

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

EDMONDS, John Christopher CMG, CVO (born 23 June 1921)

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Entered Royal Navy, 1939	p 2
Staff, NATO Defence College, Paris, 1953–55	p 3
Staff, C-in-C Home Fleet, 1956–57	pp 3-4
Staff, Chief of Defence Staff, 1958–59	p 3
Entered Diplomatic Service, 1959	p 4
Foreign Office, Arabian Department, 1959–60	pp 4-6
1st Secretary (Commercial), Tokyo, 1960–62	pp 6-7
Foreign Office, Information Research Department, 1963–67	pp 7-8
1st Secretary and Head of Chancery, Ankara, 1967–68, then Counsellor, 1968–71	pp 9-19
Counsellor (Aviation and Defence), Paris, 1972–74	pp 19-21
Head of Arms Control and Disarmament Dept, FCO, 1974–77	pp 22-26
Leader, UK Delegation to Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Negotiations, Geneva, with personal rank of Ambassador, 1978–81	pp 27-30
Chairman, Joint SDP-Liberal Alliance Commission on Defence and Disarmament, 1984–86	pp 31-32
General thoughts on arms control	p 32

JOHN CHRISTOPHER EDMONDS, CMG, CVO
interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Thursday 21 May 2009

MM: I see that you were educated at Kelly College. Whereabouts is that, and what sort of a school is it?

JCE: It's in Devon; it was founded by Admiral Kelly in 1877, and was then entirely for boarders, what used to be called a Public School with lots of outdoor activity but not quite so strong on the intellectual side.

MM: But obviously, with a naval connection. You then went into the Royal Navy and spent quite a lot of time there including during the War. How did your naval career finish up?

JCE: Well perhaps I could just say that my father was in the Navy too. My uncle and Godfather was in the Foreign Office: CJ Edmonds who made his name in Iraq between the Wars.

MM: What was he doing?

JCE: He was originally in the Levant Consular Service and then he was seconded to General Allenby during World War I. He remained in Iraq with a number of British diplomats, effectively running the country. He became a great expert on the Kurds.

MM: Did he have any contact with Lawrence of Arabia?

JCE: I think so. He certainly knew Glubb Pasha very well. I met Glubb Pasha with him.

MM: While you were in the Foreign Service?

JCE: I'm not sure. It might have been just about the time I left the Navy.

MM: You left the Navy as a Commander?

JCE: I had an interesting War. A great many of my school friends were killed; a great many of my naval entry were killed. I went through the Norwegian Campaign then spent some time in HMS *Warspite* with Andrew Cunningham as Commander-in-Chief, including the Battle of Matapan. And then two very memorable years in a cruiser called *Phoebe* where we were in charge of the evacuation from Crete. We did two of the last three runs. We were then torpedoed off Tobruk and went to New York to be repaired, which was a great experience. We came back and took part in Operation Pedestal, the last great Malta convoy. Then we were torpedoed again, this time by a U-boat off Pointe Noire in West Africa. Eight people were killed the first time; fifty-two the second, which was a much sadder occasion. And surprise-surprise, we went back to New York again to be repaired. So I spent a total of twelve months of the War in New York City. Most of us were at the ideal age to enjoy that great city and enhance our understanding of that America.

I was then an instructor at King Alfred, aged twenty-two, instructing people aged thirty to forty in how to be an officer, giving four lectures a day. I passed Staff College in 1946, and went out to Hong Kong on the Staff of the C-in-C there. I came back in 1948 and married a Russian emigrée, Elena Tornow, who herself was born in St Petersburg. We had two sons. I spent 1951/52 in destroyers, with a winter in the Suez Canal being shot at by the Egyptians. Then I spent two years on the Staff of the NATO Defence College in Paris – this was before de Gaulle. We worked at the Ecole Militaire, again a very formative experience. I was on the Staff of the C-in-C Home Fleet at the time of Suez, of which I and my Commander-in-Chief and a number of others disapproved strongly. There was an opportunity under Duncan Sandys's reforms to take early retirement from the Navy, so I did my last year on the Staff of the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Mountbatten – another formative experience! While I was there, I managed to pass the exam for what was then called the Senior Branch of the Foreign Service, with a lot of characters who were of course about thirteen years younger than me

and who've done quite well. David Hannay, Christopher Mallaby and so on. So it was quite a select body; there were fourteen of us I think, out of four hundred original candidates.

Joining the Diplomatic Service in 1959

JCE: I took the exam in late 1958 and actually joined in September 1959. I went into Arabian Department.

MM: Before we get to that, could you just say a word on how the disapproval of the Suez venture manifested itself in the Navy?

JCE: It was very interesting. The feeling among many of us who had been in the War, was that you didn't invade countries in peace time, and that the whole approach was a mistake. You certainly didn't invade countries if you had reason to believe that the Americans would disapprove! In the Home Fleet, our job was to provide the reinforcement to the Mediterranean: we weren't part of the operation, but we naturally knew what was going on. Our Commander-in-Chief was very dubious; my immediate boss, the Chief of Staff, was a very orthodox officer, so he was in favour. So, among the officers, there was quite an interesting split. I would say that, on the whole, the brainy were against whereas the good solid do-as-you're-told brigade were understandably in favour. There were four Commanders on the Staff who were against it, but we still did the job, simply saying, "This is bloody ridiculous but we'll get on with it."

And then one took the first opportunity to leave and have a go at joining the Foreign Office.

First post in Arabian Department

MM: So when you came into the Foreign Office and they gave you Arabian Department, was that because of your inherited interest in that department, or was it pure chance?

JCE: No, my background covered a lot of the Mediterranean, NATO and America but practically nothing to do with Arabia. However, my Head of Department, a marvellous man called Dick Beaumont, who died very recently, said, "I suppose there's a certain logic in this. You have a military background and we do spend

quite a lot of our time arguing with the Military.” I was the Desk Officer for the Yemen and Saudi Arabia. It was great fun because of Dick Beaumont, and also because the Prime Minister was Harold Macmillan. When things went to the Prime Minister, they came back with remarkably clear and definite decisions, and very quickly. He had a very small staff. I remember my office looked down on No 10, and this cheerful figure would come bouncing out in his heyday. I thought he was a very good Prime Minister.

MM: What about the Foreign Secretary?

JCE: That was Selwyn Lloyd.

MM: Did he not come into this?

