Yale-UN Oral History Project

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James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer
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NOTICE
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JSS Sir Anthony, I would like first to express appreciation for your willingness to participate in this Yale University oral history project. And if we could begin by talking about the Falklands/Malvinas crisis and war, would you be kind enough to state exactly what your position was in New York at the United Nations at the time the crisis began?

AP Well, I was the British Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York at the time. I had been since 1979. I'd had a fair amount of experience over the years of the Falklands Problem. I'd been assistant head of our American department in the Foreign Office in the early 60's before the question came onto the agenda at the General Assembly. And then I'd been tangentially involved with it when I was head of Chancery - that is, political counselor - in the British Mission to the United Nations in New York in the late 60's and early 70's. And of course I'd dealt with it from time to time in the Foreign Office as an Under-Secretary. So I was fairly familiar with the problem; but at the same time, of course, it had never been on the agenda of the Security Council and since the early discussions in 1965
it had only really been marginally on the General Assembly agenda. So it wasn’t what one would describe as a mainstream subject in my Mission.

JSS

That brings up the first question I wanted to pose. And that has to do with the initial difficulty in South Georgia when an Argentine group was sent there. In retrospect, do you think that the Secretary-General of the United Nations should have been alerted to the possibility of real conflict, with the intention of preventing a conflict from happening at that early stage? Or, indeed, did the UK think at all of turning to the Secretary-General at that point in fear of what might result from this beginning in South Georgia?

AP

Looking back on it now I’ve often felt that this was a classic case of the failure of preemptive diplomacy and that maybe if the Secretary-General himself had had his own sources of information he might have taken an initiative. The problem was, to be honest about it, that it was not in the interest of either party to bring this question to the Secretary-General or to the Security Council. Argentina, as we now know, because they were planning to invade the Falklands; Britain, because we were so much in a minority over the sovereignty question that we were naturally anxious to keep it away from the Security Council and, indeed, away from active consideration within any United Nations organ. Because
by 1982, I mean we were really in a minority of single figures, taking the whole membership, as it regards sovereignty. We judged that if we did do anything like that, if we took it to the Secretary-General for his good offices, or if we said that there was a threat because of South Georgia and took it to the Security Council, that we would immediately be outnumbered because of the series of Non-Aligned Movement decisions on sovereignty. So it really didn't cross our minds, this inhibition was so deep-seated with us, that it really didn't cross our minds to internationalize the issue. And, of course, it's equally true that the government did not foresee that the South Georgia incident presaged an invasion of the islands themselves.

JSS The movement was quick thereafter, however, and it was not very many weeks before the matter was taken to the Security Council by your government. At that point it has been reported that the American Ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, was fairly active and that in fact perhaps now knowing of the British hesitation in any event, advised you or your Mission against going to the Security Council on the Falklands question. Can you confirm this?

AP Yes I can indeed. Our position was this - I mean, right up to a few days before the actual invasion we in the Mission still had no intention of taking this question to the Council. About 3 or 4 days before the invasion, I
suppose, I was contacted by the Foreign Office and warned that there was a possibility of an invasion and asked, on a contingency basis, whether I could do anything preemptive in advance. I said I thought I could. I could call an emergency meeting of the Security Council to sort of try perhaps at best in a hurry to get a statement out of the President on behalf of the Council members. And I left it with the Foreign Office that this is what I would do and I was just waiting for the trigger. Well the trigger came the day before the invasion and I mean because of the urgency of the question - it was lunchtime in New York - I telephoned all my colleagues on the Security Council personally and told them I was calling an emergency meeting immediately because an invasion of the Falkland Islands was impending. A number of my colleagues, who really scarcely had ever heard of the Islands, just simply didn’t believe me. One or two thought that I was joking, one of my colleagues reminded that April Fool jokes (it was April 1) ended at midday, therefore I was offside (because it was 12:45). And when I rang Jeane Kirkpatrick, she said that she thought I had taken leave of my senses and that, you know, there should be no question of a Security Council meeting, and indeed, that she would oppose it. So I suggested to her that if she wanted to oppose it she’d have to do so in the Chamber in
public because this was serious and I was going ahead. Well, we assembled, I suppose an hour or two later, under the Presidency of Zaire, in the consultations room. And fourteen of us were there, there was nobody in the United States seat next to me, which eventually - rather late - was filled by a relatively junior member of the Mission who told me that he had instructions neither to help me nor hinder me. So I explained the situation to my colleagues and suggested that all we had time for was a statement from the President because the invasion was pending overnight. And that’s what we got - the statement was prepared and read out and that was that. Nobody spoke except myself, I think - and the President. My Argentine colleague remained silent throughout this particular exercise.

By the next day though the Council met again and the resolution was put forward which was a British draft, and I wondered - in drafting resolution 502 (which I suppose your Mission was responsible for) what was the reasoning in omitting any reference to the Secretary-General? How concerned were you at that time with the fact that the Secretary-General was from Latin America? Was this an element in your thinking?

No, I don’t think it was. You know, we drafted 502 in the mission the night before the invasion after we got the statement from the President and we cleared it
overnight with London (I can’t remember whether London proposed any changes or not). We had a number of considerations in mind in drafting this resolution, and in the tactics of presenting it. We decided that we would only have a chance of getting a resolution if we pushed it all through very quickly; that if we allowed time for the normal consultation process, that the whole exercise would run into the sand. So we decided to present it in final form from the outset, not to put down a working paper or a blue draft, or anything like that, but to put down a black draft, in final form, and insist on a vote in 24 hours. We drafted it in Chapter VII not so much because we thought that a mandatory resolution would have a stronger effect on Argentina but to avoid the possibility which came up in the debate of losing our vote under a Chapter VI resolution as being a party to the dispute. So that made us decide on Chapter VII, and that was a wise precaution as it turned out. There was no ulterior motive in not bringing the Secretary-General into the act, as far as I can remember. Certainly the question of his being a Latin American never entered our minds. It’s ironic when one comes to think of it that on more than one occasion we voted for Carlos Ortiz de Rozas as Secretary-General and without a Russian veto we might have had an Argentine Secretary-General at the time. But that’s in parenthesis. I think the reason we drafted it
as we did on the negotiations - the final paragraph - was probably because that’s how the negotiations had gone for the previous 17 years. I mean we had had direct negotiations with Argentina and we had then informed the Secretary-General of the results of those negotiations and I think what we were really aiming to do was to go back to the exact status quo ante and resume negotiations once we had got a withdrawal from the Islands. So there wasn’t any, there really wasn’t any special motive in leaving the Secretary-General out.

