

SI/DPH
ORAL
HISTORY
(02)/M235

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Clovis Maksoud
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
August 11, 1997
Washington D.C.

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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Clovis Maksoud

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

August 11, 1997

in Washington, D.C.

Jean Krasno: For the record, Mr. Maksoud, could you explain your role in the Arab League, and when you began your diplomatic career?

Clovis Maksoud: I am not a professional diplomat, I was appointed the first time to the Arab League, in order to establish the Arab League mission in New Delhi on February 4th, 1961. But I suppose you are interested only in the UN part.

JK: Well, more in relationship to the UN, but also it is good to establish something about your background.

CM: I was a political appointee at the time. That experience helped me a great deal in establishing close relationships with the Indian leadership, especially with Pauslit, Nehru, and also with Mrs. Gandhi and Mr. Shastri. It was a very interesting period for me because that was the time I was preparing for the liberation of Goa, and the Indian Council on Africa invited me, the first day I was there. There was an invitation for all the leaders, many of whom became heads of state in Africa of the national movements in the

Portuguese colonies. The conference was a prelude to India's liberation of Goa from the Portuguese enclave in India.

JK: I see.

CM: During that period, of the five and a half years I spent in India, there was the war with China, and that was a testing ground for Arab diplomacy, and especially during President Nasser's regime, and the role he played in organizing the peace settlement later on. Because of Egyptian UAR at the time and the Burmese and the Sri Lankans and other non-aligned countries took the initiative to try and bring peace. Anyway, that was a great, enriching experience, the first test of non-alignment in resolving a conflict and with all the ramifications that it had on the non-aligned movement. That was in 1962.

JK: What is your country of origin?

CM: Lebanon. Then there was, in 1965, the Kashmir crisis, which was endemic and led to the war between India and Pakistan. That too was another testing ground for the Arab League and the challenged to answer "Are we pro-India, pro-Pakistan?" The Arabs were divided in that; some were pro-Pakistan and perceived as great supporters of Palestinian rights in addition to being a Muslim country. On the other hand, Nehru and Nasser were very close and Nehru played a very important role, a pivotal role, in the non-aligned movement. Many Arabs did not think that religious bonds should be the criteria for political judgments, except in a very marginal way. So, that was another test for the

Arab League, especially when the Arab heads of state met in Rabbat at the time, to try and resolve the issue. Anyhow, these are the two major confrontations, with China -- a non-aligned country with a communist country with implications for the Soviet Union and the American situation at the time; it was a learning experience -- and then the Pakistani-Indian conflict, as well as the fact that in the period that I was there, I worked with three Prime Ministers, Nehru, Shastri, and the first government of Mrs. Gandhi.

What I am trying to summarize here is the fact that, first it was a great learning experience, it has enabled me to network with a great number of intellectuals and political leaders from India and the region (because I was also accredited at Nepal and Sri Lanka and Burma), so in a way, that region became a very important dimension of my life experience.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: And, what was your first contact with the United Nations?

Dag Hammarskjöld

CM: The first contact with the United Nations was in 1967, but in a very ad hoc manner. In 1967, we were at a conference in Algeria when tension between Egypt and Israel arose towards the end of May. Some of us were asked at the time that we should explain the Arab point of view; a couple went to France, and I went to the United States with Fayez Sayegh and Wallid Khalidi. But in order to be able to have access and explain the Arab position, we became advisors in respective Arab delegations. Wallid Khalidi joined the Iraqi delegation, Fayez Sayegh the Kuwaiti delegation, and I the Lebanese delegation. We were marginal. This was just a sort of an ad hoc position advisory, but that was my first contact with the United Nations. After that, I was in Cairo

in the Arab League at that time after I had left India. I resigned from the Arab League around early July 1967, and returned to work in al-Ahram in Cairo. I wrote several articles on India, several commentaries, etc. And then I went back, in 1971, to Lebanon to practice law and also to edit the weekly edition of al-Nahar. Then, in 1974, although it wasn't a UN experience as such, I came to the United States as a special envoy of the Arab League summit, to explain to the American public and decision-makers the reasons for the oil embargo. That enabled me to have an unprecedented access and exposure to interesting people, greatly motivated to hear our views at the time. That gave me a great deal of exposure in the media and the television. I met several of the leading newsmen in the U.S., and that facilitated my subsequent assignment to the United States and the United Nations in September 1979.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: And when did that assignment begin?

Dag Hammarskjöld

CM: Egypt was suspended from the Arab League in July 1979, during the Baghdad summit conference, because of its peace treaty with Israel, which was considered to be a violation of the charter of the Arab League. I, at that time, wrote an open letter to the new Secretary-General, whom I did not know, in the newspaper of which I was the editor. It was a huge open letter about the future of the Arab League, and the fact that Egypt is not within its ranks now, and thus its ensuing responsibilities. He didn't know me. I didn't know him either. The Arab League Secretary General Chedli Klibi explained who I was. He invited me to come to Tunis, where the League Headquarters are, and offered me the job. I was taken aback, because I was very critical of the Arab League. Anyhow, I said

“Well, I’ll take it for a year.” I came, and I assumed my new responsibilities in New York on the first of September 1979.

