

*UNITED NATIONS INTELLECTUAL HISTORY PROJECT*  
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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF**  
**SIR BRIAN URQUHART**

**BY**

**THOMAS G. WEISS**

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THOMAS G. WEISS: January 6, 2000, Tom Weiss interviewing Brian Urquhart at The City University's Graduate Center.

Brian, you have done us a favor of writing your memoirs, but I have a couple of questions related to themes that have come up elsewhere. First of all, what actually pushed you to do an autobiography? I ask this because so few officials commit themselves to writing. Many claim the restrictions on Secretariat officials, et cetera. What pushed you?

BRIAN URQUHART: Well, I really did it as an exercise in trying to get out of writing United Nations bureaucratic prose, which it certainly helped with. But, it isn't just about the UN, my memoirs. The first 120 pages are about my life before that. But I never thought—I wasn't even sure it was going to be published. I just wanted to write it all down, mostly for my kids. But then Harper & Rowe expressed an interest in it, so that was that.

TGW: It's entertaining, well written, and great fun. But, as I say, many officials claim that they have neither the time to read nor to write.

BU: I love writing, but one of the problems that a lot of people have is, they don't like it. This thing about discretion is, I think, very much overdone. When I set out to write a biography of Dag Hammarskjöld, which I was asked to do by publishers, his family, and a lot of people in Sweden, I was told by everybody, including Ralph Bunche, that it would be quite impossible—if you were a serving UN official—to write a biography of one of the Secretaries-General. And I almost didn't do it because of that.

But then I discovered that, if you, in the first place, do not have any kind of hidden motives, and, in the second place, you tell the truth, and try to represent all sides of all the controversial problems that somebody like him was involved in, nobody can really object. I think what people object to is people paddling their own canoe, or sharpening their own hatchet

in writing. Take the Arabs and the Israelis. Ralph Bunche spent a great deal of his time dealing with them. You couldn't have a more controversial subject. But if you write perfectly honestly what the motivations and the positions of both sides were, and then describe how he did or did not solve it, it really is non-objectionable.

I think this discretion business is much overdone. In the early days of the UN, there was this idea that nobody could talk to the press, and that we were some kind of Trappist order sitting there on the banks of the East River, and above all this. This was totally disastrous. It was terrible. That's why I wrote the book about Hammarskjöld, because Hammarskjöld was a master with the press, and they liked him very much, because he talked very fluently, and often said absolutely nothing, and it was sort of a game. But almost nobody understood what he had been trying to do. None of his officials ever talked to the press, and he was like a Delphic oracle: ask Hammarskjöld a question, you would get an answer which you could read under water, at 10,000 feet, backwards, forwards, and sideways. He was a brilliant intellectual, but he didn't really tell you what he was doing.

This was the reason why the Swedes were so anxious that somebody write about him. And I had actually already been through his papers, because I was one of the two people who had to deal with the disposal of his papers when he died and decide which were private and which were official. I think there's a great difference between indiscretion and honesty.

TGW: Well, I totally agree. In fact, I was able to get permission to write three books while I was in the secretariat, and it didn't seem to me that it was impossible to either write them or get them cleared.

BU: That's right. I'm sure this is right.

TGW: Because you also started *Ralph Bunche* while you were still in the Secretariat, you started gathering notes.

BU: I didn't start writing it. I wasn't quite sure how much longer I would survive while I was working there. I really mean it, because we were crashing in and out of places like Beirut, and it always seemed to me that sooner or later the grim reaper might decide that was it. So I started collecting all the stuff then, but I didn't start writing that until about 1988, two years after I had left.

Bunche was really a marvelous person, and a person of great intellectual honesty—extraordinary. Both he and Hammarskjöld were alike in that respect. Occasionally Bunche expressed opinions about people. These were all in private, most to himself, and are so funny you can't resist quoting them, but I don't think that they're very damaging.

TGW: Well, I wanted to just draw out a few themes from your biography, *Hammarskjöld*, that are relevant to our own studies of economic and social development. I guess, besides, or during the chaos of the Congo—or before, or during—did he remain optimistic about African independence?

BU: I think that the Congo was a terrible shock to Hammarskjöld. He had been on this amazing tour that same year, 1960. In January and February, he visited something like twenty-four countries and several territories of one grade or another. He spent about six weeks doing it, and had been enormously impressed—this was the honeymoon year of African independence—first by the wonders of Africa, and second by the brilliant young people who appeared to be coming up. I mean, Sekou Touré, or Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya. And he thought, rather naively, that the UN, having been the bridge over which the colonial powers crossed in

order to achieve decolonization, would also be the bridge in the opposite direction, in which the world would help the new independent countries to get into the game.

The real trouble in Africa, like in most of the colonial world, was that colonialism had meant that most colonies had missed the Industrial Revolution. They had been simply sources of raw material and, therefore, they had a huge chip on their shoulder. Whether if they had been independent they would have caught the Industrial Revolution, I'm not so sure. But, nonetheless, they did feel they missed out on the biggest basic revolution in the human condition since, let's say, the discovery of iron.

Hammar skjöld believed that the UN was going to be the bridge over which the former colonial powers and the United States would be able, in a completely uncolonial way, to help in the development of the independent African countries. When he expressed those opinions to de Gaulle, de Gaulle was furious and decided right then and there that Hammar skjöld was somebody that he never wanted to see again. This was a very Swedish idea and that was fine. He wrote a lot about this and had a lot of meetings about it when he came back from Africa. Then, suddenly, in July of that year, the Congo became independent and instantly blew up, literally almost at the moment of independence. And we were confronted with the grim reality of an African country totally unprepared for independence.

The original idea had been that all colonies would go through a period of trusteeship. This was the American idea in 1945. All colonies would go through a period of UN trusteeship to prepare them so that they could manage their independence. But, of course, it never happened except with enemy colonies like Somalia and places like that, very few.

And so, in the Congo, the UN was suddenly confronted with a first class international crisis. There was a huge uproar when tales of Belgian nuns and wives of Belgian officers began

to get around in the first days of July. The army mutinied and threw out all its officers, because there weren't any black officers, there were only Belgians. The whole place really came to a standstill. This was the second largest, and certainly the richest, country in Africa. It was also the most complicated country to run, with a very complex infrastructure. Hammarskjöld believed, originally, and quite wrongly, that this was a problem of management and training. The idea was that the UN would go in there with a peacekeeping force to get the mutiny and everything quieted down, to get the Belgian troops out, to get the place pacified. Then we would put in a huge civilian operation, which would run the banks, the post office, the communications, the hospitals, the air fields, with UN people from the specialized agencies, and each one of them would have beside them their Congolese counterpart who would eventually take over. The guy who was running the central bank, for example, would have a Congolese deputy who was going to become the head of the Congolese central bank and so on.

Hammarskjöld didn't understand at first the depths of complication in the Congo. The Congo was a place held together by Belgian tyranny. It also had an extremely complex infrastructure. It was enormously rich, and there were no trained Congolese—there was nothing above a sergeant in the army and only seventeen Congolese with university degrees. Mobutu [Sese Seko] was a sergeant until the day of independence when he became a major.

Hammarskjöld had not realized that Patrice Lumumba, the prime minister, was crazy, but he soon found out, or that President [Joseph] Kasavubu was a very sleepy passive fellow. He had not realized the tribal complications of the Congo—200 tribal groups. The final thing he hadn't realized was that this great mission, the biggest UN operation ever, was going to get crucified on the Cold War, because very early on the Russians and the Americans squared off in

the Congo. They both had enormous embassies, and very soon it was to be the Russians backing Lumumba and the Americans backing the president, Kasavubu, and later on Mobutu.