The Secretary-General was, however, at that point a fairly new quantity, he had not been Secretary-General very long and as the initial mediation efforts of General Haig took place, Pérez de Cuéllar, very carefully refrained from any interference at all. I wondered if this attitude on the part of the Secretary-General, of great caution, actually enhanced his reputation on the British side?

Yes, I think at the time there’s no doubt that it did. I mean we felt that there was a great deal of pressure on the part of Argentina, Argentina’s friends, and some non-aligned countries to engage the United Nations right from the very word "go" in the negotiation process. We weren’t particularly hostile to this but the Americans had jumped in, Haig had jumped in, and we felt that you know, the United States with its influence in Latin
America and Argentina in particular this was a good thing and I think we admired the way in which Pérez de Cuéllar managed to kind of keep the United Nations out of the act and give Haig a free run. Looking back on it now with hindsight, after all these years, I think probably we all made a mistake and that if the Secretary-General had been the mediator from the outset, maybe there would have been a better chance for a peaceful outcome. But by the time he got into the act, Haig having failed, the situation had become so kind of fouled up, as it were, diplomatically that his task was that much more difficult. I mean in a sense I flatly blame myself for not seeing this early enough and saying to the Foreign Office, "Wouldn’t it be better if we scrapped the Americans and went to the Secretary-General right from Day One?" But it would have been very very difficult to have seen that at the time because the United States seemed so obviously the best bet as the mediator.

This is a subject I’d like to come back to a little later because it does, I think, point to the importance of timing in the whole operation. But before we get to that I wanted to ask what your assessment at the time was of, not just of the Secretary-General, but of the team of his advisors who were working with him, especially as the United Nations role became more prominent. Were there any views on your part, any concern or otherwise, with
regard to those people who were working with the Secretary-General and advising him?

No, I don't think so. Quite honestly, for various reasons we didn't really know them terribly well. I mean Rafee Ahmed had never really crossed our paths in a very profound way in the Secretariat. We didn't know Alvaro de Soto very well, again. So, no, I don't really think we had a view. We knew, because the Secretary-General had told us, that he had established this task force, or whatever he called it, to work up background knowledge and all the rest and keep abreast of the thing in case he was brought in. We felt that as he was keeping himself out of it that we shouldn't get too much involved in that so we adopted a kind of very sub-conscious hands-off policy. We knew they were working away. No, I don't think had a view particularly. I'd know Pérez de Cuéllar of course for some time before and I had considerable confidence in him, in his discretion and in his skill as a negotiator and all the rest of it. So I had no kind of apprehension as to what, you know, he might be doing or the kind of people he might choose. I was perfectly happy about it all, and the same was true in London, of course.

Now on the 19th of April the Secretary-General met with you and with the Argentine Permanent Representative to explain the services that the United Nations might
provide, including a kind of umbrella. This was at the time of the mediation of General Haig, so it was not to interfere but simply to offer anything that might be helpful in terms of this United States mediation. There was actually no response, I think, from any of the parties. The Americans were also told. Was this intervention on the part of the Secretary-General seen as useful at that point or were these suggestions that he put forward?

AP This was before the failure of Haig, yes. I would say that our reaction to that as far as I can remember (and my memory is getting a bit dim on that particular phase of the thing) was fairly neutral. I mean I think we were still hoping that the Haig thing would succeed. We realized, and of course this was confirmed by the Secretary-General at the time, that if Haig did fail that the Secretary-General was ready and waiting to move into the action. So we were really - I think our reaction to that was that we were put on notice, we felt we had been put on notice that the Secretary-General was ready and willing to act if and when Haig moved out of the action. But otherwise I don’t think we regarded it as, I think we regarded it as fairly routine, the kind of thing we were expecting from him, knowing what his people had been up to during the previous weeks.

JSS In a sense the Secretary-General was acting in the dark
since he was not kept informed by any of the parties, least of all by General Haig. Did this coincide with the wishes of the British side?

Again, I don't think that there was any kind of conscious desire to keep the Secretary-General in the dark. The shuttle with Haig was proceeding in a fairly confused way and I myself was, you know, to some extent in the dark because the meetings having been face to face, it was some time before the reports got back to me. And Haig, himself, it was some time before he would be debriefed, and so on. And through that period, the Haig shuttle period, I was much busier in the United Nations, defending our corner in various irrelevant, unrelated organs of the United Nations, which happened to be sitting at the time, making our point, driving off Argentine diplomatic counter attacks, and so on. My whole mission really was very busy on that kind of activity. We were obviously following the Haig shuttle closely. I don't think that, I certainly didn't consciously feel, "My God, we mustn't let the Secretary-General know what's going on," and vice versa, really. It was all kind of flowing on and you know, we knew he was in the background and I just don't think it occurred to us that we ought to be keeping him informed or that we should be keeping him in the dark.

And your American colleague apparently was not well
informed, either as to what was going on...

AP Well, you see - I again, I mean that period between the invasion and the end of the Haig mission, I saw very little of my American colleague because I couldn’t think of anything particularly helpful that she could add on my side. I was much busier lobbying people like my European partners and Commonwealth representatives, non-aligned representatives and people like that, driving home the message of 502 that, you know, we weren’t talking about sovereignty, we were talking about the occupation of territory by force and aggression and all the rest of it. So I was much busier on that tack. I knew exactly the kind of dilemma that my American colleague was in and so there was no point in going into that. It was just kind of gossip that I heard.

JSS Now, a rather critical point arrived, I think it was on the 30th of April. On that day the Secretary-General met with the Argentine Foreign Minister, Costa Mendez and I think he met with you as well, and both you and the Argentine representative welcomed the prospect of an intervention by the Secretary-General (Parsons: Correct), the Haig mission having failed. But at the same time, it became known that there was a Peruvian initiative which, I might say, the Secretary-General knew nothing about.

AP Absolutely right.