JCE: Of course he did, but he made less of an impression on me, I’m afraid. My immediate boss after Dick Beaumont was Sir Roger Stevens, a senior Deputy Under Secretary. If I may be anecdotal for a moment, I remember after I’d been there for a while, on a Saturday morning – we worked on Saturday mornings in those days – there was a dramatic proposal from Aden that we should bomb some Yemeni tribesmen. Sir Roger asked me to go and see him and asked what I thought, and I said, “Do you really want to know?” He said, “How long have you been here?” “Six months!” He said, “Let’s face it, you know more about the Yemen than any other person in the Office!” So I said I thought it was a bad idea, and he agreed and we minuted accordingly. The Prime Minister’s decision was typically brief and clear. As I recall, he minuted: “No, I do not subscribe to Murder Incorporated. HM.”

MM: Yes, that was quite an interesting anecdote.

JCE: Well, it showed that a really junior officer could be given a say in policy matters, in some contrast with the procedure in the Navy. I said it was like being a Rear-Admiral some of the time – but an Able Seaman at other times, making sure that the milk was delivered to the Department, fires lit and other mundane tasks.

MM: What is interesting about that is that the decision came from Harold Macmillan.

JCE: Because those sort of things went to the Prime Minister.

MM: Even in those days?

JCE: Yes. And they came back jolly fast.

First Secretary (Commercial), British Embassy, Tokyo 1960-62

MM: So after that, you did a spell as First Secretary Commercial, Tokyo.

JCE: Yes. I don't think I have a lot to say about that. Our job was to make sure that Britain understood Japan in the Post-War era. We had a marvellous old Japan hand in Sir Oscar Morland, the Ambassador. But he didn't get on with the Minister, who in turn did not get on with the Head of Chancery, so it was an interesting test for those of us at a lower level, in that you wanted to make sure that the ultimate answer, namely the Ambassador's decision, was the right one. You had to work out how to get it through these hoops.

MM: Did we understand Japan?

JCE: I think a great deal was done, thanks to Oscar Morland, and the rest of us in our modest way. There were lots and lots of trade missions and so on. We negotiated the double taxation convention and a commercial treaty, and we had some very high-level visitors, including Sir Norman Kipping who was then the Head of the CBI (then called the FBI); and I went round Japan with him. That was another marvellous experience, and an eye-opener for him. There were all kinds of fascinating aspects to diplomatic life in Japan in those days; it was very formal. On the Queen's birthday we assembled in the Ambassador's office in full uniform for the Head of Protocol of the Royal Household to convey the Emperor's congratulations to the Queen, which were then immediately dispatched by telegram to London. He arrived in a little cortège of coaches and horses. We then changed into morning dress for the Queen's birthday party in the afternoon and, on one occasion, into evening dress for a ball given by the Ambassador. All this in a temperature and humidity which was rather hard to bear. You took three showers a day and still sweated.

Anyway, it was fascinating, very hard work, relieved in my case by playing golf, which in Japan was a very important key into getting to know the bigwigs.

MM: So were you able to afford the golf club fees?

JCE: Definitely not! But one was usually a guest of the Anglo-Japanese Chamber of Commerce, for example, or the Gaimusho, the Foreign Ministry. We had a match between the Prime Minister's team and the Diplomatic Corps every year, and there was tremendous competition among Ambassadors to get on the team.

MM: And this was a way round the question of fees?

JCE: Absolutely. They were very very expensive. And you had the whole day. If you were invited to the golf course, you were expected to play thirty-six holes. The trouble was - because it's a great country for being serious about things - as you walked up the fourteenth fairway, you were liable to find yourself talking about trade with China or the price of steel. So it wasn't terribly light-hearted. I wasn't a very good golfer, but I was good enough.

MM: To get on the team, that was the main thing.

JCE: I remember the Minister saying, he had a voice like Robertson Hare, when asked by a Japanese if he played golf, "No," he boomed, "Mr Edmonds plays golf. He's a real man!" He didn't know my handicap was about twenty-two!

Anyway, it was another formative experience but not a country I've ever revisited.

Information Research Department, Foreign Office, 1963-67

MM: Well after that, your next move was to come back to the International Research Department (IRD). Now that's a serious department.

JCE: A very serious department. It was a huge department. At that time there were about three hundred professional staff with, on the top, about half a dozen officers who were regular members of the Foreign Service. The Assistants and Heads of most of the sections were regular Foreign Service officers. I was Head of the International Section which dealt with communist front organisations and other 'bad' organisations and also, less publicly, with 'good' organisations. I used to liaise with a whole host of people. One of my staff's obituary is in *The Times* today; John Tyrer. It's pretty cagey about what he did but they really were outstanding. It was fascinating and one dealt with people like Burke Trend, who was Secretary of the Cabinet, and a lot of our missions abroad, and some

opposition Members of Parliament. I remember briefing Denis Healey before he went to the Far East, and Christopher Mayhew before he went to Latin America, and briefing the young David Dimbleby. What else? Well, in those four years I married my second wife who was also in IRD and came from this village. It was fascinating, but there's not a lot one can say about it really.

MM: What was your main function? To issue information?

JCE: Our main function was to liaise with the Security Service and other sources of intelligence to make sure that we knew what the Soviet Union above all, and to some extent the other communist countries including China, were up to because they were using prominent people of one kind or another as "opinion moulders", and we were countering them with both white and grey propaganda. We had some very crafty characters. But our job at the top of the Department – I was Assistant Head for the last eighteen months – was really to link it in to the Foreign Office as a whole, Embassies abroad and other departments.

George Brown became Secretary of State right at the end of my time. Unlike previous Secretaries of State, who knew we were there but didn't really know more than that, he came to see us. That was quite an intriguing occasion because he loved asking awkward questions and flirting with the secretaries and so on.

MM: Strange man.

JCE: Strange man, and unfortunately he didn't last very long.

MM: Anyway, that was IRD and, as you rightly say, I don't think there's actually very much that one can say about the detailed work.

JCE: Worthwhile, and ...

MM: But transitory really, or ephemeral, because you're dealing with discrete bits of information.

So after your period of being Assistant Head of IRD, you went as First Secretary and Head of Chancery in Ankara.

First Secretary and Head of Chancery, British Embassy, Ankara 1967-68,
Counsellor (and periodically Chargé d’Affaires), 1969-71

JCE: That was I think the most memorable posting of all. I was there for nearly five years and a great deal happened in that time, starting very soon after we got there in March 1967 with the Six Day War. There the Turks were actually first class; they helped our people in Damascus and Aleppo in Syria, and to some extent in Beirut who were under siege. You’ll remember that British and American Embassies were under siege at that time.

MM: By?

JCE: By infuriated Arabs who thought we were conniving with Israel. This was not the case. But anyway the Turks helped our people out of Syria into Turkey, and we took them all in the Embassy with their cars usually and some of their clothes and things. They had to leave in a great hurry.

The Ambassador in Damascus blotted his copybook by driving straight to Izmir in his official car with his driver driving his private car behind, and embarked on a ship without bothering to check much on the rest of his staff. George Brown did not approve. Nor did my Ambassador, Sir Roger Allen.

