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Sir Stewart Graham ELDON (born 18 September 1953)

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR STEWART ELDON KCMG OBE****RECORDED BY CHRISTINE PERT, TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT**

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CP: This is Christine Pert speaking with Stewart Eldon on 19th April 2016. We are going to discuss his career in the FCO and reminiscences.

CP: We will start with why did you join the Foreign Office?

SE: I guess that I come from a travelling family. I was born and brought up in West Africa and moved to central Africa. I really always wanted to travel. But as things turned out, I decided to study engineering at university. I was a scientist by training and did my first degree in Engineering and Electrical Sciences. Towards the end of that I thought that the FCO provided one of the few careers still available where you can actually go and experience a country for a significant length of time and get to know it and its people. In engineering that is not common. I'd done some civil engineering training and building of power stations in Southern Malawi as part of my work experience, but very often you don't travel or stay in one place for long in engineering or consultancy. So I thought that the Foreign Office might be a good change so I applied towards the end of my third undergraduate year and was accepted. I then got a final degree that was far too good for my own good and came under a lot of pressure to stay and do research, which I duly did. So I turned down the Office and I think they were slightly indignant – one didn't do that in the 1970's! After about three months of research it became quite clear that it wasn't really for me. So I applied again and the FCO magnanimously said that they'd let me off the written exams but that I'd have to go through the final two stages again. So I did that and fortunately I came out with a slightly higher mark in the overall rankings. Then I negotiated an extra year to allow me to convert a three year PhD into a two year MSc. I joined in 1976.

CP: What was your first posting?

SE: I was lucky because we had the week's training course, which was all the fast stream new entrants received at the time, in London. On the Thursday afternoon of that week, we were told where our new jobs would be. There were only twelve of us. It was a small intake

in 1976. The organizers of the training course went around the table and I waited and waited. Someone went to the Southern Africa Department – which I'd always wanted to do – somebody went to Western European Department and finally they came to me and there was a short pause and the course organizer said "Stewart, are you free on Monday?" So I said "Yes, that's fine". So he said "Good, you're on the plane to New York".

Reporting Officer UKMis New York and Third Secretary, UN Department FCO, 1976-1977

I went out as a reporting officer to UKMis New York, which was a standard thing at that time. Two new entrants went and two first year officers. So I found myself in New York for the General Assembly of 1976 within ten days of joining the Office.

CP: Wow! And how was that?

SE: Well that was great! It was a job that was basically there to fill in and help out the Mission and to do everything no one else wanted to do. But it was quite good; I had two masters – Christopher Battiscombe and David Logan – and covered basically the Middle East and the UN Special Political Committee and the First Committee on UN Disarmament - when the team from UKDis Geneva weren't in town. And that really involved taking notes and acting as a dogsbody for the first few months of the General Assembly.

CP: So you were a note taker?

SE: Yes, basically a note taker but I was allowed to do other things as well, as I kind of grew up more. One of the nice things about it was I was thrown straight in to working for a political Ambassador, Ivor Richard, who for me, as a young grade 8 at the time, was very remote. But he actually ran the Mission in a rather different way from what I think a professional appointee would do. He was much more accessible to people who had something to talk to him about and he used to play the piano very well, he threw a huge Christmas party for the Mission staff.

CP: So he was very good on the welfare and social side?

SE: Yes, he was very good on the social and welfare side I guess and at managing the Mission but again was quite remote. But he knew his politicians. I guess that was one of the first lessons for me was that a good senior Ambassador has the confidence of London and

therefore freedom to write his own policy in a way, within limits. And I think that stayed with me all the way through until I finished at NATO.

CP: So it was a good grounding?

SE: It was a very good grounding and really odd things happened. The UN at that stage hadn't modernised its procedures, so it was possible to have at the end of each General Assembly plenary an infinite string of Rights of Reply between two warring delegations. I well remember sitting taking notes one evening and there was an exchange of verbal fire – I think it was between Ethiopia and Eritrea – and it went on and on and on until I gradually lost the will to live! The next thing I knew I was being woken up by a UN security guard who wanted to remind me politely that he wanted to turn the lights out and that it was time to leave. At that stage I think there were 34 exchanges of rights of reply in one evening. So that was one lesson. But of course the whole thing was being televised, not that anyone cared. But if there had been a marauding television camera, the UK delegate would have been caught fast asleep!