JSS But can you sort out what the UK position was at this
Right, I can. Our Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, had come out to Washington to talk to the Americans, really closing down the Haig mission. And then he came on and spent the night with me in my apartment and we arranged a working dinner in my apartment, just his team, my team and Pérez de Cuéllar's team for Pérez de Cuéllar to launch his "set of ideas", I think he called them. Now, as you say, this was the 30th of April. As far as I can remember, there was no preliminary discussion between Pym and myself, or between Pym and Pérez de Cuéllar about a Peruvian initiative. But throughout the evening, which went on from about 7:45 until midnight, members of my staff kept on coming in, bring in sheets of Reuters and AP and UPI tickers with reports on the Peruvian initiative. And these were passed around the table and everybody expressed some surprise, Pérez de Cuéllar, Francis Pym, myself, everybody else. I had seen one or two telegrams from our embassy in Lima about something very sketchy on the lines of an initiative, but nothing you would call firm or solid. Pym equally, from his talks in Washington, had heard that there was something like this in the wind. But as the evening went on, it seemed to be kind of building up, somewhere else as it were outside the building in which we were, and Pérez de Cuéllar obviously wasn't disposed to take it seriously.
He had his own ideas, he saw that he was going to run with the ball and he just didn’t know what this was all about. And I recall very well when we came out, when Pérez de Cuéllar left, we came down in the elevator and there was a mass of journalists outside my apartment building. (I had a formal complaint from the supervisor two days later for blocking the road and all the rest of it). And all these journalists were simply shouting questions about the Peruvian initiative - nothing else. And neither Pérez de Cuéllar nor Francis Pym really knew what to say. They said they’d been discussing something terribly different, and they’d heard of this and so on. But it was never addressed - between Pérez de Cuéllar and Francis Pym - as a serious option to what was then going to go ahead, which was the Secretary-General's negotiation. Nor, should I add, because I think it was also on that day that the Belgrano was sunk, nor was that discussed at all.

The Argentine view of this Peruvian initiative is quite different. They apparently took it very seriously, and indeed, there is some evidence now that it was carefully coordinated with General Haig and the American side and the Argentines saw it as basically a continuation of the Haig effort. But according to Costa Mendez, the first version that was given to them he felt offered the solution; that this was it, this was going to be the
solution to the crisis. And then he contends that a correction was made in the version that was given to them by the Peruvians and it had to do with the critical subject of the "wishes, aspirations or intentions" of the Islanders. And on the Argentine side they are totally convinced that there was a British intervention at that point in order to bring, presumably through General Haig, the Peruvians to change two or three words as a correction to their earlier draft. Can you comment on that?

AP Well, I can't, not through any diplomatic reluctance. All I can say is this, that I spent certainly half of that day in the company of my Foreign Secretary who had just come up from Washington and I took him to the airport the following day, we knew each other well. We talked alone, we talked with Pérez de Cuéllar, we talked on the way to the airport and at no point was this subject mentioned. We only talked about the Peruvian initiative in the context of these public communiques which were being put in front of us and which took us all by surprise. So I can say with absolute certainty that if words were changed, they certainly weren't changed at the initiative of the Foreign Secretary that day because I can swear to that.

JSS It was just two days later on 2nd of May that the
Secretary-General gave his formal aide memoire to both of the parties. He thought (but again, he was not really fully aware even then of the course of the Haig mediation) that there were two innovative aspects to his proposal. One was the concept of simultaneity of all actions that would be taken and second was the concept that they would be provisional measures within the definition given of provisional measures in the Charter.

In accepting the Secretary-General’s points, his aide memoire as a framework for negotiations, did you on the British side, see these two points as important, as offering something different from what had been done in the previous negotiations? Did you look on the aide memoire as really giving some hope of a different approach which might lead to success?

No, I don’t think we did. I must say I don’t think we kind of thought, "Well here are two new elements in this," the ones you have just pointed out. I don’t think we saw, at least I certainly didn’t see it that way. I realized, and I pointed it out to my government, that we were on the verge of another major negotiation obviously enough, and that the Secretary-General was bound, really by the nature of the United Nations and its procedures, was bound to elaborate his set of ideas (which covered a very small amount of one sheet of paper) into a treaty. And that this elaboration was going to take place in a
negotiation. I think we realized that but I don't think that we picked out those two points that you mentioned. A lot of what was in the set of ideas replicated what had been in the Haig mission. I can't remember offhand where the differences lay. I would say that when we started out I thought to myself that because Argentina had all along expressed a wish to take this into the United Nations that maybe there was a slightly better chance of success now that the Secretary-General was getting down to business. But having followed as best I could the Haig mission, I didn't put the chances of success higher than 20 percent, whatever was agreed between the two sides, because of the evidence of total confusion in the Argentine system in Buenos Aires itself.

JSS: Now in this aide memoire of the Secretary-General the two most sensitive issues were not mentioned at all - sovereignty and the wishes, aspirations or the position of the Islands. I assume that this was noticed on your side, (AP: Certainly) and the fact that the Argentine side accepted it as a framework for negotiations, did you see that as offering some encouragement?

AP: Well I think we were slightly encouraged by this but the real encouragement came a little further down the line. I can't quite remember the formulations now but when they started out down the road our problem was that the
Argentines were insisting on the end being clear before the beginning started, that every move would actually finish up with a transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. We refused to accept that and we insisted that we would not negotiate any of the details, any of the items in the Secretary-General’s list, we wouldn’t elaborate any of them until we had an assurance that this was not the case. That the final negotiations would be open-ended. They could end up anyhow — with independence, with the acceptance of our sovereignty, with acceptance of theirs. We were open. We got that. It took a longish time, some days, the only point, I think, at which I became optimistic. I felt that if Argentina was prepared to do that, that it wasn’t simply a long drawn out means of transferring sovereignty to them, that then there was hope.

So, carrying on with that point, I was saying that I believe the Secretary-General felt that in the course of these rather intensive negotiations that followed the aide memoire (I think there were 30 meetings that the Secretary-General had with the British and Argentine sides) which were devoted in some cases simply to phrases or sentences the Secretary-General at least concluded that the sovereignty problem as a block to an ultimate settlement had been at least put aside. And was
this your conclusion?

AP: Yes, yes.

JSS: But very shortly after that, at least from the Secretary-General's point of view, a very critical and seemingly hopeful point of the negotiations, you were called back to London.

AP: Yes, well what had really happened by then, this was about the 14th or 15th of May, by that time we had actually elaborated - oh I can't remember, 13 or 14 articles in what would have been a treaty, an agreement. And the elaboration of all these articles had taken a lot of trouble, a lot of time, a lot of pain and God knows how many telegrams I'd sent off to London and how many I'd had back and how many amendments and counter-amendments there had been, and so on.