In the middle of the Six Day War, Young England played Young Turkey at football in Ankara, and I went with the Ambassador and the Information Officer. First of all it was rather a dirty game and secondly, as we left, with the flag flying on the Rolls, people were hammering on the windows and shouting abuse.

MM: Why? Did we win?

JCE: I think it was a draw. But again, the Six Day War; “here comes the Union Jack.”

MM: So that was the current feeling in Turkey?

JCE: It was certainly the feeling of some of the football fans; otherwise not really so, and definitely not the Government. Before and during the Six Day War, I called many times, sometimes with my American counterpart as we had similar instructions, on the Director General for the Middle East and Africa at the Foreign Ministry, a Turkish diplomat of the old school. He had a camp bed in his

office for several nights (as I did myself during the Cyprus crisis later that year). He was always courteous, and very helpful when we needed to evacuate British diplomats from Syria in a hurry. At the end of it all, I asked for his personal thoughts. He said “First of all, this was part of the Ottoman Empire. If you had left it to us, the Arab/Israel dispute might never have happened. Nowadays, we Turks dislike the Israelis but admire them: we love the Arabs but (sigh) we despise them.” That was frank but fair. On the whole, Turkey played a sensible role in Middle East affairs, a sort of bastion of strength and stability.

MM: That’s probably an enduring situation.

JCE: Oh yes. Even more important to the Turks, of course, was Cyprus, the subject that dominated my time in Ankara. The relevant Director General in the Foreign Ministry was another very able diplomat, Adnan Bulak. On more serious occasions, we usually spoke French, since he was not 100% confident in English and I still less in Turkish. Cyprus flared up again in November 1967. Grivas, the Greek army officer who had led the EOKA terrorist campaign a few years earlier, reappeared in the island and some Turkish Cypriot villagers were killed by Greek Cypriot paramilitaries under his command. Earlier that year, a military coup in Greece had brought to power the so-called Government of the Colonels. This had the interesting effect of making their international standing unfavourable in a dispute with Turkey, a parliamentary democracy.

The telegraphic traffic was tremendous between Ankara, Athens, Nicosia, London and Washington. I slept in the office for several nights. In the middle of that, Harold Wilson devalued the pound and an enormously long cipher which had to be deciphered by an officer came through all about the devaluation of the pound, when we were waiting for the next news of the Cyprus crisis. It was choking the airwaves with something that was terribly important to Harold Wilson but of relatively little importance to Turkey.

I remember walking out of the Embassy one lunchtime past the security guard, and he was on the telephone and he was saying, “No they’re all at lunch; nobody here!” I asked who was on the telephone, and he said, “Oh somebody in Cyprus,

Sir!” It was Group-Captain Grocock, in charge of RAF operations. And he said, “We are being buzzed by Turkish fighters, would you please tell them to stop!” So I went back to my desk and got hold of the Air Attaché and we stopped them. But I always felt that it was a lovely example of if you’re a security guard you just want to get the man off the telephone!

Later on, after some successful activity by others, it fell to me to telephone Ilter Turkmen, Bulak’s boss in the Foreign Ministry, to tell him that Grivas had left Cyprus. “Thank you, Mr Edmonds.” – one of the shortest, but also the most memorable, of many exchanges on Cyprus.

So that crisis blew over largely due to the “shuttle diplomacy” of Cyrus Vance who was sent to the area by the US President, LBJ. (Cyrus Vance was later President Carter’s Secretary of State). I went to Cyprus three times in my five years in Ankara; it was judged that the Head of Chancery or, as I was later, the No 2, could go there without attracting too much attention. It was always a useful experience, with intriguing aspects. I remember lunching with the Turkish Chargé d’Affaires at his residence, in Cyprus, which was the house where Lawrence Durrell had lived during the EOKA troubles – see his book *Bitter Lemons*.

My third and final visit from Ankara to Cyprus was in 1971, with my wife. Things were relatively quiet. Peter Ramsbotham, our High Commissioner, arranged for me and Oliver Miles, his Head of Chancery to visit several isolated Turkish Cypriot enclaves by UN helicopter. This was a vivid reminder of the underlying tension which was to erupt again in 1974 with a Greek inspired coup d’état, followed by the intervention of the Turkish Army – and the fall of the Athens Government. So Cyprus was the major political issue of Anglo-Turkish mutual interest and indeed responsibility.

MM: We’ve still got bases there.

JCE. Yes. Other important issues were often affected by our mutual membership of NATO. The Turks took seriously their strategic position on

NATO's southern flank, with control of shipping passing to and from the Black Sea and a remote eastern frontier with the Soviet Union. In August 1968 they condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Czech Ambassador had been recalled to Prague (never to return), leaving a young 2nd Secretary in charge. Rather touchingly, he approached me and an American colleague at a reception to ask for help in carrying out instructions from the embattled government of Alexander Dubcek. We were able to introduce him at once to the right member of the Foreign Ministry – one of those diplomatic social occasions which had some practical value!

There was a strange epilogue to the downfall of Dubcek's regime. The new hardline government in Prague proposed Dubcek himself as their new Ambassador in Ankara. The Turks, surprised but intrigued, accepted and he duly arrived among us – by then a frail figure with a limp handshake, invariably escorted by a burly new Counsellor. After a few months his wife returned to Prague and soon afterwards he too disappeared. I believe he spent the next few years in a factory. The Turks rightly took a very dim view and informed the Czechs that they must wait to be told when their next Ambassador would be welcome.

I was very fortunate in that I was promoted sur place, so that for my last three years I was the Counsellor and frequently the Chargé d'Affaires. My first Ambassador, Sir Roger Allen, was shrewd and very experienced but not a fit man; he retired in July 1969. After a two month interregnum, he was succeeded by Sir Roderick (Rod) Sarell. He was very fit but enjoyed moving around, so he often left me in de facto charge of the Embassy. He made much use of the Ambassador's apartments in the splendid former Embassy in Istanbul, an arrangement which did not always suit the incumbent Consul General.

During my first spell in charge in 1969, King Idris of Libya came to Turkey with a large entourage to take the waters at Bursa. In his absence a young army officer, Gaddafi, staged a revolt against the monarchy and seized power. One afternoon, I was giving a talk to a group of visiting officers from the Imperial Defence College. My secretary interrupted to say that the Libyan Ambassador

was on the telephone. I made my excuses to the IDC party and went out to take the call. The Ambassador said he was in Bursa with His Majesty, who had instructed him to seek the help of the British Government in putting down the rebellion. I said that I would of course report this request to London but, speaking personally, I did not think it was likely to be met. The Ambassador did not disagree but said we were both doing our duty. I returned to my IDC guests to apologise but was told they were glad to see a British Embassy dealing with something fairly important.

