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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME
RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR EDWARD CLAY KCMG
RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY DR JOHN HEMERY OBE

Sir Edward Clay KCMG

HM Diplomatic Service 1968-2005

In conversation with Dr John Hemery OBE, 15 and 23 October, 2020

JH: It is 15 October 2020. I have the privilege of talking to Sir Edward Clay, for the British Diplomatic Oral History Project. In this first session we're going to go through early days – school and university, and joining the Office as it was then. Pocklington Grammar – what sort of school was that?

EC: It was - as the recent biographer of Tom Stoppard said – a minor public school, a member of the Headmasters' Conference, not very well-known outside Yorkshire, but with a growing reputation. About 500 pupils, all boys.

JH: How would you describe the community? What sort of ethos?

EC: It was a Church of England orientated, traditional public school with about half of its pupils boarders, slightly more than that, with the rest coming from the towns and villages of rural Yorkshire. I was a boarder.

JH: How was that? Life in many such schools in those days was fairly brutal.

EC: There was still corporal punishment, but it was a fairly decent regime. I have good friends who thought otherwise, but I felt myself pretty fortunate, much of the time.

JH: You rose to be Deputy Head Boy. What sort of responsibility did that imply?

EC: Mostly doing things for the Head Boy, as is the fate of deputies; things that he didn't want to do, or couldn't do. And it gave me my first exposure to a leadership role, which I'm sure my native self would have shrunk from, so that was good.

JH: While you were at school you developed academic excellence, ending up in the Oxbridge stream. Was that normal in the school?

EC: It was not so well-established that there was something called 'the Oxbridge stream'. In my year probably half a dozen went up to Oxford or Cambridge. It varied, but I was lucky. I had very strong teachers in the subjects in which I was interested, particularly history, English, ancient history. They were really very good, very encouraging.

JH: You mentioned those key subjects, and yet you read PPE. Why was that?

EC: It was a second, possibly a third thought. I thought I might read history. I even toyed with the idea of reading law, and then thought that really would be a bridge too far. And that actually what I wanted to do was to study this combination of subjects, which was still only thirty years old at Oxford at that time, and it had the smack of modernity about it – particularly the economics. I thought it had enough elements that I could develop from what I'd done at school, and that would interest me.

JH: Had you already thought, in your mind, even at school, about the Diplomatic Service?

EC: No. It emerged when I was at university. And in those days people were so keen to recruit graduates that they used to do what was called the Milk Round, and I applied for a lot of jobs, some of which I got, including the Diplomatic Service, but in fact, I decided to go into journalism instead. I'd already been accepted by the Thompson Organisation to go on one of their training schemes in the northeast, on Teesside.

So I chose to do that, contrary to the advice of my father, who was himself a journalist, who said, 'You shouldn't'. So, of course, he being my father, I did. And the Office said, 'Hmm, well, we're sorry about that, but, if you change your mind, do come back to us, and we'll take the initial written papers and so on as read, and put you in at the second stage.'

JH: Do you feel that the Thompson time served you well in what became your career?

EC: Yes, it did. And in things that didn't become my career. I found my wife, Anne, there on Teesside, and she is still with me after thirty-seven years in diplomacy and fifteen years or so in retirement.

It introduced me quite rapidly to a large swathe of life. Teesside was a wonderful beat for a journalist – old industry, new industry, ports, steel, agriculture in the hinterland, and so on. So it was a very rich quarry to mine. And it taught me about reporting, getting the details of whatever the story was right, and putting them first. Trying to write them clearly and economically. So in that sense, yes, it was professionally useful. It even taught me to type.

JH: Even so, after a short time, you went back to the Office. Why was that?

EC: In those days you had to work as an indentured trainee journalist, for two and a half years, and at the six-months point, if they accepted you and you accepted them, you were then clamped with chains to your particular last for another two years. I decided that I'd had a lot of fun, but I didn't want to do it for another two years.

JH: You had had perhaps your principal cultural shock going from Yorkshire to Oxford. What was it like going from the Thompson Organisation into the Foreign Office? How did it feel when you arrived?

EC: I was and remain grateful for the reception I received. My immediate colleagues, peers and superiors were generous. They did the training, or much of it, about how the Office worked, how to manage the bureaucratic systems we used. But I did feel – as I had felt originally at Oxford – a fish out of water. I was a provincial. I was seen, I thought, as much less sophisticated than those with whom I joined, and certainly much less sophisticated than the well-travelled, practiced diplomats with whom I worked.

Three other things struck me. The first was that, in control of the Office were still people who belonged to the generation that had been engaged in the Second World War, and there were some really venerable old types. I worked in a Department that dealt with North Africa and the Horn, and two of the more senior members of the department were great figures in the way the Gulf states had been designed and demarcated. They had physically walked the boundaries.

Secondly, I think I came in with about twelve others, and four of them were women, which I thought at that stage was interesting and quite promising, although few of them stayed for a

full career in the Diplomatic Service. These were still the days in which women had to resign on marriage. And indeed, I had to seek the Secretary of State's permission to marry, myself.

And the third thing that struck me was how, despite the confident way in which senior people conducted themselves, and expected deference from their juniors, actually the atmosphere was pretty relaxed; everybody was told to call each other, except the Permanent Under Secretary, by their first name.

JH: You started in the department dealing with the countries of the Horn and the Mediterranean littoral. Of those early areas, what interested you most?

EC: Looking back, the big difference in the Office now and then, is that, then, the Office principally comprised geographic departments, and the big panjandrums were those who commanded the land.

Second, we were much more concerned with the bilateral relationship, with cultivating what came to be known in later years, sometimes rather pejoratively, as 'good relations', with states in which we were represented, which was most of them. The ambassador in Addis Ababa, for instance, at the time was a very lofty character, lofty in every sense. He used to ride, most days, with the Emperor. And that impressed me enormously, and was felt to be, perhaps, the key point in the day to day management of our relationships in Ethiopia.

The Office soon re-structured to give pre-eminence to functional and multilateral departments. Nowadays, there is some renewed emphasis on geographic expertise: that is, on knowing how our policies on international issues might be supported or opposed in other countries.

JH: This was in the late '60s, early '70s, when one might have thought that the sun had already pretty well set on British imperial behaviour, and yet the way you have described it [the UK] was still a heavy hitter, at least in the areas you were covering.

EC: It was. But the tide was going out. One of my early memories was of the revolution in Libya in 1969. I'd been in the Office less than a year, and, as always, these crises happen at Easter, on the corner of a map, on a Saturday night, at midnight. So we found ourselves coping with something completely new, after our position in Libya had been the classic one;

like the one in Ethiopia, with an aged king, with whom we were hand in glove. We had enormous arms sales to this large country with a tiny population, and we had bases. We were a power in the Mediterranean. There was a Commander Near East Air Force, Air Vice-Marshal Smallwood (always known as ‘Splinters’, inevitably). But the key factor, the shadow behind almost all we did, was the shadow of Suez, only thirteen years earlier. It not only demonstrated our loss of position in the Arab world and beyond, but the trickiness of managing our overriding relationship with the Americans.

Overnight, our position changed. I remember being sent, as a very nervous junior officer, to sit in on a meeting of the CIG in the Cabinet Office to discuss this crisis, and to manage it. There were a lot of people in uniform, senior ranks round the table, muttering about ‘give me a platoon, or a squadron or a ship, and we’ll soon put these people in their places’. And my instructions from the Head of Department were, ‘We are to resist that kind of talk. We will not intervene in Libya.’ I thought that was very striking. I admired the attitude. I thought it was, no doubt, the only one that could be sensibly adopted. But I admired the fact our Head of Department was able to reach that decision after, perhaps, a talk with his Under Secretary. There may have been some kind of talk with a Minister, though I’m not sure that there was. But he was able to say to me, ‘That’s the Foreign Office view.’, and expect me to get it across.

JH: And did the Foreign Office view prevail?

EC: It did. We were on the point of changing ambassadors, and we were fortunate that the new ambassador was to be Donald Maitland, who had been the Spokesman. He was a very wily, wiry, fairly small Scot, and I think we benefited from the fact that he was held in high regard, and was not afraid, himself, to get into the dialogue, with great difficulty, with the colonels, the captains and majors that comprised the new men.

JH: Did our non-intervention help relations with the new regime?

EC: It made them difficult; but if we had intervened we would have been in even greater difficulty. I don’t think we could have put the clock back, and we should have set our other interests at risk. We would have had a disorderly departure, rather than a relatively orderly one.

JH: Your interest in Africa even pre-dated your time in the Office. You had spent some time before you joined, with VSO in Burundi, working with Tutsi refugees. How did that time impact on your great love affair with Africa in the long run?

EC: In the beginning it was a matter of accident, really. When I was about fifteen, there was an infamous incident in South Africa, which came to be called the Sharpeville Massacre, when some seventy or eighty protesters were killed at a police station, and a hundred and sixty or seventy injured, by a predominantly white police force, at the behest of a white racist government. I remember reacting to this, and one of my contemporaries, who was a sort of Anglo-Indian throwback, described me as a ‘nigger-lover’.

I’d never heard that expression before, but I could imagine what it meant. Anyway, I reacted pretty badly to it. But it set me thinking about colonialism, empire, race relations, and the difficulty we clearly were having in doing what *we* thought was the right thing, in de-colonising, which was not as straightforward as it ought to have been, as in the case of South Africa, where we were not in any sense in control, but we had influence.

The Headmaster of Pocklington was in some ways an enlightened man; he was quite interested in Africa. Whilst I was working for Oxford (in those days you did an extra term, and then had six or eight months off, if you were successful), he spotted a call by VSO for short-term volunteers to go and help administer refugee camps in Burundi. He knew that I would have time on my hands, and he said, ‘You should apply for this. I think it would be an interesting thing to do.’ So I did.

So that introduced me to Africa. I hadn’t been abroad at all. For the first time, I landed in a plane from London, in Uganda, and changed aircraft to go on to Burundi. And from there, I and eight others were divided up into teams to go and live in first three, later four, refugee camps housing predominantly refugees from Rwanda – mostly Tutsi, but not all of them, who had been the victims of successive waves of persecution by the then newish government in Rwanda. They continued to be the subject of such persecution for the next thirty years until the genocide, in which I was caught up, also by chance.

The other aspect about PPE that quickened my interest in learning a bit more about decolonisation in Africa, was a subsidiary paper called, ‘The Political Structure of the

Commonwealth'. I guessed that this was a cloak for something a bit more interesting than the political structure of the Commonwealth. I was taught by some outstandingly knowledgeable people, about the countries that were then making the speed in Africa – Ghana, Kenya, Uganda. There was one white southern African, Bill Johnson, still around, who recently wrote a very amusing book. They tended to be pretty left-wing, pretty radical. So they were very sympathetic to the new leadership, who are now not lauded as they were then – Kwame Nkrumah, the new leaders in Nigeria, and so on.

And there were, at the African Studies Centre in Oxford, some others, usually Masters candidates from the countries themselves, who did some teaching on the side. I got to know one or two, not very well. At Oxford, too, I became a correspondent of a Rhodesian/Zimbabwean 'prisoner of conscience' adopted by Amnesty.

Third Secretary, Nairobi, 1970-72

JH: Your first posting was to Africa, to Nairobi. Did it fulfil your imagination of what it would be like? Or was it different?

EC: It was different in the sense that anyone who knows Kenya knows what a spectacular country it is. Its natural life is exotic and in those days was plentiful. So from that point of view it exceeded my expectations. It was a wonderful place to live, in Africa.

And the job likewise; I didn't expect to be so trusted by my own bosses. We had many relatively many-layered hierarchies then, but here I was, a Third Secretary. In a sense I was dispensable. They could afford to tell me to do things that it would have been unwise, or possibly even risky, for more senior people to have done. And that was to get to know younger politicians, many of whom were, in a harmless sense, dissident. They didn't go along with the prevailing Kenyatta orthodoxy at the time – Kenyatta senior, that is. And they regarded the close British relationship as some sort of a betrayal of the independence struggle which had been fought by some Kenyans. But despite that, they were very open to me, and tolerant.

JH: What was your mission? What was the UK interest in Kenya, and in wider East Africa?

EC: The wisdom of the old colonialists had been that, of the three East African countries, Tanzania would be the most successful, because it was the most stable. That Uganda would be successful because it had the most intelligent, highly-educated population; and the Buganda, the people who lived around Kampala, were the most cohesive and well-organised in the country, and would give a lead. And that Kenya was hopeless, and would be likely to be unstable, and that there was a lot at risk for us.

Things turned out differently, of course. We put a lot of effort in Kenya into the relationship with Government, and that meant particularly with Jomo Kenyatta and his close circle. And we did that because we wanted to try to ensure that Kenya didn't fall apart – or blow apart – given the combustible material that existed within the country.

Secondly, we wanted to protect the major interest that we had in an orderly transfer of land from the old white settlers to African possession. That was not a straightforward process. We had had some years before a so-called 'Million Acre Scheme', and we had successor schemes. The idea was that we would fund the purchase of land from white farmers, at a fair price, and that this would go into the hands of the government, who would re-distribute it. Sometimes they did, and sometimes they didn't. Sometimes the new guys just hung on to it.

But it was important that that went well, because of the legacy of land hunger, and resentment about land appropriation during the colonial regime, and the desperate need to get land back into African hands; to get the displaced people, in particular those displaced during the Mau Mau Emergency, back onto the land.

So that was a major interest. We also wanted to protect quite large commercial interests we had in Kenya, relative to African standards. And we wanted also to try to prevent racial tensions between the expatriate and white Kenyan population, the Kenyan Asians and British Asians in Kenya, and the indigenous Kenyans, from getting out of hand.

Those tensions were continuous. They peaked particularly when Amin, in Uganda next door, expelled the Asians wholesale from Uganda. We were desperately keen that that shouldn't happen. We didn't want a disorderly movement in a panic out of Kenya, because we had a lot of people there. By the time I arrived, there were more European British residents in Kenya than there had been before Independence. But their character had changed. The

majority of them were not landowners and settlers. They were technical assistance experts, training people in animal husbandry and so forth.

But the Asians in Kenya had a throttlehold over the country's retail business, in particular. They were much resented, because they were the people who formed the glass ceiling at which the indigenous Kenyans looked for advancement, and they were in the way. And they were jumpy about their future.

So we had that to manage. It was very difficult, and there were some notable confrontations outside our Visa Section. But on the whole, it was well-managed. The Kenyans pushed, but not impossibly. We responded by helping to encourage an orderly departure.

At the crucial moment when panic might really have set in amongst the Asian population in Kenya, following the Amin expulsions next door, we had a visit from Geoffrey Rippon, one of then-Prime Minister Edward Heath's ministers, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, known colloquially, I think, as Mr Europe.

He was one of those quiet ministers, a Conservative, with suede shoes, a bit like Reginald Maudling – same wing of the party. He came out to East Africa, and started off in Nairobi. He simply explained to people, 'I'm not here to bite anyone's head off, about what Amin is doing next door. We will accept those Asians, of course. They are our overseas citizens, and those who want to stay in Britain will be welcome.' (Hence, Priti Patel and that generation of immigrants.)

But he said, 'I just want to tell you people – African Kenyans on the one hand, British Asians on the other – that your positions are understood. We do not intend to stand in the way of an orderly movement of people. Those amongst the Asian community who want to go to Britain will of course be able to go to Britain. But there's no need to go now.'

The Kenyan Government agreed that they would not behave in the brutal way Amin had done, with forced departure of the Asians, so long as there was some acceptance of continuous pressure. We accepted that they would in due course come to Britain. I thought it was one of the bravest political gestures I had seen.

It wouldn't be easy, although the numbers were not as large as, for instance, the Hong Kongers who have just [2020] been promised similar sanctuary. But we were standing by our word for this curious category of British Overseas Citizens. It calmed the horses, and it enabled all communities to subsist. By the time I went back in 2001, the Asians were many, many fewer. They were still very comfortable. They had almost all got out of the retail sector; they were doing their business, and their profile had sunk. That was something to be proud of.

JH: You used the word earlier 'managing' the situation, as the former colonial power. Were you out front alone, as a diplomatic presence, or was there some sort of coherence to the international response to what was happening in Kenya?

EC: No, it was a British response. We were seen as the people who had created the problem, and were responsible for solving it. We had some allies, for instance, the Canadians and the Australians, amongst our Commonwealth partners, who were also interested in receiving this very talented group of people, many of whom had considerable wealth, as well as entrepreneurial expertise and experience. Our closest diplomatic interlocutors were the Americans. Mostly we were on our own on many issues.

The hottest political issue at the time was Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. I well remember being sent down to receive a deputation of students who were marching past in a state of high agitation over our alleged failings in respect of Rhodesia. I got to the front door, and as I went through it to receive the deputation, I heard the chap who put me through, click the lock behind me!

JH: You had a number of local people working in the High Commission. Were they invisible support staff, or were they an integral part of the workforce?

EC: In those days, back in the 1970s, they were pretty much invisible in Chancery. We hardly used them in the way we use local staff now, and were hardly conscious of them. They certainly never came up and took part in Chancery meetings.

JH: Were they at that stage educated people, as most locally engaged staff now are?

EC: They were mostly doing more junior jobs, for which a high education was not really required: drivers, cleaners, and administrative support staff. None of them were doing political work.

JH: When you came to the end of your time in Nairobi, for the first time, what did you bring home from there, in your head?

EC: I brought home on my arm, a child, which was a major gain!

In my head I brought home the idea that actually it was really something to be a British diplomat. For better or worse, one had a reputation, and as a country and as a Foreign Office. And in Africa, of course, the reputation of having been the former colonial power. In Kenya that was a pretty sensitive thing, but it had the benefit that, many Kenyans said, ‘You people know us better than anybody else.’ And they used that in a blackmailing sense – ‘You should be nicer to us’ – but also it was a sort of grudging acknowledgement that we knew our stuff, we worked at it. And although they could never trust us completely, I think they knew us better than we knew them.

JH: Later in your career, when you went back to Kenya, you became very involved in the struggle against systemic corruption. In that first posting (you mentioned the land transfers), were you aware of the bacillus that was going to undermine the regime?

EC: Only to a modest degree. I was really only a junior dog then. Corruption had not yet got going quite in the way that it did later, and we were not quite so interested in it. I think probably we accepted that that was life. After all, we were responsible for setting up Kenya and its Constitution and its public corporations, in the way that had been fashionable in Britain in the 1950s. It was those public corporations that in fact provided the milch cows for the regime to milk: the electricity, the power, the railway corporations and so on.

It didn’t become apparent until a bit later just how badly run they were, and how open to corruption. I didn’t know much about it. Much of the chitchat was anecdotal, and it didn’t attract as much attention as perhaps it needed to. But there were plenty of stories about how Kenyatta’s circle were enriching themselves. And about the habit of the old man himself, who would go round the country he was touring, and he would see a nice herd of shorthorns

grazing on some well-tended field in the Rift Valley, and he would say, 'I like that place. Whose is it?' If it could be arranged, he would help himself to it.

Second, later First, Secretary, Sofia, 1973-75

JH: Can we turn to the next phase of your career, when you returned from Africa to Southeast Europe. How did that happen?

EC: Well, like all things in those days, it was mostly chance. My first posting in the Foreign Office had been in North East Africa Department. I had asked for an African posting first; I had thought somewhere in Europe would help to redress the balance. I thought somewhere in peripheral Europe. I didn't really have ambitions to go to the big posts. So they said, 'How about Bulgaria?'

I thought, 'That sounds right'. So I looked up the atlas, and it seemed pretty peripheral, and it was, of course, in Eastern Europe, in the Warsaw Pact, in the setting of the Cold War, so it would be interesting.

JH: It turned out to be pretty much a hardship post.

EC: It was in terms of living conditions. It was fairly oppressive for us, but I had a very interesting job, because the British Council, bless them, were able to afford a very modest programme in Sofia, but couldn't afford the staffing. The Office liked the programme, so they agreed that part of my time – about sixty percent – would be as Cultural Attaché.

It was pretty time-consuming, but absorbing, very interesting, and got me into contact with some Bulgars I'd probably never have known otherwise. I had quite a bit of fun, and a lot of frustration with it.

JH: Was the frustration political or practical?

EC: Both. The political frustration was that the Bulgarians worked in a very bureaucratic way, and they had to clear even their contacts with us, meetings and so on, and the infrastructure didn't work very well. Phones weren't great; everything had to be done in person, and if they wanted to slow a project down, while they caught up, or perhaps weren't

very keen on, there were lots of ways in which they could delay. There was a lot of competition about it.

From London's point of view, we were just beginning to develop the notion of 'differentiation'; that is, instead of regarding the countries of the Warsaw Pact as one solid block of ice, all the same, we would actually look at the countries individually, and see how and where we could best develop a decent relationship with each of them.

We didn't have ambitions of melting the iceberg, particularly in relation to Bulgaria, which was hardly worth it. But we did just want to see how far we could use their national pride and self-awareness to make them useful partners of ours, rather than just a sleeping partner of the Soviet Union's ambitions.

JH: Might it have been useful the other way round as well, as a conduit into the Soviet Union?

EC: Probably not from Bulgaria. It might have been from some of the other East European posts, on the one hand Poland, the biggest prize, or the awkward squad, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, who had a record of dissent and revolt, where the Soviets were of course keen that that shouldn't happen again.

There were some things in which the Soviet Union was interested, and on which the Bulgarians could say, 'We have a really interesting symposium for these scientists, or those economists, or some group of experts.' We discovered a huge hunger in Britain for East European orchestras, pianists. That might have been useful to the Russians, but I think they regarded their role in relation to these hesitant links with the UK as something that they needed to watch, for their own security, rather than to cultivate.

JH: When you were in Bulgaria, the UK had just joined the European Community. Did that European-ness impact at all on your work there? Was there a greater sense of a Europe, not so much that you were representing, as part of a larger tableau?

EC: I don't think so. It was all too fresh, really, at that time. I left in 1975, so we'd hardly got dust on our boots in Europe by then. And the European-ness of our work in Sofia was limited, first of all because very few countries had embassies there (most were represented

from Moscow, or somewhere else), and secondly, we tended to group on a NATO basis. We had the Germans, the French, the Dutch, and that was about it. The other Europeans were even further away than us from becoming members of the EU, or even of NATO.

JH: How much, while you were there, did Turkey loom?

EC: In a historic sense, quite a bit; as they had been for six hundred years the dominant and possessing power in Bulgaria, and some Turkish habits remained. And some important elements in the Bulgarian make-up, including the presence of a significant Muslim minority, who were themselves Bulgarians, but Muslim Bulgarians. And a strong attachment to the national Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, which for centuries had been their main retreat, the way in which the Bulgarians insulated themselves from their Turkish overlords.

In current terms, it was very important militarily – they shared a border, but it didn't impinge much on my work.

Defence Department, FCO, 1975-79

JH: You mention 'militarily'. You came back from Sofia to London, and your career took another turn, into defence. Had your earlier work prepared you for that?

EC: A bit. I'd always been interested in defence. I used to fly a bit at Oxford, and my family had some defence background. Defence was quite an important part of the relationship in Kenya. We did a lot of training in Kenya, and we had what became the priceless privilege of using the Kenyan army's own defence areas for training. So I knew about that.

And Sofia had introduced me to the realities of life in the Warsaw Pact, what it meant to live in a Communist state, and why we were armed to the teeth in order to ensure that the Warsaw Pact advanced no further than the Bulgarian frontier in one direction, and they were equally determined that the Turks, and others, didn't advance in the other direction.