So we had the Cold War actually at its hottest possible form in a country where we were doing an enormous development exercise. None of us, I think, had understood any of this until we actually got there—I got to the Congo practically the first day, and I didn't even know which side of Africa it was on. For some unknown reason I thought it was on the Indian Ocean, and I was much surprised to discover it was on the Atlantic. That's the degree of ignorance that we had of the whole thing.

TGW: When, after all, did it become clear that it would then take twenty or twenty-five years instead of seventy-five or 100 to go through the process of decolonization?

BU: The avalanche started with the Indian subcontinent in 1947. And once that had happened, and with people like Ralph Bunche really pushing, by the mid-1950s it was clear that this was going to be a very rapid process. And of course the largest avalanche really happened in the 1960s. In the early 1960s, the entire African continent except for Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique became independent within four or five years.

The trusteeship system would have been the right way to go in an ideal and rational world. You have a country like Guinea for example. De Gaulle simply pulled out everything from Guinea. He pulled out the police force, the telecommunications system, the air field control, everything. So Guinea was left completely stranded. And, roughly speaking, for different reasons, the same thing happened in the Congo.

TGW: You mentioned that this avalanche, particularly after Ghana became independent in 1956 that this was a turning point and that the agenda shifted. To what extent did the interest,

not necessarily the security interest, but the interest in poverty alleviation or development, however you want to frame this, get elevated within the internal discussions on the 38th floor?

BU: That really started in 1948 with [Harry] Truman's "Point Four" speech in the UN, considered at that time to be an original idea. Truman's idea was that the only way to keep the world reasonably stable was to have a vast development program run by the UN, coordinating its own specialized agencies in what was then called "underdeveloped countries." Soon that phrase was considered rude, so they became "developing countries."

I think the UN started off very well on "Point Four." David Owen was in charge of it. In 1948 we wrote a report to the General Assembly, sketching out how this was going to work with the Technical Assistance Board, whether the specialized agencies were all representative, and so on. We ignored the fact that the agencies were rather like the feudal barons under King John of England. They were people who were nominally under the United Nations, but, in fact, were quite rebellious and independent. But the Technical Assistance Board, to some extent, did work. We believed that if we had economic and social development going, the politics would take care of themselves. Of course, this turned out not to be true, especially in Africa. Nobody had foreseen the political instability of many newly independent African states.

I have always felt, being British, that we really have a lot to answer for, because we roared into Africa the last years of the nineteenth century, when nobody knew anything about it, for purely economic and imperial reasons. We smashed the tribal system. We smashed animist and other religions in the various African territories. We substituted missionaries, a slightly ludicrous caricature of the British parliamentary and judicial system, which included wearing full bottom wigs on the equator and things like that. And then, just when the Africans were making a huge effort to get used to it, we up and left within two generations. That wasn't, it seems to me,



very responsible. Thus the Africans were stuck with the worst of both worlds. The original system, which in its own way had been quite effective, was gone, and they weren't used to the new political and judicial system. So the strongest element—namely, the army—took over in many countries. We didn't understand all that in 1960.

This didn't happen in the Congo while the UN was there. In fact, in spite of getting it wrong at the beginning, the Congo operation is the only UN operation that I can think of which actually did every single thing the Security Council asked it to do. It got foreign forces out of the country. It maintained the country within its borders of independence, in spite of three major secessionist movements. It trained a completely untrained Congolese cadre to run the country, and it really got the country going again. And then we left. Unfortunately the CIA then had the brilliant idea of putting in General Mobutu, which, incidentally, we strongly advised against. We all knew Mobutu, because we dealt with him as Lumumba's chief of staff, and if ever there was a guy with his eye on the main chance, it was Mobutu. He really was, even in those days, outstanding in this respect. But, when one told that to people like Mr. [Lawrence] Devlin, the head of the CIA in Leopoldville, they just shook their heads as if we were Boy Scouts.

TGW: Well, your job was peace and security, but if I were to read your book, or just now I'm rereading [Boutros] Boutros-Ghali's and [Javier] Pérez de Cuéllar's memoirs, the notion of development comes in here and there, but it virtually is almost a residual of international peace and security. Could it be otherwise?

BU: I think one has to go back to the original framework. The object of the UN was to avoid repeating the causes of World War II. To some extent we thought we were refighting the thirties in the UN. We were going to deal with aggression, we were going to have disarmament, and we were going to take measures to avoid another Great Depression. Those were the three

basic legs of the UN. In fact, we were fighting the last war, as is often the case in international organizations.

We assumed that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its various commissions would be paramount, and that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the International Trade Organization (ITO), which never came into being, would be useful colleagues, and helpful to the central economic and social organ. The Economic and Social Council was supposed to be on the same level as the Security Council. It was supposed to be the primary international organ in the economic and social field, and its commissions—the Employment Commission and the Human Rights Commission and the Social Commission and so on—were supposed to be active operational bodies. But the Cold War came and the Soviet Union was not in the Bank and the Fund. The ITO was never set up. The services weren't in the GATT. So, the United States and the western countries put their support behind those organizations and more or less left the Economic and Social Council to wither on the vine.

The 1948 "Point Four" speech and the Technical Assistance Board were the beginning of the development program. It was thought that the UN would be the primary mover in a huge new program of economic development of the underdeveloped countries, being a sort of *primus inter pares* with the Bank, the Fund, and all the specialized agencies. With the Bank and the Fund, that didn't happen.

And then, of course, the Cold War took over. The Cold War mentality. And the Bank and the Fund were the good guys, our solid western United States-oriented specialized agencies, and all the rest of us were a bunch of pinkos and fellow travelers, and we got the Soviet Union as a member. We had the incipient Third World later on coming in and sort of moving it up. And

so the old idea, the 1945 idea, simply vanished. I wonder if it will ever come back. I'm not so sure.

That didn't mean that the UN, I think, didn't do some extremely useful things, which never got any publicity. It had some real world class economists. You would know much more about this than I do, but it seems to me a lot of the work of the Economic Affairs Department was very distinguished in those early days and probably had a very considerable effect on the way things developed and also on the policies of some governments.

TGW: Who would you have classified as the intellectual giants that stand out?

BU: Well, Tom, this is the side of the thing that I'm woefully ignorant of. We had, for example, in the Economic Commission for Europe alone, we had Gunnar Myrdal, Nicky Kaldor, and two or three lesser lights on I can't remember the names of. We had the great Latin American economist, Raúl Prebisch. We had people like [Manuel] Perez-Guerrero who were not economists, but very good operators. The intellectual standard was very high. Someone like David Weintraub, who was a victim during the McCarthy era, was an extremely distinguished operator economist. There were very good people in the statistical field, and still are, as far as I know. It would be interesting to find out how much influence they really had. Certainly I think [Gunnar] Myrdal had a lot of influence. The Economic Commission for Europe, in the worst early days of the Cold War, was one of the few bridges between East and Western Europe. It was an important organization.

One of the troubles with the UN, which you are now rather belatedly remedying, is the fact that it never had a historical section. I spent years and years, from the time when I was the personal assistant to Trygve Lie, trying to get them to establish a historical section, so that people in all parts of the UN would actually record at the time what they were doing, instead of doing it

fifty years later with a sort of *esprit d'escalier*. The objection to it was that it would cost money, but worse than that, the Russians did not believe in history being impartial and objective. Even worse than that, in order to give the Russians important posts in the Secretariat, they made a Russian the head of the library and the archives, which is putting the fox in charge of the hen coop, so that you couldn't actually get responsible, objective people for a historical section, which would be part of the archives. You would have had to have established an independent unit, and that would have caused a huge row with the Soviets.