MM: Well, yes. The Libyan request from Idris was not all that unreasonable since it was Britain which had secured his appointment as King of Libya in 1952, I seem to recall. Maybe the IDC party knew that.

JCE Yes. I had visited Libya in 1952 and seen our bases there. But British foreign policy had moved on by 1969 – to put it mildly. In many ways, the five years in Ankara were the most rewarding and enjoyable of my working life. Britain had a great variety of interests in Turkey, and in those days a large Embassy staff. Our social programme was very heavy but an important part of the job. Turkish officials, academics etc were sociable, the diplomatic corps was large; especially in the bitter winters, social events were important at all levels. Even golf, though far less important than in Japan, brought regular contact with the American Ambassador and sometimes the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry. A good example of the value of social contact was the sudden formation of a new government after the 1971 military coup; the Prime Minister, Nihat Erim and several of his Ministers, were personally known to us.

There were several earthquakes in our time, usually in remote areas, and Britain invariably gave emergency aid. Visits by Ministers were fairly rare, but mostly the more valuable for that – Denis Healey in 1967 as Defence Secretary and Michael Stewart in 1970 as Foreign Secretary were notably successful.

On the cultural front, Dame Ninette de Valois was a regular visitor and always stayed at the Embassy. She founded the Turkish State Ballet in 1946. The

Crimean war scenes of the “Charge of the Light Brigade” were filmed just outside Ankara, primarily because Turkey had the only Western army with enough cavalry to mount a proper charge. Among others, this brought John Gielgud and Trevor Howard to Ankara. There was a strange spate of aircraft hijacking incidents in October 1970. A small Soviet aircraft was hijacked across the Black Sea to Turkey. Then a US military aircraft, carrying two American generals and other CENTO staff from Ankara, landed by mistake in Soviet Armenia, where they were held hostage at a military base for several days. The Soviet Ambassador remarked that he had invited the generals to his October Revolution reception but they had evidently mistaken the address! However, the smile left his face within the week when another hijacked Soviet aircraft landed in Turkey. These incidents provided the material for a light-hearted dispatch “Those embarrassing men in their flying machines” which I am glad to say the FCO printed for circulation.

Our final year, 1971, was particularly eventful. The political situation had deteriorated and there was a series of unpleasant security incidents, culminating in the kidnapping just outside Ankara of some US airmen by a self-styled “People’s Liberation Army”.

The armed forces had for some time been obviously displeased with the Government’s performance, and on 12 March they moved decisively – one of four such interventions, I think, in the second half of the 20th century. This one was short and sharp. I was again in charge and was telephoned by an American colleague who said “John, we think this is it. The Chiefs of Staff are on their way past you to see the President”. (Our Embassy is on a hill above the city, close to the Presidential Palace). We switched on the radio which announced repeatedly that the chiefs had presented a memorandum to the President which was simultaneously being presented by other representatives of the three services to the Senate, the Lower House and the main radio station.

The memorandum called for the resignation of the Government, and the President (himself a former Chief of Staff) secured the resignation within hours. Unlike the notorious 1960 military intervention, not a shot was fired, and this became known

as the “coup by memorandum”. However, the 1960 precedent concerned some people, and I was asked by the Greek Ambassador to join a meeting at the Indian Embassy where “some of us would like to know what you think”. About half a dozen Heads of Mission were assembled, some of them fearing that all hell was about to break loose. I said we reckoned that the military enjoyed wide popular support, as did the President, and we believed their claim that they simply wanted another, less corrupt and more effective, civilian government. It was a relief when a few days later a very respectable government, mainly of technocrats and intellectuals, took over. But it was a nice test of “don’t panic”.

M: Judgement.

JCE: Yes, I suppose so. And of course I had some staff with good contacts, and a knowledge of the history of Turkish military intervention. It hasn’t always been benign, but basically they prefer it to be.

MM: It’s a very impressive country, Turkey, I think.

JCE: By then we had already arranged for the Queen to pay a State Visit in October, and one bonus, if you like, was that Turkey now had a government most of whom spoke either English or French, some of them both. So when it comes to a State Visit – which I would like to talk about in its own right – you have a Prime Minister who speaks quite good English and French, a Foreign Minister who is absolutely fluent and who personally escorted the Queen round Izmir and Ephesus for example, a Culture Minister who had lived in America; altogether they took a very close interest in the Queen’s State Visit and in her welfare, and were thoroughly agreeable companions from her point of view.

I would like to talk about the State Visit a bit more. The first post war State Visit by a Turkish President to the UK had taken place in 1967 and our role in the Embassy was simply to brief. It went pretty well and it was generally agreed that there would be a return visit some time, but not immediately. The serious business began on 3 November 1970 when I was Chargé d’Affaires, Rod Sarell, being on leave in the UK. I was asked to see Mr Caglayangil, the Foreign

Minister. He proposed a visit by the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles in October 1971. I duly reported this to London and, from then on, most of the communications about the visit were between me and Sir Martin Charteris, who was then the Queen's Assistant Private Secretary and a great character. It was the most enjoyable exchange of messages I think I've ever had because all kinds of problems cropped up, and he was brilliant at speaking to the Queen when necessary and coming back with the answer. For example at one point the Turks suddenly said that they would like to present Prince Philip and Princess Anne each with a horse, and I asked what we should do about that. Back came from Martin Charteris, "On return from Ghana, I had to have a bucket full of baby alligators in the plane with me. Since then I have stuck to the rule of Jorrock: nothing wot eats!" So I was told to tell the Turks that we couldn't do it. So I went back and explained that there were difficulties of quarantine, and the Royal Family already had an awful lot of horses. Finally we compromised with a bronze model of a horse.

MM: Not life-size I hope!

JCE: No, portable. Another problem was that *Britannia* was being used, and the Admiral's programme had the *Britannia* passing Istanbul in the dark on the morning when the Queen was coming from Izmir to Istanbul. I pointed out that probably the most memorable view of the entire visit would be that one, Old Istanbul and New Istanbul seen from the Bosphorus; one of the great views of the world. Back came a reply from Martin Charteris, "The Admiral has put on his thinking cap!" In due course it was sorted.

We had a wonderful programme. The Queen thoroughly enjoyed it and it was a very pleasing occasion because the Turks' previous visitors at that level had been the Shah of Iran and President de Gaulle and both of them saw very little of the public; the Shah deliberately because he was then regarded as a security risk. One of my early meetings with the Turks discussed the speed at which the Queen's car should travel. They said that, with the Shah, they travelled at fifty miles an hour; I said that the Queen prefers to travel at more like fifteen miles an hour. The Chief of Police of Ankara looked a bit shocked, but we also said that

neither the Queen nor Prince Philip liked motorcycle outriders, and the Turks graciously agreed and it worked extraordinarily well. We came in from the airport on the Queen's arrival at fifteen miles an hour. My wife and I were in car number twenty-two or something. I think the estimate was that there were a million Turks there waving; to them it was a rather novel experience. A thoroughly good time was had by all. The Queen was marvellous, and it was Princess Anne's first ever State Visit.