There were two major crises upon my arrival: one was when Andrew Young, Ambassador of the United States, met with the PLO representative Zuhdi Tarazi in violation of a ban by the U.S., and that automatically projected the League as an important player in the United Nations and in the United States -- that was the second day of my taking over! I was trying to structure my office. At that time, also, this issue of black-Arabs relations, and Rev. Jesse Jackson came to see me, and then I was taken aback by the rush of events. I was often in interviews and all that. I secured a contribution from the Arab League’s UNESCO, ALECSO it is called, for the "Push for the Excellence" of the organization, of \$200,000. *The New York Times* the next day had a headline on the first page that said “The Arab League gives Jesse Jackson \$100,000” and I called them up and said “No, it’s \$200,000,” after I had been assured by the Justice Department that a contribution to a non-profit organization is legal. In a way, that catapulted us into prominence, into name-recognition, plus the earlier spate that I had during the oil embargo, in the mid-seventies. It was in September, so we were preparing for the General Assembly, and there was a non-aligned summit meeting in Cuba, and all of a sudden, all these developments converged and I was in the middle of them!

JK: I wanted to ask you, then, shortly after that...

CM: Ah! The second issue that was coming up in the first period of my stay was the American hostages in Tehran, and the attempts for us to help, trying to resolve that crisis.

JK: Ok. So, you were involved in that as well.

CM: Both issues. In addition to the general items of the agenda that are concurrent all the time: Israel's settlements, refugees, the Palestinian question, etc., etc. The most difficult problem for me at that time was the fact that Egypt was not part of the Arab League, so that my position was that the Egyptian government is suspended from the Councils of the Arab League but Egypt remains a member of the Arab League. So, that was my contribution to clarity, and it was accepted! But it was a difficult period, having to face Egypt when I had worked in Egypt, all my friends were in Egypt. So, it was a difficult period, but anyhow, this distinction between the government and the state was a facilitating thing to have, although we had some differences that did take place.

JK: So, you could continue to have informal consultations with Egypt?

CM: Informal relations and also consultations, yes.

JK: Even though they weren't considered a formal member?

JK: Not a formal member of the League.

JK: Right. Well, then, during your tenure in New York with the Arab League, Iran and Iraq were involved in a war, beginning in 1980, so shortly after you came to New

York, and it went on for eight years. Did the Arab League play any role during those years to address that particular crisis?

CM: Yes. First of all, it was a regular item on the agenda of the United Nations, both in the Security Council and in the General Assembly. Secondly, the Arab League was the coordinator of the Committee of Seven, which was dealing with this issue. I was the coordinator, here and in the United States, of the Committee of Seven, which we used to meet just to see how to handle the diplomatic aspects of the Iraq-Iran conflict. The responsibility was more in Tunis. But one thing: it did create two problems, one was that Syria and other countries were not in favor of this confrontation between Iraq and Iran, and secondly the tacit support that Egypt gave Iraq at the time, facilitated the re-entry of Egypt in 1989 promoted by Iraq, back into the Arab League. That was one result. Our efforts were always to try to explain the Arab consensus, but in a manner that did not provoke a contradiction by any Arab country which did not approve of this war between Iraq and Iran. Secondly, the legal aspect of it was that it wasn't a war. There's a story about it. It wasn't a war because they retained low diplomatic relations during the early part.

JK: Iran and Iraq maintained diplomatic relations?

CM: Yes, they maintained diplomatic relations, on the level of *chargé d'affaires*, in both countries, until the latter part of 1987. But they retained diplomatic relations, so despite the ferocity of the war, it wasn't technically a war. One time I mentioned that, to which

the Israeli ambassador sort of responded in a very funny way. After disclosing in his speech all of the casualties that they were both announcing, and I said that "It's not a war, but an unfortunate armed conflict," he said "Mr. President, you must agree that Dr. Maksud's lenses were suddenly out of focus." It was a funny repartee.

JK: Right, right.

CM: There was an attack by the Iranian delegation at that time on us, although we maintained relatively friendly relations, but we were very eager to have this come to an end because it was a fruitless war and it was just destroying two countries' societies. So, we, in the Arab League, while supporting Iraq diplomatically and Iraq's diplomatic position, we were always careful not to make that support adversarial to Iran. It was a semantic challenge, if you like.

JK: Did the League meet with the parties or try to mediate any kind of solution?

CM: Not the League as such, but Syria, in many ways, kept direct contact, and support. I mean, not "support" but "contact" with the Iranians, and therefore there was never an Arab rupture with Iran, but there was a great deal of Arab official support for Iraq.

JK: I see. So, it seems there were differences of opinions amongst the Arab League members?

CM: Yes, but the majority was in favor of Iraq. But Syria, being a significant country as well as South Yemen at that time, and Libya.

