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Yale UN-Oral History Project

Fred Eckhard

James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer

February 16, 1999

New York City

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James Sutterlin: Fred, first of all I want to thank you very much for giving your time and attention to this oral history project at Yale dealing with the United Nations and as you know we are including Namibia as one of the subjects that we are covering and you were there. So, I would like to talk to you this evening about your experiences there and about your perceptions of the Namibia transition. I would like to begin by asking how did you get there. In other words, what was your position before you went to Namibia in the United Nations and how were you chosen?

UNITED NATIONS

Fred Eckhard: I was a junior member of the spokesman's office for the Secretary-General in New York and I believe that the spokesman thought I'd be better off in the field. He recommended me for the job as an assistant to the spokesman who had already been designated by Mr. Ahtisaari going back ten years. Ahtisaari was extremely loyal to the people who worked for him and he tried to bring back as many of the people from 1978 as he could. In the case of the spokesman, this was a Tunisian [Anwar Cherif] who I believe at the time was an information center director in Tunis. We still hadn't learned the lesson at that time that you need a spokesman in place with the advance team. And already the force commander, who was in place and troops were arriving, was besieged by press. And he was screaming to New York, "Send me an information person!" Meanwhile the Tunisian was stuck in North Africa with a house to get rid of and a family

to move to New York before he went off to Namibia and they needed someone else. So, the spokesman recommended that I be sent. So, that is how it happened.

JS: When did you get there? I don't mean the exact date, but the critical date was April 1st. That is the day when the peace plan was supposed to go into effect.

FE: My recollection is that I arrived the first week of March, and so we were reporting primarily on logistics at that time. The chief of staff of Mr. Ahtisaari, Cedric Thornberry, had a keen interest in press relations. And when he arrived shortly before the first of April, he took over on the political side. So, for three weeks or so I just held the fort and reported primarily on logistics and arrivals of troops.

JS: Reporting to whom?

FE: There was quite a gathering of press there. Certainly, Namibia itself had quite a developed press corps. The South Africans had keen interest. I seem to recall that there may have been some Portuguese press there as well. So, the press were descending on Namibia. It was a new story for those regional media.

JS: I want to move ahead for a moment a little bit out of order because you mentioned Cedric Thornberry. From the various people that I talked to in the field, he was one of the people at headquarters whose name was relatively well known. His name was also well

known in New York, as you know, not always favorably. What was his position exactly and how did he figure into headquarters' staff?

FE: Again, he was one of those with a long standing relationship with Mr. Ahtisaari, going back to the days when Mr. Ahtisaari had been Finnish ambassador, I believe, in Lusaka, Zambia with responsibility for Namibia, as well. Cedric Thornberry was something like an Amnesty International lawyer, taking the side of Namibian politicians and political activists against the South African legal system. Cedric had gotten into some difficulty in the peacekeeping department in the UN and there were people who thought that his ouster from the UN was the last he would be seen there. But it was Martti Ahtisaari who in a sense resurrected him and brought him back, as I would describe it, chief of staff. I think it was his finest hour because first of all he was very close to Martti and that's important to have a headquarters unit at the top that is coherent. Second, as chief of staff he could speak therefore with Martti's authority. And third, he organized the mission, as least from my point of view, as far as a gatherer of information, in an interesting way. He had three tiers or three separate reporting chains. He had the political officers in the field who reported daily. He had the police which were his special responsibility. As I recall, Martti asked him to keep an eye on the civilian police, which were a very important component of this mission and more or less established the importance of civilian police to peacekeeping, generally. And then the military, for which he didn't have a lot of respect.

But he then had a staff at headquarters that was assigned first to the military. He had a military liaison person. The military were across town at a different base. So, he

had one person who went to that base and sat in on the force commander's morning meeting. He had a second person who did the same thing for the police commissioner's morning meeting. And then he had a cluster of others who divided the country by regions and who first received an overnight cable from the political officers in the field and then the next morning, as they read the cables of what happened the day before, they phoned these field offices to ask follow-up questions to what was in the cables and to get late breaking developments. All of that was before a morning meeting of all these people that he held at maybe at 10:00 or 11:00. It was interesting if something slipped by the military and the police, then the civilian picked it up. Rarely did anything important slip between all three nets. Then he was quite a terrorist because if the police failed to report something important that had come in on the civilian net, he would tell his officer who was dealing with the police commissioner, "You go down there and you chew him out and you tell him his people missed something important and next time, they better get it right."

He liked putting the fear of God into people, but I must say I sat in that morning meeting and I had a good sense of what was going on in the country. I then gave a press briefing at noon. The journalists, of course, are always the first to know anything and if I could just hold my own when they said, "Well, we understand that a man was killed in Rundu last night," I could say, "Yes, we had a report on that and the police are investigating it." It was very helpful to me. So, I ran a reasonably well informed press briefing each day and it was thanks to this system that Cedric devised and I think worked beautifully.

JS: At the next level up, that is at the top level, there was a kind of a three-headed team in the Special Representative, his deputy, and the military field commander. How did that work? How did they function?

FE: Of course, we are going back to this 1978 team. So, after ten years, both the police commissioner and the force commander were feeling a bit tired. They were not particularly energetic. They had good staff. That is not to say that they were not good leaders, but they weren't forceful which again left Cedric in an unchallenged number two position until Legwaila was brought in as the deputy. That was of interest to me politically. First of all, Ahtisaari felt very comfortable with Legwaila. And I don't know whether the Secretary-General made that appointment consciously. I assumed he did. Second, I believe Cedric had the office opposite Ahtisaari's which was a two office suite with a secretarial pool in the middle. And Cedric vacated that office and Legwaila walked into a newly furnished, freshly refurnished, executive office right across from Ahtisaari and was immediately brought into the top level of decision making. I never heard Joe Legwaila complain that he had not been fully consulted.

JS: So, it worked well.

FE: Yes. So, the three that ran the mission were Martti, Joe, and Cedric. The force commander and police commissioner had secondary roles, as far as I could tell.

JS: Although, I believe that General Prem Chand initially thought that he should be acting as deputy. Was that ever evident?

FE: No. The fact that he was off at a military base at the other end of town didn't give him a good, commanding position at headquarters. And second, he was a very refined gentleman and he never elbowed his way into anyone's office or inner circle where he wasn't wanted and third, as I mentioned, he was tired. I didn't sense he had a lot of fight in him.

JS: He actually sent in his resignation to the Secretary-General when the deputy was appointed.



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FE: Oh really, I wasn't aware of that.

Dag Hammarskjöld

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JS: I wanted to go now to the relationship with the South African representatives in Windhoek. How was this handled? Particularly Mr. Pienaar and his staff?

FE: I have less good recollections on that. I again seem to recall that Cedric took the lead on the relations with Pienaar and basically felt that they were a group that needed enlightenment, that you had to twist their arms in order to get them to do the minimum required under the plan. He seemed to find them difficult to work with. But my sense was that the South Africans had made a firm commitment to go through with the independence of Namibia as a dry run for what they were going to have to do at home.

And so, our leverage with Pienaar came from the South Africans who had a representative in Windhoek. Do you remember his name?

JS: No.

FE: I went out on a braai with him in the bush. I spent a drunken afternoon with him and his wife who was very pleasant. He was a very distinguished person who liked to drink on occasion but a very distinguished person. He was always helpful. It was a good cop - bad cop routine that they played. Pienaar seemed to be defending the interests of the conservative elements of Namibian society and the South African was prying things loose. I don't know whether they designed it that way or whether, in fact, that's how it was. But that is how it worked.

JS: Now, did these differences come out in your dealings with the press? In other words, did you have to go into the relationship with the South African representative, with the Administrator General, on such questions as the declaration on electoral procedures, the declaration on registration procedures where there were differences, as I understand it, between what his office wanted and what UNTAG wanted?

FE: The press was very well informed on all these matters. Of course, the local press, which included the South African press, tended to be better informed than I was. There were, under Namibian legislation, precise things that needed to be done to promulgate these laws and I seem to recall a lot of battles between Cedric on our side and Pienaar's

people on their side. We briefed daily, five days a week, so just about everything came before the press. It was a very free, western style press with little bit of, I want to say, naughtiness. Because they were playful at the same time, but their playfulness could be designed to embarrass me in a superficial way, a silly way, which had a political motivation underneath it to make UNTAG look silly. To give you an example, there was the SWAPO colored condom story where UNICEF was distributing condoms to the refugees. They were ordered from an American company in one of the southern states. They came in four different colors. And three of the colors were indeed SWAPO colors. They asked me this question; they produced these things as evidence at a press briefing and I turned red and dealt with it as best I could and then immediately got on the phone to try to find out who made these condoms. And I called the company in Alabama, or someplace, and I said, "Can you assure me that these particular colors were not ordered specifically and that they are your standard colors?" And they gave me the assurance but by that time the joke was over and I just looked silly. There was a fair amount of that. They were earthy; they were cunning, you know, in a political way and they probably got the better of me more than once.

JS: I judge that you are suggesting that there was a fairly sophisticated press corps there.

FE: Certainly, the police leaked to them photographs to them of murder victims, the kinds of things that police normally don't show to the press. Pienaar's office briefed them, gave them his side of the story, regularly. Of course, we were putting out our story

everyday, trying to return as many of the balls as we could. It was fun; it was lively. I thought we were grappling with the real issues. I was as sympathetic to the conservative press as I was to the liberals because I thought they were both grappling with the issues, in what was, in their way, an honest fashion.

JS: You say the conservative press, was the conservative press entirely white or was it mixed?

FE: There was the curious Turnhalle Alliance that had their newspaper or two or three. There were a lot of newspapers. That alliance was conservative, white with a conservative black as well as what were called Basters, or coloured, mixed race. So, it wasn't that easy to say it was black and white. As I recall, the Basters were spread out all over the place, but there was a concentration of them south of Windhoek just 30 miles or so. They were a very conservative lot. They trusted the whites more than they trusted SWAPO. It made the whole job of dealing with the press that much more interesting because it wasn't purely a black/white issue.