There was one potential hitch. The state dinner was given by the Queen at the Embassy. The Turks produced their guest list in protocol order; it did not include the Leader of the Opposition, who happened to be Ismet Inonu, a former President of the Republic and Ataturk's Chief of Staff, and the man who defeated Prince Philip's father at the Battle of Inonu in the Turkish War of Independence. In Turkish protocol, the Leader of the Opposition, even though he was a previous President of the Republic and a man of international fame, didn't get in. So we arranged for the Queen and Prince Philip to see him privately, and that was all right with the Turks as long as it didn't appear in the official programme. That went off rather well.

On the night of the dinner, we assembled in full evening dress on the first floor of the Embassy with the staircase below. There were two members of the Embassy staff downstairs receiving the guests. About half way through the arrivals, with the guests being presented by the Ambassador to the Queen, Prince Philip and Princess Anne, I'm just hovering, when up pops a member of staff saying, "Ismet Inonu has arrived with his wife." So there we had the most famous man in Turkey who had arrived uninvited. I immediately told the Ambassador who told the Queen, who said, "Oh good!" I then turned to the Turkish Head of Protocol whom I'd got to know as a very good friend by then because we'd spent ages together. I said, "Quickly! Mr Inonu has arrived, he's staying. Where does he stand in the protocol order?" Quick as a flash, he said number five, I think. So I then went behind a curtain where a First Secretary and the Social Secretary were, and we moved the minimum number of people so as to get him in at number five. The main dining room had the President and the Queen; the ballroom had the President's wife and Prince Philip; Princess Anne was I think with the Queen.

Then we had the small dining room which contained “spares” because what you are in danger of is that somebody doesn’t turn up. We had the opposite; we had two more very important guests than we expected.

MM: Uninvited!

JCE: Uninvited, but terribly important. Among other things, I had to demote the Queen’s Press Secretary, Bill Heseltine, and my own wife into the spares compartment, and the Naval Attaché and one other were moved into the pantry! Having done this, which meant going to a few people and saying, “You’re now sitting here, and not there,” Lord Plunket, the Queen’s Equerry, came and said, “Can I see what you’ve done?” I told him what we’d done, and he said that that was exactly what he would have done, which was the most comforting thing I could possibly hear. It was, in its way, a marvellous moment. The Turks behaved impeccably; they didn’t turn their back on the great man naturally, but it was mischievous on his part. Having seen the Queen privately earlier in the day, an appointment which we had kept off the official programme, he and his wife then decided to go to the dinner without an invitation.

MM: Gatecrash.

JCE: Yes, but at the highest possible level. I mean, he is a man of history. But it was a very gratifying occasion indeed. My wife kept a scrap book, and you can see the Turks went overboard. That headline means “welcome”. That was a very nice way of ending our time in Turkey. We were actually kept on for the State Visit and then left two weeks later.

MM: As a result of that, you got the CVO.

JCE: Yes, presented on board *Britannia* at the end of the visit. The Queen gave a dinner for the Prime Minister in *Britannia*, and for that again we had to have “spares”. So, because my wife had been demoted in Ankara, I demoted myself to the spares in the wardroom with the lads, and made sure that my wife was in at the Queen’s dinner. The Commander of *Britannia* came along to the wardroom

and said, “John, you’re in! The Minister of something or other has failed to turn up,” so virtue had its own reward.

Posting as Counsellor (Aviation and Defence) British Embassy, Paris 1972-74

My next job was in Paris as Counsellor for Aviation and Defence. This was the idea of Christopher Soames, the Ambassador, who wanted a Foreign Office man to handle, above all, Concorde, but also a fairly complicated programme of joint production of military aircraft, helicopters etc. It was interesting if a bit difficult, in that the relations between the French and British high officials in the MoD and the DTI were not always of the best, and one was kept busy saying, “I think I know what you want to achieve, but can I do it my way?” rather than delivering blunt messages. Christopher Soames was a remarkable Ambassador; he had great contacts at the highest level, he was ebullient and made his mark in many ways. A side issue, which we saw vividly, concerned the traditional Embassy church in Paris, very near the Embassy. The Ambassador disapproved of its incumbent and had arranged for him no longer to be the Embassy chaplain. So my wife and I on our first Sunday went there, and it was rather what is called ‘low church’ these days. People said it was very nice to see somebody from the Embassy. So we gathered it wasn’t normal any more. So the next Sunday we went to St George’s church, near the Etoile, where it was ‘high church’. The priest wore a white cowl and, when we said we were from the Embassy, we were placed in the second row in the front. We had hardly sat down when there was a triumphant blast on the organ, and it was the arrival of Her Majesty’s Ambassador and Lady Soames who then processed up to the front of the church. The Ambassador read the lesson. So we got the message! However, my wife and I in fact went to the American Cathedral after that.

We had another State Visit of the Queen very soon after we got to France. President Pompidou was the host. I didn’t have much to do with that visit apart from attending various events. The state visit went well enough. Most of our time was spent in trying to improve Anglo-French relations in all kinds of areas. Pompidou and Heath were conducting a dialogue which led of course to our entry into the EEC as it then was. So that was very important. We had visits from

Heath and Lord Carrington who got on well with the Minister of Defence, a man called Robert Galley whom I got to know very well. He was an old Gaullist from World War II where we had even served in the same campaign in Syria. After Harold Wilson won the early 1974 election, we had a different Ministerial team in London. In the case of aviation, Michael Heseltine, a bright young Heath Minister was succeeded by Tony Benn, which was a fascinating experience because obviously Tony Benn's ideas were not quite in line with the previous Government's and not really in line with Pompidou and Galley who were essentially Gaullists. However, the surprising thing to me was that a) he spoke fluent French, and b) he had a fund of stories about the War when of course he had served in the RAF. Although the French ministers didn't agree with what he said, he got on like a house on fire with them. It was an unexpected pleasure.

MM: A bonus really.

JCE: But Mr Benn's style was a new experience for those of us with a traditional attitude to Ministers. He would start a telephone call: "John, it's Tony here," and one would say, "Good morning, Secretary of State", feeling a touch pompous but somehow correct. Anyway, it was interesting – and enjoyable in its way.

