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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Alexander Watson
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
10 October 1997
Alexandria, Virginia

NOTICE

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Index: Central American

Bush Administration	9, 15-16, 26, 3
Contadora process	41
Carter Administration	12
Chapultepec Agreement	34
Clinton Administration	13, 60
Cristiani Administration	31, 45-46
Elections, UN monitoring of	5, 7
Frente Farabundo Marti para la Libercion Nacional (FMLN)	9, 23-24, 26, 28-33, 35, 37, 43, 46-47, 53, 55, 58
Human rights	4, 13, 42-43
International Committee for Support and Verification (CIAV)	8, 16, 22
National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ)	47
Nicaragua	
Elections	2-4, 8, 10-12, 15-16, 20
Contras	9, 13, 18, 20, 33, 57
Samoza regime	10, 12
Sandinistas	12-14, 19
Organization of American States (OAS)	5, 8, 16, 18-21, 39
Permanent Five	52
Reagan Administration	9, 12, 44, 51-52
Santiago Declaration	19
Third Committee	4
U.S. Congress	15, 52
UN General Assembly	3, 6, 52, 60
UN Security Council	4, 16, 18, 21, 51, 54

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Alexander Watson

Jean Krasno, Interiewer

October 10, 1997

Alexandria, VA

Jean Krasno (JK): This is an interview with Alexander Watson on October 10, 1997 in his office at the Nature Conservancy in Arlington, Virginia, and I am Jean Krasno. First, for the record, Mr. Watson, would you please explain your position in the United States government and when you first became involved with the UN?

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Alexander Watson (AW): I arrived at the United Nations in August of 1989 and I served there in the capacity of Deputy Permanent Representative under Tom Pickering, and then under Ed Perkins as Permanent Representative there until the very last day of 1992. So about three and a quarter years in that capacity.

JK: So that was really at the heart of the peace negotiations, particularly on El Salvador, and then there was a lot going on in Nicaragua at that time as well. Okay, so we will be focusing on Central America. Were you in the State Department prior to that time?

AW: I was Ambassador to Peru prior to that time. So I was not in the State Department. I was only tangentially involved in these developments prior to going into the United Nations. I was involved to the extent that all embassies in Latin America were asked to

make their representations from time to time to the host governments on events taking place in Central America. I was not directly involved, importantly involved, until I got to the UN

JK: Well, that's important to establish the timing here. When you joined the U.S. mission to the UN, what was the U.S. view of the situation in Central America? First of all, let's talk about Nicaragua.

AW: You'll have to help me out by telling me what the situation was in Nicaragua at that time. I can't recall exactly what happened when.

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JK: Around that time there were discussions with Nicaragua about holding elections.

AW: Those elections took place when? 1990?

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JK: Yes. Right. So the discussions were going on then and there were decisions after you had arrived at the mission to go ahead with that, that Ortega did agree to go ahead with that.

AW: But I don't remember being particularly involved in any of that, at that point. There were some talks . . . You have to remember that the UN didn't even have an electoral monitoring unit until in fact we created it. In fact, I can say that it was essentially my idea as an individual and we put it on a list of possible topics for President

Bush to raise in his speeches before the General Assembly. And I think it was 1990 or '91--I don't remember which year now—that he made it, and it was one of the ideas on our list that made it through and actually appeared in his speech and he proposed it. And then we had to bring it about over considerable resistance from some quarters that now might appear to be surprising, but the Latin Americans and the Africans for instance were not enthused with the idea of having a UN electoral unit per se, even though the UN had been working away previously in places like Namibia and elsewhere to work on these things, and Cuba took the issue up as a cause celebre and took the leadership in opposing it. So we had to proceed step by step. And the first year we managed to get the General Assembly to approve a further analysis of this idea, and the second year we managed to get them to approve the idea although it could not be called an electoral unit it had to be called something like a "coordination point" or a "focal point" or something like that.

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JK: Yes, the UN likes to use the words "focal point."

AW: The unit worried them. And then the third year that I was there we, I think, beefed it up a little bit more and let everyone know that it was a good idea, and one of the ironies was that in the very first year there were over 32 cases that it was involved in, virtually all of them in Africa, and because it could do everything from simple technical assistance such as telling people how to plan an election, how to use indelible ink, how to write the ballots, how to conduct it, transportation, how to count, all the way up to actually, and then through, monitoring elections, or giving technical assistance to elections, monitoring all the way up to running elections completely. It could do any of those things. Once it

was as clear as it was from the outset that this unit could never be involved in a country obviously without the permission of the government of the country, more than the permission, at the request of the government of the country. Still, some countries felt that even having it there would put governments in difficult positions because if they didn't ask this facility or focal point to become involved in their elections, then their opposition accused them of not being willing to withstand the international scrutiny and that's really why people were opposing it. But, in any case—that is just a long parenthesis here—during this period of time this whole idea of the UN becoming more and more involved in monitoring elections and providing technical assistance to elections was just taking shape.

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JK: And so that actually was created and occurred during the period of time that you were at the mission and was something you were very interested in pursuing.

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AW: Yes. In fact I—I don't want to keep talking about myself—but because I was so interested in this even though it was being handled by committees of the UN where I wasn't usually very active because I focused mainly on the Security Council, on the First Committee, which was the disarmament stuff. This was handled by the Third Committee, the social committee. I took the lead on it, as I did also on the narcotics issues, simply because I was the only guy in the mission with any experience on narcotics issues. Sometimes on human rights issues I would get involved even though they were not in the areas that I was principally responsible for, but since I was Tom Pickering's principal deputy I had overall management of the mission as one of my responsibilities. I

could sort of do or be wherever I wanted to. I picked up several of these issues simply because I was particularly interested in them or had a little bit more expertise than some of the others of our colleagues.

JK: Okay. Well that actually is very interesting that during that time there were specific initiatives by the U.S. that included greater UN involvement.

AW: Yes, the reason I mentioned it was not to tell you how wonderful I was, but was to point out that these circumstances—and I think probably the Namibia experience was really crucial—were starting to lead, and with the advent of greater democracy around the world, around Eastern Europe, almost as dramatically, almost as suddenly in Latin America, you had a situation which really cried out for some reinforcements by the United States. One of our principle foreign policy objectives has always been to foster democracy and to support it when we could, and we thought this was the kind of thing the UN was created to do. I think it is important that this rather important development took place during this period. So these situations in El Salvador and Nicaragua were part of this process, contributed to this process and affected this process. You can see that in a couple of situations the UN did not get in to monitor elections even though we might have thought it was a good idea. I think—was it in Nicaragua or El Salvador?--leaving it to the OAS to do. So I just wanted to give this a sort of background, a sort of a piece of the context, the texture of these times. In fact, somebody might want to take a closer look at all of this, a position that is more accurate than my own feeble memory at this point.

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JK: That's actually very interesting and as long as you bring it up, it becomes a part of the memory of the UN and then someone can actually pick this up as an issue to go and research. You don't know, that's one of the points of doing these interviews, is that a lot of this information is in people's heads but it doesn't get necessarily written down.

AW: Yes, I mean, it would be a fun study for someone to make, I think, to go back and begin with President Bush's speech, whatever year it was '90 or '91, before the General Assembly and then sort of look back from that a little bit and see what else was going on and what else he referred to at that time and maybe pick up some of that intermediate stuff or other, sort of if you will, nation-building or democracy-strengthening activities that the UN had been involved in and then take it beyond that of course in terms of how this idea was played out in the UN and became a reality, and I'll tell you I'm embarrassed at not recalling exactly now the name of the person that was in charge of this focal point.

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JK: Horatio Boneo

AW: Actually, that's who it is. Boneo and his ability to manage this once it was created, in a very sensitive and yet aggressive but careful way, I think was crucial to the success, because if somebody had handled this closely, then I think the fact that he was from a developing country was helpful and the fact that he was extremely skilled and experienced and a well-known expert in this and not somebody else stuck in there, always lent a lot of legitimacy to this and a conversation with him on this would be

extremely interesting because it is all very well to sort of talk about it and create it on paper, but the real [JK: Actually, that's an idea] interesting thing is how the first people—only two or three people in this case, they just kept it small on purpose—how he actually implemented this or articulated this and developed this, and it would be very interesting.

JK: And what's curious is that actually they end up with so many requests, like 80-something requests, to actually monitor elections, that they actually found it very difficult to be able to do as many as were being requested, although they actually did enter a lot of them and at least organized the election monitoring in some way or another, bringing in other entities, but it was a huge undertaking.

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AW: In fact, even though they did not become the scary interventionist, finger-pointing unit of the United Nations that some of the opponents of the idea originally feared, they did in fact conceive their purpose of hitting right on how elections are conducted and contributing to, I think, a situation in which more elections are now considered to be free and fair than otherwise would have been the case. Nobody really wants to go to all of the effort of having an election and then have it be perverted—they may want it perverted—but to be perceived as perverted....

JK: Right, the credibility and acceptance is important.

AW: Anyhow, that's a long aside and we don't have too much time so we had better move along here. So I have a little trouble remembering actually where we were on Nicaragua, so maybe you can tell me what happened when. Because the elections were in 1990, the UN had people there, Elliot Richardson was there, and some other really eminent people were down there, I don't remember now all of them.

JK: Jimmy Carter agreed to participate to a certain extent and the OAS was involved in monitoring the elections and then also the demobilization of the Nicaraguan rebels.

AW: Yes, I remember that process pretty well, but on the election, I think you need to talk with President Carter or Bob Pastor as people who were involved in this, they will have a lot more to say than I would. They were directly involved, and they know more about it than I do.

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JK: Well, then tell me something about the demobilization process of the rebels.