JSS: Could I just interrupt to ask you a secondary question. Did you find this method of negotiations, which were so-called proximity negotiations, useful?

AP: Yes, it seemed to me we were really making progress. It was quite obvious that there were severe problems, never mind maybe we'll come to which ones they were in substance, but they were severe problems. But we seemed to me by around that weekend, as it were, when I flew home, we seemed to be pretty close to agreement on most of the important things: the principle of mutual withdrawal, the principle of an interim period.
administration on the Islands, the principle of a final set of parallel negotiations for a definitive solution, and so on and so forth. There were one or two points — we wanted to separate the notion of South Georgia, South Sandwich from the Falklands. This seemed to us reasonable enough since the basis of the original claims were completely different. Argentina wanted them held together. The question of the Islanders and what happened to them during the interim period was also unresolved. But I suppose the momentum of negotiation, the modus operandi, which meant that article after article was kind of built up with a few square brackets made me feel that we really were getting somewhere. At the same time the whole business was becoming incredibly complicated because of the amendments and counter-amendments and all the rest of it. And so it was quite obvious to me that sooner or later I was going to have to go home and we were going to have to look at this around the table with our War Cabinet, the prime minister and all the rest of it. I can’t remember who suggested that I should come home, whether it was me or London — it doesn’t matter — if it hadn’t been suggested I would have suggested it, myself. I remember that there was a kind of feeling in the opposite camp that this was a sinister move on our part. On the contrary, it wasn’t at all, it was really an attempt to produce a clean text. There was
a feeling in London that we had reached the end of progress by the means we had been using. We were beginning to go around in circles, the whole thing had to be brought to a head fairly soon. There were practical reasons for this, too. The task force was approaching the Islands. Obviously it couldn't toss around in rough seas for six months. So something had to happen - either there was going to be a peaceful withdrawal or there was going to have to be a military action. So we needed to bring it all to our head. So back I went and Nico Henderson from Washington was summoned back as well and we met up at Chequers in this very historic meeting with the War Cabinet.

JSS And at that time, is that when the draft British interim agreement was prepared?

AP Yes, in effect this was based on the text that we prepared with the Secretary-General, that he had initiated. When I got down to the meeting the latest draft as amended and re-amended and agreed, and so forth and so forth, between me and London was in front of us. And we went through it with the prime minister in the chair over a very very protracted period, of 5 to 6 hours. We went through it, word by word, comma by comma, line by line, page by page, over and over again, and in fact made fairly few amendments. there was certainly insistence on what one might call a more democratic role
for the Islanders during the transitional period. That was a point on which we dwelt for a long time with Chapter 11 of the Charter in front of us. What we agreed in the end was very close to what I brought home, really, from the Secretary-General and indeed, in essence, it was mutual withdrawal, a 6 months interim period, extendable, parallel negotiations, a United Nations administration, with more or less equal status for Argentina and Britain alongside that administration for 6 months. I thought that it was a far more positive offer on our part than anything I had ever expected to have agreed in London. I remember saying to the assembled meeting, and because we had been through it in such detail - line by line, I said, "Now, let's look at this as a whole and I hope that everybody realizes exactly what the implications of this are if Argentina accepts it." And yes, this was agreed, and I think it was agreed at this time that whether or not Argentina accepted, that this would still be published in the House of Commons. So it was, there was no nonsense about it. And when I flew back the following morning on the Concorde, I think I had in my hands the only copy in existence of what the British Government was prepared to agree, which I gave to Pérez de Cuéllar that morning.

Was this text, this agreement, from the British point of view subject to further negotiations or was it a take-it-
or-leave-it?

It was basically a take-it-or-leave-it. There was a very strong feeling that there was nothing more to negotiate, that this was a very very reasonable offer. And we set a 48-hour deadline on acceptance or rejection, not so much again as a device or because we wanted to land troops or anything like that, but we really felt that everybody had had so much time - including the Haig mission and the Pérez de Cuéllar mission - that there was absolutely no point in procrastinating any longer. There it was, it was as clear as a bell. And when I gave it to Pérez de Cuéllar, if my memory serves me right, he was very positively impressed, he hadn't expected anything as positive as this to come back from London. Nor did he demur at all at the 48-hour deadline. He too appeared to think (and I can't speak for him but this was the impression I got from our meeting) that this was perfectly reasonable and that this gave Argentina plenty of time to look at it because after all, they had themselves something which was very close to this text. There weren't any major changes in it.

There was one point in it that I think can be seen as a definite concession to the Argentine position and that is the use of a reference in talking about the Islanders to an earlier United Nations document -GA resolution 2065 - rather than speaking specifically of the "wishes or the
aspirations." The earlier document had referred to the "interests". This was intended, I assume, as a...

Yes, I think this was intended in that sense. I mean, there was a discussion as to whether we should include any mention of these previous resolutions but we decided to do so. It was a very serious - and I don't say this in any propaganda sense - it was a very serious effort to get a peaceful resolution of the thing. We did discuss round the table what the chances were of Argentine acceptance. And I can remember saying that I didn't put it much higher than 25 to 30 per cent because I rather doubted whether the Argentine government was in a position to get its act together in Buenos Aires. But I think I also remember expressing a view that they would be absolutely bloody fools if they didn't accept it.

The other thing was done in regard to this draft interim agreement - it was published very quickly. Why?