In contrast to Ankara, where the Embassy usually held the initiative in dealings with London, Whitehall officials were regular visitors to their French opposite numbers. Ministerial visits were also frequent. Himself a former Minister, Soames affected to think this was overdone. I remember his daily staff meeting discussing next week's visits. Somebody said "Chris Chataway was coming." "Chataway?" asked Soames. "Yes"(pause). "Four minute mile Chataway?" "That's him". "Good Lord! Is *he* a Minister?"

We enjoyed Paris – who wouldn't? But it was hard work.

MM: Did you speak good French?

JCE: Yes. I'd been in Paris before on the staff of the NATO Defence College. Even in the Navy I was an interpreter in French, just because I'd been good at it at school and took exams in it. So that was a great mercy.

MM: Essential really, to succeed in Paris.

JCE: It was also important to be sensitive to the problems caused by World War II. I digress really back to World War II when we were sitting in Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York. In came the French battleship *Richelieu* which had been a target of the British fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, and I, as the French speaker, then was sent on board to call on the Captain. As I went up the ladder, at the top I was met by a French Lieutenant with a rather grim face and, behind him, was a memorial for those killed by the Royal Navy at Mers-el-Kebir. I was taken down to see the Captain who said, "I have a problem. I of course am a Gaullist, but most of my officers are not. They were at Mers-el-Kebir. However, most of my sailors are Gaullists." It was a graphic illustration. We did exchange wardroom visits, but it was tricky and I've always been aware since my time at the NATO Defence College of the agony of the French. Every Frenchman of a certain generation knew exactly where every other Frenchman stood in the World War II spectrum. At the Defence College, we had a Colonel with an MC who carried a photograph of Field Marshal Alexander in his wallet, and a Colonel who had been on the Staff at Vichy. They were on the same course. But they never spoke to each other. One could understand it. It was something that we, as a country, never had to experience. Occupation.

MM: And collaboration too.

JCE: And collaboration. It's now, with any luck, just about over but it lasted for a very long time.

MM: Tragic experience.

Head of Arms Control and Disarmament Department, FCO, 1974-77

JCE: I left Paris in 1974 to be Head of Arms Control and Disarmament Department in the FCO. It was a very interesting moment. In June of that year, India conducted a nuclear explosion. They claimed unconvincingly that it was a 'peaceful' nuclear explosion, but this was the first time that a country other than the five recognised nuclear weapons states (the United States, Soviet Union, the UK, France and China) had conducted any nuclear explosion. It was a serious blow to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation which had recently been enshrined in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. I remember going to Cabinet Office meetings where people gloomily predicted that there would be up to twenty more nuclear weapons states by 1990, and the feeling was that the dam had burst with India. However, a lot of us, including I am happy to say Henry Kissinger, who at that time was President Ford's Secretary of State, thought that the right approach was to make it very difficult for other countries to develop nuclear weapons. The Non Proliferation Treaty had been intended to ensure that, but India and certain other countries had not signed the agreement. So, in the winter of 1974/75, at Kissinger's initiative but very much supported by James Callaghan who was then Foreign Secretary, efforts were made to get together the countries capable of providing the materials and technology which would enable a country to conduct nuclear tests. The most important thing was to get the French on board; hitherto they had stood aloof from all negotiations on nuclear arms control, whereas the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom were the three depository powers for the Partial Test Ban Treaty and also critically for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. France and China had stood aside.

So Kissinger set about the French who, by now, had Giscard d'Estaing as their President. Giscard was more interested in multilateral discussions than his predecessors. By March 1975, the Americans had got agreement from France, the UK of course, Germany, the Soviet Union, Canada and Japan who were regarded as the countries most capable of providing nuclear materials. Indeed the Canadians, normally the purest of the pure, had played a large part in the Indian programme. So these were the nuclear supply countries *par excellence*.

Kissinger then said that he didn't want the United States to host, and asked if we

would; and we agreed. So we called the first meeting of those seven in the Foreign Office in April 1975. John Thomson was the Under Secretary and I was Head of Department. He acted as the Chairman and I the Managing Director of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which was run from my Department in London. It met at regular intervals through that year and the next, and gradually increased its numbers. The fact that the Federal Republic of Germany was a member meant that very early on the Russians said they would like the Democratic Republic of Germany to be included. We added countries like the Netherlands on the Western side, and more communist countries on the Soviet side.

We met at senior official level, and the absolute key was the liaison between the Americans, the Russians and ourselves. We divided the job up and allocated various other countries either to Washington, Moscow or London to deal with. It had its hilarious moments. My Department sent out some new guidelines for the nuclear suppliers which were classified 'confidential'. In East Berlin we'd given the job to the Americans to deal with the GDR. The GDR Counsellor in London came to see me and it transpired that he hadn't got all the papers he ought to have. So we had to find out what was going on. We asked Percy Cradock, our man in East Berlin, to find out. It turned out that the American Ambassador to the GDR had seen the classification 'confidential' on the paper and had said there was no way he was going to pass classified documents to the GDR!

The atmosphere at these meetings was an encouraging contrast to the prevailing Cold War climate. This was primarily because the Soviet Union and the main Western powers had a clear common interest – to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. The strategic policy was determined at a high political level (notably by Kissinger, Gromyko and Callaghan) but then left entirely to officials. Many of the delegation leaders were senior and supported by genuine experts, including scientists and the military.

It suited us all to meet behind closed doors, but with the press informed of the existence of these "secret" meetings and gradually fed enough facts to secure generally favourable publicity. For a time it was known as the "London Club", and indeed when the numbers became too great for any of the rooms then

available in the FCO, we met at my club, in the handsome Nash setting of the United Service Club library.

The main achievement was to agree a list of materials that should not be supplied to non-nuclear weapons states and the additional safeguards to be applied to nuclear trade. When this was agreed by the 15 or so Nuclear Supplier governments, it was passed to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, which adopted the guidelines and published them. It was a big task for my Department but a very rewarding one. The Indians did not conduct another nuclear explosion for several years, and nor did any other state outside the five nuclear powers.

Meanwhile we had the first review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in Geneva.

MM: That was after you became Head of Department.

JCE: Yes, that was in May 1975. It lasted a month and after two weeks our Delegation reported that the position of the three depositary powers (UK, USA, USSR) had become very difficult. I accordingly went out to Geneva for the last ten days. On the day of my arrival, the Soviet and US Delegation leaders contacted me separately and thereafter we met à trois at least twice a day.

It was a fascinating mixture of multilateral diplomacy and tripartite co-operation. The Russians, and to a lesser extent the Americans, were taking a very hard line against the non-aligned, led by Mexico, over nuclear disarmament and test bans, leading to complete deadlock on these critical issues. The Russians wanted us to shout as loudly as they did.