JS: Did you have to deal with the press in the initial period when SWAPO made the incursions into Namibia and UNTAG had to agree to the non-cantonment of the South African troops? Did you have to handle that?

FE: Well, I got my job as a result of that. The Tunisian guy [Anwar Charif] arranged to show up on Martti Ahtisaari's plane, curiously enough. There was an enormous

amount of work with the press for the day of Ahtisaari's arrival. So, I had done all of that. Of course, it was on the first day; it was April first that this crisis broke. And Martti sent Cedric up north to try to find out what was going on because, typical of the UN, at the beginning of the mission, we had only a handful of our staff in place. We had no communications equipment and if the South Africans said that SWAPO had crossed the border from Angola heavily armed, we had no independent way of verifying that. Cedric went north and the Tunisian suddenly had a huge press corps because now you had blood and guts. They were pouring out of Europe, coming down. There must have been fifty or sixty journalists hammering this poor Tunisian with tough questions whose answers were, "No comment," or "Read the documents." He didn't have the touch and so the journalists said to Cedric when he got back, "Fire your spokesman." They didn't fire him; he stayed on as director of information, but I was made the spokesman of the mission.

I myself went up to the border about the time the whole thing had settled down and we had agreed on a plan to repatriate any SWAPO that were still in the country but in hiding because they didn't trust the South African military. We agreed to set up border checkpoints where these people could turn themselves in, be disarmed, and be escorted back across the border to Angola. Every place we had a little tent. We had no flag poles, so we would attach the UN flag to the tallest tree nearest our tent. The South Africans moved in right next door and set up a military encampment that would have been the pride of any modern army, armored vehicles, jeeps, trucks, the whole business. Needless to say, very few SWAPO came to our little site with so many South Africans just next door.

There was a wounded SWAPO guy who came into our tent and the South Africans wanted to interview him. The military guy in charge was a British major and Cedric was also there with me, as I recall. And the South African said, “We want to interrogate the prisoner.” The major said, “No way, he’s our guy and you can’t have access to him.” So, the South Africans raised their automatic weapons and pointed at the major and he still said, “Over my dead body.” They said, “We’ll be back in one hour and if you don’t turn him over, we’re taking him.” So, they left.

The major got on the horn to Windhoek. The British had Motorolas in their jeeps and they had a communications unit that could talk to those Motorolas. It was the only communications we had at the time. They called the British base which was four miles outside of Windhoek, saying, “Please get to the force commander or Ahtisaari and ask him what we should do.” That jeep then called UNTAG headquarters; it was dinner hour. Both the force commander and the Special Representative were having dinner somewhere in Windhoek. The jeep went from restaurant to restaurant. There are only fifteen or twenty restaurants, but still there are enough that you couldn’t get to all of them in an hour. So, Cedric took the decision and said to the major, “Tell him your force commander says to hold the line.” So, the major went back out and these guys came up with their weapons again and he drew a line in the dirt and he said, “You cross that line and we’ll shoot.” And the South Africans backed off.

But, it is an illustration of how the lack of communications from the beginning of the mission, the lack of infrastructure, if you get any unusual challenge to the mission – we had the challenge on day one, April 1st – you’re at a loss to deal with it competently.

JS: Eventually, you developed a good communication system, right?

FE: Yes, apparently we had satellite dishes placed on a ship to save the cost of air transport, so three or four months into the mission, suddenly all this good, sophisticated stuff showed up. Then by six months, we were state of the art. By that time, of course, all the hard work had been done.

JS: You mentioned the Tunisian became the director of information. When you did have communications, were all the programs developed in Windhoek that went out throughout the country?



FE: Well, the other thing about the information program was that Cedric insisted from the beginning that it was going to be essential to have a substantial information budget and this was a country that had a communications infrastructure. You had telephone lines that linked the whole country. You had television that reached areas around Windhoek, radio that reached everywhere. Cedric said, "We want TV programs; we want radio programs, and we want printed materials." But, of course, in a typically UN way, we had very few resources with which to do this. So, the radio programs were produced by a support staff, a single support staff woman, Lena Yacoumopoulou, who researched, wrote, and produced a five minute daily radio program that got aired in the early morning and then one or twice throughout the day. And she became the single best known person in UNTAG. Because people showering in the morning would have their radio on. And Lena had a rather deep, sexy voice. The men, in any case, used to fantasize about this

exotic foreign woman in their midst who was describing the work of UNTAG on a daily basis. That was the single most successful thing we did, I think, in the information area.

The television was a French woman [Isabelle Abric] who had been hired from the outside. I don't think she was a regular UN staff member. She hired a crew locally and she tried to do a program every couple of weeks or something, a fifteen-minute program, on a regular basis whatever it was. That got a certain amount of attention. Then we borrowed the art director from the information department in New York [Jan Arnesen] over their objections. We practically had to get Ahtisaari himself to commandeer her. And she went back and forth, but she would stay several weeks at a time. She went down into Katatura, the black township, got to know the artists and the cultural life there, found a particularly gifted Namibian artist and asked him--he did linocuts--to do linocuts of Namibian faces, of all different groups and make a vote poster. And that single poster is everyone's image of UNTAG. It was the best-known thing. But she also did brochures and when it came time, the idea of the "code of conduct" came out of the blue. Cedric and some others were talking and I don't know who takes credit for having thought of it, but they said, "We need to put that out." She designed it and then did it in languages and distributed it throughout the country.

We are talking about contributions by single individuals that suddenly were free just to get a job done and who did it well and then saw the positive results of it. That's one of the reasons why everyone who participated in the mission felt elated by the experience.

JS: And these were all produced on the ground not in New York and sent out?

FE: She [Jan Arnesen] shopped around. She found that getting certain parts of the job done in New York and then moving it somewhere else to be printed or if she could get it printed in South Africa cheaper than she could get it printed in Namibia, she did it that way. That was another thing that she did. She scouted around; she checked the cost of doing business in her area and she worked out the cheapest way to do it, which I think was a little different depending on the project.

JS: Speaking of New York, how did you perceive the relationship between UNTAG and New York and in particular, the so-called Namibia task force?

FE: This was my first mission, so I was particularly susceptible to what I'm told is universal, not just in the UN but in military, of governments around the world when you are on the ground, on the front-lines, you feel you have an intimate understanding of the situation and the people sending you orders from headquarters just don't understand what we're dealing with. "If you just stay off our backs and let us do the job, we'll get it done right." New York was facing a revolt by the African Group, as I understand. And, of course, the Secretary-General is responsible for maintaining relations with member states. We serve member states and he had a revolt on his hands and we, I don't think, gave that sufficient weight; at least at my level, we didn't. I was one of those who felt that if New York just would mind its own business...it was doing things for political reasons; we don't do things for political reasons. We have a mandate here to carry out. We are trying to carry it out in a business-like way. We only have one year to do it. We want to get it

done right and on time and if New York would just stop playing politics and let us do our work, everything would be fine. So that was my view of them.

JS: The New York attitude did, of course, reflect the influence of the so-called Front-line States and the Non-aligned Movement. I was wondering, did you have press representatives from the Front-line States and were they at all hostile, or more noticeably hostile, in their questioning than others?

FE: No, my sense was that those who reported regularly or even who came and stayed for a week or two quickly saw what we were doing and were sympathetic to it. I don't recall getting headquarters type questions. We all sensed that Mr. Ahtisaari's standing among Africans had plummeted as a result of his decision to let the South Africans out of base. The South Africans double-crossed him by behaving like brutes and rampaging through the north, killing everything in sight. They made the political cost to him of taking that decision as high as possible. Of course, among the South Africans, we talked about the gentleman from the foreign ministry, but there were the security services, the military. It wasn't clear that everyone in South Africa wanted to see this Namibia experiment succeed. One of our jobs was to phase out the South African military, contain them, and then have them pack up and go home. That was politically the most uncertain time for us because when the chief is wounded which was the case with Ahtisaari, we didn't know if we were going to pull out or not. We didn't know, after the events of the first of April, whether the mission would even be completed. It was a gradual, steady climbing out of that hole that we had been thrown into the first of April.

Getting Legwaila as the deputy, he turned out to be a good deputy. He and Ahtisaari got along and then he was gradually reaching out to these others. I will say that the Front-line States and the Non-aligned Movement all had offices or representatives in Windhoek. Those people were more sympathetic to us than their bosses out of Namibia. At the same time, they were critical of us and they had their instructions from headquarters. It was most gratifying to us at the end of the process when they came up to us and said, "Job well done," because they had been consistently critical of what we did. There were times when we really felt that they wanted to fire us all. I didn't sense it so much from the press.

JS: That's interesting. Now the political parties, particularly SWAPO, and Sam Nujoma himself, what was their relationship with UNTAG like? How was it carried out? Was it mostly in the field or did Ahtisaari meet with them on political questions?

FE: I don't think they trusted us because my impression, at least at the beginning, was that they felt that Namibia was theirs, and that the UN was there to turn over the country to them. And we felt that for our credibility, we needed to carry out the mandate in an impartial manner. We were dealing with the South Africans, I think, a lot more than we were dealing with SWAPO and SWAPO for us was just one other political party. My impression was, though, that SWAPO did not make any serious political mistakes and their organization was good. They had an uphill battle. Also, the South Africans had an idea of what percentage of the vote they were to get. There was a time when I wasn't sure that this election was entirely free and fair. It seemed to me like people were trying to

reach a certain outcome, a victory by SWAPO but not an overwhelming victory. And, of course, that is how it ended up. Once they won the election, they too turned to us with a lot of gratitude. But before then, there were times when they suspected we were colluding with the South Africans.