Well the sequence was, I handed it to Pérez de Cuéllar on a Monday and he got the Argentine reply on Wednesday. He telephoned me on Wednesday evening and said that it was in Spanish and could I wait till the following morning, and I said no because I would miss a whole day with the five-hour time gap, I had to have a summary that evening. So I went down at about 11:30 at night. He was alone with Alvaro de Soto and Alvaro read out a summary translation. I realized straightaway that the Argentine
reply didn’t even address the proposals, article by article, and it just seemed to me to be a lot of kind of negative rhetoric. I realized that it was a refusal, I remember saying to Pérez de Cuéllar that, he mustn’t blame himself, I didn’t think any man could have done more but he and I both realized that a lot of young men who were alive today were going to be dead in a week or two weeks’ time. And this filled me with regret. I reported it accordingly to London and then on the following day Pérez de Cuéllar decided to have a last attempt and talked to Galtieri on the telephone and also to Mrs. Thatcher. And he made two proposals to Mrs. Thatcher, I can’t remember what they were in detail and she took them on board and I remember thinking at the time that they really didn’t cause us very much difficulty. But Galtieri never responded to whatever was proposed to him by Pérez de Cuéllar and so then the prime minister did go ahead and publish the proposal to the House of Commons. I’m not entirely sure of her motives but I think it was right. There was a great deal of speculation going on in Britain at the time. There was a great deal of worry in certain elements of the Conservative Party that, you know, the Islanders are going to be sold down the river and you know, there was a lot of secret diplomacy going on that people didn’t understand and there was a certain amount of turbulence
in the political arena in Britain and I think that she felt she must clear the air. I think it was a right move. As it was of course, she came under very severe criticism from the whole right wing for having made such enormous concessions. I remember when I came home in July I was asked straightaway to address a large meeting of members of Parliament in one of the House of Common’s committee rooms and what with one thing and another I rather expected to be greeted as a kind of hero. But not a bit of it, I got a very very rough time indeed from the Conservative MP’s for allegedly persuading the Prime Minister to sell out the Islanders to Argentina in this particularly negotiation.

The Secretary-General then made a further effort and presented yet another aide memoire in which he spelled out what he thought had been agreed to between the sides and the issues which had not yet been agreed. He made certain suggestions which I think were similar to those he had already mentioned to Mrs. Thatcher on the phone as to how perhaps these could be overcome. What was your reaction then at this point, did you see this as an act of desperation on the part of the Secretary-General?

I think I did. I think I did. Once I saw the Argentine reply on that Wednesday evening I knew that the game was up, that it wasn’t going to fly, that it was all over. If the reply had been close to the articles that had been
put to them and there'd been room for more negotiation on say some minor details, or even one or two points of principle, fair enough, we could have gone on. But as it was the reply didn't address the draft text article by article. I realized that it was so far off that it was irrecoverable and that even in spite of the Secretary-General's efforts the die was cast. There was going to have to military action, we were bound to be back in the Security Council and my job was again to fight our corner as best I could in the Security Council.

JSS And any instructions you might have received with regard to this May 19 memoire of the Secretary-General were dependent on Argentine response?

AP Exactly. The Prime Minister made it plain to me that, okay, we'd said this is our last word - (but I can't remember whether she said this or I thought this) - I mean my judgment was these points didn't give us all that much difficulty but it was made clear to me that Argentina must reply first because they were so wide of the mark. And when they didn't reply, well, events took their course.

JSS If I can ask this question, any instructions you had at that point in your view would not have changed the situation?

AP No, no, they wouldn't. Even if the Prime Minister had said, okay, we accept these two points (that Pérez de
Cuéllar had made) it wouldn't have made a damn of difference because Argentina was just playing in a different ballpark.

JSS Yes. I'd like to switch to the Argentine side now for just a minute. What was your assessment of the Argentine team - which was not just one team but I think two teams?

AP My assessment - Enrique Ros, whom I knew of course, and whom I liked and respected, I regarded him as very much the same kind of diplomat as myself. I had no doubt that he was playing the hand skillfully and accurately from New York. I did not believe that he was getting the well-deserved consideration in Buenos Aires for whatever views he was putting that I was getting from my government. And indeed a very influential Argentine official (who had been in Buenos Aires at the time) told me three or four years later - when I described to him my meeting with the War Cabinet on the 15th of May, "Well you should have seen the equivalent in Buenos Aires, it was unbelievable." So it wasn't a question of having one or two teams, it was a question sometimes of about ten different teams operating there. I mean I got the impression very strongly that Enrique was playing it to Buenos Aires just as I was playing it from New York, but that he hadn't the faintest idea of what kind of reply he was going to get back, whereas I had a very shrewd idea
of what I was going to receive at the time.

JSS And there was no direct contact at that point with Costa Mendez?

AP Between me and him? No, I think one of the reasons was really (or between Enrique and myself) I would have been delighted to talk to Enrique or Costa Mendez, and I dare say they would have been quite happy to talk to me. But the curious thing about the whole Falklands crisis was this incredible public media interest which was aroused. I dare say the Gulf War probably overmatched it but even real veterans of the United Nations like yourself were saying that they'd never seen anything like it in terms of media interest. So we really just didn't dare to see each other because I was never unaccompanied, you know, I was never on my own, I always had half a dozen television cameras and microphones and that kind of thing dogging my every footstep. And so you know that would have been a big deal if I'd even said "good morning" to an old friend like Enrique Ros.

JSS Yes, well Enrique Ros has indicated his view that if direct negotiations between you and him, or between the British and Argentine side had been possible, that the prospects would really have been better; that in fact the rather devious negotiation procedure followed, which the Secretary-General had to follow, inhibited agreement. What do you think on that?
Well, I think the only way in which I would agree with him is this. I've often felt since then, and particularly in the context of this Gulf War that we've just got over, or partially over, that the junta in Argentina, Galtieri and Company, never actually believed that Britain meant business. Curiously enough a large number of my very experienced diplomatic colleagues didn't believe that we meant business. They simply couldn't credit that, having obviously been trying to get off the hood of the Falklands for years, we would re-impale ourselves on it, even though Argentina had attached us in an extremely offensive way - by invasion, that it would end up somehow with a lot of rhetoric and protests, and so on, but not with military action. Rather as I don't believe that Saddam Hussein really thought that the US would actually liberate Kuwait by force and drive him off. I suppose it was possible that if there had been direct negotiations, say between Mrs. Thatcher and General Galtieri that he might have taken her seriously but I think it would have taken that, really. And again, against that, I frequently in the last few months described Saddam Hussein as suffering from what I've called the Galtieri syndrome - that when a dictator decides to take the plunge, an aggressive plunge, he finds it quite impossible to get back onto the bank again. I just don't think that Argentina had any
intention of pulling out once they had made that move, and indeed published material that has come out since then tends to confirm this. So I don’t think I agree with Enrique — I thought the Secretary-General actually did a very good job with the negotiating, I don’t think anybody could have done it more skillfully in a better organized way, slowly building up this draft treaty. I was full of admiration for that. No, it was predestined, I don’t think anything would have changed the situation.

