

British Diplomatic Oral History Programme

L.C. This is an interview for the diplomatic oral history project with Sir Michael Alexander. The date is 25 November 1998 and we are doing the interview at his house in Highgate. He began his career in 1962 as a Third Secretary in Southern Europe Department and ended in 1992 as Ambassador to Nato in Brussels. So his career has spanned from incidents like the Cuban Missile crisis to the fall of the Berlin Wall during his ambassadorship in Brussels. Sir Michael, perhaps you would like to start by telling us how you came to join the Foreign Office?

M.A. I must confess that I never really thought of doing anything else. My father was head of H. Division at GCHQ and was responsible for the national research effort in cryptanalysis for the whole of the post-war period from 1946 through 1972. He was one of the two or three men basically responsible for breaking the Enigma system during the last war. So international relations were very much in my blood. He, as a matter of fact, tried to persuade me not to join civil service but to become a businessman. However no member of my family, at least in our recorded history, had ever done anything other than be farmers, civil servants, lawyers or clerics. So perhaps it was not very surprising that I ended up in the Diplomatic Service. Oddly enough in the late 1950s it was already becoming a slightly unfashionable choice. My tutor at Kings, Christopher Morris, also tried to dissuade me from joining. But I cannot recollect ever in fact having been attracted by any other career. Although I had won various scholarships, I did not see any point in being an academic unless one was really good at it – which I was not.

L.C. And when you went into the Foreign Office did you have a view of where you wanted to be, what areas you wanted to be concerned with? Where you wanted to be when you retired for example?

M.A. I spent my National Service in the Navy, doing Russian, sitting in Kiel on the Baltic listening to Russian naval vessels talking to one another. That, taken together with the fact that I went to the United States after Cambridge and spent two years as a Harkness Fellow

at Yale, more or less pre-destined me to a life on North Atlantic issues and on the problems linking Washington and Moscow. I assumed that this was what I would do. My first overseas posting, as you know, was in Moscow.

L.C. So it did work out from the beginning pretty much as you expected?

M.A. Well, as I say, it did all seem slightly predestined.

L.C. Right, thank you. Well, we're going to divide this talk up into topics and Sir Michael is going to talk about the Cold War first of all, and then look at multilateral diplomacy, then the Armed Forces and MOD, a look at the role of a bilateral embassy and then to come on at the end to the administration of the Diplomatic Service and his work in various private offices. So we start off with his views on the Cold War.

M. A. I am not sure that I have anything of great originality to say about the Cold War. But it is a fact that the Cold War dominated my professional life, provided the context for everything else. Of course, it started well before I became a civil servant. The first international political event of which at the time I was at all conscious was, I suppose, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This happened while I was in Kiel and gave us all a considerable scare. I remember the American element in the teams there being withdrawn overnight because people were afraid that the balloon might go up. Then in the early Sixties, when as you have already mentioned I joined in the Service, one of the biggest events was the Cuban missile crisis.

In fact, while I was at Berkeley in the year before I joined the Diplomatic Service, the Berlin Wall was built. I vividly remember, again, being extremely alarmed that this had happened and conscious that there could very easily be an East-West military confrontation. I recall going out with my wife one evening to make sure that the car had a full tank of petrol in case we wanted to leave San Francisco in a hurry. Berlin was a long way away but we were worried. It is a pleasant irony that the fall of the Wall came so close to the end of my professional career.

Perhaps that is the first thing to say about my experience of the Cold War as a government official. Those occasions early in the 1960s, the Cuban missile crisis and the erection of the Berlin Wall, were the only times I can now recall when I was seriously bothered in the sense that I thought that there really might be fighting. For the rest of my time in the Service, i.e. for the 29 or so years that I dealt with these issues, my basic assumption was that the problems were difficult and awkward but were rather unlikely to result in an explosion. I do not remember ever again being personally scared as to what might happen. There were times in the early Eighties, something to which we may come on later, when the situation was troubling, in a policy sense, but never again physically.

L.C. And were these your own personal feelings or were they shared by the people you were working with?

M.A. My sense is that, on the whole, they were shared by the people with whom I worked. Obviously, there was always a consciousness that there might be an accident of some kind. But that either Moscow or Washington would deliberately raise the stakes to a point where confrontation became inevitable always seemed to me, after 1962, unlikely.

L.C. I think it was Kissinger who said that the partition of Europe was considered to be less dangerous than any other arrangement? Do you think this dividing line helped to make the Cold War less dangerous, really?

M.A. Everything that is said this morning is said with the benefit of hindsight. But it seems to me that the partition of Europe was basically of considerable benefit to Western Europe. One can now see that many of the remarkable achievements in the Western European and North Atlantic area in the post-war era were built on the misery and discomfort, the humiliation if you like, of Eastern Europe. Without the basic stability in Europe provided by the Cold War, it is extremely unlikely that the European Community, for instance, would have been remotely as successful as it turned out to be. This is a very unkind, a very disagreeable, thing to have to say. But I happen to think it is true. It is

implicit in what I said a little earlier about taking the Cold War for granted. It became a datum point in the larger part of our international activity. The habit of international co-operation on the Western side and indeed, even if co-operation is hardly the right word, on the Eastern side was plainly a function of the Cold War. Now that the Cold War is over, one of the things that we are going to find most difficult, though I think we have made rather a good fist of it so far, is to maintain this habit of international co-operation. It is only too easy to forget just how anomalous, in a historical perspective, the close international co-ordination to which we have become accustomed since 1948 really is. It is, in fact, extraordinary. What has happened in Yugoslavia in the last five or six years gives some sense of just how unusual it has been and how easily it could break down. I like to think that the European Union and the habit of transatlantic co-operation have passed the point of no return and that we will never go back to the bad old days. But I would hesitate to say that success could be taken for granted. It is going to require continuing effort. And the initial effort would never have been made if it had not been for the presence of the Red Army in Eastern Europe.

L.C. How did you yourself react to the movements towards détente undertaken by Nixon and Kennedy and by the Germans themselves? Did you think that was a sign of weakness on our side?

M.A. Not at all. You must remember that I went to Moscow for my first overseas posting. My youngest son was born in Moscow and was, I believe, the first British diplomatic child to be born in Moscow since the war. My wife saw no reason to treat Russians any differently from anyone else and did not see why she should go to Helsinki or back to London to have what was our third child. So I personally have always had a warm feeling towards the Russians, have always been very conscious that this is a great and serious nation. At the same time, of course, Russia had had an appalling history – a history many of whose worst features were exemplified and intensified by the State Socialist regime as it developed after 1917. But I was moderately sure that in my time they were not seeking military confrontation, that one could do business with them and certainly that one should try to do business with them. So efforts towards détente always had my strong support.

Moreover as my period of service moved forward, it became increasingly obvious to me in the late Seventies – and I put this on paper – that serious people in Russia knew they had lost, knew that that they were on the losing end of the conflict i.e. that the state socialist system simply could not compete with democratic capitalism. It followed that provided we conducted negotiations on the right basis and kept our nerve, such negotiations were in our interest. What did worry me in the early 1980s, as I said at the time, was that, conscious as they were of being on the losing end of Cold War, there were those in Russia who might have been tempted by actual military confrontation or by a much intensified form of military competition. After all the only part of the Russian economy that worked at all effectively was the famous military/industrial complex. If you are in a competition, you obviously want to conduct that competition on the part of the playing field where you are most strongly represented. We were rather lucky in the early 1980s that the Russians chose Gorbachev and not somebody like Romanov who could easily have gone down that path. I say “lucky” but probably the Russians knew what they were choosing i.e. the Politburo knew what they were choosing. When they picked Gorbachev, he had already been a member of the Politburo for six years or so. That decision by the Russians tends to confirm what I said earlier viz. that these were serious people who, in the last analysis, did not want to go to war. In that context, the much criticised decision of Ronald Reagan, Richard Perle and others to pursue SDI, to make it plain to the Russians that the Americans were prepared to spend whatever was required on defence, was basically sound.

L.C. I was going to ask you, as an ordinary member of the public, whether this very moderate interpretation of Russian intentions sits comfortably with the public perception that this was a terrible ogre that was threatening us.

M.A. As I say, the only part of the Russian economy that really worked, alongside the space programme, was the military industrial complex. There is always a danger that these kind of agglomerations of power will develop their own momentum and take over the entire body politic. But the Russians, at the end of the day and I suspect like all great

nations, are basically very cautious. The same is true of the Chinese. They know how much they have to lose. They are conscious of the sacrifices they have made to get as far as they have. People who have come to power very rapidly, like Hitler, are arguably a good deal more dangerous. The Russians were prepared to back off. Berlin in 1948/49 is an obvious example. Their reaction to Churchill's challenge in Greece in 1945 is another. You are quite right to say that public perceptions were very different. And it was popular perceptions that motivated Congress in Washington and many others. But the reality seems to me to have been as I have described it. That was certainly the basis on which I acted. We can perhaps talk a little later about that the Helsinki negotiations and the MBFR negotiations.

Perhaps I should just say something about the end of the Cold War, as this is something which is still very much on people's minds. It was, of course, when it happened and how it happened, totally unexpected. When I think back to our policy discussions in Nato in the late 1980s, it was already obvious then that events were moving and moving rapidly. We were already contemplating adjusting the stance of the Alliance in various ways: there was much discussion of something called the Comprehensive Concept. We were, nonetheless, still very uncertain as to where events were headed. In 1988, the assumption was that we would be dealing with the Soviet Union and with a Communist Eastern Europe for some considerable time. It was only in 1989, in the first half of 1989, that we really began to see that the world was changing for ever.

All that said, there was another sense in which the drama was not totally unexpected, at least for me. I am referring to correspondence I had with the Prime Minister, whose private office I had just left, from Vienna in 1983. I told her then, following a couple of lengthy car journeys through Eastern Europe, that it was clear to me that state socialism was a bankrupt system, that the Eastern European regimes were in an untenable position, and that when the collapse came it was going to come extremely suddenly and probably unexpectedly. I went on to say that it was obvious to me that Andropov, and people like him, must be perfectly well aware of this. Andropov, as head of the KGB, would have been extremely well informed. What I was uncertain about was exactly how the system

would react. But I said then that there seemed to me to be a risk that the military confrontation in the short-term would intensify, before the inevitability of collapse was acknowledged. (To some extent this happened in 1983 /84.) In 1984 I put a detailed proposal to the Prime Minister for a major gesture designed to take advantage of the situation i.e. for a western initiative to change radically the scale of the military confrontation in Europe; to institute dramatic reductions in both Russian and American forces levels in Europe. The proposal was intended to stimulate thinking rather than to be implemented. But, in one sense, it was not so very far from what actually happened in 1990 and 1991.