As I say, our relations were primarily with Pienaar and his people, the South Africans backing up those people, and the Contact Group. Ahtisaari was always pushing buttons in that area as we had to do after the first of April because he called together the Contact Group and from what they described, they met at a safari lodge somewhere. They cleared all the honeymooners out of a safari lodge for a weekend and they had this meeting there. I was not allowed in on it. But what people said was that the Russians, the Cubans, the Americans, the Angolans, they all said the same thing. SWAPO had done something very stupid and how do we get this peace process back on track. That is where they came up with this idea of the border points where the remaining SWAPO could safely go back to Angola. SWAPO was just a political party and, I think the real players were the South Africans, the Angolans, the Russians, the Americans.

JS: I want to ask a question about the old "Contact Group" from the Security Council; the ones that had worked out the plan for Namibia with the South Africans and the Front-line States. Let me put the question in context: in Cambodia the Special Representative there found it very, very useful to have a group of so-called "friends" and these were ambassadors from countries represented in the Security Council with whom he could consult on the various decisions that were being taken. I wonder was there anything comparable in the case of UNTAG? Did the Special Representative there have a group of

representatives? They were not ambassadors at that point, I guess, with whom he could consult and who would offer a kind of preferred channel to the Security Council?

FE: I don't actually know. I have already mentioned the Non-aligned Movement that had their representatives in Windhoek and who were at our headquarters all the time asking questions. In fact, I used to allow delegates to sit in the back of my briefing room everyday because my information was the cutting edge information on what was happening in the mission. As long as they didn't ask questions, the press said it was OK if they sat in the back. Those people were there. I seem to recall in addition to those representatives there were the Portuguese, the Brits, the Canadians. There were members of delegations who were interest sections from governments who were all over the place. They just seemed to be an integral part of our life. After the first of April, Ahtisaari had major fence mending to do. Whether there was a specific group from the Council, particularly this Contact Group that met as a group, all I can recall is the expanding group that included the Cubans, the Angolans, the South Africans, the Russians, and the Americans. That was the group that made things happen; that was the group that got the peace process back on track after the first of April. Those were the people that Ahtisaari had regular contact with.

JS: I want to go to a different field now. In the long period during which the United Nations claimed sovereignty in Namibia, but the South Africans were really administering it, there were groups established within the United Nations or individuals there were in the Council for Namibia, the Commissioner for Namibia. They supposedly

were to be inactive because of the impartiality agreement during the transitional period. My question is: did you perceive any residual effect of the existence of these organizations that had worked so hard at the United Nations? Did anybody in Namibia even know that they had existed?

FE: I think that anyone familiar with the history of the place knew they existed. It was important for us to ignore them. As you mentioned, their inactivity was even built into the peace plan. I think we wanted for our purposes to pretend they never existed. We were starting from scratch with a peace plan to implement. I could be wrong, but I didn't sense that they improperly interfered at any time.

JS: Theoretically, they were supposed to have protected the national resources of Namibia during the period before the transition. Again, was there any evidence of that?

FE: I don't think they had any leverage at all in Namibia. They couldn't even visit Namibia. I think the main resource was diamonds and all of that was connected to South African diamond merchants.

JS: Which brings me to the question of Walvis Bay. I wondered were you under pressure from the press or the others to deal with this particular question, which was not part of the transition agreement?

FE: Yes, it was difficult to explain that there was an understanding that this would be dealt with eventually. It was set aside. Is that how they did it?

JS: Yes.

FE: They set it aside. We were convinced that the South Africans would turn it over, but it was hard to sell anything in Namibia and particularly to the press on the basis that we believed the South Africans were genuine in their assurances to us that it would be dealt with. And in the end it was.

JS: That is a rather surprising answer in a way, but it leads me to the question of: how did you perceive the attitude of the relatively sophisticated people whom you were dealing with toward the UN as an institution? What was their perception of the UN and did it change?

FE: There was a fair amount of skepticism among the press about first, the UN's ability to act impartially and second, its ability to deliver the goods because in the end, everyone had a sense of what the right outcome would be. It surprised everyone that Ahtisaari let the South African military out of base after SWAPO came over the border on the first of April. I think that shook up perceptions of this UN mission quite a lot. At the same time, it created huge problems. Maybe that was the single most important thing to happen to get people to take a fresh look at the UN as an instrument of change. But I felt we were fighting hard, particularly since the events of the first of April where we had

to come back and then win our credibility with the Africans, to regain our credibility with the Africans. Everyday was a battle for credibility, for acceptance as impartial agents in this rather complicated formula. Because it worked out in the end, we had full satisfaction in the end. The first six months or so were a real struggle.

JS: Again, I want to compare it with Cambodia. In Cambodia, the major issue was human rights and the question was: was the United Nations associated with the concept of human rights? This is the image that it exuded. Was this true in Namibia? In Namibia, as I understand it, the United Nations was very directly involved in what we now call the democratization process, the building of institutions. Was this popularly recognized? Did you find that the press and the others that you were associated with looked to the UN for this purpose?

FE: It became apparent to us early on that our very presence there opened up everyone's eyes. This was a country of something like 1.2 million people in an arid corner of Africa where not many people wanted to live. While there was a certain amount of ethnic diversity among them, they had never seen anything like the ethnic diversity that we brought in. And the fact that we worked so naturally together caught everyone's attention. That made us feel good about ourselves as well. We were like a walking human rights lesson. They wanted to know how many of us had been tested for aids before we got there because they saw themselves as morally upright and us as a bit corrupt, perhaps. I'm not sure that they saw an international presence as necessarily a

good thing, but our ability to work together made the biggest impression on them. They began to think that maybe they can do it themselves.

JS: You didn't need to distribute definitions of what human rights are and what human rights they were entitled to and so forth?

FE: The church groups there had strong influence on people's lives. Their sense of morality and what is politically right and wrong was out there even for those that didn't accept the political necessity of majority rule, at least initially. There was a sense that it was right. It wasn't a primitive society. I don't think we introduced new concepts to them; we just showed them how it could work.

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JS: It is interesting that you mention the churches. Every one of the field officers I have talked to has emphasized the importance of the church in the community. That was their access. Did you find that true also from the center with the central church groups, or was this simply a matter of the local community church?

FE: I sense that it would be more pronounced in the small villages than at headquarters where we dealt with politicians. But when we wanted to distribute a pamphlet that is when we talked to civic groups and in particular to churches. They were the network over which you could get out a message, even in Windhoek. I was going to say more in Katutura, but that is not true. They were all churchgoers it seemed in Windhoek, whites, blacks, and coloureds.

JS: The churches did provide an element of civil society that could be utilized in building a nation.

FE: Yes, and they were.

JS: At one point, the Secretary-General came to Namibia, Pérez de Cuéllar, and he met with the leaders of all the political parties together. From your perspective as spokesman, did this play well? Did it have impact?

FE: I don't remember that it did. He came and went. Margaret Thatcher came and went. Maybe we weren't ready to cede any credit to outsiders. My memory is totally clouded, but I don't remember the Secretary-General's presence as being politically significant.


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JS: Well, that answers the question, in a way. Just in comparison, was Martti Ahtisaari a well-known figure in Namibia?

FE: Everyone knew him. Actually, everyone in the country must have known him.

JS: So, you had an audience that was interested in what the chief UN man was doing?

FE: Yes, it was a process leading to a long anticipated goal that was now shared by the South Africans who were prepared to allow it to happen. This team of foreigners was coming in to make it happen and the guy at the top of that team was Martti Ahtisaari. I think there were Namibians all over the country at that time who were named after Martti.

JS: I believe that Finland, oddly enough, had had some influence in South West Africa, when it was still South West Africa, again largely through church support. Was that evident and did that seem to be one of the reasons that Martti Ahtisaari was there?

FE: I wasn't aware of that. For us, the main problem was the Finns' saunas. They took saunas wherever they went. Of course, not at UN expense but national government expense. Like Martti himself had a sauna. The other thing they did is that they saved up their money and they bought expensive cars. This was a little hard to explain. It was embarrassing to me from the point of view of press relations. But it was a standard fact of UN peacekeeping life that troops from developed countries that get well paid buy things and exercise influence on the economies of the places where they go.

JS: Yes, again to compare with Cambodia, in Cambodia the UN presence because of the influx of the money they brought with them made a difference, and possibly not a positive difference. Was it that great in Namibia?

FE: The numbers were smaller, but the size of the population was smaller than in Cambodia.

JS: The presence of UNTAG didn't bring about a sudden distortion in the economy, or would you say it did?

FE: My sense is that it did and that our departure left a sudden gap. Our departure was accompanied by a sudden drop in real estate prices. And the pledges of development assistance were very slow to come in. We must have had a substantial impact on the economy and then a negative impact when we left.

JS: There was another important player; that was the United States in the person of Chester Crocker. I wonder how was his role perceived among those that you were associating with in Namibia?

FE: I was aware that Ahtisaari had a close personal relationship with Crocker. I wasn't that aware of his direct influence on the process. We all sensed that big powers were behind the scenes pulling the strings, sometimes in a very positive way as they did after the first of April. The Americans had a substantial amount of influence over the South Africans. My sense was that Crocker was just one more lever for Martti to pull. The way he could call on the South African foreign ministry to get Pienaar in line, he could call on the Americans to get the South Africans in line. I wasn't that aware of Crocker's day-to-day involvement if that's what it was.

JS: As spokesman, you were not expected, or perhaps not able, to give word to the public and to the media on what happened in these rather crucial meetings among this group, that is the Cubans, the Angolans, and the South Africans with the Russians and the Americans looking on.

FE: When I got word about this meeting at the safari lodge where they all agreed – they all had the same conclusion that SWAPO had done something dumb – now that had to be fixed. I put that out. I didn't mention it at a briefing, but I privately told correspondents that that was the case. That was politically significant. There was major political power behind this peace plan and therefore, it was going to get back on track because if any one of them, the South Africans first on the list, wanted to get out of the Namibian peace plan, the first of April was the excuse. And instead, they all sat around the table and they said, "How do we put it back together." I wanted to illustrate the extent to which there was international support for the process.