AW: Well, it's awfully hard to recall. I just remember the really crucial role played by CIAV in all this. And, without looking at the historical records, it's hard to remember all of the specific events, but the difficulty in assembling the people at points and the recovering the weapons and destroying the weapons and then providing the people that have been assembled at these points with basic necessities, giving them some cash and trying to find them job opportunities and things like that, is a fascinating process and a

whole variety of people played an important role in that. But, I don't remember right now the names of all of them.

JK: What I wanted to sort of get at was when the Bush Administration had come in and you and Ambassador Pickering were now at the mission there seemed to have been some changes in U.S. positions. In the 1980s it is pretty much common knowledge that the U.S. had provided assistance to the Contras in Nicaragua and to the government in El Salvador. But how had the situation changed that caused a shift in the U.S. position?

AW: Well, I hope you are talking to Ambassador Harry Shlavdeman, too, about all these things, because he is around town here and he has an excellent memory and he was involved in all of this stuff, including ending up being ambassador to the Nicaragua after Harry retired from the Foreign Service. The President begged him to go back and take this one on and he would know. He was deeply involved in the negotiations for years before that as one of the—during the Reagan Administration—one of the special envoys to Central America, and he would give you terrific insights on this and as would some of his people who worked with him. Former Senator Dick Stone of Florida and Phil Habib, who has passed away, were also envoys for Central America, but Shlavdeman was the one who spent weeks in negotiations in various spots in Mexico and he's one of these good characters. He's still right here in Georgetown.

JK: Well, okay, great. Later we can talk about how to get in touch with him.

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AW: But well, I think that once it was clear that there was a stalemate in Nicaragua of everybody and everyone was tired of fighting. Once the FMLN guys, Ortega and company, thought for whatever reason that they could retain their power and gain considerable legitimacy by doing it through an election, I think the situation changed dramatically and the focus then was more on the electoral process, on the political process, as opposed to military process. And when they surprisingly, surprisingly to many people, lost that election, including to Violeta Chamorro and a whole series of things take place, including that there was this piñata that they distributed among themselves, all of the many of the houses and other expropriated properties they had, which is still haunting Nicaragua, as they have had to deal with these property questions and is something which has been at the center of U.S. relations with Nicaragua ever since, because, property rights and things that are important in a democracy, having these properties expropriated without any compensation and then just given away to individuals that happened to be leaders in that regime is outrageous by any standards. And the trouble is that it gets complicated by things like—by considerations of questions of the agrarian reform, which they also undertook, which was quite a different kind of thing, which distributed land that in many cases was not being used to peasants and others and it was—once you start down this path of returning property to people who originally had it you run into some problems after a while because, whereas some of the initial properties may have made sense to almost everybody to return, do you really want to return properties to people from the old Somoza regime? Do you really want to take property away from peasants who are now farming it and think that they have it legitimately? So, it's a very, very tricky issue. In fact, I think the U.S. managed

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reasonably well given the political factors at work in Washington as well as in Nicaragua. That's a whole other story.

JK: I find it curious that the U.S. was willing to support elections in Nicaragua, and I was wondering whether the U.S. felt that there was a stalemate and that the continuing conflict was not going to overthrow the Sandinista government? And did the U.S. feel that, in fact, there was a chance that Ortega would lose the election?

AW: Well, I think there were people in the U.S. government who thought that, but I was not really deeply involved in that, and was certainly not in Washington at the time. But, I know there were people making, you know, little side bets, probably just playful bets, on who would win. There were some people in government who thought that Chamorro would win, others thought that she wouldn't. I don't think anybody knew for certain. But I think it is important to understand here, and I am not the best person to talk to about this, you need to talk to some people who were actively involved in the genesis, if you will, as well as support of the contras. My impression is that it was never the U.S. intention that something like the contras were started to develop—wasn't created by the U.S.—started to develop on its own, but it certainly had support from the U.S., was to actually take power, I mean there may have been some of us who thought that. I think it was far more important to sort of create a balance of forces, military forces, in a country which would bring about a stalemate, which would then allow a normal democratic political process of some sort to take place. There may have been people, I am sure there are people in the government, who thought that the best thing on earth would be for the

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contras to take power, but then you would have a terrible problem, because you would have a non—but if they did they would have to have elections almost immediately. I don't think we could be party to a non-democratic force, without any legitimacy except that which came out of the barrel of a gun, seizing power in Latin America, even against the Sandinistas, because the issue would immediately become not the Sandinistas but the history of who was in government and what is the U.S. position. And everybody, I think from the Carter Administration on and the Reagan Administration, although it may have had some doubts when it started, quickly realized the power of the idea of democracy and human rights as a central theme for our policy, not only in Latin America but elsewhere. Everybody was preaching democracy at this point and so it would have been an embarrassment for the U.S.—more than an embarrassment—a severe political problem, including for our policy throughout the hemisphere, if not broader, if we were somehow seen as propping up a non-democratic regime. So, my assumption all along was that—I was never told anyone this, that I can recall—but I certainly assumed this, and this was on the basis of everything I did was based, the contras were really a device for creating a situation which could end, an illegitimate, in our view, Sandinista regime and give the possibility to something else. Remember when the Sandinistas first came in they were a much broader coalition and Chamorro was in that coalition. As so often happens, in Latin America and elsewhere, the most radical and least-compromising and most ruthless elements win out, and other people fall away and elections are not held and power is maintained by other means and whatever legitimacy they might have had, which was considerable in overthrowing Somoza, they quickly lost around the world and I think obviously to a large extent within Nicaragua or they wouldn't have lost the election with

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all the things they had going for them. In any case, I think that was what U.S. policy was driving at and it probably turned out better than anyone expected because Chamorro won, and immediately then you had a process of reducing the armed forces, and she became controversial in many circles in the U.S. because she, in my view, widely realized that the only way to proceed was a policy of reconciliation and many people here who were very strong advocates of the contras and others thought that that was a betrayal, because of the victory over and the destruction of the Sandinistas. Well, that's very easy to say and got much harder to do when the Sandinistas do control the army. What are you going to do about that? In fact, under her leadership and under Umberto Ortega's leadership of the army, they reduced it very dramatically in size—I don't know the figures now—to about a quarter what it used to be, cut the budget back, they did not, as we insisted, redress all of the most egregious human rights violations which the army committed during the Sandinista time and some of them even in the early days of the Chamorro government, but they certainly dramatically scaled those back to the point of virtually eliminating any new incidents, and in all seriousness they moved some of the least savory people out of positions of influence and, you may say, well Violetta was dealing with a bunch of bad guys, well sometimes you have to achieve the objectives and I think the proof of the success of her policy, while not by any means perfect but still reasonably successful in this regard, is demonstrated by what has happened throughout her administration and the fact that they had another democratic election, you've got the Sandinistas involved in democratic politics and I think in a legitimate way. I could talk much more about all that stuff from my position when I was Assistant Secretary of State, but that was after my time in the UN, and what we did in the Clinton Administration is

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we took a different tack and we defied in a way the ultra-conservatives on Capitol Hill who were forcing everything—every issue—that was coming to the floor in Nicaragua up to Washington for solution and always pushing for the most conservative solution. It got to the point that there were people in Washington who would claim that they were upholders democratic principles who wanted to see Mrs. Chamorro fall from power and be replaced by her very conservative vice president who was a member of her coalition. We said three things, I said three things before Bob Torecelli's subcommittee one day in the House the first time I testified, and three things could help out I'll tell you from Senator Chris Dodd on the Senate side on this, publicly nothing public, but just three things. We said:

1. We support Violeta Chamorro a hundred percent as the democratically elected president of the country. We may not agree with everything she does but her legitimacy is uncontested. We support her a hundred percent.

2. And that having been said, were are no longer going to participate in having every issue in Nicaragua brought up to Washington for solution by all. Nicaragua needs to stay home and don't come running up here to your friends, solve your problems and the right wing ought to go back into the legislature so they have a quorum, so they can work, and all that kind of stuff.

3. We're not bosom buddies with the Sandinistas, but to the extent that they behave like a legitimate democratic party, we are perfectly capable of working with them.

We said those three things. And they may sound like small things but they became hugely important in Nicaragua and had a real impact on how right-wing people back in the Congress did start to resolve their problems and the effort to sort of topple Violeta

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lost force. And we did hold conversations that were on a much more normal basis with the Sandinistas. We were blessed by having the good fortune to have selected a first rate person to be our ambassador there, John Maisto, who had dealt with these issues on the Washington side and who really knew all the players and was a guy who for the right wing inspired great confidence, so much confidence that when it came time for him to leave and go be ambassador to Venezuela, everybody in Nicaragua asked us to leave him there through the next election. The U.S. never does that, but in this case all sides of the political spectrum in Nicaragua and in Washington believing that his presence there, believing probably incorrectly, that his presence there was crucial to the success of the elections because things have their own momentum and no one is ever as important as they may think. But anyhow we decided to leave him there, and not send him to Venezuela right away but he handled this new hand, of cards extremely skillfully, and of course we supported him in Washington. But when it became clear that the U.S. Congress was unable, even if some elements wanted to, to sort of impose certain points of view on Nicaraguans, and that Nicaragua was not going to get the satisfaction of having someone else support their side, ultra conservatives down there and thus change reality in Nicaragua, that was not going to happen anymore. Then they started to work together a little bit. So that was all after the UN period. And I would say that the Bush Administration was heading in that direction, they didn't take that last step. They were sort of embroiled in sort of negotiating all of this stuff in Washington, and I used to say that was crazy, that wasn't going to get us anywhere, that in fact was a recipe for undermining the democratic process in Nicaragua. What we had to do was strengthen it, and the way you strengthen any democratic process, even a fledgling one, especially a

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fledgling one, is make—set up conditions so that people have to deal with each other in a democratic context, and then they learn. You don't learn how to be a democrat without being one, trying it, trial and error, make mistakes, that is what democracy is all about. You try to make sure that you have enough safeguards so the mistakes don't topple everything when they occur.