So we never had a historical section. As a result nobody knows very much about the kind of serious intellectual work which went on. We all know about peacekeeping and all that, because it got in the newspapers, but there is very little about the economic and the social side. For example, how did we get to the most important document of the entire century, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948?

TGW: Could we just stick with the Universal Declaration a moment, because, in fact, in your book, you also called it a “landmark of incalculable importance,” and you just underlined this now. One of the main tensions, subsequently, was the civilian and political versus the second basket, or the second generation. How did the two covenants appear in 1966, or between the mid-'50s, the mid-'60s, when they were adopted? Were they seen as something other than an East/West framing of issues? Did this idea that we're now sort of playing with a package, or a comprehensive look at human rights, come up earlier, or were they basically seen as two separate entities?

BU: There was a lot of talk when I was young about realists, and the British Foreign Office were possibly the Olympic champions of realism. For an organization which has steadily got it wrong for 150 years, it was an amazing show of arrogance I thought. Nonetheless,

whenever anyone suggested anything in the UN, one was always being told, “this is completely unrealistic.” The attitude of this sort of foreign office bureaucracy, in many countries was, “OK, you know the Americans and Mrs. Roosevelt want to talk about human rights, OK, fine. It isn't really important. But if it pleases Mrs. Roosevelt, OK, fine. It really doesn't have any practical meaning.”

My experience was that the so-called realists almost always get it wrong. Partly due to the development of NGOs, human rights has become a world-class movement, a movement that is not going to stop. It is very imperfect at the moment, and all sorts of terrible things happen, but it is nothing like the kind of dead silence about human rights there was in my youth.

During the 1930s, distinguished Germans in the German foreign office and in the army came one after the other in secret to London and said, “Look, for God’s sake, the next time Hitler does something like going to the Rhineland, just face up to him. If you will do that, he will lose face in Germany, and we have two armored divisions outside Berlin. We will take over the government.” And the foreign office answered, “Sorry, Old Boy, we can't interfere in the internal affairs of a friendly power.” It's enough to make you weep, isn't it? I think they still felt that human rights was a kind of nice old ladies' game, which didn't really matter very much. The real thing was power and armaments. Stéphane Hessel would be a very good person to ask about human rights. He was actually in the Secretariat with Henri Laugier, the then French assistant secretary-general, when they were working up to the Universal Declaration. He could probably tell you a lot about it. Incidentally, before I forget it, Tom, you really ought to try to get a hold of Tex Goldschmidt before he dies. He's around ninety. He's completely *compos mentis*, and he was a very important figure in the development of what was then the Technical Assistant Board and later the development program. He was a wonder boy of the New Deal.

TGW: In the mid-fifties and the early sixties—do you recall reactions to the first Bandung conference, and then, obviously, the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement, and afterwards the economic coalition of the Group of 77 (G-77), did this seem momentous?

BU: Historical events often creep up on one more or less unobserved. I know about the Bandung conference only because it was in the middle of a negotiation for getting the seventeen American prisoners out of China. The CIA had the brilliant idea of shooting down Zhou Enlai's plane on the way to Bandung. In fact, they did bring it down, but he wasn't on it. They killed most of his staff. It was an Air India DC-3, and it had an altitude bomb, and blew to glory at 10,000 feet up, taking off from Singapore. I remember the Bandung conference for that reason. I don't remember that we were thinking about the Third World or the Non-aligned Movement just then. It was something that was happening, like so many other things that didn't seem to be more or less significant than anything else. Most historical events, at the time, don't seem like historical events.

TGW: Let us switch a moment to this publication, which you did with Erskine Childers.

BU: If you haven't done so already, it will be very worth talking to Sven Hamrell, who is the former head of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. He lives in Uppsala. He has done a great deal of work sort of in and around the UN's economic and social work, particularly in the developing world. His successor is called Ole Nordberg. I think they will give you a lot of stuff. They've only been going since 1963, but nonetheless.

TGW: Nonetheless, we will get in touch. In *Renewing the UN System*, you frequently put “system” in quotes, or italics, to indicate that, in fact, it is anything but.

BU: That's right.

TGW: To what extent do you think the drafters of the Charter were dominated by sort of a Keynesian notion that somebody was in charge, or steering anyway—at least an agent of managing international economic affairs—versus the notion we have today which is a considerably less intrusive one of global governance?

BU: I think you have to remember that, for the first ten years of the UN, the West had a completely automatic majority in the General Assembly, which is why the Acheson plan was put through to make it possible to transfer political and security matters from the Security Council to the assembly if they were blocked by the veto. Originally the General Assembly was a safe place for the West.

People saw the UN as a kind of reflection of what a well-run government was like. You had a central authority in the UN, and then you had the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Agriculture, and so on, the Minister of Transport, and it was all going to work like that. We put a photograph in that book of the original building plan of the UN, which has a skyscraper at the bottom of the garden, which was going to house the specialized agencies, all of them. Everybody at the beginning said it was preposterous not to have the specialized agencies in the same place as the UN. Otherwise it won't be a system. Well not a single specialized agency is in New York. Lots of countries wanted to have an agency, so Rome got the FAO, Paris got UNESCO, Geneva got a whole slew of them, Kenya got the environmental business, and so on. Of course it doesn't work. Hammarskjöld, somewhat naively, believed originally that by serious leadership you could get the specialized agencies to work as a system. He was quickly disillusioned. The director general of the World Health Organization suddenly devised a new flag for the World Health Organization, which made no mention of the UN. Hammarskjöld

wrote to this guy and said, "Look, you are a United Nations agency." And he got a furious reply back saying, "It has nothing to do with you, stay out of it."

The only time it really worked as a system, I'm proud to say, was in the Congo. And the reason for that was it was extremely dangerous in the Congo, and we were the only ones who could provide some reasonable degree of security with military escorts, so the agencies loved to work with us in the Congo. But I don't remember it working anywhere else. It isn't a system. It is King John and the barons all over again.

TGW: I have always described coordination, like St. Augustine said "Lord make me pure, just not now."

BU: Exactly.

TGW: No one wants it right now.

BU: Well, I think people like [James] Wolfensohn, as I understand, are now making a serious attempt, largely because they are also under attack, to make some kind of arrangements with the UNDP (UN Development Programme) and with the environment agency and so on.

TGW: This is the rhetoric I have yet to see an indication of.

BU: This may well be largely a result of suddenly and unexpectedly being attacked in public. The Bank and the IMF were always the good guys in the West before. They were always the ones that were perfect. But the NGOs, God bless them, have made life unsafe for established international bureaucracies. They really have. Look what they did to the WTO.

TGW: Do you see this as continuing? I mean what happens after NGOs?

BU: Well, the NGOs have to get their act in order too, because that's not a system either.

TGW: No, anything except.



BU: It's a bunch of single-issue organizations paddling their own canoes. It's fine, up to a point, but I think they too are going to have to get their act in order. We have a chapter on that in that book which is five years ago now, but it is still more or less relevant.

TGW: Well, actually I'm, like you, intrigued by the notion of trying to get more rather than less from the set of parts, and one of the people you point to is Sir Robert Jackson. And, indeed, his *Capacity Study*, tried to put slightly more order or centralization in the so-called system.

BU: That's right.

TGW: What exactly were the responses to that?

BU: Well, Jacko made a terrible mistake. I was devoted to him to, but Jacko really was rather like Theodore Roosevelt. He was about ten years old in some ways, and he made a joke—well, he thought it was a joke—in the introduction of that report, saying, as far as I remember, that there were a number of dinosaurs and cavemen in the system.