JK: Did the League at any time participate in any of the resolutions that were written, in the writing of the resolutions, or preparing the resolutions for the UN on this issue?

CM: Yes. In as much as the Committee of Seven was doing many of these. But we tried, I mean, to steer a course. It's the countries themselves who are doing it, Iraq for example. But usually there was always a regularized consultative process taking place, and therefore we would have our input, and we would have our negotiating processes with the Council members. Then in the Arab group, when we discussed our position on items, the League was always there and often the spokesman.

JK: In May of 1982, Jordan sent a letter to the Security Council requesting that they take up the issue of the Iran-Iraq war, and then a few months after that the Security Council passed Resolution 514 calling for a cease-fire.

CM: Yes. That was basically the thrust. We were always calling for a cease-fire.

JK: Ok. So the Arab League was supportive of that call for a cease-fire?

CM: Yes.

JK: And were you meeting with Jordan, and preparing the request?

CM: Well, you don't "make" a resolution, what you do it is prepare a blue paper, it becomes blue and then black. So, there's always consultation. I would speak in the Security Council, usually, on all the issues pertaining to the Middle East.

JK: And then, shortly after that, another resolution, 522, was established, that authorized sending UN observers to Iran and Iraq. What was the position of the Arab League?

CM: We wanted to have observers because that would ensure some sort of a diffusing of the conflict.

JK: In your opinion, what was the cause of the confrontation between Iran and Iraq?

CM: Well, first of all, I think that the cause was the attempt on the part of the Iraqi government to use the anxieties in the Gulf countries from an "exportation" of the Iranian "revolution," that Iraq would protect them. With Iraq as a pillar of Arab nationalism in the area, especially since Egypt was no longer an active participant in Arab national politics. So, it was an attempt to *harness* the propensity of Iran to "export" its revolution, and therefore he became the sort of deterrent against such a thing, in the Arab world, and that's why he was supported a great deal -- which is the paradox of it later on. There was another school of thought, that this was a precipitous decision, and you don't antagonize a

country like Iran, with whom the Arabs have a good deal of religious, cultural, spiritual, geopolitical relationships, and that the revolution removed the Shah, and supported the Palestinian cause a great deal -- and why, therefore, should we precipitously take on an Iraqi-Iranian war, which was corroding both countries' societies and wealth. So, there was a debate. There was never an identification, a total identification with Iraq, although there was rhetorical identification. But it wasn't a very convincing war; it was a very unfortunate war. History will judge it as such. Of course, the rhetoric of the revolution at that time also gave a pretext that they were trying to export their revolution. And on the other hand, there is a rhetorical choice being utilized to secure a place for Saddam Hussein by filling the vacuum that Egypt had left in the Arab world.



JK: Did it seem as though the Arab League's hands were somewhat tied in trying to play a more active role in mediating the conflict?

CM: Yes. That's why we were always eager to have Syria and Algeria at that time, to keep on mediating with Iran, so that it doesn't get out of hand. That was at the initial stage.

JK: Why did the war continue on for so long? There were a number of attempts by the UN to call for a cease-fire, there was another call for a cease-fire in 1986, and in 1987.

CM: Well, you had the leadership of both countries at that time, Khomeini and Saddam Hussein, I mean, you don't reason with them, you follow them. But in the case of the Arab League, we tried to maintain a sort of a responsibility of supporting Iraq but on the other hand of calling for a revival of the bonds between the Arabs and the Iranians. So in a way, it wasn't *our* declaration of war, it was a definite tilt, constrained, however, by these circumstances that there wasn't a general conviction that this war was useful.

JK: Was there a concern on the part of the Arab League for the build-up of weapons in the region, both on the Iraqi side and on the Iranian side?

CM: Well, you know, there was, in 1981, when the Israelis raided the nuclear facilities in Iraq, Osirak. We went to the General Assembly, and the Arab League at that time published a whole booklet, which you might find. I think it might be useful for you to go to the Arab League headquarters and see some of the documentation.

JK: That would be excellent.

CM: Then what I'll do is I'll send you this little thesis that was done, not a very good form, but at least it has some documentation in it.

JK: That would be very useful, because we are trying to put together a whole file on the issue, and that would be very useful for people who are doing further research.

CM: And then there was in 1987 or 1988, I'm not sure exactly the date, the Ford Foundation had a sort of a workshop on this, and I was there. Although the report doesn't reflect it, most of the ideas on the Arab side were mine. You can see that; they have a report.

JK: So, the Ford Foundation has a report on that?

CM: Yes. Brian Urquhart was chairing it, and there was also the former, or actual at that time, Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference, so it might be useful for you to get that.



JK: OK. That's good. The oral history, in general, is to be there for research, so, you know, the more kinds of references the better to documents that are also useful for people who are conducting research.

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CM: You see, the basic focus of the Arab League has been, during that period, what was taking place in Lebanon, the attrition war in Lebanon. The Palestinian issue, in all its phases during the 1980s. When we met all the members of the Security Council on Iraq and Iran, we went to Brazil. I went to Brazil at that time. So, we were active diplomatically and informationally. We carried the mandate of the Arab League, but it wasn't a very cohesive mandate, because it didn't want to go too far and provoke the three or four major countries in the Arab League that were not in favor of the war.

