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Yale-UN Oral History

Interview with Ahmad Fawzi

Friday, September 23, 2005
New York
Interviewer: Jean Krasno

YALE-UNITED NATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

AHMAD FAWZI

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NEW YORK

INTERVIEWER-JEAN KRASNO

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Jean Krasno: First of all, I wanted to thank you so much for participating in the Oral History of the United Nations. Could you explain to us a little bit about your position here at the UN, your title and what it is that you do?

Ahmad Fawzi: Thank you very much; I am flattered that you should choose to speak to me about the Oral History of an extremely important organization in the world today. I have worked for the UN for only 13 years. There are many more who have worked for far longer and deserve to be in this Oral History. I am sure you have spoken to many of them, not least people like Brian Urquhart and others who were at the spokesman's briefing (Spokesman's Roundtable organized by Fred Eckhard in 2005), as well.

But to start from my latest job which is Director of News and Media, the News and Media Division in the Department of Public Information, DPI, as we fondly refer to it. This is the division that deals with every media product that DPI puts out. In other words, audio-visual productions; we cover all the meetings in the house, all the Security Council meetings, General Assembly meetings. We have to have several what we call stake-out positions where journalists can ask UN officials or ambassadors questions from the Secretary-General to members of the Security Council and others. We just came, as you know, out of a huge event last week, the World Summit 2005. At a summit like this, my division would be covering every move that every head of state makes. Not only in television terms and feeding that to the broadcasters, we ensure that we have adequate coverage. We hope that the media will give adequate coverage to these important events, so we make their lives a little easier by providing them with the footage on video.

We have a radio section that produces Monday through Friday live radio programs in the six official languages of the United Nations. We maintain the website UN.org in the six official languages of the United Nations. We deal with media accreditation and liaison, so every journalist who enters this building or any other UN conference that we organize comes through our division for accreditation. The resident correspondents who are given offices here – in fact they don't pay for them; They have had offices here for 25 or 30 years – we administer that presence, the presence of the media here. And finally, this division covers in writing all the open meetings of the official intergovernmental bodies. The Security Council is one of them, the General Assembly, its subsidiary committees. We have what we call press officers; they sit in the meetings and take notes and then produce what we loosely call press releases. I think it is a misnomer because they are not strictly speaking written in the style of a press release. They are really summaries of meetings. These are invaluable to members of the diplomatic missions here who can't attend all the meetings and don't have the capacity, or the ability, to even take notes if they did attend. And they need to report back to their governments, what did the Fifth Committee decide about a budget question, or what did the SRSG, special representative of the Secretary-General, for Iraq tell the Security Council in his briefing on Wednesday, for example. They can go to the racks and find a summary of that meeting, so this is an invaluable tool. That is in brief, well maybe not in brief, the work of the division that I was brought back to head two years ago, the news and media division.

In DPI, there are three divisions; this is really the operational arm of DPI. The second division is the Strategic Communication Division and they design the programs that will implement the mandates that we get from the General Assembly. When the General Assembly says we want you to focus on the Millennium Development Goals for the next biennium, what are you going to do about it? Strategic Communication Division sits down and prepares a strategy which goes out to all our UN Information Centers around the world; our information officers here are involved in preparing ideas and programs and strategies, and they administer the Information Centers around the world.

The third division is the Outreach Division which deals with schools and universities, educational outreach, and also liaises with the NGO community around the world. We have over

3,000 NGOs accredited to and affiliated with DPI. So, they come and they have observer status; they attend certain meetings as observers, as you are. There is an annual meeting usually before the General Assembly plenary every year. Anyway, that is what I am doing now.

I think it would be perhaps of interest also to note that I have been in the position that Fred [Eckhard] was in as a spokesman for the Secretary-General under the previous Secretary-General: Boutros Boutros-Ghali. We might want to cover that and my role as spokesman for other senior officials as well.

JK: Yes, I wanted to open with the work that you are doing now. It is relatively unknown outside the UN, the work of this office and exactly what DPI does. People within the UN know about it but within the university and general public community, it is not well known. So, it is very useful to have it described exactly how all of this functions. I appreciate that.

Tell me when you first joined the UN and under what auspices? What was the work that you were doing at that time?

AF: I joined in 1992. I had been living in New York for about a year already as a journalist. I was working for what is now known as Reuters Television. I was a television journalist and I was in the bureau here in New York. It was in 1991; the first Gulf War was just over. I had finished covering that and then I was transferred to New York to run the operations; I was news operations manager for what was then known as YISNEWS; it is now known as Reuters Television, based at Rockefeller Center. For my agency in 1992, we decided we would like to interview Boutros Boutros-Ghali who had just been appointed Secretary-General. He had three or four months into his term of office produced what is known as An Agenda for Peace. It gained a lot of publicity and attention in academic circles and government circles. So, I requested an interview with him, got it; we chatted for a while. And a few months later, he called me up and offered me a job as Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General.

JK: Who was Spokesman at the time?

AF: Joe Sills. At that time, my old friend – she is deceased; she was killed in Baghdad, Nadia Younes – was the Deputy Spokesperson and I replaced her. This is 1992. The gentleman to my right on the wall here [We are talking about the photographs on the wall in his office conference room] is François Giulliani. And François was the Spokesman for Javier Pérez de Cuéllar the Secretary-General prior to Boutros-Ghali. So, for ten years he was the Spokesman and he was Spokesman for Kurt Waldheim as well before him. He had been a spokesman for about 17 or 18 years. And Boutros-Ghali felt that it was time for a change. He brought in Joe Sills to replace François. I say that with some doubt because François was really irreplaceable. François came to run this division, the media division. Nadia, may she rest in peace, I had a long history with Nadia because we were together in Iraq as well just before she was killed in August 2003 when I was the Spokesman for Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Special Representative in Iraq. I left a couple of weeks before the 19th of August and the bomb that killed 22 of our colleagues, including Sergio and Nadia and many others, Rick Hooper, Fiona Watson, Reham Al-Farra, Jean-Selim Kanaan, Reza Hosseini, and other colleagues.

Boutros-Ghali decided he wanted a new Spokesman and new Deputy Spokesman, so Joe Sills was brought in as Spokesman and I was brought in as Deputy Spokesman. As such, I worked very closely with Joe and the rest of our team in the Spokesman's office with the Secretary-General, traveling with him wherever he went. We rotated, of course, as they do now. That was when I was brought in, late 1992 and served in that capacity for the four or so years until Boutros-Ghali's first term ended and he was denied a second term because the Americans vetoed him, as you know. Kofi Annan took over in January 1997.