And Paul Hoffmann, who was the head of the Development Programme among others, took violent umbrage at this, and rallied all of his fellow directors-general and others. It was ridiculous, because the capacity study was a perfectly sensible study, but, as so often happens, it was ruined by one sentence. One should have an anthology of such unfortunate remarks. Kofi saying that Saddam Hussein was somebody he could do business with is a sentence which will haunt him until the day he dies.

Jacko had a lot of experience. He was the best international operator that I have ever seen. He was wonderful, and also maddening. He had been the real operator of UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency)—the biggest relief operation ever—which put the world on its feet after World War II. It was a fantastic operation. He was a great operator. And given a

sufficiently awful state of affairs, he was wonderful. We put him in charge of the Bangladesh disaster in 1971, over the dead bodies of the specialized agencies—Paul Hoffmann and everybody else—because we really needed somebody who could run it. He did a marvelous job, and he even eventually got the specialized agencies to cooperate. He was a very, very strong operator. You needed the patient's temperature to be dangerously high before you could call Jacko in. Otherwise, everybody started shooting him down from behind cover.

TGW: But if security was the explanation in the Congo, would you then say that personality was the explanation in Bangladesh?

BU: Well, in Bangladesh, it was an almost unmanageable situation. It was a country which had been ravaged, first by a drought, then by a monsoon, then by a flood, and then by a tidal wave. And since most of Bangladesh is about two or three feet above sea level, it was a country in total dissolution. And, on top of that, it was a civil war that eventually ended Pakistani rule. There were 10 million refugees from Bangladesh in India, at one point. Ten million. We're all complaining about one million from Kosovo.

And then, it became a new nation, and the UN was pledged to help it. First of all, we put in Paul Marc Henri, who made a gallant but disorganized effort to deal with it. Finally, I persuaded [Kurt] Waldheim, who was the new Secretary-General over the objections of all the specialized agencies, to put in Jackson, and he did a superb job. He got the place running again. He's never got much credit for it, but he did it. But, as I say, the patient has to be really in almost terminal condition before anybody will agree to that level of operating in the UN system.

Peacekeeping also requires critical conditions to make real progress. The first time we ever managed to get a serious agreement on what the distribution of authority between the Security Council and the Secretary-General was in 1973, when the United States had declared a

nuclear alert—the Soviet Union were moving airborne troops all over the area, and there seemed to be an imminent threat of an East-West clash. Both East and West were so scared that they agreed to the modest suggestion we actually made, on how to run a peacekeeping operation in a sensible way, where the council and the Secretary-General each had their proper sphere of authority. And it's been used ever since. There had been a committee of the General Assembly which had been trying to do that for twelve years before. We did it in ten minutes because everybody was so scared. And the same was true in Bangladesh. It was so awful, that nobody could think what to do. So they accepted Jacko. I seem to be rambling.

TGW: No. This is exactly what we are looking for. I wanted to go back to the Washington-based institutions, just for a moment. Do you recall, you had a nice quote from the director-general of the WHO about autonomy? From the 38th floor, was there a difference between the Washington-based institutions, for which there is usually a dotted line indicating that they're only de jure and not de facto under the front office's control, and the specialized agencies, which supposedly have a firm line in organizations, but sometimes go their own way? What is the balance between those two? Are they seen as the same from the 38th floor?

BU: The 38th floor, under Lie, and under everybody except Dag Hammarskjöld, didn't really devote anything like enough attention to the economic and social side—partly because they weren't economists and didn't totally understand it, and partly because there were so many political preoccupations.

Hammarskjöld made a determined effort to try to get the specialized agencies in order through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). He soon discovered how difficult it was. The directors-general mostly regarded the ACC as a kind of seasonal nuisance, which they had to waste a day on. The Bank and the Fund didn't think it was important at all,

and graciously sent some kind of a deputy to take part, almost seldom the principal. It was dominated by barracks-room lawyers, people like Wilfred Jenks of the ILO, a Dickensian lawyer. Jenks was the deputy director of the ILO and, finally, became the director.

There is a book on coordination by Martin Hill who was the UN's high priest of coordination but I have never been able to read it. It gives some idea, I believe, of the intellectual fatuity of those days.

TGW: Yes. It is difficult sledding. I read it for my dissertation.

BU: It's absolutely unreadable. As his personal assistant, I quarreled with Trygve Lie over Palestine in 1948 and was consigned to the outer darkness, a job in the coordination office, where I nearly went mad for over two and a half years, until Hammarskjöld turned up. We used to write these documents, which really could be read backwards, forwards, upside down, 10,000 feet under water with the same results because they were absolutely proof against giving offense to anybody. Martin Hill specialized in this. It was a totally useless activity in the name of coordination. It was nonsense.

TGW: On the phone, you used the term, and I think it's probably correct for Hammarskjöld, who described himself as an "*économiste manqué*." Do you think that this is a partial explanation for the interest in economic and social affairs? If Kofi were a development economist, or if the next Secretary-General happens to be someone—Mrs. Brundtland—who has spent life in development and the environment, et cetera, would this alter the perspective?

BU: Kofi, to be perfectly fair, has said that world poverty is one of the priorities that he's going to concentrate on. How far he's succeeding, I don't know. He has got a very up-and-coming head of UNDP. I don't know what he's doing, but he's a bright fellow, and he's not that old, either.

I think, in principle Kofi Annan is interested, but it is very difficult, when you are Secretary-General, to focus on the economic and social side, because every day, and every night, something happens which preoccupies you on the political side. Hammarskjöld had all these ideas, mostly to do with development, and he actually made one or two quite good speeches about all this. He had started his career primarily as a banker and an economist.

TGW: Interestingly, in reading Pérez de Cuéllar's autobiography, he straightforwardly says there's been inadequate leadership on the part of the Secretary-General. He incorrectly notes that none of his predecessors have been economists. But he clearly says the political and security demands always take over.

BU: He's quite right. They do.

TGW: Is that the same for—it seems to me that there is a slight difference if we think about human rights. Although, Secretaries-General have not actually taken much of a stand on these until—I would have to say—Kofi. How does human rights fit into this package of economic and social affairs?

BU: It is hard now to remember that there was a time when human rights was the preoccupation of a very limited number of people. Greatly to the credit of NGOs, no government can now ignore human rights. They can violate human rights all right, but they are going to hear about it, which is a huge step forward. It is not the end of the venture, but it's certainly a good beginning. That wasn't really so in the early period. What used to happen was that the Secretary-General, right from—not right from the beginning, from about the fifties on—was constantly being asked to operate in some particular human rights violation.

One of the most persistent was the flight of Jews in the Soviet Union, and Jews in Arab countries like Syria and Lebanon. And whenever any of us were going to the Middle East, scores

of different organizations would come in to say you've got to do something about these people. And there were lots of other individual human rights problems.

Much of the hands-on human rights work was done by NGOs. To his credit, Waldheim did do a lot about the Jews in the Soviet Union. He got a number of agreements out of the Soviet government that probably wouldn't have been got by anybody else. The old Jewish community in Beirut happened to be right on the green line in the civil war and most of its inhabitants were over sixty. We finally did get them moved out.

TGW: I would like to spend a moment on actually one of my favorite subjects, and I guess because I retired as an international civil servant slightly before you did. But there is a passage here in your biography which sounds somewhat akin to Jessie Helms, in which you say, "Over the years there has been a serious erosion of the standards of the international civil service, which we had so jealously guarded at the beginning."

BU: That's perfectly true.

TGW: "Too many top officials, political appointments, rotten boroughs, and pointless programs has rendered the Secretariat fat and flabby." Well, a two-part question. What happened over the years? And, two, what is the relative competence, or incompetence, of the Secretariat, vis-à-vis a government bureaucracy?