So that interested me, but the first job I had in Defence Department was to do with the withdrawal of Britain, following the 1974 Defence Review, from many of our defence responsibilities and bases East of Suez. In fact, that process was pretty much well under way, and indeed, from 1969 in Libya, our position in the Mediterranean very rapidly altered.

But still, East of Suez meant that we were giving up some important historic responsibilities. It was a sensitive time domestically, sensitive with the armed forces, but as usual with them, you had people who were rather resistant to the idea of change, especially if it would mean sharp shrinkage in manpower and ambition, and more thoughtful soldiers who recognised that this was what we ought to do as a medium-sized country going through terrific social change and suffering major economic difficulties in that time.

So that was interesting, and it was mostly about trying to leave with dignity, and I suppose an appearance of involvement, which amounted to little more than arrangements and agreements, for instance, the Five Power defence arrangement involving Singapore and Malaysia in Southeast Asia: and the giving up of some staging posts.

JH: Was that 'retreat with dignity' driven from the Foreign Office, from Downing Street, from the MoD?

EC: It was the MoD, driven by the Treasury and Downing Street. So it was the FCO's job to help the MoD accomplish this, while making sure that we didn't render ourselves incapable of fulfilling the obligations that we still had, notably to the Dependent Territories.

By that time – the mid-70s – we had more or less given up all the Dependent Territories that were viable on their own, and, as in Africa, mostly wanted independence. There wasn't any dispute. If a country wanted to exercise self-determination, it could do so, and that was fine. We were not going to use our armed forces any more to suppress internal movements of that kind.

We nevertheless still had an internal security obligation in the smaller Territories of the West Indies, while we sorted out which of them wished to coalesce with the other islands, and become independent Commonwealth countries in their own right, and which of them wished to remain somehow attached to the Crown as Dependencies.

But we had some major obligations – the Falklands Islands, which in the 70s were the subject of Argentine mostly rhetorical drum-rolling; and Belize, which was at that time coveted by Guatemala, which considered that the territory should never have become independent in its own right; it belonged to them.

And in fact, they caused us quite a lot of grief by preparing for what appeared to be attacks on Belize, which required reinforcements from the UK by air, along a complicated air route through Canada, and down to Belize itself, usually by squadrons of Harriers. And that was enough to see the Guatemalans off, until in due course they accepted that Belize might become independent in its own right.

JH: At the time, as you've described it, Belize was the greater worry than the Falklands Islands.

EC: It happened to be, in 1975-76, more active. The Falklands were always on our minds, because the Argentines never let us forget it – as they don't now. Indeed, their claim on the Malvinas is a more or less constant and reasonably serious ambition that most Argentinians, I understand, share. These issues in the Americas were of keen interest to the US, too.

But the most intense battles were, I think, stimulated by the Treasury. There was one ship, called 'Endurance', which provided around the Falklands Islands a physical evidence of Britain's will to defend the Islands. It wouldn't have been able to do very much, except to call in reinforcements. And that was an even more complicated line of support, because we couldn't count on being able to use facilities on the South American mainland.

So these little bunches of property here and there in the deep oceans, like Ascension Island, turned out to be our lifeline. Our Head of Department was fond of quoting Kissinger's advice at about that time: 'You guys, with your Dependent Territories, little packets of real estate around the world; don't give them up if you don't have to. They'll always come in handy'. And indeed they did, in the case of Diego Garcia, which was just beginning to be developed as an American 're-fuelling facility'.

JH: Your mention of the Americans turns us to the grand strategic issues at the time, especially the deployment of useable nuclear weapons on the mainland of Europe. How did you perceive the feeling in the Office at the time about nuclear weapons specifically, and the place of Britain in relation to the United States at that stage in international affairs?

EC: I changed desks part-way through my time in Defence Department, so I left the 1974 Defence Review, and went on to the Nuclear Desk. I think, probably like me, most people

took the possession of nuclear weapons by the British as a given, and didn't think too much about it.

There didn't seem to be any reason why one should be doubtful about their utility. The Cold War was still in its full vigour, and the Americans, with whom we had a unique relationship in NATO, because we were the only other active nuclear power in the Alliance (the French having nuclear weapons, but having set themselves apart from the Alliance's nuclear policy and planning). We had this great intelligence link with the Americans, too.

So we were very close to the Americans, and were, of course, to an important extent, dependent on them in the nuclear field, technically, militarily, politically and diplomatically. And that was the most important interest we had to protect.

As regards the rest of the Office, the people who dealt with nuclear policy were a very small group of officials, cleared to the highest possible level. There were probably about ten of us who were privy to the innermost secrets of our own nuclear weapons policy, and the progress of the negotiations between the Russians and the Americans over the way that the two alliances, the Warsaw Pact and NATO, would be able increasingly to reassure one another about the circumstances in which these weapons would be used, or would not be used.

But there were some notable people who took an independent line. John Edmonds was a notable diplomat who worked hard and conscientiously in arms control fora. He'd been a naval officer in the War, and he didn't believe in them. And that was fine; nobody was going to mark him down for that.

Governments liked nuclear defence issues to keep a low public profile. Every so often, a development or proposed deployment (of so-called 'theatre' nuclear weapons, the neutron bomb and, most sensitively, the modernisation of UK forces) would provoke public interest and some opposition. David Owen, as Foreign Secretary, took a keen interest and argued hard for consideration of alternatives to the ballistic force we had deployed on submarines. (I discovered many years later how critical he was of the Moi era's treatment of prominent Kenyan opposition politicians).

There were others, too, either by conviction or by function, (because for every defence department there was an arms control or disarmament department), headed by very able

people. And their interest was to try to reduce the numbers and types of weapons that the Big Powers deployed, and that included ours, relatively modest though our numbers were.

JH: It is now clear in hindsight that the Soviet Union was decaying very rapidly inside, while it was purporting to be invulnerable and capable of warfighting on the outside. You were privy to the highest intelligence. Did anybody have any clear idea about the distinction between the image and the substance?

EC: The Americans, I think. I asked around, a few years later in the Foreign Office, and I didn't discover any people who expected the Soviet Union to fall apart in the way that it did, in 1990. It was very precipitate. There were some people who said, 'It was bound to happen'. Well, maybe it was, but the way it happened, and the speed with which it happened, were unexpected.

JH: During that time, were you conscious of its vulnerability?

EC: No. Not from that point of view. We were from a weapons point of view, but we all took [the Soviet Union] seriously, even though – you could see it clearly if you walked down the streets – it was difficult to believe that such a dysfunctional society and government could be militarily as effective as they cracked up to be. But they were. And they showed in Eastern Europe, in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia, that they meant and would do what they said. And the Americans took them seriously.

First Secretary, Budapest, 1979-82

JH: You went from that series of perceptions of the grand strategic competition, back into the Warsaw Pact, in Budapest in 1979, moving from strategic issues to commercial issues. How did that happen?

EC: Like most things in the FCO, the prime duty of the Personnel Department was to make sure that jobs were filled. They knew that I had become interested in Eastern Europe. I did want to do commercial work. It was quite a rare thing in those days to have the opportunity of doing it. The Office kept saying, 'We always want our diplomats to do more commercial work', and then they kept cutting the jobs which involved commercial work, and that pattern has continued. So I was quite keen to do that, and what I heard about Hungary attracted me

to it. I had one or two colleagues who said, 'Yes, you should go there; it's nothing like the rest of Eastern Europe. It's an extraordinary country'. So off we went.

JH: Did you have time to learn some Magyar?

EC: Yes, I did. I was never a very successful speaker, but I knew enough of it to rearrange my small vocabulary in ways that enabled me to talk to people. And Hungarians responded very well; they were not snooty about it. They knew that their language was one of their peculiar characteristics; one of the things that really set them apart in the world, and particularly in Eastern Europe. And they loved it, because it meant that nobody could overhear them ... at least, not successfully.

So to have foreigners speaking the language with any semblance of understanding, and with a decent accent and projection, was something that they welcomed.

JH: It can be helpful, too, if people don't know that you understand them ... Your job was commercial, and at that stage the Hungarians were interested in expanding their reach commercially. When you were there, could you see emerging an entrepreneurial group of young, new entrepreneurs, or was it still hidebound in the state?

EC: The state were involved, of course, in everything, including in the way trade was conducted, which was through what they called 'foreign trade enterprises', which took on some of the habits and appearances of entrepreneurial activity, but in fact were state companies, and you had to cope with that.

Some of the bigger companies did their own foreign trade. They didn't necessarily have to go through the foreign trade enterprises. Some of the big manufacturing companies, steel works and so on, conducted their own business, and in there would be some very traditional-looking heavy industry types, and of course some Party representatives, and also some very bright young people, who understood the technology and were keen to get on terms with their opposite numbers in whatever trading partners they had abroad.

The banking sector was interesting, in that the Hungarians had decided that this was the sector in which they would really make it. They would really set their own pattern. The banks had a number of very able people, some of whom very clearly cleaved to the Party line,

but nevertheless attached great importance to their ability to go abroad and cultivate bankers in the West.

They concentrated their efforts on those that they thought could do Hungary most good, obviously. The nearest and natural trading partners were Austria, of course (and that in a way was the one that worried the Russians least, because the Austrians were neutral, and the reasons for a close Hungarian affinity were historical as well as linguistic – they spoke quite a lot of German); Germany itself, and Britain and the US. But Britain, particularly, because of our own banking reputation, and the fact that we were relatively near.

JH: Did you have the enthusiastic encouragement of the Office and of Whitehall for what you were doing, and British business as well? Or were you pushing without much interest at home?

EC: I did have some enthusiastic backing. It depended a bit on personalities, but on the whole, London *were* keen to see links developed with Hungary, partly because the Hungarians seemed to be keen themselves; and partly because there were enough enthusiasts – relatively few, but enough enthusiasts in the British business community who said, ‘Actually, you can do good business with the Hungarians. They pay their bills, and although they bang on a bit about barter trade and so on, the way all Eastern Europeans do, in the end they pay in something more useful than jars of jam’.

JH: Were you aware that your commercial work had a political edge?

EC: Yes, I was. And it was a useful sort of ice-breaker for the embassy as a whole, because I could go to places on terms that were not available to most of my colleagues (so, too, the other commercial officers). They would see us, and it was recognised that they could, and of course they reported on us. But we could go and do business, and in the process get quite an insight into the way Hungary functioned.

Ambassadors found us useful, because we gave them the excuse to go and talk to somebody other than the rather stilted officials that they sometimes had to be satisfied with in the Foreign Ministry.

Incidentally, by this time, the Locally Engaged staff were pretty much integrated into our Commercial Section. We were of course on a different floor, so we weren't near anything sensitive, but we sat alongside one another, and worked together.

JH: What was the balance of your work, as between industry and agriculture?

EC: The Section as a whole did a lot on agriculture. Probably more work on industry, but to less good effect. Agriculture had a longer history of, as they put it, co-operation. We had had some good deals there. Also, the idea of 'barter', never far away when you talked to Eastern Europeans, had a bit more reality in the agricultural sector than in machinery or transport goods.

JH: Was there any pushback from anyone in UK about doing business in Communist East Europe?

EC: No, not that I'm aware of. At least in the countries I know, the connection was so relatively slight that we didn't get into sensitive areas. There was no question of selling to the Hungarians something that might have had a security or strategic or defence interest – or so we thought. We were much more prepared to do that with respect to Iraq or Iran, but not to Eastern Europe.

JH: You had two postings in Communist countries, in enormously different cultures. What did you take away from your time in European posts, in the same way as from Africa?

EC: Well, three children, rather than one. Major gains! I think I became more suspicious, perhaps less naïve, from working in Eastern Europe. One was so conscious of the surrounding security threat, and the way in which people could be targeted, and was targeted oneself. We were conscious that people would come into our house or flat and work things over – once, twice; pinch things – that they were continually watching us.

Even while the regime appeared benign, and liked to present a picture of rustic jollity, actually there was great cruelty behind it, in the way they treated their own people. I had one or two encounters, particularly in Hungary, where the past cast long shadows on individuals that I knew and liked well. I grew to mistrust things that I was told, and to want them to be supported by more than one piece of extra evidence before I would act upon them.

JH: How long was the shadow of the Uprising, then, over twenty years later?

EC: It was a pretty long shadow. Hungarians didn't much like to talk about it. János Kádár, the Hungarian leader whilst I was in the country, was a kind of bridge of compromise himself, in human form. He had been brought in by the Russians, on the tail end of their intervention, brought back from Moscow in the Russians' baggage train, and installed as leader.

He had a dual role: he was trusted by the Russians, who allowed him a reasonable length of chain on which to operate, in order that he could reconcile the Hungarians to the fact that they would never be other than a Soviet ally or vassal. And to do that he needed to make sure, first of all, that the relationship with the Church could improve; secondly, that the Hungarians enjoyed a limited but cultural renaissance, not only in the classic sense, but cartoons, modest satire and so on; and thirdly, in terms of prosperity, that they would be seen as the market leaders in the Warsaw Pact, for the availability of goods, including Western goods, and the relative freedom with which they would try and cultivate relationships with the Western European economies.

I think that was the deal, and the mood in Hungary waxed and waned a bit, as Kádár tried to pull back his galloping horses, or the Russians did.

But the cruelty really goes back to the Communist takeover. We had a friend who had been a very young man when the Russians came in, and he had been consigned to the hulks in the Danube until they sorted him out. We also had a lovely house in Budapest, up on a hill (gradually falling down the hill, actually). It had belonged to a soap manufacturer before and during the War. When the Communists took over, they came and said, 'We're taking possession of this house'. They gave him about ten minutes to put on a coat, and took him away, and he never saw it again, except from the outside.

When we got to Budapest, we saw [in the house] a bookcase full of books indicating a very cosmopolitan man, in the best sense, well read in several languages, obviously a highly-educated person. All the doorknobs were decorated with the classic Hungarian cross on the boss of the brass handle, and so on. I asked around, and the fellow who lived in the block of flats just below us knew the story. His father had known the man who had lived in what was

by then our house. He said, ‘Yes, I think I know him, and if you like, I’ll try to indicate that you’re here’.

I said, ‘I don’t want to embarrass him, but tell him we have a whole heap of books, and every time the bogeys come into our house, they take a few more. So I’d rather he had some of them, rather than that whoever is our landlord, *soit disant*, has them all’. So, by degrees, we got to know who this elderly gentleman was. I said to him, ‘Why don’t you come up and have a look at those books?’ So he did. He was dying to see the family, and he saw these books (we got out the stepladders, it was a huge bookcase), and he looked at them with great pleasure. I said, ‘Here are some boxes. Take what you like. You don’t have to walk away with them; nobody will see. I’ll put them in the back of my car, and if you tell me where, I’ll come and deliver them one day’.

He was delighted, and we were moved. But I thought, how vile it was that this fellow had been dispossessed in that abrupt way. At the end of the War perhaps not so surprising, but that in the meantime, nobody had tried to make any recompense to him. They hadn’t said, ‘Look, the house is now being let to these foreigners. It’s full of bugs, but we’ll give you some of the rent’. Or anything like that. It just seemed to me to be a form of class revenge carried to an unreasonable degree, that he couldn’t have access to his own books. I thought it was monstrous.

Personnel Operations, FCO, 1982-85 (and Head of Personnel Operations, 1989-93)

JH: You left Hungary to come back to London. You had had three posts by then – Nairobi, Sofia and Budapest, and six years in London, so you brought a great range of experience to the next stage in your career, in Personnel Operations. When you arrived back from abroad, and had to turn your head to one of the most difficult of organisational tasks anywhere, the management of a Foreign Ministry, what was your impression of how the system in the Office then worked?

EC: I became quite attached to it – and, ironically, to the way it used to work. I had four jobs in Personnel, in effect. First, in the 80s, when I came back from Hungary (where I had been for three years), I became the Area Officer for Europe, in the widest sense (Western Europe, Eastern Europe, right out to Vladivostok). In the second job I became the Home Area Officer, which was the biggest in terms of the weight of personnel of the four Area jobs.

Then I became the Assistant in Personnel Operations Department (POD), responsible for managing the A Stream as a whole, New Entrants in particular, and the operations of all the Areas that worked to that Assistant. And finally, coming back from Nicosia in 1989, I was appointed Head of POD, and did that job for four and a half years, which was a very long time, by any standard.

When I came to POD first, there was a well-oiled machine, and it worked very well. People were on the whole well-chosen for their roles. Some things had begun to change, in an evolutionary way, as they do. The Service was getting into the habit of consulting people about their next postings, and indeed grappling with things like career planning, which tried to look somewhere like seven years ahead.

It tried to look for long-term winners, the so-called 'Fliers Exercise', which became highly controversial. People wanted to know whether they were a 'flier' or not, and we got into the habit of saying ridiculous things like, 'You're a 'near-flier'. But it did work pretty well, and it was clear that our responsibility in the first place was to make sure that the jobs the Office had were filled, on time, with people who were qualified for them. And secondly, to try to manage people's careers, and get them onto the launchpad for a new posting.

The first function was the more demanding, because jobs kept coming and going. The FCO Inspectors went round deciding whether the job was needed, or perhaps needed to be changed in some way; whether the grading was right, and what the job specification should be. We had to respond to that.

We responded, looking at the balance of the post as a whole. Secondly, we had to try to make sure that the way we were developing the Service, from the beginning of officers' careers through to the end (which for all practical purposes was 60, in those days), was that they were going to be able to give good service in a variety of jobs and remain motivated and fulfilled for all of that time.

That was a pretty tall order. Much of it of course devolved to the individuals themselves. But we did get into the habit of consulting, and we had some really good partners in this vineyard (this veil of tears, sometimes).

We had a Personnel Policy Department (PPD) alongside, which helped to ensure that we obeyed the law, that we kept up to date with good personnel practice, and that acted as a small but very able source of advice on the problems that came up.

We had a Legal Adviser who was very important to us, and a Training Department, which was beginning to get more recognition, having been regarded in some ways as a bit of a poor relation. Training was vital in respect of languages. Without a really good language centre, and a cadre of specialist language teachers, the Foreign Office would have been lost.

We had a Personnel Services Department (PSD) which kept people paid, made sure the allowances were properly calibrated for the costs of the capital in which they were living, and for the job they were doing.

Personnel Operations Department was the central department in this large operation within the administration, much the most numerous, and with good colleagues working within it. And we had to work in a co-operative way, because at any given moment there would be a limited field of people suitable for more jobs than we could easily fill. We had to recognise that, if there was a pecking order of priority, that we observed it, and that we sent the best people to where the demand was greatest.

That really meant to the biggest posts; those were Washington, the major West European capitals, but above all the multilateral representations or missions (New York, two each in Brussels, Geneva and Vienna), and also to the most problematic posts (Beijing, in those days; we had no other subordinate posts in China), and to the specialist posts, such as Riyadh and Tokyo, where language and other skills were really in demand, and where the sensitivities of the job were such that you needed people who were of the right character, as well.

That was very interesting, and mostly satisfying. I lost more nights' sleep over personnel issues than I ever did over nuclear policy issues, I must say.

JH: Your job was dealing with New Entrants and the Fast Stream, and managing the beginnings of people's careers. Did the shape of the intake change during those years while you were in Personnel Operations? Was the Office making an effort to broaden its base, having come under fire for decades for being a closed elite?

EC: They were. Recruitment was substantially in the hands of Personnel Policy Department. The management of New Entrants became ours. It was our job to try to place them, keep an eye on them, make sure they were being well-treated, well-managed, and that they were being guided along a constructive path. PPD worked hard in the recruitment process. (I was involved as an FCO member of some of the recruitment boards.)

They worked hard, first of all, to try to widen the range of places where we trailed the FCO's coat as a career, opening up to more universities, and to schools. Secondly, to make clear, particularly to those who doubted it, that we were interested in the best people, and it didn't matter whether they were male or female, or whether they spoke with a particular accent or not. That was quite difficult, but they did it with moderate success, though there never seemed to be enough successes at any particular moment, when questions were asked in Parliament. But there was a difference over a couple of decades, a sharp difference, in the sort of – and the quality of – the recruits we got.

JH: There seems to have been greater success in gender diversity than in ethnic diversity.

EC: At that time there was. It wasn't that we were unconscious of the need for other diversification; we weren't. But we perhaps concentrated on gender, because that seemed to be the most pressing. In the 90s, we concentrated much more on the ethnicity question.

JH: Did you develop a sense of how this particular foreign ministry could attract people who say, 'Ooh, this isn't me'?

EC: Very difficult, because we don't hear them, mostly. I remember being outraged at one Board, hearing a candidate being interviewed. This was the Final Board, and he said that at an earlier stage he had put down on his preferences 'Foreign Office', as well as a number of others, but that in one of the earlier encounters somebody (not from the Foreign Office) had said, 'Oh, I don't think you're quite the type the Foreign Office are looking for'. And I really got pretty angry about that, because 'First, you have no business saying that; it's not actually our policy, and second, how do you know what qualities we're looking for that this candidate could offer?' That has leached itself out of the system, I think. The ethnic issue we still struggle with.

One thing I *was* pleased about, in 1997, when I became Director of Public Services, coinciding with the arrival of Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary. He said, 'We must be more exhibitionist; set out our stall'. It fell to me to oversee the organisation of an Open Day, the first of the Office's Open Days, to which we would invite people we knew of, schools we knew of, people who wouldn't normally come to the Office, as well as those who would. We filled the Durbar Court with lots of enthusiastic and, in the end, quite excited groups of sixth formers, students, people who, by their quality, for their age group, were considered very promising, and whom we would never have got a look at, if their institutions hadn't been in a position to say, 'We'll bring a busload up for this Open Day'. So I was pleased about that.

JH: There were still some divisions between consular work and political work, between executive jobs and policy jobs. What did you do to ameliorate those distinctions?

EC: When I first entered POD, in 1982, there were a number of fairly clear divisions in the FCO, between a Home Civil Service cadre, between Researchers and the Mainstream. Within the Mainstream itself there was a division between the Fast Stream and the Executive Stream. Traditionally, the Fast Stream had been recruited from universities, and the E Stream had been recruited from school.

Increasingly, as the 1980s wore on, E Streamers were also recruited from universities, and sometimes the distinction between E Streamers and A Streamers became less and less easy to defend, except by function.

Traditionally, jobs such as visa work, consular work, management work had been the preserve of E Streamers rather than A Streamers, although sometimes A Streamers assumed these responsibilities when they became Consul Generals. But there were a lot of ambassadors around the Service for whom these functions (management, visa, consular work) were becoming increasingly important, and they knew nothing about them. They had had no live experience. So that was a problem for the Office.

But it was also a problem for staff, because it meant that we were overlooking staff who had plenty of potential, and who had shown in the sort of jobs they were doing that they *did* have that potential. So for some decades a bridging mechanism had been established for E Streamers to cross to the A Stream. I had worked with and for people who had done that. Secondly, we wanted to try to merge the streams, at about the level of Grade 5, or Principal,

so that one couldn't distinguish between people except by their innate ability, and how they'd come into the Service all those years before. I think we were relatively successful in doing that.

JH: Was there any pushback from A Streamers who said, 'I only do policy'?

EC: Some took a view, and almost had imbibed the idea when they entered the Service, that they were a *corps d'elite* who didn't do the jobs of hewing wood and drawing water. But life was against them, because they found that they *did* have to do them, and above all, our Ministers saw that in the good or bad performance of these tasks lay a lot of scope for trouble, and indeed for the FCO to be not only criticised, but to lose resources, if they weren't seen to be doing what most people thought was the job of the Foreign Office, and doing it well.