He then appointed me Director of the United Nations Information Center in London. So, I went to London for six years, from 1997 to 2003. London was my home base and my working base during which time I was responsible for the UN information efforts in the UK and Ireland. That was a very interesting period. Tony Blair had just taken over as Prime Minister. The British government is traditionally, historically very supportive of the UN and the objectives of the UN and the work of the UN. The press is a very vibrant press in Britain, as you know, and very well informed about the work of the United Nations, better informed than other media in other parts of the world. But still a challenging press corps, critical of the work of the UN but usually in a

constructive way. So, I spent six years as the Director of UNIC, UN Information Center, London. During which time I also went on mission to several places. I went to East Timor to assist Sergio during the election period in 2001. After the atrocities in 1999, Sergio took over and he was building up that office from rubble, as you know. He asked me to go and help during the run up to the first ever free and fair elections for the East Timorese people. I did that. And during my time in London, I also served as a spokesman for Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan at the time. So, we went to Bonn for the Bonn talks that resulted in the Bonn Agreement which led to the handover of power, after the fall of the Taliban in September/October 2001, from Rabbani to Karzai. That is when Karzai took over on the 20th of December 2001. We went to Kabul for the handover and then I assisted in setting up the information unit in the UN mission in Afghanistan. I spent about three months doing that with Mr. Brahimi and then Iraq happened. I was also sent on various missions to the Middle East. I am from Egypt. So, I guess it was natural for them to consider sending me. I traveled with this Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on almost all his trips to the Middle East, which included Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Morocco, Tunis, and a few other African countries. During those six years in London, I was also sent off on these missions. The last one was the tragic mission on Iraq.

To back track, in 1998, I went with the Secretary-General to Iraq on that famous mission when he went to convince Saddam Hussein to open up the palaces for the inspections. He took a delegation with him and there was Lakhdar Brahimi and Shashi Tharoor, myself, Fred Eckhard, Elizabeth Lindenmayer. We spent a few days there. I actually went as an advance party two days before he did to prepare for his arrival and I stayed on a couple of days after he left to brief the press on the outcome of the Memorandum of Understanding, which was hailed as a great success at the time. Of course, six months down the line, Saddam broke his promise and violated the agreement.

Finally, the Iraq mission came along and this was in May of 2003. Sergio put together a small team consisting of Nadia as his Chief of Staff, myself as Spokesman and information chief, and Jonathan Prentice as his special assistant; Fiona Watson, who was also killed, was political officer. We had a human rights officer. We had someone from UNDP who was severely

injured, Henrik Kolstrup. We went in together, first to Larnaca in Cyprus where we spent a day doing briefings and getting briefed by several people, the humanitarian and political who came out of Iraq at the time to brief us. Then we flew in together on the 2nd of June into Baghdad.

We rolled up our sleeves and began working to set up a mission. We weren't quite sure how we were to fulfill our mandate in a country under occupation at the time. It was a very, very bizaare situation to be in, as Sergio often said. He traveled around the country listening to Iraqis, listening to what they had to say about their plight, about what they needed, about what they thought the UN should be doing, about the occupation. He drew many useful conclusions based upon which we mapped out a strategy to help Iraqis as much as we could. We developed some quick impact projects in the field of the rule of law, renovation of the courts, setting up a fresh new court system, helping to develop a free and independent media, talking to Iraqi journalists. There was a lot to be done.



Unfortunately, this was cut short by the bomb on the 19th of August which killed Sergio, Nadia, Fiona, Rick Cooper, and many others, 22 in all. The UN, I think, at that time after the bomb at the Canal Hotel and a second bomb near the Canal Hotel in early September of 2003, the UN and the Secretary-General decided it was time to revise our overseas operations and how we operated. There was a total review and revamping of our security in all our missions. I will stop there because I am rambling.

JK: It has been useful to cover the history and then we can go back. There is so much to talk about, and so little time. I definitely want to talk about your trip in 1998 to Baghdad, but I think for reasons of chronology, let's start with your work with Boutros-Ghali. What were some of the key issues that happened during that tenure? How did Boutros-Ghali deal with the media when there would be a key issue coming up?

AF: The early and mid-nineties were turbulent years in the history of the UN. We had just come out of a very high point after the success of the first Gulf War in evicting Saddam Hussein from Kuwait and liberating Kuwait. The international community was euphoric about what the United Nations and the international community could do collectively to reverse an injustice. Boutros-

Ghali used to say, "We don't suffer from a crisis of confidence; we are suffering from a crisis of too much confidence in the UN." There were great expectations after the success of that Gulf War in February 1991. The world thought the UN could do anything. As a result, we got entangled in civil wars in the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, where the international community refused to get involved and we saw the most horrific genocide of the last decade of the 20th century. There were a lot of debacles under his watch.

How did he deal with the media? He was often dismissive of the resident press corps. He had come from a senior position in the Egyptian government. He was the deputy prime minister for the six months preceding his election as Secretary-General of the United Nations. And before that, for 14 years he had been minister of state for foreign affairs. The irony of it is that in that position he was the darling of the press in Egypt. Not just the Egyptian press, but the foreign press loved him because he spoke languages, his door was open. When he came to the UN, somehow that door closed. Maybe there was a crack; it was half open. He was accustomed to talking to editors-in-chief. He would talk to the big boss. He treated ambassadors almost the same way. He would talk to foreign ministers and presidents and prime ministers. Kofi Annan is the opposite. He does reach out to the ambassadors here. He has a very good working relationship with them.

Dag Hammarskjöld

Dr. Boutros-Ghali was extremely erudite and deeply intellectual as an academic of 30 years. He was a man who taught international law and political science for over 30 years. He had hundreds of books published and his doctoral dissertation was at the Sorbonne in international organizations. It was almost as if he had been created for this job. But sadly he made a few people unhappy in powerful places as he went about his job. To get back to his relation with the media, the media felt he was dismissive of them here. He considered that if he told the media everything he was doing then he was not doing his job. He felt that a lot of what he did, had to be done in private and in silence and behind closed doors. Otherwise, it would fail miserably. The best diplomacy is quiet diplomacy. He would often say, "It is not my business to give you news; you go find out the news; it is not my job to give you news."

We tried as much as possible and he over the years was more and more cooperative. We would say, "Right, you do not want to give a press conference. Why don't you give a background briefing to a group of visiting journalists from developing countries? That will get picked up by the wires. To nurture the press corps here, why don't you meet them, say once a month over a working lunch." But then we got into a problem because why did we select say Jean Krasno and not Evelyn Leopold of Reuters. We would have to be very careful to be balanced. If we chose one wire service, we had to choose the other. Or if we did choose one this time, we would choose the other next time. It just doesn't work like that in the news business. You have to give everybody or nobody, or be exclusive. So, he became a little more cooperative towards the end, especially in 1996. This was when the big story was that America had announced, and this is unprecedented, that if the Secretary-General ran for a second term, they would veto him, his candidacy.