JS: I want to go back to this question of democratization and human rights, for a minute. There was great emphasis, I believe, on preparing for the elections, right?

FE: Yes.

JS: And this was also true in Cambodia. The criticism has been frequently made in the case of Cambodia that there was so much emphasis on preparing for the elections that

there was insufficient attention given to the protection of human rights. I have not heard this criticism of the operation in Namibia. Why, in your view?

FE: Namibia hadn't experienced the genocide. The elections were the central event of the transition to independence and so if you emphasize the code of conduct of how people behave decently in an election, that you don't beat up the opposition and you don't tear down their posters and you let them speak and so on. That was human rights enough. There was also a human rights center in Windhoek that we worked very closely with, Cedric in particular. I wish I knew a little bit more about them and their work. But I know we supported them and we pulled them in on our deliberations. You ought to try to look into them. Come to think of it, they weren't based in Windhoek. They were based up north. I think it is a religious group or a religious base, the Namibian Center for Human Rights, or something like that.

JS: Which was an indigenous group?

FE: Yes.

JS: I'd like to go back to the question of relations with New York. You were on the information side. In your relation to New York, did you look to DPI [Department of Public Information] or to the 38th floor?

FE: Cedric had total disdain for DPI. He had disdain for a lot of things. He felt that DPI wasn't field oriented, wasn't operational, so his instructions to me were pretty much, "Ignore DPI; we'll do it ourselves." I had to go to DPI to get a designer, to get a TV producer, and so on because these were the professionals. Then we had to adapt those skills to fieldwork. So, I always felt that DPI was very supportive of me. And I called on individuals within DPI. I wouldn't call the director, the head of the Department. I would call a P5 or a P4 in TV and say, "Here's what we need down here. We're doing something good, but we need this." And they would make suggestions. So, I felt I had a lot of unofficial support from DPI. The information side of our work was technically under Anwar Charif, the Tunisian fellow that I mentioned, North African, in any case. He would have worked more classically within the DPI framework. But I had nothing bad to say about DPI despite my boss.

Another thing, if I can switch subject, he had disdain for was UN agencies. He said, "We are going to keep those agencies out of here as long as we can. It's not going to be easy." But, of course, they started drifting in well before the elections. And the way we see peacekeeping today, that is proper, that they would begin the development, the transition to the post-peacekeeping development phase while the peacekeeping operation is still underway. Here is a perfect example of why he felt these people were political blunderers and to be kept completely off the political stage for as long as possible for the good of the political process. FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] came in with a plan distribute to all the newly returned refugees--through an irregularity of the peace process, many of whom were former SWAPO fighters who in civilians came across as refugees – distribute to these people a kit so that they could plant their first crop and gave

them all machetes. This absolutely terrified the white population that these SWAPO guys should be armed with machetes by FAO. We had to try to undo that. But that is part of the problem of working with a decentralized UN system when you have 12 months to do a very precise thing and you don't want anyone sullyng the landscape.

JS: But UNHCR was active, right?

FE: Right, but they worked very closely with us. In fact, Cedric's ex-wife was a senior UNHCR official with responsibility for that region. Although she was his ex-wife, he had a working relationship with her. I remember her coming down a few times. But HCR as we saw in Bosnia, the reason they were given the lead by the Security Council was because they were so good at what they did. And they organized the repatriation in a very efficient way.

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JS: That went well, right?

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FE: That went very well. We knew that there were these SWAPO members coming over in civvies. But we decided as long as they didn't rearm on re-entry, we could afford to look the other way. I believe we convinced the South Africans and the Pienaar people that that was a gamble worth taking and they reluctantly went along with it. As it turned out it was just fine.

JS: Fred, looking back were there any Namibians who stood out in your mind as particularly gifted, particularly talented people who could be future leaders in the country?

FE: In what age group?

JS: I don't know. I guess you'd have to say the middle group, perhaps those who had been in exile.

FE: The outgoing Pienaar Administration was leaving in place a fair amount of the old bureaucracy and SWAPO, once they had won the election, had to kind of share power with some of the other parties. What impressed me first about SWAPO, as I mentioned earlier, is that apart from the first of April, that was the last serious mistake they made. They were almost statesmanlike. It seemed like the long years that they had spent in the UN, lobbying governments, building an international support base, made them smooth political operators. These were not country hicks. These were people who knew how to organize things and garner support for a political idea. They were an impressive lot. I think of the foreign minister, Theo-Ben Gurirab, just very natural, very confident.

JS: The reason that I ask this is because my colleague, Jean Krasno, is going to Namibia next month and will be interviewing Namibians, in the same way.

FE: I think it would be interesting to see what has cropped up in almost ten years. It would be interesting to see Namibians from what walks of life, from what ethnic groups, are they all Ovambo, the traditional base of SWAPO support, or have others felt that there are enough opportunities in the political sphere for them to move forward. I don't think there is any shortage of educated Namibians. There were so many in the Diaspora that seemed happy to come home. The economy seems to be doing well, so there are opportunities in business there. Among the younger people today, in all parts of the world, business has more allure than public service. I think that it would be interesting to see.

JS: That's true. For this project what we are interested in is those who had some awareness of what was going on during the transition process and who were vaguely familiar, at least, with what the United Nations and what you were doing, to get their assessment of how the UN functioned.

FE: People in their twenties who were teenagers at the time.

JS: Well, we would include Nujoma, in fact, we will be interviewing him. That generation had a lot to do with the UN in the years before. Nujoma apparently was a well-known character to the diplomats in New York and elsewhere. But there is no particular one who stands out in your mind that we should look up? Or in the press, for that matter.

FE: I wouldn't know who is still there. There was the woman who ran the *Namibian* that was seen as a pro-SWAPO paper but which did fairly serious journalism. Her name escapes me now. [Gwen Lister] She's of European decent.

JS: I really have a double question for the last question: the first part may be more difficult. What did you see, from your position, as the weakest point of the UNTAG operation?

FE: The structural one. It seemed like we had the talent; we had the political support; we had the willingness of the population to give it a go. But we were too slow to deploy and too slow to get up our communications links. By the time of the elections, we were up and running and at our peak. What gave us the greatest satisfaction is that under the plan, the South Africans or the local authorities were to announce the electoral results. And they had to gather numbers from all over the country, including from very obscure places. As the South African military pulled out, a lot of their communications infrastructure collapsed. So, they didn't have quite as reliable communications as we did. So, we were collecting the same numbers they were, but then we were sitting back and letting them announce it. But they were calling us to find out what the numbers were. Because they had incomplete returns. So, we were whispering to them what the numbers were and they were announcing it. That's when we felt that we finally had the upper hand because the South African infrastructure was formidable. Our infrastructure in the beginning was non-existent. One was gradually dismantled while the other one was built

up. We really felt our strength at the time of the voting because we knew exactly what the results were.

JS: That is the second part of the question because Namibia is generally considered, and rightly so, one of the most successful UN operations ever. What do you think were the strong points? Why is Namibia seen as a success? There is practically no criticism.

FE: I give credit first of all to the South Africans. They held most of the cards and they wanted this to happen. They wanted it to happen in a certain way, so they were manipulative, but we were moving in the same direction. If they had decided at any point to fight the process, it never would have happened. Next, we have both the Russians and the Americans, the South Africans and the Angolans also supporting the process. If any one of the key players wanted to throw a curve ball into this operation, they could have caused casualties; they could have thrown off the timetable; they could have made it go wrong in a lot of ways. It was just everyone pulling in the right direction. We went in there with our inadequate preparation, our insufficient knowledge of the place and we were carried along by this political tide that just moving us inexorably toward our goal. Even when SWAPO screwed up on the first of April, we stumbled, picked ourselves up and just kept going. There was such momentum that one practical obstacle after another fell before the weight of this pressure to succeed. Everyone wanted it and it happened. I don't think we take credit for it. It was geopolitical forces that couldn't be stopped, starting with South Africa's making a strategic decision to go to majority rule at home and to start with majority rule in Namibia.

JS: So, the cards were right, you are saying.

FE: Absolutely.

JS: Well, thank you very much.

FE: Sure.



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Yale UN-Oral History Project

Fred Eckhard

James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer

February 16, 1999

New York City

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Yale-UN Oral History

Interview with Fred Eckhard

May 10, 2005 and June 7, 2005

New York

Interviewer: James Sutterlin

Yale-UN Oral History
Interview with Fred Eckhard
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Yale-United Nations Oral History Project
Interview with Fred Eckhard
May 10, 2005 and June 7, 2005
Interviewer- James Sutterlin

Side-1 [Initial interview conducted on 10 May]

James Sutterlin: First of all, I'd like to thank you, Fred--Fred Eckhard, that is--for participating in this UN Oral History. I also want to thank you for all that you have done to make this particular segment of the Oral History possible as a result of the Spokesman's Reunion that you organized.

I would like to start off by asking you what is the background, as you see it, of your selection by Kofi Annan to be his, and the UN's, spokesperson?

Fred Eckhard: He really didn't want me. Initially, at least, he wanted a woman; and I think he wanted someone a little bit more senior to me. I was a recent promotee to the P-5 level. This was a D-2 job and I thought he probably felt I'd make a good deputy. But he asked around. In fact Mark Malloch Brown was one of the people he asked to submit names. Mark was with the World Bank at that time. And they didn't come up with anybody. So after a month of looking he finally just said to me "well, you take the job."

But I remember when I moved into the spokesman's office, even while I was acting spokesman, there was something I felt was permanent about this. I took charge. I'd been in the office as a number three or number four for many years. I had done principal spokesman's jobs abroad, in Namibia, or the Yugoslav peace talks in Geneva. I knew how I wanted to do it and I just hit the ground running--within the UN restraints, of course, or constraints, because it takes a year and a half to hire anybody, and basically everyone was gone but me. So I had to build up the size of the office over 2 years. But I felt that even though I wasn't his first choice, he knew me well, he had confidence in me.