The other thing that is remarkable about the UN is that it's cyclical. One of the first meetings that I ever attended to take a note was with the then Deputy Permanent Representative – who went on to be the Permanent Representative in Geneva – with the Greek Cypriot Cabinet. I sat and listened, slightly bemused, to their explanations about the conflict and where it had got to in 1976. At the time there was a new Defence Minister called Tassos Papadopoulos, who sat and kind of stared most of the time. But then the last meeting that I took as DPR in 2002 was with the Greek Cypriot Cabinet. Then President Papadopoulos, who I'd seen thirty-odd years before, and do you know the arguments hadn't changed very much – it goes on and on. And I think that is one of the lessons of the intractable nature of disputes that sometimes you can only move it along very gradually. It's very repetitive and the sad thing about it is that the longer it goes on the more entrenched things become.

I think that those were my two lessons then – the beginning of understanding how multilateral negotiation works. How what is said around the formal table is only a small part of what goes on – the tip of the iceberg. It's all about building relationships; it's all about being agile on your feet. It's all about information and obtaining information first, ideally before you share too much of it. And a lot of these things I teach now when I give training to UN weapons inspectors and other people in how to negotiate and manage themselves.

CP: So the grey areas?

SE: Yes, it's all grey. Life is shades of grey in foreign affairs. Looking back on it – without skipping around chronologically too much – now again working with the UK military as I do, I think that one of the changes that you see as you move from middle command to senior command is that things stop being black and white and they start becoming shades of grey. And it's really important for senior military to get comfortable with that and for diplomats probably at all levels to get comfortable with it right from the start. And to remember that it offers an opportunity not a threat.

CP: In the sense of seeing the positives in a situation?

SE: Well it's the positives and how you can exploit it to achieve your objectives.

One of the things that the first three months in New York taught me was the importance of knowing what you wanted, which is quite difficult. As a note taker and then eventually being allowed to begin negotiations of minor resolutions on the Middle East, that's really important because if you don't know what you want you won't get it.

CP: Yes, I can see that.

SE: And apart from that, it was a fun time. New York was a tremendous city. The Mission staff were quite young and lively. It was relatively small actually. When I first went there were only about 30 full time permanent staff in the Mission.

CP: Were there families?

SE: Some families were there but there tended to be a slight predominance of single people because the hours were so long.

CP: So it was a lively social post?

SE: Yes, it was a lively social place and a lively social city. But not one where it is terribly easy to make American friends. The US is one of the few places where it can be a disadvantage to be a diplomat and New York in particular, given the American views of the UN.

CP: In what sense?

SE: Well, diplomats can park where other people can't and that causes resentment. But also because the US has always had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the UN. They are very proud to have it there, they recognise its importance but equally recognise that it doesn't always do what the United States wants, which is a bit of a problem for them.

So that was a very interesting first three months. As part of the posting one of us was selected to go back to UN department to take a desk dealing with Fifth Committee matters, which is administration, budget and finance. I did that and headed up the little section in UN Department responsible for those areas.

CP: And how did you find that?

SE: That was interesting. On the one hand it was technical and confusing sometimes. You had to be careful within limits to keep the Treasury on side, so there was an element of Whitehall negotiation. And there was also an element of providing specialist advice to other Whitehall departments, who lead delegations to some of the specialised agencies. In the middle of the year I was sent out to Nairobi for the UN Environment Programme Governing Council led by a Department of the Environment Undersecretary. That threw me into hard practical experience of the art of 'roll up your sleeves negotiation'. I think that was part of the important thing that the UN Department job gave – not only were you trying to write instructions for the Mission (in so far as they needed instructions) but you also had to do it all yourself. For me as a 23 year old at that point, a trip to Nairobi for ten days on a UK delegation with my own committee to run was a great experience. I think it was a lot of responsibility at quite a young age with a Department which was at that stage run along quite traditional lines. It was actually some quite good Foreign Office training too in drafting and being careful in how you put things down on paper.