JK: They announced it publicly?



AF: They announced it publicly. Warren Christopher gave an interview to the New York Times; I think it was in June. This matter is usually not considered until October of election year. That was the big story in 1996. Would he run for a second term or not now that the Americans had said they would veto him?

He had a lot of problems to grapple with: Somalia, the failed raid of the US Rangers in Somalia. They made a film out of it, "Black Hawk Down." That was followed by the genocide in Rwanda, which actually the lack of intervention you will find is associated to what became known as the Somalia syndrome. As soon as troops were lost, countries would withdraw. Then they think twice, or thrice, before sending troops anywhere else. "Why should we send our boys and girls to be killed in a foreign conflict?"

JK: We now have a Secretary-General who is being criticized by the press and other individuals. At that time, the UN itself was being criticized for not acting in Rwanda. So, how did the office of the Spokesman and how did the UN try to deal with that?

AF: Do you mean under Boutros-Ghali's term?

JK: Yes.

AF: How did we deal with criticism. As with every press office, whether it's the United Nations, NATO, or the White House, or the Foreign Office in London, our press officers around the world feed us information about the media and what the media is saying. If there is a critical article, we will look at it carefully and decide whether it is appropriate to respond or whether responding would only fan the flames of this particular trend? Is it accurate? Is it inaccurate? If we decide to respond, then we would use various methods as we do now. One of them would be to issue a denial or talk to the paper and say, "We would like equal space to publish a response." Or we could write a letter to the editor, which isn't usually very effective because the damage has already been done or we would launch a massive campaign on all fronts. In other words, write an Op-Ed for a different paper, go on television, give a few interviews, well placed interviews by senior officials. Depending on how high we want to go, we could draft an Op-Ed in the name of the Secretary-General or in the name of one of his senior advisers. Depending on what the issues is; is it peacekeeping? Is it political affairs? We would find an appropriate personality from within the house or better still, a surrogate, people who do not work for the United Nations but who are former politicians or statesmen or stateswomen, academics, journalists who have an understanding of the realities of UN activities. We would give them all the facts and say, "Here are the facts; maybe you would like to respond to a certain critical article?" Those are some of the tools that we use.

JK: Have you had good response from the media? Have you had good access to the media? A criticism of the UN is that it doesn't get its message out. So, why? Does the media just not respond sometimes when you are trying to get the message out?

AF: The media always regards what the UN or any intergovernmental institution does with a lot of skepticism. It is expected that we are going to defend ourselves. Of course, we are going to defend ourselves and speak highly of our operations, say no you are mistaken. But, sadly, in this day and age, the media go after the sensational headlines. "Oil for Food scandal, 64 billion

dollar program riddled with corruption and mismanagement.” Exaggeration has become a tool to sell papers, to sell programs, to get ratings. And however much we try, and we have tried very hard especially during these difficult years, offering senior officials for talk shows, writing articles in response, writing letters to the editor. Not a day goes by without something being done to try and respond. Now, accusations that we fail to get the story out, is not a question of blame. Who did what wrong? We feel we have done as much as we humanly could do in terms of surrogates speaking on our behalf, giving them all the necessary information, writing letters to the editor, writing Op-Eds, appearing on talk shows.

But you see, our critics own bigger guns than we do. They have access to the Sunday talk shows and to the Fox News talk shows, to the Washington circuit. There are a lot of extremely conservative organizations which are ideologically opposed to the United Nations that have tools to use that we don't. We are always in the position of responding. And when you are responding, you are already in a weaker position. I would like the people who say that the UN is not doing enough to get its message out to tell us – and this is sincere – tell us what we should be doing that we haven't done already. There is another side to this. I think we are being too America-centric here. It is in the American press, and especially a certain type of press where we are being severely criticized. The story isn't running with the same fervor in the rest of the world, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia. We must always remind ourselves that we are an organization of 191 Member States. And when we speak to the American press, we must also speak to the European press, and the African press, and the Asian press, and the Latin American press with the same degree of respect and importance that we give the American press.

But the American press is extremely powerful especially in the States and it gets quoted very widely all over the world. A lot of damage has been done to the credibility of the UN over this Oil-for-Food program; there is no question about it. Now, I don't want to get into what was wrong and what was right in the program; we feel that the program saved lives. If there were a few rotten apples, so be it. We identify them; they get whatever is coming to them. And then we move on. Because the UN is about a lot more than the Oil-for-Food program, which sparked all this criticism.

JK: Let me ask you another question related to this. I know these questions are sensitive, but it is hard for outsiders to understand. Are there any constraints by Member States on the kind of information that you might provide or messages that you get out? Do you have Member States coming to you and saying, “We don’t want you to talk about that.”

AF: We have to take Member State’s sensitivity into consideration, of course. For example, a Member State could object to something we said. I remember when I was in the Spokesman’s office one of the topics we treated with kid gloves was Cyprus. No matter what you said, you would upset one side or the other. Either the Turkish Cypriots would be upset or the Greek Cypriots would be upset. And it was because you didn’t say, “President so-and-so and president so-and-so; you said president so-and-so and Mr. so-and-so. Why did you call him Mr.? You called the other one president, when ours is a president as well.” And this would go on and on for days, protestations to the Secretary-General and we would have to issue a correction. So there are sensitivities sometimes in political issues that we have to be aware of. And we, I think, are very good at it now. Although we still make some Member States unhappy. They are usually over political sensitivities. But if we were to come out, as the Secretary-General has done recently and say, “Look, we have important things to talk about; let’s move on.” And to be forceful in responding to his critics, I don’t think anybody would object to that or could object to that. There is much more to the UN than the political side and the Security Council. We often used to say that 75 percent of the work of the UN – and this is not a very accurate statistic; it’s very rough – is in development and economic and social affairs. The rest is political but that is what grabs the headlines, usually. So, we have to be careful of the sensitivities of Member States.

At the same time, I think that we have developed a media approach that has become in recent years and under Kofi Annan much more open, transparent. We are opening up the house for the public, reaching out to the people through businesses and academic institutions and nongovernmental organizations and inviting scrutiny and being much more open in talking to the media. This Secretary-General has issued media guidelines to every single UN official, saying, “You can talk to the press about your area of expertise.” In the past, people were afraid to talk to the press. There was an impression that we were not allowed to speak to the press; only the


Spokesman was authorized. Nearly eight or nine years ago these guidelines were issued. Everybody should be able to talk to the press: number one, as long as you are talking in your own area of expertise, and number two, you don't speak on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. That is the Spokesman's job. But don't feel you are not allowed to talk; you are allowed to talk. So, there is an openness that has come about in the United Nations over the past decade.