JH: During this time, staff were going out of the Office to the private sector, to civil society, and coming back in. When they came back, did they bring back different ideas, different strengths, different specialist knowledge that proved to be valuable?

EC: On the whole, they did. For years, people had gone to the European Commission on long secondments, and increasingly we encouraged people to think of a spell in the private sector, or in another Government Department, or in an NGO, as being something constructive for their career. Some leapt at the opportunity, others were a bit dubious, suspecting that they might simply be out of sight and out of mind.

So we needed to make a reality of the promise that when they came back they would be seen to have done something useful. That was more difficult than it might sound. Sometimes they got exaggerated ideas of their value, or they had got used to living a bit higher off the hog than most civil servants did. But on the whole we did gain, and they gained, in terms of their being known and knowing a network of people in the private sector, and in acquiring understanding of the way in which the private sector worked, and in which good companies, NGOs, other Whitehall and indeed other foreign Ministries worked.

The substance of what they were doing, whether it was working on some project at the Department of Health, or working in Unilever, perhaps in their International Department, was a gain to both, as in the case of Ann Grant, an African and UN expert, who went to work with

Oxfam, in discovering how that big and increasingly important body operated in the international sector.

The Office was getting used to the idea that, whereas in the '60s we might have said we were the main, sometimes the sole UK player in international affairs, by the '80s and '90s we certainly were not. Companies, NGOs increasingly, were all crowding what we had thought was our private stage.

JH: During those years, when there began to be serious cuts, the Office was trying to maintain the same size and, in some cases, a bigger network, on what became eventually about half the budget. Did you or anyone else say, 'We can't do this. We have to make the tough political decision to cut according to the cloth'?

EC: We did. I don't think I was as effective as I ought to have been, because in POD we were at the sharp end. We weren't the people necessarily who did the research into the size and shape of the Service, which was something that PPD mostly did. We did not control financial resource. That was for Finance Department, and PSD. We didn't control the types of jobs at a number of our embassies, which was for the line departments to do. They had to respond, in the medium to long term certainly, to manifesto promises and foreign policy commitments which ministers had made. But still, the pinch came with us. We found that we had too few people for too many jobs. That pressure became more intense as we approached the millennium, and thereafter.

Some Foreign Secretaries were sympathetic to it, and some were not. Some just said, 'You must find it. Shake out the resource from your Command and fill those posts'. But it was acute in the 1990s, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the need to staff so many new posts in the former Soviet Union, in particular. And in the millennium, to open up a large number of posts in China, outside Beijing, and to staff those.

JH: Is there a minimum number to be an effective post?

EC: Experience shows that good people can make a success even of a small post. But they are rare animals, because if you're on your own, more or less, you find that you have to spend a hell of a lot of time performing tasks to keep yourself going, and perhaps not looking to the substance of the job which you're sent to that place to do.

I think everybody needs the company of at least one UK-based member of staff. But increasingly we are working very successfully with very good nationals engaged locally. But you must have at least two people to make a success of an embassy.

JH: During your time, particularly after you came back from being Deputy High Commissioner in Nicosia, there was an urge for reform. Where did that urge come from?

EC: In terms of personnel reform, it came from within the Department. Not that there were a lot of rampant revolutionaries waiting to collar me as soon as I sat down at the new desk. But personnel officers were in touch with their clients, their customers, and with line managers throughout the Office. They were the sources of feedback.

There were three things. One was the sense round the Office that POD was set in its ways, and wasn't really transparent enough, as the saying went, 'to satisfy the curiosity' of people about the way important decisions for managing their careers, their postings and their prospects were taken.

Secondly, there was a sense that we were out of step with the Home Civil Service, and didn't pay enough attention to trying to make sure that we were behaving in the way that a modern personnel department in the Civil Service should.

And thirdly, a sense within the Department itself that, although we had good habits, they weren't as respectable as they ought to be. We needed, in particular, to do more to develop the trend, which was already under way, of being more transparent about the way we managed people, and tried to plan people's careers with them in a positive and meaningful way. This meant a little more emphasis on the managing of people, which was our subordinate function, and perhaps a little less on our obsessive concern to try to fill jobs, wherever and whenever they cropped up.

JH: You brought in people from outside the Office, outside the Civil Service. Did that prove to be a good thing?

EC: I think it *was* a good thing. It was the right decision to bring them in.

JH: Can you say something about the process?

EC: The process was managed mostly by others, deliberately. We didn't want the process of reform of POD to be seen to be something that the Department managed to its own satisfaction. People would have seen that as being a fix, in the traditional way. Secondly, we felt that any programme of reform, to be respectable, would need to pay attention to what was going on in the world at large, what was best practice in the private sector. And thirdly – and I'm sure we were right in this – I don't think we trusted our own officials to do the right job on their own.

And that in fact turned out to be the case. When Coopers and Lybrand came in, the FCO Inspectors were tasked to work with them, to guide them through the bureaucracy, to explain what was going on. And it became clear that some of the guidance the Inspectors gave was based on a misunderstanding. So it was no harder, really, to induct complete newcomers to the Office, as it was to induct our own people. In fact, we ended up with a group of recommendations which nobody could say were arranged comfortably to suit us. They were uncomfortable.

JH: How long did the process take, and how widely did they consult?

EC: They consulted very widely. They went round the Office, they spent time, of course, in POD. They spent time looking at how the Boarding system worked, and the way the pre-Boarding system worked. (This was the mysterious papal conclave which preceded an open Board, at which we decided who would be the main runners and riders for particular jobs). This developed, of course, into the idea of competitive bidding for jobs.

So they had a pretty free run of the Office, and they saw how embassies worked. I wasn't unhappy, feeling they hadn't seen as much as they needed to see. I was a bit gobsmacked that they hadn't always understood correctly the phenomena they were observing. But at the end of it they came up with an enormous number of recommendations, and we had a choice. I remember sitting down with the Deputy Chief Clerk, and he said, 'Well, you know, we can either reject this, or we can reject most of it and try to cherry pick, or we can accept it. How difficult would it be if we accept it?'

We discussed that and thought that it would be quite difficult. ‘How difficult would it be if we tried to cherry pick?’. That would be pretty difficult, because some of us would want to pick out some cherries, and others other cherries, and it would be very difficult to reach consensus on which cherries we wanted to pick.

The third option, of rejection, on the whole was universally deplored, on the ground that we had put a lot of effort into calling for reform, and if we were seen to be rejecting something it would be thought to be because it was inconvenient to us, and we couldn’t stand the heat of change.

I remember consulting two good women who were working in the Department at the time, one of whom was the most senior Home Civil Servant to work in POD, which was very significant, and a good addition to the team. She said, ‘I think this is all good stuff, but it’s just running contrary to what is going on in Whitehall at the moment, in terms of building up the personnel function’. The other said, ‘If I were you, I’d reject it. It’s my view that we should just hand over the personnel function to the professionals, and have done with it’.

I didn’t like the idea of having outside HR professionals. I believed in the idea of ‘amateur’ personnel management, with good standards and all of that. The idea that good people would come out of the line and do a spell in personnel, would be good for them, good for the Office, and would produce a standard of personnel management which was humane and understanding, and where people knew that what they were serving out one day would be served unto them the next.

JH: Two criticisms have been made of such reforms.

EC: Is that all ..?

JH: One is that a private sector company can’t possibly understand the different pressures on a civil service, more especially a foreign service, and once you take away the profit motive, the context and the dynamic changes. Secondly, that you imbibe the latest management fad. How did you respond to those two criticisms?

EC: The first, that Coopers & Lybrand, and their leader, Peninah Thomson, ‘couldn’t possibly understand this; it’s far too complex and different’. That criticism could be levelled

by any institution that they looked at: National Health, Hospital Trust, another company. Their businesses are all quite different. Secondly, ‘imbibe the latest fad?’. Perhaps we would, but better than the day before yesterday’s fad, which is what we were running with then. We had to make a leap of faith. I had misgivings myself. Some of my colleagues had more serious ones.

JH: What were they?

EC: About those sorts of criticisms, and about what they thought would be the huge complexity, because one of the chief sets of recommendations concerned the way in which we tried to even up. Instead of making the filling of jobs, putting bums on seats, as people crudely put it, the great and predominant priority, we would try to even that up with the responsibility to try to manage people’s careers constructively.

And that involved dividing the Department in half, as you’d have people managing individuals, and other people trying to fill jobs in embassies and at the desks in London; and there would be a constructive tension set up between these two outfits. But you can imagine that it proved, first of all, to be even more time-consuming, and consuming of the personnel officers than any of us had dreamt.

Secondly, it generated a colossal paper chase (later, an IT chase), a heavy burden of reading, given the way in which individuals were to be presented in the meetings that would decide whether x, y or z would be best cast in this particular job. That just proved to be, in the long term, unmanageable. The Department swelled in size enormously, and I think today, with all the sensitivity about data protection and so on, it would probably have become more or less unmanageable.

JH: There is a noticeable improvement in the quality of management. Some have said that it has given rise to a managerialism that undermines the original purpose.

EC: People would say that, wouldn’t they? But I think that was one of the best outcomes, not purely because of the reform of POD, but that did give it an enormous boost. We had for years been conscious that people were getting to very senior levels in the diplomatic service without any talent for or liking of management, particularly of personnel management. And

here we were trying to run a Service that had nothing but people. They were our main resource.

So we were preparing people, training them expensively, and they would go off to a job and be treated miserably badly. Or, to say the least, have no follow through at post – managers who would not write their reports, and so on. So, under the reform of POD, we managed to get it accepted by senior management, who were very ready to accept it, that we really would make it a principle that people would not be promoted to the top jobs who were bad managers, and we knew pretty much who *they* were.

So we replaced the ‘fliers’ league table with the ‘bad managers’ league table. Indeed, we did stop some appointments that would have been bad if they had taken place. And I think that was a good thing. People say ‘managerialism’; perhaps they did mean that. Certainly, those who were the targets of it probably felt it hard. But I think it was one of the chief gains.

Other aspects of managerialism were not necessarily up to us. They were things that were happening anyway, and would have happened. The reform of POD was such a big part of the administration, and so much in people’s lives, that in the backdraft of the things we were trying to do, in came quite a lot of other good new things. New thinking about homosexuality, which would have come at some stage, also. Suddenly, there was a feeling that, why had we been so obsessed that homosexuality was a problem? Looking back from now you think, that was the least of our troubles.

JH: Questions of security?

EC: But, you know, we had just kissed goodbye to the Warsaw Pact. We were within reaching distance of posting our first married couple, shared ambassadorial jobs. Getting people to work in new and different ways. Suddenly these things seemed to become possible, and we could dare to ask, ‘Why not?’. From that point of view, it was exhilarating, and it was right to do.

There were inconveniences. We experimented with forms of report writing which irritated the hell out of people. But, once a year? All of us take our expensive cars to be serviced once a year. It is not too much to ask a manager to sit down with each of the people she or he manages and to say, every few months, ‘How are you getting on? Let’s have a look at the

objectives you got when you first arrived, and after a year', and to sum that up properly. And then to say to the reported upon, 'We'd like you also to write a report now on the boss. How do you feel about working in this outfit?'. Of course people did find that a bit irksome, but it's the way a civilised public service ought to work. Still.

On the whole, though, I'm impressed more by the progress than by the fallibility of human beings' efforts to engineer worthwhile objectives, or to achieve quite worthwhile ambitions. For example, our desire to plan people's careers, and to use their skills to the maximum.

I reflect that, when I went to Kampala, I didn't know until the last minute that I was also going to receive Rwanda and Burundi. The then Director said (I paraphrase), 'We have these two countries, and we've had problems of representation for years. Sometimes they've been represented from Kinshasa, or one of them from Kinshasa, and one from Dar es Salaam. It has been all over the place. We're going to give them to you, because communications with them from Uganda are best. Our main interest is in Rwanda, because of the relationship of Museveni with the Rwanda Patriotic Front. So here they are, lad, two balls of dung. They should take one percent of your time. Turn them into gold. Goodbye'.

It struck me as odd, but nobody in the Office had remembered that one of the earliest papers they must have had about me was that I had been in Burundi in 1964, living with Rwandan refugees, and I don't think anybody else at that time had. The time when we had embassies in both countries was in the '60s, and they'd been closed, sometimes opened again, and ultimately closed definitively. But nobody had said, 'Actually these accreditations make sense, not just because there's a decent air timetable or something (which there wasn't), but because you know something about a problematic area of the world'. We ought to be more attentive to the skills that people bring to the Office, rather than trying to develop them all the time. I think that the Office is much better at that now.

JH: Training in many organisations is a Cinderella operation, and the first to be cut. Has the Office been good at its training development?

EC: Training had been a bit of a small department, but it did have, and maintained for years, good language cadres and a language school, as long as it was feasible, in Arabic, in Shemlan [Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies (MECAS)], much-beloved of Arabic speakers of my generation, and a bit older now, since it closed. And really good teachers in London of

French and so on, who were disbanded, again, pretty thoughtlessly. These are the Office's assets, which just casually were thrown away.

I don't get the impression that the people who are managing the courses offered by the Diplomatic Academy are enthused by them, or about them, in the way that they ought to be. It's very difficult, if that's the case, to persuade those who come in to do the courses to take them with all the seriousness, or all the fun, if they are going to really acquire benefits by disappearing from their desks for a few days at a time.

But I don't know about the resources aspects. It looks as though they can afford lots of flash equipment; but how good they are at persuading people to leave their work behind them to come and do training, I don't know.

JH: You said you had more sleepless nights in personnel than you ever had over nuclear issues. What gave you the sleepless nights?

EC: Hard decisions. I remember getting a call from somebody my age, saying, 'I'm about to spoil your weekend', and then went on to say that a Sunday newspaper was going to unveil him as a closet homosexual. That was grotesque and unfair, and, happily, we were able to handle it intelligently, as he had handled us intelligently, by warning us that this was going to come out.

But you discover in Personnel that the things that make you agonise are people's domestic and personal problems. Sometimes their ambitions, sometimes the extraordinary lack of confidence that quite senior people show, about, 'Do ministers like me?'; 'What do ministers think of me?'. These things take you into the heart of the human condition, really, and you realise (a) how common these problems are, and (b) how few those who are suffering from them have people they feel they can talk to. Sometimes that can be burdensome.

JH: One of the problems of management, particularly of mid-career and middle-senior managers, is overwork. You said that a good manager ought to be able to spend some time mentoring their subordinates, but as a result of ICT, the whole infrastructure of administrative support has been stripped out. People spend a great deal of time simply managing themselves, and don't have time to give to personnel performance management, and to the concerns of their staff. Was that in your time remediable? Is it ever, now, remediable?

EC: In my time in Personnel, the ICT revolution was really in its infancy. We had computers, but they weren't as useful, still less as effective and omnipresent as they have become. So that problem didn't really loom as large as it has, but I do think it's a problem. Not only or necessarily in the management of people, but in the way diplomats do their job.

If you sit too long in front of a screen answering what may be stream of consciousness emails from all over the place, you never take time to step back and take a look at your job, and to say, 'What I should be doing now is walking around the corridors of parliament, or of the [UN] Environment Program, or even, god forbid, going to help open some new wing of a primary school out in the sticks'.

This is a real problem, and I don't have an answer to it, but it would be wrong for diplomacy, which is a human business in which the transactions are almost always made by human beings, to be dominated by the processes of IT. Diplomats have got to make time for talking: to themselves, to other diplomats, to their staff, to the general public - to the general public perhaps more than anybody.

JH: One final point from this part of your career. When you were there, the Office still owned Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Were there two distinct cultures between the overseas development people, and in particular the A Stream policy people, seeing their job differently? In other foreign ministries, in Canada and Australia for example, trade and development have been bolted together with foreign affairs, separated, re-bolted together, usually each time with difficulty.

EC: It probably has been a problem. When I was back in London in the '80s and early '90s, I wasn't so much conscious of it. But having something as big and important as the Overseas Development Administration bolted on was bound to be one of the bigger divisions, because the ODA had some really able civil servants working for it, as well as expertise (contract officers, mostly in the field, of course), and they had to have a distinct rationale in order to be taken seriously.

Sometimes that extended into officials thinking that either diplomats or aid officials should do the other's work. Sometimes that would lead to difficulty. But on the whole the ODA and the FCO made quite a good fist of things, with forbearing Permanent Secretaries. In the

'80s and '90s. One of the great human resources in this area was having a minister who supervised both. The Minister for Africa, Lynda Chalker, also supervised the ODA, which was very suitable, and it helped to avoid conflict.

The most infamous conflict, of course, arose over the Pergau Dam in Malaysia, where the Foreign Secretary had tried to use the aid budget as a *douceur* to obtain some commercial defence benefits. That led to a huge row, because, in the end, Tim Lankester had to tell the Foreign Secretary that the decision had been flawed. And I remember Douglas Hurd, who was supposed to be coming to Kampala to visit Rwanda just after the end of the genocide in 1994, having to cancel that visit to attend a debate [on the Pergau Dam issue] in the House of Commons.

But on the whole the relationship worked well, and I remember Anthony Goodenough telling me, in 1994, that the agenda on which both sides were agreed was 'conditionality'. That is, that the aid budget would go to countries that showed they would reform their politics and economics. After all, this was in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Cold War was over, and all the old clients that we'd been propping up with bucketsful of aid, like Moi and Mobutu, and all those old-fashioned leaders who for years had been our very good partners, we no longer needed to sustain, because the consequence of their departure was not going to be the takeover of government by some Communist-led rebel movement.

JH: After you left Personnel, but while you were still serving, the Department for International Development was created, and moved fairly rapidly to create a parallel system of 'embassies' which didn't always work hand in hand with the accredited embassy. How did you see that process at first hand?

EC: I was in Uganda at the time when the old ODA was there, and we had a pretty good relationship with the Development Office in Nairobi, which was clearly subordinate to the High Commission. The styles and responsibilities varied a bit, but essentially Nairobi had a development division headquarters for Eastern Africa, and we had an Aid Secretary in Kampala who was a diplomat. We would be visited by one or other of their specialists from Nairobi, or occasionally from London, on particular programmes.

By the time I got to Nairobi, DFID had been in existence for four years, and Clare Short had set for it a very decided, determined direction to her own design, assisted by Myles

Wickstead, who had been the Head of the Development Division in Nairobi. He wrote the White Paper which produced the International Development Assistance Act, which said that, thenceforward, the DFID budget would be entirely the responsibility of the Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, and that, secondly, its main purpose was the eradication (later modified to the reduction) of poverty in the recipient countries.

Clare Short was determined that DFID would set its own path, would have its own corps of excellent civil servants, and the power to engage people on contract for whatever purposes they wanted to use them in particular countries. These people would be reporting to her. They should work with embassies, but not be their servants, in the way that a consul or defence attaché might be considered the servant of the ambassador. She was very determined about this. I think that some of her officials were in awe of her.

She was a very tough woman. I watched her in Nairobi round my dinner table. She had come out because she wanted to talk to the then new government of President Kibaki, about British aid, and to make clear how much we supported the reform programme as it had been set out during the election.

Around the table sat the Head of the USAID department in the American Embassy, where they managed things differently. The conversation went on, and he said, mildly, 'I don't think we can just go around committing ourselves to saying 'We accept your promises, and we'll deliver on our promises before you deliver on yours'. No blank cheque. Our legislation doesn't allow it'.

She bit his head off, very comprehensively. I had good reason to know that, sometimes, even the head of the office in Nairobi, who was a very good fellow with whom we had pretty good relationships much of the time, ran for cover when I did something, or she reacted to something. When I was quite new, the Minister of Finance summoned me to see him. So I went to see him, and reported that.

The next day, the Head of DFID came in, looking very sheepish, saying 'I've had this from head office.' It was a blast from Clare Short saying, 'Why weren't you there? Why weren't you with the High Commissioner when he went in to see Mr Obure?'. I said to him, 'You know the answer to that, don't you.' He said, 'Yes.' So I said, 'Well, I should bloody well think so. First of all, a Kenyan minister can summon whom he likes; secondly, I would

certainly have taken you if I had known what the business was, and if you'd wanted to come, but he had asked to see me, and as it turned out it was special pleading. He wanted our support in the IMF for things before the Kenyans had even started taking the necessary actions'. (This was while Moi was still in office.) 'So I knew what answers to give. Were there any objections to my report? No?'. And that was an end of it.

Director, Public Diplomacy and Public Services, FCO, 1997–99

JH: Could we now turn to the time when you were Director of Public Services, which then included the British Council and the BBC World Service. How serious was the Office taking that task?

EC: The Director of Public Services was a miscellany, really. I think I was regarded by most of my colleagues as the most junior, the most dispensable of their assembled number round the table. But they couldn't quite dispense with me, because to do so they'd have had to invent more panjandrum.

So there I was, overseeing visa and consular work, information work, News Department (theoretically, although they never took much notice of me), the Parliamentary Unit, Cultural Relations Department, and handling the two budgets that we had, one for the BBC World Service, the other for the British Council, and some other budgets, too. So under this Command (as they were then called) fell probably two-thirds of the Office's manpower, and most of its financial resource (other than running costs).

It really was a big Command, and the Foreign Affairs Committee interested themselves always in the British Council and the BBC World Service. They both had enormous resonance with the political and other chattering classes. The Office as a whole didn't feel quite so attached to them. The BBC World Service since the end of the Cold War had perhaps lost a bit of cachet, and likewise the British Council. The Office, not for the first time, rather carelessly got rid of two vital instruments of soft power that are very widely recognised outside, and have been scandalously under-appreciated in the Office.

Nobody understands soft power. It grieves me when people talk about aid as soft power. Aid is not soft power. As Joe Nye observes, economic assistance does not constitute soft power.

Anyone who has been poor, or has asked the bank for a loan, knows that aid is hard power, in its most naked form.

But *attractive power* is something that a country accumulates, almost by chance, and gets rid of at its peril. It grieves me that the current [2020] debate, for instance about immigration, particularly led by someone like Priti Patel, who ought to know better than most, that actually quite a lot of the impulse for migration to this country is a tribute – is a form of our soft power. It may be inconvenient, but we ought to compensate ourselves that these are values that we ought to be proud of. The current pressure from around five million Europeans wanting to settle here or even aspiring to citizenship ought to be a source of pride rather than a cause of grumpiness.

I think it was so with the British Council, and with the BBC World Service, and I regret very much that the process of attrition from their budgets by the FCO proceeded on my watch and thereafter, and that they've had to make their way increasingly commercially. In the process, I think, they have lost a bit of their character.

In the case of the British Council, it used to be a wonderful instrument, because however bad political relations got between governments, there was the Council, and quite often it could carry on doing things, and conducting dialogues, introducing musicians or academics or scientists to one another, in a country where otherwise the atmosphere was pretty chilly.

And it is not just a question of producing 'Macbeth' in improbable tropical settings. We can't do that anymore. But we could perhaps be more helpful, and they could be helpful to us, in making sure that the godsend of the English language and our culture don't get ignored.

And the BBC World Service? I expect when the present [Johnson] government reviews the BBC, the World Service will become even more attenuated than it is now, sadly, *and* its reputation for being the sole reliable source of news, which is almost universally accepted, even if people don't say so.

JH: Finally, in this section of your career. During these years there was a dramatic change in European and international affairs, and you were responsible for trying to pull a traditional

institution into a modern personnel and management era at the same time. Did you feel at the time that you were preparing a new institution for a new era, or not?