When under Boutros-Ghali I was asked to brief alongside the chief spokesman, Joe Sills, to brief on peacekeeping and where Kofi Annan was my main source of information for the briefing everyday, I did that. I don't remember for how long, but again somehow the politics of the 38th floor intervened. I was told I would not brief anymore. And Kofi Annan wrote a letter to John Hughes, who was a media advisor to Boutros-Ghali, in which he said that I was [one of] the best spokesman he had come across in 38 years in the UN system. So he had been very flattering to me and I think he held me in high regard. But I think as someone who probably headed the UN

personnel system before in his life, he maybe questioned whether a P-4 or recent P-5 could jump into a D-2 position.

JS: That's interesting. Many people have the impression that you actually worked in DPKO handling the press for Kofi Annan at that point but you were in the spokesman's office where you did handled that segment of the briefing?

FE: No, both are true. I had been trying to get a promotion for 10 years but I loved my work and in the UN system you get a promotion by changing jobs, not by being good at a given job and staying in it. I asked Kofi Annan if he had any positions open. In fact, I think I was told by Shashi Tharoor that Kofi Annan had a kind of information post that had recently been created because the General Assembly was getting too much of its news from the media and particularly on peacekeeping. CNN was breaking the news on what was happening in Somalia and Bosnia, well before anyone at the UN reported to delegations on these developments. So it was thought that the Peacekeeping Department should have a kind of information officer to answer the questions from delegations. So that post was created. Someone was put in it for about a year and for whatever reason that person was moved out; there was a vacancy; it was a P-5; and I jumped into it in, I think, the beginning of 1996, not knowing that before the end of that year my new boss, Kofi Annan, was going to become Secretary-General.

JS: I see, did you in that capacity or in your earlier associations with him, did you detect a particular knack of dealing with Kofi Annan? You obviously were successful. Is there some quality that appeals to him that you had?

FE: I don't think he's difficult to work for. Well, let me say something a little bit different. I think most people find him very easy to work for, though the people who get closest to him sometimes feel--and it's not abuse--but he allows himself to occasionally get impatient, to express direct displeasure with your work, to perhaps blame you unfairly for something you feel you weren't responsible for, and it's very few people.

I believe Elisabeth Lindenmayer, who was closer to him than almost anyone, felt this the most. And I remember one time we were on a trip after I had been working with him for five years or more and he was very critical of me for something that I could not reasonably be held responsible for; and I turned to Elisabeth and she said you've just entered a very privileged class of people. But despite those few exceptions where I was led to believe that it was a privilege to be criticized unfairly by Kofi Annan, I found that he was very easy to work for, very flexible. But on the other hand I never felt that I got to know him really well and I don't know how many people besides his wife know him really well.

JS: As you mentioned, while he was the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, there were a number of peacekeeping operations that were notable failures, especially Rwanda but also Somalia. In your experience, how did he deal with the press on this? How did he, in a sense, explain the situation or did he try? Did he try through you or others to get through to the press some appreciation of the complexities of the operations?

FE: Well it really wasn't for him to explain; it was for Boutros-Ghali and Boutros Ghali's spokesman to explain these missions, their failures. And Boutros-Ghali did not want Kofi Annan to have a high media profile, so he would not let Kofi Annan brief the Security Council. My sense is that Kofi Annan was basically told to stay at his desk and do his job. To the extent he did deal with the media, he has a very likeable trait, that if you ask him a question, he answers that question, maybe not as fully as you would like, but you always sense that he is trying to give you the information that you are asking for. He also, as a person, not just with journalists but with everyone, remembers little details about you, the fact that you have two children and maybe even your wife's name and with journalists he would add that personal touch, so that journalists liked him. I think that probably when he went to Bosnia to hand over that mission to NATO, where he was in the field, where he had a lot of exposure to journalists without anyone breathing down his back--I was not with him in Bosnia during that time--but I sense that he got very good press then and also impressed the key Member States and that was probably one of his tickets to the Secretary-Generalship.

JS: That's interesting and it makes me skip ahead to a later question because what I wanted to ask was whether he did have such opportunities to deal directly with the press and whether the image that the press got of him changed from these earlier days when he was the head of peacekeeping, to later days, in particular the later period in his Secretary-Generalship?

FE: I think he evolved as a person as well. So when he was Budget Director or Personnel Director he would have no particular media profile. He probably didn't work as hard at being Controller, where someone told me his nickname was the remote controller, as head of peacekeeping where he was challenged, really challenged, and where he rose to the challenge. So--I'm losing my thread here---but I think it's a different Kofi Annan who is Secretary-General. He works consistently, methodically. I meet him every morning when he comes to work and he has bags of documents, big envelopes full of documents that he has gone through the night before. He takes homework home every night. That is, I think, a new, evolved Kofi Annan who rose to the challenge that life gave him and that he was never expecting. And his press profile, I think, rose along with that. You heard at the

Spokesmen's Reunion, a journalist say that when Kofi Annan was elected Secretary-General, he, the journalist, stopped by the office and Kofi Annan invited him in and talked to him for half an hour. So he made himself accessible to the press.

I asked him again during that transition period after his election and before he took office, how much time he would commit to the press. So I said, "what's good press relations worth to you as a method of achieving your political objectives? Five per cent? Two percent? How much of your time can I have to schedule press events?" And wisely he didn't give me a number, but he was rather good about saying, "Ok, I will talk to the press regularly." I said, "Would you do a monthly press conference?" "Well, not monthly, but maybe every two months or so." Then he got in the habit of speaking to the press when he was coming into the building, so then the casual press encounter became a regular feature for him.

When he traveled we said, "Ok, now as a rule of thumb, let's do one print interview, one electronic media interview, and one full blown press conference at every stop. Every place where you spend two days or more, let's do at least that." And he accepted that and was doing that. Over the years, he's cut back on that, so the press conference turns into a press encounter with the Foreign Minister when he's traveling. And the two interviews get reduced to one and sometimes none. And the security element at Headquarters has changed, because he used to walk in the front door everyday, which gives the press the chance to intercept him. Now they bring him in the third basement, you know, among the loading trucks, at this big loading platform and he goes right into an elevator that takes him up to the 38th floor. So we have to arrange the press encounter to tell him, "Okay, now press is waiting at the front door; will you talk to them?" He says, "Yes." We stop the elevator at the first floor; he gets out of the elevator and walks over to talk to them.

But even with all of that, I think he has been more accessible to the press than his predecessors that I am familiar with going back to Waldheim.

JS: Right. Now this is a very general question, but from this fairly generous contact with the media, what image do you think they took away from that and what do they have at the present time? Has that changed? How do the reporters who have had this opportunity, what image do they take away? Not just what they write, but what they think?

FE: What they think has been profoundly influenced by the Oil-for-Food scandal. I think that in the first term and part of the second term, they gave him the benefit of the doubt. I think they liked him as a person. They probably wished that they had more access to him than they did, but that's only natural. The reform agenda was hard for them to grasp because

it required a more sophisticated grasp of the bureaucracy than most of them had. But I think they were prepared to credit him with serious reform efforts. And on the political side, I think they sensed that his political instincts were sharp, his intentions were noble, and as a Secretary-General he was up there in the top rung. Now what happened with Oil-for-Food is that for whatever reason, and I suspect that it was ideological and political reasons, he was made a target. He was this very popular Secretary-General with a nice soft voice that average people found comforting, whom average people felt was a nice, decent guy, and he headed a United Nations that in the 1990s, despite Somalia, despite Rwanda, and despite Bosnia, was becoming more powerful and more central to the foreign policy planning of governments, particularly governments that were big political actors on the world stage.

And then came Iraq; and Iraq, for a certain element of the political spectrum, Iraq was the expression of the new American power, an unchallenged, unrivaled power, that the United Nations should not in any way impede. And therefore to go to war in Iraq without the Security Council was part of the new order. And when he didn't agree with that, he was marked as a target. And when the invasion of Iraq turned into a nightmare, threatening that political end of the spectrum that said that this is going to be the ticket to the American century, they needed to lash out somewhere and, in my view, they lashed out at him as a way of undermining the organization. But he has been so hammered by these attacks that even fair-minded people have questions in their hearts about whether he indeed is honest and decent; that somehow he may have known about this Oil-for-Food contract to the Cotecna Company; that maybe his son's connection with that company wasn't as innocent as we first said it was; that maybe his long-standing, not friendship, but acquaintance with the founder of the Cotecna Company actually came into play.

It's hard even in these days when one single ex-FBI investigator working for Paul Volcker breaks ranks with Volcker, says that Volcker and Goldstone and Pieth all went too easy on Kofi Annan, and in fact he knew more about Cotecna than anyone said. That FBI agent has more credibility than Volcker and Goldstone and Pieth. A CNN producer for a very pro-UN news program called Diplomatic License came into my office yesterday and I said, "You really don't believe that this guy, this FBI guy, has more credibility than Volcker, do you, and she said, "Well" So the damage, I think, to Kofi Annan's reputation is maybe irreparable, at least over the short term, and only when the historians start writing about this 10 year period, if it does turn out to be a 10 year period, way down the line, there might be some course correction.

JS: This leads to several of my questions, but let me do this one first: the Oil-for-Food program has turned out to be a public relations disaster, undeservedly in

many ways, but do you as spokesman feel that it could have been handled in some other way and part of this could have been avoided?

FE: I think in the United Nations we've always had the luxury of not having to worry about public relations. Basically we were an organization of governments and if we had government support, we could do our job and we didn't have to worry about much else. And governments took care of the public relations. If they supported the United Nations and their particular policies in the United Nations, they would make sure that their public knew what they were doing and why they were doing it and why it was all worthwhile. If we have to do public relations for ourselves, we may, in fact, be in competition with governments--and they don't like that. In this case, if governments start attacking us, or even if it's just one government that attacks us, and we come out with a sophisticated line to attack back as any politician would do, I don't think that's kind of consistent with our role. So, we don't have the capacity; we may not even have the political latitude, to defend ourselves against some of these attacks. Let me just stop there.