JK: So, there wasn't a complete consensus within the League that you could work with?

CM: There was a consensus, but not unanimity.

JK: Not unanimity?

CM: But a very flawed consensus.

JK: What was the response of the Arab League to allegations, beginning in 1983 but continuing through the Iran-Iraq war, of the use of chemical weapons?

CM: Well, there was an underlying factor that we are against the use of chemical weapons, but it was always associated with a discourse that Israel possessed the nuclear weapon, and therefore weapon parity on that level is dangerous. But, there was a sort of a surreptitious factor that although chemical weapons should be barred but it was always that the nuclear possession of weapons by Israel is the cause of whatever weaponry the Arabs might have. So, in that sense, there was a position against it, and then, the Arab League wanted a nuclear free zone in the area and was against all sorts of chemical weapons. That was the official position.

JK: Right. But when it was suspected and then, I think, later shown, that Iraq had been using chemical weapons during that war, then they were actually being used against other Arabs.

CM: Against the Kurds, but I mean, they were Iraqi citizens. No, there was never a sort of “approval” of the war in general, there was always a shy support to Iraq’s position, trying to explain it, but there was never a conviction that this was a viable war or a just one.

JK: Yes, OK. At one point, the Secretary-General of the UN, or actually, at a couple of points, appealed to both Iran and Iraq not to attack civilian centers. Was the Arab League in support of his appeal?

CM: Yes, we approved that. Because they were attacking Tehran and Baghdad and so on. So, the Arab League was consistently appealing in that nature, supporting the Secretary-General. As a matter of fact, many of the appeals and others were in direct consultation between the Secretary-General and myself, or the UN Secretary-General and the Arab League Secretary-General. During my period, there has been a more institutional relationship between the Arab League and the United Nations, and the level of cooperation became very strong. In 1983, we had treaties and agreements signed by the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the UN in Tunis, and then there was regular consultation. There was an enhanced level of cooperation during that period.

JK: OK. Were some of those letters actually at your request, or were you involved in the preparation?

CM: On Iraq-Iran? No. But on other issues, some of them were upon our request, i.e., violations by Israel of the borders with Lebanon.

JK: What was the role of the Kurds in the conflict with Iran and Iraq, and what was the basic approach of the Arab League toward the Kurdish problem?

CM: Well, there was always the fact that first of all, the Kurds of Iraq were part of the Iraqi citizenry. They wanted some level of autonomy because of internal problems and allocation of resources. What we were keen about was the territorial integrity and the unity of Iraq. We were against separatist movements; we were not against the Kurds. We could see the position of the Kurds. First of all, the Kurdish problem, although there is a moral validity for the Kurds saying, "We're a nation -- we need a state, and so self-determination," but that would mean a geopolitical explosion in the area for four countries, Turkey especially. So, in that sense our position was always that an administrative, cultural autonomy within the unity of the state, of the citizenship of Iraq, would be possible. And we considered that Iraq *did*, at least in terms of legal matters, give them among the best formulations for Kurdish autonomy and cultural identity and recognition of their language, etc. On the other hand, there were certain Kurds who rebelled against the authority of the state, who wanted to separate and secede, and therefore they were attacked. While we did not approve of the level of violence against

them, we did feel that there was some sort of legitimacy in dealing with it, because they had offered them, within the realm of a realistic context, a measure of autonomy.

Whether the brutalization of the attacks was condoned or condemned, there was, as usual, an abstention of rendering moral judgments, but at least criticizing some of the excesses of the attacks on Kurds. It was a series of dilemmas, and that's why you had people calling after my name to "Clovis-ize": that is to make what is clear unclear. They started using my name!

JK: So, to use certain kinds of diplomatic language?

CM: Right -- which I don't now anymore. You know what I mean?

JK: That's interesting! Well, a few minutes ago, you mentioned that you had been involved in some of the issues in Lebanon, the conflict between Israel and Lebanon. Could you explain a little bit of what the issues were there, and your involvement?

CM: Well, the attack. First of all, in 1978 I wasn't there. But in 1982, when the second invasion took place, I was instrumental in mobilizing the Arab group, although they didn't need much effort to do so, but I was speaking every day in the Security Council, at press conferences, my wife was heading a hunger strike in front of the White House which, ultimately, when Mrs. Reagan met the delegation of the Arab women.

In Lebanon, we did, yes. And we were also very keen on preparing for the Committee of Three of the Arab League, and our Assistant Secretary General was at that

time in charge of it. He's now going to Afghanistan on behalf of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

JK: Now, when you say the Committee of Three, what is that?

CM: The Arab League appointed three foreign ministers to handle the Lebanese crisis, which ended up in the Ta'if agreement that ended the war in Lebanon.

JK: I see, so which were the three countries? They were the foreign ministers of which countries?