EC: We, as backroom boys, wondered from time to time as we saw the ship of state sailing by in all its glorious livery, where for instance the process of European coalescence and unification would end, and what that world would mean to the Foreign Office. Would we, for instance, go out of business?

It became pretty clear that no politician of any stripe was going to go as far as that. But it was not clear how far along that path we might go. How far, for instance, we might go with merged embassies, or a common foreign policy worked out on the ground, and how we would relate to the European Commission delegations, or to the European External Action Service posts operating to all intents and purposes as embassies alongside ours in third countries.

In an operational sense we never got answers to those questions except, 'Just carry on'. And that's what we did. We carried on. It has become clear since that there were more doubts about the road on which Britain's international policy was proceeding than in the mid-90s, and even in the early millennium, than we fully realised or appreciated.

One of my almost last speeches as High Commissioner in Nairobi was to the Karen Country Club, a pretty high class club in an area of Nairobi infested equally by old Europeans and some pretty dynamic Kenyans. And I thought I'd talk about something I believed in – Britain's European vocation – on which I was pretty sure that most of the crusty old Europeans would take a pretty hostile view, and most of the Kenyans would be probably quite interested, as the dilemmas would have occurred to them because they were bright younger people. So I thought I'd address this.

I got instructions from London that I was to do no such thing, because I'd been making speeches on another subject [official corruption] that had got a bit of attention. The word had gone out from [Foreign Secretary] Jack Straw that ambassadors were to draw as little attention as possible to matters which were internally sensitive for the UK, and indeed that they should make themselves as inconspicuous as possible during the coming [2005] election campaign. Said my Director, 'There's nothing more sensitive than the EU, and speculating about what we can do for it, and what it might do for us, would not be welcome'.

I hadn't intended anything controversial. I just thought that I'd explain where I thought it was heading, and why it was important to Britain. But it didn't exclude good relations with the rest of the world. Indeed, it could enhance them. That was my rough theme. Since then, it seems we have set our minds against the latter.

Session 2, 23 October 2020.

Counsellor and Deputy High Commissioner, Nicosia, 1985-89, and High Commissioner, 1999-2001

JH: Can we turn our attention now to your two postings in Cyprus, in 1985-89 as Deputy High Commissioner, and from 1999 to 2001 as High Commissioner. Could you say a little about Cyprus. It is a simply beautiful place, with a wonderful climate. You'd think that it would be paradise, but its history is far from it. Why is that?

EC: It is a small island, perhaps a bit too small, and riven with the inter-communal problem, the division between the Turks and the Greeks, which some say the British exploited, but in any case, suppressed for much of the time, until Greek nationalism got the better of the Greek Cypriots, and the EOKA revolt took place in the last years of imperial rule.

The inter-communal problem was exploited also by two other outside powers – Greece and Turkey – which some of both communities regarded as the mother countries. When I arrived in 1985 the Turkish Cypriots had declared their illegal Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) just a couple of years before, and we had successfully led the UN Security Council, and others, in declaring that it was illegal, and that other members of the Council should have no formal dealings with it.

In 1985 the atmosphere was very edgy. The Turkish Cypriots were jealous of their own illegal status, and anxious to push it up people's noses as much as they could. The Greek Cypriots were immensely neurotic about its consequences for them, and the possibility that anybody might recognize the TNRC. Nobody did, except for a short period and in a rather underhand way, the Jordanians and the Pakistanis. But it brings to mind a theme that recurred from then on, and through the remainder of my career – it was especially true in Cyprus – the question of recognition of the statehood of post-colonial countries.

It was something about which they were very sensitive indeed, and it arose in all three countries: in Cyprus obviously; in Uganda, in respect of the possibility that the traditional kingdoms, particularly Buganda, might be restored, and even the question of whether opposition parties might harbour secessionist ambitions. Secondly, its close relation kept obtruding – the accusation of interference in internal affairs, particularly by the British.

These two things kept recurring, but they both arose in respect of Cyprus, particularly, the question of recognition.

JH: The High Commission building is right up against the Green Line. How much did the inter-communal conflict impact on your work?

EC: A great deal, because it impinged on almost every aspect of the High Commission's activity. The Consul had to be in touch with the British community and tourists in the Republic, in the southern Greek-controlled area of Cyprus, but also effectively in the North, too, and that could be tricky. So we had to have a double personality.

That was smiled upon by the Turkish Cypriots, a little unwillingly in some ways because it was short of full recognition; and it was tolerated by the Greek Cypriots who were on the lookout for signs of too much attention being paid to Turkish Cypriots, to activity in the North, and clearly did not want us to deal with the Turkish Cypriots as we did with the authorities in the South.

On the other hand, both communities knew that nobody else in Cyprus, particularly in the '80s, had quite the contact with both communities that we did, and we were able to be a bridge and were useful, in that we could sometimes convey messages between one and the other, and occasionally broker problems.

In the High Commission we had inevitably in the Chancery two bright young language officers, respectively known as 'the young Greek' and 'the young Turk'. They were responsible for following the politics, and for advising the whole of the High Commission on aspects of the attitudes of either community on what we might be doing that would be sensitive.

Finally, of course, we were not just a stakeholder in Cyprus, but were a part-owner of the island in the Sovereign Base Areas, which had been written into the Independence Constitution and Treaties as British sovereign territory. They were ours, and they subsisted mostly co-operatively alongside the Republic. They provided employment. Over the years, their significance to the Republic's economy diminished as the South became more prosperous and more developed. But their military activities were always sensitive, because inevitably they were seen to impinge on Cyprus's relationship with its own near hinterland and the Near East.

JH: It was clearly a politically sensitive time. In those pre-9/11 days, what was security like? Did you find you could go anywhere on foot without an escort?

EC: We did, but in the mid-'80s the problem in Cyprus was Palestinian terrorism. We did for a period have to have the protection offered from the Bases by the Royal Military Police, of the High Commissioner, who didn't much appreciate it, wondering if it really mattered. But it did. There were some ugly incidents – the bomb attack on the Israeli Embassy – and indeed, a young Briton who was convicted for assassinating Israeli visitors who were on their yacht in a local marina. So it did intrude, but not in the sense that we now think of ISIS, and so on.

JH: No one recognized the TRNC except Turkey, but you still had to deal with them. How did you do that?

EC: We dealt with the Turkish Embassy, which the Greek Cypriots didn't like, but didn't really know about. The Turks didn't recognize the Greek-controlled Republic of Cyprus, but we had dealings with the Turkish Ambassador in north Nicosia. The most important part of our relationship was conducted with Rauf Denktash, who was then the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community.

We used to call on him at his residence, which he treated for these purposes as his Office, but it was his residence, and he usually had with him a team of advisers. If we wanted to see anyone else, we did it at the level of Deputy High Commissioner, so in the 1980s that fell to me to deal with the purported Foreign Minister and other 'ministers' of that kind, and the young Turk mopped up much of the other business that we had to deal with in a semi-official way.

By the time we went back, things had eased a bit. Crossing the Green Line was not regarded as being such a big deal. The other consequence of the effective division of the island in 1964, when the first inter-communal trouble broke out, was that we had two Residences. The traditional Residence was by the Green Line near the High Commission, but just across the riverbed, decidedly in the Northern sector.

As High Commissioner I lived in what had been the Deputy High Commissioner's house in the South, chiefly because President Makarios had said he was damned if he was going to cross a Turkish sentry point in order to come to the British High Commissioner's house. So we moved. I think there was only one High Commissioner who lived in the old residence in the north thereafter, and that was because he had a child with a disability, and the small swimming pool was useful for that purpose. But by the time I went back we were using the old Residence more productively. We had a small Visa office there. The British Council had a little library, and we used the garden and the swimming pool as a staff facility. We would use the Residence itself for entertaining Turkish Cypriots.

JH: What was Denktash like as a person?

EC: He was clever, witty, likeable – likeable rogue in some ways – but he was very quick to follow and to take up points. He was without parallel really on his own side, and of course in the 1980s, and even when I went back in 1999, he and the senior Greek Cypriots knew each other well from the old days, particularly he and Gafcos Clerides, the President of the Republic. They had been lawyers and drinking rivals together.

The Greek Cypriots regarded Denktash as a leader into darkness, and as a Turkish stool pigeon and a Turkish nationalist. There is something in the last accusation, of course.

JH: Was he an obstacle; while he was leader, was he the obstacle to reconciliation?

EC: To reconciliation, perhaps he was. But always remember that the last great effort in 2004 to achieve a settlement was actually torpedoed by the Greek Cypriots, who held an election that wrecked the idea. I think either side sought in the other an alibi for not taking the daring step to a solution. From Denktash's point of view, he was happy with the TRNC. That was his creation. He knew he could count on Turkey.

I found Cyprus the most neurotic place in which I served. The Greek-Cypriots' endless neurosis was caused by the knowledge that you couldn't do much about Denktash. Everything they did to smooth the path through the negotiations, to refrain from acting rashly at critical moments, made them grind their teeth rather. But I think the efforts for a settlement were genuine enough, and the British in particular had no option but to support them whole-heartedly, which we did. We supported the UN Secretary General throughout.

In the late '90s, we were already engaged with the Americans and the EU in an effort, with the UN, to bring Cyprus towards a settlement, because by that time it was known that Cyprus's ambition stretched to joining the EU. They had been working towards that for more than a decade, and they were of course meeting the standards required in most areas. The thing that obstructed was the division of the island, doubt over the legality of EU accession by a fractured Cyprus, and its inability to enforce EU regulations through the territory of the whole island.

JH: You referred to the Sovereign Base areas, and to one in particular, Dhekelia, that forms in a sense a border with the North. Did you find that a useful entrepôt, so to speak?

EC: Dhekelia, the eastern Sovereign Base Area, did have a common border with the North and also provided the point of confluence of that border with the North and the South, in a village called Pyla, which was always referred to rather hopefully as a mixed village. It was actually a bit of a den of rascals engaged on various forms of smuggling between the north and south. But Dhekelia could have had value if a settlement had been achieved. Indeed, the offer was made to cede some of the Sovereign Base Area's territory if that would help bring about a settlement, and contribute to an eventual territorial balance between North and South. That offer was never called in, because the settlement negotiations came to naught at the time. Otherwise, Dhekelia was a bit sleepy. There was quite a lot of movement across the boundary – shepherds moved their flocks around reasonably freely – and it offered a way between North and South that could be controlled only by the Turkish Cypriots on the one hand, and on the other by the British Sovereign Base Area authorities.

Pyla and that border became notorious because of the abduction of a Greek Cypriot builder called Panicos Tsiakourmas, who employed quite a number of Turkish Cypriots. He brought

them to his building sites in the South by picking them up in the Sovereign Base Area near Pyla, until one morning he was abducted, allegedly by Turkish agents.

So the Sovereign Base Areas were a continual source of sensitivity – what they did, the fact that they were there, and that the Republic whose claim to legitimacy and to sovereignty lay in strict observance of the Treaties, knew that they couldn't really get rid of the British without causing the whole question of the Treaties to come up. Occasionally there would be unease, mostly in the press and some public utterances about things that we were alleged to be doing in the Sovereign Base Areas, particularly including military activity in moments of tensions, maybe in the Near East, and also our famous aerals especially when we had plans to construct a new one.

The Sovereign Base Area authorities took great care to make an assessment of how this new aerial might impact on the birdlife, in particular in Cyprus. Considering that the Cypriots spent much of the winter shooting migrant birds in very large numbers, their concern about the possibility of a bird strike on this mast was slightly bogus. Anyway, a Greek Cypriot MP called Matsakis (who had been in fact, a captain in the British Army, about which we liked to remind him), made a demonstration by shinning up a radio mast and squatting up there.

It caused a huge row because he was arrested by the Sovereign Base Area police, and from the police station Matsakis called in some bully boys from Limassol who wrecked the place, and the cars and property of the policemen, most of whom, of course, were Cypriots. It led me in a moment of passion to refer to him as behaving irresponsibly, like a monkey up a stick. This became notorious, and although some Cypriots affected to regard it as a calculated insult, others were amused and approving. Of course, the soldiers and policemen were highly appreciative.

JH: You referred to Panicos Tsiakourmas. This became quite a public affair, and you became personally involved. Interestingly, it pre-figures your activities later in your career, especially in Nairobi when you became involved in justice. What was it about, and why did it become such a cause célèbre?

EC: Tsiakourmas was a perfectly innocent, ordinary guy. He would drive into the Base's perimeter near Pyla and collect these Turkish-Cypriot labourers, take them to his building site where they would work all day, and bring them back in the evening. Everyone knew about

it. It was frequently done, and it was a benefit of course, because it provided employment in the North.

He was picked up, it was said, although no one said so publicly, in retaliation for the arrest by the Greek Cypriot police in Pila of a Turkish Cypriot bad hat, a dealer whose smuggling offences were irregular but not unusual. Tsiakourmas was arrested simply in retaliation for that. He was taken away and imprisoned, and the affair went on for five months.

It was a huge consumer of time, because it attracted immense attention in Cyprus, and the Greek and Turkish Cypriots both expected us to do something about it, on the grounds that it had taken place on our territory. It was a typical Cypriot storm – of little concern to the outside world – into which we became a central player because of our position in the island.

The character who emerged with the most credit from it was his wife, Niki Tsiakourmas, who was a woman of immense will and courage. She came and shook me until my teeth rattled, metaphorically speaking, and said, ‘You’ve got to get him out!’. Inevitably in Cyprus, an element of tragedy obtruded, because Tsiakourmas’s elderly mother became very ill, and that caused extra human drama because we knew that Tsiakourmas was going to be tried in an ‘illegal’ Turkish-Cypriot court, and would not be released to see his mother pending trial. The fact that he was going to be tried in a Turkish Cypriot court caught the Greek Cypriots right on the horns of several dilemmas. One, it was an illegal court, naturally; and secondly, who would be able to observe the trial without implying recognition of the Turkish Cypriot legal system?

I decided that we were going to observe this trial, and indeed I went to part of it myself to show interest. But I also had to intercede with Mr Denktash, who appeared to be sympathetic when I said. ‘This man’s mother is seriously ill. She may well die, and if she does die while Tsiakourmas is in your hands in these circumstances, there will be a huge reaction and a lot of trouble’. He understood that, but in the end he proved unable or unwilling to return the man to the south.

We had very little room for manoeuvre. We couldn’t of course assure that if he were allowed south to see his dying mother, that he would then return to the north. We got as many assurances as we could from the Greek Cypriots, but these were only assurances that we

could pass between two mutually non-recognizing authorities. It wasn't our business to enforce them.

In any case, the trial was held. His mother didn't die until hours before he returned home. The outcome of the trial was that he had served enough time in prison awaiting trial and should be released forthwith. We had anticipated this, and I had sent my car and driver and our young Turk, Peter Boxer, to go to the last session, scoop up Tsiakourmas and bring him home through the Ledra Palace check point, which Peter did.

As it happened, we had President and Mrs Clerides to lunch that day. So I said to Peter, 'Just go through the Ledra Palace checkpoint slowly, but don't stop until you can let him out into the arms of his family, and then come on back and you can tell the Clerides how it went,' which he did.

Clerides was much tickled by this bit of theatre, which was pure coincidence, and the Tsiakourmas affair ended, to that extent, reasonably happily. The Greek Cypriots thought he had been abducted. They held us not irresponsible. On the one hand, they appreciated what we had done to observe the trial and to intervene on his behalf. The press, of course, said that Tsiakourmas's mother had died with her son's name on her lips in her dying breath. Which I thought, unkindly, was unlikely, as it would have involved an army of journalists around her bed as the old lady lay unconscious, listening to these dramatic last words. But still, it was a very nasty moment. It shook me, and knocked my faith actually in the good will of the Turkish Cypriots. Mr Denktas had sounded compassionate, but in the end said he couldn't intervene to stop the course of justice, which was pure piffle.

JH: Your time in Cyprus was separated by ten years between your first and second time there. How had it changed when you came back?

EC: The mood remained still edgy, although there had been some relaxation – I think resignation, really, on the part of the Greek Cypriots. After all, by that time the so-called TRNC had been in being for sixteen years. Somehow people had got used to it, except for regular demonstrations by the widows, the displaced, who brought to the Greek Cypriot mind the memory of 1974, and the Turkish invasion.

The island had become vastly more prosperous and developed. Its tourism had really taken off. It had begun to lose the rather rustic charm it had had even into the '80s. Limassol was full of Russians who had come into the island in droves, some of them with their dirty money, particularly since the 1990s. There were still quite a lot of Arabs there, and there had been a construction of universities both north and south. In the north, many mosques had been constructed, making the impact of the incomers from Anatolia, which the Greek Cypriots had alleged for years, much more obvious, and giving the north an Islamic character which it had not had in the '80s. The Turkish Cypriots were traditionally not particularly observant.

So the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Church, which had always been a power in the south and hostile to a settlement, had even more to bite on in the '90s in terms of an alleged invasion of Turkish Muslims from the mainland.

JH: The year before you arrived as High Commissioner, the EU had started to open the possibility of Turkish membership. How much difference did that make to the inter-communal process, to the sense that the EU might be a factor in resolving the problem?

EC: It made a big difference to the *process* of the quest for an inter-communal settlement on the island, which had really begun to get under way in the '90s. It didn't really make a substantive difference. The people who made most difference, actually, were two smaller and still only potentially EU countries, the Czechs and the Slovaks.

Czechoslovakia had made it their particular special contribution to foster inter-communal contacts across the Green Line between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and even after the separation of Czechoslovakia into its two components, the two Ambassadors, to their great credit, kept going at the respective lasts.

The process towards a settlement was helped by the possibility of Turkish membership of the EU, and by the EU's awareness that gradually the clock was moving on Cyprus's own application. They couldn't ignore any longer that the moment was approaching when a decision would need to be made about whether to accept a fractured new member to the EU. Also within the EU, it was clear that the French and the Germans, who had strong interests in the question of Turkey's membership, would also play an important part, not because they cared an awful lot about Cyprus, but because they cared, for different reasons, about Turkey.

The Turks themselves recognized that their possible Accession was a long way away, and that it would be bitterly contested by the French, by the Greeks, and if they didn't get in at the same time as Cyprus or before, of course by the Cyprus government.

There was an ill-moment in December 1999, at the Helsinki European Council, when a formula intended to be constructive was devised. It was a formula intended to help people over a stile, and it did in the short term. But it led the Greek Cypriots to believe that the outcome of the talks on the inter-communal problem would not prevent their acceding to the EU; that the settlement of the political problem on the island was not a pre-condition.

Kofi Annan's effort to achieve a settlement was immensely assisted on the whole by the fact that the Cypriots, and the existing members of the European Union, had a common objective in mind, mostly: that was, Cyprus's European avocation. It made negotiation, of course, more complicated, in the sense that more people had to be kept informed,

But also we had a notable addition of two Special Representatives – the American, Tom Weston, who was a very practiced senior diplomat; and secondly, David Hannay, now Lord Hannay, who had retired from the FCO having been Permanent Representative to the UN in New York and Permanent Representative to the European Union in Brussels, and having dealt with European business for much of the preceding twenty odd years. David Hannay was a heavy hitter and extremely knowledgeable. He had never visited Cyprus, but it was in New York and in Brussels that he had become conscious of this island and of its inter-communal problem, and thought that the island's fate should not forever be hobbled by this dispute. So he came to it with real idealism and commitment, and worked very hard at it.

I think the diplomatic fair wind for a Cyprus settlement blew very favourably and strongly around the millennium, and a thousand pities that it failed at the point where the Turkish Cypriots were ready to accept it, and the Greek Cypriots didn't.

JH: A critical moment came at the European Council in Copenhagen, when the EU went against all its principles by agreeing to the accession of Cyprus without a settlement of a disputed border. How did you feel about that?

EC: That really was a fulfilment of what had been stated in Helsinki. The hosts in Helsinki had written a separate letter to the Turks on the back of that Council saying, 'This is what we mean', and it was enough for the Turks to acknowledge that they should come and join the Europeans at dinner in Helsinki. But actually, what the Helsinki Council's decision meant was that the Greek Cypriots had been led to believe that the solution of the political problem would not necessarily prevent their acceding to the EU, and they traded on that for the intervening years.

So they were unduly encouraged, and the Turkish Cypriots were unduly discouraged. But what was more decisive for them was that the Turks were always able, as the years went by, to say, 'Look, these Europeans are never going to say hello to us, and whatever they say about the benefits to Turkish Cypriots of EU membership is immaterial, if in the end we're not going to be able to join the European Union'. I think that was a pity.

JH: You've mentioned the Czechs, the Slovaks, Kofi Annan and the UN process. Did the UK do enough to push the peace process?

EC: We worked hard, and we worked honestly. The UN Secretary General's Special Representative, Álvaro de Soto, was a very able man. (Also a very picky eater. We used to have dinners for The Four during his visits to Cyprus. I took home one and a half sheets of A4 of the things that Álvaro de Soto couldn't eat, or how he liked them to be prepared. Fortunately, we had a cook who was brilliant, and regarded this as a challenge, and invariably managed to tickle his fancy with the right things.)

We did work very hard, and we had every reason to do so because a settlement would have been in our interests. Whatever else changed, the British position in Cyprus would only be worsened if there were not only no settlement, but a breakdown. We knew from our dealings over the previous thirty-five years, living with no peace and no war was not really helpful, so we worked hard.

We were a leading contributor to UNIFCYP, the UN force along the Green Line, in the beginning, and we continued to contribute to it though with diminishing numbers over the years. We kept in close step with the UN, and supported them and their activities with the two sides faithfully. It was a remarkable achievement, much of it due, from the millennium onwards, from my observation, to David Hannay's commitment himself.

JH: One final point on Cyprus: much of that process was a multilateral process and you were High Commissioner to the Republic. What was the balance of your work between bilateral and multilateral, when the main event, so to speak, was multilateral?

EC: It was in fact, mostly multilateral, in the sense that, like most multilateral work, it is a series of bilateral discussions that have to be conducted. In the 1980s, it was really a close relationship between the US, UK and UN in Cyprus that drove the policy-making in New York. These were sometimes consecutive, sometimes simultaneous. By the millennium, the circle of participants was wider, with the EU being the most significant new partner, with individual EU countries carrying weight.

But to deal, for instance, with an issue like Tsiakourmas, which looked pretty much like a purely British bilateral issue (because most people didn't want to touch it with a barge pole), we did have to keep in lock step with the United Nations who were always called in for apparent breaches of behaviour of the rules or conventions across the Green Line.

We had to talk carefully to the most sensible Greek Cypriots, and that meant in particular the Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides, and with Denktash himself. In the end we were reasonably successful, in that we got the man back, and the roof didn't fall in over this particular incident. But I think if Mr Tsiakourmas had still been actually in prison when his mother died, there would have been real trouble in the south, and perhaps in the north, too – popular demonstrations and so on. It would have set back the cause of the peace process for some time.

So in that sense, and in others, it was a multilateral job dealing with the UN, dealing with EU colleagues, who were not quite so closely involved, and particularly with the Greek Ambassador who was, of course, a major player, privy to most of what went on, but sometimes with a rather distorted view on where the talks were going. He couldn't always be relied on.

JH: What does that mean?

EC: In the 1980s, the Greek Ambassador was a very hot-headed man known for heating up nationalist passions on occasion, and for attending public demonstrations which took place on

some of the major black anniversaries of the Turkish Cypriot invasion, even going into the Buffer Zone to confront the sentries on the other side.

In the '90s the Greek Ambassador was a much more sensible man, and he worked for a government which was much better disposed to a settlement and the UN efforts to achieve one. He was, on the whole, cooperative with it. But still, he talked to opinion, some of which was really venomously opposed and unhelpful on a settlement.