L.C. You thought it would have been safer to have done it beforehand before the...

M.A. I put the idea to her not because I thought she would actually do it, because I'm sure it would not have been politically negotiable at the time, but simply in order to make her think about the nature of the situation that confronted us. She did read it and think about it. Then again, in 1985 in the MBFR context and with Mrs Thatcher's backing, I negotiated (first with the Germans and Americans and then with the Russians on behalf of the West) an initiative designed to put the force reduction talks onto a new footing (or to wind them up). This was regarded as a major change in previous Western positions (e.g. on prior data agreement). I had the impression that it did wrong foot the Russians almost completely. It was put to them in December 1985. Gorbachev's first major force reduction proposals followed in April 1986. I have often wondered, and if I were more energetic I would go to Moscow and investigate, whether the fact that we wrong footed the Russians in Vienna had anything to do with Gorbachev's subsequent initiatives. Again, all this is simply to indicate that it was clear to me in the mid -1980s that things had to move in one direction or another, that they could not go on as before. Do not misunderstand me. I absolutely did not anticipate what was going to happen in 1989 - even in 1989. If anyone had suggested to me in 1986 that the Warsaw Pact organisation would dissolve in 1991, I would have called in the men in white coats! But in the sense I have just been describing, one could say that the end of the Cold War was not totally unexpected.

L.C. How well do you think the Russians managed it or do you think they just let it roll?

M.A. Of course, this is the area that Gorbachev undoubtedly showed himself a very considerable figure. This is a man who came into a system which was set in its ways and which in some senses had not done badly. It had certainly done a great deal better in the East-West confrontation than the realities of the situation at home warranted. He had good reasons for persisting with the previous course. He certainly must have had many people around him who wanted him to pursue the military confrontation. Yet he chose to put the system on a completely new course. This is not to deny that he was a socialist, a Communist. He did not realise, any more than the rest of us, that the result of what he was doing would be the disintegration of the entire system. He simply thought he could make it work more efficiently. One way of doing this was to reduce the terrible burden of military expenditure on the Soviet budget. He was, if you like, a better socialist than some of the others. He had a greater faith in the system. But he was wrong. In that respect it was rather miraculous, as far as I am concerned, that we got through the period 1988/92 without a major military accident –in the course of the troop withdrawals from East Germany or wherever. It was extraordinary. To that extent the Russians managed the transition effectively. But when you look at the state of the country today, it is a little difficult to give them credit for managing anything effectively. Another person, alongside Gorbachev, who deserves enormous credit is George Bush. I think Bush played the hand in 1989/90 extremely well. Sadly, I have to say that Margaret Thatcher came out of it all rather badly. Again, this is something I debated with her at the time.

L.C. You mean her attitude to German unification?

M.A. Exactly. Above all her attitude to German unification. It was completely misguided.

L.C. Do you think that left any legacy?

M.A. Yes. Of course the policy was associated to a very great degree with her personally. To some extent, it went when she went. But, and I can say this now because I said it to her at the time, the idea that we could resist the unification (it wasn't clear in the autumn of 1989 exactly what form that unification take) of the two halves Germany was remarkably foolish. I wrote her a long letter on the subject at the end of October 1989. As luck would have it, I had visited East Berlin in that month so I had had occasion to think about it all before the Wall came down. I was rather startled by what I had seen in Berlin so I wrote her a letter saying "This is about to happen; I do not know when it is going to happen, but it is about to happen; for Heaven's sake don't resist it because the Germans will not forgive you". But she had passionately held views about the Germans! I told her that in 15 years Germany and Berlin would matter more to us than Russia and Moscow. That still looks about right.

L.C. What about Chancellor Kohl's role?

M.A. It was remarkable. And, again, I think some of his advisers, like those around Bush, were highly effective. They drew up the 10 points and so on. This was a case of a man taking history by the forelock and tugging it in the direction he wanted to go. Along with Bush, and of course Gorbachev, Kohl to my way thinking was a hero. It is a pity that our role was as negative as it was seen to be. We had played a very large role throughout the Cold War. As I was saying earlier, the UK's influence on events was much greater than our real power justified. Certainly throughout my time in Margaret Thatcher's Private Office and in Nato, I was very conscious that our role in the evolution of East-West policy was disproportionately large, larger than it tended to be in the European Community. We appeared to place some of that achievement at risk in 1989. This was a pity and rather unnecessary. But there you go. Swings and roundabouts.

L.C. I can't think of chapter and verse but I thought there were some East Germans who thought that the East Germans might come and look at West Germany and decide, no thank you and go back again.

M.A. Reunification certainly did not have to happen in the way that it did happen. The fact that it happened as it happened is very much down to Helmut Kohl and to Kohl's relationship with Gorbachev. But that some form of reintegration was going to take place was inevitable. In effect, in the summer and early autumn of 1989, the population of East Germany began to go round the end of the Wall. The Wall was built in 1961 to stop the population of East Germany emigrating to West Germany. As you know, in 1989 as relations with Hungary and Czechoslovakia relaxed and as the Iron Curtain (literally) between Austria and Hungary came down, the population of East Germany began to filter around the corner. There were dramatic scenes at the West German embassies in Prague and Budapest. There was nothing much any East German regime could do about this. The disparity in quality of life in the two halves of German was simply too great. Where what you have just said is relevant is that it was eminently predictable that once the Wall came down and effective unification occurred, the relationship between the two halves Germany was going to be extremely uncomfortable. My wife is German and we have talked about this a great deal. I remember saying in 1991 that the next ten years were going to be much more difficult for the east Germans than for the Poles. The Poles were re-establishing their own nation. The East Germans, on the other hand, had become poor cousins. This is a deeply uncomfortable relationship. That said, I also happen to think that ten years from now, when all the industrial plant has been renewed, East Germany will almost certainly be an economic powerhouse. Once the change of generations has taken place, the new plant has come on stream and Berlin's position as the capital of Europe (which is obviously what it is going to be) has become established, East Germany could be very prosperous indeed. But the intervening period may well be traumatic.

L.C. Especially as among the East European countries they were considered to be the best.

M.A. The efficiency of the East German regime was always a bit of a con job, as anyone that travelled in East Germany would have known. Their standards were not particularly high unless one was comparing East Germany with, say, Romania. And there were doubts in East Germany for just those reasons. We were all very lucky that it ended as peacefully as it did. The West did not do badly. We did not behave provocatively. You might argue

that precisely because we had become so accustomed to the Cold War, because it was so built into our attitudes, we were not as greedy in 1989/90 as we might have been. None of us could believe our luck so we did not push too hard. Subsequently events have, perhaps, developed in a way that has not been helpful to Russia. I sometimes feel a little guilty about what I said when I went to Moscow in 1991, as Nato Permanent Representative, to give a lecture to the Soviet General Staff College. I had long meetings with Akhromeyev, the previous head of the Soviet General Staff and then Gorbachev's military adviser and with Moisyev, who was then head of the Soviet General Staff. I told them, in slightly weasel worded terms, that Nato would not expand, that it would not seek e.g. the Visegrad Trio as members of Nato. I gave myself a let out by saying that, of course, the decision lay with the countries involved and that they would have to do as they wanted. But I think many people were then saying the same thing as me to the Russians viz. that Nato would not be enlarged. Nato has been enlarged. It became apparent to me not long after my visit to Moscow that Nato would have to enlarge. But these events have led, inevitably, to a sense of betrayal in Moscow.

L.C. I don't know how much you know of the scale of investment in Russia, how much was promised.

M.A. I was not involved with that. The main decisions were taken after I had left government service. I have since been earning my living as an investment banker in Eastern Europe and Russia. But I have never taken part in government to government discussions on this issue. What I do know was that there was an intense debate on the question. There was never any agreement among Western governments as to the scale of what we should invest in Russia in the early 1990s. I'm also aware that there are many people around, Western academics like Bob Blackwill, who were arguing in 1992/93 for much higher levels of Western investment than actually took place. I fear my own opinion is that it would probably have been a waste of money. What has happened in Russia is not primarily a reflection of the lack of Western investment. It is a reflection of the fact that the infrastructure for running Russia, for want of a better word, as a capitalist democracy simply does not exist. Why should it? I have always thought that it would take two

generations to turn Russia into the kind of society with which we could confidently do business. Which is not to say that I anticipated what has happened in the last six months? I did not and it has cost me a good deal of money. But I did think that the process would be traumatic and difficult. When we were discussing these issues in Nato, I was once accused by my German colleague of being a Cassandra. Nonetheless I believe the process of change will continue. The character of the Cold War has in part been a reflection of Russia's history; Russia's history not simply that of the Soviet Union. Russia has always been a closed society, profoundly neurotic about its relations with Western Europe. Wherever you look the story is the same. The Marquis de Custine, for instance, wrote a book about Russia in the mid-19th century in which the Russia portrayed was quite plainly the same place as the Soviet Union of the 1960s. We young men in the Embassy used to read de Custine to learn what the Soviet Union that we could not visit was like. Certainly some Russians have quoted Dickens at me as a guide to the English character. But the kind of thing that de Custine was describing was the difficulty of getting travel permits, of visiting provincial Russians cities. The difficulties were exactly the same in 1964. Nothing much had changed. What the Russians were looking for in Dickens was the squalor of London's slums and that did seem to have changed a good deal!

L.C. I think we should just end this section on the Cold War by asking where you were the night the Wall came down?

M.A. I was in Brussels with my wife watching the television. We did talk about getting on a plane and going to participate, but in the end we did nothing.

L.C. Sir Michael, you spent a lot of your life in multilateral diplomacy, in the CSCE and MBFR talks. Perhaps you would like tell us a bit about it.

M.A. That's right. I have spent a lot of my time in multilateral negotiations, basically in the security field – CSCE, MBFR and of course Nato itself, which for my six years was one long multilateral negotiation. But perhaps since we have just been talking about the Cold War and East-West relations, I should first say something about CSCE and MBFR.

These were essentially bloc to bloc negotiations. I was lucky enough at some points to end up in effect speaking for the West as a whole. I am aware that my experience, however relevant at a certain time, is in another sense now largely irrelevant since those kind of bloc to bloc negotiations may never happen again. We no longer live in a world divided into blocs. Much of what I have to say is therefore primarily of historical interest.