And then back to New York again for the next year's General Assembly in 1977, but this time in a slightly different role working for the UK Fifth Committee Representative in New York. He was an interesting man, a seconded Treasury officer. He wore two hats – he was the UK representative on the Fifth Committee dealing with the administrative and budgetary bits of the Mission and the negotiations of the UN budget. But at the same time he was the UK representative for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. I slightly mis-spoke there in that he wasn't a UK Representative but he served in a personal capacity and just happened to be a Brit. At that stage the P5 almost, but not quite, had a

permanent presence on the ACABQ, which is a really important UN advisory committee that sits outside the system but exercises tremendous influence. It was kind of a budgetary policeman if you like and the Secretariat slightly trembled at it and still do actually. It was chaired by a Tanzanian, who was extremely good and managed to stay doing that job for about twenty years if not more. The net effect was that I was left on my own in the Fifth Committee on occasions when Michael was doing his ACABQ job, so I was the UK Representative. But he came back for the big negotiations. It was a fantastic introduction to how negotiations are really done. This kind of administration and budgetary stuff was always very hard fought in a UN context. For many decades the UK has been driven by a desire to keep the budget down and there are some very strange alliances. By and large, at that stage the UK and Russia had a mutual interest in limiting UN contributions and expenditure because at the time the Russians didn't have that much money. The Americans and French were more liberal but there was tremendous pressure from the non-aligned and the G77 just to spend more.

CP: The British and the Russians wanted to spend less?

SE: Yes and the Germans were also really good allies and sometimes the Americans. That was really quite a tussle and you ended up having convoluted long-running negotiations. It was my first experience of working through the EU, because at that stage there was UN coordination and quite often our policy was expressed through an EU negotiating position – it's now almost invariably the case. It was a lesson about almost having to negotiate at once-remove. The first thing that you had to do was to agree an EU position, which wasn't always easy given the spread of views within the EU on these kinds of budgetary and administrative matters. Then you'd let the EU Presidency negotiate it in the front line within the Committee. At that stage there was still much more freedom of manoeuvre to intervene nationally if you really wished. So again, another interesting lesson in the dynamics of negotiation – how you influence things at one remove. And it proved to be a useful lesson later on – not being obvious about how you achieve objectives.

CP: So you were subtle in your approach?

SE: I wouldn't say I was necessarily subtle but I tried. It said a lot about how the UN pressured negotiations to come to an outcome. The Fifth Committee was always the last

committee to finish because not least it had to look at the financial implications of the decisions that everyone else had taken. But it also had these big set piece negotiations on the UN budget and the UN programme of work and they would never finish on time. I still remember that as we came close to Christmas in 1977, I was going into the negotiations finding the doors locked so that we couldn't get out and just occasionally people would bring in trays of sandwiches and cups of tea and whisky and so on. Sometimes we would go on all night and then eventually get let out when you'd come to some sort of agreement.

CP: So they almost held you there until you made a decision, saying you're not going home?

SE: Yes! But that was another lesson because that kind of pressure can be very useful in achieving deals. You have to learn how to apply it. There was one marvellous occasion in the late evening when my Irish colleague (who I met subsequently when I was Ambassador in Dublin decades later) bought in a case of Irish whisky and went around pouring it into everyone's water jugs to make the evening a little more bearable. That was absolutely fine for everyone except the Soviet Union who took one look at it and thought it was poison and refused to touch it. So those are a few atmospheric anecdotes about UN negotiations.

CP: But they drink vodka.

SE: Yes but they wondered what this slightly brown liquid was. So again some useful early lessons and a very good introduction into how the UN worked.

CP: Did you find it frustrating at all?

SE: Yes it's always frustrating but I think to be a good negotiator you have to have a kind of streak of sado-masochism in you. The way to deal with that is to be clear about what you want and how you are going to get it.

CP: And then be flexible?

SE: Well flexible within limits because you have to know what your limits are and there are points where it no longer is worth negotiating and you should simply walk away.