CM: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. And then we had the League's Assistant Secretary-General being the coordinator and the spokesman of the Committee.

JK: And do you recall who that Assistant was?

CM: Yes, of course! It was Lakhdar Ibrahim, who is now the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General going to Afghanistan, tomorrow.

JK: So, there were three countries that worked together.

CM: Yes, on behalf of the Arab League to settle the issues of conflict in Lebanon.

JK: And they worked to keep the issue moving ahead, to coordinate the policies?

CM: Until it culminated in the Ta'if agreement.

JK: And it was called the Committee of Three?

CM: No, it was called the Arab League Committee.

JK: Oh, the Arab League Committee, I see. Did this Committee work in cooperation with the UN in any way?



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CM: Yes, in certain instances.

JK: Oh, because they were coordinated with the Assistant Secretary-General.

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CM: Yes, the Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League.

JK: Oh, of the Arab League, OK.

CM: We were only facilitators, and in the UN we tried to extract from the General Assembly support for this committee.

JK: ...in the General Assembly.

CM: And when necessary in the Security Council.

JK: And then did you, yourself, work with this committee in drafting some of the proposals that they might make?

CM: No. But we were in certain levels of consultation, I mean, we were in regular consultation. One, officially, because I had to handle the part at the UN, and one, unofficially, because I was Lebanese and I knew a little more about the internal politics of Lebanon, so that was not official, that was unofficial. There were two advisors there, the two Arab League coordinators in this committee: one, who died, was later on Ambassador of the Arab League in Paris, but he died, and then Ibrahim. So they knew that being a senior official of the Arab League and a Lebanese, they would consult with me. I had an input, but not necessarily a part of the team. I was sort of a resource for them.

JK: OK. Now, was your position that you were in favor of the UN sending the peace-keeping troops to Lebanon?

CM: The peace-keeping troops were there before.

JK: They had been there.

CM: What our request was that they should be enabled to exercise their mandate, because Israel had put the militias there that prevented the UN forces from exercising their mandate over all the territories that the Security Council had defined. So, in a way we were condemning Israel for preventing the implementation of the Security Council's resolutions 425, 508, 509 and 520.

JK: So, what was the ultimate outcome of the committee, specifically?

CM: The Ta'if agreement, and what is governing the situation in Lebanon now.

JK: OK. So, they were instrumental.



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CM: Oh yes. They were not only instrumental -- they did it!

Dag Hammarskjöld

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JK: They did it, OK. Did the committee continue to meet and follow the issue once the agreement was made?

CM: No, once the election of the president and parliament took place, then it became a point of reference: "Are you violating? Is somebody violating the Committee agreement?", etc. But not any more in charge.

JK: I see, OK. As you said, your role as Lebanese was important to understanding what the subtleties of the issues were.

CM: Yes, sometimes they would seek my advise and my input. I don't know if it was helpful or not, but we remain friends, so that's fine!

JK: That's a good sign.

CM: There was a time when the Secretary-General, in the earlier part, wanted me to be on the committee. I said no, because even if I'm one hundred percent objective, I would be always perceived as a Lebanese -- don't send a Lebanese! So the first envoy of the Secretary-General was a Tunisian. The second was the Algerian. It's better.



JK: Right. There was so much going on during these years.

CM: Libya, the attack on Libya, the Lebanese, the Palestinians, the Jerusalem issue, all that.

JK: It's difficult to put a chronology together because of the interweaving of all of these conflicts.

CM: Yes, but it is important, if you want to make it a little bit more vibrant, to get some of these pamphlets and things which we published.

JK: Right.

CM: There is here, at the Arab League maybe they have it, the *Al-Arab* which is the magazine which we used to publish, and my editorials would reflect a sequence of positions that we took on all issues.

[end of side #1]

[side 2]

JK: We've been talking basically about the 1980s, and all the complex events that were leading up to various different crises in the Middle East. I wanted to talk to you now about the Second Gulf War, the war with Iraq and the invasion of Kuwait. Was the Arab League involved in some of the meetings prior to that event, leading up to it?

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CM: Yes, the Baghdad Summit conference, and then subsequently the letter that was sent on the 18th of July to the UN Secretary-General, by the foreign minister of Iraq, which was very strong language. At that time, I sensed that it was the beginning of a real crisis taking off, and I sort of alerted the headquarters of the Arab League that they must do something to prevent further escalation. And there were appeals by the League Secretary-General. In a way, I thought there were some countries that were trying to do some sort of avoiding the escalation of the rhetoric. Since the 18th of July, and as a result of that I had accepted an invitation to be the commencement speaker at the American University of Beirut, which is my alma mater, it was the peak of my academic presence and I wanted to do it. Then U.N. Secretary General de Cuellar calls me up in the car on my way to the airport asking me to come back because this was becoming very, very

serious. I came back, thinking maybe one or two days' postponement would be all right. And then, the invasion took place, so I had a press conference, and I condemned the invasion, but I asked for a "breathing space," that's what I called it, "breathing space" for the Arabs to undertake efforts to fashion an Arab solution before it blows out of proportion. At that time, the Kuwaitis and the Iraqis in a way inferred that I should not make any more emphasis on the Arab solution, but I kept on. And then when the Arab League split on the 14th and 15th of their summit in Cairo and when they ratified the deployment of American troops to Saudi Arabia, I resigned as a matter of policy. Do you have the letter of resignation?