JK: Yes, to negotiate and to accept the compromises

AW: Yes, you know, people when they come out of civil war don't want to accept compromises, but then they have to realize that that is what you have to do, but after civil war nobody wants that. So anyhow, but in the Bush Administration a lot of very important things were happening and I think the support for what CIAV and the OAS and the UN elements were doing in Nicaragua was important. I think we were pretty steadfast in that support.

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JK: Now, you talked about the UN involvement in the electoral process and perhaps we have discussed that significantly enough. Actually, what I was going to ask you about was the UN resolution that took place in July of 1989, but that's actually before you got there

AW: Just before I got there, yes.

JK: Because that also marked a change in U.S. policy because actually Jean Kirkpatrick had made it clear to Pérez de Cuéllar that the U.S. did not want the UN to get involved, but by July 1989 the U.S. had supported the Security Council resolution to a certain extent which called for the Secretary-General to use his "good offices," so that was a definite change.

AW: That was a definite change, yes.

JK: Was this something that Ambassador Pickering was in favor of, or how did that evolve?

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AW: I'm sure he must have been, but I don't remember it very well. I think there is a very important factor here that anyone who is looking at the UN during that time, I think, has to bear in mind, and it is a greater or lesser factor depending on a lot of other circumstances, but it is always a factor. I think I can say this safely, when President Bush became involved, you had, for the first time in history, a U.S. president who actually had been our representative to the UN, liked the UN, understood how it worked, and as a skillful politician understood its failings but also understood its potentialities and didn't allow himself to think of the UN only in terms of its less successful ventures, and of course it's always going to have lots of failures because it's out there on the cutting edge, it gets pushed out there by the members when they can't solve things themselves. Of course it goes into the worst possible situations and usually without all of the resources to do what it is supposed to do and then we are very comfortable in blaming it, you know,

but it's only there because we can't think of anyone else to do it, and we have to remember that the UN is nothing more than its members, although there are people in this country who think that there are black helicopters flying all over the place, total madness. It's really the dreams of Dantes' inferno or something, a lunatic asylum, one flew over the cuckoo's nest. But in any case, I think President Bush, and you see this over and over again. The job that he and Jim Baker did, rounding up support for the "all necessary means" resolution on Iraq and Kuwait was absolutely extraordinary. I think that is one of the most dramatic turning points in U.S. foreign policy that we have seen in a long, long time. I don't think it's getting anywhere near the attention it should have. The fact that Baker met with every single foreign minister on the Security Council, including of Cuba as the last one in the Waldorf Astoria hotel. He flew to places like Yemen and went to Geneva to see the Africans and went to Los Angeles to see the Malaysian who was coming through, all these people, and just worked and worked and worked and worked until we got this really amazing resolution -- I don't remember the number anymore -- that allowed us a coalition of states to use all necessary means to bring about a certain end. That was extraordinary. I can't imagine another President doing that. Now we think about it, we do it all the time. But that was the first time that I recall. And I think only a president who had an understanding of how the UN could be worked could have brought this about. So going back to what happened in July of '89, I don't know too much about that, because it was before my time, but I am absolutely certain Ambassador Pickering would have been fully on alert. I do not know the origin of the ship, but I would think that what I said earlier is relevant, which is that we were trying to get to the point where we needed to have a democratic process. We, as virtually a combatant in

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Nicaragua, in our support for the contras, you know, could not credibly be the only electoral monitor. Even the OAS, which up until—people forget this too—up until very recently most of the Latin Americans thought of the OAS as nothing but our creature, they had no confidence in it, they would much rather have the UN in there rather than the U.S. Now the OAS, I think, has proven itself recently with the Santiago Declaration and the Washington Protocol and things like that. Its behavior in a series of difficult circumstances could be a useful instrument for—I think also the fact that the ideological spectrum has narrowed somewhat, with the exception of Cuba which is essentially an irrelevancy, and makes it easier to do this, but now the OAS has greater credibility too. I think when you looked around maybe people were grumbling and biting their tongues and complaining about the goddamned UN, you know, but what else did you have? Couldn't use the OAS because the left and most of the major nations of Latin America didn't want that necessarily. You certainly couldn't have, I don't think you could put together a credible coalition of people to go in there, so the UN proves—ends up being the one that made the most sense.

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JK: It had the most credibility internationally.

AW: It may not have had the most credibility in certain sectors in Washington, but what you had was credibility first of all in Nicaragua, that was the first objective, and the Sandinistas wouldn't have probably have let the OAS in there, I don't know, as an electoral monitor, it wouldn't have been an electoral monitor all by itself. So, I don't

know, but I'm now talking about things I don't know anything about so you had better talk to other people about this.

JK: Well, I think what is interesting is that Nicaragua was—the elections in Nicaragua—was the first Central American issue to come to the UN for support, and in light of that what effect did the elections and the outcome of the elections in Nicaragua have on the rest of Central America and the process and the solution of the contras going on in the rest of Central America?

AW: Well, my impression was that what happened in Nicaragua gave a big boost to democracy and peaceful settlements of disputes everywhere in the hemisphere. I think that to the extent the UN played a role in that, it gave a certain prestige itself. And I think that, this is really speculative, but I would say that to the extent the UN was involved in Nicaragua and the situation in Nicaragua and the elections came out sort of better than people expected. People who, especially the more conservative elements who would have opposed the UN being involved, might have said "Hmm, maybe it's not so bad after all."

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JK: Now you talk a little bit about the OAS. From your experience or your point of view, did the OAS and the UN work fairly well together in Nicaragua?

AW: Oh, no. I don't remember this all very clearly anymore, but there were enormous rivalries. There were enormous tensions between the two secretaries general, Pérez de

Cuéllar and Baena Soares and resentments, and this was clearly reverberated throughout their respective organizations and bureaucracies. I don't remember all of the details anymore but people who were around then can tell you a bit more about that.

JK: Okay, so it would be interesting to explore that.

AW: I think that that's another issue that is probably worth someone spending a little time somewhere looking at is the relationship between the UN and the OAS and the evolution that has had. You recall that in Haiti, the absolutely crucial step towards getting the "all necessary means," or whatever the precise form of words was, of the Security Council on the Haiti situation, was that prior to that at the OAS General Assembly meeting in Belem, Brazil, Baena Soares's last one as Secretary General, the OAS General Assembly called for the UN Security Council to do this, which had never happened before. The OAS acknowledging the fact that it didn't have any compulsory power like the UN does, like the Security Council does, only recommendatory. It doesn't have the authority that the Security Council has to send troops in. Therefore after responding to President Aristide's appeal, there was some grumbling on the part of some delegations who questioned the OAS General Assembly that made this request of the Security Council. This was crucial, it represents quite an evolution in their relationship.

JK: On the same track, the Latin American countries, or the people of Latin American countries at the UN, what kind of issues do you have with them in sort of rounding them up to support issues on Nicaragua or El Salvador?

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AW: Well, I'm sort of having a hard time remembering too much about El Salvador, I mean Nicaragua. My recollections there were mainly that the discussions and the issues were very largely what you might call technical, but with political implications—who is to do what job, what troops would come in, who would be commanders, how does CIAV work, a whole series of issues like that. I don't remember. . . .

JK: Okay, all right. Well, I wanted to get on to El Salvador anyway.

AW: Well, I know a little bit more about that.

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JK: Well, in El Salvador . . . .

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AW: You ask here in Nicaragua the Venezuelan battalion, the chief military observer, right? Who was the chief military observer? Was that Suarez, the Spaniard?

JK: I don't recall right now.

AW: I just don't remember, without looking at the records, if I had some sort of record or a text or something I could work from, I could do this a lot better, but I have kept no notes of my own. But in my recollection, the Venezuelan battalion acquitted itself very well. It's my recollection, but we should check that out with people who were closer to it. El Salvador?

JK: In El Salvador the UN had not been directly involved until the summer of 1989, about the time that you had joined the U.S. mission. At that point, the UN was really only an observer. I understand that Alvaro De Soto sat in as an observer with some of the meetings between the government and the FMLN. Was the U.S. mission or the U.S. also observers in any of those early negotiations?

AW: Well, the negotiations didn't take place in New York. In my recollection, only certain meetings took place in New York, from time to time, three or four meetings.

JK: Yes, more towards the end.

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AW: Those were always extremely difficult because of the tremendous pressure on the U.S. to issue visas. Well, we very often discouraged having the negotiations in New York for those reasons. And they were politicized in the U.S. more than they already were. Most of the negotiations took place in Mexico and Alvaro went down there very often. So, we were not involved with those negotiations directly at all. We were not sitting at the table with anybody. We had, I think, a very intimate relationship with the Administration of President Cristiani. This does not mean, this is an important point, that President Cristiani always did everything we wanted, by any means. But we basically were supportive of his position in the negotiations. My job was to keep in close touch with, at least I made it my job, to keep in close touch with Alvaro de Soto to make sure he understood where we stood on all these issues. From time to time Bernie Aronson,

who was really the key figure in the administration in all of this, was Assistant Secretary of Statefor Inter-American Affairs at the time, to come up to New York to meet with Alvaro de Soto, Marrack Goulding, Iqbal Riza and the other players—UN players—in this whole process. Sometimes the discussions would get heated and strong if not actually acrimonious because there was a feeling on the part of Bernie and Peter Romero and others in Washington that de Soto and the UN team, particularly Alvaro, were leaning too much towards FLMN positions. So, my job, and my sidekick Joe Manso—another guy it would be fun to talk to, his memory, since he is younger than I am, his memory is probably better—you know, we met with Alvaro de Soto on a weekly, sometimes several times a week, to talk about this stuff, make sure that we were getting back to Bernie our best analysis of where Alvaro thought he was going, in his analysis of the situation, as well our making our points to Alvaro to make sure he didn't misunderstand where the U.S. was. He, of course, understood that we were a crucial player in the negotiations even if we weren't at the table. So, we had lengthy and very interesting discussions and the review of the record of those conversations would be revealing.

