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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

KURT WALDHEIM

BY

THOMAS G. WEISS

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THOMAS G. WEISS: This is Tom Weiss interviewing his excellency, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, former secretary-general and former president of Austria, on 20 November 2000 in his offices at 8 Walfischesgasse, in the first district of historic Vienna.

Good afternoon, Dr. Waldheim, I wonder whether you could tell me briefly, or at any length, about your family's background, and in particular how your experiences during the 1930s and 1940s contributed to your interest in diplomacy and eventually to international cooperation?

KURT WALDHEIM: Well, it was always my desire—my wish—to see other countries, to get out of the confines of my own narrow country. I was interested to live with other people, to learn to know their way of life. And it was this basic interest to open up to the rest of the world, to the international community, that I tried to study in the Vienna Consular Academy. At that time it was called Consular Academy. Today it is called Diplomatic Academy. So it was this basic desire to get out of the narrowness of my own country, which was at that time (between the two World Wars) a small, not very important country. But the geopolitical situation of Austria between the wars was important. If you remember what happened in the 1930s, there was an enormous international economic crisis. It started here in Vienna with Creditanstalt, the biggest Austrian bank. Life in Austria was miserable—unemployment, no food, civil war in 1934. We got a loan from the League of Nations in Geneva in the 1930s, in order to barely survive.

My father was a district school inspector. When I expressed the wish to study at the Consular Academy, I noticed that my father was quite surprised and said, "How do we get the money? It is a very expensive school." However, some of the relatives helped out and assisted in paying what had to be paid. That school was, in the first place, for students who were sleeping and living there, but that was too expensive for me. And therefore, we used the opportunity to be

an “externist,” which means I was going to the academy every morning, leaving in the afternoon, and sleeping at home. But this again was a problem because we were not living in Vienna. We were living in the small city of Tulln, a district capital not far away from Vienna. I had to commute everyday from that little place to Vienna to go to the university and simultaneously, to attend the Consular Academy, which was a sort of college. We had to report to the portier (the doorman) who made us sign whether we were present or not. There was a very strict control in order to ensure attendance of the courses. In this way, we learned a lot.

I finished the first year. In 1938 the ordeal began. In March, the Nazis came and occupied Austria. I wasn’t sure whether they would close the Consular Academy or whether I would have a chance to finish the second year of studies. Finally, it was possible to finish the second year and to get the diploma in 1939.

It was at that time I came to know George Weisenfeld, who later became a well known publisher in London where he had emigrated after the Nazis came to Austria in 1938. George was my schoolmate. In his memoirs, which came out two years ago in London, he describes very kindly the help I had given him in order to finish school. Being Jewish, the Nazis did not permit him to continue his studies. The strange situation was—and it was George himself who told me this story—that the Nazi authorities permitted him to make the final exams, but not to attend the courses. But, as he said to me, “How could I pass the final exams without having a chance to attend the courses?” So it was at that time that I could help by giving him my notes; and in this way he could prepare himself for the final exams, which he passed very well and got the final degree of the Consular Academy. He described this episode vividly in his memoirs.

TGW: You mention that your father was a school inspector, and I believe one of your brothers is also a teacher.

KW: My brother died a few years ago, quite young, of a heart attack. Indeed he was a teacher at one of the most prestigious schools in Vienna, the Theresianum college.

TGW: Were you ever tempted to become a teacher, an academic?

KW: No, I didn't like teaching. But I'll tell you something else. My father wanted me to become a medical doctor because he himself had wanted to become one. However, the money for his studies was not available. He came from a poor family, so he was put up in a Catholic school on the outskirts of Vienna. He became a successful teacher and later, district school inspector.

When the Nazis came, they dismissed him immediately and put him in the local prison in Tulln. Fortunately, he was not sent to a concentration camp. He was set free after a few days. They searched repeatedly our house to find some material which the Nazis could use against him. He was a member of the Christian social party and participated in political rallies. That was the reason why they immediately dismissed him and put him in prison. When he was freed, my parents left Tulln and moved to Baden, south of Vienna. After the end of the Nazi era in 1945, my father was again appointed district school instructor.

But back to my own life, when my father wanted me to become a medical doctor I told him, "Father, please understand. I can't stand blood. Why should I become a doctor if I can't see blood? Imagine I should operate on somebody! It is impossible." So he said, "What do you want to become?" I hesitate a little and then I said, "Look, I want to become a diplomat. I wish to see other countries, other cultures."

However, coming from a poor family, there was no chance to pay the fee. The only foreign experience I had was when I became a student-teacher with a Hungarian family in Miscolec, Slovakia. There was an exchange program between my college and a school northeast

of Bratislava. I was teaching the German language and violin. I wasn't a great artist but talented enough to teach two youngsters about twelve and fourteen years of age—one boy and one girl. It was my only experience outside of Austria before the war. My father understood me, and with the financial help of some relatives made it possible to inscribe in the academy. I am grateful to my father that he showed so much understanding for my wishes. I finished the Diplomatic Academy and graduated *summa cum laude*.

TGW: And this was in which year?

KW: 1939. I started in 1939 and finished in 1939.

TGW: You mentioned the League of Nations, and I was just wondering how the League's successes or failures were taught at the Diplomatic Academy. What was the perspective of the teachers towards this first experience in international cooperation?

KW: Which experience do you mean?

TGW: The League of Nations. That is, how did the professionals talk about or how did the books describe the experience?

KW: Not very much. We had to find out from our parents and older colleagues. My father was a very experienced man and well-informed on everything which dealt with politics and history, so I could listen to him and I learned a lot from him. But my other interlocutors showed some hesitation—there was a mixture of feelings, good and bad. On the one hand, we were grateful for the help we received from the League. On the other hand, we minded the domination by the allied powers and the pressure exercised upon us. In those years, after the First World War, we were controlled like an occupied country, so nobody was really happy.

TGW: How was the founding of the United Nations, and of the specialized agencies and the World Bank, treated in the press or in university education immediately after the Second World War?