In the CSCE context, I was responsible in Geneva for Basket Three issues i.e. human rights and information, in the last 12 months of the negotiations, leading up to the Helsinki Final Act. What was so fascinating about those negotiations, and about the MBFR negotiations in Vienna ten years later, was that there were always two negotiations in progress. First you had the negotiations inside your own bloc to agree a position. Then you had a negotiation with the Warsaw Pact to see what you could agree with them. There was also a third, rather less important, negotiation with the neutral and non-aligned participants in the CSCE negotiations to see what they would be prepared to support or what they might be prepared to advocate. This was a time-consuming process. But it did serve to introduce a considerable degree of discipline into the negotiations. I rather doubt, looking back, whether the Helsinki Final Act could ever have been agreed had it not been a bloc to bloc negotiation. To have agreed a document of that detail, with that degree of impact on domestic policies in the participating states, with 35 separate governments might just have been impossible. The spectrum of views, practices and animosities would have simply been too wide.

L.C. I was going to ask you if you thought that were too many countries involved in CSCE? But as blocs?

M.A. As blocs it was more manageable and that was how it worked throughout. As you know, the whole process took almost three years to complete. I was only involved during the last year. The negotiations within the Western bloc took place primarily in Geneva but also in capitals, in Community meetings and in Nato. The process of co-ordination both made the negotiation possible and assisted us in getting our way vis-à-vis the Russians. We posed a difficult problem for the Russians because they knew that once we had agreed

a position it had a certain inertia behind it, which was very difficult to change. They also knew that on any given issue, we almost invariably had one or two governments in our group, in our bloc, who wanted to take a very hard line indeed. As I have mentioned, I ended up as spokesman for the West on Information and, latterly, on Human Rights issues. It was really very easy to say to the Russians “Well, Sergei, I would love to agree this text with you but I have these difficult people looking over my shoulder and I simply can’t do it”. (One did not usually name the recalcitrants because one did not want to expose them too much to bilateral Russian pressure.) This kind of line was true often enough for it to make the Russians’ life difficult. Whenever the Russians were able to identify someone in the West who was taking a different view or being particularly difficult, they would try to get at them bilaterally – often in capitals. They were extraordinary crude and brutal in their efforts to exert pressure – particularly if it was one of the smaller and less robust members.

L.C. Was there general pressure to try to split America from the Europeans?

M.A. The Russians were certainly interested in achieving that. They were interested in exploiting differences in any way they could. On the whole transatlantic solidarity was pretty good. The people who were difficult were the French. At times the French performance in the Helsinki negotiations seemed to me almost incomprehensible. They kept on trying to peddle deals on their own and kept on being disowned. Some of us used the surname of my French opposite number, Jacques Chazelle, as a verb to describe surreptitious and unsuccessful manoeuvring!

L.C. By the Allies you mean?

M.A. Yes, they were disowned by us. They would do deals with the Russians that could not be delivered because the rest of us said, “get lost”. I could never understand why the French went on doing it. But there you are. I will talk a bit later about Nato and will have to say the same thing again. The French, with their unhappy history over the last century, have their own reasons for needing to pursue a different line from the rest of us.

They intensely disliked American leadership of the Alliance. But that leadership was inevitable. The facts of American power were incontrovertible. The Americans had a direct line to Moscow and a special relationship with Moscow. American leadership was essential. The rest of us complained about it when we got it and complained about it when we did not get it. That was a consistent feature of my time in the Service. If there was feebleness and inconsistency in Washington, we were in trouble. If the Americans threw their weight around, there was resentment. But in the Helsinki negotiations, the role of the United States was not that great. It was a genuinely collective negotiation. Let me quote a purely personal example: the final breakthrough in Geneva came when the Russians accepted a package deal in Basket III which I had drawn up and negotiated on behalf of the EC and Nato and in which the Americans played virtually no role.

The details are in the collection of documents published by the FCO recently. But it may be of interest if I recall some of the background. One needs to remember that the whole Helsinki process was a Russian idea. The Russians dreamed it up in 1972, or earlier, as a way of getting the existing frontiers in Europe recognised. Brezhnev was personally associated with initiative. The price that the West had named for going along with the proposal was the balancing of Basket I (including the principle of the inviolability of existing frontiers) with Basket III, human rights and information. After two and a half years of surpassingly tedious haggling Brezhnev made a major mistake in April 1975. He stated publicly that he wanted the negotiations to be completed quickly and that he wanted to go to Helsinki to sign the Final Act in July.

I was, perhaps, a bit quicker than were other people to see that this gave us an opportunity to strike a bargain. In the face of a good deal of scepticism from colleagues, I persuaded them to make the attempt. We did say, literally, to the Russians early in May 1975, “if you want to go to Helsinki on 15 July, we have no problem but there will be a price”. We then gave them a complete text, without any square brackets, for the human rights and information sections of basket III. We added, “if you accept this, we will turn up; if you don’t accept we are going to go back to square one and will negotiate all the outstanding

differences individually. That may well take until the end of the year, assuming it is possible at all.” The Russians were beside themselves. Their first response was unacceptable, containing as it did attempts to re-negotiate numerous points. I then had the pleasure of saying, “fine, let’s start again”. Three four days later they accepted our package. The Americans played very little part in this at all (although there was an important discussion between Kissinger and Gromyko in Vienna at which Kissinger made it clear that the United States backed the Nato text). That kind of ploy is only possible if you have a bloc that is reasonably solid. The Russians were unable to strike a separate deal with any of the constituent parts. Russian acceptance of the package was, incidentally, conveyed to us, to a group of Western ambassadors, over lunch. The East Europeans were not present and did not know what was going on. They were told subsequently. That gives as good an insight as any into the true nature of the relationships in the 1970s. What I have given you is, of course, a very shorthand account of events.

L.C. What do you think were British interests in CSCE? Do you think they were very influenced by lobby groups back in Britain?

M.A. No. One important thing to remember about the CSCE negotiation is that the world largely forgot about it. This was an extremely useful card in our hand. The Russians underestimated the patience of the Western participants. They did not recognise the fact that, in the absence of public interest, professional diplomats would be able just to sit tight. I put a good deal of effort into trying to ensure that people like Harold Wilson did not take up the negotiation, raising issues with the Russians and searching for short cuts instead of being patient and waiting until a mistake of the kind I’ve described was made. CSCE was, as I say, the negotiation that the world forgot. With benefit of hindsight, we can see that it was a very significant event. But I had no idea at the time just how significant. Some journalists, like Don Cook of the Herald Tribune, did suspect its importance.

What persuaded me that we might have done something of more than passing significance, was an exchange with the deputy head of the Polish delegation in Geneva in the small hours of the morning on the night we finished the negotiations. This was a

month before the Helsinki summit. There had just been an enormous row between the Russians and Romanians about the speeches of thanks. Partly as a result, I was wandering around corridors looking rather depressed. One of my Polish colleagues, a man called Novak, came up to me and asked why I was looking so gloomy. I replied “ Well, post coitum triste. I have put a lot into this negotiation over the last 12 months and I wonder whether we, the West, should not have done better. Perhaps we should have got more out of you.” Novak said something to this effect: “Well let me tell you something. This text will go back to Warsaw tomorrow and will be formally translated. It will then be sent round the party headquarters in the regions. Do you know what will happen then?” I admitted to having absolutely no idea. “The phone will go in the party headquarters in Warsaw. It will be the party secretary in Cracow, or somewhere, on the line. He is going to say, “you people must have been mad to sign this thing””. That did make me feel rather good. And as we now know, the Final Act did turn out to be important. It was the text which the opposition movements, Charter 77 and the rest, in Eastern Europe and eventually in Russia itself used as the reason for demanding more access to information, more frequent travel and so on. Since their heads of state had signed the text, their basis for complaint was rather solid.

L.C. Do you think it had an effect on Russia's, the Soviet Union's activities in the rest of the world? I mean the Afghan War, which caused some hiccups in later CSCE meetings. Do you think it moderated the way that they acted in other spheres?

M.A. I do not think it made things much more difficult for the Russians – at least initially. You talk of the Afghan invasion. We might say something more about that in a second. But I do not believe the Helsinki Final Act inhibited the Russian authorities all that greatly. I am fairly confident that the head of the Soviet delegation, Kovalev, and the diplomat who did the Basket I negotiations, Mendelyevich, were both anxious to sign the agreement. (Both were, for instance, absolutely furious with the Maltese about the delays caused by Dom Mintoff in the last 72 hours of negotiation. At one point, Kovalev stopped me in a corridor to say that after the conference was over, he was personally going to go down to Valletta, take Malta to pieces stone by stone, and sink the whole lot in the

Mediterranean!) But the Russian who negotiated with me in Basket 3, Dubinin, would in my view probably have preferred not to sign the agreement. To the extent that the likely consequences of the Final Act were controversial within the Soviet delegation – and indeed within the Politburo, as we now know they were, the Final Act clearly did matter to the Russians. But I do not myself think the Russian authorities subsequently felt themselves particularly inhibited by the existence of the Helsinki agreement. They surely thought, as did Kovalev, that the benefit of the recognition of existing frontiers was sufficient to outweigh the other drawbacks. As I have already said, where the Final Act really mattered was in the rationale it provided for opposition groups in Eastern Europe. Dubinin will have had ample opportunity in subsequent years to say, “I told you so” (he later served as Moscow’s ambassador to the UN, at Washington and at Kiev)!

Turning, then, to Afghanistan. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan was of course a highly significant event – at the time and in retrospect. Mrs Thatcher and I were actually together in the Ambassador’s residence in Luxembourg when the news came through. As her memoirs make plain, she interpreted the invasion as an exercise in aggressive Russian expansionism. She and President Reagan consulted together about measures to punish the Russians e.g. the Olympic boycott. I must confess that I argued with her that night that the invasion was if anything an act of desperation on the part of the Russians – rather out of keeping with their usual caution. God knows the British had had enough experience of military activities in Afghanistan. The Russians were going in because they were unable to control the situation in any other way. That struck me as something over which we should not lose too much sleep. If the Russians were prepared to bleed themselves white in Afghanistan, good luck to them.

L.C. You were there to set it all up, but you were not, after that, involved in CSCE conferences?

M.A. That is right. I was consulted occasionally but I was not directly involved in any of the subsequent follow-up conferences.