JK: No, no. I don't have that.



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CM: And then there's an article in the *World Policy Journal*, you have that?

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JK: Yes, I do have that.

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CM: That is a more elaborate one. Since then, I resigned, but because the duty required that I stay in the post for two months afterwards, I stayed in my home doing only the administrative work, signing checks, paying the rents, but not getting involved.

JK: Yes. Then, explain the background of your resignation, and what was the specific issue at hand, why you decided in a way important for you to resign in that case?

CM: The split of the Arab League! I didn't want to represent a faction of an organization that had no consensus. The whole aspect of the Arab League, in my view, is to articulate a credible consensus.

JK: In that you had such a privileged position within the Arab League itself, I think it would be useful if perhaps you could explain for people doing research what the nature of the split was, and what were some of the conflicts within the Arab League at the time that would bring such a difference in policy.

CM: Well, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was the first time an Arab country invaded another.



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[interrupted]

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JK: Well, we were talking about Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the crisis that ensued after that, and then ultimately your resignation. I was wondering if you could explain a little bit more about the split that happened in the Arab League over this particular crisis and what were the issues involved that caused the split?

CM: Well, first of all there was a clear violation of the Charter of the Arab League. Therefore, the Arab League was meeting at the level of the Council of foreign ministers, and it condemned it. Now, that was a justifiable condemnation, because, and this was so traumatizing, because it was the first time an Arab state invaded an Arab state. There had

been disputes, we can have little conflicts, but never has there been an invasion, and then annexation, and therefore the negation of sovereignty. The Charter of the Arab League says that all these states are independent sovereign states. They are all Arab states, they have to be accountable to each other up to a point. That's why we suspended the membership in the League's Councils of Egypt, because it violated the Charter by signing a unilateral peace treaty with Israel. Now, the invasion and then the annexation, both levels, were a compounded violation of the Charter. The condemnation was inescapable, inevitable, and required.

During this period, after efforts of conciliation did not succeed, and the invasion took place, many of the Arab countries that wanted to try and resolve it were going about it individually. The Jordanian king, the Algerian president, Yasser Arafat, all those who were worried about the escalation, and the League's Secretary-General, would go separately. My suggestion was that as long as there is going to be a meeting of the Arab summit, let us then make a formula for an Arab solution, which is a collective one. Because every time one of the Arab leaders would go to Saddam Hussein, he said, "Well, I don't want to discuss anything. The only condition now is that you remove the condemnation and then we'll discuss." But you can't remove the condemnation. My proposition, at that time, was that a group, on the 14th of August, of around five heads of state, go on behalf of the Arab League and the Arab nation, and tell him "We will not *ratify* the condemnation -- because when you take a decision at the summit, you can ratify or not ratify the resolutions of the foreign ministers. If you "redeploy," and we used the word "redeploy" instead of withdraw so that he has a face-saver, "to the borders, we will have observers from the Arab League at these borders, we'll have an adjudicating

mechanism, etc., etc.” That was the composite proposal for an Arab solution, to be attempted. If it succeeded, it would have been wonderful; if it doesn’t, ...

In the meantime, Secretary Richard Cheney went there, convinced the Saudis -- the Saudis were wavering between accepting mediation or not. The United States persuaded Saudi Arabia that there was a threat to their own, and because of the record of Saddam Hussein, they were ultimately persuaded.

Then, this meant, when Saudi Arabia, all the Arab Gulf states, so how many are those? Six? So, you had six states automatically against any mediation. Then, they persuaded Somalia and Djibouti, so that’s eight. Egypt is nine. Syria, because of its antipathy to Saddam Hussein, went along, so that’s ten. And Lebanon, eleven. And there’s one more... Anyhow, there was a majority that prevented an Arab solution, or the attempt at an Arab solution, which might have worked, or might not have worked. But at least, it should have been tried. I think it should have been tried. The fact that it hadn’t been tried, and they allowed a deployment of the American troops to Saudi Arabia, I resigned. That was it. The Arab League should have attempted an Arab League mediation effort -- no guarantee that it would succeed, but at least it would have defused the popular anger. You had people supporting Saddam Hussein not because of Saddam Hussein, but because of the fact that he was perceived as standing up to the Americans -- which was not true, that was not the issue. The issue was distorted. And the Arabs... I can understand the Kuwaitis not wanting any more mediation, they wanted force, but the Arabs should have tried.

JK: Right, right. So that there could have been at least an attempt on a regional solution.

CM: A regional solution, which if it had succeeded, we would have avoided all this; if it had failed, there wouldn't have been any deception among the people. Remember 400,000 demonstrated in Casablanca in Morocco, 400,000 against it and in Algeria. To many people Saddam Hussein became a hero, but he's not! That was the big distortion, and in depth it remains to today.