KW: Well, this is not always understood by our friends abroad. Our main effort was to rebuild this country, which was badly destroyed. Vienna and all bigger cities were heavily damaged or destroyed. So the older generation, including my parents, wanted to rebuild the country. They were concentrating on that basic aim. They were also longing to get rid of the occupying forces patrolling through the city for ten years. They were really upset and said, “Will this remain forever?” So, people were not really interested in talking about intellectual problems or about things which were not of immediate concern.

This changed, of course, in 1955 when we got our freedom back. I want to make clear immediately that we were completely western, as far as our ideology was concerned. The people, the great majority, were supporting western values and democracy. We were longing for a democratic system, and we established it despite the long occupation. We had close relations with the Americans and were grateful for their generous help through the Marshall Plan. Without it we could probably not have survived.

The problem was the Russians. The communists in the country were rather small in number, and nobody wanted them. We were really happy that we got rid of the Soviet pressure. The Americans and the other occupying western powers—British and French—helped us with food and medicine.

TGW: So, in fact, your arrival—I hadn’t made this connection—but your arrival as an observer to the UN for the first time in 1955 also coincided with Austria’s gaining independence (signing of the state treaty). So it was the same year—1955—that you went to New York?

KW: Yes. In 1948, I went to Paris. This was my first diplomatic assignment. I was first secretary of the Austrian embassy between 1948 and 1952. Before, I had served as secretary to Dr. Karl Grubel, the then foreign minister of Austria. After my return from Paris, in 1952, I served as chief of personnel in the ministry for the next four years.

In 1955, when I was appointed permanent observer to the United Nations, we could not become a full member. We had the same position as Italy, Finland, and other mostly Eastern European countries that had participated in the war. We all had to wait until after a package deal was worked out by the United Nations Security Council. There was some hesitation about Japan, which was finally also admitted. But the package did not include Germany. That came much later.

TGW: In which year was this package deal put together?

KW: In December 1955.

TGW: During this tense period of East-West concerns, when you were in New York, what do you recall of the remnants of McCarthyism? In particular, what was its effect on the diplomatic community and on the United Nations itself?

KW: It was a very bad experience. I was shocked to see how this development influenced the United Nations. There was great unease, and people became very uneasy by the attitude of [Joseph] McCarthy and his entourage. They tried to control the work of the United Nations. Many in the United Nations were, in their eyes, secret agents of the communists trying to subvert the international organization. And there were human tragedies. I remember there was a suicide by one official who was accused of being an agent.

TGW: Abe Feller.

KW: This was really a tragedy. Everybody was relieved when this phenomenon changed and we got back to normal. It was a bad experience.

TGW: What do you recall of the decolonization movement at that time? Did it seem, in the 1950s, that this would proceed as far as it did? I mean, literally, by the early 1960s, virtually independence is assured across the planet. How did it seem at the outset? Did it strike you folks in Europe that it was going to proceed very quickly?

KW: Yes. We did expect that it would happen soon. The pressure was enormous and the people in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere wanted independence. We in the UN were fully aware that this could not be stopped. This was one of my great experiences when I was there first as ambassador of my country to the UN between 1964 and 1968. I remember very well how this movement developed when the gap between the rich industrialized countries in the North and the poor countries in the South of the world became bigger and bigger.

This development has also to be seen in connection with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The independence movement of those countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has to be seen in connection with the activities of the 77 (Group of 77) countries. They became more and more important, more powerful in the deliberations of the United Nations—in other words, the voting system and the working methods, as well as the political climate in general. Military power blocs of the Americans and the Soviets on the other side—both tried to gain influence in the developing countries during the period of the Cold War. Our work in the UN was dominated by this confrontation. It was not only a military confrontation, but also an ideological one.

Today, with the end of the Soviet empire, people cannot always fully understand the difference. With the end of the East-West confrontation, developing countries gained ground in the decision-making process of the UN.

TGW: You mentioned the competition between western and eastern countries in regard to the developing nations. There was also a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union about admitting developing countries. What was Austria's diplomatic position in this discussion as to whether newly independent countries should enter the United Nations?

KW: Austria was firmly rooted in the western ideology, being a democratic country, despite the occupation by the four allied powers. There was never a doubt in our minds that we belonged to the western world, to western ideology. And we made this clear, although we were politically neutral. Having fought for our membership in the United Nations, we fully supported the wish of newly independent countries for UN membership. We accepted this status in our negotiation with the four allied powers. It was the Soviet Union which insisted on that status.

In 1955, we became an independent country. This was the price we had to pay to get rid of the occupying Soviet forces. However, we remained in all those years firmly rooted in western democratic values. For instance, during the Berlin blockade, we firmly supported the western, American position. And the Americans knew that they could count on us, which was important, not at least because of our geopolitical division. The western powers, especially the Americans, were always afraid that one day the Soviets would return and occupy us again. The fear of a Soviet return to Austria after the departure of the western powers made us an ever stronger supporter of the western allies.

TGW: So you arrive, as quite a young man, as ambassador in New York. During this period of time, you've mentioned that the Non-Aligned Movement first, and the Group of 77, came together. There were three institutions founded during those four years that were of great concern to developing countries—first UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), then the UNDP (UN Development Programme), then UNIDO (UN Industrial Development

Organization). What do you recall about debates during this time about the importance of those institutions? How do you look back on that period?

KW: The situation was characterized by the divergent interests of the member states. It was the sort of confrontation which I always regretted. The problem really was that the 77 developing countries became a solid bloc which did not always share the ideals and interests of the industrialized countries. So there was a confrontation between the industrialized countries and the 77, which had their own desires, their own wishes and ideas, about the future of mankind. They complained by saying, “Why does not the North share its wealth with us? The industrialized countries do not really help us in a way they could and should. On the other hand, they expect our cooperation and support.” The creation of UNCTAD, UNDP, and UNIDO was generally welcomed, but they could not solve the challenging problems between the North and South.

I was participating in the Cancun conference (International Meeting on Cooperation and Development) on a new economic order in 1981. This was a group of 23 countries—half industrialized and half developing, personalities, heads of state or government from East and West. The group also included Indira Gandhi from India and Ronald Reagan.