JS: Okay. There is a follow-up question there. As you say, Secretary-General Kofi Annan obviously was shaken by the US policy on Iraq and its attitude towards the Security Council. And shortly after that he gave a major speech in which he said that "the United Nations has come to a fork in the road," implying that things could go desperately wrong as far as the United Nations is concerned unless it improved itself in some way. There are two questions on this: first, what do you think were the principal motivating factors in bringing him to this dramatic conclusion and, in addition to the what, who? Was this his own perception as far as you know or were there influences being brought to bear on him on the 38th floor, or elsewhere?

FE: On the latter question, I think he has always been influenced, guided by the thinking of others; he actively solicits the views of others as part of his decision-making process. He's not an academic the way Boutros-Ghali was. He isn't a politician like Waldheim and some of the others were. He was an international civil servant who never expected to be in this job. The advantage to that is, he knows how to pull the strings in the building to get things done and he is smart enough to know that he needs to tap into the ideas of thinkers, policy-makers, politicians to identify what needs to be done. He is also the first Secretary-General to be formally trained as a manager. So with a Masters degree from the Sloan School of Management at MIT, you kind of see that he organizes his tasks. He identifies objectives; he lays down the sequence of actions that need to be taken to reach those objectives. If he hits a brick wall and falls down, he picks himself up, redefines the new steps that need to be taken to reach those objectives or adjust the objectives because they are not reachable, and he

delegates down the line to get the full support of the people working for him. The first question was ...

JS: You keep bringing up interesting points that are bringing me to other questions. You talked about his [Kofi Annan's] managerial skills. A couple of weeks ago, I was at a breakfast for Madeleine Albright and Madeleine Albright said publicly in this small group that she was really responsible for bringing Kofi Annan into the job of Secretary-General, and that she loved Kofi Annan, She thought he was a wonderful man, but, of course, he was a miserable administrator. Now, the question I have here is you've been with Kofi for a long time, How did you see the beginning of this relationship with the Americans and in particular with the US ambassador to United Nations, how did this come about?

FE: I think it's widely acknowledged that Madeleine Albright was one of the determining political actors that brought Kofi Annan into the Secretary-General's job, but he had, as I mentioned earlier, already come to the attention of other governments and other Americans, including American military, in the job he did in Bosnia and maybe even earlier in the job he did in Iraq in releasing the international hostages, if that is what you call them.

JS: In the first Iraq war...

FE: In the first Iraq war. So he had become a known entity, a comfortable presence, did not appear to be politically ambitious or threatening in that way, who was easy going but able. And, of course, many people say that governments don't look for strong dynamic political actors for Secretary-General. They want someone who's going to do what they want him to do. I don't know enough about the politics in Washington to have a view on what forces came together to deliver this verdict, but I do know that on Boutros-Ghali, the Americans felt that they had been trumped by the French and I think on the next election of the Secretary-General they weren't going to be caught sleeping at the wheel. They identified the candidate they wanted, they maneuvered to get him elected and they succeeded.

I was with Kofi Annan when he went to Washington for the first time and it was extraordinary because it was like everyone was scripted to praise him, and that included in the Congress. And I believe that Madeleine Albright was already working with Jessie Helms to come up with some kind of a compromise on the funding issue. President Clinton turned out at the reception and said all these warm, wonderful words. Kofi Annan then met



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with Jessie Helms and Jessie Helms said to him, "you know I asked my staff to look into your background and try to find somebody who doesn't like you and they couldn't find anybody that doesn't like you; everybody likes you; I like you," And that was the beginning of a partnership. But it was all, I think, done by an agreed upon plan at the outset. I think Congress wanted to avoid the Article 19 loss of vote because the arrears were getting astronomical. They were looking for a political compromise. Helms wanted something from Madeleine Albright on the reorganization of the State Department. She was willing to make that concession. They cut a deal and the Helms/Biden legislation went through, and the solution was found. And Kofi Annan got credit for having resolved that.

Some of his advisors said, how can you go to Washington as your first trip, because everyone is saying that you are America's man? Shouldn't you go to a third-world country, some other member of the permanent five of the Security Council? His answer was, "I'd go anywhere to solve a problem of a billion dollars owed to me." Those weren't his exact words, but that was the thrust of what he said. And it made sense. Here was problem number one: US arrears. I think issue number one for any Secretary-General is relations with United States. You get that right first. On whether he was a good manager or not, Madeleine Albright, I think, was one of the worst managers, if you talk to anyone in the State Department who worked under her. So maybe it takes one to know one. But I think the criticism I've heard of Kofi Aman as a manager is, yes he delegates, but maybe he

delegates too much. He is intensely loyal; and maybe too loyal. So he selects friends who are capable but he keeps them on too long. So he kept Iqbal Riza too long but he was so loyal to Iqbal Riza, he wouldn't let him go when Iqbal wanted to go and Iqbal probably should have gone as chief of staff.

So, I don't know, I sense, as a manager, I have very good vibrations from how he runs the Secretariat -- it seems to me, by the book. No Secretary-General ever had a cabinet; he created a cabinet. He holds regular meetings, not just because we're good at meetings here at the UN, but through meetings you share information. Boutros-Ghali had three principal Under Secretaries-General on the 38th floor, who managed everything. Kofi Annan eliminated those three jobs and let the heads of department deal directly with him, report directly to him, and then sit in on his weekly cabinet meeting where he could hear directly from them. Boutros-Ghali would only let Mr. [Chinmaya] Gharekhan brief the Security Council. Kofi Annan would let a D-2 report to the Security Council, if that D-2 was the most knowledgeable person on the subject they were asking us for information on. So, it's just one thing after another, that to me it makes eminent good sense, seems like a perfectly logical way to better run a bureaucracy, these things that he's done. And you can't believe that his predecessors never thought of these ideas

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Has he been a brilliant success? No, I mean, but he keeps trying. He put in results-based budgeting. I was told that results-based budgeting was already so widely spread throughout the world that it wasn't a brilliant new idea, but he introduced it anyway and he got governments to accept it. He's tried to revamp the personnel department, an impossible task probably. I don't think he's succeeded there, but anyway he's made one try and he's about to make another try. He knows how the bureaucracy works and I think he continues to try to make it work better. I would argue that he has succeeded more than any of his predecessors that I am familiar with, in adapting this place, also at a time in history when its role is changing. The end of the Cold War meant that the UN became operational to an extraordinary degree. It wasn't just the place where meetings were held.

In 1993, the UN was the world's largest consumer of charter aircraft services, why? Because we had peacekeeping missions in 17 places with some 75,000 people involved. The military had to be rotated every six months. You had to bring in food and equipment and all the rest. That took skill. We didn't have those skills at the time particularly, but over the last 10-15 years we've been evolving them and he was, of course, as the head of peacekeeping, he was at the heart of where that action was and where that new side of the UN was emerging. A terribly exciting time for the UN and he was in the most exciting place. Did anyone criticize him for running peacekeeping badly? No I think peacekeeping was run reasonably well under

him, adapting all the time to these new challenges.

JS: Right, there is still another side to this question, which is very important I think. I believe that in the second segment of the Volcker report he was criticized for inadequate administrative control. That is the main criticism and the only real criticism. This got played up in the press, so my question here is: has his profile, his public profile become one now of an inadequate administrator even if within the Secretariat the image is different?

FE: I'm not sure that even within the administration that he is recognized as a gifted administrator, so maybe it's just me who thinks that. The Volcker report, I think so far, is the elephant that gave birth to the mouse. They said that he should have followed up more rigorously on his son's connection to Cotecna, but his son lied about his connection to Cotecna. He has rather bravely said, "Yes, I accept your criticism; I could have done things better." If you were around in the 1990s, it wasn't the Secretariat that was in the driver's seat on the Oil-for-Food program. It was a wild, chaotic time. The Soviet Union didn't exist anymore; every government was trying to redefine a foreign policy for itself in terms that made sense and nobody knew what made sense.

The Secretariat's role on Oil-for-Food was not particularly significant and a much more significant finding by Volcker in the first report was that the Secretariat had managed the program competently; that the controllers' work, the auditors' work, was all done competently. Now later on in the program they felt that there should have been more auditors and maybe that could have been done a little bit better. But that's a conclusion by Volcker that is basically ignored by everybody and that reflects not on Kofi Annan so much as on Boutros-Ghali and really not on Boutros-Ghali but the international civil servants that have been around for decades doing the budget, doing the controller's work and so on. It was done competently and I think the Secretariat by and large is made up of people who do their jobs reasonably well. Now what do you compare that with? The average government? How does the average civil service of a national government even a big one like the United States, how does that stack up? I think we compare reasonably well with the State Department or some other national bureaucracy here in the States.

JS: Again, another question that really is in the administrative area. In all of your press briefings as spokesman, I haven't heard you mention, give too much mention to the Deputy Secretary-General, who supposedly is in charge of the whole area of coordination and I suppose the implementation of reform. Why is this? Why has no real effort been made to give a public profile to this new position, which was created by Kofi Annan?

FE: I think it's her personality. We were told when her job was created, that we were to give her the same treatment we gave him. But, they just don't compare; she was the classic vice-president, the classic number two, working in the shadow of the boss and we concentrated on the boss. She also, as an individual, didn't demand the limelight. She was happy to beaver away with the secondary portfolios, if you will. I sense that she took an enormous load off his plate, that he's gotten his money's worth from her, and from her office. But she never really evolved as the person who would stand in for him. We found that she would be traveling the same time as he was traveling, whereas we thought that she would organize her program to be around when he was away. But, in fact, the chief of staff was the one who stood in for the Secretary-General when the Secretary-General was away.