JK: When we were talking to Fred Eckhard and others, one of the things he was saying is that the UN might do a better job in just providing information, providing factual information. Do you feel the UN does that or could do more of that? Like, for example, on the Oil-for-Food, because people are so confused about it. Are there ways to provide better information so people can actually understand it a little better?

AF: I think we have provided as much information as we can. We have information coming out of our ears, fact sheets. On the website, you will find we developed a site with the catchy title of "Hot Issues; Cold Facts." Here are the issues; here are the facts. You click on it; you get the facts, in figures and statistics. I think we put out a lot of information. Sometimes it is too much for the media to absorb. And they look for the scandal and the sensational headlines. It is not news that the plane landed safely at the airport; it is news if the plane crashed on the tarmac. It is bad news and that's what makes news. As we say, if it bleeds, it leads. We have that dilemma. We think we have a good development story, a good humanitarian interest story, but it is just not sexy enough to grab the news. Having said that, to be fair, there are journalists who pay attention to the humanitarian story. They are few and far between, but there are serious journalists who are able to differentiate between the sensational story and the real human interest story. We have a lot of respect for them. We try as much as possible to provide the information to them and let the others do what they can.

JK: That is extremely helpful. One of the things we wanted to do in these interviews is to understand these various relationships. So, I think you have explained them very well. I would like to go back to some of your personal experiences and talk about the trip to Baghdad in 1998. You said you had gone in a few days early. Tell us the story of what happened.

AF: I was asked to help prepare the groundwork for the Secretary-General's arrival in terms of the media. On this trip, unprecedentedly, because it was an historic trip, he agreed to take journalists with him. So, there were two flights of journalists, one coming in from Larnaca in Cyprus, and the other coming in from Kuwait. Since the end of the first Gulf War in February 1991, Baghdad airport had been closed because the country was under sanctions. There was no air traffic over Iraq except for UNSCOM and the US and the UK in the no-fly zone. I went to Larnaca, assembled a group of about 30 journalists on a UN plane, and flew in two days before the Secretary-General arrived. We met with our people on the ground. UNSCOM was there as you know, and not just UNSCOM but the humanitarian office. At the time, it was Dennis Haliday who was the humanitarian coordinator for the Oil-for-Food program. We are in 1998, yes.



We met with the Iraqi Ministry of Information people to decide what would be done when the Secretary-General arrived in terms of the media, who was going to be at the airport, where the media would be. Would they be allowed to ask questions. Would the Secretary-General make a statement or not. I was advising the Secretary-General's delegation which was arriving from Paris on the scenario, what to expect when he arrived. Who was going to greet him. Was it Tariq Aziz. Would they sit; would they stand. The logistics are always worked out in advance for these things. By then, there were about 200 media organizations represented in Baghdad. We took two plane loads of about 30 each. So, between the press accompanying the Secretary-General and the press for visit, and the press already there, there were about 300 international press who were present. This was the story of the day. We needed to feed the beast as much as we could. I was giving background briefings on what to expect. We didn't know what to expect, but we did as much as possible. We prepared ourselves. Fred Eckhard and I had our own briefs about why the Secretary-General was going. We always prepare as much as possible draft Q and As, so if they asked you this question, we would give this answer; if they asked you this question, you would give them this answer. So we have a scenario of questions that we prepare in advance and we think about. We produce the balanced answers that you need in a very sensitive situation like that. You do not want to give away too much. You do not want to upset your hosts. At the time, you don't want to raise expectations too high.

JK: Was there somebody representing UNSCOM with your delegation? Rolf Ekéus, or anyone in the office there, the spokesman, Ewen Buchanan?

AF: At that time it was Richard Butler; Ewen Buchanan has been the spokesman for a long time based in New York. But, no he wasn't with the Secretary-General at the time. This was a purely political mission, of the Secretary-General, to allow the armed inspectors in. There had been a standoff. So, he went in to mediate and to produce an agreement, which he did. Negotiations, really most of them took place tête-à-tête between him and Tariq Aziz, plus one or two advisers at most. I think it was Friday, Saturday, Sunday, 18, 19, 20 of February, or thereabouts. It was Friday, all day, quick break for a meal, Friday, all night, past midnight, back to the residential guest house; Saturday again all day; lawyers talking to each other to refine the points in the agreement that the principals had agreed upon, again until the early hours of the morning. Sunday it was again the same thing, so three days of nearly 20 hours a day of negotiations.

In and out of those meetings the Secretary-General would come out and talk to his advisers. He would talk to us, Fred and myself, "Here is the line; hold this line." We normally in very sensitive negotiations like this, you don't want to give away too much, publicly. And as I said earlier, the best diplomacy is quiet diplomacy, until you have a breakthrough. And that happened at about 2am past midnight on Sunday. Oh, I forgot to say, on the Sunday, there was one sticking point. That sticking point could only be approved by the president himself. So, Tariq Aziz said, "The president will see you."

This was late Saturday night, so the next morning, Sunday, we waited around for an appointment with the president. It was all very mysterious. You didn't know when and you didn't know where. Then suddenly the black cars arrived in mid-morning. The Secretary-General was whisked away with only two of his advisers. He was taken away. We were not told where. He went with one of his security guards or maybe two (I can't remember) and two or maybe three advisers, Lakhdar Brahimi, Rolf Knutson, his political director, and the Secretary-General. He met Saddam Hussein. They agreed on the last sticking point. He came back to the guest house and briefed us and said, "I think we have a breakthrough." Those were his exact words. I asked if we could use those words and he said, "Yes, absolutely." And we agreed upon what else to

say. Fred went out and did a press conference and he said, "We have a breakthrough." And that became the headline on Sunday afternoon. We signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Monday morning and the Secretary-General flew out immediately.

JK: There was an incident that happened at the airport. Tariq Aziz, as I understand it, came to the airport and handed the Secretary-General a note. Did you see that?

AF: No, I don't know the story behind that.

JK: I thought you might have seen or known about that. Because in the note, he made some other restrictions that were not in the actual agreement.

AF: The rest is history. I was asked to stay behind. The agreement was concluded in such a rush; it was signed. There was a long press conference and the Secretary-General left.

JK: So, you did not leave with him? So, you were not there at the airport?

AF: No, I went to the airport with him and saw him off on the plane; it was a French Mystère that was loaned by President Chirac to the Secretary-General, a small private jet from Paris. The French were very supportive of the mission. I saw him off and he said, "It might be a good idea if you stayed behind to brief the press corps here on the background to the agreement and what the agreement means, what the MoU really means." So, I stayed behind for an extra day and briefed the press as much as possible. Then I flew out the next morning via Larnaca again and back to London.