BU: Well, last question first. To some extent, there is a gross lack of accountability for the Secretariat, except in purely budgetary terms, and somebody has to correct that. We started off with an absolutely total belief in the rules of the Charter. We thought that we were there to serve the organization as a whole, that we did not take pressure or instructions from any government, and that any governments who tried to put pressure on us were to be rebuked.

The perfect example for us all was Ralph Bunche. Bunche never, ever, took instructions from any government and reacted extremely adversely to pressure, and that particularly applied to the United States. It became a sort of joke with the State Department, that if they wanted Bunche to do something it would be unwise to tell him because he almost certainly would refuse to do it. And I think he was right. Hammarskjöld felt extremely strongly about this.

The person who was generally named as the first Secretary-General of the UN was Dwight Eisenhower and, failing him, Anthony Eden. That was the level that was expected. Because of the Cold War, we got Trygve Lie, who was a mediocre and rather pathetic character but he did his best. But Lie was somebody who had never been heard of, who had no moral authority, and who was intellectually totally inadequate for the job. That was the beginning of the end as far as the secretariat was concerned.

When Lie began to appoint the heads of the different departments, the original eight assistant secretaries-general, there was a gentleman's agreement that the Russians would have the Security Council and politics, that the British were to have economics, the French were to have social affairs, and the Chinese would have trusteeship. The Americans would have administration. They insisted on that. And then the non-permanent members would have the other three posts.

What did we get? We tried to get Milton Eisenhower, Eisenhower's very able brother. Forget it. For the economic post we tried to get Jeffrey Crowther, editor of *The Economist*. Forget it. And so on down the line. Easily, the best assistant secretary-general was the Russian, Arkady Sobolev, who really was very able. They were an undistinguished lot.

The first American appointee was called “Potato Jack” Hudson, a Southerner, who had been thrown out of the U.S. agriculture department. He was called “Potato Jack” because his specialty had been potatoes. He was unbelievable. That was the standard we got.

And we had Trygve, who wasn't really very bright. So it was hard to maintain standards. Then the economic, social, and specialized agencies had all of these proliferating projects of one sort or another. The best known one was UNESCO's (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) project on sex at high altitudes, a project Julian Huxley introduced. So the secretariat—or some parts of it—became a.) overstuffed and, b.) disreputable intellectually.

And then, of course, we had the Russians. The Russians were permanent members. The staff was overwhelmingly Western European and American, and the Russians, not unnaturally, insisted on a quota. And we got a large collection of Soviet *apparatchiks*. The best of them were the KGB people, who were at least reasonably intelligent. The remainder were the dregs of the foreign service, and they were completely useless to any UN purposes. Right in the middle of the Secretariat, there was this large inert mass of Soviet officials who nobody trusted.

On top of that, decolonization and the tripling of the membership posed a large geographical representation problem in the Third World. Few people in the Third World had much experience of the principles of a national civil service, let alone an international one, and whenever anything happened, they ran to their governments who would then mobilize the entire Non-Aligned Movement even on the smaller matters like appointments. So, if you were trying to fire a P-3, it became an international incident with the Non-Aligned Movement. It was ludicrous.

The standards of the secretariat were very difficult to maintain, and Hammarskjöld gave a lot of time to this position. He arrived in the middle of the McCarthy mess and the anti-



communist witch-hunt. The UN was a big focus center of the witch-hunt, and the Americans in the secretariat were going to the wall right and left. Even Ralph Bunche was challenged. My friend Gustavo Durán, who was a famous ex-Spanish Civil War general, was being pursued all over the place by the FBI and Roy Cohn, and McCarthy.

Hammar skjöld was tough. He put an end to that. He threw out the FBI, who were fingerprinting American members of the Secretariat in the basement of the UN building. He also rewrote the staff rules governing staff loyalty and the political activity of staff members. He wrote integrity into the staff rules. On top of that, he completely reorganized the Secretariat. In those days he had time, because he wasn't yet a famous international figure. He spent eighteen months with people like Ralph Bunche looking at UN offices all over the world and radically reorganizing the Secretariat. He reduced the budget, he reduced the staff, he got rid of a lot of people, and he pulled it all together. It was the only reform of the UN which has ever been the remotest bit effective.

When Hammar skjöld died, we got U Thant, who was a good man but a terrible administrator. His executive assistant was C.V. Narsihman, who was a great operator in the personnel field. There was a huge demand from the developing world to have representation, and I don't think anybody's ever had it under control since. Those of us who sacked people for disobeying Article 100 of the Charter were regarded as old fashioned and ridiculous. Because we had the Eastern Europeans in peacekeeping after the '73 war, I finally gave into the constant Soviet demand that there be a Soviet director in my office. I had been against this on the grounds that they didn't work for us. I said to Malik, who was then the Soviet ambassador and a former head of the KGB, "You've been going on about this for years. I will do this on one condition." And he said, "What's that?" And I said, "That the Soviet member of my office is from the KGB

and not from the Foreign Office.” And he went an interesting shade of purple at this. And he said, “That is outrageous. Why?” I said, “I want somebody who is really well-informed. I don't want some kind of a ‘coupon clipper.’” He was pleased about that, because he had run it.

I finally got this KGB guy Nikolai Fochine, and I told him, “You're in a very special position here, because we all know that you report to your government, you can't help it, but the rest of us don't do that. So the information that you will be given, and the meetings that you can take part in, will be limited because we depend on confidence and confidentiality with governments. I will give you all of the information that I can give you and, by the same token, I expect you to give me any information which you think might be useful to us. And I hope we can operate it in a friendly way.”

Fochine was a real central casting character. He had this terrific body language. He would appear in the door making extravagant gestures and you would say, “What's on your mind, Nikolai.” He would say, “Very important, I have to tell you.” One day in 1980, he came and said, “I have very important piece of information you should have.” I said, “What's that?” He said, “In exactly six weeks, the Soviet Army is going to invade Afghanistan.” So I said, “Are you sure?” He said, “Absolutely, there's no question of it. And I thought you ought to know.” I said, “Look, Nikolai, this is extremely interesting, and I am sure if you say so it's true, but what am I supposed to do with this information?” And he said, “You can tell anybody you like.” I said, “You mean the Americans?” He said, “Particularly the Americans.”

So I went over the road to the U.S. mission. Unfortunately, the ambassador was away, and I got some jackass from the State Department. I said that I've been told by my friendly neighborhood KGB director, who's never been wrong before, that the Russians are going to invade Afghanistan in six weeks time. And this preposterous young man said, “Oh, that's just

disinformation. You obviously haven't had very much experience in dealing with the Soviet Union.” I said, “I have been dealing with the Soviet Union since you were in diapers, and I don't think it is disinformation.” He said, “No; it's typical disinformation.” Exactly six weeks later, sure enough, the Russians went into Afghanistan.

It is very difficult to sack people in the UN, and you can only do it if they show real cause to be sacked. I sacked one general for being drunk on the job. I sacked my political director in Jerusalem for being ridiculous. Of course, they went to their governments, and the governments said to me, “Why on earth didn't you fire them before?” So that was all right.

TGW: You mentioned McCarthyism as another factor in a whole long list. Perhaps it's just because I'm an American and embarrassed with this incident, but was this worse or just another straw on the camel's back here, in terms of the deterioration of the *esprit de corps* and the international civil service?

BU: Truman's executive order about the international civil service Loyalty Board, which was an effort to try to deal in a rational way with [Joseph] McCarthy, was in fact a devastating blow to the Charter principles governing the Secretariat, because what it really meant was that the appointments were ultimately made by governments, and not by the Secretary-General, and that the people ultimately were accountable to their own governments.

