

BBC BREAKFAST WITH FROST

INTERVIEW:

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

KOFI ANNAN

JUNE 27th, 1999

Please note "BBC Breakfast with Frost" must be credited if any part of this transcript is used

DAVID FROST:

And now from the subject of Judy Garland to one of the other major stories across the world, Kosovo. The conflict in Kosovo was a bruising experience for the United Nations, dividing its most powerful member states, the Nato campaign did not have authorisation by the UN in advance but now that there is a peace agreement it is very much involved in the reconstruction of Kosovo. That's one of the reasons why the UN seem to be sidelined in the conflict, was the fact that it has huge difficulties in raising its own army. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was in London this week and whilst here received a promise from the government that British troops will, in the future, be put on standby for deployment as UN peace-keeping forces. Earlier I spoke to Kofi Annan and I asked him how this would help the UN play a global military role?

KOFI ANNAN:

Well we've been very concerned at the UN about rapidity of deployment. When these crisis hit the ideal situation would we'll be able to move very quickly if one had an army to move in to try and nip the problem in the bud or to contain it. But the UN, we don't have an army, we go to the governments and ask them for troops and it takes us on the average four to five months to put the troops down on the

ground. So we started looking around for solutions and came up with the idea of a standby forces arrangements where we encourage governments to tell us what they can offer, what you will say, they will provide if they were to participate in a particular peace-keeping operation and, and so I'm very happy Britain has come along, which will mean that they will identify units at home who may participate in peace-keeping operation and they can move very quickly and it should be able to cut the lead time for deployment quite considerably and make a difference.

DAVID FROST:

And so Britain is going to deploy, or have on hold 6,000 to 8,000 troops in that position is it?

KOFI ANNAN:

Well not quite, not, I think it was a bit of a state when one said 6,000 to 8,000, but they would be able, for example they can give us logistical units for a peace-keeping operation that they are going to participate in and those units are extremely crucial. In fact the logistical units are more or less the glue for an army, without them you can't really do very much with an army and very few countries have that capacity and can play that crucial role in a peace-keeping operation.

DAVID FROST:

And in a situation like that, Secretary-General, on each deployment does the country concerned, in this case Britain, have a right to say yes or no or only yes?

KOFI ANNAN:

Oh absolutely, it has a right to say yes or no, it's up to the government to decide when to participate in a peace-keeping operation and which one and when to withdraw its forces, it will be a decision of the government but Britain has been such a good supporter of the UN and of the international system that I would hope that more often than not if it was well thought out they will say yes.

DAVID FROST:

On the, on the question of Kosovo, Secretary-General, would you have rather Nato got prior approval of the bombing of Serbia and Kosovo rather than post?

KOFI ANNAN:

Yeah I think ideally that the charter is very clear, it gives primary responsibility to the Security Council in matters of peace and security and interestingly enough Nato's own statutes also recognises that but in, so in this particular situation one was caught with two competing and compelling priorities if you wish, the need to respect the charter and the need to act in a compelling humanitarian situation. And in fact on the day they bombing started I made a statement really saying that, you know, there is, there is a time when one can use force in pursuit of peace but the Security Council's role should be respected and the Security Council must have a say. But I think it is important that the issue came back to the Council which in a way reaffirmed the primary role of the Council in issues of peace and security and its ability to give legal under-pining to some of these activities because it would have been extremely awkward for the allies to put troops down, establish an interim administration without authority from the Security Council.

DAVID FROST:

Is there any sense in which Nato, if things didn't go right Nato could become a rival of the UN rather than an ally?

KOFI ANNAN:

I, I don't see, I hope that wouldn't happen and I don't see Nato as a rival, I think Nato should be seen as an ally. The charter itself has provision for the role of regional organisations and arrangements but the charter also insists that the rule of the use of force must be approved by the Council. So I hope what happened and what we went through is a one-off and it's not going to be a precedent.

DAVID FROST:

Right you said a one-off there and yes you said if this happened again or again then it could be the dangerous road to anarchy in fact?

KOFI ANNAN:

That's correct, I did say that and I've also mentioned in my own discussions with Nato leaders. But it is not only that regional arrangement Council I understand the reasons why they felt they had to act quickly and they may be held back by the Council, but when you have a regional arrangement with three permanent members of the Security Council taking action without resort to the Council, if you're not careful you are really starting on that road to anarchy tomorrow. What moral authority or legal authority would one have, the Council to go and lecture other groups or other countries not to do this and this is why I think the way it has ended in the end is a good way to do it and I hope this is not a precedent and it's not something that's going to happen. But that also would require the Council to act and organise itself in such a manner that it can respond promptly and rapidly to these compelling situations.

DAVID FROST:

Well the toughest moment for the UN is really, and the Security Council, is like the early days of this particular situation, where as you say of the five Security Council members they were split three and two or whatever and that's the most difficult situation for the Security Council to give a lead in isn't it?

KOFI ANNAN:

It is extremely difficult because the Security Council has strength in unity, I mean what we talk of the permanent five veto but veto is a negative power, you can use veto to block you can't use veto to get things done, you need to convince the others and persuade the others to come around. And so I was very happy they came together to resolve the Kosovo crisis, without that we would still be in a mess and that is a good example of how their strength lies in unity, unity of purpose and common ground and moving forward.