JK: It is an amazing story. The agreement was successful, but as you said before, it didn't really hold for very long.

AF: No.

JK: Perhaps we should stop here rather than start up a new story. But maybe we could come back because we have East Timor to talk about; we have Baghdad to talk about, the Bonn talks.

AF: Sure.

[Second part of interview: October 4, 2005]

JK: Thank you again for meeting with me on this to finish up our interview from last time. To pick up where we left off, you had mentioned that you had been in East Timor and I thought maybe we could start there, and you could tell us what your role was.

AF: You may recall that in August 1999, there were fierce battles between the Indonesian-supported militias and the East Timorese which resulted in the near destruction of the entire infrastructure in that country. As the battles were raging, the Security Council was meeting and they decided to send in a force, which I think was the fastest force to ever deploy at the time. It took one week from the adoption of the resolution by the Security Council for the Australian peacekeeping force to move into East Timor. The Secretary-General was also on the phone to the then Indonesian president, Habib, and managed to get an agreement from him that Indonesia would invite the United Nations in to monitor the situation and monitor the cease-fire. As you know, the UN can't go into any country without that country's explicit invitation.

The late Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of our star diplomats and negotiators, was sent in by the Secretary-General to East Timor to take over from Ian Martin. Ian Martin had been there as the Special Representative during the crisis and during the troubles and then had left. Sergio was sent in right after the peacekeeping force was sent in. He immediately took charge of the situation. He took charge of a territory that was completely devastated, no infrastructure to speak about, no police, no border guards, no school system, no government. Indeed it was a territory under Indonesian rule, as you know, a former Portuguese colony. The Portuguese had abandoned it twenty-five years earlier. The Indonesians had taken over. I won't go into that history because you asked me what my role was.

I was invited by Sergio who by then – this is the year 2001 – he had been firmly established as Transitional Administrator of East Timor. So, he was virtually running the country. He was SRSG but also Transitional Administrator. He was very keen to hand over to the East Timorese as quickly as possible. He invited me in to help as an adviser on public information and the media. At the time when we were helping to organize the first ever free and fair elections in the history of that tiny half-island. I went in and spent some time in the summer of 2000 with him in Dili. Conditions were quite appalling, the conditions where the UN staff were staying, dilapidated houses without electricity or water. The best accommodation was a boat floating in the sea at the port in Dili, docked very close to where UNTAET headquarters were. That is the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor.

I stayed on the boat and worked at UNTAET headquarters in Dili, but traveled around with Sergio and with other colleagues to other provinces to see where the elections booths would be, what was being done to inform the people of East Timor about their electoral rights, what was being done back in Dili to finalize the electoral law. And a lot was being done at the time. The same person who is now directing our Electoral Assistance Division, Carina Perelli, who also went to Iraq and is in Iraq at the moment helping with the referendum. She went to Iraq for the elections in January 2005. Carina was there with her team. And in fact, Carlos Valenzuela, one of her very able assistants, who was in Iraq for the elections as well, was also there. They have been to scores of emerging nations in post-conflict situations, assisting the authorities to organize elections at various levels, either taking charge of the whole thing or assisting the local authorities.

In East Timor, they were organizing. I was assisting on the public information side. We had, to their credit, the public information office in UNTAET had already established a television station, a radio station, had a daily newspaper. So, my job was to assist them in public information that was going to the local population, but also trying to interest the international media. As you well know, the media is interested more in sensational and dramatic news. As we say, if it bleeds, it leads. They were extremely interested in the troubles but as it became more and more peaceful, the international press corps were withdrawing from Dili and from East Timor. Sergio was very keen to rekindle the interest of the international media and the regional

media in what was happening because this was an historic occasion. It was the first free and fair elections to be held in East Timor, elections for parliamentary seats, for parliament.

JK: So, your role was to be sure that the general public in East Timor understood what the elections were about, what they needed to do to register, and to vote? Was it educational?

AF: That is one aspect of it. There was the work of the office of communication and public information in UNTAET. They were doing a good job. I was helping them make sure that all the outlets were providing the information that the population needed. But the other side of that was getting international media again interested in what was going on in East Timor. That entailed communicating with the international media in the region and with our networks worldwide. Those who would be interested, of course, were mostly in the region. Many international news agencies who had correspondents in the region, mainly in Jakarta, we were able to interest in what was going on. It was quite remarkable because there was a lot of fear that violence would erupt, that remnants of the militia who had been staging cross-border raids from West Timor, but who had been dealt a severe blow by the peacekeeping mission, under Sergio's command. He had told them to be firm and ruthless in putting down the remnants of the militias who had devastated the territory.

There was fear that they would emerge from the woodwork and disrupt the elections. And to our delight and surprise, at seven o'clock in the morning on the day of the elections, the 31st of August 2001, there were long lines of East Timorese patiently, quietly cueing up to vote, with their babies, with their children. It was a day out. We visited with Sergio all the polling stations in Dili and the reports from all the other provinces were also that at every polling booth there long lines and they were peaceful. And there was no destruction throughout the day.

JK: Do you think that the presence of the international media, the press, in East Timor around that time added to a level of monitoring and accountability?

AF: Of course, it was not just the international media; but there were monitors, from the European Union, and from other international organizations, plus the presence of the United

Nations, plus the presence of the peacekeeping troops. Plus the fact that as part of building this nascent nation a military force was being trained and some of them were on the streets, an East Timorese police force was starting to patrol the streets. I think all of this combined to create an environment where we were able to help the Timorese vote in a peaceful manner. And of course, information is extremely important. Information locally is extremely important, that they know what their rights are and that they know what the election means, and they know what the law is, and they know that they will be protected, despite all the fears that existed at the time. It went very well; it was quite an experience. As usual, a pleasure to work with Sergio.

JK: But I think that is an important aspect of the work that you do that often doesn't get acknowledged, the importance of the presence of information and the media in terms of creating an environment of peace and security for those who have to come forward and vote.

AF: That's right because how do the people know what their rights are? How do they know what the environment is going to be like on the day? There are simple logistical facts that you have to give them: where the polling station is, what you have to do, where to put your finger print or your signature. Apart from that, there is the substantial information about their rights as a citizen, their human rights, electoral laws, the building of a police force, and the creation of a peaceful environment. Not only that, but also the ability of all the candidates to use the public information outlets to propose their platforms and to talk about what they support and what they don't support, and to create an electoral atmosphere that will help people make their choice. We were very careful to give equal time to all the candidates. And there were many candidates and many parties at the very beginning. Some of them drop away as others get bigger and merge and coalitions are formed. We also formed a committee that was observing all the campaigning and if there were any complaints from one party against another, these complaints were taken very seriously and taken into consideration during the voting day, the electoral day, and afterwards. We looked into all the complaints. Information plays an enormously important role.