The other negotiation of this kind was that concerning MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions) in Europe. It is appropriate to talk about it in the East-West part of our conversation. As it happens, I put together the only major initiative taken by the West in this negotiation in the 1980s. It turned out to be the last gasp for MBFR. It was an interesting episode and throws a startling light on the West's attitudes towards the future of the Cold War even as late as 1985. At that point MBFR had been going nowhere for many years. When I took over the leadership of the UK delegation in the early summer of 1985, it seemed to me that we should either close the negotiation down or try to put the Russians on the spot or perhaps both i.e. put the Russians on the spot and, if they reacted inappropriately, go home. (It was not a cheap negotiation. When I became head of the MBFR delegation in 1975, combining it with my role as bilateral ambassador in Vienna, there was a substantial cost saving.) As I say, I thought we should put together a package which would involve acceptance of one major East European demand that we had always resisted (i.e. abandonment of the need for a prior data agreement, agreement as to who had what forces and where) and at the same time presentation by us of new figures regarding the scale of reductions that should be made. I wanted to propose that the East should reduce its forces by 25,000 and the West by 10-12,000. There was a tremendous hagggle inside the Western camp about this package and about the numbers. The UK first agreed it with the Germans and then presented it jointly to the Americans. The process eventually involved messages between Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl. In the end we agreed what in those days seemed a rather dramatic package which I read out in Vienna, just before Christmas 1985, to an extremely startled group of Russian and East European delegates. The point of the story is that we had only been able to agree the package because Mrs Thatcher put her own weight behind it and intervened directly with Reagan. The Department of Defence (Richard Perle in particular) were strongly opposed to the whole thing. They insisted that the numbers of forces to be reduced should be limited to 12,000 on the Russian side and 5000 on the American side. In 1985 those numbers were still regarded as highly significant. Rather startling when one thinks where we were five years later. Almost equally startling is the fact that in those days it was an absolute given that reductions would have to be taken in manpower levels without involving equipment or armaments. When the force reduction agreement was eventually

completed in 1990, the CFE, the agreement was entirely based on reductions in equipment. People had by then accepted that if equipment left, the soldiers would leave with it. It never ceases to surprise me to discover that experts can turn through a hundred and eighty degrees with such ease when they have no choice. MBFR was nonetheless an interesting negotiation. We did wrong foot the Russians very comprehensively in 1985 and that gave me a certain satisfaction. I would love to know whether the Russian discomfiture had any connection with Gorbachev's April 1986 disarmament speech. I also look back with amusement on one exchange with Richard Perle –one which underlines yet again how much history matters. Perle wished to have in the draft agreement an automatic trigger mechanism whereby if the Russians later failed to carry out some part of the agreement, the agreement would self-destruct automatically without any further decision on the part of West European governments. This, of course, was an absurd notion. No European government was going to agree on a Doomsday mechanism of this kind. I said to Richard over coffee – not across the negotiating table – “You cannot be serious. What on earth is motivating you?” He replied “You ***** in London showed in 1938 that you could not be trusted. Why should we trust you now?” Eventually he was persuaded to drop the idea. As I had told him, it was completely unnegotiable. But the fact that considerations of this kind do motivate people should never be forgotten.

That was MBFR. Already by the summer of 1986, when I left Vienna to go to Nato, we were talking about a different kind negotiation. It was clear from the Reykjavik summit between Gorbachev and Reagan in the Autumn of that year that we were headed into uncharted waters. But old habits die hard. It is easy to forget now that there were serious internal rows in Nato in 1987/1988 about the deployment of new nuclear delivery systems in Europe, specifically the follow-on to Lance, an intermediate range nuclear missile system. At Nato's 1988 summit it was touch and go whether we would reach agreement that all. I have long since forgotten the details but there were endless debates about INF. There were violent disagreement between the Germans and the rest of us which were only resolved in an all night negotiation during the summit. This was not how Nato summits were supposed to work!

L.C. How were the Germans convinced?

M.A. Basically by an almost completely cosmetic American proposal for increased conventional reductions to accompany the INF decision. This gave Genscher a way to get off the hook. We had one extraordinary, and for me unforgettable evening. The US and the UK sit next to each other in the North Atlantic Council. Late one night in a formal Nato negotiating session, I sat for several hours between Jim Baker and Geoffrey Howe briefing both of them on how to conduct the negotiations. The Americans were completely out of patience as they did not fully understand the issues. This was one of the less good periods in the State Department and they were at six and sevens with the White House. The US delegation arrived at the Summit not at all well briefed and unclear as to what they were trying to achieve. Rather unusually, therefore, both delegations agreed to be guided by the UK Permanent Delegation. It was a long night but we got there in the end. Those were days when UK influence in Nato did indeed seem disproportionate. I suspect my successors as Permanent Representative could tell similar stories.

In Nato, as I have already indicated when talking about bloc to bloc negotiations, the institution does not really work when texts are being negotiated from scratch by 16 (19) governments at a summit – or anywhere else. The process needs to be directed. This goes back to your earlier question about the American role. The Americans do have Nato leadership. But they probably will not get their way, certainly not as effectively, unless some of the larger European governments are working with them. In other words, although one always hesitates to say so publicly, there has to be a directorate. A good example of this is provided by the drafting of the Alliance's New Strategic Concept in 1991. The text was in fact produced, over a period of many weeks, by the four leading delegations (US, UK, France and Germany) with the UK taking a prominent role. In the circumstances of the time, France's willingness to play a constructive and fully engaged role was remarkable. The fact that this drafting exercise was in progress was – or was supposed to be – confidential. The final text had to be sold to the rest of the Alliance as a Secretariat document. It would never have been accepted on any other basis. I have always assumed that many of the other delegations in fact knew what was happening but

had no interest in letting on. The Italians or Canadians, for instance, would have to make a fuss had they been formally excluded. But they were more than happy to have a text circulated to them which, by a fortunate chance, turned out to be acceptable to the four big players. In that kind of activity, and for all sorts of reasons, the UK delegation, certainly in my time, almost always took the lead. I assume the same has been true since.

I was always confident that Nato would survive the end of the Cold War. But it was clear that its *raison d'être* would have to change. I tended to scepticism about the likelihood of a trouble free transition as regarded Russia, East Europe and the Balkans. I ran up a number of warning flags. Indeed my German colleagues once accused me, in the NAC, of being a Cassandra. This was because I was arguing that the focus of Nato activity in the rest of the decade would be dealing with problems on its periphery i.e. out of area. By the time I left Brussels in January 1992, it was already apparent that Yugoslavia was developing into a major trouble spot. A particular source of concern for me related not specifically to Yugoslavia but to a worry that the Europeans would pretend to be able to act in a crisis before they were in fact capable of doing so. This is largely what happened in 1991 when the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Poos, announced in the context of the Yugoslav crisis that "Europe's hour had come"- blithely ignoring both Europe's lack of preparedness and the differences of view among the Europeans about the course to follow. At the same time, Jim Baker was making it clear that the US wished to concentrate on the Middle East. This was the period when the disaster with Milosevich and Serbia really began to gather momentum.

[? L.C. Could the Europeans have done better?]

M.A. One of the first things I did after my arrival at Nato in 1986 was to write a letter to the Prime Minister saying that we really ought to try to create some kind of mechanism within the Alliance whereby the Europeans would be able to work together more effectively. I suggested that she should take this on. Geoffrey Howe made a good speech in 1987 arguing the case. But of course Mrs Thatcher was not interested. It was a great pity. It would have been a very natural issue for the UK to have led on. It was something

the Americans would have been perfectly happy for us to do. I know that for a fact. It was also something, as Blair has now discovered, which would have enabled us to look European without having to adopt an excessively pro European stance. Sadly, Mrs Thatcher was both unenthusiastic and unduly nervous about the US reaction, particularly in the aftermath of the Reykjavik summit. The only thing on which, much later, I succeeded in getting agreement was that the WEU secretariat should be moved from London to Brussels so that it could co-operate more closely with the other major institutions, notably Nato. I had hoped that most countries would “double hat” their Nato and WEU representatives but in the event only a minority, including the UK, agreed to do so. The UK, in any case, never put enough effort into the development of a European defence identity. Perhaps Mr Blair will do so now. I hope there will be substance as well as presentation in our approach. If Mr Robertson is serious and has substantive ideas, this ought to be a relatively easy trick for the UK to take. Unfortunately, it was another of the issues on which Mrs Thatcher and I disagreed. It was sad that I, and those who thought like me, were unable to persuade her.

Another of the things that occupied me in the latter part of my time at Nato and which I found a fascinating was the “transformation” of the Alliance. In 1991, for instance, we were much involved with the creation of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, basically an American idea but one in the development of which the UK was much involved. By the time I left Nato we were already having meeting with 30 or more countries. Sitting down around the Council table with representatives from countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan was for me, given the situation when I arrived in Brussels, remarkable. Occasionally the progress of events gave rise to incidents of considerable drama, such as the visit to Brussels of the Soviet Foreign Minister, Sheverdnadze, who is now, of course, president of Georgia. My last meeting of the North Atlantic Council at Ministerial level, when the UK representative was the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, was the occasion for another remarkable moment. (If you look at the record you will see that the incident I am about to describe happened just before Manfred Wornier, the Secretary General, said goodbye to me. The two events are immediately next to each other in the record but, sadly for my self-esteem, not otherwise linked! To be accurate the

incident itself happened a few minutes before the then Estonian Foreign Minister, Meri, now president of Estonia, drew attention to it.) The Ministers, including Afanasiev, the Soviet Ambassador in Brussels, were engaged in debate. A message was brought to Afanasiev who read it, put it down, leant over and removed the Soviet Union's nameplate from the table, placing it under his chair. As far as I recall, this occurred about 1130 a.m. Everyone noticed. Later Meri asked him why had done this. Afanasiev replied "because the Soviet Union has ceased to exist". Some 30 minutes later the meeting broke up. As was customary on these occasions everyone was asked to go out for a group photograph. Afanasiev refused to participate, giving as his reason that he no longer had a flag in front of which to stand. That was the last meeting of the NAC, at ministerial level, which I attended.

L.C. Very dramatic!

M. A. That was about as dramatic as it gets for a diplomat. And it was, as I said, literally my last ministerial meeting. I was in post for another six weeks but there were no more ministerial meetings. Given that I had started about a month before the Reykjavik summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, and that my last meeting was as I have just described, I thought my five and a half years had been well spent. Nato, it seems to me, can take much of credit for what happened between 1949 and 1992. It really has been the most successful military alliance in history. When Nato sent some aeroplanes to Turkey in the summer of 1990, in the margins of the Iraq crisis, it was the first time the Alliance had ever deployed force in anger, so to speak. That is quite a thought. Nato won the Cold War without ever firing a shot. Admittedly there were nervous moments along the way, including near accidents during exercises like Able Archer in, I think, 1983. But that was before my time. In any case, the record of successes far outweighs the near misses.

L.C. Do you want to say something more about the French involvement?

M.A. Our French friends?

L.C. Did it affect to the business of Nato?

MA: Yes. The departure of the French from the military side of Nato was long before my time. But the French attitude to Nato was enormously costly in terms of bureaucratic resources and time wasted. We spent so much time trying to get the French on board, doing things to meet the French halfway and got so little change out of it. One had to persevere, one had no choice. Look at a map of Europe and you will see that France cannot but be involved. The French, in a certain sense, were able to have their cake and eat it. Over the years they did weaken the Alliance, there is no question about it. They also weakened their own security and spent more on their own defence than they need have done. In a security, as opposed to a political, sense they got very little return. The rest of us got none at all.