So, she was at the other end of the top floor. She had her own little cluster of portfolios which she beavered away at diligently and well, in my view. She did not demand a public profile. Even today, where we have perceived a political need to feed the press, and in Washington our Information Center there is desperate to feed the Congress with nuts and bolts information on the process of reform--for example, she has evolved two new financial disclosure points in the wake of the scandals about Maurice Strong's taking money from Tongsun Park and so on--and we thought "Gee, wouldn't it be great to say we're working on new forms? We have two in draft; a simplified one where people who do one dollar a year or when actually employed, and a more complex one for full-time staff." No, not a word, didn't want a word breathed of it. It's her perception of the job which is not conducive to publicity. We brought her to the briefing room a few times. We thought she did well, but of course in this Oil-for-Food time, the rabid critics among the press began to tear her apart the way they were tearing the Secretary-General apart. She didn't like it and she doesn't show much inclination to come back to the briefing room, the press briefing room, again soon.

5/10/05- Final Side [Here follows the final segment of the 10May interview.]

FE: [talking here about the reform of the Security Council] With 24 members, I just can't imagine that the Security Council becomes better, except in that it might be more representative--that's good, so that anything it does might be seen as more legitimate even though they don't see it doing more. We'll just have to wait and see how that turns out.

What I don't know is whether the stain of Oil-for-Food will ever go away. Whether people will say one day, "Oh, we must have been wrong about that, that Kofi Annan; it seems he was a decent guy after all. He was being beaten up by right wing ideologies. He really was an honest and good leader who headed the UN at an extraordinary time in its history and really was the right man for the job, came from a place no one expected, the Secretariat, came as a result of an extraordinary political circumstance, where a US Secretary of State hated a Secretary-General who hated her back. And who in any case was perhaps the wrong man for the wrong time and there he was. And isn't it great that we got Kofi Annan, and isn't it great that he brought to the Organization the intimate knowledge of it that no previous Secretary-General had and was able to exploit that for its general improvement at a time when history was giving it a more and more important role to play.

JS: For just a few minutes I want to go back to one quite specific instance of Kofi Annan's achievements. Going back to the Iraq weapons of mass destruction inspection era, he had an early triumph, at least it was called a triumph, when he went to see Saddam Hussein in order to try to alleviate the crisis over the access for inspectors. And at that time it was indeed seen as a great triumph that he had managed to prevent a military operation by the Americans and the British at least against Iraq. Two questions, first as spokesman were you given any guidance as to how to handle this particular trip that the Secretary-General made? Secondly, do you think that he was aware, or were you aware, that within UNSCOM, itself, there was considerable disillusionment with the Secretary-General because of what he had done with Saddam Hussein?

FE: I was kept pretty well informed on the Secretary-General's preparations for the trip. I knew that the Catholic cardinal of New York was on the phone to him, that religious leaders all over the world were appealing to him. And he was feeling that he somehow had some moral obligation to act on behalf of the millions of people who were demonstrating in the streets against military action and, of course, this is what the UN is there for. On the other hand, he realized that the politics of the thing were extremely complex and he could be digging his grave.

He called the Security Council together in his conference room. I don't know how many Secretaries-General did that before. I think this was one of the first times this was done and he said, "I want to go to Iraq; I think the right thing is to go to Iraq, but I'm not going without guidelines from you. You tell me what area of negotiation you want to impose on me." It was most extraordinary; they wouldn't give it to him in writing and in the end the Brits slipped him a piece of paper, unofficially, saying here's what you can do. And in Iraq -- I was with him -- Madeleine Albright was on the phone with him at four o'clock in the morning screaming at him, screaming at him. There was so much at stake.

I got very little guidance there. I was following it as best I could. I remember there were about 300 journalists, 150 TV cameras outside his residence when we got the news that a deal was accepted. They said, "Just go out and say that we've come to an agreement with the Saddam Hussein government in Iraq, but don't take any questions." And I said, "I can't do that." So, I went out and I said, "We have a deal." And I took 20 questions, 25 questions; I just weaved and bobbed. "We have a deal" was the news; that's what--the rest was just filling and so it didn't matter whether I gave them much substance beyond that or not, but I needed to talk to them. Then they went away and filed and then they came back, and I kept going on until it was night time, going out, taking them 50 at a time, and talking to them, talking to them, talking to them. By this time they saw that I was feeding this beast, that I was earning my salary, and didn't matter too much to them what I was saying. They were all distracted by other things.

It bought time. And what we knew, what I understood had to happen, was that the Americans had to say, "Ok, we're going to let Saddam off the hook; we're going to say, okay that's it; sanctions are off and now you behave or else we'll nuke you, or something you know." But the sanctions regime just didn't seem to be viable. Of course, Oil-for-Food was one of the things that gave it viability and more life. But if the Americans weren't going to soften up on Saddam in the coming months, then we knew that this whole thing was for nothing. And instead of softening up, they turned harder and eventually prepared the way for military action.

So, I think we knew at the time it was a bandaid. It was hard not to be exhilarated by the warmth--it was more than warmth; it was almost hysteria, the reception he got when he returned. There was that political error he made in saying , "I can do business with Saddam Hussein", and the conservative in the US congress never forgave him for that. Am I surprised at some in UNSCOM -- we had all kinds of people in UNSCOM, including government operatives from all over the place and it was governments, many governments that didn't want Kofi Annan to do this -- so I wouldn't be surprised that there were people in UNSCOM who didn't want him to do it either, who were so intent on destroying these weapons that Saddam supposedly had, including by taking military action if necessary. No, it doesn't surprise me.

JS: But it wasn't on your mind at the time?

FE: No.

JS: Nobody from UNSCOM was included in the delegation, which was rather significant. But that was not something on your mind as spokesman that you had to explain?

FE: No, and I don't remember any journalists asking me about it.

JS: Final question, Fred, looking to the future, do you have suggestions, do you have thoughts as to how the whole outreach program of the United Nations, the media but even beyond that can be improved, do you have suggestions?

FE: I suspect that as we get more into the big leagues of political action, we're going to have to get more sophisticated at delivering the message. So that I think someone like Mark Malloch Brown is perfectly suited to this kind of new United Nations that's playing with the big guys, where the playing gets rough. I would like the spokesman's office to be isolated from that message delivery. In the spokesman's reunion, you heard Michael Gordon of the New York Times say that the spokesmen in Washington today have no credibility at all. They are all trying to deliver a message. He said, "We know what the message is; what we need is information." So, I would like the spokesman's office to be kept out of that message delivery loop and just to help journalists write informed, accurate articles about the United Nations

On the other hand, I think we may have to play dirty at Mark Malloch Brown's level--not even playing dirty. I remember two years ago, the Secretary-General was going to speak to the opening of the General Assembly. Bush was going to speak on the same day, within the same hour,



and Edward Mortimer said, "Why don't we put the Secretary-General's speech out the day before, so the journalists can write about his speech on the day of delivery and Bush's speech the next day?" And we did that. Well the White House was furious; we had gotten sophisticated on the communications management side and we had scooped their boss and they were very unhappy with that. Well, I think that's what politicians do everywhere and that's maybe what we need to do a bit more as far as the speeches, the timing of the speeches, the location of the speeches and anything Mark Malloch Brown can do to talk to journalists behind the scenes and try to shape the message. But they already know that he's a spinmeister, but he's a quotable spin-master. So, they like him; he's good for their work. He gives them good quotes, but they realize that not everything he says is true, whereas what I try for this office is to give it to them straight.

And when the Fox news guy yesterday in the noon briefing said, "You're trying to spin this a certain way," that drives me crazy. When people on the 38th floor say we need to spin this a certain way, I stop them dead in their tracks. I say, "Sorry, Kofi Annan doesn't spin; it's not what he wants his press people to do. He has a straight, honest relationship with the press and we don't spin because spin assumes deception and we can't have a credible press operation based on deception."

So, yes, I realize we're taking our lumps because we are not sophisticated enough in message management and in doing sharp maneuvers like releasing the Secretary-General's speech a day in advance. We probably need to do more than that, but please don't contaminate the spokesman's office with those kinds of highjinks. I think it undermines the Organization and the Secretary-General.

JS: Thank You.

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Yale-UN Oral History

Interview with Fred Eckhard

May 10, 2005 and June 7, 2005

New York

Interviewer: James Sutterlin

Yale-UN Oral History
Interview with Fred Eckhard
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6/7/05-Side-2 [Much of the second side of this tape was blank, due to a malfunction of the recorder. To replace it, a second interview was conducted on 7 June 2005, the transcript of which follows.]

JS: Fred I want to now go back to some of the nuts and bolts of your job if I might for a moment and ask you, what were the conditions under which you accepted the job of spokesman for the Secretary-General. How was the relationship determined?

FE: Well, I had been in the office for many years, as number three or number four and I had evolved my own sense of how the job should be done. I think I mentioned to you at the seminar [Fred had run a seminar for former spokesman on April 14, 2005.] that Francois Giuliani, who was my boss and the spokesman, one time said something that I thought was clearly,

factually inaccurate in the noon briefing. And I said to him afterwards, "Francois, you know I don't think what you said was right." And he said, "Once I said it, it became right." So I had my own ideas and Francois joked that if ever I took over the office, I would end up firing everybody because I guess it was pretty clear that I judged that it could be done much more professionally than it was being done. But the unusual thing that happened when Kofi Annan was elected Secretary-General was that Silvana Foa, who had lobbied so hard for Boutros-Ghali's re-election, realized that the only graceful thing for her to do was to resign, which she did. And her deputy, Ahmad Fawzi, who had been brought in by Boutros-Ghali, indicated his willingness to stay on in the spokesman's office, but Kofi Annan made it very clear that he would be taken care of but he would be moved out and he was sent to the London Information Center.

JS: In his speeches and reports over the period that Kofi Annan has been Secretary-General, he has introduced certain themes, especially "cultures" -- the culture of reform, culture of development, culture of disarmament; these obviously are themes. I wonder to what extent you feel that he has been successful or you have been successful or others have been successful in getting across an understanding of these rather vague concepts, not just to the American press but to the global press?