Things seem to change slowly in Cyprus, despite the apparent development, the development of the tourist centres and all of that, and a lot of people we knew from the '80s were still around and active in the 90s. In a way I thought that was a high point, because at this stage you had people at the top of both communities who knew and, in one way or another, esteemed each other from a long way back, and, particularly on the Greek Cypriot side, were committed to doing their best by the settlement.

We liked many Cypriots on both sides, particularly as individuals. What was sometimes striking was how quickly both Cypriot communities could turn into ravening and foam-flecked purveyors of opposition and dislike of the other community, and occasionally of the British, if they thought we were responsible, as they did, for much of the underlying original tensions between the communities.

The other thing to say is that, from the beginning of the Cyprus problems, including the outbreak of the first inter-communal troubles that happened as early as 1964 – (it wasn't the Turkish invasion; it was a Greek Cypriot attack on the Turkish Cypriots in Nicosia that led to the first Green Line being established) – but throughout, one of the Treaties under which Cyprus became independent, called the Treaty of Guarantee, pledged the Turks and the Greeks respectively and the UK to cooperate together in the defence of Cyprus. And of those three Powers, the Turks and the Greeks were irretrievably partisan.

We were the third Guarantor who were in touch with both sides throughout, and who used our Guarantor role constructively. Whatever is said about the British role, and a lot is said, much of it unfavourable, it is worth remembering that. Turkey and Greece between them tried to divide the island, the Greeks by fomenting the coup against Makarios, and the Turks by exploiting that as a reason to lay down a military line of partition across the island.

High Commissioner to Uganda, 1993–97 (and Ambassador (non-resident) to Rwanda, 1994–95, and Burundi, 1994–96)

JH: We turn now to your time as Head of Mission in Africa, going back in time after the discussion of Cyprus.

In 1993 you went as High Commissioner in Uganda, your first time as Head of Mission. How well had you been prepared for that by the Office for this new level of responsibility, and how much did you have to prepare yourself?

EC: We had at that time a system of briefing for Heads of Mission. I had, as Head of POD, rather run it down in the interests of reform and economy, but there still remained quite a good system of ensuring that the responsible geographic department made sure that High Commissioners - or Ambassadors-designate were briefed by all Whitehall departments, and by other interested people – companies, sometimes the Church – who might have useful backgrounds, or indeed points they wanted you to make. So I was well-prepared in that way.

The Office's memory was becoming patchy about Africa. The best briefing I had, for instance, on Rwanda, was from the researcher Lilian Wong, who had been nursing the Central Africa Desk in Research Department for some years. I made a point, also, of going to see some academics who had written about Uganda or knew about it – including a professor in Cambridge on the brink of retirement who had written I think the best thing about the Buganda Kingdom. So I was well prepared. And in terms of leadership, POD or PMD, as it became known, had been a really useful experience on that.

JH: How did you feel, if differently at all, arriving in Kampala in command as compared to earlier diplomatic experiences?

EC: I thought it was rather scabby! My arriving happened to coincide with the convening of an OAU Heads of Government conference in Kampala, so the taxi ways and aprons were full of various rather smart aircraft conveying Presidents and Prime Ministers from across the continent, and the odd British Airways flights were ushered to a corner. The British High Commissioner was invited to get out and scuttle into the baggage handling area, and to make his entry into the country that way!

I think it was Chris Mullin, who was Minister for Africa, who wrote in his diary how odd he felt as he put his wheelie case onto the Number 3 bus in Brixton, on the way to conduct international business in Africa. Thereafter, people carried his suitcase to VIP rooms and onto aircraft and, on arrival, he would be met by military bands and red carpets!

Uganda was still unsure of its identity. I had to be very careful about my contacts with the Baganda, and old friends of Obote in the Uganda People's Congress, who were still around. As in Cyprus, people were watching to see whether I was giving too much recognition to their opponents: going to tea, for example, at the invitation of the Kabaka [King]. I got away with it without too much trouble, but I heard Museveni say once at a gathering at which the Kabaka was present, in his humorous way – he had a wonderful gift of talking to an audience on several levels at once – he began by greeting all the dignitaries there – and saying, ‘and whatever else, I am King of Kings’, which was a wonderful way of putting it.

Perhaps the principal task, not so clearly recognized in 1993 as it was after the establishment of DFID, was development and the eradication of poverty. Uganda was a really, really, poor country at that time. It had the great advantage of a benign climate with lots of land, and that's what kept the Ugandans going during the Amin period. Those who were at risk could retreat to their traditional village homes to subsist with what they could grow for themselves.

But the other thing that is difficult to remember now, is that in those days we didn't really have computers, we didn't have mobile phones. It took me a lot of argument to get a satellite phone which only came the year before I left, with Baroness Chalker's kindly intervention. Communications were hellishly difficult and, in any case, even with them, in Uganda people didn't really believe you existed unless they saw you, and they heard from you, so getting around was an obligation, as Kieran Prendergast had advised on the basis of his African experience.

Uganda had a National AIDS Day, so it was an issue of huge national significance – and I remember going to the first one and sitting waiting for about four hours anticipating the arrival of the President. As the hours went by the Guest of Honour changed, away from the Minister of Health, or someone else who had special relevance to the celebration of this day, until it turned out to be the Speaker of Parliament, who was a very fine man, and happened to be the local MP. What irked, however, was that this was a national occasion of special relevance to Uganda, which I thought they treated with a cavalier lack of regard. They had

kept the people who were waiting to celebrate their leaders – the dancers, the school children, the women singers and so on – they kept them all waiting while the heavens alternately rained very hard and shone with astonishing force on the crowd and the rest of us.

It was good to get around. There were some places that I liked and that I was glad I had gone to, where I knew that the local Ministers had not, and that went down well. Anne's presence was always an advantage because women played a major role. In fact, in many ways, contrary to popular belief, many African countries are more matriarchal than patriarchal societies. The main decisions about which of the children they could afford to send to school, which crop they would plant, and when, were always taken by women. Women were glad to hear from Anne in Uganda and Kenya, and often insisted on a word from her.

Uganda taught me three other things: first, the fortitude of people who were really under the cosh economically, and in respect of the North, of course, at the hands of the rebels or of the military. Not just their fortitude. I insisted that I would go and observe the elections in the North, and I remember being really moved to see people making haste to vote so they could get home well in time before darkness, against the possibility of being abducted by rebels, or being pushed around by soldiers, but mostly by the rebels.

Secondly, the power of people, at any level, to extract bribes, petty bribery at the expense of quite poor people. Policemen, even a doctor, would not do their jobs without insisting on extracting something. We knew that our staff, for instance, were frequently shaken down for the performance of a service to which they were entitled; and we were shaken down as well on their behalf. One of my drivers' son's leg was damaged in an accident, and the orthopedic surgeon would not even be consulted about treatment without a backhand. And that was understandable because he probably hadn't been paid for months, and the policemen likewise. So the way in which petty corruption fed into grand corruption stayed in my mind.

The third lesson was the value of consistent presence. We were blessed in those days with what was called the 'Small Projects Scheme', a small pot of money in the hands of the High Commissioner to spend on minor projects, typically a few thousand quid for putting up a classroom or clinic, something like that. We of course spent it in ways that were consistent with the objectives of our larger aid programme, which was much more spectacular and wide-ranging; this modest fund allowed us to do things, and to see people on their own turf and on their own terms, which would have been difficult to do otherwise. They were always

glad to see the British, amazingly, perhaps a reflection of the instability to which they had been subjected for so long. We reminded them of a time when, even though we were foreigners, at least life was settled and reasonably predictable.

I suppose the fourth lesson was my homilies to new arrivals, that whatever the terrorist threat, or the threat of being mugged or robbed or burgled, the most dangerous thing you could do in this place was to get in your car and drive down the road. It really was; there were some nasty accidents.

And on a private basis, touring the country was very rewarding. We went to Murchison Falls and saw the fort where Samuel Baker and his Transylvanian wife rested for a time, having expelled the slavers who had an encampment there, and were moving their slaves from Central Africa up towards the coast. We saw the niches in the rock where the slavers had sometimes executed their slaves.

My youngest daughter and I went white water rafting there below the even more historic Owen Falls, the exodus of the Nile from Lake Victoria via the turbines of the great hydroelectric scheme.

Session 3, 23 October 2020

JH: You were High Commissioner in Uganda and then you became Ambassador also to Rwanda, and later to Burundi. How did that come about, and how did you prepare for being accredited elsewhere?

EC: Just before I went to Kampala, it was decided to give the High Commission there responsibility for both Rwanda and Burundi. It was driven largely by two things: first, our interest in Rwanda was substantially Museveni's known connection with the Rwandan Patriotic Front who had invaded Northern Rwanda four years before. A battalion of them were by now encamped, by agreement, behind the Parliament building in Kigali. Second, by logistical considerations. Communications were simply better from Kampala than from Kinshasa or Dar es Salaam where responsibilities for both countries had oscillated for the previous twenty years.

When I first went to Burundi as a volunteer in 1964, we had Embassies in both places but they had been closed for reasons of economy, so that's how I came to be responsible for Rwanda. I went to Kampala in November, sent my letters in January and finally got to Kigali in February, so about seven weeks before the air crash that precipitated the genocide.

Anne and I, my DA, our close protection team and Edward the driver, went down by car. It was very eerie. We were met at the Rwandan border by an Egyptian officer of UNAMIR, who took an extremely high-handed tone with the teenage boys who were Rwandan army soldiers in uniform. He escorted us through this weird area of North Rwanda which was no man's land, neither under anybody's control, nor completely under the control of the Opposition, and into Kigali.

Anne spent the whole week frustratingly banged up in the hotel while I made such calls as I could in my unaccredited state. Finally, I got some help from a business associate of the Honorary Consul who had wisely left Kigali some time before. This chap, Alan Vigneron, a Belgian, was very helpful, but eventually I got frustrated, because I really had to get back to Uganda whose constituent elections were due. I said, 'I'm leaving on Saturday no matter what happens, so either give me an appointment with the President, or tell me it's not this time.' Finally I was summoned on my last day in Kigali.

JH: What did you make of the delay?

EC: I thought it was caused partly by the pressure of events. I think also it was an unwillingness to see the British representative whose voice would simply be added to those who were calling for the Arusha peace process to succeed etc. etc. Additionally, Britain was regarded by the Rwandan government at the time as being the main sponsor of Museveni, and Museveni the main sponsor of their opponents, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) – probably that. I took a pretty strong aversion to Habyarimana, and not just in retrospect.

JH: You mentioned the Peace Process. Could you explain a bit about it, and why the UK cared about it?

EC: I reflected on it later, when somebody said in relation to Cyprus that a major instrument of peace keeping is to have a peace process in being. Actually, there *was* a peace process in being in respect of Rwanda and Burundi – it was called the Arusha process. The Tanzanians

had the major hand in it, and the Tanzanians, it seemed to me, were the most seriously concerned about the situation in their neighbours, for good reasons. But they were also the only African country at that time which had any track record in intervening to overthrow an oppressive government, namely that of Amin. I don't think anybody else had done it up until that point.

The point of the Arusha Process was to try to get the sides talking, and in Rwanda to work towards a power-sharing framework under which the RPF's representatives could join the government, and RPF soldiers could be incorporated into the national army. In the meantime, there would be various way-stations. The achievement so far had been to stop the advance of the RPF, with their battalion behind the Parliament building in Kigali, and to leave the northern part of the country in a state of unease between the two sides. So there was a peace process in being, and everybody latched onto it because there was nothing else in sight. There was a real sense of hopelessness, and only the Tanzanians (and the UN) seemed to have a real commitment to it, so we supported it, too, and we were prepared to put help behind it.

JH: What does 'help' mean?

EC: It would have meant our assistance to an integrated government, and an integrated army; help to de-mobilize the unwanted surplus of soldiers. And other good things to do that, in fact, I suggested on this first visit, like language training, because the RPF came substantially from an English-speaking background by that time, while Rwanda was French-speaking.

When I finished my visit, I said to London that things looked pretty bleak – Kigali was called a *ville morte*. Anne wasn't able to move around. I could only move around in a limited way, but I did get to their Parliament, in fact twice, for an abortive meeting called by Habyarimana, I think for effect. Everywhere there were little barricades of tyres that had been set alight. It was particularly striking, because Kigali was a very neat little Belgian suburban town. Considering how knocked about Kampala was, it felt extremely comfortable and civilized.

When I went back and wrote my report, I said that we should not get too deeply involved but follow the lead of our major allies since we didn't have any particular dog in this fight, nor any expertise to offer, but that we could provide some English language training which could

be useful, and which would be much desired by the Rwandans. I talked to our British Council colleague, who was up for it, and suggested £20,000 might fund it. London said, 'Push off'.

JH: Did you meet the French Ambassador?

EC: Not on that occasion, except very fleetingly in the Parliament, but I met the American who was very knowledgeable. He was the child of missionaries and he spoke the language. And I met the commanders of UNAMIR, and called on their little offshoot, UNAMUR, which was monitoring the Rwanda-Uganda border, and a few others.

JH: What was the sense of competition or contestation between the French and the British in Rwanda?

EC: Our colleague in Kampala made it seem very competitive. I said to him once, 'It sounds like we are re-living the Fashoda Incident all over again'. He was a very able person, and he once said bitterly, 'Kampala was a poor appointment for me – it might be very nice for you, because you really count here'. He was very young, I think the youngest French Ambassador at the time, but he said, 'Imagine you as British Ambassador in Senegal, and I was Ambassador there – our roles would be reversed'.

He took a very bitter line on what happened when the genocide broke out. He wasn't very constructive, and he cleaved to the French line, which was that the RPF was the catspaw of Museveni, and Museveni was the catspaw of the British, and that this was an Anglophone conspiracy to claw back a bit of the *francophonie* – literally like that. He was also the first person I heard use the expression 'cockroaches', which was the term the Interahamwe, and indeed the Rwandan regime used to describe the Tutsi, even just before the genocide started. So he was very difficult. He had very little evidence on which to base his assertions. He may have had more – he must have been in touch with his Embassy in Kigali, but if he did know more, he wasn't saying.

The French are still looking into their role in those events, but I believed, and still believe, that they knew more about it than anyone else. They were so close to the Habyarimana government, they could not not have had some inkling of what was being prepared. Likewise the Chinese.

In the film 'Hotel Rwanda', there is a scene where caseloads, pallet loads of machetes were shown being delivered. It was said at the time, and I believe it true, that the Chinese provided many of the agricultural implements which were used to kill people during the genocide. We have to remember that the Chinese *were* close to the Habyarimana regime. They had been generous donors, and after all the Hutu regime which had come to power at independence in Rwanda was regarded as rather a good thing by progressive African and non-African opinion. It was a nice little Republic that was being set up in which the old over-lords were being put in their place, and I think that sort of gut sympathy persisted for quite some time. It was based on the fashionable misunderstanding, prevalent in the 1960s, that social reform in Africa was like the disappearance of feudalism in Europe. Both the French role and the central character in 'Hotel Rwanda' are now subject to sharp re-interpretation.

JH: When you came back from Kigali, did you have an inkling that something much worse was going to happen, or hadn't it really got to that point?

EC: It was clear that something pretty bad was going to happen, and there was no reason to believe otherwise. But that it might involve genocide – I didn't dream of it, and I don't think anyone else did.

JH: Why did it take the UN so long to engage?

EC: It didn't take them long to engage, but it took them an interminable time to *do* anything, which was not very much until the RPF had won the civil war.

I think the reasons for the inactivity were numerous, but one was, as far as the Americans were concerned, they had been very bruised by their experience in Somalia, with the Black Hawk Down episode, and had had enough. They had no taste for having that experience repeated to keep peace in Africa.

Secondly, the Security Council was divided, because the French were probably in cahoots with the regime to some degree; they had been its supporters anyway. The Chinese also had a sympathetic interest. The Russians were really nowhere, but the last three in any case sympathized with what was the predominant feeling amongst the African members of the

United Nations, which was this overwhelming respect for the sovereignty of states and for non-interference. Sadly the UN seems to be in the grip of that feeling for at least another generation. Certainly the African states were very reluctant to act against an African government. Their attitude has changed a bit with their peacekeeping – the African Union’s peacekeeping has been strengthened – but at that time it was very difficult to recommend an international action against an African government, even if its behaviour was appalling.

JH: When you were talking to Museveni at this time, what was he saying, and what was his role subsequently?

EC: He took an active part in trying to generate some useful diplomacy in the early phases of the genocide, and was responsive to requests to rein back the RPF, to moderate the RPF’s appetite for an advance and for fighting to the finish. He engaged in those efforts the Americans, the French, the Tanzanians, the Rwandan Ambassador and me, and the RPF representative. I think he genuinely wanted to try to pull back the RPF, if only to try to avoid inciting the Interahamwe to intensify the massacres - as they were then called.

But I did wonder subsequently, whether that was, perhaps partly anyway, a bit of an act. He must have had a better sense than anybody about the resolution of the RPF. After all, when they had invaded Rwanda, somebody had killed their great leader Fred Rwigyema, and most people believed that it was somebody else in the RPF who shot him. Paul Kagame then took over, and Museveni must have known Kagame better than anybody, that he was so resolute that nothing would hold him back.

I personally believe that ... well, the French were the ones who said immediately after the President’s plane crashed, ‘It was the RPF that shot it down.’ I said, ‘I don’t see that at all. I don’t believe you. There is no evidence either way, but *qui bono?*’ That still has to be resolved, as well, but I don’t think the RPF shot the plane down. (Michela Wrong, author of “Do Not Disturb”, reports former RPF leaders, now out of favour, as contradicting the official line that the RPF had nothing to do with shooting down.) If they had known what would be precipitated by that, it would be the most horrible thing to have done. I think that that plane was shot down by somebody on Habyarimana’s own side, too ready to talk to the devil. Once that happened, and the Hutu and the Interahamwe had begun their killing, and the Rwandan army and RPF became engaged, I don’t think anybody could have stopped them.

Even if the UN had passed a resolution immediately to strengthen UNAMIR, they weren't in control of the airport. The people who might have done the job most effectively were not ready to do it, and on whose behalf would they have done it? Would the UN Security Council (of which Rwanda was a member at the time) have authorized intervention against a member state's government? I doubt it, and in fact if they had intervened, they would have been seen as partisan one way or another, and probably become piggies in the middle of the fighting. Once they got engaged, the RPF, the Rwandan government and its cohorts in the Interahamwe needed to fight to a finish. On the one hand, the Rwandan government knew if they lost, or peacekeepers intervened, they would face condemnation for their behaviour and their crimes against humanity; and the RPF knew that they had to win if they were to stop the genocide and secure their people's claim to a future in the state and in the country.

JH: What did you think of Kagame?

EC: I only got to know him at all once the fighting had more or less stopped. We made our first visit just before the civil war had ended formally. He was an extremely impressive figure, very tall, very spare, very tough and full of natural authority, reinforced by the fact that he was the winner. We all regarded him with awe. It wasn't long before our Ministers began to speak of a new generation of African leaders – Museveni, Kagame, Isaias – all these young fellows with a new approach to leadership.

Some turned out to be very dubious quantities, and some turned out to be long over-stayers. Kagame has turned out to be the most impressive and successful so far, but he has a lot of enemies, and a great many admirers, particularly in this country, with people who are hard over in support of the RPF regime that I think is perhaps a little exaggerated.

JH: What did you advise London at the time about him?

EC: Not about him, but about the country. By Christmas 1994 we were running what would have been on an annual basis our largest aid programme in Africa, in terms of relief and reconstruction aid and development. The research analyst Lilian Wong was amongst those who came out to run a temporary office. The strain was colossal on her. There were others who came, Paul Whiteway, who had been the Deputy High Commissioner in Uganda. Lesley Craig, who was Press Officer, went and did a stint in Kigali. In a way, it was a very popular

job because it was about giving over a lot of money and assistance and promises to a country on its knees. But it was extremely hard work and emotionally exhausting, because everyone you talked to had not just lost one member of family, but dozens, in the genocide, and what they wanted to do in the future was not immediately clear.

My recommendation to Lynda Chalker was that we should do our bit, but not have a major role in Rwanda long term, which turned out to be a major misjudgment on my part. But we really didn't have big interests, and if we weren't prepared, as a Member of the Security Council, to have an Embassy, then we had no business there, really. We had been hampered by the fact that we had no recent tradition in the country, no particular knowledge of it, nor interest in it. I saw nothing which was likely to alter that lack of interest or motivation to get more people involved in the long term.

JH: I remember your having a vivid impression of the genocide when you went back to Kigali.

EC: I had had one vivid impression during the genocide itself, actually in Uganda, when I went to a meeting convened by Museveni on the shores of Lake Victoria where the Kagera River debouches into the lake. Bodies and body parts were coming down the river at the rate of about a hundred an hour, and the Ugandans were making a valiant effort to retrieve them. They tried using nets to catch the bodies across the mouth of the river, but they kept breaking, so they had boats with fishermen trying to haul these corpses aboard or to the side, and the body parts which had been separated from their corpses by the action of the *genocidaires* or by the crocodiles. A heavy digger was at work at the side of the river digging a series of huge communal graves in which the bodies were placed and covered in lime, and a small service of commemoration was held there. Ugandans were trying to do the right thing by these poor victims.

I remember going down for this burial meeting, with a few Ugandans, hardly any diplomats, and a reporter from the BBC, Emily Buchanan, who hitched a lift back to Kampala with me. It was a horrendous and ghastly scene, and the atmosphere and smell was just appalling. And going back to Kigali, what one was struck by was the eerie peacefulness of it all. A lot of people were gone, but the buildings were not. A shell had gone through the roof of the Parliament building and one or two other places, but this was like the effect of a neutron bomb – a lot of people were killed, but not much damage to infrastructure, except in the

villages, of course, where houses had been torched and churches used as ovens, and the place was relatively quiet. About a million people had fled as refugees into Zaire, as it then was called, from what they thought would be a vengeful force, as the RPF advanced. Everywhere the countryside looked semi-deserted at the time, with traces of the killings, and the burials were pretty much apparent.

But the new government quickly got a grip of the essentials of trying to tidy the place up. I went to a church that had been a notorious site of a killing where people had fled in the hope of being safe, and their pursuers had thrown hand grenades through the windows and set the place on fire, and generally created a hell. The church was full of bones and skulls – you couldn't walk around without feeling human remains crackling under your feet. It was just appalling.

As a little time went by, it became apparent that the Churches themselves had been riven by the same ethnic hatred that had driven the Interahamwe. The divisions were acute in the Catholic and the Anglican Church. Some of their hierarchy had fled. The shame of the Anglican hierarchy had prompted the Archbishop of Canterbury to come out. The only people who behaved with any apparent decency were the Muslims. There were not many of them, but they made a small difference.

On another visit I was asked to go and see a prison, because a lot of people had been put into prison, awaiting sorting out of who were serious offenders and who were simply foot soldiers in the genocide. But thousands more were in prisons than there was accommodation for, in conditions which were frightful. The whole body of prisoners was obliged to stand up much of the day and night. After heavy rain I remember seeing an area, a huge internal pond in which prisoners were standing, and the longer they stood, the more their flesh rotted.

All the donors were keen to do something to ameliorate conditions, and of course they were very active in Zaire where hundreds of thousands of refugees were encamped just over the border, with a huge aid operation facilitated by giant aircraft. One of the peace dividends at the end of the Cold War was these very large former Soviet transport aircraft, mostly flown by Ukrainian pilots who were the only people brave or mad enough to land on the small runways in the area. But they made a major difference, and I reflected on the contrast with the crude way in which we had been forced to manage the needs of the refugees back in 1964, when I was a volunteer.