JK: There are notes of those conversations?

AW: Well, they're probably all still classified.

AW: Each time Joe Manso and I met with Alvaro there was a comprehensive telegram to Washington, you know, pages, and it was really probably ad nauseam for the readers, but I wanted to be certain that we conveyed not being intimately involved in the negotiations

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per se nor being intimately involved in all of the discussions within the U.S. government, and not being part of all of the tortured history of the U.S. actions toward El Salvador. I felt that I could not be absolutely certain of which kind of nuance might resonate by having an importance that escaped me, might be important to other people, so our reporting on this was quite comprehensive. Poor Joe, he will probably never forgive me, he did most of the writing

JK: Well, details are important. As I told you yesterday, I did interview Bernard Aronson and he explained very interesting points. He was very modest, though, about his own role.

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AW: He is a modest guy.

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JK: I wanted to ask you about his role and the importance that he played?

AW: He was central, as far as I am concerned. He may say Jim Baker was essential or somebody else, but my guess is that Bernie himself was the key policy maker for the U.S. during this process. It is not something you just sort of sit down one day and decide something and then that's it. It's an evolving process that requires decisions every single day, sometimes many decisions as to where we are and what we say to Cristiani, what we recommend that he do, how does we respond to the UN, what to tell Watson, to tell de Soto, that kind of stuff all the time.

JK: So he was really active?

AW: Yes. And he had Bill Walker, whom I mentioned before, that you really have to talk to, as our ambassador there involved and Cristiani also is necessary, the Foreign Minister and others. We, too, in New York, whenever the Salvadoran Foreign Minister would come up, we would sit down and go over things with him at great length. And in fact, --he was a negotiator—he wasn't the Foreign Minister at that time. Now, remember, we were not talking to the FMLN.

JK: Well, I wanted to ask you about that. . . .

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AW: It was tough for us. Any objective observer would say: "How the heck can you do this?" We were only talking to one side. Well that's one of the reasons that I was talking to de Soto to get as much information on the other side—what their views were—as possible. I can tell you, a lot of times people in Washington were very upset with what de Soto was doing. But, he may have had his own attitudes and ideas not all of which would have been incompatible with the Bush Administration's attitudes and ideas. But, on the other hand, he was in some ways looking for any solution without determining in advance what it would be, that could be supported by both sides and would be sustainable, and I think that's basically what he was trying to do even though he may have had some of his own biases which may have led him from time to time in certain directions. Probably, and it's obvious from my point of view, it is absolutely evident that he was going to be in a position that was not exactly what the U.S. wanted because we

had to deal with one extreme and the FMLN was the other extreme, and whatever solution was going to be in the middle and not necessarily satisfactory to either. So, we also tried to make sure Washington understood this point, that de Soto wasn't necessarily an evil person that was doing something that we didn't like and therefore was bad, but some people certainly thought that. He was a negotiator looking for some sort of solution that would be viable.

JK: Right. Because there was some open criticism of de Soto.

AW: Of course. You know the tempers involved in the U.S.—you talk to the people who were involved in El Salvador during that time, they still can't let go. Many of them still can't look at El Salvador today, except through the lens of the past. They still look at the personalities for that time. It was a scorching, searing time for people. I had the luxury of not being involved in all that, so I felt that I was in certain ways more objective than some of these others.

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JK: You could be more objective.

AW: I could be. Whether or not I proved to be is another question. I was not seared by personal experiences that made me have very strong views about the good or evil of different people. I could be a little more detached, if you will.

JK: I believe that you mentioned actually before we started the tape about Ambassador Walker. Maybe you could clear that up again?

AW: Well, he was obviously a key player, he was a very smart and aggressive, active guy, and I just mentioned to you earlier, you really should find a way to talk to Bill because he did some really—first of all being a faithful messenger of our position and getting our views to Cristiani and getting Cristiani's views back to all the rest of us—was a crucial thing to do, but in addition to that, he did this dramatic trip to—I can't quite remember the name of the town now—up to the rebel base, the FMLN base, where he sat around with all of the leaders there and talked to them like human beings and that was—and then Bernie, at least in conversations with me, has emphasized how important that was in terms of convincing the FMLN that we were actually really interested in negotiating a solution, that we weren't just trying to suck them in to something where they would get hurt, in some way, that we were prepared to live with them. Up until that point we were not talking with them at all. Remember when Pete Romero in New York made the first contact, at one point when there was an FMLN delegation up there, the first contact between us—that is the U.S. government—and the FMLN, was those negotiations sort of on the margin, and it was all hush hush, it was not public or anything like that. It wasn't Bernie who did it, it wasn't even I who did it, it certainly wasn't Pickering who did it. It was Pete, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary or Office Director maybe at the time, whatever his title was. He was a key player, but he didn't have the political salience or visibility. Walker played a very crucial role and Pete Romero was Bernie's right hand man, so he is another important person to talk to about this.

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JK: Again, on El Salvador, in November of 1989, now this was after you had joined the U.S. mission, the FMLN launched its largest attack of the war. Had the U.S. anticipated that attack?

AW: I don't think so. I don't remember very well. There might have been some intelligence about it, but I think, but my recollection is that by and large it was a surprise. But that was also an absolutely crucial turning point, in both ways. It demonstrated to the elite of El Salvador categorically and definitively and unforgettably that this war was not simply among peasants scrabbling around in the countryside among themselves, and hired military people and stuff like that, and it actually affected them in a personal way, like their own houses being shot at, and I think it made the elite realize that they had to do something to bring this to an end, and it wasn't going to come to an end by military means. It also demonstrated that the FMLN could give a sort of like a TET offensive. They threw everything they could into this, and bam they didn't achieve anything. For both sides, I think that was crucial. I think most analysts and people who analyze this a hell of a lot better than I am, would agree that that was a crucial point and that the attitudes they described, that came out of it, were crucial to setting a psychological or political situation conducive to a negotiated solution.

JK: I wanted to ask you about an incident during that time in which the FMLN took the Sheraton Hotel. I don't know if you remember it?

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AW: Yes, I remember it. Wasn't Baena Soares in the hotel?

JK: Baena Soares was there in the hotel, and they also discovered some thirteen or so U.S. military personnel, at least they were trained or something like that. Were you involved in the negotiations to get them released?

AW: No, I don't remember. I don't think so. I remember the incident. But the FMLN may have been a lot of things but they weren't idiots, and they weren't about to do something bad to the U.S. military, and get the U.S. directly, even more directly, involved, but they might have been tempted to.

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JK: No, they weren't tempted to. Because I actually interviewed some of the leaders of the FMLN and they told me about their surprise when they found these soldiers—mortified I should say—that they found them in that hotel.

AW: But there's another whole dimension to this, and maybe you were going to get to it. That is the creation by Pérez de Cuéllar of the "Friends of the Secretary-General"

JK: Yes, I wanted to ask about that.

AW: My own view on that has always been that this was an idea broached initially by Alvaro de Soto to Javier Pérez de Cuéllar—I don't know what he says about it in his book—that it was a device designed to offset our influence and they were trying to create

some other external actors that would come in. But only when the Secretary-General wanted and in the way that he wanted. It wouldn't actually be like we were perceived to be sort of absolutely wedded to the Cristiani Administration's objectives, otherwise it wouldn't be wedded to the FMLN's objectives, but it would be wedded to the Secretary-General's objectives, Alvaro's objectives, and would give them more resonance and help counteract us to some extent. It didn't work out that way and it's one of the most interesting stories and when you talk to someone like Ambassador Jorge Montaño of Mexico, perhaps the leader of this group, who is now retired and living in Mexico.

JK: I really would like to interview him [AW: He is up here often] Is he? I should write to him because I have interviewed Ambassador Tello who is now the Mexican Ambassador to the UN But his direct involvement in El Salvador is limited because he was in Mexico during that time, but he certainly was aware of all the negotiations.

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AW: Tello was not involved because Tello was somewhere else.

JK: But Montaño was involved....

AW: Montaño was absolutely involved and a very important player and I would say the—perhaps in a way the leader—perhaps a little too strong of a term—but he was perhaps the most active and perhaps the most influential of the four friends.

JK: So what was the role that they ended up playing? Because you said they didn't actually play the anticipated role.

AW: We became—I think we handled this really well—we became the "four friends plus one." The Secretary-General had now five guys that were involved in this and coordinating our positions in advance and actually participating in the negotiations behind the scenes and so poor Alvaro got something that. . . .So, we ended up with a group—we met all the time—the "four friends plus one" as we came to be called. We worked out or positions together and we went back, and we couldn't talk to the FMLN, but the Mexicans could and the Spaniards could really talk with them very well, very close to them. The Colombians and the Venezuelans both were less involved directly with the combatants but gave a certain kind of a leveling element to the whole thing. . . .

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JK: In the group of friends during the negotiation process before the final agreement, the U.S. role was really that you met with the group of friends. . . .

AW: All the time, every week, several times a week, at the Mexican mission, usually at Jorge's place. They had a nice conference room and served good cookies.

JK: And you would meet Cristiani. So the one difference between you and the other four members of the group of friends was that you were not meeting directly with the FMLN? Because Mexico and the other friends were meeting directly?