Mrs. Gandhi was at that time prime minister of India and a very competent and outspoken figure during this conference. Developing countries tried to get acceptance from the rich, industrialized countries of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The efforts on both sides to overcome the difficulties and to agree on the principles of that economic order did not work. There was a very sad atmosphere when the conference finished after two days of hectic debate, and no agreement could be reached. Industrialized countries insisted that it was impossible to relieve the developing countries from paying all their debts. This was just one of

many other problems which still exist today. Finally, the conference failed and there was no new economic order. But it was also agreed that the two sides would continue their efforts to overcome the existing gap.

TGW: Yes, that was 1981. I myself see that as the end of North-South dialogue, so called. The middle of the 1970s was when the NIEO was launched, but you were deeply involved in the Middle East. I imagine that Secretaries-General are usually preoccupied by political and security crises. While you are involved in the Middle East war at that point, the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) boycott then led to enough leverage to call for a special session of the General Assembly and this New International Economic Order. How did you balance your concerns with fostering international peace and security with this call for New International Economic Order? Did you have any time to even think about it, or did your staff do most of the thinking about the New International Economic Order?

KW: Obviously, I was personally involved. However, my leading advisors worked hard in order to find a way out of the dilemma. The main experts in this field were Philippe de Seynes, Paul Hoffman, Bradford Morse—to maintain just a few in the UN Secretariat. Brian Urquhart was one of the main thinkers in the political field. I could rely on his good judgement. He dealt mainly with political and security issues. There were, of course, a number of other leading people who were considering means and ways to overcome the difficulties. It did not work. Developments like the debate about the New Economic Order or the confrontation between nonaligned countries and the industrialized influenced the decisions of the main bodies of the United Nations like the General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

On matters of international security I had a lot of difficulties and many troubles. When the Security Council decided, for instance, on such matters like the Middle East, I had to make sure that these resolutions were implemented. But frequently they were not. For instance, the question of the withdrawal from the occupied territories—the relevant resolution of the Security Council does not say “from the occupied territories” but “from occupied territories.” This wording caused much confusion. The Israelis insisted that it means only withdrawal from parts of the territory, whereas the Palestinians and the Arabs insisted that they have to withdraw from all occupied territories. The French version said, “*des territoires occupés.*” This was clear. Under this version, it meant withdrawal from all occupied land. But the Israelis said, “No, the English text is the authentic text and, therefore, we are only ready to withdraw from certain areas, but not from all occupied territories.” So, there was an endless discussion about the meaning of that resolution. I was, of course, involved and whatever I did, one or the other side was unhappy.

Another example, when the Israeli forces bombarded the UN headquarters in Naqura—it is in the south of Lebanon, near the Israeli border—I protested to the Israeli ambassador in New York, Mr. Blum. He answered that it was done by mistake and apologized. However, the fact remains that our installations were destroyed. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

I always tried to be objective, and I had to maintain the principles of the Charter. So my problem was that I had to support the principles of the Charter and, on the other hand, to mediate between the two sides in order to maintain the negotiating process. I was convinced that this problem could only be resolved by negotiations, not by force, and I made this clear to all participants in that process.

An episode, which is very positive in regard to the cooperation between parties in conflict and powerful nations like the United States, for instance—in 1973, when the Egyptians attacked Israel across the Suez Canal (October War). After initial successes, they were pushed back by the Israelis with American military help. The Egyptian forces were pushed back by Israeli forces. They were cut off from their supplies. A situation developed which constituted an enormous challenge to the UN and the international diplomacy.

The question was, “Will the Americans quit the Israelis to destroy the Egyptian forces, or will they try to avoid it in order to facilitate later negotiations?” Suddenly, I came into the middle of the whole drama. I had to negotiate with both sides. [Ismail] Fahmy, the foreign minister of Egypt, rang me up every night to plead with me to send supplies for the Egyptian army. “Why does the United Nations not do more?” So I contacted Henry Kissinger. He is one of the few international personalities who understood the situation, and he was giving a good example of how one can use the United Nations in a positive way. He convinced the Israelis to let the UN deliver supplies to the Egyptian army—food and water—with the tolerance of the Israelis. This is a good example of how bilateral diplomacy can cooperate with the UN in solving the tough problems.

TGW: Let’s go back a little to just before your election as Secretary-General. You were Austrian foreign minister. What were the issues as you saw them in your own candidacy to become Secretary-General? What were the pluses and minuses of your candidacy? What was discussed within the Austrian government as this became serious?

KW: It was not the policy of my being presented as “candidate.” I was, at that time, a dark horse. There were other names, like the Finnish permanent representative, Max Jacobson, who was a very strong candidate. But he had difficulties with the Russians. There was an

Argentine ambassador, Ortiz de Rosas, who had also his difficulties with one or the other side. The problem was that you had to get support from both sides in that Cold War situation. You had to be supported by the permanent members of the Security Council—United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and China—because they have a veto in the council. So, to get elected, you need the support of the big powers and the majority of the non-permanent members. To achieve this wasn't an easy undertaking.

All in all, there were—as far as I can remember—about half a dozen of candidates. Some were presented by their governments, others not. I was not formally presented by my government, but fully supported.

After several ballots I was accepted, especially by the Americans and the Russians. Apparently, coming from a neutral country and having been known in the UN as ambassador and foreign minister of Austria, I was a well-known factor, acceptable to all sides.

TGW: Once you become Secretary-General, I'd like to ask you a few things about your impressions of the sources of ideas. We are trying to get our fingers on economic and social and human rights ideas, and how they come in and go out of the secretariat. To what extent do individuals make a difference? You mentioned Brian Urquhart on the security side, but on the economic, social, and human rights side, do individuals, either officials or experts who are called in to serve the United Nations, make a difference?

KW: Yes, but it was not a decisive difference. The UN at the time were contemplating more on peace and security aspects whereas the developing countries did not. They expressed the wish to see a New Economic Order agreed upon at least on its principles. This is understandable because they were mostly poor countries. They wanted to get more of the cake, and the western countries were very reluctant to fulfill those wishes. Experts were indeed

consulted on a number of issues. There was permanent tension between the rich and the poor countries. This confrontation in the General Assembly and its main bodies was dominating the whole period I was Secretary-General. Originally, it was more concentrated in the Economic and Social Council and other social and economic institutions whereas later the problem was dealt with extensively by the General Assembly and special agendas. It was politicized and led frequently to a very serious confrontation.