Hammarskjöld told the United States, “You cannot appoint people to my staff. You can give me information about someone you want to be appointed, and I will judge whether to appoint them or not.” This was one of his original rows with John Foster Dulles. The impact of McCarthyism went very deep, because it really challenged the Secretary-General's authority as head of the Secretariat. It challenged the principle of Article 100 that the Secretariat cannot take instructions from any government, and no government can put pressure on the Secretariat.

McCarthyism decimated the economic department. David Weintraub was a brilliant guy. I don't know whether he was a communist or not, but he was a brilliant economist. He went and so did a whole series of lesser people.

At least with the Soviet Union they were perfectly honest about their position. They said we don't recognize the notion of an objective international service. As [Nikita] Khrushchev said to Hammarskjöld, "We don't believe in angels. We don't believe there is such a thing as an objective international civil servant, particularly you." Well, at least he was honest, whereas the United States carried on about Article 100 and then really made it impossible.

This had a great effect on the intellectuals in the economic affairs department particularly, because they were mostly former New Deal people, and very brilliant. One of them, Abe Feller, who was the legal counsel, committed suicide. It all became too much. He was a brilliant man, a marvelous lawyer, and a devoted civil servant, but he just jumped out of a window, and that was it.

TGW: We forgot the second part of my question, which was, in your experience, what are your views about the average, if there is one, performance of the UN versus a government?

BU: In public service standards?

TGW: Right.

BU: Well, I think the UN has a nucleus of wonderful people in the middle of a large mediocre group of coupon clippers. And in some departments in the UN you really wonder what on earth they do or not, except getting coffee. That's one of the problems with trying to reorganize it. But you have outstanding people; and, brilliant or effective people tend to be given their heads to a much greater extent than is a national civil service. But the UN is not a hierarchy where, if you are good, you automatically ascend, and get more important as you move up.

The UN is a static bureaucratic organization where, if you are bright enough, you may conceivably get somewhere where you can actually do something useful. It is a terrible system. It's nothing like the State Department or British Foreign Office system of weeding people out as they go up, because those are single nationality systems. They are part of a constitutional government. The UN is not. The UN is an institution. It has 188 sovereignly independent masters. It has a quota system. The idea of civil service varies. Some of its members are unfamiliar with the idea of an independent civil service.

One of the worst things in the UN secretariat is that there is no regular system of moving people about. People don't gain the sort of experience that they gain in the national civil service. They tend to stay in one place comfortably for the whole time. You can see the expressions of the faces of people carrying coffee up in the elevator, people who have been sitting in the same place drawing their paychecks for years. Staff members should expect to move into the field and to go to unpleasant places. They should gain experiences. But that is very difficult to organize, and is, I think, intellectually deadening.

Even at the beginning, it was difficult to recruit intellectually first-class people. We had some. Richard Symonds, for example, is a brilliant man, but excessively modest. David Weintraub was a brilliant economist. Myrdal was a brilliant, if rather tiresome, person. Nicky Kaldor was a world class economist. But, the UN became so big, and then you had, instead of eight assistant secretaries-general, you got up to 24 or even 30, most of them coupon clippers.

The incentive for a serious intellectual to leave a university or government service to the UN is very limited. Greatly to Boutros-Ghali's and Kofi's Annan's credit, they have managed to get serious people into their immediate office. They have people like John Ruggie and Edward Mortimer and Shashi Tharoor and a lot of very bright people, which is good. I think it shows,

and I hope they can continue. But, to do that in the general body of the Secretariat is much more difficult. For example, the director-general was a dead loss to begin with. They never got anybody who was any good for that post. They got these perfectly nice, rather mediocre, national civil servants who couldn't do the job.

I think the uneven standards at the under-secretary level in the UN is one of the problems. You can name on the fingers of two hands the really brilliant under-secretaries-general that they have had in that organization. That, again, has improved greatly. Someone like Lakhtar Brahimi is a world-class performer. So is Danilo Turk. And they are beginning to get people like that. But it was very difficult to do in the past, particularly during the Cold War.

TGW: As someone who was a second echelon person, fancied himself somewhat of an intellectual, you have explained my retirement from the institution.

BU: That's right.

TGW: It really was paralyzing.

BU: I was extremely lucky, with the exception of two and a half years in the coordination department, I always had an interesting time, and I always worked for somebody that I greatly respected. I worked for Bunche and Hammarskjöld. I thought U Thant was a wonderful person to work for. And Waldheim, curiously enough, although he was the biggest bore on earth, if you pointed him in the right direction and gave him a push, he was usually prepared to do quite sensible things. He wasn't all bad. He didn't have any kind of originality, but he would, at least, work very hard. He wasn't a total disaster. As a personality, he was abysmal, but he was a very hard working hack.

TGW: In most people's writings, and in the literature, there are a couple of events that are usually singled out as important in terms of moving the agenda ahead, pushing out the

envelope. One of those happens to be global ad hoc conferences, sometimes dismissed as jamborees, sometimes praised as norm-setting events of major consequences. One, what is your view on these; and, two, what happened before, during, and after one of these major conferences in Stockholm or Rome on food or Bucharest on population in those days? Did this disrupt the flow of political security events?

BU: No. Not at all. In fact, not enough. You know in 1945 there was no such thing as global problems. There were political problems and political problems were the dirty stuff, which the UN did, and then these sea-green incorruptible, special problems like labor, or food and agriculture, were non-political and were dealt with by specialized agencies. Nobody thought of global problems which affected everybody, which no country could deal with by itself, including the United States.

So we had started off in 1945 on fairly unreal footing. So it is a great achievement to have gotten those global conferences going. Of course they're talking shops. As T.S. Eliot rightly said, "I've got to use words when I talk to you." Human enterprises, unless they're war, start by discussion, and usually end by discussion. Of course those global conferences are talking shops. Why not? Environmental concern unfortunately gets forgotten every now and then like last year's hats, but the whole effort on human rights and women's rights and all the other global issues have been extremely important. Thank God for the NGOs, who have been the sounding board and the missionaries from these conferences. They also shame the governments into taking part in them.

That's something that was unimaginable in 1945 because global problems didn't exist. Everybody thought that governments, especially the five permanent members, could deal with everything, and it was going to be fine, and the UN would do the dirty political work, and the

others would do the nice clean specialized work. It is a pity that the so-called UN system wasn't geared to really work with one voice on the outcomes of these various conferences. In fact, the NGOs took up the slack far more than the system did. Maybe that's gotten better now. I don't know.

TGW: I don't think so. Alas, what about—not that the intellectual quality is necessarily earthshaking—but what about the interesting and sometimes more forthcoming statements, reports from so-called eminent persons? In fact, you have been one on a couple of occasions, the Brandt report (*North-South: A Programme for Survival*) and the Palme report (*Common Security*), Carlsson and Ramphal reports (*Our Global Neighborhood*). In your view, what role do these play, both within the UN and elsewhere?

BU: I have been a member of the Palme Commission, the Carlsson/Ramphal Commission on Global Governance, the Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict, and at least one other that I can't remember. Far too many anyway.

TGW: You're very eminent?

BU: I've actually been the coordinator of two others, which were the Ford Foundation and Yale study on the future of the UN, which was a wonderful group of people, but a total disaster as a report. It was appalling. And then we did a very small report with eminent persons on the financial condition of the UN, co-chaired by Paul Volcker and Shijuro Ogata, a wonderful Japanese banker. If you are going to have commissions of distinguished people, that was a perfect example of how to do it. We had a brilliant secretariat—and I say this without shame—which consisted of me, Shep Forman, and a brilliant young man, Tom Malinowski, who was then twenty-six years old. We only got the commission together when they had before them something written, which they really wanted to talk about. We produced a very brief and



lucid report, which I still think is the best thing written on UN finances. It is extremely good, and it is a great pity that governments haven't taken more notice of it, but didn't do much about. In fact, they did take a certain amount of notice of it.