AW: They could do that whenever they wanted, they were in touch with them, including with the FMLN representative in New York. Whatever his name was. I don't remember right now. This was interesting, very interesting. But I think that this is only possible because the U.S. position was also evolving very rapidly as the negotiations, despite fitful progress, looked like the only game in town. And if we were going to get any solution to this—remember how contentious this had been in Congress and everything, all this Central American stuff? And Bernie and Jim Baker did a great job diffusing that when they came in before Bernie was sworn in as Assistant Secretary and cutting a deal on Nicaragua that we would stop sending weapons to them. But if the elements that were so strongly opposed to the Contras would give us a break. I forget all of the specifics of it. I think the whole Bush Administration policy was evolving toward the offensive and everything, and if this was the only game in town, we would have to try to make it work. We might not have liked everything de Soto was doing, but we might try make it better. In fact, by working with these four friends, he now had five of us pressing de Soto on certain issues, the five of us together.

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JK: I just wanted to clarify my understanding on this .

AW: I wanted to make sure. . . I'm trying to think about this. We did meet with the FMLN negotiators in New York. I'm trying to put that meeting that Pete Romero had in context with that, but I'm just not remembering it very well. But I think that his meeting may have been before any of the other meetings. And then we met with Shafik Handel,

but usually in the company of the four friends, and Villalobos and all those guys, we all came out together.

JK: But after the signing of the agreement in Chapultepec in January of 1992, then it seems as though the U.S. was much more in direct contact with both sides.

AW: Then it was all—then it was different. The negotiations were completed at midnight, whenever it was, '91?

JK: Yes, December 31, 1991

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AW: We stopped the clock and wouldn't let Pérez de Cuéllar leave. His wife had to fly off with Naboa to the Bahamas in their private plane and Javier just stayed behind. I could go on. There are a lot of stories there.

JK: Well, actually Bernard Aronson was saying that Javier Pérez de Cuéllar was actually going to leave in the afternoon on that day. So what happened that he finally stayed until midnight?

AW: He stayed beyond midnight. He was no longer Secretary-General. We stopped the clock, like in labor negotiations, literally. It was amazing. Because everyone looked at him and said you cannot walk away from this negotiating process. You are the central

figure of this goddamned thing. You just can't abandon us. We are this far from an agreement. You are not going to leave this room.

JK: So at that point the friends went to speak to him?

AW: Some people were saying—I think Alvaro de Soto was saying—I was not necessarily—here, Tom Pickering and Jorge Montaño I think—you'll have to talk to him. I don't remember all the details. I was not in that room at that time. What I hear is, I might have heard this from Alvaro, so I ought to be careful. De Soto was saying he should leave, we weren't going to get anywhere. But these guys were saying absolutely no, you have to stay here, we will stop the clock. I am no longer Secretary-General, who cares. Let's get this process going. Meanwhile you had everybody downstairs, you had the FMLN one place, and you had the government people in another. The current president Calderón Sol was there, he was handling one part of it, you had generals handling the other parts. Cristiani, like a masterful conductor, with a cigarette in his hand, he was sort of a calm, in his calm, calm way, you know. Making all decisions, dealing with problems. His wife there, she was terrific. The whole show. I just found a picture, I don't know why, lying around in my bedroom of a bunch of us, Cristiani and Pickering and I and somebody else standing there that night, just lying around.

JK: If you would be interested in donating that to the Oral History collection, that would be great. Or a copy, if you have the negatives, or something.

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AW: I don't know who took it, where it came from. That was a rough night. But Goulding played a crucial role in this.

JK: What was Goulding's role?

AW: He was the peacemaker guy—head of peacekeeping in the UN His job was sort of basic, theoretical. Simply dealing with the deployment of troops and those kinds of things. But de Soto was the political negotiator. But Goulding expanded his role, too. He did a lot of real action in negotiating. He was really tough in some of those negotiations, I understand, not having been in the room, of course. I think something about a sword. There's a great story here somewhere. Maybe Bernie remembers it better than I. He took some kind of a ceremonial sword lying around in his office. I'm sure there were some comic opera elements of it. Everybody was tense and everybody was trying to get the last drop out of the negotiating stone, and of course there was still a lack of confidence all over the place. But, you know, they finally made it. Where did I just see a picture? Did you show me something?

JK: Oh, the book.

AW: Yes, the book. There is a picture of people standing around making these press announcements at the end. Then we all went home. I had my whole family around for a New Year's Eve party at our house. Our house was on Fifth Avenue overlooking Central Park. I walked in there and they were all sound asleep on the couch. It was two in the

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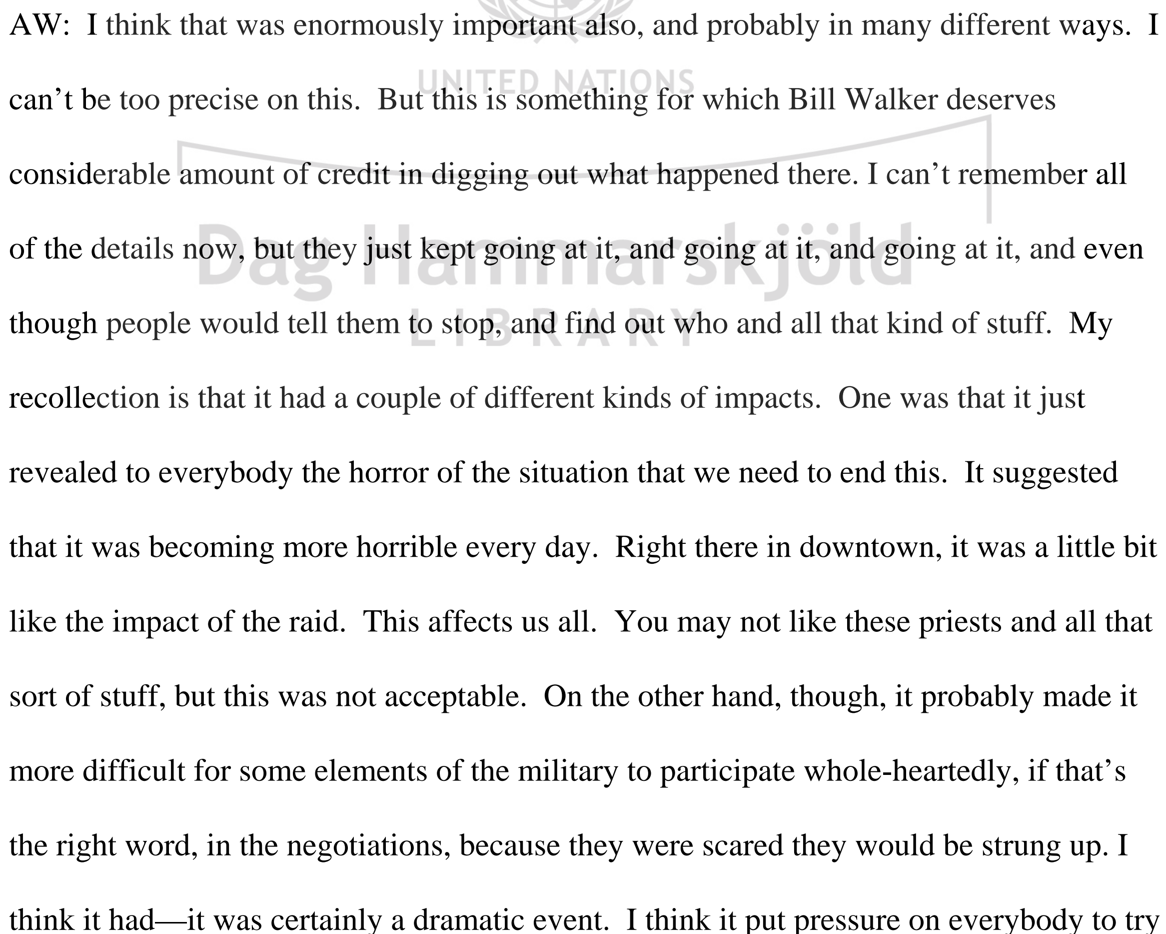
morning, or two-thirty in the morning. My brother was down from Connecticut and his kids. I was full of adrenalin, wide-awake. Drinking champagne or something all evening and passed out there.

JK: I wanted to just back up a little bit, because that was the end of 1991, but after the FMLN offensive in 1989, and in relation to that, the Salvadoran military had responded by killing a group of Jesuit priests. So we talked about the impact of the offensive and how that changed the view of the situation. How did the killing of the Jesuit priests impact the perceptions?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AW: I think that was enormously important also, and probably in many different ways. I can't be too precise on this. But this is something for which Bill Walker deserves considerable amount of credit in digging out what happened there. I can't remember all of the details now, but they just kept going at it, and going at it, and going at it, and even though people would tell them to stop, and find out who and all that kind of stuff. My recollection is that it had a couple of different kinds of impacts. One was that it just revealed to everybody the horror of the situation that we need to end this. It suggested that it was becoming more horrible every day. Right there in downtown, it was a little bit like the impact of the raid. This affects us all. You may not like these priests and all that sort of stuff, but this was not acceptable. On the other hand, though, it probably made it more difficult for some elements of the military to participate whole-heartedly, if that's the right word, in the negotiations, because they were scared they would be strung up. I think it had—it was certainly a dramatic event. I think it put pressure on everybody to try

to end this thing. Of course it was a key—the negotiations resulted in a whole lot of military people having to move out, retiring, leaving and that had something to do with who had to leave.

JK: Had the U.S. been in conversation with the Soviet Union or with Cuba on Central America, either on Nicaragua or El Salvador?

AW: You know, my recollection is no. But there were people, I mean at one point Pérez de Cuéllar was talking about having the Cubans involved. Not even the FMLN wanted the Cubans involved. Cuba didn't have any relevance by that point [JK: Yes, by that point.] In the seventies and maybe even the early eighties it was, but by that point they didn't have anything to bring to the table. The four friends didn't involve the Cubans. The Cubans were not involved in any of this in any significant way. But a couple—there was a moment there where there was some talk about it. I can almost remember it, but not entirely. Something that the Cubans were going to do in terms of a visit or something, but it never materialized.