L.C. Do you think it was for internal political reasons?

M.A. Undoubtedly. The history of France since 1870 has not been happy. National pride has been repeatedly savaged. Given that behind the last century and a half stand Napoleon and Louis XIV, one can understand while all this is so painful for them. Think of de Gaulle and it is clear why the defence consensus is so important. But the rest of us paid a large price for keeping the French happy, or at least for keeping them more or less on board. In my view, in the 1980s, the French could have been more imaginative, could have taken more risks to meet us half way. But they never nerved themselves to do it. The same thing could be said of their performance during the Helsinki negotiations in Geneva. Too often their policies were simply destructive or unduly selfish.

L.C. Kissinger described somewhere the relationship of the Americans and the French as “long-term friendly adversaries”. This is much warmer than the relationship you describe.

M.A. I am speaking from a less stratospheric level. One of the most irritating things in relation to the French is that they are so talented and at the same time so contrary. Their diplomats are outstanding people. They are almost always among the only serious players

in the game. It made it more rather than less irritating that they pursued their often perverse policies with enormous brio and intellectual competence. Whenever a Gabriel Robin, or whoever, took the floor one knew one was likely to hear a brilliant intervention. It was just very wearing because it so often seemed wrong-headed. The depressing thing was that they would build these wonderful structures, presenting them as self-evidently rational and sensible. Anyone who cast doubt on their correctness risked dismissal as foolish or muddle headed. But of course the arguments were too often built on premises that were mere prejudice. At least so far as I was concerned the premise about France's role in European security was essentially irrational --i.e. that France could do better on its own and that France's posture strengthened the rest of us. It did not: it weakened the rest of us. The French knew perfectly well, of course, that outside Nato they had no security at all. But they nonetheless declined to make, and to this day have still not made, the moves that would actually have reinforced the position of the Alliance as a whole.

It needs to be remembered that the only reason the Gulf campaign was possible was Nato. Not that Nato was involved as an organisation. But the interoperability, the ease with which the British and American forces worked together would not have been possible if the platforms haven't existed in Europe, if doctrines had not been worked out long before and so on. The French were not part of that. I felt that their isolation was self-defeating. In the last analysis one understands well how it happened and why it happened. But my attitude towards France's security role is very critical, partly irritation over the time I wasted and partly regret at the opportunities missed. The French took the view they could get away with it. They thought that the rest of us would put up with it. And they were right. We did. But I cannot, at this late date, be expected to praise them.

L.C. And of the three organisations you were involved with, did you find Nato the most satisfying?

M.A. There is no comparison between CSCE and Nato in terms of magnitude – but, yes, Nato was also the more amusing. But perhaps I should complete my animadversions on the French by noting one other reason why their posture was so irritating. It was because,

from the UK point of view, the French were the only other serious military power in Europe as well as being the only other nuclear power. We ought to have had so much in common with them and in some ways we did. I remember, vividly, in 1988/89 thinking this and repeatedly hoping that we were on the edge of a breakthrough. The real similarity in our attitudes towards defence issues, nuclear issues and so on was going to be allowed to emerge and take its proper place. But on each occasion the chimera disappeared. It seems the same thing may be happening again just now. Whether it is going to come any closer to fruition on this occasion than on previous occasions I do not know. One would like to think that it might but who can tell. Anyway, enough about the French.

L.C. You were going to go on to look at the work that you did with the Armed Forces and the MOD.

M.A. Inevitably, given that so much of my career has been focused on security issues, I spent a lot of time working with the Armed Forces. This started in Singapore where I was Head of the Joint Intelligence Staff during the latter stages of Confrontation (with

Indonesia). I have always enjoyed the relationship. I find the military agreeable and, at least in the middle ranks, very easy to work with. On occasion I got into trouble with ranks much to senior to me (starting during National Service!). Not when I myself was senior: I have always found that very easy! But when I was a junior member of the Diplomatic Service, it was sometimes difficult to get senior military ranks to take things seriously.

And of course as a younger man one was, I suppose, inclined to be more radical. When I was in Singapore, although in a sense it was none of my business, I had to make assessments as to the future of Britain's military presence in South-East Asia. Very early on, I formed the view that we were destined to leave South-East Asia in the relatively near future – as indeed turned out to be the case. This was not an opinion that the military particularly wanted to hear. I remember vividly Sir Anthony Rumbold, who was then H.M Ambassador at Bangkok, writing a dispatch about SEATO, the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation. He cast some doubt on the longevity of the organisation and wondered aloud whether it had a future. The dispatch was marked up to the Commander in Chief Far East (CINCFE) who was then an Air Marshall, Sir John Grandy. The dispatch came back down to me for entry with a brief comment, written on the top of the front page in the green ink which Grandy used. It simply said, "This is treason. J. G." That copy must still be somewhere in the files. In any case it turned out that Rumbold was right: SEATO did indeed have a short life. That was not the only occasion in those days when I encountered such attitudes. But at the end of my time in Singapore CINCFE was Michael Carver, subsequently Chief of the Defence Staff. He was, and still is, a splendid man, as sharp as ever. The best soldiers are among the ablest people one will ever come across. The habit of command coupled with a good mind can be a most impressive combination. And they get excellent support. I was always amazed at the scale and quality of the support given to senior officers. I still am to some extent. If I envy them anything, I envy them that.

L.C. Do you mean the practical support?

M.A. Yes, practical support in housing and staff, in briefing and so on.

I greatly enjoyed my time in Singapore. In Phoenix Park I acquired the habit of working with the military which, as my subsequent career indicates, stayed with me. And of course it was a fascinating time to be there. “Confrontasi” was an extraordinary business. It is not often realised that we were awarding VCs to soldiers for action against a country with which we were in full diplomatic relations. Very odd. But it was so. I used to brief the single service commanders and the Commander in Chief every morning. I have a pleasant memory of the morning I briefed them about the apparent overthrow of Sukharno, the principal begetter of “Confrontasi”. The audience was satisfactorily startled and reluctant to believe me (though I suspect one or two of them knew a great deal more about the background than I did!).

Also, of course, since I was there from 1965 to 1968, I was much involved with local UK assessments of the build-up in Vietnam. I visited Vietnam two or three times. I think the consensus among us, certainly by 67/68, was that the Americans were on a hiding to nothing. They were not going to win the kind of victory they were seeking. I remember wondering whether a giant machine of the sort that the US could deploy was not going to defeat itself in a certain sense. It was obvious to me, being on the Intelligence side, that the Americans could not cope with their own intelligence product. They had no means of dealing in a structured and coherent way with the mass of photographic and other intelligence being produced. The result was that the immense effort of interpretation being made at junior levels simply never got through to the top people in a timely way – in real-time. What tended to happen was that two star generals were being forced to restart the process from scratch and to give essentially personal interpretations of the material. The machine did not function effectively. Visiting Saigon in 1967 was another extraordinary experience for me. I had never seen so many aircraft in one place. I was there on one occasion with the UK Commander in Chief, Land Forces (FARELF). He only landed to re-fuel, have a meal and a short briefing. But when we got back to the airport, our aircraft was completely blocked off. We had to sit impatiently for several

hours while the aircraft that had parked behind us were cleared away! I did not of course anticipate the Tet offensive but we all felt extremely uncomfortable.

Dealing with the Americans, among whom there were then a lot of pretty unreconstructed backwoodsmen, was not always easy. In 1967 I had occasion to give a talk in Singapore about China to a conference of defence attaches and intelligence people from Vietnam. In those days there was a good deal of nervousness about whether China would get involved in Vietnam. There was also considerable reluctance among the American military to accept that the apparent breakdown of the relationship between Russia and China was genuine rather than some sort of trap to lure the West into situations where we would find ourselves facing both Russians and Chinese. There were all sorts of misunderstanding about the Cultural Revolution. Anyway, I stood up and told them what I then genuinely believed viz. that the breakdown between Russia and China was for real and that the Cultural Revolution was not about to result in masses of students invading Vietnam or indeed to succeed in creating a permanent revolution in China. I said that Chinese pragmatism would have reasserted itself within ten years – which was not far from what happened. When I had finished and proposed taking questions, an American colonel stood up, said he did not propose to listen to this “pink nonsense” any more and walked out. Being a relatively young man in those days I did not know how to deal with this, the more so since there was obviously a lot of similar sentiment elsewhere in the hall.

Of course, addressing the military en masse is always risky. In the early Nineties, as I may have already mentioned, I visited Moscow and talked to the Soviet General Staff College, as it then was, about Nato. There was a formidable audience of 200/300 Colonels and Generals. I made a plea for a rational and mutually tolerant relationship. After I had finished and sat down, a Russian Brigadier, as broad as he was tall and covered with medals, stood up at the back and bellowed, “I hope, Ambassador, that you have not come here to teach us how to behave”. Dealing with the military is always, in other words, slightly problematic. I must say I always found it enjoyable, just as I have found working with the Ministry of Defence. The relationship between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence has on occasion in the past been quite difficult. But on the whole I

personally always found it agreeable. The MOD have tended to put their best people into dealing with Nato and international security issues. The present relationship is clearly the envy of most other Governments. In Washington the relationship between the State Department and the Pentagon is rarely at all close. On the contrary.

L.C. To what do you attribute this good relationship?

M.A. There is a very large civilian element in the Ministry of Defence working alongside members of the Armed Forces. The civilian element in the Ministry of Defence is staffed by people with similar academic backgrounds to those in the Diplomatic Service. In recent years it has on the whole been a very easy relationship. I made a considerable effort while I was at Nato to ensure not only that the individuals on my staff from the two departments were genuinely integrated but that there was effective co-ordination in Whitehall. I initiated a pattern of monthly visits by the PermRep to London which were the occasion of joint FCO / MOD meetings at Under Secretary level. These seemed to me at the time to be very useful and they have, I believe, been continued subsequently. I am not saying that they transformed a bad situation. They did not. But they regularised and further improved an already good situation.

L.C. The caricatures of the army, gung-ho, and the FO, endlessly playing with words, are too extreme?