DAVID FROST:

And what have you found out so far, your UN forensic teams and so on, what do you think the murder toll in Kosovo, harmless citizens who were murdered, will be, I've read that the estimate is at least 10,000...civilians?

KOFI ANNAN:

Yes I have read that figure too but I think it's too early to say the work is still ongoing and the teams are going to do their work and all this go ahead and so I would, I would, I would not want to throw out a figure because I think I should wait for them to get the work done. But it does seem as if it is worse than one had thought.

DAVID FROST:

The Americans have offered a \$5 million reward for Milosevic or others as well, do you think that President Milosevic will ever sit in court to face his indictment?

KOFI ANNAN:

That is a difficult question, obviously the tribunal that indicted him hopes that one day he will be in the dock but our record has not been very good when you look at some of the indicted in Bosnia, this case may be different, only time will tell.

DAVID FROST:

Because the other things is obviously that we've said that we won't give any reconstruction aid to Serbia until Milosevic is toppled, everyone's in agreement on that, are they?

KOFI ANNAN:

I know several leaders have said that, I can understand the feelings and the desire which has led to this statement but I have also pleaded with some of them that we have to be careful, they've all said they would give humanitarian aid but not economic assistance and there are some difficulties with that. First of all we said at the beginning of the war that the fight is not with the Yugoslavian people but with the leadership and therefore the war was not against them. Now at the end of the

war with quite a bit of destruction and some essential facilities destroyed, electrical transmission systems, water systems, if we say we're only going to offer humanitarian assistance I hope we are going to define the humanitarian assistance broad enough, broadly, in a broad manner to include electricity repairs, water systems which are life-sustaining services.

DAVID FROST:

Electricity, water?

KOFI ANNAN:

Because come winter if they have no heat they may also be on the move to try and keep warm elsewhere and I think we need to really perhaps look at this much more closely and not sort of categorically saying no assistance.

DAVID FROST:

So that, that needs to be looked at urgently with the winter coming on and it's a tough winter?

KOFI ANNAN:

Oh absolutely, I think it has to be looked at very carefully and each time I have the chance I'm telling the leaders that we need to be careful not to box ourselves in because if we do that it would create another humanitarian disaster and we are trying to sort out Kosovo which we should and Kosovo for all the all Kosovars, Serbs and Albanians. But we have to make sure that the Serbs who in some ways are victims of their own leadership should not be twice punished.

DAVID FROST:

In terms of a UN Administrator for the Balkans, Tony Blair has recommended very strongly Paddy Ashdown and you met with him on this trip to London, what are his chances?

KOFI ANNAN:

He is a very impressive man and I have many candidates and I hope to make the decision in the course of the coming week or so. Obviously there are many factors to, to consider and I was impressed with my, during my meeting with him.

DAVID FROST:

And how long do you expect, I mean do you budget for Nato peace-keepers and UN personnel and so on, to have to remain in Kosovo, a minimum of ten years would you say?

KOFI ANNAN:

I think it's going to be a while, I don't know if it should be as long as we've been in Cyprus but it will be a while, it should be several years in the minimum, I think the reconstruction of the South Eastern Europe should take about ten years at least. Whether we will be there for that whole period I cannot say but it would at least take several years.

DAVID FROST:

Tell me on Iraq, Secretary-General, have you any hope that, any hopes or plans for Unscorn inspectors ever to return to Iraq or have we lost that one?

KOFI ANNAN:

The Council is currently engaged in discussions on the future of Iraq, the British and Dutch tabled the resolution two days ago and the Russians also have some ideas, so do the French and the Council has become very actively engaged in the search for a solution. It is my hope that again the Council will find a common ground and come up with a proposal that we can then put to the Iraqi leadership because even after the Council has agreed we need to engage the Iraqis and make sure that they will cooperate because on the question of monitoring arms or disarmament issues we can do very little without their cooperation.

DAVID FROST:

And that evidence gathered by Unscorn that they alleged was then passed on to US Intelligence, was that a libel or did you find there was any truth in that?

KOFI ANNAN:

I think there was a, a measure of justification in those allegations and Washington never denied it and that of course, as I said, was worrisome because it did not only undermine Unscorn but it could undermine future disarmament regimes and, and tomorrow if we decide to disarm or go for an inspection in another country the suspicion will always be there, are they coming to disarm or are they going to spy and destabilise the state. So that was not a very comfortable situation for the UN to find itself in and I think it has done us a considerable harm and could harm disarmament regimes in the future.

DAVID FROST:

And as you look at the world who do you think is the most dangerous figure, Saddam Hussein or President Milosevic?

KOFI ANNAN:

You expect the Secretary-General of the UN to answer that question?

DAVID FROST:

I wasn't over-confident. Kofi Annan, well he'd been so frank about everything else it was worth having a go. In fact very, very frank on Nato getting UN authorisation on Unscorn and of course on that other humanitarian disaster unless we redesign the word humanitarian or humanitarian aid.

END