CP: So this helped you in your further career?

SE: Yes, it's the lessons learned that you don't necessarily internally articulate until much later. But there are things that you do which help you.

Third (later Second) Secretary, Bonn, 1978-82

SE: After that I came back and got sent off to Bonn. I had got married and the allowances from New York bought the dinner service, the hifi and first set of bed linen. Then in early 1978 we were posted to Bonn.

CP: So it was your first accompanied posting?

SE: ... first accompanied posting, first traditional posting. We pitched up and were given an apartment in the original jerry-built flats. It was mid-way between the city of Bonn and Bad Godesberg. There is a big road that goes through Bonn called the B9 and the Embassy was situated there. It had originally been designed as a hospital, like the NATO Headquarters which is currently an old military hospital but they are about to move across the road to a shiny new building. The Embassy was mid-way between Bonn and Bad Godesberg on this big road, the B9. That was a very big traditional Embassy with a wonderful Ambassador, Oliver Wright. Julian Bullard was Minister at the time. I was second to bottom of the heap in Chancery. There was one DS9 who was a cross between Oliver's private secretary and the Chancery dogsbody and I was the second Chancery dogsbody. But it was a very high achieving place and it was big because of the UK interest in Germany.

CP: Were there a lot of military there at the time?

SE: Not so many. The Defence Section was quite large but with the military just up the road in Rheindahlen, there wasn't a big military presence. But Berlin was a very large part of the Embassy's life. Oliver Wright was the British Ambassador and also the British Representative in Berlin, so he had two Residences. He superintended the British Military Government as it was still known then in Berlin. That was a great additional bit bolted onto the Embassy.

CP: That's unusual?

SE: That was necessary because of the Four Power Agreement governing Berlin. There was a lot of negotiation to be done in Bonn about the implementation of the Agreement as it related to the German Government at the time.

I went out there to do a traditional Chancery role with responsibility for organising visits including the six-monthly summit meetings with Mrs Thatcher at the time. Then I had two sets of responsibilities for German Third World policy on the external side of Chancery and then the German political foundations, education and so on on the internal political side of the Chancery. It was a kind of split existence.

I was lucky because at that stage the Germans were getting their teeth into work on Namibia and the Namibia Contact Group. Genscher was Foreign Minister and exercising, for the first time, some foreign policy muscle in an area where he felt safe. So for about two years, I was getting more action telegrams than anyone else in the Chancery. David Owen was an activist UK Foreign Secretary. There was a lot going on and it was one of the first examples of multilateral diplomacy to solve a decolonisation problem. There were complications with South Africa and South Africa's position with the legality or not of the South African mandate over the territory and a guerrilla war. All of those ingredients made for a really interesting and complex foreign policy issue.

CP: Was that the foundation of Namibia?

SE: Well it went on for a long while after. This was 1978 to 1982 and there was a lot of diplomatic activity that ultimately stalled. But it then continued and when I was back in New York in the late 1980s, I took through Namibian independence and the transition period from New York on the Security Council. So it was nice to come back to it.

But very often I would get four or five sets of instructions on Namibia that needed action with the Africa bit of the Auswaetiges Amt. So I'd be driving up and down the road between the Embassy and the Foreign Ministry very regularly. I had a very good set of colleagues and I got to know the German Africa Director. So I made some great contacts and great friends. At one point they almost awarded me an honorary desk in the Department because I was

there so often. It was a great opportunity to get into the real minutiae of running a multilateral negotiation effort.

There were some moments of high comedy. When David Owen was flying in from Africa for a meeting with Genscher and the other Foreign Ministers of the contact group, his VC10 had to overfly Bonn airport because of fog and eventually landed at an RAF airport in the Rhein. He arrived late in a very bad temper preceded by a military dispatch rider on a motor cycle that went “ pup..pup..pup!”. He was in a foul mood but he eventually left slightly mollified. Again, it was really useful just to get a feel for how all the consequentials of active multilateral negotiations and conflict management all work from the perspective of a bilateral capital. So it was great experience for me.