JK: Were you using television, radio, and print?

AF: Yes, all three. We were also making sure, and this was part of my job, that television was covering the entire country. It wasn't when I arrived and we had to put up a few television towers, transmitters, or repeaters, to reach a particularly remote area. We had radio and we had a daily newspaper. The distribution of the daily newspaper was all ad hoc. We were using volunteers and people with trucks and getting the newspapers to the people.

JK: Was there a code of conduct for those who were campaigning?

AF: Yes, there was code of conduct; there was an electoral law that was drafted and all this was done with the assistance of the electoral assistance division, as I explained earlier, Carina and her team. There was a large team of UN advisers in Dili, leading up to the elections and for the elections.

JK: How did people like Sergio Vieira de Mello and Lakhdar Brahimi become selected to take on these kinds of positions?

AF: The two names you mentioned are icons in the UN. They are stars in the UN hemisphere. But there are many other stars up there. At particular moments, certain stars shine brighter than others. Sergio's star was particularly brilliant at that time because of what he had achieved throughout his short lifetime. He was 55 when he was killed in 2003. He spent a lot of time helping people in Cambodia, the repatriation of refugees in Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of refugees. He worked for UNHCR in many trouble spots, in Goma in central Africa, in Kosovo, in Bosnia, Cambodia, I just mentioned. He had an impeccable record of diplomacy, of being able to talk to all sides, of mediation, of compassion, of managerial skills, of charisma. He knew everyone in East Timor. Everyone loved Sergio because of his very laid back and charismatic approach.

JK: And he spoke Portuguese.

AF: He spoke Portuguese; he spoke many languages. Wherever he went, he spoke in the native tongue. He always presented himself impeccably, whether he was in the jungles of Africa or

Cambodia. Or in smoke-filled closed doors, mediating in Kosovo, he was always impeccably dressed and looked like he had just stepped out of a shower. I think it was Holbrooke who once said, "Whenever you emerged from a conversation with Sergio, you felt you were badly informed and badly dressed." It was absolutely true. Sergio was an amazing combination of traits. He was a PhD from the Sorbonne in international law. He was an intellectual, a great intellect, and at the same time, he was a man of the people.

JK: He would be someone who was very familiar to Kofi Annan.

AF: Yes, just before going to East Timor, he had been appointed to the Secretariat by Kofi Annan -- he had taken him from UNHCR and made him Humanitarian Coordinator here at headquarters, what we call OCHA. He was the emergency humanitarian coordinator, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. Nevertheless, he couldn't sit at his desk and he accepted these assignments willingly. Six months after he was appointed, he was in Kosovo after the bombing. He came back a few weeks later and off he was to East Timor. And he stayed there about two and a half years, from about 1999 to the liberation of East Timor and the handover which was around May 2002. He stayed there maybe three years, or so. He made friends with a lot of people, President Xanana Gusmão, even when he was a rebel leader before becoming president, Ramos Horta, who was the foreign minister; he is now deputy prime minister for foreign affairs, a Nobel laureate, very close friend of his. He was a friend of everyone he met and shook hands with. Anyone he met would claim that Sergio was their friend.

Now Brahimi has a similar history, but he started off in a different way. He started off as an Algerian diplomat. Algeria was fighting for independence and he was a representative of the National Liberation Committee. That was a very long time ago. Then he represented his country in Indonesia and in Asia. He then worked for the Arab League. He was also a member of the Algerian Foreign Ministry. He was ambassador of Algeria to London for a long time, to Cairo. As a negotiator for the Arab League, he was fundamental in the accord that ended the civil war in Lebanon. After 15 years of civil war, he led the negotiations in a city in Saudi Arabia called

Taef. So the Taef talks led to the Taef Accord, and similarly the Bonn talks would lead to the Bonn Accord. He was a formidable negotiator.

JK: The Secretary-General would be aware of these kinds of skills that he has.

AF: Of course, he had worked for the United Nations. He was first brought in by Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992 when he became Secretary-General, or shortly after he became Secretary-General, as a special adviser. He went on various missions. He went to many, many trouble spots, including Yemen, Zaire. He supervised the elections in South Africa that brought Mandela to power. He was special representative in Haiti. He traveled far and wide representing the United Nations and trouble shooting for the United Nations. So, when Kofi Annan came into office in 1997, Lakhdar Brahimi had already established himself as a formidable UN special adviser.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: Tell us about the Bonn talks.

AF: He was selected by Kofi Annan to put together a team to go to Bonn right after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. I was then director of the UN Information Center in London, which I had also been when I went to East Timor. I had just gotten a phone call from Sergio saying, "Will you come and help us?" I consulted with New York and they said yes immediately. I also got a phone call from Lakhdar Brahimi. I remember it was a Sunday and I was having brunch in a restaurant in London. He said, "Will you come with me to Bonn? We are planning talks somewhere. We don't know where they are yet. We are planning talks with the four Afghan parties and I'd like you to come and handle the media and be my spokesman and the spokesman for the delegation." I said, "When is this supposed to happen?" And he said, "Can you make it tomorrow?" I said, "Can you give me some time to pack and to hand over my office to someone and talk to New York?" And he said, "Yes, Tuesday, then."

It was 48 hours later, I found myself back in New York. There were several locations that were proposed in two different countries. In the end, Germany was the country that had the two most secure locations. He wanted a location that was completely secure and away from the public

eye. In Germany, there were two locations and finally, we settled upon St. Petersburg where they have a hotel on top of a hill that is completely secure. I started from New York working on the facilities that would be available for us in terms of media and how we would be playing this. I first had a meeting with Mr. Brahimi to understand what his views were on how we should be dealing with the press. He was adamant that the talks and the negotiators and all the four parties had to be protected from the media during the course of the talks. That was imperative for the success of the talks, that there be no leaks to the media during the talks whether it was one week or ten days. In the end, it was about 10 days.

JK: Why was that so important?

AF: There is an adage that the best diplomacy is quiet diplomacy because you get so many different variations on what is going on, what is transpiring, that one party is getting an advantage over another or one party is attacking the other. You get speculation that usually can lead to the collapse of the talks. We had four parties at the talks. The four represented at the time what we perceived to be the four main parties in Afghanistan. It was impossible to get other parties represented in such a short period of time. And Mr. Brahimi was very keen to move as quickly as possible while the iron was hot. Had this been played out in public the parties would be posturing to their constituencies. The victors which were at the time the Northern Alliance felt that they had the power; they controlled the streets; they should get all the benefits and reap the fruits of victory. The others also felt they had a historic right to share in the power in the new found administration, whatever it would be. To play this out in the glare of the media would have been very disruptive and potentially damaging.