M.A. Yes. I think they are a long way wide of the mark. Again, to go back to what I have already said, the best military people can be superb. There are, of course, exceptions. On occasion one could describe their attitude as, shall we say, rather backward looking! But in general they want discussions to go somewhere; they want to reach conclusions; they want clarity because they need it. One good thing that has happened in the last 15 years in this civil/military relationship is that the military have become much less gung-ho and much more cautious in e.g. Bosnia or Kosovo type situations. Before they go in, they want to be told how and when they are going to get out. They want to know the object of the exercise – something Colin Powell was extremely keen on, as was Dick Vincent,

something that was very important in the Gulf campaign. The military insisted on being told the purpose of the war. One of the reasons why we did not go to Baghdad, for good or ill (in my view for good), was because the military's task was to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait not to reform Iraq or save the Middle East from itself. I think that this is relatively new. In this sense the military have become much more sophisticated. Politicians have had their task defined for them in a way in which would have been very helpful in, say, 1914.

L.C. Do you think this reflects the fact that they do not have such vast resources in terms of men and money, that they must be much more focused?

M.A. What you have said is true. But it is also true, of course, that the destructive potential at their disposal has increased exponentially. These people really can wreck civilisations and a lot of them are uneasily conscious of it. It is not by chance that men like Michael Carver, whom I have already mentioned, have begun to express doubts about the value of nuclear weapons. They know better than anyone what would actually happen if weapons of mass destruction were to be used. They have been forced to think about it. Many of them have become much more reluctant than the civilian politicians to get involved in military adventures. That is the importance of what I have just been saying about having objectives and an agreed plan. Another point, which ought to have come up in the context of my earlier remarks on Nato, is that the habit of co-operation, our key inheritance from the Cold War era, is embodied above all in the military. Nato's integrated military structure (IMS) is where the soldiers of different allied countries have acquired the habit of working together. Their assumption is that if they go to war they will go to war alongside other Allies. Therefore they had better know how to fight alongside them and how to integrate their operations. They know perfectly well that no average nation state can hope to go to war alone and be successful. It would be nonsense. You cannot do it – or if you can, it makes no sense. (We could not have managed in the Falklands without American support.) That realisation is deeply embedded in military thinking now and is a very significant development. It is one sense in which attitudes in Europe towards war have changed for the better – as well as for good. It is another reason why the

enlargement of Nato, which is inevitable for all sorts of reasons, is so important. I want to see the Poles, the Czechs and the Hungarians learning the lessons of integration. They also need to get into the habit of thinking that the only times they are going to fight will be if the Germans, the French and British are fighting beside them.

L.C. And you think Nato has the capacity endlessly to incorporate new members?

M.A. Well “endlessly” is obviously a problem. The fundamental reason – to diverge for a moment – why the enlargement Nato was inevitable (as became clear to me in 1992) was that it was intolerable in a political sense to proceed indefinitely on the basis that Europe had been divided for good in 1945. It was not tolerable in Germany. It was not tolerable in Poland. I understand Russia’s nervousness about this perfectly. But the political reality was that a permanent division was not going to be tolerated. As for “endlessly”, my personal view is that for the foreseeable future no former members of the Soviet Union i.e. the Baltic states, Belorus, Ukraine, should be considered for full membership of the Alliance. It would make more sense for the Baltic states to be associated with the European Union. When I am asked, “Is that not a new dividing line in Europe”, the answer has to be “Yes”. But what is one to say? There are some choices that cannot be avoided. I do not think that the idea of incorporating Russia into Nato at present makes any sense at all. One would, for instance, be making Nato responsible for the security of the Russo-Chinese border! My own view, therefore, is that in an imperfect world the least damaging thing to say is “No Baltic or CIS members of Nato”. If the Baltic states are nervous, as they obviously are, they should be encouraged to associate themselves with the European Union. Ukraine, I think, recognises that membership of Nato would not be sensible. If you want to be nervous about something in Eastern Europe, be nervous about relations between Moscow and Kiev. The unity of Ukraine looks pretty solid at the moment. But there is underlying tension between Ukrainian speakers and Russian speakers. However, all this is taking us away from my past! You wanted to talk about being a bilateral ambassador. Vienna was the only bilateral job I had apart from, as a very young man, my time in Moscow.

L.C. I would have thought you would find it very narrowing after your multilateral activities.

M.A. Well it's different kind of job. I went to Vienna because when I was offered the job I was only 44, a flatteringly young age at which to become an ambassador in our system. I was attracted by the idea of being my own boss after my time in Downing Street. And of course I have a German wife. Austria is an exceptionally agreeable place as a posting but I cannot really pretend that Anglo/Austrian relations were at the top of anybody's list of priorities in London. Austria is an interesting country – at least assuming one has any interest in history. The gibe is that Austria's greatest achievement was to persuade the world that Beethoven was an Austrian and Hitler was a German. It is impossible to ignore that aspect, that background of unpleasantness, to Austria's history. Kaltenbrunner, Eichmann, Seyss-Inquart, Hitler – they were all Austrians and there were plenty of others as well. One can argue that Nazism was born in Vienna, where Hitler spent the years of his youth before 1914. Anti-Semitism was very marked in Austria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But leaving that aside, Austria is an extremely successful and extremely prosperous country. That was the appeal, not any illusion that it mattered enormously to London.

L.C. But what did London want you to do in Austria?

M.A. They wanted me to preserve and improve Anglo/Austrian relations if I could. In some senses I would have been reasonably successful except that about three weeks before I left Austria, Kurt Waldheim became President of Austria and Austria's relations with the UK, as well as with many other countries, went into the cooler – at least in the diplomatic sense! That relates to what I just been saying about Austria's history, which in its turn underlines why Waldheim was such an intriguing – but at the same time typically Austrian – character. Reverting to what I did in Austria, perhaps I should stress that at the end of the day there is not a great deal a bilateral embassy can do to improve relations or even to increase bilateral trade – which was the other thing I was supposed to be doing. I am rather unimpressed by the potential for any bilateral Embassy nowadays to change the

substance of an interstate relationship for the better. I do not doubt that it could damage relations without much difficulty but to improve things in a fundamental sense is challenging. I am not even sure it is possible – except in a rather ephemeral and superficial sense.

What I did do in an effort to move things forward – at least partly for that reason and partly, if I'm honest, to amuse myself and to give myself a goal – was to invent a project called "Britain in Vienna". This was in essence a large British manifestation in Vienna. I spent about three years planning it, from 1983 to the spring of 1986. In some ways it was rather daring since the FCO declined to foot the bill: I had to raise the money myself from the business community in Vienna and London. It was made clear to me that any debts left at the end would be my responsibility. In fact the whole festival ended up in the black, largely because of a movement in the exchange rate at a critical moment. But I believe it was the first time anybody had attempted anything quite like this. We took over the *Kunstler Haus*, the premier exhibition facility in central Vienna, and laid on a specially created design exhibition, which took over the whole of the top floor. On the ground floor we had a major art exhibition. The only criterion for the latter was that none of exhibitors should be over 45. We had a large programme of music etc. and the whole affair lasted for some two months. The British Council was, of course, involved – tho' only after a good deal of initial reluctance. Prince Charles and Diana came to Vienna to open the festival, flying over in *Concorde*. That was enormously popular. Tens of thousands of people appeared in the *Graben* to greet them. For a couple of weeks the trams were decorated with *Union Jacks*. In general the Embassy had a whale of a time. We had two publicity reverses. One I have already mentioned, the election of *Waldheim* as president. The other was that the day we opened, or rather the day before, the Americans bombed *Libya*. Even then, Charles and Diana drove *Libya* off the front pages in Vienna. I believe that the basic concept, i.e. raising money from the business community and putting on a major display of British achievements, British design, art, music, cinema etc. has been copied elsewhere subsequently. So that was all the rather pleasing. And of course *Margaret Thatcher* came to spend her holidays with us in Austria, not in Vienna, in the summers of 1984 and 1985. She spent ten days in a mountain hide away near *Salzburg*.

The Austrians do that kind of thing supremely well. I had a friend who had an estate up in the Alps who could receive her and provide for her security and privacy. In short, I do not think anyone could have done much more in a conventional sense to foster the bilateral relationship. But everything I might have achieved was swept away by Waldheim's election.

L.C. Do you think the bilateral ambassador in Europe is now doomed?

M.A. Oh no, they're not doomed. You will have to have ambassadors for a good while yet.

L.C. As significant players?

M.A. There are posts like Paris and Bonn – or rather Berlin – which will obviously always be important. But as regards ambassadors in, say, Luxembourg or Copenhagen, I am not so sure. You may have to have an ambassador but hardly as a significant player. And there is a problem about the kind of individual one sends. I was much the youngest ambassador to have served in Vienna, before or since (with the exception of Harold Caccia). But if you are going to make a post, in effect, a retirement post then you are sending a particular kind of message to the government there. If the job does not matter, then I agree it is an acceptable way of putting people out to pasture. But if you want things to happen you must send people who are much younger. But doing so does cause difficulties for the structure of the service. People must have something to which to look forward. Maybe these smaller European posts are best used for that. This raises the larger question of how Britain's public administration is organised. One of its drawbacks is the extent to which British society, British culture and British bureaucracy as a whole is based on people climbing single ladders rather than moving between ladders. One needs cross fertilisation between government service and commerce. This is, of course, something the current administration is supporting. I tried when I was Head of Personnel but got nowhere. It seems to be becoming easier now.

As for commercial work, the important thing has always been to ensure that able British diplomats have one or more commercial jobs reasonably early in their career so that they understand something about selling before they reach the top. I am not really persuaded that having businessmen as ambassadors is going to work so long as our society is arranged as at present. If there is a level competition, a head to head contest, between a businessman and a career diplomat for a job in their mid-fifties and for which they are going to be paid the same i.e. not commercial rates, the businessman will never succeed because he will never be of the same quality. By contrast, if you are going to pay a businessman £300,000 per annum, which is what you will have to pay to get quality, then you will create intolerable strains. You cannot have a situation where the ambassador in Vienna is paid £90,000 per annum and the ambassador in Berlin £300,000. That seems to me impossible in a career service. No businessman prepared to accept £90,000 is likely to be much good (unless he or she is doing it on a charitable basis, which raises other issues). Secondment the other way makes more sense because then we should have professional ambassadors who understand something about commerce. To get a real job for a competent diplomat in business is, of course, not easy. But at least you do not have the money problem to the same degree.

L.C. So you think that the moves the FCO has made towards commerce have not yet been totally thought out and totally successful?