So everything was a huge and grisly testimony to what had gone on. There was no difficulty in imagining three quarters of a million or 800,000 killed – the figures even now see-saw up and down – and there was no difficulty in imagining that that is what had happened. It would be inhuman and churlish to deny what Kagame had done to give an appearance of inclusiveness, and to put the country back together. That involved some fairly rough treatment, but bringing the refugees back from Zaire was a major achievement.

There was coercion, and it was probably unavoidable in the circumstances. We Europeans didn't have the right to start reading sanctimonious lessons, and all we could do was to make sure we were generous in trying to ease the immediate needs of food, water, sanitation, shelter. Prisoners, like prisoners everywhere, came near the end of the food chain, but the Scandinavians moved in pretty rapidly to help increase prisoners' accommodation. I think Kagame and the RPF have never quite recovered from what he felt was the world's abandonment of Rwanda under the Hutu ascendancy from Independence.

Had things been different, and if the international community had tried to intervene, his feelings would have been different, but not more favourable. I think by the time it came to civil war, it was them or us on both sides. Some people don't believe that, but I do.

Since I retired, I have found myself talking to quite a lot of people who are interested in researching Rwanda. It's quite clear that the genocide and its origins and subsequent developments evoke very strong feelings even amongst the most dispassionate observers. It's very difficult to get a cool discussion of things Rwandan. Some of the propositions put forward are, I think, dishonest. Amongst the most interesting was the pledge made by President Clinton at the time, that such a dreadful thing could never be allowed to happen again, and the cry went up, 'Never Again'.

I think that is a worthy sentiment and some things have been done about it, for instance the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC), much derided, of course, by most Africans now, especially by Kagame. He regarded it as entirely ineffectual for his purposes, and he carried out more quickly and cheaply a pretty respectable domestic judicial process himself, in which thousands of suspected *genocidaires* were tried and punished.

In 2005, the UN decreed that the ICC and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) should be its approach to incidences in which governments had clearly either lost control, or worse, set out deliberately to oppress their peoples.

Anyway, it hasn't been enough. We have so many examples since, Myanmar onwards, of situations in which we ought to be intervening, and are unable to do so because the UN is really an association of sovereign states, and sovereign states, even more so now, are given respect sometimes beyond their due.

I was also struck by reading Douglas Hurd's memoir about fifteen years ago now, in which he said that he had never paid too much attention to Africa, or Rwanda, and he was regretful about that. Indeed, after the genocide, he was due to come to Rwanda, to stay with us in Kampala and launch himself from there to Kigali. He and his wife were unable to do so, having had to cancel at the last minute because he was due to take part in a very critical debate in the House of Commons on the Pergau Dam.

He reflected in his memoir [page 489], 'Later, much regret was expressed for the West's inaction. President Clinton, in expressing his own remorse, indicated that the lesson had been learned, and that in the future the West would not stand idly by.' 'I believe', said Sir Douglas Hurd, 'that this is proven nonsense. For several years now, the Congo has been convulsed by civil war. It has been pillaged by its own politicians, and by the armies of its neighbours. The UN, backed by the West, has tried to find a solution by the sustained diplomacy that was tried in Bosnia. No Western power has contemplated military intervention to impose a solution by force. The doctrine of humanitarian intervention will never be universal. It will always depend on the time, place and the circumstance. That is why universal rhetoric, however generously meant, is unconvincing. We deceive ourselves with our own speeches.'

In one of my run-ins with Andrew Mitchell years later, I asked if he had read Douglas Hurd's reaction. He said, 'Douglas Hurd is a man I adore. What did he say?'. I said, 'Well, naught for your comfort', and read it out to him. 'I don't believe it.', he retorted. But that was his usual reaction on Rwanda. He was not susceptible to persuasion, nor uncomfortable facts.

It's very interesting to reflect that much of later British policy was driven by people who had fallen in love with the country in the wake of its catastrophic downfall in 1994. It was true of

Lynda Chalker, of her successor Clare Short, and of Andrew Mitchell. And all credit to them for their natural sympathy, but that doesn't always make for the most clear-eyed judgments.

JH: Kampala was a challenging post as a first time Head of Mission. What did you take from your time there that stood you in good stead for your subsequent role, especially in neighbouring Kenya?

EC: I think, first, stay on top of the task of trying to keep access to the leaders, to the men in charge. That gets more difficult as Britain's relative weight in the world declines, and that probably will become even more difficult in the coming years. But there is really no substitute to talking to the boss on the major issues about which we care. So I always keep Kieran Prendergast's advice in mind – 'Go wherever they can be found'. It's immensely time-consuming, can be very frustrating, for them as well as for you.

Secondly, and particularly in a place like Kenya which has a well-developed civil society and media, I made a point of saying to Moi when I arrived, (he was very touchy on the point, and in fact in our first talk, he banged on about no interference and so on), but I promised him and promised Mwai Kibaki after him, that I would not spring ambushes; that if I had things on which I felt strongly, or had instructions, I would want to tell them first, even if I had to go public later. The other side of that coin was that I must be able to get access, and I would only seek access when I really had something to say. They both agreed with that. Kibaki was particularly welcoming ... in the beginning.

Thirdly, (I don't know how it works now, with so much better ICT around Africa), Africans are much more curious and better informed, and intelligently informed, about us than we are about them, probably still. There seems to me to be no substitute than to be seen around the country, particularly if the country is in some way divided, or even more, in conflict.

Related to that is a reservation about becoming too closely involved with politicians, as individuals, because quite often their interest in the masses, in the people they represent, is confined to the period of election time to get themselves re-elected. After that, it's back to their base in the capital, and doing whatever they do for themselves. Sad to say – there are some who are not like that – but choosing your friends is an art that needs developing with great care and skill, because it is possible to get into company that you really do not want to keep. It can be equally foolish to miss company that you would like - or need - to keep.

I cherished, once, the memory of my introductory call on Kibaki. He had been impressed that I had turned up in his garden after his election as President, where he was receiving victory delegations, with his injured leg up on a stool. When I saw him in State House subsequently, he said, ‘We expect to see the British High Commissioner, and to hear from him. There will be no talk about your interfering in our internal affairs. If something is wrong, we shall expect to hear your voice.’ He assured me of access when I needed it. But within two years, he was blocking me, running away from unpleasant news on corruption, which implicated him.

One’s own impressions, especially first impressions, and the impression one makes, are vital to demonstrating a serious interest in a country with serious problems. Uganda was one of the earliest countries to recognize – under Museveni – the devastation wrought by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

The extent of the social damage the disease did was demonstrated graphically by a journey I made through Rakai district. This was known, even amongst Ugandans, as the ‘dead district’, in which AIDS had hit particularly hard. There were whole villages that were depopulated, sometimes deserted. Most often there would be occasional houses with grandparents who were in charge of innumerable grandchildren. The intervening generations had been wiped out by the disease, and homes would have padlocks on the doors. It was a bloody awful day.

Travel could sometimes be very difficult for logistical, practical, protocol and emotional reasons. Getting VIPs around was doubly so. Our desire to see the wretched aftermath of genocide in Rwanda was not aided by the fact that, when Lynda Chalker came out for the first time, we went together into nearby Zaire (DRC), and visited one of the huge refugee encampments which stretched out over a field of volcanic rock. (The volcanoes were not far away.) There was just nothing growing. Bushes, small trees, whatever had been there had all been used for construction of crude shelters, or for stretchers. As we went towards the camps, lying beside the road there were corpses awaiting collection for burial. I’d never seen, never hoped to see, such misery.

I admired Lynda Chalker very much for my memory of that particular day, when she entered shelters to meet refugees who were being given such help as they could get, or feeding

stations, holding a scarf over her nose. The smell and sensation of corruption, in the biblical sense, was absolutely overpowering.

But anyway, at the end of one of these traumatic trips, we had been summoned to see Museveni in a distant part of the North, an area called Kidepo. He had taken it into his head that he wished to show her a particular kind of what he called a 'valley dam', as a means of conserving water.

So we got into the plane she had hired, with her ten officials or so, and went off from Kigali, but we couldn't make it to Kidepo's earth strip before dark, so we stopped in Entebbe and headed for home. On the way, we got this plaintive call from one of his staff, saying, 'Where are you? The President is waiting!' We were exhausted emotionally. 'It's too late; the daylight's gone.' But we went up the following day, not wishing to appear rude.

Museveni met us, and we had a cursory look at this valley dam, and then Museveni said, 'Right, let's go back!' 'You come in my plane', he said to Lynda Chalker and me, and one other person. 'The rest of you go in your plane'.

We were supposed to take off first. We took off in Museveni's aircraft. There had been a lot of rain; the grass had grown up. It was just an earth strip that hadn't been used, apart from our visit, probably for months. The grass was high and the mud was very slippery, and as we went down the strip, the plane began to develop a bias. I realised, looking out the window, that the wing was scything the grass and blowing it into the engine. We failed to really get off until we had almost reached the very end of the strip. But when we were about thirty feet up, the wing simply scythed through a fairly skinny tree, and the aircraft fell with us back onto the runway.

Mercifully, the captain of the aircraft, who was not piloting but was the captain, had the presence of mind to shut off the fuel as we fell back to the ground. Museveni was the first to collect himself, and said, 'We'll get out of this door'. It was one of those doors the top half of which open upwards, and the steps open the other way; but it didn't open, it was jammed.

Museveni managed to scramble out over the bottom half of the door that was stuck. Lynda said, 'I can't possibly do that'. So we battered at the door until we could get it to give, and then piled out, distinctly shaky, and went and sat at the side of the runway.

Lynda then said, 'I've left all my briefs on the plane.' Like a fool, I said I'd go and get them, so I went and got back in to get this bag of papers. And as I did so, I could see Museveni's and our party, who had been waiting at the other end of the runway to catch the other plane, streaming down towards us in high excitement. They had seen us not leave the ground until we were almost beyond the curvature of the earth, take off briefly and then go down with a bang. They thought we had crashed.

Museveni's people were in a stupendous state of alarm, with the expectation that they would find him dead, and then what would they do? Our colleagues were, of course, seriously upset, at least, by the possibility that they might have lost a British Minister in the process of this visit, never mind the High Commissioner. (You could always get another one of those).

So we all foregathered, and Museveni summoned up one of his two serviceable Hind helicopters, bought cheaply from Ukraine, and Lynda, he and I and a few of Museveni's people sat on the extremely uncomfortably bench which runs round the belly of this thing, facing the giant fuel tank inside. We endured a very shaky journey back to Entebbe in this helicopter, whose reliability records were bad.

I tried to draft a little statement which I hoped would preempt the worst rumours and agreed it with Museveni and Chalker. We got to the other end and gave it to our press officer, and said, 'Can you get this to Museveni's press person, and tell her that the President has agreed it, and it should be issued pronto'.

When we got to Entebbe, Museveni said, "Right, we should go on from here to my farm at Rwakitura.' The pilot of the helicopter bravely said, 'I'm afraid not, Sir. The weather's too bad. It's getting dark, and I do not think we should fly'. 'Oh, come on!' said Museveni, 'Don't be such a wimp', more or less. And this officer, to his great credit, stood his ground and said, 'No Sir, I cannot agree to your flying in these conditions.' Museveni was finally overborne, and after he was whisked away to State House, the British party finally managed to use the one telephone in the VIP room that worked, to get some cars sent out. I took Lynda and our colleagues back to our house.

Anne was rehearsing that evening for one of the Kampala Amateur Dramatic Society's productions, so she was in blissful ignorance of this, but Jo, our eldest daughter, had just

arrived on holiday, and I said to her, ‘Can you rustle together about fourteen dinners?’. She said, ‘Leave it with me’, and she and Sophie the cook managed to put together a very fine nosh.

Anyway, all that is by the way, but it explained why, when I found myself having to fly to Kigali and Bujumbura on light aircraft, because there were no quicker commercial means, I felt somewhat apprehensive about it. I didn’t like flying for a long time, from that moment on, particularly as there was usually a difficult message to deliver.

I’d been to see the doctor to check out if there had been any damage from the accident with the aircraft. I’d cracked a couple of ribs, nothing serious, but the doctor said, ‘We should make sure there’s nothing wrong with your internal organs, so go and have a scan.’ I went to a place in Kampala that did scans, on the Saturday morning before we were due to go to the wedding of the son of the chairman of the Uganda Manufacturers Association. The chap who was applying the gel before they start the ultrasound had got it all set up, when the power went off – a very common occurrence, of course, in Kampala in those days. And he said, ‘Well, we have a choice now. It doesn’t usually stay off for too long. We can either clean you up, and you can go off and come back some other day, or you can take a chance and stay.’ I decided to take a chance. So I lay there, gelled up, ready to go, for three quarters of an hour in the dark. Finally, we did make the wedding, after all.

JH: Were you alright?

EC: Yes, apart from this dislike of flight. The next time Anne and I we went home, we found ourselves going on a jumbo jet upstairs, with the Kabaka sitting a few seats along. For some reason, I don’t know why, it may have been apprehension, I was sick, and passed out as the plane was taxiing. So I have that to my discredit in the memory of the Kabaka,

JH: What did your observation of Museveni during the crash, tell you about him?

EC: A man of iron courage, and once he was clear that no real damage had been done to anybody else, he took control of the situation pretty rapidly, and saw us all safe home. But, he didn’t follow through. If we had gone under his guidance, we would have got home to find that the news had preceded us along the bush telegraph and military channels, and a very

dramatic episode would have been made out of this and would have been re-played in London to general alarm on account of Lynda being present.

So it had been my idea that we should agree a very simple press statement, and leave it at that. But *his* staff were extremely unpleasant. When the Press Officer rang State House and got hold of their Head of Press, she said, 'I'm not going to accept a statement issued by the British High Commissioner on behalf of the President' and wouldn't be persuaded on something we had agreed was in the joint interest.

That was often the case. Institutions were weak - and were being weakened further by the practice of his personal authority by the Head of State, that they didn't really work properly. The Office had only a couple of years previously sent a Private Secretary, Richard Gozney, to Museveni's office to help them with expertise on how to set up and run a Private Office. Obviously the lessons hadn't really been learnt effectively. It is a real weakness, when even quite senior people feel unable to take decisions without consulting the boss. So the bosses get overburdened, their judgement suffers, and generally speaking there is a slow - or quick - downward spiral.

High Commissioner, Kenya, 2001-05

JH: You went back to London from Uganda and you took over a major job as Director of Public Services, as you've described in your earlier remarks. What lessons did you take to Nairobi from those times in command of such a big organization, and of leadership in difficult circumstances - both internal in London, and external in Cyprus?

EC: I think an awareness of how constrained the FCO's resources were becoming, and how the Office was having to sort out priorities - or Whitehall was having to sort out priorities, because FCO objectives were becoming understood to be a compressed version of the objectives of the British Government. That is, that embassies overseas should not just be doing the classic embassy jobs, but also meeting the requirements of the Home Office, Customs and Excise, the Police, and whoever else had an interest in the country where the mission was.

Also, some embassies were becoming designated as 'hubs', as they were called, with people based in them whose responsibilities stretched to other posts. In the process they were

becoming very diverse and, in the case of Nairobi, very large. I think in my time it was the fourth largest post in the world, amazingly, because it had all these bits spatchcocked onto them.

JH: How many were in the mission?

EC: I think, all up, we were about 160.

JH: All reporting to different Ministers?

EC: The core reporting was to the FCO, but increasingly, the FCO, partly for financial reasons, had been devolving tasks and responsibilities. For instance, the Visa Sections still reported, but not for long, to the FCO, though their work was being outsourced around the world, including in Nairobi, too. Commercial companies became the initial recipients of visa applications instead of the embassy.

The Drugs Liaison Officers, too, were sent out by a variety of interested parties – the Police, Customs and so on, and they operated largely independently. They took the cover of the High Commission, and their diplomatic status, but they operated pretty much as a separate unit, and reported directly to line managers in London, which wasn't altogether satisfactory.

Some of them were extremely good, some of them not, and some Other Government Departments' HR people obviously regarded a Foreign Office posting, especially a place like Nairobi, as somewhere they could solve a problem. That was very un-clever of them, because none of the jobs in Nairobi were other than extremely demanding.

The other thing that I took away from my experience in London, where I had also had a very large command, was just what it took to be in charge of such a large number of people doing highly disparate tasks, and how to keep tabs on them successfully, and to try to make sure that all were dancing the same dance, to the same tune.

One of the highly desirable changes in the so-called management revolution, which the Office underwent in the '90s and 2000s, was the improvement in the status of management officers, whose role had been rather ill-regarded or even ignored in the days when people doing that work were regarded as 'admin officers'.

They had been rebranded as Management Officers and encouraged to develop a career progression of their own, and to recognise that management jobs were a thing to aspire to, some of which would be highly graded. It was already beginning to show results. In all three posts I went to as High Commissioner, I was really glad and grateful for very high quality Management Officers, on whom I came to rely a lot. So those who belittled the concern with management failed to see the point, thereby missing one of the opportunities to get the best out of some really high quality people.

And if, as I have, you have been in London and seen a Permanent Under Secretary scragged by the Foreign Affairs Committee, or you have known that Douglas Hurd had been scragged in the House of Commons for what turned to be an illegal decision in respect of the Pergau Dam, probably you will have appreciated that the management revolution was long overdue, if the Office was to satisfy its masters, Parliament, and maintain its reputation amongst the general public.

One of the lessons I brought in terms of management was to make sure that I got around the place, and saw what people were doing at their desks, and made myself accessible for discussion or problem-solving, whenever they felt it necessary, whoever they were. That, on the whole, paid dividends, though of course it was time-consuming.

I was really pleased, in Nairobi, when the big election in 2002 came round, just after I'd been there a year, ushering in the big transition from the Moi era to the new Kibaki era. The enthusiasm for our mooted election observation operation was such that we got 53 volunteers from the staff, Locally Engaged and British, to take part in the observation exercise, which meant, since the election took place on Boxing Day, that Christmas was pretty heavily disrupted for all these people. So I thought that was a really good sign of high morale from the staff, which was much better integrated than I ever remember LEs and UK-based being before. We had some really good Locally Engaged staff, with really meaty jobs in the enterprise.

As for myself, it was more or less from Cyprus and Uganda that I took to Nairobi a sense of the continuing importance of Britain's links with Commonwealth countries, for better or for worse, and the way that people in those countries, on the whole, still responded to the British in a way that they didn't to other diplomats. Also for better or for worse, they expected more

from us. They were more ready to attribute the evil that had happened to them from our errors from long ago, but the first thing Moi said, and the first thing Kibaki said was, ‘You know the way this country works’. (Moi, in the way of making us complicit, in the sense of excusing some of the more grotesque acts of his government.) But it did imply a degree of intimacy, even affection – they were used to us. Rwanda – never a colony – later applied to join the Commonwealth, for reasons which had something to do with soft power.

The other thing was that lobbying was very often going to be problematic. I would be instructed to say things that Moi or Kibaki didn’t want to hear - that was particularly true of Kagame, sometimes true of Museveni. So when lobbying, I usually tried to make it my practice to start off with the positive - to find something constructive. ‘I’ve noticed this, and it’s gone well, and we applaud that ...’, and then would come to the point. It didn’t always work!

I was coming back to Nairobi, a place which I hadn’t visited since my first posting except very briefly. When I was Head of Personnel, I went on a visit, and passed through Nairobi, and had a look at their morale and management. I hadn’t otherwise been back since 1972, and I arrived in 2001, so it was a long gap. I reflected again that one of my first jobs as a Third Secretary had been to make an analysis of the first Kenyan census since independence. Back in 1970 the population of Kenya had been under 10 million. When I went back in 2002 it was getting on for 40 million, and it’s expected to reach 85 million by 2050. It’s a country about the size of France, its cultivable area is about 15% of the size of France’s cultivable land, and its population is going to far outstrip ours and the French in thirty years.

The good thing for Kenya, though, and what the World Bank tells us, is that it is a virtuous population growth. What I understand that to mean is that the size of families is diminishing, as you expect from societies as they get wealthier. Growth will come in the next thirty years from the multiplication of family units, rather than the multiplication of young people.

When I went back, the country remained physically the same size, it was at peace, there was no Somali Shifta problem. There was a Somali refugee problem, there was a Somalia that was in chaos, but, beyond the colossal refugee problem, its insecurity hadn’t yet infected Kenya, so the country was, relatively speaking, at peace. It looked more developed; it was also poorer. The UNDP calculated that the wellbeing index in Kenya was lower in the early 00s than it had been 20 years earlier in the 1980s. The big problems were development, of

course, again, and in particular, providing employment for a huge bulge of youthful population – 55% of the population were under the age of 16-17, a huge number, and coming onto a labour market which wasn't ready for them.

JH: Had the institutions of government kept pace with the growth of the population, and the sophistication of the economy?

EC: There had been some change, but mostly Kenya was governed by the Independence Constitution, as amended over the years, to provide for a one-party state, and then in the latter years of Moi, to provide for its dismantling. But the other institutions were much the same, there was a President and Ministers who were responsible to Parliament - it was a parliamentary presidential system at that time. There was a good deal of discontent with it. When I arrived, there was a major constitutional review under way which neither Moi, nor his successor much liked. Nevertheless, it was under way, and we wanted it to succeed, though we had no particular preferences about what should be in it.

Some of the institutions had been corrupted so much so that they didn't function properly. For instance, a huge issue for nearly all Kenyans was land ownership, and access to land by the population. The Ministry of Lands and Settlement hadn't been recording land transactions properly for many years, and the abuse of the system by those who wanted to appropriate land for themselves was widespread. There had been multiple transactions on the same piece of land, and the records were in an appalling state.

The Judiciary was run down. There were some judges and more lawyers who really wanted reform of the judicial system, but just before I arrived, I read an unfavourable report, and there was to be another on the state of the judiciary in Kenya, who were regarded as low life by the chattering classes and other people.

The numbers of quasi-police forces had multiplied. They were not particularly well disciplined, but they were heavily armed, and they formed a large group of people around the country possessing power and authority in the name of government. That was a multiplication of the instruments of coercion in the hands of the government which hadn't been there in the early 70s.

JH: Was that Moi's doing? He had been in power for more than twenty years when you arrived.

EC: I think Moi *and* Kenyatta. The national police force remained the same, but its leadership, its command of law, when I arrived, was deplored. Over the years, administrative police forces, forestry officers, all sorts of forces had acquired considerable numbers of people and arms. It was not quite clear why they needed to be as heavily armed as they were, nor at whose behest they would go into action. And when they did go into action, they were pretty ill-disciplined, and so were the police. Extrajudicial killing was a commonplace, and it remained a commonplace throughout our time there.

Our cook had a son, a university student, who found himself walking with a friend quite peacefully down the street and was allegedly shot by a plain clothes policeman. It was very common. The police would act against suspects.

So, it was not altogether an attractive scene that presented itself, although Nairobi remained in many ways a very desirable place to live, compared to most sub-Saharan African capitals. But it was known as 'Nairobi', given the incidence of burglary, mugging and criminal attack. My Deputy's wife's car was shot up while we were there. Just before my posting, a man called Graeme Gibson, a diplomat, had been shot dead for reasons which are obscure. So it was not an easy nor necessarily a happier place than it had been in the innocent days of the 1970s, when standards were still pretty high.

JH: What was Moi like as a person, and what was it like to deal with him and his entourage?