JK: Do you think that it may have been possible that if the Arab League had appealed for mediation with Saddam Hussein, that he might have been more agreeable to something within the region? And that once it became a U.S. issue, that it hardened his resolve?

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CM: Well, no, I don't know if he would have. Now, in retrospect, I don't think he would have accepted. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Now, his attack on Iran is so reckless, I mean his verbal attack when there's the new Khatemiregime. He's unpredictable, so I don't know. At that time I was very keen that it should be attempted, I wasn't sure that it was going to work. But I was attacked, strongly, by lots of people. In Kuwait, a very dear friend of mine attacked me strongly, but I didn't answer him because I realized that there was a shock. And then, Dr. Ghazi al-Gosaibi, who is now the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in London, also, wrote four articles and one of them is that I should commit suicide! There was this sort of thing, but there was a great deal of

popularity for me, also. I emerged on the one hand as a symbol of Arab nationalism and unity, and all that, and so I became very popular, popular in some places, and deeply unpopular in other places.

JK: Were there fears on the side of Saudi Arabia?

CM: In a way, I became very popular in the mass image, I was on television every other day and all that stuff, interviews with the papers. So on the one hand, I became ostracized by Kuwait, definitely with a few minor exceptions, and by the Saudis, but not all the Saudis, but a significant element in the establishment of Saudi Arabia, and that's all. But, now in Saudi Arabia there's no more ostracism. In Kuwait, there is still lingering bitterness about my position.

JK: And was that because they were afraid that if the US or the industrialized nations didn't come in immediately on their side, that it could get worse?

CM: That's right. "There is no hope of an Arab solution, so why ponder it? If you're pondering an Arab solution you are pro-Iraqi." Which is not true. That was their thesis. "You know that the Arab solution is not a viable solution, not a practical solution, not a realistic solution, but you are proposing it because you want to support Iraq's aggression."

JK: And that was a misinterpretation of what you were saying?

CM: Not only a misinterpretation, a distortion.

JK: A distortion of what you were trying to do.

CM: But it was partly understandable because they were victimized and they wanted to rush for revenge. It was no more... they wanted revenge. Some of us wanted to salvage. That was the difference.

JK: Ah ha. That was an important difference. Now, in your opinion, why did Iraq invade Kuwait?



CM: Well, there were several reasons. One is the fact that there has always been a historical claim. In 1961 there was a claim but the Arab League at that time succeeded in avoiding it. They claimed that it's part of Basra, and therefore historically it is part of Iraq. But Iraq did not exist as an entity as it is now. So, in a way the claim is at best contentious. Secondly, as long as we have recognized the sovereignty of Kuwait as it is, then you don't invade it! An Arab doesn't invade. There's a sort of sanctity, even of your enemy. The third, they did have some grievances, genuine grievances of access to the Gulf, which they needed, from these two little islands which could have been granted or something, and the Rumaila, from which the Kuwaitis were drawing some oil. So, there were legitimate grievances, which could have been arbitrated, mediated, etc., but would not justify under any circumstances a war, an invasion. So, that plus that, and the fact that, I think, with the great deal of losses that Iraq suffered during the Iran war, and

wanted to derail attention from accountability, Iraq needed another sort of “patriotic” undertaking. So, in part, there was an historical claim which was not valid -- well, it’s not invalid either, if you want to go into detail -- so that’s one. Second, there was some legitimate grievances and losses of money, he wanted more money, ten billion dollars, to cover some of the losses for which they were not forthcoming, and the grievances about access to the Gulf. These were legitimate grievances. And third, is the humiliation and, falsely and corruptingly saying, “this is a form of Arab unity.” I mean, Arab unity is a voluntary access to unity, not something that is accomplished by force. And Saddam misread the support that he had. Because, you know, for a while, in Kuwait, all his pictures were on the walls, because they felt if he saved them from the Iranians. But in ten days, the reversal was complete. He felt that the people were going to welcome him because his ambassador must have written “All your photographs, Mr. President, are all over the shops” -- which was true, because of the Iranian thing. So, he felt that if he invaded, he would be welcomed, which was totally a miscalculation, a misreading of the international climate, a misreading of April Glaspie's statement, “We don’t interfere in disputes among Arab states,” which is a logical American position. They made a misstatement here. But, she just said, “We won’t interfere if there’s a dispute.” She didn’t say, “We are in favor of resolving disputes by invasion”!

JK: What is it, in your opinion, which enables Saddam Hussein to maintain the kind of control that he does within Iraq?