This approach was the wish of the developing countries. They knew very well that the problem cannot be solved by the ECOSOC alone or by other purely economic institutions. This was the turning point—when the problem was picked up by the political institutions of the world organization, e.g., the General Assembly and, in certain instances, the Security Council. In this way, the issue was more and more discussed on the highest level by heads of state and government. The pressure from developing countries upon the industrialized countries was growing. Numerous international meetings made clear to the rich countries that they had to do something. The high level conference in Cancun of twenty-three countries from the North and the South on the level of heads of state tried to agree on a set of principles. The basic issues could not be resolved. It was not possible to make partial concessions but not on basic issues like, for instance, to relieve the developing countries from their foreign debts.

TGW: To what extent do groups of so-called eminent persons, who put forward ideas, make an impact on the United Nations itself, the specialized agencies, and the governments that compose them? I'm thinking, for example, just before you became Secretary-General, the very first of these so-called blockbuster reports—the Pearson report (*Partners in Development*)—came out. Just as you became Secretary-General, the *Limits to Growth* report was on everyone's radar screen. At the end of your time as Secretary-General, the Brandt report

(*North-South: A Programme for Survival*) was published. Do these fairly prominent reports make a difference?

KW: Such reports were certainly helpful. Prestigious people drafted them and underlined the importance and urgency of solving burning issues. Governments had to think about those problems. They gave also the possibility to developing countries to draw the attention of the international community to these issues. This is one side of the coin. The other side is that governments usually are not ready to act on matters which are not ripe for decisions.

And here I come to a very delicate subject—that is, power politics. Having gone through this experience for ten years, I have to say that power politics of the nineteenth or twentieth century hasn't really stopped. The belief that problems can be resolved through important intellectual reports with good ideas is wrong. It is not realistic. I learned it the hard way because I was an idealist. I always tried to convince governments, especially the big ones, but also many of the small and middle-sized countries, to be less selfish, to be more cooperative, and in the last instance to be ready to accept a reasonable compromise. Sometimes it worked, but very often it was just not in the interest of those countries which had the power to decide. Things did not work out. I have to say that more realism is necessary because the world is different from well-meaning and surely idealistic reports.

TGW: I am humbled as an academic!

KW: I hope you don't take this as a negative comment. I myself had to be an idealist. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to survive. I'm convinced that there can be no world peace in the long-run if we do not agree on a new approach. The New International Economic Order was proposed by the developing countries, in order to enable the poor countries to participate in

the wealth of the industrialized countries. This is for many nations not only a religious but also a very political issue, and deserves our full attention.

TGW: I can imagine. Before we began the interview, you mentioned Sir Robert Jackson, which leads me to ask what kinds of qualities were you looking for when you appointed high-ranking officials? How did you select candidates? What kinds of pressures did you come under or were you subjected to before you made appointments? How did you resist them? I remember in *In the Eye of the Storm* your writing that “political pressures have become all too common in the appointments process.” I just wondered if you could talk about the processes of making key appointments.

KW: Well, you have to take into account several aspects. In the first place, my concern for the appointment to a key position, like special representative, was the capability to do the job well and to be ready to make decisions on the spot, not just to refer everything back to headquarters. Here, Robert Jackson was an excellent example of a man who was not only an impressive expert in the economic and social field, but also in the political area. We could use him for everything. He was an all-round expert. But in the economic and social field, he was especially qualified. He was also ready to make decisions. Sometimes he had problems because people did not like him. Everybody who is ready to make decisions has enemies in the long run. He wasn't liked by some people. But he had always my firm support. I knew this man from years of cooperation with him. I knew I could rely on him.

As far as high-level appointments in general are concerned, I can say the following. First, the candidate has to have the qualification. Second, he has to be willing to take the responsibility upon himself or herself to make decisions on his/her own. Third, I tried to find out

whether he or she has a reasonable *hausverstand*, which means a healthy and realistic approach to the problems.

TGW: What about the heads of the agencies, where making decisions is important? What about their capacity for independent thinking? I'm thinking of someone like Maurice Strong or Gamani Corea, who were appointed during your term to head agencies that dealt with concrete operations, but also had to deal with big ideas.

KW: It is a lengthy process to find the right man or the right woman for such an important job like director-general of a specialized agency. However, this is not the job of the UN Secretary-General. The agencies have their own structure. They have their own general assemblies, their own boards of governors, their own legislative organs. Under the Charter, the Secretary-General is the chairman of the ACC (Administrative Committee on Coordination). This is a purely coordinating function, but in view of the many different problems of the agency, the Secretary-General (chairman) has to proceed carefully not to antagonize his colleagues in the ACC. He has to ensure that this important body functions constructively and without too many frictions. In this job the Secretary-General cannot satisfy everybody. I tried to be conciliatory as much as possible. When it was necessary to be rigid, I did not hesitate to use my authority.

In crisis situations, like Iran, Cypress, Namibia, or the Middle East, I did not avoid making decisions, but I was always trying to involve the parties concerned and to get their agreement. In the Middle East, it was always my position that we cannot solve the problem with one party alone. We need the consent with all parties involved in the negotiating process. Needless to say, the U.S. is in a key position. The UN can help but cannot do it alone.

TGW: It is very different, indeed. But you used the word "conciliatory." I think that many people criticized you for being too conciliatory. How did you react to these criticisms?

KW: Well, you can't satisfy everybody. There were always these two or three opinions expressed mainly by the media. One school of thinking would say, "The Secretary-General has to be firm and strong. And if somebody does not agree, he has to make this decision alone. The other opinion would say, "He is right because he achieved preliminary agreements from both sides to a conflict which paved the way for later agreements through direct negotiations of the governments concerned." And the third one is just neutral—"Don't do anything, just let things go." This was not my position. I usually tried the second version, conciliatory, but this doesn't mean that I didn't come out with strong statements and criticisms. For instance, when the Israelis attacked Naqura headquarters (the UN in Lebanon), I came out with a very strong protest. I called the Israeli ambassador to my office in New York. I did the same with the Palestinians. When they committed acts of aggression and terror, I called the ambassador, and I told him that this is the wrong approach to the whole problem. I pleaded with both sides to stop these acts and to return to the negotiating table.