JK: Now you talked about the importance of Jorge Montaño and the group of friends, what of about the President of Venezuela?

AW: Carlos Andrés Pérez. I heard many stories that he was extremely active. I think he was active. I can't remember now anything specific. He put up money in Nicaragua to provide security for Violeta, things like that. One reason that he ended up in jail was that

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he had this big slush fund that he used for foreign policy. He had plenty of money to throw around so he could influence people. He flew people around in planes, hired security. He did all kinds of things. God knows what else he did with all that money that he had. He was very active. I think all the presidents were active. I think Salinas was active. Carlos Andrés Pérez liked this stuff more than the others.

JK: So personally he liked to be active and involved.

AW. And you had an active Diego Arria who is still in New York. You might want to talk to him. His English is absolutely perfect, and he is still living there in New York. You might want to see him and talk to him about this. He will give you a lot of stories, I'm sure. He has a rather flamboyant personality. And then Fernando Cepeda, who was the Colombian during most of this time and he is there now as of a few weeks ago the new ambassador to the OAS. You could talk to him too. Yañez, who is in this picture here, first Paco de Villar who is in fact a Spanish observer at the OAS right now, interestingly enough, was the first member, Spanish Perm Rep, that was involved in all of this. I had lots of meetings with him on the side at the very beginning of this process.

JK: What is his name again, the Spanish Perm Rep?

AW: Francisco de Villar, he is the Perm Rep to the OAS and he was the Perm Rep to the UN, and then he went back to be number two in their Foreign Ministry and then when Gonzales lost the election, he moved out here in a less important position. He sort of

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identified with the Socialist administration and then after him there was Yañez right here. That is Montaño and that is Yañez.

JK: That actually is a really good picture, isn't it?

AW: I don't know where Tom or anyone of us is. See it doesn't have a—it doesn't describe who is in it. This is Cepeda, here. Here is Cepeda. Here is Arria. See those are the four friends. These four guys. I hadn't looked at this closely. And then here is Calderön Sol, the current president. [JK: Yes, I recognized him.]

JK: We are referring to a photograph that is in the memoirs of Pérez de Cuéllar.

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AW: Yes, the last one, in the section of photographs here, just before 215. They're all good guys, all those guys were great. It must have been difficult. It was interesting for them. They all had very different personalities and different approaches to this, but they worked together extremely nicely and always in a very forthright and open way. They were very easy to deal with.

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JK: Now that you are saying this, was this just a lucky gathering of people? Or could this be orchestrated again to have a group of friends that were worked with the Secretary-General?

AW: I think the group of friends idea is now used over and over again. I'm trying to think here.

JK: Well, on Haiti and Guatemala. . .

AW: On Haiti. . . . In a way it comes out of the Contadora process. These were the leaders of Contadora. Now, that whole process has expanded out into a whole Rio group now but with a much wider agenda. All this is distinct from the Latin American historical context because the Latins didn't usually work together. My recollection is that the first time in history that all Latin American presidents met without the presence of the United States was in about 1987 in Mexico. Two hundred years after, or 180 years after they were founded as countries. It really is pretty interesting. Now they meet to talk all the time. They have the Rio group, they have Mercosur, they have a variety of things, they're on the phone, they see each other. Very, very interesting and a very important development too. I think maybe the Contadora thing sort of galvanized this process.

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JK: What kind of incentives or leverage did the U.S. use during the process?

AW: Well, we had the promise of assistance, which was large. And I think, as I said earlier, everybody recognized that there wasn't going to be a solution without us as part of it. Now how do you make us part of it? Cristiani might have been able to make us part of some things we didn't want to be part of. He said I've got to have this and we

would say after all, we're supporting him. So there was probably a range of latitude, quite a range there. But if Cristiani didn't like it, sometimes I think we had to work to persuade him, to buck him up. He was negotiating in the political context of his own administration, military and all kinds of other people all over him. That's another story that's worth someone looking into: How the Salvadorans handled this? We had foreign assistance. We had influence on Cristiani and influence elsewhere in the world and we could marshall other resources.

JK: The first actual agreement that was reached between the parties was on human rights in July of 1990, so that would have been about a year after you had joined the mission. What was the U.S. view on this agreement and coming to an agreement on human rights without a cease-fire?

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AW: Well, I think that we were pushing for a cease-fire and an end to the conflict above all else. I wouldn't be honest if I tried to tell you exactly how we reacted. I know that my view all along—I accepted the idea that the process had to be piecemeal. But I'm not sure if everyone in Washington did. People wanted a comprehensive agreement, but sometimes you can't get there because you don't have enough confidence or enough experience with the other guy to get there. You need to do things that lead you there, sort of like the Middle East. Anyone who sits down and says this is what the solution to the Middle East should be, will lose immediately and everyone will reject it. You have to get there and you only get there when people have confidence enough in each other and feel serious enough about changing the situation for the better that they then start

incrementally moving there and defining real options and making real choices. If you told them at the beginning what they were going to end up with, they would probably all say you're crazy. So it's a process that has to go on inside people's brains and you need to bring them along. And after all human rights are a pretty major step. Many people would say the human rights thing was designed to get at the military and all that stuff, but okay so what? That builds confidence on the part of the FMLN. And besides, some things the military did were really bad. But also, if I remember correctly, they set up this panel that went to examine the human rights situation that took place. It didn't finish its work until I was in Washington as Assistant Secretary. And they came back and they looked at the evidence and they accused all sorts of people of different kinds of things. As it happens in Latin America, a lot of people were upset about this. But it happens all the time. And once you get to that point, a lot of people say, well let's go get the bastards and Latinos invariably say no. They say we can spend all our time seeking retribution for the past, opening up more and more wounds, or we can say—in a way Americans would have a hard time doing—that happened and it's horrible and now let's forget it and let's look at the future. And it's a tough call. Human rights groups in the U.S. and elsewhere understandably are very frustrated by this. But it happened in Chile, it happened in Uruguay, and in Brazil and El Salvador, and in Nicaragua. In Argentina, they actually threw the generals in jail. Now they're all out. But they were. Argentineans were the exceptions to the story, at least they appeared to be.

JK: What's the result or what is the purpose of this combination of a truth commission's report which names names and then the amnesty?

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AW: Just what I said. I think that's just the way they deal with this. The evidence is out there. And this happened in Chile I think, quite dramatically. I think generally there are enough examples of this, people although uncomfortable are willing to do this. People want information: I want to know what happened to my son or daughter. Where were they killed and where are they buried? What happened? And I'd like to know who did it. But it's not essential that I know, becauseif I have to pin it on a single individual I know basically what bastards did it. Nothing is going to bring this son of mine back again. What we have to avoid is the horror of this affecting more peoples' sons and daughters. It's that kind of attitude. So in Chile there is all this information out there but there is no retribution. Really the only case in Chile was Contreras and company, and the secret police chief, and that was largely because the U.S. insisted on it because they murdered Ambassador Letelier and the young woman, his aide. That was a murder in the United States and the U.S. administration at the time was the Reagan Administration and it decided that what we would try was to insist on something other than impunity in this case, so that we forced that on the Chileans. Those are the only guys that are really in jail.

JK: Now you have talked about Ambassador Thomas Pickering at the UN How would you evaluate his role in the process? He had been the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador previously.

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AW: He was first of all enormously respected by everybody and liked and knew a lot about El Salvador and always had tremendous energy and creativity. Whenever we were dealing with anything up there, the rest of us would be sharpening our pencils to get ready to write something and he would already have it done. We were his aides, we were supposed to be helping him and he does it already. How about this for a resolution? What a second, wait a minute. You would be putting the first word on the page and he had already done the whole thing. And I think everybody viewed him as a person of good will and they also viewed him as a person with tremendous standing within the Administration. So you were dealing with a very valid interlocutor. And on a couple of occasions, I think, I was not present, he and Montaño and some of those other guys—there were moments when we were directly involved in negotiations, we were right on the edge, talking to the Cristiani government and others, talking to the Secretary-General, Tom played a crucial role pushing people in the right direction. Most of the stuff I have described happened to me, but if I ever needed him, he was there. I could ask him and he would come if I needed support or authority or a better idea than I could come up with. He was directly involved, although I kept him fully briefed and everything on all that stuff, he was directly involved, though he largely delegated this one to me, monitoring it all the way, and he would tell me what he wanted.

JK: This may be sort of a really detailed question, but it just occurred to me that Ambassador Pickering spoke Spanish because he had been in El Salvador and you spoke Spanish because you had been in Peru. What language was the final agreement written in? Was that in English or was it written in Spanish?

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AW: I think—see what happened was, those negotiations at midnight on December 31st of '91 resulted in agreements on all the key issues which had been identified by the process that Alvaro De Soto set up. And you really have to give Alvaro a lot of credit. He may have had reservations. He put together a successful negotiation and identified the issues and got them on the table and set about a process that under Pérez de Cuéllar's leadership and the participation of whole bunch of other people as well produced themselves. Then came the process of writing it all down. It wasn't a negotiation where you ended up at two in the morning on the first of January 1992 with an absolutely clean text. Then you had to sit down and write what this was and re-consolidate and Oh My God that's not what we meant, that's not what we agreed to, bullshit that's what you agreed to, and that kind of stuff. It required a lot of firmness on the part of the UN people who were writing it, not to let it slip away again. But these guys, especially the FMLN, would take advantage of anything they could to try to twist it just a little bit more in another direction. But who could blame them? So it took a lot of effort. That's another interesting part of this. But my recollection is that most of the negotiating was being done in Spanish because it was between the FMLN and the Salvadorans, the Cristiani administration. A lot of the meetings that I went to with the four friends and when I was also meeting eventually with Rovos and the FMLN guys, those were all in Spanish. You need to also know that Pickering picked his deputies with these things in mind. He wanted a person for Asia and a person for Latin America and a person for Africa. He was ambassador to Israel and Jordan. So he had a couple of experts. His mission staff was designed to be able to go to work. I was the Latin American guy,

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obviously, as well as being his deputy. Jim Wilkinson was Asia, Jonathan Moore was Africa, Shirin Tahir-Kehly was the South Asia person.