M.A. I myself am not convinced that you can make ambassadors all that much more commercially minded than they already are or that doing so would make all that much difference to the country's performance. What would be most use would be a system whereby if the commercial councillor sees an opportunity in country X, that opportunity can be on the desk of the relevant company or companies in this country within, say, 72 hours. That could be done but was certainly not being done in my time. And Ambassadors need to know more exactly what it is they are supposed to be selling. For instance, we should be making a much bigger effort to sell financial services. One thing that this country does really well is the City of London, banking, the associated insurance businesses and all that. But I do not think ambassadors or commercial councillors are out

there selling it hard. Again, it is difficult to judge how much difference it would really make. Embassies can help in closing deals, in providing key political insights and the relationships that enable a deal to be signed. Relationships, intelligence etc. are what we should be focusing on, all with a more commercial spin that it has traditionally had. I spent a good deal of time in Vienna trying to do this sort of thing. Trying to get the Austrians, for instance, to buy the Lightning fighter and British armour piercing shells. I had many of the necessary contacts, arranged innumerable meetings etc. But when the team came over to demonstrate the armour piercing shell, it bounced off the target tank. End of story! There are clear and severe limits to what an ambassador in a small bilateral embassy can hope to do in this field.

L.C. Did you actually write up “Britain in Vienna” as a blueprint?

M.A. Yes, there is a dispatch about it somewhere in the files. But we were going to have a few words about administration.

L.C. This is your experience in Personnel Department?

M.A. Yes, I was in Personnel Operations Department for almost two years and Head of it for one. Of course things have changed completely in the last 20 odd years, as I can see from the DSA (Diplomatic Service Association) newsletters. Plainly, the approach to personnel management nowadays is much more professional- so much so that I am unable to understand much of the jargon. In the late 1970s, we had a substantial problem with David Owen, the Foreign Secretary, who had no interest in personnel management issues. He was largely indifferent to the reactions and concerns of his staff. Leaving that kind of individual problem aside, I always felt that despite the rather amateurish way we did things then we made a reasonable fist of administering the Service fairly and sensibly. How much has been improved by the changes in technique, procedures and so on since, I really do not know. But I am not altogether convinced that in a Service where everyone applies for every job that interests them, as opposed to having their fate determined by Personnel Operations Department, people at the end of the day are in fact more justly treated. In my time we made enormous efforts to ensure that the staff as a whole got a fair deal. Obviously some people resented the postings they were given and even more people received postings they did not particularly want. But the service as a whole was dealt with fairly. We deployed our resources in a way that was sensible and gave people a reasonable crack of the whip. What we suffered from terribly in those times, and possibly thereafter, was that we never had a margin. We were always understaffed. We never had enough people to fill the posts that had to be filled. This greatly complicated the business of secondment, training and so on. I am told that this is changing and that the Service is now getting rather close to full staffing. It may even have a margin, for the first time in a couple of generations.

L. C.: And why was that? Money? Not lack of talent?

M.A.: Lack of money and a reluctance on the part of governments to allow the Service to tailor its cloth i.e. to close posts. As regards talent, I have always been nervous that the Service employed more talent than is warranted by its actual importance. An enormous proportion of national talent, in terms of the bureaucratically inclined, goes into the Diplomatic Service. I have never been absolutely sure in my own mind whether or not this was a proper allocation of national resources. But it is extremely difficult to tell people who come top in the exams that they cannot join because they are too good. Anyway, that was my real concern about the “talent” issue. Of course I cannot speak about the current situation. My impression, despite the enormous disparity in pay levels between the public and private sectors, is that there are still far more qualified applicants than can be accepted. I find this rather surprising.

I suppose the structure of the Diplomatic Service will always be a problem – at least for as long as it (and the Civil Service in general) is effectively isolated from the rest of the employment pool. One needs a large group of talented people to be available in their thirties to keep the machine running, to keep ministers briefed, to avoid Sierra Leone type problems etc. But then what you do with the same people in their fifties when the pyramid narrows? Obviously there are some glorious posts. But there is also Port Moresby, or wherever, to be staffed. To persuade a 50 year-old with a wife and family to go to Port Moresby can be a very hard sell! (In fact, I believe Port Moresby is about to become locally staffed for just this kind of reason.) France could take talented people out of government and put them in to run medium-sized businesses. One cannot do that in this country. We have to climb our individual ladders, as I already mentioned. In other countries, like the United States, the system is different again. Any really good bureaucrat in the United States can walk into a job in the private sector more or less whenever he likes and return to government service later. Of course such individuals tend to have a political orientation, which is not the case in the United Kingdom.

So that was a real problem in administering the Service effectively. But I am hopelessly out of date now. And in the background there is, or was, a broader cultural problem. In my generation I simply could not see myself getting into “commerce” at all. It never occurred to me. My eldest son has become an academic; my daughter started as an academic although she is now in business. She and I, in my post retirement occupations, are the first two members of my family in many, many years to have earned their living in business. As I said earlier, they were clerics, academics, lawyers, farmers and so on. None of them had ever been in business. Repeated again and again across society, that represents a considerable problem. I hope it lies the past.

L. C.: Did you think the Foreign Office as an employer, as far as you were concerned, dealt well by you, developed your talents and moved your career in the way you would have liked to have had it done?

M.A: I can only say that I was very lucky.

L. C.: How much do you think it was luck and how much good management?

M.A: To some extent it was good management. But from my mid-thirties I was developing my own career anyway. Basically, I got the jobs I asked for.

L. C.: That really answers my question. It is left to the officer, if he has the initiative, to plot his career?

M.A: No. There is more to it than that. When I was head of Personnel Operations, we certainly had career plans, career development programmes. But when, as I was, you are dealing with a service that is chronically short of staff, it is difficult to develop careers consistently. One can only really do career development in a serious way when one has a margin and can take people out of the mainstream. You know then that you can fill any post. When one is understaffed, one is forever trying to plug holes. That does make career planning very difficult.

The individuals on whom a Diplomatic Service life is terribly hard are the wives. I think that the life is a lousy one for wives, I really do. When I retired, my wife had been an ambassador's wife for ten years and had managed big houses even before that. The pain/reward ratio was hopelessly unbalanced. She took the job of looking after the residences very seriously and put out a great deal of effort – with effectively no personal recompense. I am not blaming individuals in the Service. It was the structure that was impossible. There was, for instance, no mechanism for distinguishing between the wives that did their work seriously and the wives who simply enjoyed the parties and did little else. My wife almost literally rebuilt the residence in Vienna and substantially rebuilt that in Brussels. When we arrived, the house in Vienna was falling down. The façade was disintegrating – a policeman had been hit on the head by a large piece of plaster. But when we said, “Look, this has to be done”, the reaction we tended to get from London was “Who are these people? Why should we spend all this money on the place? We will just have the servants living better than they should”. It was difficult to go on telling them that people were tripping on the loose parquet floors; that tiles were coming off the walls; that windows and doors could not be shut etc. etc. We ended up having to re-decorate every single room in the Vienna residence, which is a huge building. It was only my previous job that made it possible to get the necessary authorisations in London.

My wife did all that and she got no thanks at all. Every £10 order for a box of bulbs had to be argued about. The basic attitude in London was not “Gosh, aren't we lucky to have somebody who is prepared to take this on”, but “Why should we spend this money”. For Traute ten years of that was more than enough. The other thing that was so infuriating was the whole business of “working wives”. The implication that a wife like Traute was not a working wife was intolerable. The service, instead, had to go through hoops to make it possible for wives to have a career outside the service. Wives who spent their time trying to maintain the estate, or whatever, simply came with the rations! But I hope things have now moved on decisively. Certainly they were going to have to change. One or two younger colleagues who stayed with us in Vienna said that they would never accept a posting as Ambassador in Vienna because their wives would not take on the job unless the

Treasury made special arrangements for them – which in those days was not on the cards. My case was not strengthened by the fact that I personally considered that in Vienna the residence was one of the biggest assets we had. It was perhaps more important than the personalities posted there. It was such a very Viennese building. It was in reality a palace and no one ever refused an invitation to be a guest there. I remember when Ron Lauder, Estee Lauder's son, came as US ambassador to Vienna. He offered, half seriously, to buy the residence off HMG out of his own pocket and to convert it into the American residence. He could easily have afforded the transaction.

I fought a long and ultimately unsuccessful battle with the Administration in London about the fate of the residence garden in Vienna. Even before I arrived in 1982, they had been toying with the idea of building new Chancery offices in the garden. I argued that this would both cost a great deal more money than they expected (it did) and ruin the finest private garden in central Vienna (it did). In the end my only achievement was to have construction postponed until after I had left for Brussels. The bulldozers moved in the week after my departure.

This episode also exposed me to perhaps the most severe of the several temptations to misbehave to which I was exposed during my career. Near the end of my time in Vienna, the Mayor, Helmut Zilk, sent me a personal letter offering to refuse planning permission for the new building if I so requested. (It was rumoured he had been lobbied by the Prince of Wales but I have no idea whether or not this was the case.) I was much attracted by the idea. But I eventually concluded that, however convinced I might be that I was right, it would be inappropriate for an ambassador to seek actively to frustrate his own government's decisions. In earlier days perhaps but not any more!

LC: Now we come to the private offices. This is to encourage you to be candid.

M.A.: I started in Moscow with Humphrey Trevelyan as his private secretary. I thought he was a marvellous man. He was gifted, humane and remarkably experienced, having started his career in the Indian Civil Service. He ended, somewhat improbably, as the

last Governor of Aden. He was very kind to me and to my family. His only piece of career advice - which I followed on the whole – was “Do what they ask you to do, never turn anything down”. In terms of recognition from the great and good, I suppose he was the most highly regarded diplomat of the last 30 years. I do not recall that any other professional received both a peerage and the Garter. He deserved both.

Subsequently I was unusually fortunate in having been private secretary to three individuals who were at one time or another Prime Minister. The first was Alec Douglas-Home. It was impossible not to like him. He must have been about the most agreeable individual ever to be both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. A humble man, he was also very much the aristocrat. He was not a man who spent a lot of time saying thank you for things. He expected them to be done properly as a matter of course. But his gratitude was obvious.

The respect in which he was held internationally was equally apparent. Alec was not an intellectual, perhaps not even a clever man, but it did not matter. I particularly remember the Belgian Foreign Minister, Harmel, coming to talk to him about some obscure aspect of Community activity. I do not now remember what the issue was. But it was perfectly clear to me, taking the note, that Alec was completely at sea. Nonetheless he made some sensible if jejune remarks. What was so startling was that Harmel, a great expert, evidently took Alec’s remarks as something close to the gospel. “Yes, Sir Alec, I see it just the same way. Absolutely right. I will certainly do that.” Alec got away with this over and over again because of the regard in which his colleagues held him.