What I want to say is that you can't avoid to be conciliatory if and when it is in the interest of results. It is, of course, a question of temperament. There are people who prefer to choose the hard way, whatever the result may be. The others will say, "Let's try again and again in order to achieve agreement." When this does not help you have to adopt firmness, especially on principles. In some cases it worked, in others not. If you look back during those ten years, we have succeeded in a number of cases—South Africa, Namibia, the Balkans, et cetera. So, one could not say that nothing came of it.

TGW: You used the word "independent" to describe agencies of the system. Other people might describe them as "feudal." Was your approach also one of conciliation with the heads of agencies? How did you try to pull this loosely-knit system together? Or is this just a

hopeless task—that is, of making the system work better together rather than having so many moving parts, to try to make a more cohesive group?

KW: I always tried to make it more cohesive. I tried to convince my colleagues that our strength lies in cooperation. This is not only the interest of the organization as such but also of the specialized agencies, I argued. And if you do not cooperate better, the public will get the impression that we are working against each other. Despite these difficulties, there was a reasonably good coordination. I can say, all in all, it has achieved results.

But let me also mention another aspect. Whenever the head of a specialized agency had to be appointed, the political pressure started. Of course, the Secretary-General helped to do something about it. It was not easy. Remember UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in Paris, the calamity which we went through was very bad for the image of the United Nations. There were similar cases in other institutions of the UN system—not too many. However, the media started to attack the United Nations in general. This was a disquieting development. But in the long run, the problems were settled in a satisfactory way, making sure that the appointments were made on the basis of the merits and capability of the candidates.

TGW: What is your perspective on the distance that separates New York and Washington—the Bretton Woods institutions? In my textbook, for example, there is a dotted line that goes to the World Bank and the IMF because they're judicially part of the system, but they're really very separate indeed. How did you try to bring the institutions closer together, or at least have them less far apart?

KW: IMF and World Bank have been considered by developing countries as institutions of the United States and the western world in general. They were criticized for dominating these

agencies. One of these organizations, the World Bank, is the one that always had an American as its head. There was a sort of agreement which wasn't really liked by developing countries. Of course, we in New York had close contacts with the heads of those two institutions, but problems existed. This also has to be seen in the context of the basic question: how can financial assistance achieve better help to consolidate the world economy, and most of all to stabilize the financial and economic situation in the developing countries? They are doing a good job under difficult circumstances. The protection of human rights has preoccupied us during my term of office. There is a big chance, if you see what happens today in this field, we can say that progress was made, although we are far from a solution.

In previous years the situation was different. Now, no government would dare to make proposals in the political, economic, and social field without referring to human rights. Governments would have a lot of trouble if they did not publicly express regret for the violation of human rights regardless what they really do in this regard. China and the American approach is a typical example. The Americans always make clear that they want the Chinese to respect human rights whenever they deal with them in the political or economic field. We know that we cannot control what really happens in this regard, but it is important that the principle is recognized. We know that it won't be done immediately by the Chinese. But in most of such international papers or international conferences, reference is made to human rights. I think this is progress.

TGW: In fact, I remember writing something down from your book *In the Eye of the Storm*. You wrote, "The UN will go down in history as the first international organization to concern itself in a sustained and serious way with the rights of all human beings." I wonder how you recall the conflict during the Cold War between the East and West on human rights. In

particular, over these two generations of rights, the individual, civil, and political were pushed by the West usually, and the economic and social were the socialist bloc argument in human rights.

What do you recall of these debates?

KW: It was a permanent confrontation between the two sides. Everything was politicized. The Soviets always tried to get their approach to these problems though they had, of course, a bad conscience in regard to human rights. If one thinks back how they dealt with human rights in their country and how they treated their friends in one way or another, it was very negative, disrespect of human rights. That made everything much more difficult. The western countries insisted on human rights and came finally to the conclusion that they could not convince the Soviets to be more cooperative in this regard. So it was a very, very negative influence on international cooperation, or at least on the efforts of the world community to solve these problems. There was no cooperation by the communist bloc. I think is also one of the great problems we were facing until the end of the Soviet empire. Then the world changed completely.

Today we have a different world. I think it is a better world, not only in regard to human rights, which is very important enough, but also in many other fields. International cooperation is facilitated. Don't forget the two power blocs, led by Washington and Moscow, had their own clients. One side went along with the western countries and the United States especially, and the other, the friends and allies of the Soviet Union, stuck to the line which was given to the Soviet bloc. That made international cooperation very, very difficult.

TGW: You mentioned the Stockholm conference (UN Conference on the Human Environment) and indeed the 1970s were a period when global ad hoc conferences were used with great regularity and great enthusiasm. What is the meaning of these conferences in helping

to generate or promote new ideas? I think some people dismiss them as largely rhetorical, others see them as important as proposing new kinds of institutions—for example, you mentioned UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). What is your view of the utility of these conferences in terms of ideas?

KW: I think they are extremely important. It would be very cheap to say, “Well, nothing comes out of it. They make big declarations but no results.” This is wrong. What we have witnessed is the creation of much more international interest in human rights, human environment, and other important questions as a result of these world conferences. The United Nations were able to mobilize the international conscience for those problems. So I think it is absolutely wrong to say it is hopeless and that nothing comes out of them. What we have already today is a great progress in respect to these preoccupations—for instance, human rights, narcotic problems, and how to deal with them. There is a better approach to these new problems. In this respect these international gatherings are very important.

We have in Vienna the new narcotic drug organization. The international gatherings which you mentioned were to a certain degree the result of international pressure and fulfilled a very important task. What I mean is that these international conferences create greater interest within the public for the need to solve old and new problems. People also begin to understand that it can't be done from one day to the other, that it takes patience and perseverance. But the limited progress which we have made in this field, not only in human rights, but also in human environment and habitat, human population. Imagine what happens with the world population in a few decades. How can we manage to feed these people? Therefore, these conferences are of great importance and helpful.