JK: We were just talking about the importance of being able to speak Spanish and the languages the negotiations were going on in and so forth, and I was thinking about that because the next question I was going to ask you was, Was the language of the agreement adequate when it came time to implement the different elements of the agreement?

AW: I think so. It was very, very detailed. And in the final analysis, if I remember correctly, we had texts in both English and in Spanish. But I think that most of the working documents were in Spanish. Even Marrack Goulding, who spoke Portuguese, was the ambassador in, let's see, in Mozambique, I guess, for the U.K., he spoke Portuguese, he knew enough Spanish to be able to participate and he was part of the discussions that had to do with military matters and things. Many of the Salvadorans speak English. Now remember these negotiations had like fifty people involved, maybe not that many, four of five government and four or five FMLN people in every one of a series of the rings of a circus. It is very hard to function at the UN—you can function only in English, but it really helps the mission to have some people who can speak some other languages. Right now, the Perm Rep. Bill Richardson is an excellent Spanish speaker. His mother was Mexican.

JK: That's right, that's right. So it really is a big advantage. Were you at all involved in the creation of COPAZ? What was your evaluation of that or who had thought that up?

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AW: I don't remember very well. I don't remember very well. Iqbal Riza was the UN guy who was on the scene, who worked mostly with COPAZ there. My impression was that COPAZ served a very useful function, I mean maybe not as fully successful as some people had hoped it would be, but it brought together people to discuss some of the issues that had to be discussed somewhere, and it served a function. It served a confidence-building function as well. My recollection is that, but Bill Walker would know much more about that. I think.

JK: We have talked about a number of the players involved. You have actually spoken quite a bit about President Cristiani. But how important was it that it was he who was president at that time?

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AW: Oh, extremely important. I think it was extremely important, in many ways. First of all, sort of like they say about President Nixon in China, Cristiani came out of the Arena Party and he was considered to be a very conservative member of that party—that was the right-wing party. But I think he had greater credibility on the right in El Salvador than would have than a Duarte or someone who was from the left or center. So, that was the first thing. He could deliver. Death squads and everything came out of the Arana Party. You had to have them engaged. He and Calderón Sol and others seemed to have the Arena Party pretty much under control. So that was crucial, just simply in terms of solidifying the government position. And then secondly, I think that he proved himself to be—I don't want to say evolved, because I don't know what he was like

before—he proved himself to be a person sincerely interested in finding a peace and willing to forsake old positions in order to get that. He was steadfast. That doesn't mean he didn't have moments of doubt, he figured out what the best thing to do was. But he was steadfast and I think he demonstrated that he was a man of his word and therefore he could be trusted, that when he made a deal he would stick to it. And I think that just watching him in that final evening, when everything was coming together, he was as cool as he could be. I told you there were several different groups out there negotiating. He was sort of in a room off—we were all. . .he was there, Pickering was there, Bernie was there, I was there. We were all sort of hanging around there.

JK: So President Cristiani had his own office, I believe?

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AW: Yes, he had his own office and we were all hanging around there or just outside there. And issues would come out of these other groups to him. You know Calder n Sol, I think was doing the agriculture stuff, agrarian reform. I think that was what he was doing, if I remember correctly. He would come and say this is where we are, what should we do? He never wasted a lot of time. He never raised his voice, never looked in doubt, he just knew where he wanted to go and what decisions he wanted to make. So I think it was crucial that we had a guy, first of all with that kind of political posture and secondly with that kind of dedication to the process and thirdly with that kind of skill at managing this whole crazy thing, including managing us.

JK: What about his team, because he had quite a cross-section of people in his team, from military generals to chief of staff?

AW: I think that was all helpful, because he had a very broad team that had credibility I think in most sectors of the society. They were all recognized as fairly conservative people. Galindo had been involved for a long time in the negotiating team. And you had Colonel—what was his name, this is terrible—who then suddenly became a general who was always on the team [JK: Maricio Vargas.] Maricio Vargas, yes. But this thing had—Ponce who was the Defense Minister and Calderón Sol who was the Mayor of San Salvador at the time and leader of the party. You had enough political weight there to make decisions. It was crucial. The whole FMLN high command was there too. So you had all the players. Enough to be able to deliver. You didn't have to worry that you would get back home and some key element who would say we're not playing.

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JK: Yes, okay, so that was important. What about the role of Secretary Baker? Was he very directly involved?

AW: My impression was that he was not. But, once again, you would have to ask Bernie. Baker did not come up and address any of these issues or people that I can ever remember in a direct fashion in New York. But this doesn't mean that he didn't talk to President Cristiani on the phone or something from his office in Washington. I just don't know. But he wasn't visible.

JK: But Baker delegated much of this to Bernie Aronson?

AW: Bernie Aronson was my perception, yes to Bernie. And we had some authority too in New York, but it was really authority to explore lots of things and we put back recommendations and Washington would decide what they wanted to do. But Bernie would be able to tell you much more about Baker's role than I.

JK: You had mentioned that initially President Bush played an important role in that he acknowledged the role of the UN

AW: That's one of the reasons that made it so much fun to work there. Of course, that was when everyone thought the UN was really the cats pajamas doing all kinds of neat things and we were overly optimistic, I think. But there were a lot of factors for that. But I think President Bush and Secretary Baker deserve a lot of credit for taking advantage of those moments. Bush did a lot of things. He liked the UN, he visited it with frequency, and when he was there he would say, "Alec, do you know so-and-so? She works up in this department and can you find her". In the Security Council President Bush is leading our delegation, so I go call up and say "Is so-and-so there?" And she'd say, "Yeah, I'm here." "President Bush wants to see you." "Great, I love George."

JK: So he was fond of his earlier role?

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AW: These were not necessarily important, high-ranking officials. These were the secretaries that he just remembered affectionately. But also I think, you know, the Reagan Administration had done several things, like not pay what we owed. Most people don't know they did something else. It's always haunting us. It will probably always haunt us. They shifted the entire fiscal year, in which are our appropriations to the UN comes. We had a whole year where we didn't have to do anything for the UN That means that the earliest we can pay anything to the UN is on the first of October of the year that is then three quarters old. Which then puts pressure on everyone else in the world to their great resentment to pay more than their share during the first nine months because we're not there.

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JK: And that shift took place under the Reagan Administration?

AW: Oh, absolutely.

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JK: I wasn't aware of that.

AW: At the end, the President said when he was leaving office that we should—I think he started a process that Bush then really followed through on, which was to pay up our arrearages. He caused them. It was long before the Congress did it. He came in with his ultra-right ideas. But President Bush had a schedule and he was meeting that schedule with the help of the Democratic Congress, he had the knowledge to pay up the arrearages.

So we were fortunate in having first of all circumstances under which the UN was really popular, where the stalemate had been broken.

Pérez de Cuéllar was helpful in that regard, in setting up these meetings of the Permanent Five, which never had really met before. He talked about that in his book. That was one of his great contributions. And whenever we had the General Assembly there would be a lunch with the Permanent Five and the Secretary-General would meet at the state level and the government, at least at the ministerial level—I think it was at the ministerial level. You had a lot of good things happening at the UN. You had people like Secretary Baker and President Bush who took advantage and used it as an instrument to achieve some of our objectives.

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JK: And the role of Pérez de Cuéllar. You mentioned that he had these meetings with the five Permanent Representatives. Was it key that he was Latin American himself in terms of the Central American peace process?

AW: I think it certainly helped. I think it certainly helped.

JK: It seemed as though it was important to reach agreement by the end of his tenure.

AW: Yes, but we would have tried to reach agreement by the end of anyone's tenure, too. That was a device, like in any negotiation, you try to create some kind of a wall against which everyone is pushed to arrive at a solution. But, sure, we didn't want to start all over again with a new secretary-general who might change all the staff. And I

don’t think the FMLN figured—I think this is important—I think the FMLN—you’ll have to ask them in your interview—they probably figured that they weren’t going to get much better of a deal than they were getting there. And de Soto was probably as supportive of their position as anyone they were ever going to find that would have any ability to do anything. Castro might support them but it was not going to account for anything. And Pérez de Cuéllar was dedicated to finding a solution and Boutros-Ghali came in and he might have focused more on the Middle East naturally. A whole lot of factors were taken advantage of here.

JK: But when there was the change in secretary-general to Boutros-Ghali, was there still the same support, though, for the process, because then at that point you had to implement the agreement?

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AW: Yes, I think my impression was that there was support for the process, but he delegated a lot of it to Goulding and to De Soto and the others. [JK: For them to carry on.] The implementation was largely by the Salvadorans. The rest of us were monitoring it and the Security Council was still fully engaged. He did nothing, that I can recall, except be supportive.

JK: So there wasn’t anything dramatically lost as the transition occurred?

AW: I don’t recall that. I think the dramatic moment was reaching the negotiation. The rest was just driving it forward. We had enough impetus in the Security Council. You

know, a lot of people in the Security Council wanted to sort of cut costs and get our people out, the UN people out of El Salvador and all that. The Brits and others wanted to do that. Maybe they were just saying that to tweak us a little bit. But we could handle that.