CM: Because he controls part of Iraq by force, and because, well, because he projected it as a sort of Sunni-Shiite coalition, thing. So, he controls the Sunni territory, so they support him by default, not by conviction. And, because, at this moment, the opposition is so amorphous, and they fight among themselves, so he is lucky by what kind of opposition he has. And, civil society had completely broken down in Iraq. Civil society in Iraq was one of the most advanced. It is the people who had the best contributions to science, engineering, and women's status, and art, music, poetry, literature, everything. It's totally changed, it's all in diaspora. It's a tragedy. And then the hunger and all that has created such a crisis of conscience; in the Gulf countries everybody is saying, "We want to support the Iraqi people," the artists, the poets, the teachers, etc., and when they realize that the children are dying, then, although they hate Saddam Hussein, they are in this position where they want to support the Iraqi people. So, in the UAE you have people sending money and food and medicines into Iraq and by Qatar too.

JK: That leads me to another question that I have for you, which is that in your opinion, and then also in the opinion of the Arab world, what is your view of the economic sanctions that have been imposed?

CM: Well, in the earlier stages the economic sanctions were part of the UN enforcement measures. They penalize the people and not the regime. As a matter of fact, they were sustaining the regime and penalizing the people; it was a reverse effect. I think that the Arabs have a crisis of conscience about the Iraqi people, that there is a very profound crisis, a guilt complex, that maybe they contributed to this, and they want to lift

it. This is a big test, whether it helps or harms Saddam Hussein, they just want to lift the sanctions, it's a very urgent demand, with the exception of Kuwait, but even those who fought. And so there is a very strong sense that they want to help the Iraqi people, irrespective of their regime.

JK: And what about the view of the oil in trade for lifting some of the sanctions?

CM: There is support as alleviation, but not as a resolution of the crisis. It would sort of alleviate some of the extreme pain, but it doesn't restore the civil society.

JK: And what about the issue of Jordan in relation to this, because Jordan, being one of Iraq's main trading partners, has suffered tremendously, economically, from the sanctions?

CM: In Jordan, and Turkey up to a point to, the business class, which might ideologically be against the regime, but they are in favor of lifting sanctions because that's their outlet. And, some corrections have been made through the Security Council's committee to see where there have been problems and where they could have helped.

JK: For some compensation towards Jordan?

CM: Yeah. But now there is a reversal of positions. The United States supports Jordan. But there have always been ways to trade with Iraqis and even Iranians.

JK: Unofficial ways.

CM: Unofficial ways, also with the Syrians.

JK: If the UN were able to target the sanctions better, how would you suggest they might be able to do that, so that it would affect the regime and not necessarily the people?

CM: It's too late. It is too late. They were done more in the spirit of vengeance during the Bush administration and Kuwait, rather than in the spirit of bringing a solution. And they were so sweeping, and the human tragedy so visible, that people became against the sanctions as such, per se.

JK: Is there a way that early on the sanctions might have been targeted more carefully?

CM: ... more carefully, and more selectively. Yes, there could have been. It was so sweeping and in a spirit of vengeance rather than a spirit of correction. And it did not appeal to any sentiment of the population, in the same manner as the sanctions on Rhodesia and on South Africa were, where you had part of the population. Here, you destroy the infrastructure and the civil society as well.

JK: And it seems as though Saddam Hussein and his cadres have themselves not suffered, from the reports that we get from the building that's going on...

CM: Not at all. What happened is that when the infrastructure was destroyed, the whole cadres of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqis, their scientists and engineers, they just went and rebuilt it, as an act of defiance.

JK: And, how does the Arab world feel about Iraq's program to try to achieve nuclear weapons capacity?

CM: Well, at the beginning, they felt that this was a deterrent, a contributing deterrent against Israel's nuclear bomb. So, they were not supporting it, but they were trying to justify it in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, rather than in the context of the morality of having nuclear weapons. There has always been an Arab official position that the region as a whole should be a nuclear-free zone.

JK: And what about, then, the UN role of UNSCOM, in other words, the UN role of coming into Iraq and actually doing the investigation and destroying the capacity for weapons of mass destruction?

CM: Well, there is now a change. They felt that Ekéus was sort of part of the vengefulness, although he was very calm, but part of the vengefulness, part of the sweepingness. But, notwithstanding the fact that there was also, in terms of Saddam Hussein's transgressions on that. The new one, Butler, the Australian, has captured the need to talk to rather than talk at the regime, and therefore he is getting a sort of more

cooperative response, and he is somebody who is very tough but fair. And I think that it's succeeding. [It ultimately failed completely.]

JK: He's an extremely knowledgeable person on the issues.

CM: He's on our Board. [No longer.]

JK: He's on your Board? Ah -- interesting.

CM: He's a very good man. [When I knew him -- after his term in UNSCOM, I felt he became opposite to the man I knew and respected.]

JK: Well, I think that actually I have covered most of the things that I wanted to discuss with you. Is there anything in particular that you would like to add yourself to this, to the discussion?

CM: Well, let me tell you what, you have the articles, do you have the Middle East journal article on the Arab League and... OK. That's two. There is an article coming out now on 30 years after 1967, it's coming in two months but I can send it to you before. I'll send you a copy. This last article gives you a whole different view.

And then there is this little thesis on the Arab League in the 1980s in the UN by one of my students that can help you.

JK: Thank you very much.



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Clovis Maksoud
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
August 11, 1997
Washington D.C.

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