EC: Well, it was easier in some ways, in that Moi was a stickler for timekeeping, at least as far as his public role in the capital was concerned. He would be there on time, very often with a rose in his buttonhole. He was a real fashion statement in himself. He was tall, very straight, and he looked the part.

Indeed, when I was in Uganda another thing which caused me to get into a bit of bother was that I did, from Uganda, just point out to London, at the time when they were being extremely tough on Moi for his failure to reform, and to meet the International Financial Institutions' requirements in terms of economic management, that actually, the man was presiding over a country which had never collapsed, which continued to behave in a pretty

conventional way as regards business and so on, and its institutions, however badly weakened, were on the whole in one piece.

Museveni, on the other hand, the darling of the donors, had not done very much to re-establish and strengthen the institutions which Uganda's unhappy recent history had caused to rot from the inside out. So I had a certain sympathy for Moi, but from our first meeting onwards, it was clear that we were set to conflict on London's instructions on certain things, including constitutional review, and including on whether Kenya was really making a consistent and constant effort to meet the conditions which the International Financial Institutions had set as a basis for further aid to Kenya.

Kenya, I think, had gone off-piste about fifteen times in the previous ten years with regard to the World Bank's and IMF's efforts to help the country. The first period after my arrival in the country was spent trying to fend off pleas from leading Kenyans that the British should cut them a bit of slack, and tell these International Financial Institutions and other players to rally behind a country that was doing its best, even though it wasn't doing enough.

We didn't think it *was* doing its best, so the stage was set for a fair amount of disagreement. Moi had said at the beginning, 'No interference in our internal affairs', which was a bit rich considering that it was the Kenyans themselves who had internationalized their relationship with the International Financial Institutions and with the donors by seeking their help.

JH: Was it during Moi's time, in particular, that corruption came to engulf the state?

EC: It was. What formed the centrepiece of my campaign in the '00s was in many cases deals that had started in the Moi era, sometimes going back a long way. The point was that they had been continued in the Kibaki era. So the teats had just been transferred into other people's mouths, and they happily sucked on the cows of corruption which they inherited. So quite a lot did come from the Moi era. Sometimes Kibaki apologists would say, 'This is Moi's stuff'. To which the answer was, 'Yes, but you are still enjoying it, and paying interest on these corrupt deals, and you are yourselves signing a few extremely dodgy and very lucrative contracts'. I suppose it had got going under Kenyatta. I don't think we were too interested in those days. We knew that Kenyatta was given to casting an acquisitive eye but I think it really got going under Moi.

Moi had a notoriously corrupt Minister, who was also a very effective one, called Biwott and he also had a very corrupt financial adviser, his Financial Comptroller in a way, a man called Kulei. He was a former prison warder, who sank to great heights and a huge fortune. So did Moi himself, and others under him.

One of the things that it was hoped would make a difference was the dismantling of the colonial paraphernalia of public corporations. At Independence, we had handed over the state and its constitution and its appurtenances to the successor government. So there was a Kenya Power and Lighting – actually, there was an East Africa Power and Lighting at one stage – but all the big utilities were state monopolies, as they were in this country until the Thatcher era, and they provided enormous scope for corruption by those in power, which was why they were so reluctant to get rid of them. (I suppose that, in the Soviet Union, when the big state enterprises were dissolved, they got into the hands of other people who were almost more corrupt, and made an even better thing out of it.) By the time I arrived, institutions had clearly been corrupted, and they could not any longer be relied upon, including the Judiciary.

JH: You decided to tackle it head on in public. Why did you decide to do that?

EC: Well, we had in fact discussed privately among ourselves the possibility of seeing if we could get some coverage before the 2002 Election, because we had some evidence. We decided not to, because that would have been a bit too much like Russian interference in the Trump campaign.

By 2004, which was when I made my first major speech on the subject, we had had a year and a half of Kibaki. The government was elected at the end of 2002 and started working in early 2003. Kibaki had been elected on a reforming agenda, including on corruption. He had appointed an Anti-Corruption Czar, as well as an Anti-Corruption Commission. The Anti-Corruption Czar was John Githongo, and all the donors fell over themselves with delight at this. We became very excited, as the heads of NGOs – civic society – were co-opted into Kibaki's government. Here was a reforming government which we could back to the hilt, particularly on corruption, which everyone regarded as being Kenya's major blemish. Everybody knew about it. What we didn't know was precisely where it was, and how much it was worth. The evidence was extremely slippery; had always been. And woe betide those who spoke about it.

Because the government had made such a demonstration before the 2002 election of its desire to tackle corruption, the media, which was well-developed in Kenya, and the civil society, were onto the corruption case pretty quickly. By mid-2004, there was a lot of evidence lying around, some of it even in the Budget. I discovered quite a lot of evidence in the Annexes to the Budget, which contained details of interest being paid on contracts that we knew were crooked. Nobody ever thought to read the damn things, but we did. Kibaki had said to John Githongo, 'You must talk to the donors, keep me informed of what you are doing'. At the time we thought he had meant it, but it became clearer that, far from meaning it, those around President Kibaki were bent on constraining the role of the Anti-Corruption Czar, and that President Kibaki himself either wasn't aware of quite how far this was going, or encouraged it. So we began to mistrust him.

By mid-2004 there was a lot of evidence in our hands of which we were extremely confident; and with the work we had put in ourselves, we dared to put out what turned out to be a highly conservative figure of the sums involved. We could make a very good case of the damage that it was doing to Kenya, and of the damage that it was doing to our relationship with Kenya, as a major donor, and other donors too; because what was being abstracted from the Kenyan budget was worth just about as much as the total inflow of aid from the donors each year.

Secondly, we could express the cost in terms of services foregone by the Kenyan public, indeed by their own taxpayers. The way it worked was that on the whole, the Kenyan burglars didn't look for donor money. They did some of it; and some of it was wasted. But the main offence was that they stole money from the Kenyan Treasury, their own revenue for paying the Government's running costs, paying teachers and nurses, and providing the services that Kenyans relied on.

We thought that this was really telling evidence that we could present to the Kenyan government and the Kenyan public in a way which would make clear that we weren't giving them lectures *de haut en bas*. This was not a case of lecturing the venal Kenyans from a position of superiority. After all, we recognized that we had a certain responsibility for corruption ourselves. On the other hand, we were partners with the Kenyan public in this campaign against corruption, because we had a similar interest. We wanted schools that worked. But there was no point in building a new school, or introducing new skills to public officials, if in fact the teachers or officials weren't going to be paid for month after month

after month. These deprivations were suffered by ordinary Kenyans on a grand scale; and they affected sectors like education and health in which donors were keenly engaged.

I have described in regard to Uganda, how petty bribery, petty corruption, fed up into grand corruption, because the corrupt policeman or the corrupt official who demanded a sweetener for doing what he or she ought to have been doing anyway, was after all only copying the model set by their superiors who were responsible for stealing much larger sums, and having a much larger impact on the public good.

The opportunity arose to make a speech at a semi-private meeting of the British Business Association of Kenya, which comprised the heads of British-owned companies or subsidiaries of British companies in Kenya. More than half the audience were, in fact, Kenyans, and I used to speak to them every now and then, perhaps once a year, or more. Corruption wasn't the first thing I had tackled with them or others. My earlier themes had included constitutional reform and criticism of those around President Moi who had floated the idea that he might extend his tenure for a relatively short period. So I chose this semi-private occasion to float my corruption theme. We weren't going to make a big thing of it. I would give the text to anyone who asked for it, but we didn't issue it until they asked for it.

JH: Did you float it in advance? Did people know it was coming?

EC: I floated it with London, not to the audience until the day. I said, 'This is what I propose to say. Let me know if you have any comments'.

The speech received widespread coverage, not only in Kenya, which is what I had hoped for, but I had not expected such widespread interest internationally. When Chris Mullin, the Africa Minister, was put up to explain himself on *The World At One* on BBC Radio 4, the Department had to say "we'd better support this, because corruption is a genuine problem in Kenya, and although we had the speech, we hadn't actually read it, so were unable to advise you in advance".

But Chris is very valiant, and he stood up for it. His Private Secretary at the time was Tom Fletcher, who had left Nairobi soon after I arrived, and Tom wrote privately to say that perhaps Chris Mullin was slightly jealous of the speech. So that made officials feel a bit

silly, but it also rebounded on me, because London became extremely keen that I clear anything I might say on any subject from there on in.

I had thought very carefully about my speech, and about the metaphors I used. I had concentrated on things that were in the public mind, like the shortage of school buildings, or the recent government request for x hundred million shillings to repair the infrastructure, things that would have public resonance. I could say, 'The money spent on this useless contract, for which nothing was ever shown, a contract drawn up on the back of an envelope: - even half the money saved from that would pay for all the new school buildings required over the next three years'. These were things that would have meaning to people and put what would otherwise have been long rows of zeros into terms that people could readily grasp. I think that worked, and we were very conservative in estimating the total costs, as it turned out.

The speech did have large impact, and I held my breath as the impact was felt, just to see where the balance would turn out. As far as one could tell from polls carried out by the TV stations and so on, 82-83% of people agreed that the British High Commissioner should have the right to say this, and that they supported what he said.

So that was gratifying. What was even more gratifying, it got me some good mates. Walking into our bank one day, a man stopped in front of me, whom I didn't know, stood there, blocking my path, with an amused face, and then he looked at my shoes, and said, 'I see that there is no vomit on your shoes.' So we laughed. It was one of those metaphors that took root well. He said 'My name is Mulei. I am a former President of the Kenya Central Bank, and I think you have rendered this country a signal service'.

Another was Gado, the *Nation's* very accomplished cartoonist, who developed, on the basis of my campaign, a series of cartoons on thieving and corruption in which ill-disguised caricatures of government figures appeared as animals - hyenas, pigs, warthogs - and proceeded to entertain the *Nation's* readers with these for the next several years.

Finally, I was driving down the next weekend into town, where the traffic used to slow down at each roundabout on Uhuru Avenue; the men who were selling trinkets, newspapers and so on, realized it was me driving my car, and they crowded round, full of praise for the speech, and they said, 'We know who they are!', and proceeded to run off the five or six key targets.

So it was widely known, and correctly known, who the great corrupters were in this 'reforming' government.

Walking down the street a little later, past a line of shoe shiners, one of them said, 'Are you Mr Clay?' 'Guilty as charged', I said, and he said, '20 shillings to polish your shoes?; 200 shillings for a season ticket to clean off the vomit'.

So, it had great impact. Of course, it aroused some fury in some places, but nobody really tried to deny it. Those who did try were ignorant. One was the then Foreign Minister, who was a toady of the Kibaki circle. He said he thought I was drunk and that I should either put up or shut up, and he hauled me in for a roasting in the Foreign Ministry, which he then misrepresented to the press. So I took him up on the idea that I should put up or shut up, and decided that I would put up another speech. This would essentially present a dossier of what I had been talking about, which I would present first to President Kibaki, if I could.

It took me ages to get an appointment with Kibaki. His people obviously thought that he needed to be protected from me, or perhaps he was unwilling, but finally, a well-disposed Minister, not in his inner circle, persuaded him that I really should be given a call. I was sitting – I had a very tiny balcony just outside my office, with a view over Nairobi, and I just sat out on it, to the dismay of our security people – and my mobile phone rang, and a familiar voice said, 'Bwana Edward, ni lazima tuzungumze'. It was Kibaki, and he was simply saying, 'We need to talk'. I said, 'We do: your place or mine?'

I went to see him and handed over the dossier we had assembled which showed the deals on which we had focused: the dates, the values, the responsible people, and so on. There were twenty cases listed. I said, 'I'm going to make a speech on it, and present it publicly'. By that time, I had already accepted an invitation to present the prize for Investigative Journalist of the Year, at the annual dinner of the Kenyan Union of Journalists, which was imminent. I said, 'I would have told you earlier if I had had the chance, but I have not given this to anybody else, except you – so here it is.'

Then I gave my speech. I didn't give out the list in the dossier I had given to President Kibaki, although I did speak to it. As before, the papers carried the speech in full, including the two rather feeble poems that, with the aid of a colleague, I had written. One was called 'Kenya Breakfast'; the other was called, 'Macavity', both on the theme of corruption, which

struck most Kenyans as completely incomprehensible, but were quite amusing for the writers, and became collectors' items for the more knowledgeable amongst the chattering classes. A judge wrote a very nice note afterwards saying he'd loved it all. It had made him laugh, and he approved of it mightily.

JH: What was Mwai Kibaki like as a person?

EC: I liked him. Do you remember Reginald Maudling - a very clever, slightly sleepy guy, with a very sharp mind, and suede shoes? Like an earlier version of Ken Clarke - amiable, but not to be fooled around with. Kibaki was like that.

He was said to be the first African student at LSE to get a First in his day, and he'd been around in politics since the Kenyatta era, as Minister of Finance actually. But he fell out of favour after the transition to Moi in 1978, and he had then developed an opposition party. By 2001 he was quite a considerable figure. But inevitably, the ethnic polarization of politics in Kenya meant that his Party was largely the embodiment of Kikuyu opposition to the Moi era, and, as they saw it, Moi's exclusion of them from political power and authority. So he was going to be a formidable competitor in the 2002 election.

What made the 2002 election different from its predecessors and successors was, first of all, that it was demonstrably a pretty fair election, pretty well run. Observers were well in place, huge numbers of Kenyans, but also quite a lot of international observers, and a very good coordinated operation by the Europeans, Americans, Australians and Canadians operating in teams together. So we covered quite a lot of the country, and the Kenyans of course covered it all, and they were very good.

The chief opposition and competition to Kibaki came from Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of the great Jomo Kenyatta, whom Moi had anointed as his successor. It wasn't that Uhuru did so much worse than Moi had in previous multi-party elections: when Moi had won, he had won on a plurality of the vote, in other words, he got the largest vote but not a majority of the votes cast. But the decisive novelty was that a coalition formed around Kibaki in which the opposition all came together, and their combined votes, a Rainbow Coalition, got Kibaki into power with a very handsome endorsement from the electorate.

JH: Was he then captured and out-manoeuvred by more unscrupulous people?

EC: There may be something in that, particularly at the beginning. Kibaki was a very clever man, but in order to get himself elected, actually he owed a lot to Raila Odinga, the son of the great Oginga Odinga, who was the man who persuaded the rest of the opposition, many of whom who had been Ministers under Moi, to rally around Kibaki. He used a famous expression, 'Kibaki tosha'; in other words, 'Kibaki is good enough. Let's all forget our reservations, and rally round him'. So that was a great thing, but a bad thing was that during the election campaign, Kibaki was involved in a horrendous road accident, and that took him off to London for weeks.

JH: Was that an accident?

EC: Well, I think so. His deputy, Mike Wamalwa, whom I had known in the 1970s, was unwell, too. People never said what they were unwell with, but everyone reached their own conclusions in a country where HIV was a major preoccupation. So they were both in the London clinic at the same time, and the new reforming government lacked effective leadership in the early weeks.

Kibaki came back, and he was sworn in in a wheelchair, but he was off his oats for quite a while, and it took him months to get back on song, properly speaking. Sometimes if you made an appointment, it would be abruptly cancelled because he wasn't up to it. And sometimes you would have an appointment, but it would be embarrassing because he was clearly *not* up to it, and in going through with it he showed us just how unwell he was.

So that was a pity, and probably during that period of relative convalescence, people did take advantage of him. But I doubt they did things which he wouldn't have approved of. The rule after Kenyan elections was, everyone was broke. They had broken themselves to run the election, so first priorities were re-pay your debts; secondly, build up treasure for the next election; thirdly, buy the new lampshades and the new house, or whatever your family wanted you to do for them. That's how it went; those were the orders of priority, and people set about enriching themselves pretty quickly.

The other thing that happened was that ethnic politics really came into play. Those who had been prime leaders in the opposition, including in civil society before the election, who had been sworn enemies of Moi, civil society people of great reputation, wildly popular with the

donors, became co-opted into government. I think that when Kibaki appointed John Githongo, he traded on John Githongo's great reputation as a former journalist, head of the Kenyan Chapter of Transparency International. He said, 'Well, this man, he's one of us, too. He'll bring great authority to this job, he'll do our reputation a lot of good, but he won't actually harm our interests in continuing the corruption'. Well, he made the wrong call there. They all did, and couldn't call Githongo to heel.

But ethnic politics is a very heady brew. I think when Kibaki came round, as it were, to the reality of being the President, and heard all these people around him saying similar things, with no dissenting voices, and many of them in the same ethnic tongue, he said, 'Of course, this must be right. This is what I expected to hear, and is what indeed I am hearing'.

I don't excuse him, really, at all. He was a very clever man. He knew why Moi had been so unpopular with his antipathy to reform; his regime had been steeped in corruption. These things that Kibaki had said he would change – Moi's bad relations with the donors – all these things were headline points in his election for the Presidency, but he ditched them, and obstructed the way of real change.

I lived not far along the road from his private house, and the day after his election there was a great gathering of people in his garden – tent set up, crowds around his wheelchair, everyone congratulating him. I walked along the road, and looked in, and people said, 'Come in, come in!'. So I went in, and he saw me, and greeted me with great warmth, and that warmth lasted a long time.

He said publicly and privately, 'This is the British High Commissioner. We expect to hear from him if things go wrong, and we shall not be accusing him of intervention or threatening to expel him, like the last government, when he speaks up.' So, I banked that, and reminded him of it once or twice, and he never denied it. But by mid-2004, I thought the government was really going badly off track, and I particularly resented some of the exaggerated pledges of virtue. For instance, his Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, who was a leading figure in the network of corruption that had enveloped the government, said to me that he wanted to 'walk all the way with Britain' on our reform agenda. I thought, 'We're not doing very well at it'. I lost confidence in people that I had liked and admired. There were some that I didn't like or admire, who appeared to be leading lights in the corrupt networks.

JH: You fell out famously with Martha Karua, later Minister of Justice. How did that happen?

EC: Martha Karua was a prime example. She had been a leading light as a lawyer in the International Federation of Women Lawyers, a great protagonist of rights and a notable opponent of Moi. When Kibaki was elected, she became one of his Ministers.

When I started criticizing the slowness of the constitutional review process, which ought to have been completed by then, and then got onto corruption, she turned 180 degrees and became Kibaki's attack dog.

Long after I had left, when the 2007 election went bad and led to the violence of early 2008, I appeared on a BBC programme called Hard Talk, with her down the line from Nairobi, and me in the studio. Her venom exceeded all previous levels. She accused me of having properties in Kenya 'which I would really like to visit, (I didn't have any properties in Kenya), but the pity was that I couldn't, because I had been PNGed [*declared 'persona non grata' by the government*].' Well, you can't PNG a retired diplomat; you just declare them a prohibited immigrant. It was a bit of drama. I don't know whether it was true that the government had decided to ban me from Kenya, but I suspect that it probably was true at the time. It was a revenge after my retirement: it cost the Kenya government nothing to skewer a former servant of The Queen or an employee of the Foreign Office, and it sounded dramatic on her part. There were others like her.

I remember bumping into her at the German National Day not long before we left, and I made to greet her, and she gave me a freezing look of gorgon-esque horror, which meant that she really didn't want to say hello, which was unusual, because Kenyans, however wretched relations might have become, on the whole always wanted to say hello and chat.

JH: When you were there this time round, development had been separated off into DFID. How were relations between the High Commission and the DFID office during your time?

EC: It was a very big office. In fact, we had a spanking new building in Nairobi, and DFID had a half of it, nearly, so they were a big presence, under their own hierarchy. They had a very big programme, not just in Kenya but in other countries of Eastern Africa. They were familiar with the Foreign Office from their ODA past, and, on the whole, very glad to be out

from under the heel of a Foreign Office which had not always handled them very intelligently in the past. But, although it wasn't quite apparent then, they were going to enjoy huge increases in their budget. That fed hubris, and the appetite of DFID to plough its own furrow. I got on perfectly well with their Heads, but there were incidents which revealed how close we might be to, as it were, running completely different foreign policies.

I well remember quite early on the Minister of Finance summoning me for a discussion, as usual: 'Why are the British so mean to us? You should be helping us to get the IFIs to take their boot off our neck', etc. etc. I knew what I had to say, and I said it, and reported it to London. The next morning the Head of DFID, whom I liked well, came in looking a bit shamefaced, and showed me a telegram that he'd had from Clare Short, saying, 'What the hell is the High Commissioner doing going in to see the Minister of Finance? Why weren't you with him?', etc. etc. So I said to him, 'Well, Matthew, how are you going to reply?'. 'What do you suggest?', he asked.

So I said, 'Tell her three things: the first is that the Minister asked to see me, and any Kenyan Minister can ask to see whom he likes, within reason. I would think it odd if he had asked to see the British High Commissioner if he had really wanted to see the DFID representative. You saw what he had to say, and how I handled it. Was there anything wrong?'. 'No, no,' he said, 'no problem'. 'Secondly, you weren't actually around. I wouldn't have minded being accompanied by you, at all, had you been available. Thirdly, maybe you should tell Clare Short that there is only one British High Commission and one high commissioner in Kenya - we all cleave to the same broad line, and the longer we do that, the better.' So we parted amicably, he and I.

I thought it was a good example of the way in which Clare Short was intent on imposing her very strong personality on DFID as a distinct Department and making sure that her officials did not resile from that position. There was another thing, of course: she didn't like Robin Cook, and I don't think she was altogether flattered to be made Secretary of State for International Development in the first place. She grew to like the job with its enormous potential for raising her profile, and making sure that Britain cut a very useful figure in the world through an active, well-run aid and development programme. I feel admiration for much of what DFID does, but I didn't like their conceit, and I found them sometimes rather slippery, including on corruption.

Individual DFID officials were very helpful to me, obviously with speeches, because they were able to tell me what things were worth, how much 50 million shillings would have bought in terms of what they were trying to do with their massive aid budget.

Their bosses were a bit more doubtful, and I suspected that backchat was going on behind my back. I know a telegram went back to DFID in July 2004 saying, "I wasn't consulted about this speech" etc. etc. Not true. Some of his colleagues were certainly aware of what was going into the speech, because I relied on them a lot. In any case, as a subsequent Permanent Under Secretary of DFID who came to see me when he was on a visit to Nairobi, said, 'It would be awful if British diplomats got into a position where they had to get clearance, or agree the draft of a speech with their DFID colleagues. It's almost back-watching. It would be quite wrong; quite unconstructive'. DFID carried out a straw poll amongst their staff, and discovered that nine out of ten, or a bit more, were roundly in favour of what I could say.

So, I didn't repine about that, but I did regret the sense that some of our DFID colleagues were occasionally watching their backs at the expense of giving their full-hearted support to what was going on in the mission as a whole. The theme of corruption was not a new one: we had been banging on about it in respect of Kenya for twenty or thirty years.

JH: While you were there as bilateral Head, you were also Permanent Representative to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and to Habitat, in Nairobi. What did that entail? How did you factor those responsibilities into an already heavy programme bilaterally?

EC: I didn't give them as much attention as I should have done, but inevitably, because of the size of their meetings at ambassadorial level, and the need to coordinate EU positions, they took ages. Also, I had a very good First Secretary whose job it was to mind those two portfolios. He did it very well. He was highly regarded, and, so long as that was so, that was good enough.

Occasionally, the stuffer ambassadors might raise an eyebrow about a First Secretary going along to a co-ordination meeting. But on the whole, the sensible ones accepted the quality of his interventions and contributions, and didn't worry about the fact that he was more junior than most of them. He knew more about the portfolio than most of them, played a good role in EU co-ordination and in the meetings of the wider membership in Nairobi.