I said we had already described the Mexican proposals as “quite unacceptable”, but the obvious need was to break the deadlock. I believed the UK, without disloyalty to the Super Powers, could usefully play a more conciliatory role by concentrating on neutralising the Mexicans and working with such as Canada on drafting the important Final Declaration. The Americans agreed at once and we

worked very closely with them. The Russians settled down to an arrangement whereby they still fired the big guns, the Americans supported them moderately and briefly, and we were seen as a bridge between the three Nuclear Weapons States and other NATO members plus Australia, Japan, Sweden, even at times Romania (with Yugoslavia, a maverick in the Soviet camp) and Mexico. All this was under the shrewdly benevolent eye of Inga Thorsson of Sweden, President of the Conference. It was one of those occasions which went right to the wire at midnight on the final day, when a useful Final Declaration was eventually agreed.

That experience gave rise to some valuable friendships – with several US officials, with Madame Thorrson who had great influence among the neutrals and told me afterwards that the conference had been a great lesson in “realpolitik”, and with Victor Israelyan the de facto Soviet leader, and his deputy Roland Timerbaev. The latter was one member of the Soviet delegation who never got excited and was quick to help achieve a consensus where Soviet interests were not seriously imperilled. He also played a useful role in the Nuclear Suppliers Group and later in the Comprehensive Test Ban (CTB) negotiations.

Nuclear non-proliferation was the central theme of my last six years of service. It contributed to a period of relative détente in East-West relations. It enjoyed the support of the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and the Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan. In July 1975 a group of senior FCO officials visited Moscow for the first bilateral Anglo-Soviet meetings for several years. John Thomson and I had several useful discussions with Israelyan and Timerbaev. These meetings became annual events, alternating between Moscow and London, for some time.

Nuclear arms control was highlighted in the 1976 US Presidential campaign of Jimmy Carter. At the time of the election, I was in Washington with Lord Goronwy-Roberts, Minister of State. Peter Ramsbotham, our Ambassador, arranged for us to meet a number of Carter supporters behind his emphasis on non-proliferation and especially the importance of banning all nuclear tests under a Comprehensive Test Ban (CTB) Treaty. By the time we moved to New York for the UN First Committee, Carter had won the election.

Soon after Carter's inauguration, a team led by Cyrus Vance, his Secretary of State, and including Paul Warnke, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), visited Moscow and London. They proposed several negotiations, most of them bilateral with the Soviet Union, notably the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). James Callaghan, by then Prime Minister, and David Owen, Foreign Secretary, fully supported these initiatives. In one case, the CTB, Callaghan decided that we should join the US and USSR from the start, as we had in the negotiations for the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.

After some further discussions with the Americans, there came the moment when we wanted to tell the Russians that we would definitely wish to take part in the CTB negotiations. The Cabinet Office suggested using the hotline from 10 Downing Street to the Kremlin, which had not been used since Ted Heath wanted to tell the Russians about Britain joining the EEC, some five years earlier. So I drafted a quite a short message which was duly sent over to No. 10 and transmitted to Moscow. Nothing happened for several days, then back came a message from President Brezhnev saying he agreed. Some time later, I teased my friend Timerbaev about the delay. He said their man on the hotline had had nothing to do for years, and it took several days to find him. We agreed that in a serious emergency this would not be ideal!

MM: You can say that again.

JCE: Geneva was the agreed location, and we assembled a delegation, initially with Percy Cradock, still our Ambassador to the GDR, as our leader and me, still Head of Arms Control and Disarmament, as deputy leader. After a first round in Geneva, Christopher Mallaby, relieved me in the FCO and I was full time on CTB negotiations. This called for frequent visits to Washington to co-ordinate policy, and on two occasions I returned from there by Concorde (fare paid by Cabinet Office authority). After a few months Cradock was posted as Ambassador in Peking, and I became Ambassador and Leader of the CTB Delegation and remained so for the rest of my career.

**Ambassador and leader of the UK Delegation to Comprehensive Test Ban
Negotiation, Geneva 1978-81**

I have written extensively about these negotiations, officially at the time and since I retired. So I will try to concentrate on what seem to me the most important aspects.

Since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in 1945, there has been a widespread belief that nuclear weapons must be banned. One practical way to prevent their development and spread would be to stop all nuclear testing. From the 1950s the first three nuclear weapons states (US, USSR, UK) discussed the subject at great length, but it became apparent that there was no prospect of agreement on how to verify a ban on tests conducted underground. After personal intervention by Harold Macmillan with Kennedy and Khrushchev, the three powers signed and ratified the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963, banning nuclear tests in all other elements – land, sea, and air.

Discussion of a CTB continued in the UN and elsewhere. The Russians continued to oppose the Western position that on-site inspection was essential. They also refused to renounce so-called Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNE), which the West maintained could not be distinguished from weapons tests; and they said they would not be party to a CTB without France and China (by then also NWS, but distancing themselves from all nuclear arms control).

This was essentially the position when we started the tripartite CTB negotiations in 1977. However, the political atmosphere was favourable, largely owing to Carter and Vance, and the three powers had got accustomed to working together in the NPT and the Nuclear Suppliers. The US Delegation was led by Warnke, who not only remained Director of ACDA in Washington but also led the separate delegation to the US/Soviet SALT II negotiations, also in Geneva. The Soviet leader was Morokhov, who had led them at the NPT RC and in the Nuclear Suppliers; in early 1978 he retired on health grounds and was replaced by his boss in Moscow, Chairman Andronik Petrosyants, a lively septuagenarian of Armenian origin.

We used the conference facilities of our resident Missions, rotating the chairmanship. Once or twice a week we held “Plenary Sessions”, attended typically by about 15 each from the US and USSR, 10 from the UK. Normally only Heads of Delegation spoke, and their main statements were passed to the others at the end. There followed an informal meeting in the office of that day’s chairman, confined to Heads of Delegation, their political and technical deputies and interpreters. These were often invaluable for sorting out misunderstandings and planning future work. After a while Warnke said that he had noticed that these informal meetings lasted longer at the UK and Soviet missions than when it was his turn, when the Russians made their excuses and left after only a few minutes. I said that I thought the explanation was simple – the Russians served vodka, we served whisky, he served coffee! Warnke said he personally sympathised but there was nothing he could do about it – after an unfortunate incident a few years back, the State Department had declared the premises dry.

MM: Were they getting their CTBs mixed up with their NTPs, RCs and Nuclear Suppliers?