He put together a team and we flew together to Bonn, drove to St. Petersburg, inspected the premises before his arrival. We divided up the rooms, decided who would be where. It was very important because we were also obliged to accept the fact that there were countries in the world that were interested in Afghanistan. Some were the Friends of Afghanistan who were six countries in the region plus the United States and Russia. Then there were other countries who showed an interest from Holland to the EU and other countries. About 22 countries wanted to be there. Mr. Brahimi said, "You are most welcome to be there but you will not participate in the

talks and you will not even have observer status in the talks. These talks are between the four parties and we as the United Nations will be facilitators of these talks. Any other interference is going to disrupt the talks."

We had to decide logistically where the representatives of those 22 countries would be and where the Afghans would be physically and a room for each of the four parties, and a room for the UN, and a room where we would have plenaries. This is the boring logistics of it.

JK: That is actually critical for the operational success of the talks.

AF: For the success of the talks, absolutely. The house was easy because it was naturally divided. There was an east wing and a west wing. We would have all the talks in the east wing and the diplomats would be in the west wing. We would go out and brief them now and then. My job was to brief the press on a daily basis. We decided they would not be present there; they would not have access to the talks or the participants. But you had to feed the hungry beast. It was extremely hungry because it was the biggest story of the day. If you go back to the archives, you will find that between the 25th and 26th of November and the 5th of December, that was the big story of the day.

For a spokesman to succeed in his job, he has to have the trust of the principal he is working with, the confidence and trust of the principal, and has to know what is going on. It is a great privilege to work with Brahimi and it was a great privilege to work with Sergio because they understand that. The spokesman is always by their side. I was always in every meeting that he had, unless it was a crucial tête-à-tête that he had to have with the head of a delegation or another personality. After which he would come out and tell me, "Here's what happened. This is what you can say; this is what you should never say under any circumstances." A spokesman, in order to do his job, should know not only what the line is and what he can say, but also what he cannot say. But he should know about it because somebody else may know about it and if he gets hit with a question about that subject as well, he should be knowledgeable, knowledgeable enough to be able to answer in the right context, and steer the journalist in the direction that we feel is the right direction.

After attending the meetings, we agreed that I would brief the press on a daily basis. At 2:00pm every day, I went down the hill escorted by the German authorities because it was a highly secure atmosphere. There were mounted police everywhere; the black Mercedes that the Germans are famous for were transporting us up and down. I go down the hill to the little village adjacent to St. Petersburg called Köernigswinter. Because it was such a small village, it had only one hotel that couldn't accommodate the hundreds of journalists. We were overwhelmed with accreditation requests.

The German authorities did a brilliant job, absolutely brilliant job, of setting up the logistics for this huge influx of journalists to this sleepy little town on the Rhine. They brought in a boat to accommodate the overflow of journalists from the hotels and it was on this boat, that became known as the media boat, that I would brief everyday at 2:00pm local time. For the record, you choose a time that is convenient for the time zones that you want to reach. It isn't an ad hoc process: ok, let's brief at 11:00am because I feel like it and I will do it after morning coffee. You think about which news bulletins are you hitting. And so because this was a major international story, we wanted to hit the Western press but also we wanted to reach the local press in Asia and in the regions. So, 2:00pm was five hours away from Asia, from Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and Iran, and that region. It was also six hours ahead of this hemisphere, of the United States. It would capture the 8:00 morning news in the East Coast; it would get to the mid-day bulletins in Europe; and also get the newspapers for the next day in Europe, and also reach the viewers and the people who were interested in Kabul, in Afghanistan, who were most concerned about the outcome of these talks.

On a daily basis for about 10 days, I was briefing the press and then running back to attend the rest of the meetings.

JK: Just a point of clarification, the press was not allowed up in Saint Petersburg?

AF: As I said, it was a hotel on top of a hill. The hill was completely secluded from the nearest town which was Köernigswinter. It was a 15-minute drive down the hill through forests and

winding lanes and streets down to the village. Nobody was allowed to approach the hill, let alone gain access to the top. There were police patrols with dogs and mounted police all over covering the mountain, the circumference of the mountain. At the bottom of the mountain, there was a barrier and nobody was allowed unless they had the right passes.

There were occasions when I would take one or two journalists up to give them some color. I was taking them up in my car and supervising what they were doing. They would have no access to anyone, any of the Afghans or maybe I would introduce them to one or two of the UN people, or one or two of the observers from the international community. But it was very controlled in the sense that we wanted to keep that atmosphere up there pristine and completely devoid of any public and media pressures; to give these people the environment they needed to talk to each other and to hammer out an agreement.

Now the UN went in with legal advisers. Brahimi had a team of legal experts, of experts who knew the region well. He had a university professor, Barnett Rubin, from Columbia who was advising him. He had Ashraf Ghani who was an Afghan exile who worked with the World Bank. Together the team had hammered out the skeleton of a draft agreement. Then they refined it as the talks progressed. Brahimi's style was first to meet everybody in a plenary and say, "Ok, we are all in this together; we want to come out with an agreement that will take this country forward. Afghanistan has suffered enough; the people you represent have suffered enough for over 25 years. It is your hands now to save these people from further suffering, civil wars, human rights abuses. The country has been devastated and demolished. It is your responsibility." And then he would break them up into smaller groups. They would go into their own rooms that we had allocated for each party. Then he would go to each party and talk to them separately and say, "What are you prepared to concede? What are your demands?" He would go to each of the four parties and some of us would be with him in these meetings. Then we would meet as a group. Brahimi would convene his group.

JK: Do you mean the staff?

AF: Yes, the staff to assess the situation so far, at the end of day one; at the end of day two; at the end of day three. Then what would we need to put into the agreement or take out of the agreement. "Aha, this party is insisting on demobilization of the militia in a certain region. Should we put that in or should we take it out?" I am just giving an example off the top of my head, not necessarily a correct one. After he assesses with his team the progress or lack of progress in certain areas, the draft agreement would be adjusted. After about three days of this pattern which is a plenary in the morning, breaking up and meeting then separately, saying, "I spoke to group B and they are receptive to your suggestion about X, Y, Z, but group C will need some assurances from you that in the eastern province you will agree to stop the poppy growing," for example. Or, "you will make sure there are no Taliban elements," etc. Going from group to group, assessing the situation, refining the agreement, and then he presented it to them in a plenary.

He said, "We now have a draft text for you." We realized something that had not been thought of and it was a terrible oversight. And that is that many of the members of these delegations didn't speak English. They spoke Pashtu. Some of them understood Arabic, but that was not the language of the country. It was Pashtu. So, we had to scramble and find a Pashtun interpreter. And we did through the BBC World Service.