TGW: And before these conferences, how did they look from the 38th floor? That is, what kinds of preparations were required by you or your staff to try to get ready for these conferences? As I said, some people see them as jamborees—lots of publicity, but they immediately disappear. What kinds of efforts did you put in place on the 38th floor before, during, and after these conferences to look at a particular issue?

KW: Of course these conferences have to be prepared in the first place by the United Nations, because the United Nations are usually the leading organization in preparing them. We have the Economic and Social Council and a secretariat serving it. They are responsible for preparing these conferences. They make an important contribution to a better handling of these sometimes highly-technical questions.

Of course, then comes the question of, “What comes out of it?” And when you don’t get concrete results, then you are giving those who criticize the conferences enough grounds to insist that they are not really helpful. I think people are not patient enough. Every great idea needs time to be implemented.

TGW: The creation of new institutions may be the most important results. That is, not just a separate institution, as in the case of UNEP, but also new ministries of the environment within governments. There are special new private organizations that work on new problems. Is this perhaps the most visible impact of these conferences?

KW: I think it has a very important impact. I know that here in Vienna, for instance, a number of new institutions have been created after conferences of this kind. I think this is a sort of mobilization of international conscience for the need to solve these burning problems.

It is not correct to say, “They have no impact on the behavior of people, on the behavior of governments.” Why? Because nobody likes to be blamed by the United Nations. Many

governments, member states of the United Nations, ignore decisions by the United Nations. But when it comes to the point where the UN, the Security Council, ECOSOC, or other relevant organs in the field of human environment the concerned states are at least “uneasy.” It means a bad record in matters of human rights. I can really tell you that I saw it repeatedly during my time, that governments are very touchy to be blamed for not fulfilling obligations which are contained in international conventions or in decisions of the UN. This aspect is our great help. It is not because governments like the United Nations, but they don’t want to be blamed by the United Nations. The UN has still enough moral impact so that the governments say, “Well, we don’t like it, but we have to do it.”

TGW: The embarrassment factor is a major one.

KW: Yes, that is the point.

TGW: I think the *Human Development Report* in the 1990s has played a very important role, and governments do not like to be listed last.

KW: Yes, it is very true.

TGW: In 1972 at the Stockholm meeting, Maurice Strong pushed the role of NGOs, which have now become part and parcel of most UN gatherings. What were the reactions—your own or others—to that first forum around Nairobi, and when did it become clear that NGOs were almost a third power?

KW: That’s a good point. NGOs hadn’t played a great role when I arrived in New York for the job in 1971. They existed, but their participation in the decision-making process was minimal. Then the problems became more acute, and people realized more and more the problems of atomic energy and pollution of our environment, while the nongovernmental organizations gained ground and became more and more important. If you remember, for

instance, what has happened with the French nuclear experiments in the Pacific, how the nongovernmental organizations—Greenpeace, for instance—tried actively to avoid those experiments. This was an indication, a strong signal, which was sent to governments to stop this. Finally, it has worked. It wasn't done immediately, but finally it succeeded.

I don't know whether you know that Austria had constructed an atomic plant in lower Austria and when it came to the question of whether to open it or not, [Bruno] Kreisky, the then chancellor, went to the public and there was a vote, a referendum. Should it be opened? Should atomic energy be used for electricity or not? The referendum was negative. So this plant, which costs a fortune, is still there. It was never opened just because the public was against using atomic energy.

Now we have the problem here with our Czech neighbors where our people—not the government, the people—were making demonstrations along the borders against the opening of the Temelin reactor. They are afraid. They still think of Chernobyl. Here in Austria, there is a very strong opposition against everything which has to deal with atomic power. I mention this just as an example of a delicate problem. In Europe in general, as well as in the United States and other countries, atomic power is used considerably for energy purposes.

TGW: Do you see a growing role for nongovernmental organizations?

KW: Yes, they have it already. From the experience I have made here in my own country, but also watching the situation in other states, the opposition is growing against nuclear power. People have not forgotten what happened in Chernobyl and similar situations. They are really rather afraid and say, "Why should we risk this?" So nongovernmental organizations play an important role in such matters when governments—for a number of reasons—do not want to act or omit to act.

TGW: What about the quality of the people who work in the secretariat? I remember reading that you mentioned—like many places—there are “stars and drones.” But what is the relative mixture? And how does the secretariat compare with a good civil service—the Austrian one or British one?

KW: Obviously it is easier to handle national employment than international as in the secretariat of the United Nations. Don't forget that we have people from practically all parts of the world, with different educational backgrounds, with language problems. Although they are supposed to speak two or three languages, it doesn't solve the problem. I think it is the background of this international civil service which makes the difference. Here I can say that from my experience, there are two schools.

One is to take only those who want to make a career in the United Nations, to start with a P-1 and then to climb up to a P-2, or perhaps even higher. This is, of course, the better way because they get their professional experience and education already when they start in the secretariat, learning to behave like an international civil servant. But then you have the other group who are proposed by the government as a sort of key or *schlussel* (quota) for each country, depending on the population, the contribution to the finances of the United Nations, et cetera. There are criteria which have to be filled. Here the governments sometimes try to send people who are not qualified, who have shortcomings, or who are just there in order to report back to their governments.

We have had that problem with the Soviets. I was criticized. There were agents from the Soviet secret service. We knew it. But what could we do as long as we cannot prove that they have sent secret information from the UN secretariat to their governments? Perhaps you remember, it was toward the end of my term of office. There was a high-ranking Soviet agent in

the secretariat, Mr. [Viktor] Lesiovsky. I was away on a trip, and when I came back I was confronted with that situation. But he is now an American citizen. He's married to an American woman and wrote a book about his experience in the United Nations, confirming that he has worked as an agent. But the Americans used him, too, as their agent. I mention this because you can see what we are facing. Of course, we noticed that Lesiovsky felt uneasy, but without evidence we had no possibility for taking measures against him.