On the other side of the house, there was the visits organisation stuff. One of the first things that I had to do was to organise visits as part of the portfolio. The one that I always remember because it was early on in my time was when the Germans hosted a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It was a global conference in Bonn, with huge numbers of MPs around. I got responsibility for the British delegation of about fifteen. They were all extremely nice people but a handful. I had to find one, I picked him out of a hedge after a party in one of the German guesthouses outside Bonn and I had to put them on the bus and sort that out. Mostly they were all charming but it was my first experience of backbench MPs and how they work. It was really important and I learned some of the basic tricks, tips and techniques for dealing with MPs overseas. One: Be nice and Two: do what you can to help and Three: be nice. I will always remember that at the end of the visit Oliver Wright threw a buffet dinner party for them. So I got them off the coach, into the Residence, then they had a nice dinner with nice speeches and they gave Oliver a House of Commons plate. Being the man that he was he came up to me and said “Don’t worry Stewart, I know that you did all the work for this. But you will have grey hair before you get public thanks. And I appreciate what you did”.

CP: That was very gracious.

SE: Yes, it was very nice but what he didn’t know was that there had been a ceremony in the car park on the way in where they had given me a much nicer cut glass goblet.

CP: So you got the nicer gift.

SE: At least I thought so. That's the nice thing and that teaches you something about relationship building with MPs. Then organising the six-monthly bilateral summit meetings, when Mrs Thatcher would come to Bonn and have meetings with Helmut Schmidt. She blew in, came in and left. She was actually very nice to her staff. She wasn't particularly relishing the job she had to do. But I remember sitting outside the office while these meetings were going on and talking to Bernard Ingham about the mechanics of running a press operation at Number 10, nudging people.

CP: What did you learn from that?

SE: Well, just how simple in a way politics at the top level are and how much they are dependent on the personal relationships between the two Heads of State or Governments. A lesson that came through later on when I was in the European Secretariat in the Cabinet Office was that the Heads of Government are human. They have exactly the same needs and interests and requirements as everyone else. Yes, Departments produce terribly complex briefings for them but it boils down very often to a few very simple things just falling out of how they relate to their counterpart.

The other thing that this taught me was that German organisational skills were not always perfect. It was a question of flexibility and responding on the hoof. To get to Bonn/Cologne airport was about twenty kilometres down the motorway. The Germans would close the motorway in stages when they had a high priority head of government visiting. So the convoy of 35 or so vehicles would just zoom through. That was the usual requirement and it was alright providing it all left on time. But if we were late that would cause them enormous problems, as they didn't quite know when and how to open and close the motorway entry ramps. It was quite interesting juggling all that kind of stuff.

CP: The Germans like to plan.

SE: Yes, they like to plan very carefully but there is a danger in that in planning very carefully you lose the ability to respond to flexibility and change. So that's kind of another

lesson that came back to roost when I was running summit meetings for the Blair government just after they assumed office.

I suppose that the other visit related lesson from Bonn was the importance of cultural diplomacy. I was the nearest thing that the Embassy had to a Cultural Attaché. The actual Cultural Attaché was the head of the British Council in Cologne but I was the Embassy link-in point. This was bought home to me when Helmut Schmidt decided to buy a Henry Moore sculpture for the New Federal Chancellery. It caused enormous controversy in Germany – why wasn't he buying a German sculptor? The answer was that he liked Moore and he had a relationship with Moore. Very often when he was in London for summit meetings, he would take a helicopter and fly down to Moore's studio in Much Hadham. So he decided to buy Two Large Forms for the Federal Chancellery building in Bonn, and it's still there as far as I know. This was a huge sculpture and it weighed a huge number of tons. They built a special mound for it outside the building. Henry Moore came out to superintend the actual positioning of the sculpture.

CP: Did you get to meet him?

SE: Yes and I took him around when he was there. He came back for the formal inauguration.

CP: What was he like?

SE: He was a lovely man – very quiet, very pleasant and very gentle. He had a walking stick. I took him down the Rhine and he enjoyed the countryside. I still have this image of this large piece of bronze on the end of a crane, with Henry Moore shoving it with his walking stick. It came in two pieces and they had to get the positioning of the two pieces absolutely right. Then it was very interesting the power of all of this because Schmidt never came to Ambassadorial dinner parties. But he did for this. So Oliver was able to get him around to the Residence for a formal dinner to mark the inauguration of the statue.