After the landing of British troops actually took place, the Security Council still asked the Secretary-General to endeavor to attain a ceasefire and the Secretary-General indicated in his response that he thought this was an impossible task but nonetheless, he would try — which he did in conversations again with you and with the Argentine representative. It just happens that I still have my notes on one of those conversations. And you took a number of Secretary-General’s points seemingly quite seriously and indicated you were going to report them back to London with reference to the precedent of the 1973 Sinai negotiations. Was this taken at all seriously, was there ever really a possibility of a ceasefire?

Well, again, I think it sounds easy just to turn everything onto Argentina, but the scenario I was painting to London from the end of the Pérez de Cuéllar
negotiations - that is to say, the resumption of the Security Council meeting - was as follows. I was saying, "Argentina’s tactics from now on are going to be to try to mire us down into an endless negotiation of some kind or other which will gradually sap our will to recover the Islands and eventually, leave the new status quo, or at least part of it, in place. So they’re going to press all they can for ceasefires which are not linked to immediate withdrawal. So that once we’ve ceased fire we’ll have lost impetus and then the negotiation will start and a year later we’ll still be negotiating. We must not be drawn into this trap. This is what I was saying. So what we must do is to make clear to the Secretary-General and anybody else who wants to listen that the only circumstances in which we would accept a ceasefire is if it is absolutely, unequivocally and credibly linked to an immediate Argentine withdrawal. We can discuss any number of points around that but that is a central point which we’ve got to adhere to. The government in Britain obviously felt exactly the same so I think that really is the answer. Certainly we took all these points seriously but I hope that from your notes of long ago that I was unequivocal on this point, that ceasefire and withdrawal must be absolutely and inextricably linked.

JSS Yes, that point was always clear. I have a few overall
questions with regard to the crisis and the war. One of
them is on decision-making. This has been gone over with the Argentine side and incidentally, just for your information, at least Mr. Costa Mendez has indicated that General Galtieri could not make decisions by himself, that it was a purely consensual arrangement then and he was unable to make decisions. But what about the decision-making process on the British side? How important was the input from you, from the UK Mission in New York in terms of the ultimate positions of the British government?

Well I thought, and you and I have lived through many British government crises, foreign affairs crises in my life, I thought it was all handled in a very smooth way. This War Cabinet was set up which contained all the people needed and nobody who wasn't needed. And quite a large body but still, everybody there had a part to play. The Prime Minister was a very firm chairman but not a dictatorial one at all, unlike popular perception. I thought, perhaps this is rather conceited to say, but I thought our input was important, thanks to the very good communications, thanks to the fact that I was in personal contact with the Foreign Secretary, with the Prime Minister quite a lot. I felt - also the fact that I had a live feed into my office from the House of Commons- I felt that I was pretty well zeroed in really on both the political ingredients and the operational ingredients in
London and there wasn’t much of their thinking that I wasn’t abreast of. That was for my own protection, as it were. I can’t remember a time when we fell out, when my recommendations were rejected with contempt, or terribly disagreed. I mean there were differences of emphasis here and there but generally speaking, considering the volume of correspondence and, on top of that, the number of personal telephone calls, on our side it all went very smoothly. I remember, before I left New York some months later, oh no, weeks later in July, I decided to write a dispatch on the whole crisis and I sent for all the papers, going right back to the first of April. They had to be brought in on a trolley. Over 3,000 long telegrams had been exchanged during that period quite apart from anything else. And yet at no time did one feel that the whole thing was becoming chaotic, or that there were cross-purposes going on in London. I know that there’s a popular idea that you know, the Prime Minister felt this and the Foreign Office felt that and she was constantly overriding them. Maybe something like that was happening but it certainly didn’t penetrate to me. Occasionally one felt that there was a difference of emphasis, but only of emphasis. And I think the remarkable thing in Britain was that politically, unlike on so many other occasions, there was this astonishing unity between all the parties and there’s no doubt about
it, I mean having heard on my live feed the first debate in the House of Commons on the Saturday after the invasion, that any Prime Minister - whoever it had been - who had not sent a task force would not have been in power 24 hours later.

JSS So you had the advantage of clear instructions, clear communications and clear understanding?

AP Yes, yes. And when I was in any doubt at all I could telephone. I knew the Prime Minister, I knew the Foreign Secretary not so well, all the kind of top people in the Foreign Office, we were old friends. So there was a complete ease of communication as far as I was concerned.

JSS Now on the Argentine side there was some impression that the attitude of the Secretary-General changed toward the later stages, especially at the time of the aide memoire of May 19; that in their view he became less objective, more inclined to the British side. Did you have any such impression?

AP I certainly got the impression - the only time I felt.... All through the negotiation I felt he was absolutely objective. I confess that I felt that the emotions of certain members of his team varied a little in a certain sense. As far as he was concerned I got an impression of total objectivity. I certainly did feel when I came back on the 17th and delivered our agreement to him that he was impressed by that and that he had expected a much
more negative response, and was really very surprised and favorably impressed by the deal we were offering. I suppose to that extent maybe his views did change. He suddenly realized that we were not quite as hardnosed as he had thought.

JSS Given the application by the security Council of sanctions in the Gulf crisis, the question arises as to whether you thought of proposing the imposition of sanctions against Argentina.

AP Sanctions? The reason we didn’t go for sanctions in 502 was not because we wanted to fight. It was because we knew the Russians would veto, and that, we felt, would destroy the whole weight of 502. So we decided not to and in the present atmosphere if we’d got a sanctions resolution and a naval blockade Galtieri would have had to pull that bloody garrison out, no question of that, I mean sanction really would have worked.

JSS Yes, that’s a very interesting point, that in the present context of world relationships it might have been possible to get sanctions included in Resolution 502.

AP We would have put them straight in, no doubt about it. We didn’t exclude them because we wanted to exercise our troops or our weapons or anything, it was entirely - I mean, my recommendation is "this is as far as we can go,
we can’t get anything more out of the Council because anything more the Russians will veto. And they would have, they damn nearly vetoed 502. I’m sure that was a correct judgment. There’s no doubt if we’d got an equivalent to 661 or whatever it was on the Gulf War plus the naval blockade, the Argentines would have had absolutely no choice but to withdraw. It would have been tough on the Islanders for a few months but no worse than that. And they wouldn’t have lasted weeks if there’d been a blockade.