So, we have the translator; we are in the plenary; it is day four, or something. This isn't necessarily accurate. Mr. Brahimi submits the draft to them which has now been translated into Pashtu as well. So, you have an English text and you have a Pashtu text. Those who understand English are going by the English text and those who don't are going by the Pashtu text. He gives them the text and asks them to study it and see if they agree to it. They come back the next day with their comments, their objections, their rejections; and Mr. Brahimi sits through the session that is supposed to be the drafting session. The agreement was about seven pages long or eight pages long, maybe seven and a half.

JK: Now you are meeting in the plenary?

AF: Now he is meeting in the plenary and he goes through the agreement line-by-line, word-by-word. You start with page one, line one, and he reads it. Then he looks up, "Any objections?" Somebody puts up their hand and demands a certain correction in this text. And he goes on like this, line-by-line. He reads each line, looks up, asks for corrections. It was taking -- I looked at my watch -- about an hour a page. It was an extremely long day. The agreement took about eight hours to go through, to correct. There is interpretation, remember, as well.

I remember it was Ramadan, which is the Muslim holy month of fasting. And all these people are Muslim, including Brahimi. And they were fasting; many of them were fasting. That means no water, no food, nothing at all by mouth throughout the day, from sunrise to sunset. The hotel had very conveniently set up the dining hour at the hour of the breaking of the fast which was sunset. So, dinner wasn't 7:30 or 8:00; dinner was whenever the sun set. If it were 5:30 or 6:00, that was when the buffet was ready for the people who were fasting. Then they would have another buffet for people who were not fasting. It was very well done; the Germans did a brilliant job of administration and logistics. On the media side it could not have been better, the arrangements they made for the media which made my life a lot easier.

Brahimi sat in his chair; he didn't move; he didn't get up; he didn't have a glass of water for eight hours straight.

JK: With all this talking.

AF: with all this talking. Some of the members of the delegations who were not fasting would get up, go get a glass of water, come back, go to the toilet, come back, go grab a bite to eat, and come back. But he stayed there. The heads of delegations, if they got up would have to have their number two continue. But he is extremely determined when it comes to negotiations and when it comes to achieving results. We were going to go through that text on that day. And you have to keep moving forward.

Finally, he finished that. It was one hurdle, an extremely important one. But then the other hurdle was the formation of the government, the formation of a cabinet of ministers, and the

selection of a head of state. Who would take over from the current government of Afghanistan after the toppling of the Taliban? You must remember that there was a government that the Taliban overthrew and that was the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani. The Rabbani government returned to power with the fall of the Taliban. In Bonn -- and many people objected to this -- in Bonn, the four Afghan groups with the help of the United Nations were forming a new government. There was for a time, resistance to this idea from within Afghanistan. "How dare you form a government outside Kabul in a foreign land." There were reasons why this could not take place in Kabul because of the post-conflict situation, the continuing violence, the fact that you needed to isolate these people for a while to give them a chance to think clearly.

Whenever international pressure was required they were just next door. Mr. Brahimi could talk to the representative of Russia, to the foreign minister of Germany, and say, "Please talk to your friends, your allies and tell them we need them to do this, that, or the other. This is all for the welfare of the Afghan people, for the greater good of the Afghan people." The formation of the cabinet took a very long time. As the saying goes, "to the victor, the spoils." The Northern Alliance wanted the majority of the seats, but the other three parties were also vying for seats in the cabinet. Mr. Brahimi asked them to put forward their lists of names, "Show us your list." It took a while to get the lists out of them. That took a few days. To cut a very long story short, the last few days we were all up until the wee hours of the morning, 3:00/4:00am. He kept going; he is a work horse, unforgiving, relentless. He would be calling people into his office at 2:00am, 3am, heads of delegations, squeezing concessions out, squeezing compromise.

But all the while he was extremely gracious, extremely humble, operating with a lot of humility. It is the humility that I think is his greatest weapon, although he may not know this. He makes people feel that they are making the decisions at the end of the day. It is their decisions, and it is their welfare, and their people they are serving. "We are here only to help; we are the servants of the international community." He succeeded to get the final concession out of the heads of delegations -- this is the best we could do -- at 7:00 in the morning on the last day. The four Afghan parties signed the Bonn agreement at 9:00am, two hours later. We barely had time to shower, and shave, and change, and run to the press conference.

Then we had to organize the logistics of what kind of signing ceremony will we have. Where is the table; where is the location; what is the backdrop? Who is going to give them the pen, the little things that you scramble to organize with the German authorities and the UN side.

JK: And taking into consideration all the protocol.

AF: Yes, and the chancellor of Germany is leaving on a trip at 10:00am to Burundi and he wants to be at the signing, so, "Can you hurry up?" There is always the funny side to things. The hotel we were staying in was booked for a dentists' convention the next day. They were biting their nails, hoping we would finish in time for their dentists' convention to take place. The other thing is that the tide in the Rhine was rising, so my media boat was going to have to move the next day, had we not completed the agreement. We would have lost the media boat. The water was rising to a very dangerous level. The forces of nature as well as the economics of running a hotel and the politics all converged to get the agreement signed on the fifth of December 2001. We had a huge press conference. If you go back to the newspaper archives at the time, the fifth or sixth of December, television as well, Brahimi and Joska Fischer, the German foreign minister and myself moderating with about 500 or 600 journalists packed in the space on that boat, it was quite remarkable.

That lasted about a half an hour and then Brahimi and Fischer rode in a helicopter straight to Berlin to attend a donors conference on Afghanistan. The last point that I will just make on the Bonn talks is that, before the signing of the agreement, Brahimi agreed to put in the agreement something about the transfer of power. He believed firmly in the importance of benchmarks in any agreement. So, the Bonn agreement had a number of benchmarks. The first was the transfer of power from the existing Rabbani government to the new leader who had been chosen and that was Karzai. That was when the Bonn agreement would start being implemented. Some of the people were saying, "It is the fifth of December, should we wait until after the Christmas and New Year holidays? Shall we say January?" And he was adamant that it had to be as soon as possible, a week from now. "Shall we say a week from now? Shall we say two weeks from now? When is two weeks from the fifth of December? That would be the 22nd of December. Right, it is the 22nd of December. Transfer of power, are we all agreed, the 22nd of December?"



We are agreed." He put it in the agreement. The next benchmark was to have a Loya Jirga, and the rest is all history. Each big event was a benchmark: writing the constitution, adopting the constitution, elections, second elections, etc.

That is the Bonn talks. What else can I tell you?

JK: It is 12:00, and I think we will end it here. Thank you so much.



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