So I just wanted to explain the two categories who are working in the secretariat. All in all, it is important that we were able to establish an international civil service. It is not perfect, but it works. I also want to stress the fact that, with a few exceptions, the international civil service is very dedicated, hard-working people. Unfortunately, they do not, in the execution of their task, always get the necessary support from member states, despite the fact that they have a clear mandate from the relevant organs of the United Nations.

I remember once I had the visit of the Soviet ambassador complaining that the Soviet quota for their employees in the secretariat were not fulfilled within a period of five years. At that time, I had an excellent chief of administration, the Canadian George Davidson. I got to know him when I was Austrian ambassador to Canada. At that time he was Canada's minister of immigration. And when I needed a new head for the UN department of administration, I rang him up in Ottawa and offered him the job. He accepted without hesitation. He became one of the best high-ranking members of the secretariat. So I called him in when I got the visit from the Soviet ambassador. [Jacob] Malik was his name at that time. And when the ambassador complained to me about not fulfilling the quota, Davidson made a very snippy remark: "Mr. Ambassador, we know that the Soviet government also has a five-year plan. It was never

fulfilled.” Malik was looking up, surprised. He didn’t even know the answer! You need sometimes a portion of humor.

TGW: Yes, you need a very large dose of humor to survive. What in your view is the role of cataclysmic events in making the international system, in making the United Nations, in making individuals more open to new ideas? Obviously, the Second World War, the Korean War, the collapse of the Bretton Woods systems in 1971, the oil price hike in 1973-1974, the end of the Cold War—are these really the moments of truth when individuals and institutions are open to thinking in new ways?

KW: I think it was a completely new idea when Lester Pearson, the then Canadian foreign minister, invented the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. I knew him quite well, and I can say that he was one of those thinkers who did the right thing at the right time. He was the one who suggested the creation of such operations. He got the Nobel Peace Prize for these ideas, and I think it was really a turning point because until then the United Nations had not participated in such military operations. It started with the formation of such operations in the Congo. The United Nations suffered losses. It was a very tough beginning. This was something new and had its impact on the behavior of the member states. They welcomed this initiative because there was a sort of longing for a more active role of the United Nations. With the peacekeeping operations, this active role was established and was therefore welcomed.

And of course, needless to say, in 1989 when the Soviet empire broke down, this was a turning point also in the history of the United Nations. The unification of Germany, the end of the Cold War, all this influenced considerably the work of the United Nations. The East-West confrontation in the UN was gone. The decision-making process became easier. It was a new situation which influenced the structure of the United Nations. For instance, ECE, the Economic

Commission for Europe, was, before the 1989 collapse of the Soviet empire, a very important economic and social institution. Members were not only the West European countries, but also eastern bloc nations. This offered the opportunity to discuss and negotiate issues which concerned the whole of Europe. After the end of the Cold War, it lost its importance. The real decisions are not made by the ECE. Now the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) has taken over as the leading organization in the economic field, in comprising the states of East and West of Europe plus the USA and Canada. It has its headquarters in Vienna—a good place situated in the middle of Europe.

TGW: Were you, like the rest of us, totally surprised by the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union?

KW: Yes. I don't hesitate to say that we didn't expect it. We thought it would perhaps one day come, but we didn't expect it so soon. And I think all those who say, "Yes, we knew it before" are not saying the truth. Nobody really knew it. It was such a dramatic breakdown of the whole communist system which couldn't really be foreseen.

TGW: Actually, interestingly enough, I interviewed Vladimir Petrovsky on Saturday. I asked him the same question, and his response was pretty much the same as yours, except that he actually did say that beginning in the 1980s it seemed clear to Soviet officials that dramatic change was necessary. They thought that it might take longer than it did, but insiders were perhaps more aware than we were of how imminent was the end. How did you feel in 1981, when you weren't elected to a third term?

KW: Although the Chinese had indicated to me before the elections that they would support me, they finally vetoed me. They argued after three Secretaries-General from Western Europe, it was time to elect a candidate from the Third World. This decision had nothing to do

with me personally. On the contrary, they expressed their appreciation for my work as Secretary-General during the past ten years. Most delegates assumed that the Chinese would support me. Frankly, I would not have put forward my candidacy if I had known that there were difficulties. At any rate, the Chinese decision was a surprise and was made on the highest level in Peking, ignoring the recommendation of the permanent mission of China in New York. The strange thing was that the Chinese told me during the North-South conference in Cancun in 1981 that they would give me their support.

Anyway, there was a candidate from Africa. And in the last minute, it was said that there was a difference of opinion amongst the Chinese and the great old man Deng Xiao Ping, who apparently wanted to support my opponent, the foreign minister of Tanzania.

TGW: It was Salim Salim.

KW: Yes, Salim Salim, who had been ambassador to the United Nations and, later, Tanzanian foreign minister. However, he had no chance. The Americans vetoed him. When I saw that the Chinese would not change their mind, I withdrew my candidacy.

TGW: What did you do when you returned to Austria?

KW: I did not return immediately. I became professor for international relations at Georgetown University. It was a great experience. I liked to get together with young students, to tell them about the United Nations and the need for international cooperation. At the same time, I became chairman of a very distinguished group of former heads of government, the so-called Interaction Council, which was organized by Bradford Morse who was, as you know, the American administrator of UNDP. The project was initiated and financed mainly by the Japanese.

TGW: Morse was a former congressman.

KW: Yes, a Republican congressman. He was a very good and competent man. I liked him. He was a realist. He knew what could be achieved and what not.

I was elected president of the council and chaired it for two and a half years. Morse organized the secretariat on my behalf. It was headquartered in New York, and we had meetings of former heads of state and heads of government to present new approaches and new ideas to the UN General Assembly and to the secretariat. Every year we had one meeting of all members—in different capitals, as for instance in Tokyo, Vienna, or Rome. We produced interesting reports.

TGW: So how long did you stay in Georgetown?

KW: Two and a half years. I started in 1982, soon after my term of office as Secretary-General of the UN ended in December 1981. Parallel to that function, I served as chairman of the Interaction Council.