JSS We were talking just now about the Secretary-General. There was another aspect of the New York picture at that time. And that again brings us back to Mrs. Kirkpatrick. There were some other Argentineans in New York at the time. Were you concerned about this, were you aware of this, did you have any information about this seemingly secondary channel?

AP Yes, I was aware of it alright, I mean - Jean Kirkpatrick and I were good friends and I understood her intellectual problem over this. She felt that she’d been instrumental in building up the new Reagan policy towards South America, particularly Argentina, in relation to the problems of Central America and so on and here were these infernal Brits coming along and wrecking her policy. So I understood her position well enough - looking at it through her eyes it was perfectly valid. And I was aware
of the fact that she was talking to these senior Argentine people in the background, and so on. It wasn’t so much in the background, either. But quite honestly—as far as I was concerned, in all my career, that period I suppose between the first of April and the 14th of June was the most unrelentingly busy of my life. I was working literally about 16 or 17 hours a day and I have very very little opportunity to raise my eyes from the immediate task in front of me. So unless it actually had an immediate operational bearing on what I was trying to achieve that day I just put it out of my mind.

And that leads really to the next question, and it’s a very general question, about timing. I think even in the Frank report on the Falklands events timing is emphasized as important. But my question really relates to the course of the crisis at the beginning of South Georgia. For example, the Haig mediation actually covered a lot of the same ground that was subsequently covered by Pérez de Cuéllar but without Pérez de Cuéllar’s knowledge. If there had been greater time for the UN part of the negotiations, if in fact less time had been spent shuttling between Buenos Aires and London and back and forth, do you think that in this sense timing might have made a difference?

It’s a very difficult question. I have a feeling myself that it’s just possible that it might have if the whole
thing had been centered in New York - this is because, of course, the shuttle was a fairly laborious process just because of the distances to be covered, general exhaustion and so on. I suppose looking back on it now if there was any chance of a peaceful Argentine withdrawal in exchange for a meaningful negotiation for a final solution, a final settlement, then the more time passed the less that likelihood became. Maybe there would have been an opportunity if it had all happened within a few days and if it had all been conducted in New York that would have been more likely but as it was, by the time the situation moved to New York we were - how long? - we were over a month into the crisis, I think it was too late. I think to that extent I think that’s right and of course, going back before the invasion to your original question, I suppose we did waste - we, the British - we did waste an awful lot of time, messing about with the technicalities of the South Georgia incident - whether or not these people should show passports to some kind of scientist who was acting as consul or something of that kind, instead of grasping the nettle, i.e. the peace and security of implications of the problem. We let that drag on much too long.

Now for another specific time question, going back to the interim agreement that the British side drafted and put forward as you say under a deadline of 48 hours. Did the
position of the British flotilla at that point influence - in other words, it was getting closer and closer to the Islands?

AP Yes, there was no question about that. There were parameters, quite clearly it would have been unthinkable to have carried out an opposed landing while negotiations were actually going on. Equally it would have been unthinkable for the task force actually to arrive there and to sit there doing nothing for, say, a period of weeks. I mean, just simply for physical reasons, the sea is very rough down there and the weather was awful and it was getting worse. So obviously with the task force moving down there the window was closing and although it wasn’t a matter of 48 hours it was certainly a matter of several days rather than several weeks at that stage.

JSS And perhaps there was a certain parallelism, here. The Secretary-General felt that it was essential that he put his assessment of the entire situation on the record before the first British troops landed on the island. On the British side, did you feel it equally essential to have a clear statement of the British position of the extent to which the British would go, to have all of that on a record at that stage?

AP Yes, I think it was felt essential for a number of reasons, not least of which was to clarify the situation totally to our won parliamentary opinion before a move
was made to military action.

JSS It can be argued that the idea of the British putting forward the plan with such a strict deadline made it, in itself, unacceptable and of necessity, unacceptable to the Argentines because of the Argentine temperament.

AP Yes, I thought about this at the time. If Pérez de Cuéllar at the time had said to me, "Look, this is - because of the Argentine temperament - bound to make them refuse, you must give them more time," or something like that I would have gone straight back to London on that basis. I had this very much on mind when I gave him the document, taking it into consideration also that he was a Latin American and would obviously understand this far better than me. He never, never brought this up - in fact I remember asking him, "Do you think this is a reasonable thing to do?" and as far as I can recall now (maybe my memory is playing me false) he certainly didn't demur from that. He seemed to think this was, you know - we've had enough talk and this is the time to bring it to a head one way or another.

JSS So, taking all these things into consideration and your post facto as well as current wisdom at the time, looking back, do you see anything that could have been done differently - other than this question of perhaps bringing the UN in earlier - that might have changed the outcome?
Once the die was cast I don't think so. The only thing I have felt, and I have said this in public since then, is what we said right back at the very beginning. For totally different reasons, neither party wanted to involve the UN, particularly the Security Council. If the Secretary-General had had his own sources of information and had taken the South Georgia incident more seriously and had judged that the reason why neither of the parties was coming to him was for national reasons of the parties and not through lack of apprehensions as to where this might build, and if he had taken the bull by the horns and had either summoned both of us and said, "Look, what are you two up to down there? Is there a danger of breach of the peace because if there is, I'm going to invoke Article 99 and call the Security Council." I think it's possible that Argentina would have been deterred. It seems to me - I know it's easy to say this with hindsight - there was an opportunity for the preemptive diplomacy in which the UN so conspicuously failed over the years. I don't know whether this would have stopped Argentina in their tracks but I think it might have. But by the time we made our move in the Security Council it was just too late, and they were already at the scene.

I'd like to just thank you for giving these very full answers to these questions on the Falklands which will be
debated for years. I would like now to turn the subject to the election of Secretaries-General.

I was involved in two Secretary-General elections, I was the Under Secretary responsible for international organizations in London in '71 when Waldheim was first elected and I was Permanent Representative in New York in '81 when Pérez de Cuéllar was eventually elected. On both occasions I think I was really monstrously unimpressed by the way the whole thing was done. To start with, no serious attempt was made by the membership to look positively for a candidate on either occasion. It was far more a question of candidates coming forward and lobbying for themselves whether they were suitable or not. On both occasions what one might call the lowest common denominator factor was playing a very large part.

On the first occasion, the Waldheim election, negative factors played a much much greater part than the positive factors, right from moment one. It was quite clear to me as Under-Secretary that the Russians were determined to have Waldheim...