We occasionally got Ministerial visits. The Kenyans didn't allow, or recognize, that there was any real read-across to their own domestic policies, but of course there was. Particularly on the UNEP environment side, it was highly relevant in terms of what was going on with deforestation and land regulation, and the drying up of the rivers in Kenya. Habitat was highly relevant to the way the government were managing, or not managing, slums which had sprawled across the city. Most of them were illegal settlements on land owned by some quite senior people.

I once got together a few like-minded ambassadors to go and lobby the Kenyan Minister against a proposal which we understood was being considered, to clear a major area of the slum of Kibera, a very densely populated slum beside the railway, and just to move the people off with no thought as to where they were to go.

So a few of us - the usual suspects, the Dutch, the Scandinavians, one or two others - made up a little delegation, and went to make representations to the Foreign Minister, in the first instance, and then to his colleagues in the relevant Planning Ministry, to say, 'You can't do this, it will be a disaster. You'll have very many people, something like half a million probably, who if you've just turfed them out of the slum, will become wretched. They can't fail to be noticed, given their numbers, and they will do your government's reputation great harm, and likewise the social fabric. You must think about it'. I think we had some success in getting the Kenyans to think again, but they should have thought about it themselves, in the first instance, really.

JH: Was that the slum that came to be featured in the film 'The Constant Gardener'?

EC: Yes, it was.

JH: The film was made there, and you became involved in the process then and since. How did that come about?

EC: The Office had been contacted by the man who was to produce the film, and said he wanted to talk to us about it in Nairobi. London wondered how we would react. I reacted rather negatively in the first instance. I didn't think a lot of the book, and I thought the portrayal by John le Carré of the British High Commissioner was hopelessly out of date - at least, I hoped it was!

JH: Did he use you as his model?

EC: No. In his introduction he apologized to my predecessor, Jeffrey James, who might have felt offended, but whom he'd only met once. I don't think he was modelling it on anybody, except a rather antiquated stereotype of a British diplomat of the type that he had known when he was in active service, which was several decades before. He didn't know much about Africa, and he picked up the theme from a visit to Kenya.

I said, 'We've enough problems without getting tangled up in this'. But my Deputy, Ray Kyles, very wisely said, 'Well, I think we should see. Just offer a hand of friendship, at least. This could be the major British feature film next year. The Kenyans would be gratified, because it was being made during the new regime of a reforming government, so they could say, 'Look how bad it was under Moi', and they would be flattered to have it made in Kenya.' (There was in Kenya a small, but quite active, film sector itself.) So I said, 'OK, let's do it'.

We saw Simon Channing Williams (the late Simon Channing Williams, sadly), who was the producer, and partner in a film company with Mike Leigh. He said, 'We have a basic problem. We need, of course, money from the United States, and all the people there are saying, 'Naturally, you are going to make it in South Africa, aren't you, because Kenya is so dangerous?'. Terrorism, robbery and all that. So he asked me what did I think. I said, 'It's absolute rubbish. If I had the choice between visiting the two countries, on the grounds of security I'd certainly rather come to Kenya, and you'll be much better looked after here. You can't step outside your hotel in Johannesburg without being savaged, and you'll be received much more warmly here. You'll get decent support and, if the Kenyans like the idea, which they probably will, they will help you to film this in the places where the scenes are actually supposed to be, that is, Turkana in the North, and in Kibera in the South. It won't be easy, it won't be straightforward, but go for it, and we'll back you up'.

He managed to persuade the funders that that's what we would do. So we were responsible for encouraging him to get the film made in Kenya, contrary to the first instincts of the film industry's financiers. Then, when they came out on preparatory visits they got in touch with various people, and sought advice on how people dressed in the diplomatic community. Our

EU colleague had his house used for some of the more formal diplomatic bits in the film. There was quite a lot of advice given by colleagues in the High Commission, and by us.

When they really got filming, the director came out, and we met him a few times, and some of the actors. Anne and I went up for a day to Turkana to watch the shooting there, which really was very interesting. We met some of the stars, and saw the way that they conducted the shoot.

What was really impressive, to my mind, was that there was a huge army of Kenyans employed as carpenters, drivers, horse managers, farriers and so on. There was a large encampment in Turkana housing all these people and the services they represented, and a large central canteen in which everybody ate, from carpenters to Rachel Weisz and so on.

Simon Channing Williams had said before they started, 'We want to do this rather differently. The film industry has a reputation for going into an under-developed country providing facilities or context and scenery, and they just go in and distribute large numbers of goodies, shoot and forget. We want to get on terms with the local community, explain what we're doing, but try to see whether we can't develop a longer-term relationship with them'.

So he invited the cast and crew to give some thought to this. He said, 'We can all leave tips, and the odd bottle of whisky, here today, gone tomorrow. Or we can do something longer-lasting, by putting our contributions together.' So they did. They set up a trust, called the Constant Gardener Trust, and carried out some major works in the village in which they were principally based, and I take my hat off to them for that. Simon was a really good man.

I had said to Fernando Meirelles, the director, when I met him, 'I hope, for god's sake, that you produce a better film than the book.' And this comment appeared, unfortunately, in an interview he gave to one of those flight magazines, you know, on some Emirates flight to Hong Kong or somewhere. It got back to John Le Carré, who nevertheless was really gracious about it. I did think it was quite a good film, and we much enjoyed meeting him.

JH: You managed to get up to Turkana then. During your time in Kenya you managed to travel perhaps even more widely than when in Uganda, and your diaries of the time are a great paean to the people and the country. What do you remember most vividly about those years, outside the High Commission?

EC: I think I mentioned the minor celebrity which I got as high commissioner. In each of those three posts, because of history, one probably gets more exposure in the media than is merited. That's in the nature of being British High Commissioner. And I got some on top, because in some cases I became the focus of attack. For instance, the Kenyan press, the straightforward press, were mostly full on in support of the two major speeches [on official corruption]. But some of the more scurrilous, obscene, defamatory and libellous attacks were made in the yellow press, which were very small papers, designed to look like newspapers, but in fact about four pages long and full of nothing very substantial. They were created as a sort of vehicle to convey an assault by somebody who had taken agin one.

I remember one example of the yellow press carrying an attack, which said that I was a notable figure in the gay scene in London, and that John Githongo and I were often to be seen headed off at weekends to orgies in Naivasha. So I took this thing home, preparing my words very carefully for Anne, so she should know it was there, but not take it too tragically. So I handed it over, and fortunately she burst into gales of laughter at this absurd thing. But, you know, some things were really unpleasant; even from some of the straight columnists.

Another of the yellow papers alleged that, at one of the National Day Receptions at State House, Murungaru, then Kibaki's Minister of State for Security and Defence and a central figure in my attacks on corruption, had got hold of me and given me a good scragging, had beaten me up. I thought that was amusing, because, actually, I had been in the company of Chris Mullin [then Minister for Africa], who happened to be visiting, and I think even he would have intervened to stop me being assaulted by this senior minister.

On the whole, celebrity is full of dangers. In all those three countries, any favourable reference presaged a fall. I had a friend who was himself a journalist, (he came to a lunch during a visit by Michael Jay, then Permanent Under Secretary), who warned me, 'You know, you be careful. There will be your Beckham moment, with an open goal yawning in front of you, and you bugger up the kick: then your reputation will be mud.' I always kept that. I also treasured his parting valedictory note: 'You never had that Beckham moment. I am consoled. Good luck, you leave in trails of glory.'

So the celebrity was an uncomfortable thing, and unfamiliar. I do remember it for better, or for worse. There were things – the kindness of strangers – that I really appreciated from

people I didn't really know. In Kampala there were two newspapers, neither of whom could be guaranteed to say anything nice about the British High Commissioner; occasionally did, but somebody I had never heard of, never knew who it was, just wrote a letter saying, "I don't know about most British High Commissioners, but I'd just like to say that Edward Clay is admirable." Which was gratuitous, but very kind of him, at a time when I was under pressure, because some of Museveni's associates were poison.

One of the reasons I always feel a bit doubtful as to whether an education in Britain turns foreigners into observers of our values for all time, is that there was a columnist in Kenya who worked for Museveni, who spoke like a regular English gent, but who took a dislike to me because I challenged him on something, and we never got back on terms. I reflected that going to England and getting a patina of an English education doesn't necessarily guarantee that you behave like a British journalist or a British lawyer or whatever when you get back and come under the old pressures.

What I always remember is the human ambience, the warmth of personal contact. Even people one had fallen out with, except in a very few cases, would usually come up and be polite, be helpful and kind. Getting out amongst ordinary Kenyans and Ugandans, was always a pleasure, because you always felt that, actually, however poor they were, if you found yourself on your uppers, they would share their last potato with you.

We once went on a family trip from Uganda into Kenya and came to grief. One of our vehicles turned over. Two of our daughters were in it, and were cut about and injured, and the rest of us were pretty shaken. We got a lot of help from people who had no special reason to be good to us. After all, we were not being diplomats in Kenya, we were just visitors from Uganda. The local dispensarian was a Kikuyu, far from home, at a time when his profession was on strike because they had not been paid. He did his best to patch us up and sent us on, in fact, to an Italian mission down the road. The headmaster of the local school gave us a lot of help in retrieving the vehicle, getting a local trucker to drive it over to the nearest town.

When we got to the Italian mission, the Sisters were pretty snotty, and didn't really want to give us a hand. But there was a female, lay doctor working there for a short period, who said, 'Come with me. Where are you going to stay?' We mumbled about lodging in the local village, a really rough place; there was nowhere else. So she said, 'No, you can sleep on my floor. I'll patch up these girls.'

I also remember the support of staff, especially our Residence staff. We arrived in Nairobi when the Residence was entering on a period of nearly six months refurbishment, which should have been done long before. We were put into temporary accommodation, which was far from ideal at the beginning of our time. Within six months we had lost two of our colleagues to HIV. But our staff were always staunch in support of us, and I really appreciated them. Whatever was going on outside the gates, home was a haven.

Anne was terrific at managing the home. There was a controversial movement at the time to install Residence managers to run the Residence on a professional basis. But we decided not, for a couple of reasons. First of all Anne said, 'This is our home. This is where we live, and where our family is going to come to see us, as well as guests. I'm not going to hand it over to somebody else to do; I'll do it myself.' Secondly she said, 'Have you seen what the Office is proposing by way of pay?'. We looked at it together, and it would have meant that the rate they were prepared to pay for the role of Residence manager, which Heads of Mission spouses were invited to bid for, would have made her the lowest paid person in the Residence. Well down the pecking order, and that would become known, of course, around the Office, a source of minor wonderment.

When things looked a bit bleak, the High Commission's locally employed staff were also solid in support, especially on the campaigns for a Constitution and against corruption. I felt we were pushing in the direction that was understood by our very large staff. I tried to take trouble to make sure that people knew what I was doing, and why I was doing it. And in the case of election monitoring, they were involved, too.

There was another famous slum, called Mathare, which had a well-known youth sports association. They had a notably large number of teams, including girls'. So we had a bit to do with them, and sometimes would just go and watch the games. They were always worth watching. It led to an unexpected and memorable development in our work.

In 2003, we brought out Manchester United's Under 15s as a high point of a series of events we mounted to mark forty years of Kenya's independence, which we put under the brand 'UKenya'. We had tried writing to the Club to proposition them about this for some long time, but had had no reply. I said, 'Well, I'm going home on brief leave. Do you think I should just try a personal approach to Sir Alec Ferguson?' They said, 'Aah, *would* you?'

So I went up to Manchester and got an appointment with the great man, and put this proposition to him. I said, 'You may think we're a bit nuts,' (because we had become infamous in some travel advisory crises, with unpopular advice on terrorism and so on), 'but we wouldn't expose your team to those sorts of threats, if they existed at the time of your visit, because we would have to warn you off as we would warn other people. But, Manchester United has probably more fans in Kenya than in Britain. So it would be a great thing for a team to play here. With the Under 15 age group, it would be meaningful football, and it would have immense appeal to an age group which comprises the largest in Kenya's complex demographic'.

He said, 'Ay, we pride ourselves on being an international club. We'll have to talk to the parents, tell them it would be good for them, good to go and see life in Kenya. I sometimes look at these young men who come to play football, and they arrive in their Ferraris and Maseratis, and I look out the window and think, 'You young buggers, you should remember where you came from'. So he was on board.

On the whole, it nearly killed us, arranging all this. But, we did it with lots of local sponsors and help, and enjoyed it.

JH: What was the reaction in the club, in Mathare?

EC: The MUFC team went to Mathare, they went to Kibera and had a look round there. They had a very nice physio with them, whom they used to call 'Matron'. Halfway through the week, she and one of the coaches said, 'They are passing through a really difficult phase. They are emotionally exhausted from what they have seen, and the impressions they have had, in the slums, in the game parks, and of course on the football field. It has really bowled them over'. A couple of the lads had never been on an aeroplane before, never been abroad. So it was a good thing to do in broadening understanding on both sides.

At the end of the year in Kenya, we held a rather elaborate Christmas party, at which Father Christmas, yours truly, came riding though on a camel. We visited the cancer ward of a nearby children's hospital and had a party in the garden for children from various children's homes. It was absolutely uproarious, a terrific occasion.

I remember affectionately an Italian doctor who had lived in East Africa for years and had seen us both for various bits of sun damage. Once, as he was doing his work, he said, 'Would you like me to clean you up a bit? What are you doing afterwards? I want to save you embarrassment?'. So I said, 'Dr Landra, I am going back to the office after this, but I can tell you that there's no way in which you could embarrass me any more than I have embarrassed myself one way or another.' 'Oh', he said, 'I shall remember that forever!'

NGOs are an important part of British activity in east Africa. One such was called Excellent Development, which we helped to get going in Nairobi. It had been formed by a young British man with a Kenyan water engineer. Anne and I went to have a look at what they were doing, building sand dams in semi-arid areas of Kenya. We helped them to build one of their early ones, with cash from the Small Projects scheme. Their turnover now is about a million pounds a year, working in eight countries. I think they'll survive this spasm we're going through. I'm really glad we were in touch with them in the early days, and are still in touch, although I've stopped being a patron now.

Some of the people we had known in Kenya in 1970, and their families, were still around in the 2000s. We had some really nice family dinners, including with John Githongo before he took himself into self-imposed exile in early 2005. We had all his family over before he left. There was another family, the Muteshi, which comprised mostly girls whom Anne had taught in 1970 at the Loreto Convent. She remembered the girls from then, and they remembered her, because, whereas the nuns had been pretty cruel to them, Anne was not. But also, she had realised to her horror, that the nuns had never talked to these girls - who were then about thirteen - about reproduction. So she said, 'I better had', because she was by then herself pregnant. She explained what was going on, and they all said, 'Oh, so now we know what you have been doing!'

We had over some of the remnants of the family of a man, J M Kariuki, with whom I had been quite friendly back in 1970. He had been killed, almost certainly by agents of the regime, not long after we left, whilst we were in Bulgaria. So we had some of his dependents, and the man who had been his close associate, Oliver Litondo, over.

One of the most astonishing examples of kindness to strangers came from former President Moi, in 2005. His private secretary rang, and said, 'President Moi would like to say goodbye'. I thought, 'I bet he would. What does he want to throw at me?'. But I said,

‘That’s nice of him. When would he like me to call?’. He said, ‘No, he’d like to call on you’. I said, ‘Are you sure? Mountains usually go to Mohamed’. We fixed up a date at my house. I’d been having a last word with some of the journalists that day, when Moi and his entourage arrived for tea. We walked around the garden, and he was very kind. He ate some of Anne’s cake (getting his food taster to taste some of it first). Some of the journalists had stayed behind, naturally, and they asked Moi, ‘What did you say to the High Commissioner? Do you regard him as somebody who has been a friend of Kenya?’ He said, ‘Oh yes. I think he’s been a good friend of Kenya’. At which, you could have knocked me down with a feather.

I remember going on a local radio called KISS 100 FM, for the morning programme which I used to listen to on the way to work. Caroline Mutoko, who presented it, said, ‘Let’s just kick back, we’ll play some music; you choose it. So I chose one number that I particularly liked, the lead singer of which was a man called Nameless. When the radio station rang him and said, ‘Can we play your record for the High Commissioner?’, he said, ‘Right, I shall come in and give it a dedication to him.’ So that was fun, particularly because after about a quarter of an hour, Caroline Mutoko took off her headphones and said, ‘You’ve been off air for the last eight minutes.’ Somebody had pulled the plug. And we were never quite sure whether it was an act of sabotage, or what. She said, ‘Never mind. We’ll do it again tomorrow.’

The thing which pleased me particularly about the Office was that, quite early on in my time in Nairobi, something emerged that the Office had obviously been thinking hard about: extending Locally Engaged staff’s health insurance. Including the costs of HIV treatment, which was a very extensive commitment. London sent a message round the African posts saying, ‘This is what we are proposing to do, and this is how it’s going to work.’ I thought that was really admirable, because HIV loomed over everything, in Uganda and in Kenya. It was a really widespread and serious problem. Having health insurance to cover that was seen by our Locally Engaged staff as a great step forward in the Office’s appreciation of them and of their status, and a real help, because treatment for HIV was almost unaffordable.

One of the first beneficiaries was one of our Residence staff. When he fell desperately ill, he was taken into the Aga Khan hospital. Poor man, he was a guinea pig for this scheme, but it showed that he had been treated in the same way as anybody else. It made a great impression. It was one of the great reforms on the part of the Office.

There are many good things to remember about our time there. It was good to be out in Kenya again, with our family, and with friends. It was good to go around the country with them. Kenya is a wonderful country. Nobody can fail to be delighted by its variety, and challenged by its people, who must be amongst the most talented and hard-working on the continent. I always used to think, if you needed psychological help or counselling, go to Uganda. If you wanted brain surgery, go to Kenya. The people with whom we worked were generally happy, and the human ambience was more than anybody had a right to deserve.

JH: You've covered a remarkable spread of time and jobs and posts. Coming to the end of this account of your career, when you look back on it, should you have stayed a journalist? What do you remember most fondly about the career of a diplomat?

EC: I think its variety. The fact that every two, three or four years one faced a new set of challenges. As you developed through your career, you acquired, hopefully, a sense of how the Office worked, how people would expect you to respond to new phenomena, new stimuli, and that the context in which you practised your trade would be changing and would be refreshed every so often. That was a great thing.

Secondly, since I hardly knew anything about the world before I entered, almost every post I went to held challenges which were not only new, but really pretty welcome. They taught me a lot about a world which I barely understood as a teenager.

And I liked the fact that, as it happened, I was repeated in a number of jobs. I went to Cyprus twice, to Kenya twice, and I did some things which built incrementally on previous experience. Going to Cyprus for the second time was a good example of what the Office sometimes required. And that was, you just have to turn to it. I hadn't intended or wanted to be in Cyprus at that point. I hadn't long been home. But there was an overwhelming necessity, so I accepted the challenge; if you can't take a joke, you shouldn't have joined.

I liked all my jobs. Some had their darker sides, but on the whole they were challenging. I liked what they required me to do, mostly. I liked the collegiate spirit, which you could either inherit or build up in most jobs at home and abroad, and the importance attached to building teams. (We used the term long before Microsoft ever discovered it existed.) And I liked the way in which leadership at its best was practised. In my early days it was hardly

thought about or trained in, but nevertheless somehow good ideas of leadership were scattered around the Office, and, like most good ideas, they became in the end the heart of a desirable quest for better professional practice.

I thought more of my colleagues when I departed, than I did a couple of years later, when I rather fell out with the Office over some remarks I made on the theme of corruption. Because when I retired, I determined that, if I was going to be consistent, I had to acknowledge that the British had had a hand in fostering corruption and laundering its proceeds, and that that should be stopped.

So when, in 2006, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, ordered the Serious Fraud Office to call off its inquiries into BAE Systems' business in Saudi Arabia, I made some public comments about how this would wreck the message we ambassadors had been told to put across, by his government and previous governments, about due process, the rule of law and anti-corruption; I said that, in particular in Africa, governments would note our inconsistency, and ambassadors would feel that the carpet had been removed from under their feet as they tried to do their jobs.

Anyway, this didn't go down very well. I was already in the middle of an argument with the Office about the terms of a contract for a minor part-time job they had asked me to do. I had discovered they had changed the rules on what even a retired ambassador should be required to consult about before they made public comments. I declined to sign such a contract. No 10 and DFID created a stink, and I was told I was no longer needed for that small job (to do with Chevening scholarships).

I determined that I would get that rule amended back to somewhere nearer the original. It took about two and a half years, but in the end the Office did reverse, and I've been amused to see in the last three or four years that retired diplomats of much greater eminence have enjoyed exercising their freedom to speak as they will on matters of public interest, without consulting the interests of the government of the day, concerning Europe, NATO, all the major issues that beset our country. They were able to speak their minds, which, as I understand it, would not have been possible unless the Office had overturned this obnoxious rule about clearing their lines with the authorities in the Office.

It was an unhappy period, and I'm amazed that the Office agreed to the introduction of such an apparently restrictive rule. It was done at the behest of Jack Straw, evidently, reflecting his annoyance at the publication of 'DC Confidential', by Christopher Meyer, and his feeling that former ambassadors should be controlled in some way; and not just be freely published without proper consultation.

But the reaction to my remarks about Tony Blair's inconsistency in trying to stop legal inquiries into BAE Systems in Saudi Arabia seemed to me to be absurd, indecent and unnecessary, and I thought that the people who were involved in it didn't reflect the spirit that I had appreciated for most of my career in the FCO.

JH: Does that mean that the FCO had followed society in its trek away from some of the more accepted traditional norms of life and behaviour, that are apparent at least to an old observer, or not?

EC: I think it was probably a bit of a one-off. Jack Straw's irritation, if that's what it was, led to the rule in the Diplomatic Service Regulations being tightened up, so that retired diplomats would be required to clear their lines with the Office in order to be able to speak about anything in public. It perhaps had not been intended in that way, but like other intrusions into private space, authority found it useful when they wanted to hit someone with it. People in the Office dealing with this issue recognised that it was a monstrosity, and secondly, that the alleged threat from the Saudis (to withhold their intelligence co-operation if the SFO's inquiry went ahead) didn't wash. I don't know whether they would or they wouldn't, but I would be surprised.

JH: In many respects you've been a crusader for things you've cared about. What's the last thing you want to say to the British Diplomatic Oral History Project?

EC: Would I recommend the life again? Oh, yes, I would, but on today's terms. I wouldn't like to undertake it again on the same terms as we did. The costs to spouse and family were too high. Life is much better in that respect now, because your partners can work almost anywhere, and less is perhaps expected of the spouse in terms of compliance with the requirements of the FCO.

It is a fascinating job, and the people that I know, still serving, seem to be thriving in it. And to be Head of Mission, even in these days when ICT and limited resources make an oppressive task master, is still a great thing to be. It is a good way of serving one's country, and meeting challenges which present themselves particularly acutely to government servants abroad.

On the other hand, my enthusiasm is lessened by the knowledge that British diplomats, in my day, were amongst the very few people, except for representatives of Shell or BP, who were actually posted abroad for their living. These days, travel is open to almost everyone, even in the most improbable places, and employees of industry, the arts, NGOs and countless other callings can also work abroad. The field of international relations is very crowded, so it's no longer quite the unique status and opportunity that it once was, but it would still be attractive.

Sir Edward Clay KCMG, in conversation with Dr John Hemery, 15 and 23 October, 2020