JK: Did the friends of the Secretary-General continue to play a role in the implementation as far as in the Security Council?

AW: Sure. These FMLN guys would come up to New York all the time and say that the government is not living up to its thing. We would meet. We were always meeting somewhere. Then the government would send up Santa Maria and he would say that the FMLN—Oh sure like anything complicated like that. We held together in this thing. I would meet very often with the government people alone, but then they would also meet with the five of us. Santa Maria may have talked to me and then he would talk to the "four" plus us. I'm sure that the FMLN in talking to Montaño and Yañez as well as talking with the group together. But usually between the two events, Montaño and I would speak, so that when we got together with everybody, everyone knew what was going on.

JK: Basically this is just sort of the last general question that I have. Are there some lessons learned from the Central American peace process that are, in looking back at it, things that the UN can carry into the future?

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AW: Well, I'm sure there are and I haven't really given too much thought to this, unfortunately. It is a most important question. I think a couple of things come to mind. One is that the UN can play a useful role when it has for one reason or another established credibility with all parties, like any other negotiator. If it doesn't have that, it's very hard. And it has to build that credibility during the negotiating process which is even more difficult and can lead the negotiators to do things that you wouldn't really want to do because he is trying to curry favor or build confidence on one side or another. That's the first thing. Second thing, I think that the UN absolutely has to have the support of the members. The cardinal rule which I always say is that the UN is nothing more than it's members. It's not something independent. It can sometimes execute things or do things, but in the final analysis, its decisions are made by the membership and its ability to follow through on them is determined by the membership, political and economic support and military support. And you have to always remember that. So it needs to have support. Once a decision is made—you can't be, you can't look at the UN and say we don't know how the hell to do things so let's have the UN do it. Because then whatever they do, you'll say, Why are they doing that? You have to have a decision—this is an objective that we have to achieve and the best instrument is the UN and this is how we're going to do it and then support it. Very often we don't do that. That's the way it has to be done. And the UN Secretary-General absolutely has to insist on that. And he should at some point say that if they aren't going to support me then I can't do this and I'm out of there. You know, this sort of siding—it's not so much that—in Zaire now. But he has to be able to say, and not just make it look like he is

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incompetent or something. He has to be able to say now look, he has to get people together, he can no longer think before doing, it is the right thing to do, what you told us to do before, now let's take another look at it. Third, I think it has to be—it has to make absolutely certain that it has enough resources—it goes with the second one—to meet the objectives. Fourth, you have to be careful—this goes along with the last one—not to ask it to do things that it can't do. I think Boutros-Ghali made a mistake in Somalia, insisting that the forces that went in there collect the weapons from the warlords. Why would the warlords give them the weapons? How were they going to take them from the warlords if they don't want them to have them? I mean the UN forces that originally went into Somalia, it was for a very limited purpose, it was to guarantee delivery of relief supplies—delivery of relief supplies. To protect the guards on a wagon train. That was their job, that's all it was. And it got beyond that very quickly and I think the Secretary-General was pushing to do—sure you want to pick up those guns. Now you can't—the final analysis is that these decisions are made by people in the countries. You can facilitate them, you can nudge them and push them forward, but you can't impose solutions very well on a people, unless you are going to use massive military force, which the UN can't do. Then the members will do it. And that is the importance of the "all necessary means" resolution. I mean, we knew that even from the Korean War, way, way back before this era. So we have to be careful not to overreach. I think it is pretty good at monitoring. It has got a lot of smart people keeping on top of things and reporting back in a pretty objective fashion. I think they have an ability that other organizations, including other countries, don't have to sort of keep sort of coalitions in place for supporting things. I think they could pick up the weapons in Nicaragua because

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everyone agreed the war was over and time to get on with other things and there was no more money coming in. The contras and Ortega and Chamorr were cutting back and these guys had no place to go and some of them were still running around with guns in El Salvador and robbing banks. You have to have that political agreement first before you can do these other things. Those are just some thoughts, pretty simple ones.

JK: In terms of the will of member states, is the friends a useful tool in terms of getting a few key countries to stick with the process?

AW: Yes. You had to be careful. It's not suitable to every process and not everybody is a suitable friend and the same group is not relevant in every situation. I think it was crucial in these situations to have Mexicans, right down to basic things like the negotiations taking place in Mexico. That gives the Mexicans a certain kind of power, if you want to use it. You probably don't want to use it most of the time, but everyone knows that if you're the FMLN coming into Mexico, coming to the government in Mexico. You're in Mexico. They can cut off the lights, do whatever they want to you. You've got to make sure that if there are people providing funds or support, those are key players, that those are among the friends. And that's why Cuba became irrelevant. They support some of these guys. Aid had stopped for all kinds of reasons. We didn't have any influence over them and Central Americans didn't want to listen to Cuba. They had nothing to say. They would go to them sometimes when they needed a sounding board or when they wanted to burnish their revolutionary credentials or when they had medical problems. For things like that they would go to Havana, but they didn't really. The

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Cubans didn't have anything to bring to this discussion. So they would have been very destructive and they probably would not have been very useful to the Secretary-General. Because they probably would have had their own agenda. So they wouldn't necessarily have wanted peace in Central America.

JK: So it is important in selecting a group like that that they do want the peace process to move forward and they don't have their own individual agenda.

AW: You might even say in this case there was some good luck there because—maybe I won't continue that. I'm not quite sure how they picked the four. So without knowing that I shouldn't draw any conclusions. You can argue that the most important were probably Mexico and Spain. And because of Carlos Andrés Péres,it was good to have Venezuela. And Colombia, they were the other country fighting an insurgency. So they sort of brought in a more conservative edge, so you had kind of a balance.

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JK: Well, I don't have any other questions. If there is any other comment you'd like to make. . .?

AW: Well, there is the question here about post-conflict peace building. I think the UN can do a lot of that stuff. Once again, it has to get the right people, it has to have the right resources to do it, but it can do it a lot better in an apolitical way than we can do it, or anyone else can do it. And we ought to be supportive of that and supportive of developing these kinds of capabilities in the UN staff or somewhere the UN can draw

from. I'm very much in favor of bringing in people and not having them on permanent payroll, bringing them in, having a group of them. We were trying to work on this in an electoral year. We started talking about it a long time ago, in this conversation. I think they've done this. They had a list of electoral experts, all over the world, in all countries, all different languages. That means, all of a sudden you have a situation in this country, boom, and this place requires this experience and this language and here's your list and here are three people. Are any of them available? Bring them in rather than having people sitting around in their offices and twiddling their thumbs waiting for something to happen. President Bush even in his last speech to the UN—I mention Bush because that was when I was up there—the Clinton people have done a lot of interesting things to it. They deserve a lot of credit I would say for following through in Central America, even though these issues were not as pressing on the domestic political agenda by the time Clinton came into office. I always found that I had no difficulty in getting support from the Administration to get the resources necessary to proceed in Guatemala which is important, but also in Nicaragua and El Salvador. But I think Bush's last speech to the General Assembly, which, if I'm not mistaken, would have been '90--when would that have been—it wasn't the last one, it was the penultimate one—anyhow, '92 maybe, he called for something which never really happened. A whole bunch of combined military training and standardization of new practices and the writing of handbooks, practicing together, and all that stuff and he offered California to do it in, or something like that. I don't remember all the details, but that kind of idea, not necessarily only in the peacekeeping or in the military arena, makes a lot of sense.

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JK: We've covered a lot. There is probably more we could talk about.

AW: Well, I wish I had more details and recollection about a lot of these things, but without going over old cables or looking at a calendar it's hard to remember a lot of this.

K: Well, thank you very much.

AW: Thank you.

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Jean Krasno, Interviewer
October 10, 1997
Alexandria, VA

Name Index: Central American

Aristide, Jean-Bertrand	21
Aronson, Bernie	23-25, 28, 33, 36, 50-51
Arria, Diego	39-40
Baena Soares, João	20-21, 29-30
Baker, Jim	18, 25, 33, 50-51, 53
Boneo, Horatio	6
Boutros-Ghali, Boutros	53-54, 56-57
Bush, George	2-3, 6, 9, 17-18, 51, 53, 60
Carter, Jimmy	8
Castor, Fidel	53
Chamorro, Violeta	10-14, 38
Clinton, Bill	60
Cristiani, Alfredo	23, 25-26, 28, 32, 41-42, 48-49
de Soto, Alvaro	23-27, 31-36, 46, 53-54
de Villar, Paco	39
Dodd, Christopher	14
Goulding, Marrack	23, 35-36, 47, 54
Habib, Phil	9
Handal, Shafik	33
Kirkpatrick, Jean	16
Letelier, Orlando	44
Manso, Joe	24-25
Mastowe, John	14-15
Montaño, Jorge	31-32, 35, 38-39, 55
Nixon, Richard	48
Ortega, Humberto	2 ,9, 11, 13, 57
Pastor, Bob	8
Péres, Carlos Andrés	38-39, 59
Pérez de Cuéllar, Javier	20-21, 30-32, 34, 38, 40, 46, 52
Perkins, Ed	1
Pickering, Tom	1, 4, 9, 17-18, 28, 35, 44-45, 49
Ravila, David Escover	49
Richardson, Bill	47
Richardson, Elliot	8
Richardson, Horatio	6
Riza, Iqbal	23, 47
Romero, Peter	24, 28, 33
Salinas, Carlos	39
Schlaughterman, Henry	9
Sol, Calderón	40, 48, 50
Stone, Dick	9
Supera, Fernando	39-40
Tello, Manuel	31

UNITED NATIONS
Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

Torecelli, Bob	14
Vargas, Maricio	50
Villalobos, Fernando Naranjo	33
Walker, Bill	26-28, 37, 48
Wilkinson, Jim	46

UNITED NATIONS
Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY