to Baghdad. So, there was bombing that took place. Immediately following the bombing, the Iraqis got in contact with UNSCOM and said, "OK, your plane can fly wherever it wants to." There had been a precedent for military action to get a result.

EB: In November of 1998, when there had been this almost bombing, both Clinton and Blair had publicly said that there would be no warning next time. If Iraq didn't cooperate then there would be action. Both of them came out publicly and said that. Iraq was on notice that if they didn't cooperate with us, there would be military action.

And I believe that Clinton said at the time that there would be no warning. There would not be discussions in the Security Council; there would not be consultations. It would just be the case that if Iraq stepped out of line, they would be hit.

JK: From UNSCOM's point of view here at headquarters, what was UNSCOM's reaction to the bombing?

EB: I supposed we all had our individual private reactions. UNSCOM as a body had no reaction. What individual UN Member States do is their business, in essence.

JK: Did you hope that it would open the doors to Iraq again? Did you think that it would not happen?

EB: I thought that the bombing would happen and that we would go back, yes. It probably took me, on a personal level, maybe three or four months to realize that no, we wouldn't go back to what had been going on before. In fact, it wasn't long after the bombing took place, Desert Fox, that there were already discussions in the Security Council about the need for some new mechanism, some new approach [to the Iraqi weapons issue]. Only days after the bombing had taken place, some of the Security Council members – I think the French first – started talking about the need for something new.

JK: Thank you, that helps to understand that. I wanted to ask you; I have been going over the report that was dated January 25, 1999, which was the big thick report.

EB: Which we nicknamed the "compendium."

JK: The "compendium," basically pulling together an assessment, or an accounting, of what had been destroyed and what was unaccounted for. You had started to say something on the phone when I talked to you about how that report had come about. Perhaps you could give me just a little background on that.

EB: When the Secretary-General went to Iraq in February 1998, from press accounts and through the grape vine, I had heard that the Iraqis complained that they hadn't been given a fair opportunity to address a whole host of grievances about the UN, not just about UNSCOM, but about everything, basically. They believed they hadn't had a proper hearing of their side of things. They felt they were not allowed to address the Security Council. They felt they were ignored or their views were never taken into account. I think this struck a note with the Secretary-General and he came up with the idea of the "comprehensive review." This was first envisaged by some of the players as an opportunity for Iraq to take its grievances to the Council and have some of those things addressed publicly. There were a number of exchanges as to its possible format.

The Secretary-General circulated a paper proposing an outline of what the comprehensive review could, in his view, try to address. As part of that, he talked about a review of where we were with the status of Iraq's disarmament and verification of the disarmament. One of the ideas was that we as UNSCOM would produce an assessment of where matters rested. The ideas were battered back and forth. We had been doing assessments all the way along, but this was a chance for us to have our say. So, work was started on producing papers, although nothing had been agreed at that point [on the format of the review]. Work started on putting together assessments by the various disciplines, the chemists, the biology, and the missile people, to come up with an assessment. In the end, the conditions for the comprehensive review were somewhat changed. There was a letter from the president of the Security Council, outlining the arrangements for a comprehensive review, that all got folded into the whole business [crisis] in the middle of November 1998. In essence, what was going to happen was that the report, which was ultimately asked of us on Iraq's cooperation between the middle of November to the middle of December, that if we reported positively on that, there was going to the comprehensive review.

You need to go back and look at the covering letter that the Secretary-General sent to the Security Council on the evening of the 15th of December transmitting the reports from Butler and the IAEA on Iraq's cooperation. In that, I think, the Secretary-General offers three options; 1) although Iraq had not necessarily provided the level of cooperation the Council had been seeking, the comprehensive review should, nevertheless, go ahead, 2) or postponed was another option, 3) or abandoned. In any case, the comprehensive review never happened. Since we had put quite a bit of work into this document or into what we perceived might be required from us for the comprehensive review, it was decided that this should not just go back on the shelf. It was an assessment that we had been preparing for public release, so why not do it? Richard Butler decided to send it to the Security Council. At the time, there were certain members of the Security Council who simply said that the Council had not, in fact, asked for this report, so why should it be circulated. If you look closely at the document itself, you will notice that the covering letter circulating the report comes not from UNSCOM but from two Council members. It was Slovenia [Danilo Turk] and the Netherlands [Peter van Walsum]. They said in the interest of transparency and given the interest of not only the Security Council but to all UN Member States in this issue, perhaps the UNSCOM assessment should be circulated as a public document of the Security Council. And that is what happened.

JK: That is very interesting, now that we look more carefully at the details then you begin to understand why this is a letter from these two countries.

EB: Yes, that explains why this is a letter from these two delegations.

JK: We have a very interesting interview with Ambassador Lavrov.

EB: I'm sure you have.

JK: From his point of view. In going through the report, what I wanted to do was to try to come up with a summary of the achievements of UNSCOM. And I still really want to do that because I think that is a very important part of a book that we would produce. We have a scholarly book that we are writing. We are doing it now a couple of years after the end of UNSCOM, so it is possible to look at the whole time. In the number that came together in the report, there are just a few things that I was trying to understand. One of the areas is VX, the chemical agent VX, for my own understanding and from an accounting standpoint. Maybe I need to talk to somebody else. My understanding from reading about chemical weapons is that the importance of VX is that it is the most toxic of the agents. Is that a fair characterization?

EB: As a non-technical expert, that is my understanding. Also, one of its attributes is that it is persistent. A lot of chemical weapons agents when you disburse them, fire them, or release them, they degrade or lose their potency; whereas VX, one of its characteristics in addition to being very toxic, is its persistency. If you were to detonate a shell in this room, it would hang around much longer or better than other agents. So not only is it highly toxic but it is also persistent. You can improve your kill rate.

JK: Some of the findings of the technical experts about VX and its presence in Iraq showed two rather incriminating things: One is that there was evidence that it had been weaponized. The other was that the Iraqis had been able to stabilize it. Was it definitely established that the Iraqis had weaponized VX?

EB: They deny it. But it remains UNSCOM's assessment in the document you refer to that Iraq did indeed weaponize it. We had laboratory tests carried out and it became a very controversial issue in the Security Council with some delegations not sharing our assessment. The reports that we sent forward said that Iraq had weaponized VX. They denied ever having produced it in the first place. The story changed over the years as we gathered more information from inspections or from documents. Iraq slowly admitted that they had indeed had a VX program. It had not just been research; it had been produced. Their last admission was that they had produced 3.9 tons, which they claimed to have destroyed.

JK: In the document it says that Iraq has claimed to have destroyed 1.5 tons of the suspected 3.9. They said they had dumped it. I understand that UNSCOM was allowed to go to the dumpsite and did find some remnants but could not verify 1.5 tons. Is that correct?

EB: Yes, basically. The problem is that if you were to spill a container of gasoline on your front lawn, you would find traces of gasoline but are you able to measure how much gasoline was spilt there? Was it a gallon; was it three gallons? We found traces of VX or VX degraded products, but we were not able to quantify to any degree of accuracy how much there had been, or how much agent is still left. We did measurements as best we could, but it didn't add up to as much as Iraq had said.

JK: So, the discrepancies are several in terms of VX: one is that there was supposedly 3.9 tons of the actual agent that had been produced. They said that they had unilaterally disposed of 1.5, but one cannot even verify that, although they had disposed of some. So, there is that gap. And you don't know for sure if they had produced more than 3.9 tons.

EB: Yes, and that was a concern that was made publicly available through the reports of the so called Technical Evaluation Meetings, which was an Iraqi attempt to have other outside international experts assess the matters. One of the findings of one these Technical Evaluation Meeting, where we invited technical experts from outside UNSCOM, one of the conclusions was that Iraq had the capability, given the raw materials they had available to them, the equipment, the time span, etc., had the capability to have produced a lot more than 3.9 tons. The question remained not just what had happened to the 3.9 tons, but whether or not that figure was the true level of what Iraq had produced.

JK: And the level of precursors that they had available to them was also rather high.

EB: Documents do exist, but I think they had sufficient precursors for about 50 tons of VX.

JK: That is what I had read also. And that is a big discrepancy between 3.9 tons and 50 tons.

EB: The question was: if they could have made it, why didn't they?

JK: Do you recall where that dumpsite was? It is recorded anywhere?

EB: I think it was at Muthanna which was Iraq's main chemical weapons establishment.

JK: That leads me to a very technical question: how do you spell, or how have you agreed amongst you, to spell things that start with "al" like al Muthanna, or al Hakam, or the al Hussein missile? Do you use the al; do you hyphenate it; do you capitalize it?

EB: We do everything, I'm afraid. There has never been consistency. And frankly, nor was there ever consistency in Iraq's own spelling. We would have letters from the Iraqis which would refer to something as "the" something. The next time it would be "al" and the spellings would be different. Sometimes I even recalled going back to Iraqi letters to find out that individuals spelled their own names differently on different correspondence. We never had a systematized term of spelling. How do you spell Muthanna? Is it with two A's or not?

JK: So, we will just pick one and explain it.

EB: Like Saddam Hussein, you see it spelled Hassein even with a "y" in it sometimes.

JK: Now I would like to skip to the issue of the munitions, the "special" munitions that would have contained either chemical or biological weapons. One part that I am a little bit confused on is, were the munitions marked as to what had been in them or what was still in them? In some cases, I had read that they had not been marked so it made it more confusing. In other cases I had been reading that they had been color coded. I wasn't sure if they were marked or not marked.

EB: Good question. I'm not competent to answer, not because it is secret. I think the story varied over time. That was the problem. There was a great debate about black stripes on R400 bombs, whether that indicated they were biological or not. There were other markings, whether "A" meant botulinum or whether "A" meant aflatoxin, or whatever else. It seems to me as a semi-layman, that it would be very odd for any military system not to know or be able to tell what was inside particular munitions. If you have them in storage sites, you have to be able to know if this one is full of mustard gas or full of sarin. I can't imagine any military system living without a system, whether it is markings, or numbering, or serial numbers, or something to indicate what was inside. I am not a technical expert but there are others I can find for you. They would know it till the nth detail.

JK: That was just a point that I couldn't get strait from the various books I had read.

EB: And it varies on whether it was biological or chemical, so it doesn't help.

JK: Back to the VX, there had been some suspicions that they had made VX, but the concluding evidence was when an UNSCOM inspection team went back to al Muthanna in 1996 and actually decided that they needed to go into the bunker that had been partially destroyed from the Coalition bombing. They took structural engineers and went in to recover the safe that had been inside. That is when they found the documentation of the 3.9 tons of VX.

EB: That was a very brave inspection.

JK: Ekéus said that it was very brave and that it had been a Dutchman who had led that inspection. Would that have been Cees Wolterbeek?

EB: Wolterbeek, yes, it was. Now he works for NATO in Brussels.

JK: Also on chemical weapons?

EB: I thought it was rather wider than that.

JK: Weapons of mass destruction, I believe. Was there any evidence that biological agents had been weaponized?

EB: Yes, Iraq itself admitted it had. In the declarations it gave us in late 1995, they certainly admitted having filled 157 bombs and 25 al Hussein or SCUD warheads. They themselves made that declaration. I can't imagine that they would make that declaration if they hadn't.

JK: Right, but early on they said they had no biological program, and then little by little that came out.

EB: That was one of the revelations that Iraq made after the defection of Hussein Kamal. Before Hussein Kamal they had admitted production but denied weaponization. After Hussein Kamal, they admitted weaponization, too. Sampling has taken place of warheads or R400s [bombs] where we found remains of it. There used to be pictures around here [n this room] of the Nibai pits.

JK: You are talking about Nibai. That is where they had buried the warheads.

EB: Yes, we found biological weapon degradation products or material on more warheads than Iraq had admitted. They [the Iraqis] had tried to tell us, the Inspectors, how many warheads of each individual type and fill had been buried or destroyed at the various places. We found traces of anthrax on more warheads than the Iraqis had said had been destroyed at the time. So what they simply did was reorganize the numbers. So, it wasn't fifteen of this and five of that; it was ten of this and ten of that. They admitted weaponization.

JK: They always were adjusting their figures. Is some of that attributable to the fact that with all these big numbers, legitimately they could have made some mistakes in their accounting? Or was it simply manipulation?

EB: There are mistakes in Iraq's own documentation, things that we have spotted. Generally, nobody is 100% accurate in keeping records. However, there was an increasing practice on the part of Iraq to admit up to what they believed was the level of our knowledge and no further. It became a game of, "You tell us what you know and we'll tell you if you are right." Not, "we will volunteer." The way the system was worked out by the Security Council in 1991 was Iraq was supposed to declare and we, UNSCOM, were supposed to verify. Whereas it turned into a case of us saying we think you have got "X" and they would then admit it. They would stick to that particular story until we found out more. It could be that they didn't have the information. I do believe that they destroyed a lot of documentation. Certainly, on other occasions numbers were manipulated to suit their story.

JK: So much has been said about Hussein Kamal's defection. I have never heard anything about what he actually said. It seemed as though the benefit of his defection was what the Iraqis produced in terms of the documentation that was at the chicken farm. What did Kamal say, personally, that was useful?

EB: I am not personally privy to that. We did write in our report in October 1995; there is a rather cryptic sentence which says something to the effect that, "The Executive Chairman traveled on to Amman to meet General Hussein Kamal," and I think the wording we used in the report was, "useful information was obtained."

JK: Very vague.

EB: Yes, but with good reason. It is always nice to keep information up one's sleeve for use at the appropriate moment. It is like detectives trying to keep their information until the appropriate point, don't show your evidence until you have to. But the defection caused the Government of Iraq to disclose it awful lot of stuff voluntarily. So, it had an effect both ways, I suspect.

JK: Perhaps what he said which was very useful was about the concealment.

EB: That is how I understand it and one or two technical things. But I am not privy myself.

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JK: There was one box of documents, in all the boxes that were found at the chicken farm, that dealt with biological weapons.

EB: That is my understanding. There were roughly 155 boxes, of which two thirds were nuclear and went straight to the IAEA, and the rest was almost all chemical and missile, except for one box of biological documents.

JK: Was that considered strange that there was this one random box?

EB: The Iraqis had always said that the whole program had been "obliterated," that was the expression they used, in 1991, including all the documentation. Who knows?

Some of our colleagues were not convinced that what was at the chicken farm represented the whole stash of retained documents.

JK: In one account I had read that there had been a red book that was placed very neatly on top of the documents in the biological box. What was that? Did you know anything about that? It just piqued my interest.

EB: Are you sure it was bio?

JK: Graham Pearson has come out with a book recently and he said that in the book. [*The UNSCOM Saga*}

EB: It is two things that it could have been. One is a photo album. Is that how it is described?

JK: No, it says "red book."

EB: There was a photo album which included pictures of experiments carried out on animals which I believe was amongst the things in the chicken farm bio box. In other parts of the chicken farm stash there were other rather nice leather bound, almost like catalogues or reports which were probably produced for the leadership on the various programs, almost like an annual report, like here are some nice pictures of the progress of this project.

JK: So, it may have been some kind of compiled report for the leadership at some point that summarized things. There were photographs there; boy that is curious.

EB: The chicken farm material was not just documents. It was videos, microfiches, tapes, all sorts of things.

JK: Did it seem as though it had been thrown together? Was there any organization to the materials in the boxes?

EB: Good questions, there have been various views. Some of my former colleagues believe that it was very carefully put together; others say no because there were certain things in it that had it been put together carefully, the Iraqis would never have given us. There are documents that if anyone had planned it they would certainly not have wanted to include.

JK: So, it was actually a pretty useful stash. It was a million pages.

EB: More.

JK: Perhaps they thought it was going to be overwhelming to go through it.

EB: Yes, some people have speculated that. Here is a way to get inspectors off our back. Give them the equivalent of hundreds of telephone books and tell them to go away and study that. Some people have suggested that it might have partly been a tactic to overwhelm us with material. Just going through it with interpreters and translators to try to identify what the documentation was before deciding whether it was relevant or whether it was worth even translating. Even that screening took a long time. It was a huge job.

JK: A huge job. I wanted to go to the whole issue of the presidential sites. Did UNSCOM feel initially that there was any real valuable information in the presidential sites? What was UNSCOM looking for in the presidential sites?

EB: I don't believe we actually were. To my recollection, the issue was more about the creation by Iraq of sanctuaries, or parts of Iraq that would not be subject to inspection. The fact that it was presidential sites or palaces versus anything else wasn't really the issue. It was that the rights given to us by the Council were "any time, any place inspections." If you created a special category of sites whether you called them presidential or whatever, secret or sensitive or even if you said schools are out of bounds, or to declare hospitals out of bounds. Anything that you did that would prevent any time, any place inspections was contrary to our operating methods. The creation of sanctuaries in Iraq that would not be subject to inspection was not on. The UN surveyed the eight presidential sites that were eventually agreed on and they comprised some 30 square kilometers.

JK: The total was 30 square kilometers. That is a lot of space.

EB: This is not just open space. The sites included very large numbers of buildings where things could easily be produced or "hide" sites. It was a question of access rather than palaces. It got taken over by the media as about palaces.

JK: But these buildings were other than palaces.

EB: In the main presidential area in Baghdad, for example, it's about 3 or 4 square miles with several hundred buildings on it, including barracks and workshops, garages, all sorts of things, not just what one would identify as being a presidential palace.

JK: You were talking about barracks. I understand that the Special Republican Guard had some barracks, or installations within the presidential sites. Weren't the Special Republican Guard implicated in the concealment process?

EB: Yes, and it was in one of our reports, possibly in 1996, where we identified what we believed were the main organizations responsible for the concealment and I'm sure we named the special security organization, the military and civilian intelligence, and also the Special Republican Guard.

JK: So, there was also a legitimate reason for why UNSCOM might want to see what kind of documentation or whatever might be housed there.

EB: Yes, because the people associated with the security of the president were who we believed were involved in the concealment. It was those people who were co-located with the actual presidential part or the palace or whatever you want to call it, which we were interested it, certainly.

JK: The discovery at Abu Ghuraib by David Kay had uncovered with these trucks carrying the calutrons, that was very early on. That episode of hiding the calutrons was an effort of the Special Republican Guard maneuvers.

The whole issue of the presidential sites seemed to have gotten out of proportion. I was wondering what your opinion on that. Was UNSCOM distracted by that issue from doing its other work, its other inspections?

EB: It certainly put a lot of pressure on the Chairman, in that we were having to deal with things on the political level which should not have been part of our basic operations. So, a lot of the Chairman's time was spent on the politics and the management of it rather than the actual implementation like inspections or analysis. We talked about the 31st floor; the UNSCOM offices were split into two locations, one on the 30th floor where more of the analysts worked and the 31st floor where the Chairman and his various advisors were. Increasingly, the work of the 31st floor was not about disarmament or about weapons, it was about politics. Sadly, the whole issue of the presidential sites did detract from us getting on with our real business. That and many other issues which came up, not just the presidential sites but the U-2 "spy" plane, and all sorts of other issues.

JK: In the documentary I was just watching by Scott Ritter, he points out that there was what he characterizes as a certain amount of pressure by the Americans to do certain kinds of inspections even though UNSCOM knew that Iraq would deny them entrance. The purpose of that was to reveal what Iraq would do when they knew that UNSCOM was coming, what kind of concealment mechanisms Iraq would put into place suddenly, once UNSCOM was trying to inspect a particular site. So, there would be aerial surveillance and sound surveillance.

EB: The reaction.

JK: Was that useful? Did UNSCOM learn from that?

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EB: It did give us an indication of who was involved and how this concealment apparatus operated. Who was involved, what were they doing, what were the lines of command, what was the structure of it? By inspecting point A, if that causes a whole host of activities at point B, or point C, or causes trucks to move from D to E, then that might give an indication of something else. We were trying to map that.

JK: Some of the aerial photos that he showed [in the film] of a convoy of trucks moving out of a site after they had been challenged. UNSCOM was not allowed to get into the site and so the aerial photographs showed that UNSCOM was not able to get into the site, but all of a sudden, this convoy of trucks moving out. They are still photographs, so it shows the trucks moving out in stages and then there were none left inside the compound.

EB: It indicates to us that there is something going on.

JK: What were they hiding in the trucks?

EB: Right, and who ran the trucks, where were they coming from or going to, under whose orders, and how were they connected? That is what we were trying to investigate.

JK: What were they moving around on the trucks?

EB: I personally don't know.

JK: Didn't anyone find out what they were moving around on the trucks?

EB: We would try to interview people or we would ask who had been responsible. Some of Scott [Ritter's] inspections were involved in looking for vehicle logs, as to who these trucks belong to, whom do they report to?

JK: [Switched topics] Ekéus knew what Kamal said; he was with him. I believe that both Ekéus and Nikita Smidovitch were there. They didn't tell me what he had said.

There was a usefulness to carrying out unannounced inspections to instigate this response and then follow the response.

Exactly when was UNSCOM terminated? We know that the last inspections took place before Desert Fox and then there was the report in 1999.

EB: Officially, it was with Security Council Resolution 1284, which was the 17th of December 1999, where the Security Council says, "decides to replace UNSCOM by UNMOVIC.

In the legal sense, UNSCOM existed until the Security Council decided to create UNMOVIC. We did continue, albeit on a more limited basis, to send reports to the Council. The last one we would have sent was October 1999, saying that while we were not in Iraq, we were continuing to analyze documents already in our possession, reorganizing the database, and doing as much as we could, and thinking about what kinds of elements would be required to re-establish a [disarmament and monitoring] presence in Iraq.

JK: Going back to the period of time when UNSCOM was overseeing the destruction of quite a lot of material and buildings, as well. For the most part was that done by UNSCOM overseeing it and the Iraqis actually carrying out the destruction?

EB: By and large yes, we would say to the Iraqis, "You please provide dynamite, bull dozers, workman," or whatever it would be and we would supervise them carrying out the destruction. Some stuff was removed by us. We supervised the Iraqi destruction of things. The chemical destruction was different. We had the Iraqis build for us an incinerator and a hydrolysis plant for which we cannibalized the plant which they used to produce the (chemical weapons) agents in order to destroy it [the chemical weapons themselves].

JK: UNSCOM worked with the Iraqis to build the hydrolysis plant at al Muthanna. So, it didn't exist there before. That is a good point of clarification.

EB: Cees Wolterbeek was the one who ran that.

JK: Then UNSCOM would oversee the destruction of the chemical weapons there. Once all of that was completed, all of those structures were destroyed.

EB: Yes, there was not much left at Muthanna.

JK: There was a discrepancy on the numbers of munitions (warheads), how many were used up in the war and how many were accounted for. Then Iraq came forward at some point with what they called ingots, metal ingots. What did that refer to?

EB: It is a number of things. One of the things that the Iraqis had the habit of doing which cost us a lot of time and energy was this unilateral destruction. Under the resolution, they were supposed to have everything destroyed under international supervision. They didn't; they destroyed things themselves, making our job much more difficult. We would say, "Where are the warheads?" And they would say, "Here," in this huge pile of mangled metal. They would say to us, "This is twenty-five warheads." We would say, "How do we know that?" They would say, "You have to believe us." What we would do was to take the stuff away, weigh it, measure it, look for serial numbers, base plates, whatever. We spent years doing forensic science, trying to determine what matched. In some cases, they had melted things down. There were tools that were melted down. There were other missile components that were melted down. And there were possibly also warheads. The Iraqis would present us with these huge ingots and say, "This represents the remains of A or B."

JK: So, it was a block of metal, a hunk of metal.

EB: Sometimes, we were able to determine, for example, that there is brass and steel in this ingot, but does that mean it came from a particular piece of equipment? Not necessarily. We were unable to verify that the ingots did represent the remains of a particular thing that Iraq claimed.

JK: Is it a normal thing to make ingots of the destruction of other metal parts?

EB: My understanding was that one of the reasons the Iraqis offered was that for a country such as Iraq under sanctions, metal is a valuable commodity. So, if you can reuse it for whatever else, and you have dead warheads lying around, why not make them into bicycles, or whatever else. That was one reason that they put forward. And it was true. In Iraq, you would find bombed out buildings and the Iraqis would tear them to bits to take out the reinforced steel bars for recycling, to cannibalize buildings to make new ones.

JK: All right, so there is some logic to that.

EB: It could also be to cover their traces. One of the problems we faced a lot was trying to determine just how far Iraq had mastered a particular technology or technique. One of the best ways to cover up is to destroy all evidence of how far they had gotten. One of the areas where UNSCOM ran into a lot of problems was the indigenous production of missile components, just how far did Iraq get. We knew they were able to make engines and warheads, but were they able to make other things. They had a campaign to conceal and destroy evidence of just how much they had managed to achieve.

JK: We have talked quite a bit about chemical weapons and biological weapons. What are the remaining concerns now on weapons of mass destruction or the capabilities that Iraq might still have?

EB: Are you asking me as UNMOVIC? [Ewen continues now to work for UNMOVIC.]

JK: Yes, I guess it is hard to separate it.

EB: Certainly, in terms of UNSCOM -- if I can make it clear that I am talking about UNSCOM – there were major concerns. In declining order: there were least concerns about the missile area, then next was the chemical, and last was the biological, which according to Butler was the black hole. That was the one where there were the most questions. In the missile area, we still had concerns about warhead numbers; we had concerns about the status of the achievements of Iraq's indigenous missile capability. We had questions about the whereabouts or possible retention by Iraq of missile fuel and oxidizers. In the chemical area, we were concerned that we did not have the full story on VX. We also had questions on [chemical weapons filled] missiles and bombs which had been unaccounted for. In the biological area, we were not sure we had an understanding at all of the extent of the program: how much had been produced; which agents had been produced, in what quantities, and whether or not they had been accounted for.

In the missile area, if I can use an analogy, we had the borders of the jigsaw puzzle done and had filled in a lot; whereas in the biological area, we didn't even have the borders of the jigsaw.

JK: Good analogy.

EB: UNMOVIC has inherited the database, the archives of UNSCOM. One of the tasks that is ongoing now under the direction of the new Chairman, is to come up with, as we are asked to do by the Security Council, a list of the key remaining disarmament tasks. Before we get to that point, the Chairman has now asked us to come up with an inventory of all unresolved disarmament issues. My colleagues at UNMOVIC are mining through this same information which UNSCOM had and coming up with a list, an inventory, of unresolved disarmament issues. That is work in progress.

JK: Will a report on that be coming out?

EB: I don't know; it is internal at the moment. Security Council Resolution 1284 calls on us to come up with this not later than sixty days after we start work in Iraq, which we obviously haven't. We have to come up with a work plan as to how to tackle key remaining disarmament tasks. We can't pick the key ones unless we know the whole set to begin with. What we are doing now is gathering together the whole set of unresolved disarmament issues. From that we would ultimately come up with a list of key remaining disarmament tasks which Iraq would specifically have to address. There may be some issues that may be unresolved but may be of a lesser significance, for example, the whereabouts of one widget. It may be an unresolved issue but it is not a key disarmament task. There are other things, which may be more obviously outstanding disarmament issues. We at UNMOVIC have yet to rule on any of this.

JK: One of my tasks for the book that we are doing is to write a chapter on UNSCOM's achievements. And I think there are many achievements. But is it actually possible to do an accounting of the achievements of the destruction and elimination or rendering harmless the weapons, or is it too ambiguous to come up with a summary?

EB: We produced something for the Amorim Panel [Ambassador of Brazil Celso Amorim]. This panel set up by Ambassador Amorim was established to advise the Security Council on a number of issues, one of which was the weapons area. they also did reports on the humanitarian situation and on Kuwaiti issues. It was to come up with recommendation on how to re-establish monitoring and verification in Iraq. One of the things that UNSCOM produced for the Amorim panel was a paper on what we had achieved.

JK: Is that a public document? I can get that?

EB: Yes, it is by no means the whole list. It is a succinct summary of how many warheads we accounted for and destroyed, etc.

JK: So I could compare that with the report and what I have produced.

EB: The so-called compendium of January 1999 report, they are slightly different creatures in that compendium, the big document, is status of verification, how much we have actually verified as being truthful. The paper on achievements is what we have actually done. The big document says verified or unverified. It is more an account of the gaps as opposed to the other one is an account of what we have done. It is a relatively short paper.

JK: Back to Butler, one of the things that I wanted to ask was that when I interviewed Ekéus, he pointed out that he realized from the very beginning that keeping the Security Council together was a key factor. A part of that was to brief the president of the Security Council every month as the new president came in. I have never known whether Butler carried on that practice. Do you know whether he briefed the incoming president of the Security Council?

EB: I was not aware that in the later years that Ekéus was himself doing that.

JK: Maybe it tapered off.

EB: That would be my impression, but I can't recall. I suspect it is safe to say that we know that under Richard Butler there was not a routine briefing of the Security Council president every month, no. Now with UNMOVIC, Dr. Blix has made a point of it and every month he does so. He goes and visits the president of the Security Council.

JK: Hans Blix, the Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC, does brief the incoming president of the Security Council.

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EB: Going back to Butler, there were some months when not much was happening and there were other months when a lot of things were going on where he would be in direct contact with the president of the Security Council daily or sometimes even more than once a day. It was more ad hoc, not a routine of doing it every month, just for the sake of doing it. Depending on the climate of what was going on, he would be in touch with the president of the Council. We were always firing off letters at them.

JK: We interviewed Ambassador Lavrov. And Lavrov made a very big point of a particular issue. Butler had gone to Moscow in early December of 1998.

EB: I was not on that visit.

JK: He makes a very big point that Butler, in Lavrov's perception, had said to the Russians that the UNSCOM report was going to be very "positive" and then it turned out that it wasn't. But you were not there.

There were a few other things I wanted to ask you. We have discussed the technical achievements of UNSCOM, but in the broader sense of non-proliferation, how would you view the experiment of UNSCOM?

EB: I personally don't think it will ever be replicated. People say lessons learned, but lessons learned for what? I don't think you will ever see a system like this imposed anywhere else again. I think it shows the real limits of non-proliferation activity. Even with all our draconian rights of any place, any time, taking samples, taking documents, destroying things, with these absolute rights, we were still not able to achieve the mandate against an unwilling partner. The fact that this has gone off the radar screen now, the fact that we have not been able to do inspections for two and a half years, there is a declining interest in non-proliferation. It is not as high up on the international agenda as it used to be five years ago or even ten years ago.

JK: Some of the things that we have come across that UNSCOM contributed to the issue of non-proliferation was the information analysis that UNSCOM was able to put together because you pooled global information. I don't recall that there has ever been any other body that was able to do that, to pull together so much global information from governments, from companies, the exports.

EB: That is why I question lessons learned because I don't think it could ever be recreated again because it did have such a remarkable ability to do these things. The climate was right at the time, the end of the Gulf War, the end of the Cold War, the new international order. We had all of this coming together. People were prepared to share secrets with the UN and give us intelligence, give satellite photos, access to defectors, etc. But then the whole thing has collapsed and one wonders what caused it to collapse. Would you do it again? Now that these allegations have come out about sharing of information, would it happen again? I think no. It is an experiment which did wonders; it did work, but could you recreate it? Probably not. You are right about getting information. People were sharing things with the UN that two years previously they would never have dreamt of. Presumably because they believed there was an overall advantage in doing so, whether it be from a national perspective or an international perspective. We were also a tremendous laboratory, investigating the potential use of new sensors or technologies, all sorts of things. This can be applied elsewhere. The remote monitoring techniques we developed certainly are useful in other applications.

JK: I have come to the end of the questions that I have. Are there other comments that you would like to make or frustrations about errors in public knowledge that you would like to correct?

EB: I think too much has been made of the so-called spying. I think it does a lot of discredit to all the thousands of decent people who have come through UNSCOM. These are people who have given up comfortable jobs and family to go and work in a potentially unpleasant environment in Iraq, physically dealing with weapons or potential toxic substances, and also a political environment that was not exactly friendly. The contribution and dedication of these people is cast aside by allegations about spying as if the whole thing was somehow a US staged operation to extract information from Iraq. There are many people who did tough jobs and did them very well with great competence. That tends to be overshadowed by the political side of things. I feel that my colleagues who did the hard work in Iraq have had a raw deal and the criticism that they have come into, whether it came from people, including the Secretary-General himself, is unfair. There have been thousands of good people who have done a good job for the UN, after all, which doesn't get much recognition.

JK: Originally the allegations of spying came from the Iraqis.

EB: All the way back to 1991.

JK: Why did it catch on later?

EB: There were a number of revelations in the US press, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe* was another one, which seemed to put together well researched pieces with allegations which were not denied by the Americans.

JK: There was no real effort on the part of the US or the press to deny those allegations?

EB: To give the Americans their due, there are situations when they say, "We do not talk about these issues." But, nobody came out and said this is a lot of nonsense.

JK: Was it used as political capital by other Member States to try to pin this on the US?

EB: I think so, yes. I should add, I don't know how much of it is actually true.

JK: We maintain in our book, that there was no evidence that there was any spying being done.

EB: It depends on how you define spying.

JK: Ekéus acknowledged in the interviews with us that some information that was gathered by inspectors might make it back to their national governments. It was somewhat of a natural thing.

EB: And impossible to police.

JK: The point would be: is information being used for a different purpose. If information is being used to disarm Iraq, then that is the purpose of UNSCOM. But if information was purposefully being gathered and then used for something else like to assassinate Saddam Hussein, then that was not according what should have been done.

EB: Yes, there have been two forms of allegations: one that UNSCOM willingly and knowingly collected information for the Americans and the second allegation is that UNSCOM unbeknownst to them was used, piggy backed: advantage was taken of the UN operation to do things unbeknownst to UNSCOM itself.

JK: That is what Ritter alleges that UNSCOM in the later years.

EB: Butler has said that he did not authorize any piggy backing or anything else. If there had been then that was clearly very wrong. He said that publicly.

JK: Butler says in his book that he had installed listening devices that were supposedly upgraded from what had been used as listening devices. That was part of the accusations that these listening devices were going to be used by the Americans. He says that that was not true and that they turned out to be not very useful and he had them withdrawn. Do you anything about that?

EB: I have read all the books but I personally have no knowledge of this.

JK: Well, thank you very much for taking so much time to share you knowledge with us.

EB: My pleasure.

Yale-UN Oral History Interview
Ewen Buchanan
July 18, 2001
New York City, New York
Interviewer: Jean Krasno

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