The big commissions always claim a great deal of credit. I just got a five-page letter from David Hamburg saying how absolutely stellar the repercussions of the Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict have been. I am glad he thinks so, and I hope it's true. But a high-level commission is a huge, heavy piece of machinery. It is enormously expensive. It takes a hell of a lot of time, and I wonder really how much effect it has.

Funnily enough, I think Erskine Childers and I, sitting in a room somewhere, writing individual reports, in one way is more effective. At least we got people to discuss the election of the Secretary-General at a very high level in the early 1990s, when Ambassador Tom Pickering, and others took it to the Security Council. I still think that the recommendations on the Secretary-General—seven years single term, and a really serious effort to find within political limitations the best person, by a long search effort—will eventually come about, but it hasn't come about yet.

I must say that quite a lot of *Renewing the United Nations System*, including the title, got into Kofi's reform plan. I hope they don't have more of these huge distinguished commissions for the time being. The Palme commission's ideas on security, how much difference did they really make?

TGW: It is really hard to trace the impact of ideas.

BU: A lot of the ideas in that commission's report had already been put forward in articles by me and various other people in *Foreign Affairs* and places. The prevention of deadly conflict is too big a subject. If you focus very brilliant people on a specific subject, like UN

finances, it works. And sometimes, if the Secretariat is good enough, they will produce a really useful piece of work, which has a certain amount of influence.

We all know the general propositions. We all know the world ought to be better—we should give up war, poverty should be abolished, we should have international trade system that doesn't leave people behind. And now we know all about globalization and the internet and all that. I don't really believe that these problems are susceptible to thirty distinguished old fellows deliberating on them and producing a report. Do you?

TGW: No, I don't. But it is hard to trace the actual impact of any single idea and change. But I was wondering, because I also noted that *Renewing the United Nations System* had an echo in the 1997 report that came out. And I was just wondering whether you had any thoughts on one of the other recommendations that was here, that actually came about, the creation of a position of deputy secretary-general.

BU: We had been banging away at that, Erskine and I, since 1991. And it was always said it was impossible because they wouldn't be able to agree on who it was. I think that that is a major step forward. Actually we suggested two alternatives. One was one deputy, and one was four deputies, running the four major groups of activity so that you would have a cabinet of people of serious rank, which was small enough to make decisions. We suggested that there should be deputy secretaries-general in charge of peace and security, economic and social affairs, administration finance and management, and humanitarian affairs and human rights. We actually had serious discussions with all the ambassadors about this when I was in the Ford Foundation. We used to have these meetings which they all turned up, including, I'm glad to say, the United States.

Tom Pickering was a live wire in these things. He was wonderful. He liked it because he could talk to his fellow ambassadors in a protected setting where he could say absolutely anything he wanted to say. Certainly the clustering of parts of the Secretariat, which has now taken place, comes directly from a previous report we wrote on reorganizing the secretariat.

TGW: I think it is important to have a specific idea, concrete suggestion, and then get the right group of people around a table.

BU: Exactly. One of the things IPA is so good at now, because it is so near to the UN and it has such good access, is to organize these morning 8:30 meetings, addressed by interesting people who are going through New York. I think they're extremely useful.

BU: One of the things Erskine and I published was the original plan for UN headquarters, and the building you see at the bottom of the garden which was never built was to be the headquarters of the specialized agencies. If you are going to explain why the "UN system is not a system," that picture says it all. During the meetings of the Commission on the Prevention of Deadly conflict, I had suggested, if we were talking about prevention in the humanitarian field, that one of the things that was essential was to provide any new system of refugee camps in controversial or difficult areas, like the Great Lakes region of Africa, with sufficient security elements so that the High Commissioner for Refugees actually runs those camps and not some refugee faction. And the only way to do that is to have some standby arrangement for providing people who are capable of physically controlling and policing the camp.

David Owen, who was a member of the Commission said, "Oh, that's totally ridiculous, that's bloody nonsense. Peacekeeping operations always do that." I said, "Where have you been all this time? Even if there is a local peacekeeping operation, they don't do it. That's exactly the

problem. They didn't do it in Kosovo, they didn't do it in Bosnia, they didn't do it in the Great Lakes region, and the result is the crisis is maintained by the refugee problem. And if you don't believe that, look what's happening in East Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and surrounding countries now; it's a nightmare." Incidentally, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, was strongly in favor of this idea. It is very hard to get people to accept even the smallest new idea.

TGW: Well, do you think that—maybe this is a silly question, but there's a difference between good ideas and bad ones within a bureaucracy. The quote that I remember from your book, actually I pulled out here, was that “when a bureaucracy becomes involved with more or less abstract ideas, a terrible elephantitis often sets in.”

BU: That's absolutely true. I think that's what happened to the UN at the beginning. Well, just after two or three years. It was awful. We lost our slim figure very quickly. And people and governments had their own hobbies that they were pursuing in the UN, that was one of the troubles.

TGW: Their own hobbies?

BU: I mentioned Julian Huxley and the study of sex at high altitudes as one of the things that had made UNESCO ridiculous. There were lots of things like that in the UN, especially on the agenda in the General Assembly. There was even a UFO item at one point. At the beginning the mutual goodwill was such that if anybody got up in the Economic Social Council and began to pursue some personal obsession, the members would say, “Yeah, that's a very good idea. Why don't we have a subcommittee to look into that?” These things perpetuate themselves. They make a report, which gets commented on, sent back, and they make another report, and before you know it, you have a section of the Secretariat which is there for life. It's hopeless. And I don't know whether that happens in governments. It certainly shouldn't.

Once you try to abolish parts of the UN, you run into all kinds of problems because you have the government who has proposed it and the staff that is living on it. The concerned government is likely to go to its group whether it is the nonaligned group or some regional group and say, “Look here, we can't have this, and mind you, the next time you have a project, I will certainly support it, provided”—and so the whole group goes along. I think that this is one of the tendencies which have destroyed the credibility of a lot of the economic and social side of the UN.

On the political side we had this very weird situation during the Cold War, where you had, thanks to the original gentlemen's agreement, the political and security department run by a Soviet official, and staffed by Soviets in large numbers, so no serious UN business ever got done there. The under-secretary-general of special political affairs had this tiny office on the 38th floor, which at its largest was ten officials, at least—five of whom were in the field at any one time and all the serious political work came to us. We couldn't expand because politically it would have been unwise. Also, the moment we created a new post, we knew the drunken brother of the prime minister of some country would instantly be proposed for it. Huge pressure would come on the Secretary-General to put him in, so we never created or posted vacancies. We used to get the very best people from the Secretariat, and thank God we got them too. We got wonderful people. But it was a very much a Cold War phenomenon.

TGW: Actually, we'll end here in a minute, because you have to get to your next appointment, but after reading your autobiography, and thinking about the momentous changes that have occurred just after you left the Secretariat, was there sort of a tinge of regret that you didn't stick around maybe two or three years longer to see the renaissance?

BU: No. I wanted to get out before Javier's reelection came up. To be truthful, I had the strong feeling that Javier—although he was nothing but civility and kindness to me—was actually quite uncomfortable with me. I had been there so long and, inevitably, we ran our own shop. You only bothered the Secretary-General if there was some issue of principle which he had to decide.

I'm not sure he really liked that and I felt that it was time to make a change. I had been there much too long. I was sixty-seven years old, after all, which was seven years over the age limit. And I wanted to get out. Actually what I didn't foresee was that the three years later there would be this vast increase of activity, but I think it's just as well they had somebody new for that. I would have loved to have been there, but I would have been seventy-one years old by that time. That's too old.