Another thing that was remarkable about Alec, in the context of the current debate about the abolition of voting peers and so on, was that he had a position of enormous strength in the Cabinet. He made it plain to his colleagues, in the nicest possible way, that if he did not get his way, he would be off. He did not care. He owed nothing to anybody. At the time of which I am speaking he was Foreign Secretary. But he had already been Prime Minister, he had an estate in Scotland that he loved. If Mr Heath did not like

what he recommended that would be fine. He would simply leave. The implicit threat was there all the time. Everybody knew it and equally everyone knew that the Prime Minister could not do without him. So he almost always got his way. Usually of course his requests were modest. But we will pay a price for doing away with the hereditary peers. I quite understand that Messrs Blair and Hague can no longer defend the idea of a hereditary house. But a lot of the peers, and Alec was a case in point, were remarkable people. The fact that this was so was not entirely unconnected with their background, from their being accustomed to take responsibility and from their being genuinely independent. I suspect we will miss them. We won't quite know how but over the years we will lose something from the governance of the country. From now on everyone will be a placeman or in thrall to the voters. Everyone will be looking over his or her shoulder. Even the Americans have a hereditary political aristocracy – the Bushes, Rockefellers, Gores and so on. I am not sure that a combination of elections and nominations is really a better way of doing it. At any rate I greatly enjoyed working for that particular hereditary peer and thought he brought something irreplaceable to the job.

Jim Callaghan represented a complete change of style. I have to say that I am very fond of Jim too but he was a professional politician in a way that Alec Home never was. He was a politician to his fingertips. He was, of course, an unlucky Prime Minister, a man of higher quality than the record may indicate. There is the story of how Patrick Wright, when private secretary at No 10, fobbed off a number of ambassadors, including the Somali ambassador, who had been seeking appointments. When he gave the PM a list in of those who had been turned away, Jim spotted the Somali ambassador among them and expressed astonishment saying that of course he was prepared to see him. "Don't you know who my constituents in Cardiff are!" That was very typical.

The two main episodes while I was with Jim were the renegotiation of the terms of our accession to the Common Market and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. The renegotiation was in fact largely a sham since there was not all that much that could be changed in the accession agreement. But it was politically important and, in that sense, also successful.

It is also a good example of why the FCO is such an effective department. The day that Jim walked into his office for the first time after the election, there was a renegotiation package ready for him to pick up and study. He was very grateful. Indeed he has thanked me personally on more than one occasion since! In fact I did little more than act as a reasonably rapid conduit between him and the department. The real work had all been done by John Robinson and Michael Butler.

Then there was the invasion of Cyprus. Jim was unflappable throughout, unlike some of his junior ministers. It was my first taste of dealing with really unhelpful international figures such as Gunes, the Turkish Foreign Minister, and Mavros, his Greek opposite number. Jim says in his memoirs that he is not ashamed of the outcome. But the fact is that Cyprus remains divided. We should never forget that it was the Greeks who started it. The Turks responded willingly but it was a Greek manufactured disaster and a Greek government that was kicked out as a result. For me it was, of course, a fascinating experience. I remember lying in bed at 4am and taking a telephone call from Larry Eagleburger – Kissinger’s aide, who subsequently and briefly became US Secretary of State. We did our bit of business and at the end of the conversation he said “Michael, why don’t you and I run the world”. I also saw then, for the first time, how gifted people can simply collapse under pressure –and in some cases never recover. Anyway, that was Jim Callaghan and Cyprus. I remain friendly with him – a very sensible and decent man.

Finally there was Margaret Thatcher. My two and a half years at No 10 with her were the most strenuous of my life but not to have been missed. She was, and is, a very remarkable woman. It is easy to forget now that when I went to No 10 she was regarded as a very short-term prospect. She had been in office for a couple of months when I joined her staff. No one really expected her to win a second term. She had a poor reputation among the cognoscenti. Although the post at No 10 is much sought-after, many in the Service considered that I had drawn a short straw. Michael Palliser, for instance, plainly thought that my priority would be damage limitation. And the day before I joined her staff, Mountbatten was killed. So it was all rather demanding. But I

got on very well with her – so much so that later on she spent her holidays with us in Austria, on the estate of a friend of mine, for two summers running.

As regards policy, I disagreed with her strongly on some issues e.g. on Ireland and the hunger strike where she, on the whole, was right and I was wrong. On Europe her views in those days were good deal less pronounced than they subsequently became. For instance, she delivered a speech in Luxembourg in late 1979, which I wrote for her, which was rather pro European. But even in those days she was viscerally suspicious of the Germans and my efforts to change this e.g. by arranging for her to meet Helmut Kohl informally in the Austrian Alps were to no avail. (Incidentally, the story that Kohl escaped early from one of these meetings on the excuse of an urgent business engagement and that the Prime Minister met him window shopping in Salzburg a couple of hours later, is entirely untrue!) On East-West relations our views were broadly similar although she was, in my view, inclined to oversimplify and overdramatise the issues.

As regards stress in the job, you have to remember that during the two and half years I was at No 10, Peter Carrington was Foreign Secretary and Geoffrey Howe was Chancellor. Arguably in that period, 1979/81, the big three worked better together than at any other time in the last thirty years – much better than now, for instance, and much better than later in the Eighties or in Callaghan's time. You have to go back to the Wilson/Callaghan period to find a moment when Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary were working together as well. I am not, of course, taking any credit for this, merely commenting that it made my life easier. (Even so, the life was distinctly hectic. Outsiders tend to lose sight of the fact that there is only one private secretary at No 10 advising the Prime Minister on overseas affairs. The sheer burden involved in keeping abreast of events, providing timely advice, arranging programmes and, worst of all, producing same day records of the Prime Minister's conversations, is very considerable. In my time, meeting it was only made possible by the phenomenal competence of the "garden room" girls.)

If anyone can claim responsibility for the relatively good relations at the top in those days, it is Peter Carrington. (Not that it was always plain sailing. There was one occasion when we were staying at Blair House in Washington when Peter walked out of a meeting with the Prime Minister, slamming the door. I have often wondered what the Americans, who were no doubt listening in, made of this fracas.) The Rhodesia agreement was also primarily, but not exclusively, Carrington's achievement. Margaret Thatcher's contribution was, initially, to have made the negotiation possible at Lusaka and thereafter, during the Autumn, to have let Carrington get on with it while exercising her influence in the background.

L.C.: I did look this up in her memoirs and I thought what very little part...

M. A. What tended to happen was that Carrington went over to Lancaster House every day and came back to No 10 every night. We had sessions with the Prime Minister most evenings after the negotiating day was over. Her role was to be rather extreme, to criticise all the participants all the time. (So much so that I did not keep a record of these nocturnal discussions. They would not have done her reputation much good!) "I won't have it; I won't do it" and "Absolutely not!" "Why not propose this new approach, or that, to Muzorewa or Nkomo?" Peter would then go back to Lancaster House and say that the Prime Minister was giving him a hard time and that the participants had better agree to whatever he proposed "for fear of something worse". Margaret Thatcher had a great deal of credibility. Even then, in the early years, everyone knew that she was a very strong willed individual. I myself think that it was this good cop/bad cop relationship which made the Rhodesia success possible- the more so as the hand was being played by such a superb diplomat as Carrington.

Then there was "I want my money back" in Dublin and all that. I wrote speeches for her but not that one! Sadly, I was not present at the great confrontation between Carrington, Gilmour and the Prime Minister at Chequers. There was, obviously, a good deal of tension on European issues. But, again, her actions and attitudes gave everyone

else credibility. Later on when the splits became public knowledge it did not work any more. The colleagues became disloyal and the Prime Minister became eccentric. But in my time it was a single team whose members used, with conviction, the argument that “we have this lady who won’t to put up with that”. It worked rather well. One other thing one needs to bear in mind is that in those early days her position was not at all strong. She was often very depressed about the prospects e.g. for the economy and indeed for her own career. It was the Falkland Islands war that made the Thatcher era. Whether it was right to have the Falklands war in order to make the Thatcher era possible, I am not sure. That is a big subject.

But, as I say, she is a remarkable individual. Her energy is unbelievable. I recall that once she went off to the Mansion House to deliver a speech at some function. I spent the evening at No 10 and sent up three or four boxes for her to deal with overnight. I came in the following morning and there they were, all done. I knew that she had not returned until 1 am. So when she came in, as she often did, and sat on the desk to chat I asked whether she had not been exhausted the previous evening. She laughed and said, “Yes I was rather tired. I couldn’t really settle down so I moved the furniture round for an hour. When I was satisfied with that, then I did the boxes!”

L. C.: You never discovered the secret of this energy?

M.A.: No. But it is something all successful politicians seem to have. It’s not brains. It’s not charm. It’s not imagination or creativity. What they all have is the ability to keep going. Even Alec Home had extraordinary stamina and commitment to the job. Margaret Thatcher is not particularly clever or imaginative. She has an excellent memory, a firm will and a comprehensive set of prejudices. One of the reasons for her success was that she knew the answer to 80% of the questions addressed to her before the questions were asked. Her priorities were strong and clearly marked. She didn’t worry. She didn’t have to worry because generally her answers were instinctive. (A substantial contrast with John Major, for instance.). For good or ill, that is a very useful quality in a Prime Minister, particularly when the prejudices reflect those of a great

many of one's fellow citizens and are in line with the needs of the time. Analytical ability, which was not Mrs Thatcher's strong point, is ultimately less important.

L. C.: A good chooser of character?

M.A.: In the people immediately around her it was loyalty that mattered. If you were part of the family, as one was as a private secretary, she was ferocious in your defence and would cover up for you if that was necessary. If you were outside the family, and above all if you were a potential rival, the situation was very different. Then she did not care for the Tory grandees – Carrington always excepted. In Cabinet, Christopher Soames once remarked that to take some proposed action would be like “shooting a bird on the nest” i.e. beyond the pale. The Prime Minister wondered aloud what was wrong with that and, so far as I recall, ignored Soames' views. She treated Geoffrey Howe, when he was Foreign Secretary, in a deeply unattractive manner – even if I have to say that Geoffrey's manner sometimes encouraged her to do so. On one occasion, during a Nato summit in Brussels, I found myself asking her to “lay off “ him since I did not think it appropriate for the Secretary of State to be criticised by the Prime Minister in front of my (and therefore his) staff.

As regards her eventual stature on the international stage, my own view is that had she been able to take a rather different attitude towards Europe and towards Germany, she could have been a genuinely historic international figure. A Belgian diplomat once said to me that there had only been two people since the war who could have played the role of Charlemagne in Europe – one was de Gaulle and the other was Margaret Thatcher. The tragedy was that neither of them wanted to job. Both walked away from it. Margaret Thatcher in 1985/86 could have done more or less anything she liked to shape the political future of Europe- only provided her starting point was seen to be pro-European. It is an enormous pity, given the opportunities available to her in those years, that she did not choose to take them.

I seem to have omitted a good deal more from these musings than I have put in. But this will have to be enough for the moment.

Michael Alexander