JCE: We had three rounds of negotiations in Geneva each year for four years, usually of six weeks and often much longer. From the start the US and UK concentrated on the importance of verification and of banning PNE, and of the need to avoid giving France and China an effective veto against a CTB. Having asked us to repeat these positions one more time, Morokhov left suddenly for Moscow. A few days later, in a speech by Brezhnev himself, the Russians publicly abandoned their position on PNE and on France and China. In early 1978 both sides made useful concessions on verification. By July we had reached agreement on all but one of the articles of the main Treaty, plus much of the technical annexes. However this encouraging progress sounded alarm bells in Washington, where the opponents of nuclear arms control raised all kinds of problems over both SALT II and CTB. Warnke had to spend most of his time in Washington (“I need to check my name is still on the door”, he told Petrosyants and me). In October he resigned as Director of ACDA, and Chief SALT and CTB Negotiator. After a regrettable 3-month gap, the Americans at last appointed a full-time CTB leader

in Dr Herbert York, ideally qualified as a former Director of a Nuclear Weapons Laboratory but also a staunch believer in CTB. Unfortunately, the US administration's CTB policy was already in serious disarray – and the Russians were fully aware of it.

We continued to negotiate, essentially on secondary issues. Movement was inevitably slow, and the new British Government of Mrs Thatcher was less interested in arms control generally. In December, the Russians invaded Afghanistan.

The US and UK decided that the CTB negotiations should continue, and we were then the only British officials in direct confidential negotiation with the USSR. Herb York's instructions required him to ensure a "slow pace". When we resumed in February 1980, he and I began by telling the Russians in a plenary session that their invasion of Afghanistan had seriously damaged détente. The reaction was fascinating. The junior members of the Soviet Delegation's jaws dropped in amazement – they had never witnessed such criticism of their government. The senior members probably saw it coming, and Timerbaev said to me privately afterwards "It is our Vietnam".

MM: Ours too, as it happens.

JCE: The Russians were evidently relieved that the negotiations were continuing but they were well placed to blame the US, and by association the UK, for a total loss of momentum. In November, Carter was defeated in the US Presidential election by Ronald Reagan, and that was that.

As is often the case, the obvious reasons for our inability to complete the negotiations were external. President Carter had lost support in Congress for all his arms control policies and much else. Mrs Thatcher became our Prime Minister in May 1979, and it is no secret that arms control was not one of her favourite subjects. East/West relations were deteriorating, much worsened by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

But there is a more specific obstacle to achieving an end to nuclear testing. This is the attitude of the “military-industrial complex” about whose influence President Eisenhower warned in 1960. This particularly applies in the US, where vested interests, notably in the weapons laboratories, maintain that continued testing is essential to national security. This of course suited the hawks in London.

MM: Were there hawks in London?

JCE: Yes. Not so much among the military, but among the scientists who had tremendous pride in what they had achieved and supported their US colleagues in arguing that tests were essential. This goes against the mainstream belief that world-wide security will be better served by a universal ban. Political leadership is the key, above all in the US. It was another 15 years before a CTB Treaty, negotiated multilaterally this time, was signed, but over 10 years later it has still to be ratified by the US.

I concluded my last statement in Geneva by quoting Professor Sir Michael Howard – “Neither doves nor hawks will save the world from catastrophe. What we need are owls for the patient negotiation of multilateral arms control, based on sympathetic and reciprocal understanding”. It was my privilege to work with many “owls”, British, American and Russian, and to lead a team who earned the respect of their super-power colleagues.

Post-retirement activities

It was a privilege to serve in the Royal Navy and the diplomatic Service, above all I think because one felt the main purpose was to make the world a better place. In retirement, I have devoted quite a lot of time to lecturing and writing about international affairs and especially arms control.

I was invited to lecture to students of diplomacy in Malta and Oman, and twice to visit the United States. In 1982 I spoke at various seminars on the West coast, arranged by Herb York. In one case I was met at a small railway station by a smart young woman who drove me in her rather ancient Cadillac to Stanford

University, conducted the seminar, hosted lunch, and drove me back to the station. Her name was Condoleeza Rice! In 1993, following Clinton's election, General Sir Hugh Beach and I were invited to Washington where we had some good sessions with prominent Democrats such as Robert McNamara and my old CTB colleague Paul Warnke.

I was visiting Fellow in International Relations at Reading University, only four miles from here, for about 15 years. I'm a member of various non-governmental organisations.

MM: Such as?

JCE: It has changed over time. We started with an organisation called the Council for Arms Control, which was set up the year after I retired. I was asked to join it: other members were Richard Harries, later Bishop of Oxford; Lawrence Freedman, King's College London; a number of MPs. Later on I became its Chairman based in King's College. I took a couple of years out from that in order to be Chairman of the Liberal Social Democratic Party Commission on Defence and Disarmament which was set up by David Owen and David Steel. Among the people on the committee were Paddy Ashdown, Bill Rodgers (one of the Gang of Four), Lady Grimond, John Cartwright (close to David Owen), General Sir Hugh Beach. We had a fascinating time and put together a report but, in the course of the operation, David Owen and David Steel drew apart over the future of British nuclear weapons. It was a case of replacing Polaris and there was a lot of controversy. We said there was no hurry and there was time to think about the rationale. David Steel was thrilled and told a newspaper and David Owen was furious. That was, I'm afraid, the beginning of the split.

MM: Why was David Owen furious?

JCE: Because he thought we were pointing towards a unilateral answer. We carefully didn't go that far, but he had got that impression. Just before we published our report, I had a session with David Owen and David Steel. After all David Owen had been my Secretary of State and he'd actually appointed me. David Steel I

only knew slightly. I went to see them in Owen's office and it was a remarkable experience. I almost felt like a housemaster with two senior prefects who didn't get on. However, I managed to persuade them to accept our report, and a week later we launched it at a press conference in the House of Commons. Predictably, it had a mixed reception but there were some favourable comments, including "a thoroughly intelligent and workmanlike document" (*Guardian*). It still reads quite well, I think, but of course the SDP/Liberal Alliance broke up soon afterwards.

After that I became increasingly convinced that Britain did not need nuclear weapons and that the cost and talented manpower involved would be better devoted to other aspects of defence. Moreover, it was no help to non-proliferation to go on saying how important nuclear weapons are to us because, for example, Pakistan can say they have a far more obvious need of such a "deterrent". So I believe that we should be working towards a world free of nuclear weapons, which is now a cause supported by no less than Henry Kissinger.

MM: And was incidentally strongly supported by Ronald Reagan.

JCE: Yes, in a rather maverick way, to be fair. I mean Gorbachev led him down a road and he went very willingly, but the Washington establishment turned him back. So intellectually he wasn't perhaps fully engaged, although his instincts I think were right. So that's where my principal interest lies.

I used to go to quite a lot of meetings in the Foreign Office but nowadays naturally not. I'm too out of date.

MM: Chatham House?

JCE: Yes; not a forum where you can actually achieve a great deal. I am still on the board of an organisation publishing a thing called Disarmament Diplomacy. So in a small way, one is still trying to make the world a better place.

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