You felt that?

Before the election took place...

From London you felt that?

Yep, and that they would veto every other candidate and if nobody vetoed Waldheim he would get it on the first round. It was with that in mind that I recommended to my
ministers at the time that we should veto Waldheim, which we did. Our preferred candidate was Max Jacobson whom we thought (and I still do) would have made an excellent Secretary-General. We saw no reason why the Soviet Union should simply get away with their preferred candidate without at least a fight for it. So a rather undignified struggle set in and eventually we and the US who had started by vetoing Waldheim got fed up and the inevitable happened, Waldheim was elected. One can say really that he was elected for purely negative reasons - the Russians wanted him because he was not going to be a Secretary-General with any initiative. We let him in because, having resisted for a time, we judged that he would be relatively harmless. We didn’t have very much for him but we didn’t have very much against him. The whole question of his wartime record never entered into our calculations at all, I can tell you that quite honestly because I was the stage manager back in London and he had been Austrian Foreign Minister, he had been Permanent Representative, he had a long record in the Austrian diplomatic service, he was well known. And it certainly never occurred to me to ask anybody to check out what he did during the war. And I don’t believe the US did either because we were in very close touch with them throughout the whole thing because we were actually vetoing together for a couple of rounds or whatever it
was. So that one just went by the board.

The Pérez de Cuéllar election degenerated - as I’m sure you’ll recall - into what one can only describe as total buffoonery. We had Waldheim pressing his case with what one might describe politely as the utmost vigor, and being vetoed time and time again by the Chinese on the grounds that ten years is enough and it was somebody else’s turn. I don’t think there was any more to it than that. And Salim, with whom we were certainly quite happy, a senior Commonwealth representative, a good friend to all of us, being vetoed equally regularly by the US (I suppose on the grounds that he was on the radical side of the African political consensus and also that he was too close to the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli sense (being a Moslem and all the rest of it, Arabic-speaking). It looked as though this nightmare was going to continue indefinitely. And then we had this extraordinary business of the straw poll, the informal vote in the consultations room where every candidate under the sun was allowed to come forward. Once Waldheim and Salim had stepped out I think something like 14 people came out. So we started voting on them informally and eventually came up with Pérez de Cuéllar. Well he was, I believe, the best choice from the beginning, taking all the candidates, and so I think we were lucky to get him. But it really was the most unedifying
spectacle. But I suppose what we’ve got to look forward to now is the first time a Secretary-General election would have taken place in a non-Cold War atmosphere, because we go right back to Trygve Lie. It’s going to be very interesting to see how this is going to pan out because in what is laughingly referred to by some gentlemen as he "new world order," one aspect of that should be that the Permanent Representatives should get together – should have already got together if they haven’t – to come up with some idea of who they think would be the best person to be the Secretary-General. So you would have a positive choice which would then be put to the non-Permanent Representatives and the membership as a whole. I hope that that’s going to happen and we wouldn’t be left until the last moment with somebody trying to persuade poor Pérez de Cuéllar to stay on and die in the saddle. There are lots of other people coming out of every bit of woodwork you can think of.

JSS I have two questions in this regard. First, with regard to the British government, is the selection of the Secretary-General considered of sufficient importance to demand the attention of the highest levels in the British government?

AP Yes. I wouldn’t say that it’s important enough to command what we might call the continuing attention of the British government at the highest level. But
certainly we would not, the British government would not
either strongly endorse or veto a candidate with
authority short of the Prime Minister, no doubt about
that. I hope that on this occasion the British
government will take a more active interest than it has
in the past. I think we've rather kind of tended to
accept the inevitable, you know, the lowest common
denominator. We've known that candidates that we thought
were really good were going to be vetoed by people, and
so on. I know who I would like to see as the next
Secretary-General but I'm not sure that he's got a chance
of getting in.

JSS Which may be a lead into the next question. Do you think
that the President of the Security Council can in fact
make a difference?

AP To the Secretary-General's election? (JSS: Yes) Well,
there's no question about it, that the deadlock over
Waldheim and Salim, the idiocy that went on in 1981, that
was broken by the procedural genius of Olara Otunnu. It
was he who dreamt up this brilliant idea of getting the
two candidates to stand back and having this informal
series of votes in the Consultations Room. It set up
some interesting records and one of the candidates as far
as I can remember actually managed to get 5 vetoes - all
five Permanent Representatives.

JSS But it can make a difference then in your view who
happens to be the President of the Security Council?

AP I think it can only make a procedural difference and we really were in a deadlock situation there but it really ought to be different this time. I mean, on all previous occasions Cold War divisions have played a maximal role, I reckon myself that if it hadn’t been for the Cold War that Carlos Ortiz de Rozas, for example, would have become Secretary-General in 1971. I think that Sadriddin Aga Khan would probably have become Secretary-General at some state if it hadn’t been for the Cold War. So it would have been different all down the line. And now there isn’t a Cold War, well it should be different the next time.

JSS Does this then open the way to realization of the idea that Brian Urquhart has put forward, that is there should be some kind of a search committee?

AP Yes, I think it should do, but Brian’s report has been out now for several months, almost a year now. I don’t know, you will know and I don’t - is anything being done in New York now?

JSS As far as I know, not a great deal.

AP Well, there we are, the search committee should have been in action for quite some time if there is one. And it seems to me - I mean, this is talking about an ideal world - what should be happening now, or what should have already have happened, is that the five Permanent
Representatives who after all do have the last word (whether this is equitable or not, they do) they should have been getting together to decide, first of all, on a common view on what the actual duties of a Secretary-General are. To put this into British commercial terms, I think for most of the past 40 years the British have regarded the Secretary-General as a potential managing director of the company with the Security Council as the board of directors. Whereas the Soviet Union have regarded him as what we call the Company Secretary, the man who takes the minutes and sees that things are carried out - entirely the slave of the board, with no initiative. Now if that difference could be reconciled and they could all five of them decide the kind of person they want, regardless of nationality or geographical group, or anything else - and what his powers should be, what limits should there be to those powers and how much initiative he should be able to take, then you start searching for the man. But I just cannot see that happening.

JSS So one still continues to hope.

AP One continues to hope, yes.

JSS Thanks very much.
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<td>25-26, 30</td>
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<td>Urquhart, Brian</td>
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<td>Waldheim, Kurt</td>
<td>43-45, 47</td>
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