FE: We don't concern ourselves too much with themes. Although we have told the speechwriters when there is a really important speech, would the speechwriter come down and do a background briefing for the press embargoed before the speech is delivered and talk about the main ideas, and if there is a theme, talk about how it runs parallel with earlier speeches or big conceptual ideas the Secretary-General has and stands for. The speechwriters again have not done that with any great consistency. So, when it comes though to my office, the journalists want to know what the news is. "What's new here?" Has he said this before? What is he saying for the first time, because that is their business. So we take a rather narrow or parochial view of these grand speeches by saying, "What's quotable and what's new?"

JS: And one of the few really quotable things in a speech over the past year or so has been the Secretary-General's reference to his perception that after the Iraq war and the articulation of the US policy on defense "the United Nations has come to a fork in the road." This is a fairly dramatic statement and I wonder how did you handle this as spokesman at the time? What do you think about it at the present time?

FE: I think the "fork in the road" was probably a rhetorical expression thought up by the speechwriter. It had resonance with the press because first, it is a snappy little saying; second, it implies a dramatic point in history where you face a choice. Then there was the obvious reference

point to the United Nations. So, all of those things I think all of this made this a compelling quote. All we had to do was to say it, to echo it. The Secretary-General said "fork in the road." But it was one of those quotes where the press picked up on it even if we didn't say it. They would have read that speech, skimmed over that speech, and picked up that quote. You have to say the quote was good, and it suited the times and it suited the message. So, our work was done for us by the power of the words and the relevance of the words.

JS: Well, continuing this thought to a certain extent, the Secretary-General has articulated his philosophy pretty well in speeches and reports and so forth. What do you think will be his heritage, assuming he stays for the remaining period of his tenure?

FE: First, I think he will stay till the end. I think he has no choice but to stay to the end. The elements of the political spectrum that have been calling for his resignation are a little bit too far out of the mainstream, even though they have become a powerful voice within the current US administration. But I just think that for him to resign in the face of this very unfair, politically motivated pressure would be to imply guilt. The other side of that is, of course, whether his effectiveness as Secretary-General has been overwhelmed by this unfair perception -- that he is greatly weakened by the scandal of Oil-for-Food and his son's involvement with the company and all the rest of it. And there we kind of look at his body language and his spirit, his inner strength. Does he still have it? And of course after eight and a half years, it isn't just the scandals that wear you down, it's the responsibilities of the job, it's the pace of the work, its your advancing age. He isn't as sprightly, as light-hearted as he was in 1997. He's wearing these heavy chains of eight and a half years of miserable crises. But that said, as a leader, he sees where he wants to go; he has a year and a half left to do it, and I think he has got the moral strength to do it. And therefore I think he has the obligation to soldier on.

JS: What do you think the press, the thinking press, sees as his major contributions?

FE: Well he's gotten all tied up in this UN reform, which, of course, is a bit of a long shot. Hanging your legacy on reforming a bureaucracy as complicated as the UN's and as out of the control of the Secretary-General as chief administrator as the UN is, because governments figure so prominently in every administrative decision, which is reviewed by the General Assembly, the Budget Committee, the Fifth Committee, information policies in the Information Committee and on and on and on. That said, we think, in mid-2005, that his agenda for the summit in September of this year stands a very good chance of moderate success, very little chance of

major failure, and very little chance of major success.

So even without Security Council reform, which we think is, privately, a remote chance right now, but a possible chance, we think that the Assembly will take concrete steps towards setting up a Human Rights Council, and will more or less approve a Peace-building Commission. And that some kind of reform, modest perhaps, maybe a little more significant, we don't know yet, in ECOSOC and the General Assembly will happen. We think the progress on the Millennium Development Goals is picking up. The European Union's commitment to 0.7 percent of GDP for Official Development Assistance is a very positive sign. We think there is going to be, as a result of that, more development assistance than ever before. So I think he's going to be able to hang his hat on that UN reform agenda and say "I accomplished something, something worthwhile."

Continued 6/7/05- Side-3 [This is the continuation of the second interview on 7 June.]

After that his consistent and strong emphasis on human rights, if it could be capped by agreement on a Human Rights Council, that would be a major achievement. There's even talk of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the NPT review, being somehow revived and something accomplished this fall; that would be icing on the cake

It surprises me when people say he's not a particularly good manager because I think he has accomplished what he has so far in the reform agenda by managing the process very carefully. He seems always to have a very clear sense of where he needs to go. He seems to line up his resources and aim them at that goal. If he is set back by an unexpected turn of events, he stops, picks himself up, says, "now, what do I need to do to get to my goal?" and moves on.

He organized for the 2000 Assembly; he wrote the agenda. He didn't leave it to a 191 member states to write the agenda; he wrote the agenda. He asked John Ruggie to work the General Assembly floor for him, to find out what member states were thinking, find out where there are pockets of resistance. He would then deal with those pockets of resistance, explaining to those member states what his objectives were. And now, he's doing the same thing in 2005. He's written the paper; the paper has now been taken over by the President of the General Assembly, who has produced his own paper, but largely, overwhelmingly based on the Secretary-General's ideas. And now, they are marching towards the summit.

He found when traveling around that heads of state didn't know about his reform agenda, so he named five high-level envoys to go speak directly to heads of state. He has advised the President of the Assembly to name

facilitators, to work with small groups within the Assembly to try to move the process forward, keep people focused on the final product, which is his paper that's on the table. It's a degree of organizational management that I think is admirable and effective. I don't know who's going to write that book, but maybe Edward Mortimer, who has been closest to the inside processes of the 38th floor. We will have to see what kind of book he's going to write.

But Kofi Annan is the consummate insider; the Secretariat person who unexpectedly made it to the top, the one Secretary-General with a Masters degree in Management from MIT. This Secretary-General was not a politician, never a politician, whose skin therefore was not sufficiently thick to take the blows that had been thrust at him. It's taken its toll, the public criticism, the assassination of his character by the far right in the United States. And it's true he suffered from what really looked like a classic withdrawal and maybe even depression symptoms after the invasion of Iraq and again more recently. But he's a very centered person. He sits down by himself; he thinks through his problems, focuses on his objectives and picks himself up and keeps going.

He somehow has gotten through this very trying time as an experienced Secretariat member playing big time politics, following what I think most people would acknowledge is a very keen and refined political instinct. And as a personality, he's not a threatening person. He's never been a threatening person. He wants to be friends with everyone. Now there's a down side to that you see in high-stakes politics, but there's a big upside for a Secretary-General who is not supposed to be much of a political player to begin with. So, I think that in part explains his success in the political area. So, there's this overall assessment of him that I hope will survive the Oil-for-Food scandal, of the unexpected success story, the Secretary-General who had innate skills that served him well, who had a personality that was really suited to the job, but who had a commitment to principles of democracy and human rights that guided his policies and in the end led him to achieve substantial success in these areas. And finally, the Secretary-General who as former Controller and former head of Budget and former Head of Personnel and former Head of Peacekeeping and former this and that, with the Economic Commission for Africa, World Health Program and the High Commission for Refugees, he has been all throughout the system and he has had the nuts and bolts jobs at the center of the Secretariat. So, he more than anyone before him and maybe even more than anyone who will come after him, knows where the skeletons are buried and knows how to fix the bureaucracy and did his best to do that. I think Secretariat reform will be the last element in September where we hope we will make some real strides and secure his legacy.

JS: As you were saying, so much in the Secretary-General's present reputation, not

necessarily his legacy, depends on things that are said on the American side and things that are written on the American side. What about your relations as spokesman here with the spokesman of the US Mission who was speaking for at least the US Mission and, to a lesser extent I suppose, as spokesman of the White House?

FE: Well, here you talk about personalities. As an American, I have never been particularly close to the US government. I haven't cultivated contacts in the government, apart from the three years before I was spokesman when I was an Information Officer working primarily on the Hill on budgetary issues. I really don't seek out the Mission's spokesman, who is a rather interventionist spokesman. He calls journalists and screams at them when he thinks that they did not report things in the way the White House would like them to report them. He usually does say White House because he is a political appointee with good contacts in the White House even though he is on the State Department payroll.

I've had a very comfortable but distant relationship with the State Department spokesman. He is more my model of a spokesman [than the US Mission spokesman] - low key, soft-spoken and tries to stay on message on 150 different subjects. That's Richard Boucher. And Richard gave me really the model relationship between the spokesman and the boss. He said between him and Colin Powell that though protocol never puts his name on any list, he can sit in on any meeting he wants and most extraordinarily he said, "no piece of paper crosses the Secretary's desk that I'm not allowed to see." That you have to assume would include very highly sensitive documents and communications. I have not achieved that. There are still very small policy meetings that the Secretary-General holds that he does not invite me into. I have always felt that I and my staff should be actually part of his staff and not part of the information department. I have not achieved that, so I am leaving this job having failed to get Richard Boucher's status with the Secretary-General. I don't know if anyone ever will. It's partly the Secretary-General's own personality and style. He is much better than his predecessors in terms of his openness to me and his openness to the media, but it's still got a ways to go to be a spokesman's heaven.

JS: But the US spokesman doesn't call you occasionally and say "why did you say this, why did you say that?"

FE: To his credit no, but when you say the US spokesman. . .

JS: I mean the Mission spokesman

FE: The Mission's spokesman--oddly enough, he calls me from time to time, but if it's criticism it's veiled criticism. And I would like to think it is because he holds me in respect. The journalists, I'm told by the

journalists, that with the journalists he is downright abusive at times, extremely aggressive, but then he, I have to assume, was getting some prods not just from the State Department but also the White House as well. So, maybe it's the culture of this administration, George W. Bush's administration, that pushes him in those extreme directions. But with me, he has almost always been a gentleman and has not, or if so very rarely, interfered with my delivery of a message.

JS: Thank you very, very much, Fred, for this very valuable interview.

FE: My pleasure.



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