TGW: I happened to think, also, in rereading this, that the—what a role a sort of serendipity plays in career development, from falling out of an airplane, to falling into Gladwyn Jebb's office.

BU: Absolutely. It's pure luck.

TGW: Is it pure luck?

BU: It is pure luck up to a point, and then I think it is hard work and a certain ability. I was tremendously lucky. In retrospect, I was very lucky to have fallen out with Trygve Lie, partly because I thought he was an absolutely terrible administrator, and partly because I thought he was wildly biased on the Palestine problem, and was, in fact, at one point putting Ralph Bunche's life in danger. We had already lost one mediator to the Stern Gang; we didn't need to lose another one. But I didn't want to leave the Secretariat because the UN was where I wanted to work.

So I was confined for two years to the awful fate of the coordination office. But, if I hadn't done that, I don't think Hammarskjöld would have immediately taken me out of storage, which he did. So you never know your luck really. When Hammarskjöld first came, he looked about fifteen years old. He was the youngest looking forty-five-year-old I have ever seen. He was extremely diffident and very shy and started off with all kinds of rather misguided gestures, like eating lunch in the cafeteria every day, and turning down the Secretary-General's hospitality and living allowance, and—

TGW: Jimmy Carter?

BU: Some of us said, look, you can't do that because you don't have a family. It's all very well for you, but what about your successor who has three children and a wife? And you'll also find that it is an extremely expensive and high pressure job, and, of course, he soon found that was true.

Hammarskjöld, more or less, backed into the political part of the job. He had a row with the United States over Guatemala in 1954, quite rightly, where he said, I really don't expect a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to depose the government of a small country. Was he ever right. The Guatemala episode of 1954 was one of the most disastrous things that the CIA ever did, and Guatemala is still paying for it.

But then, the next year, the question arose of the American Air Force prisoners in China, a dangerous problem because, in the first place, the United States refused to speak to the Chinese, and in the second place, the Chinese courts had condemned the prisoners for espionage, which in the case of the bomber crew, was almost certainly justified. It was a CIA plane, full of all sorts of weird equipment. So the Chinese couldn't be talked to by the Americans because

Dulles thought that this was immoral; and they couldn't overturn the decisions in their own courts.

This was an enormous issue in Washington. Senator [William] Knowland was calling in for nuclear strikes on the Chinese mainland, and extremists in the Congress were jumping up and down and saying that the Eisenhower administration was feeble and action must be taken and so on. The United States brought the problem to the Security Council, where the Soviets vetoed any action. Then they took it to the General Assembly, under the Uniting for Peace Resolution. And the General Assembly passed a resolution saying that the Secretary-General should do something about this. Nobody expected him to do anything whatsoever.

Hammar skjöld announced that he was leaving on the following day for Beijing, causing a flurry of telephone calls from Dulles saying, you mean you are going to talk to the Chinese communists? Hammar skjöld said, “Yes, in human affairs it is very difficult to get anywhere if you don't talk to people. Of course, if you want to have a war with them, that's different.” So he went. The question was whether the Chinese would accept him, because this was a result of the General Assembly resolution, and the Chinese People's Republic didn't like the General Assembly because it had voted against their representing China for three previous years.

Hammar skjöld had invented the Peking Formula—a wonderful Hammar skjöld creation—which was that the Secretary-General, though he is the servant of the Security Council and the General Assembly, also has an overall responsibility for world peace under Article 99, and, therefore, he can come and talk to a government in his own right about something which is a threat to world peace, which this question undoubtedly was. Zhou Enlai had certainly noticed how Hammar skjöld had handled the United States over the Guatemala affair and realized that he was someone who was not frightened of disagreeing with a great power.



In my time, as a matter of course, we dealt at a very high level in negotiations. We always saw the president and prime minister of a country before we started negotiations. And I think the reason for that was Ralph Bunche and Hammarskjöld. They were so highly respected that they sort of handed us an amazing gift—it was assumed that senior officials in the UN were received at that level. I don't know whether that still happens. I am not sure it does to such an extent. I think it's a pity.

TGW: I think, like the international civil service, that seems to have been downgraded. It seems to me that the UN's presence has been downgraded.

BU: I don't know. For example, I was reading just this morning about the Golan Heights. It is now never mentioned, to my knowledge, certainly in the *New York Times* that, in fact, there is a peacekeeping force on the Golan Heights. It's been there since 1974, and it has worked absolutely perfectly. The two major opponents in the Middle East, with the two biggest armies, have not fired a shot since 1974. That's not bad, but it's never mentioned. All we hear is, our U.S. boys will have to go in there and make a meaningful presence, but must not, of course, run any risks. Well, what do they think has been going on since 1974?

I feel strongly about it. I designed and installed that force, and, as a matter of fact, it was easily the most successful peacekeeping operation the UN ever did in terms of fulfilling its mandate. It was based on a brilliant negotiation by Henry Kissinger, and it's been a great success. But now you would think it doesn't exist. In the maps, it doesn't exist either. It says demilitarized zone in the maps. It doesn't say UNDOF, or anything like that.

TGW: Exactly. I use UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Force) usually when discussing how to design a traditional peacekeeping operation, et cetera, and I had the same question from my daughter. She asked me, "Aren't there lots of UN forces?" She's in history

and literature. "Aren't there some UN troops in the Middle East?" She was reading the article on the Syrian/Israeli talks in West Virginia, and there is no mention.

BU: No mention at all. Even on the maps, there's no mention. It is a perfect arrangement because, in the first place, it has an extremely efficient 1,500 member force who do a lot of things besides being there, they do mine clearing and reunions of families, and all these things which are psychologically important. The agreement provides zones on each side where there are no heavy weapons. It works. And, of course, both sides save a lot of money each year by not maintaining standing forces sitting there.

Another one you'll never here about is the one in south Lebanon, without which the Israelis would really have a problem. It's lucky they have that there, particularly how they are going to withdraw.

TGW: Well, it's typical.

BU: It's really odd. In the fifties and sixties, the United States believed that whenever they could delegate a serious international problem to the UN, they should do it. But ever since Kissinger, they believe, especially now, that if there is a serious international problem, they ought to get involved and solve it and get credit for it. So they only dump problems on the UN when they've made such a mess of it, like in former Yugoslavia, that they want to get rid of it. Under Truman, Eisenhower, [John F.] Kennedy and [Lyndon] Johnson, the United States believed that the national good was served by not getting its feet dirty in regional conflicts and the UN was extremely useful. And I think, to some extent, the same was true certainly on the development side. But now it is the other way around.

TGW: And it's been exacerbated. Here is where the end to the Cold War has really made a difference because now American exceptionalism seems tolerable, both in Washington

and I think elsewhere. There is certainly an actuarial imperative to our work, and we will be moving ahead. Indeed, Johan Kaufmann, one of the first people I interviewed, actually died last week.

BU: Really?

TGW: Yes.

BU: You might, incidentally, want to find out where David Owen's papers are. I don't know where they are. But they would be of great interest. The older David Owen.

TGW: Yes. The older David Owen?

BU: His widow is still alive. She is called Mrs. Elizabeth Berger. And her husband just died.

TGW: I'll look at the Bodleian.

BU: They may conceivably be in the Bodleian, I don't think so. But they would be extremely interesting because he was the first head of the economic department and the first head of the development program. So he's quite important. And he was the one that encouraged all these very bright young people like Sidney Dell. He was wonderful at getting hold of bright young people.

TGW: We will look into that. Actually, we are almost out of tape, and you're almost out of time.

BU: Yes. I have to go.

TGW: This concludes the interview with Brian Urquhart on January 6.

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