TGW: And when did you decide to run for office in Austria?

KW: That was in the making already for quite some time—of course, not officially. It started in 1982 when I came back. Soundings—nothing official—but it went on until 1985. The elections were in 1986. The nomination process started in November 1985 when the Christian Democratic Party—the People's Party as it is called in Austria—announced my candidacy. It was a little too early because I had to go through a full year election campaign. That was a great challenge.

TGW: You were kind enough to give me your book, *Building the Future Order*. But you mentioned that the dispute, or much of it, revolved around differences in interpretations of this book and your other book, *In the Eye of the Storm*. What exactly was that dispute?

KW: The books do not deal with the matter. It was published much earlier. The dispute was about my war service in the German army.

TGW: Over those years when you were president and the criticisms continued, how did you feel about this in relationship to what had been your long international service? How did you feel toward criticism that came your way?

KW: I felt very sorry. I was deeply disappointed because I had not done anything wrong during my war service. I did not commit any war crime. But I felt deep compassion for all those millions of innocent victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecutions. I was nineteen years old when [Adolf] Hitler took over Austria. But long before, in 1934, I was horrified by the civil war between Christian democrats and socialists, and when I saw the dead bodies and destroyed houses in the streets of Vienna.

But let me return to my student years. After the civil war, in 1934, the situation in Austria was very fragile. The position of the Austrian government under [Engelbert] Dollfuss and [Kurt von] Schuschnigg was extremely weak. Dollfuss was finally killed by the Nazis. He was shot dead in the chancellery. Then in 1934 he was succeeded by Schuschnigg, and he was put under heavy pressure by Hitler. He was called to Obersalzberg in Bavaria, and there he was pressed into a sort of cheap agreement with Germany to permit leading Nazis to join the Austrian government. The entry of [Arthur] Seyss-Inquart in the Austrian political arena was the beginning of the end of Austria in March 1938. Hitler marched in. Schuschnigg, in his desperate situation, appealed to the Austrian people to have a vote about the Anschluss (annexation by Germany). Hitler was so uncertain of the outcome that he cancelled the vote, which I believe would have produced a convincing majority in favor of an independent Austria, and organized a new referendum under Nazi auspices. So Hitler was afraid and he marched in.

This was a very sad experience. Despite my life, which was always trying to make a contribution to conciliation and understanding, I had to go through a terrible war. Whoever experiences a war knows how important it is to assure and maintain peace. It was in this spirit that I felt very sorry that they accused me of having been involved in war crimes and having served in Nazi organizations. However, my father was put in prison by the Nazis, and I was beaten up altogether with my brother when we distributed pamphlets against the Anschluss.

The campaign against me started in 1985-1986 with a photo where I'm shown with two generals in the Balkans. One is a German general, and the other one, an Italian, because after I was wounded on the Russian front, I was sent back for not being fit for combat. And they asked me, "Do you speak languages? We saw in your curriculum vitae that you studied at the Consular Academy." I said, "Yes, English, French, and some Italian." "Italian? Oh fine, we need badly interpreters for the Italian language because we have Italian troops in the Balkans and not enough interpreters." So, I started as an interpreter, and I am shown when I was interpreting between the two generals—an Italian and a German.

TGW: I can imagine your disappointment. Do you regret some handling of the situation? Is there something you think, in retrospect, that you could have done to disarm the critics or to dissipate the criticism?

KW: I tried to dissipate the criticism—unfortunately, in vain. I was correct. But the mistake I made was not to mention clear enough the details of my military service in the Balkans. I had nothing to hide. I mention it in my curriculum vitae, which was available, and stated that I had served in the Balkans. But they said, "Yes, but in some of the publications you didn't mention it, and it created the impression that you hadn't been there." That was not my intention, but I knew I hadn't done anything wrong. So I didn't elaborate on that. The effect

was still there. This was a mistake that I recognize. I never expected that my military service would create a problem, because it was really nothing. I was a young lieutenant, so I had no power to give orders or anything like that.

TGW: The United Nations was paralyzed by East-West tensions, and it was torn apart by North-South problems. How do you see the future of the world organization now? What would you say are the main intellectual and operational challenges that face the world organization in the next ten to twenty years?

KW: I think we have to recognize the fact that security problems are handled mainly by the military alliances like NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and similar institutions. The United States is the only real power. The Europeans have not yet caught up with this power. They are too divided on such subjects. But it will come sooner or later.

Military organizations will gain ground. People and governments have seen that it was only NATO, led by the Americans, which could deal with the main crises like in the Balkans and recently again in Afghanistan. I regret this because those problems are in the first place European matters. The Balkans is part of Europe, and it would have only been logical that the Europeans apart from the United Nations deal with the matter. But the United Nations were not given a chance and not able to deal with it.

Here we have to watch out because this development will influence the future of the United Nations. We cannot accept that the United Nations will be responsible only for economic and social problems, whereas peacekeeping and peace maintaining is for others, because the UN has no military power. The world organizations tried repeatedly during my time to set up an emergency military force which would be immediately available when a crisis arises. It has not worked until today. So here I see another challenge for the future.

In other words, my preoccupation is that peacekeeping and peace maintaining is not getting too much in the hands of military organizations and leaving the UN in the sidelines. Of course, we know NATO has not solved the problem, but at least, through its intervention, a ceasefire was achieved. I am afraid there will be problems whenever those military forces withdraw—wherever they are, whether they are in Bosnia, or in other countries of the Balkans, and Kosovo in the first place. Then trouble will start again and we will have renewed fighting. This is a typical example for the delicate and at the same time challenging role of the UN in this field. What I see in the future is more involvement of the great power in regional conflicts and not to leave it to the international organizations which are being criticized for not being able to master the situation.

TGW: We are at the end of our time together. But is there a question that I should have asked that I did not, that you wished I'd asked?

KW: No, you have covered really most of the aspects of my professional life. I think I have tried to give an honest answer to your questions. Of course, I am not a prophet. But I try to explain my views, in light of my experience.

TGW: I am indeed grateful. Future generations of scholars and practitioners and journalists who will be able to consult this record will also thank you.

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