CP: Did that help with relations?

SE: Of course it did because it got Oliver face time with the Chancellor and talking about an issue that he loved. For me, I worked with the Head of Religious and Cultural Affairs in the Chancellery, who was a kind of Counsellor-level secondee from the Ministry of the Interior but had an enormous amount of money to spend. He had an enormous amount of influence because Schmidt liked culture and wanted to see it taken forward throughout the Federal Republic. He also had to pay a lot of attention to religion because Germany splits between Protestant and Catholic, so the church is quite powerful in a quiet way. That needed to be managed at that time too so he was quite an important person.

The first Moore visit lasted three days. Towards the end of day one I was sitting at my desk in the Embassy when he was doing other things, when I got a phone call. The voice on the other end said "This is the office of the State Secretary, in the Chancellors Office" (which is the equivalent of the Cabinet Office) "and he would like to invite you to dinner tomorrow." And I said "Well that's very nice but surely you mean the Ambassador?" And she said "No, you're responsible for this visit. The State Secretary would like you to come to dinner with Sir Henry Moore and a few other people." So I said "That's very nice. Okay, I'll be there." So I then went to Oliver and confessed. I said "I'm really sorry about this. Are you sure you don't really want to go?" Oliver, being Oliver, said "No, no, you go and this is what I'd like you to ask the State Secretary." Again, as a 24/25 year old suddenly being plunged into a working dinner at that level was a bit daunting. But I think that I didn't disgrace myself. The State Secretary was kind and accommodating and knew awfully well what was going on. But again, it was on the direction of the Chancellor. It showed that he cared a lot about this. The fact that you can actually deploy something cultural in that way to make a diplomatic point was really very powerful. So I guess there was this cultural policy which had mass market aspects to it. But you also had the potential if you are lucky and you play your cards right to make this high level input. It's a really good lesson in diplomatic technique.

CP: To use it?

SE: Yes to use it, but legitimately of course. Not to be mercenary about it but it's a kind of really interesting thing to do.

My final set of recollections about Bonn was the opportunity offered by the German political foundations to travel within the country and to appreciate the importance of that kind of

instrument which we don't really have in this country. The German political foundations are affiliated to the major political parties, funded by the state, and allow the political parties to undertake their own sort of programme activities which are related to political education in the widest sense. It gave a whole new scope for doing different things in different ways which weren't necessarily connected formally with the Government. The foundations for years have been doing work inside Germany. It's a legacy of the war that the Germans were and still are extremely concerned to make sure that they have political institutions that function properly and democratically. And that they don't lose the important bits of a proper democratic political order.

But when I was there the foundations were beginning to expand overseas. Each of the parties was building links with other political parties of a similar persuasion. They were doing things which were really rather impactful on broader foreign policy. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation which was affiliated with the SPD developed very close connections in Central America, particularly with leftist regimes like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. There was one incident that occurred when I was there when as the Sandinistas were advancing to take over the government, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation pulled the key leaders back for a weekend session in their office in Costa Rica. They sat down with them and said "If and when you take over the government, then you will need a constitution. Have you thought about that?" "Er, no ...". So they said well okay we don't want to impose anything on you but here's the German Constitution. How much of that would be suitable for a Sandinista Government? They sat down and had a workshop and a lot of the Nicaraguan Constitution derives from that workshop.

CP: Right, so it was quite influential?

SE: Yes, very influential. The United States government was deeply against the Sandinistas and wanted to prop up a right wing government in Nicaragua at the time.

CP: It was the Cold War?

SE: It was still in the Cold War but this wasn't the Soviet-US confrontation, it was Monroe Doctrine in my back yard issue. The Americans took rather a dim view of what the Ebert Foundation was doing. The Germans then had a diplomatic problem in negotiating that

through and explaining what was going on but not always to a sympathetic ear in Washington.

Similarly, the Christian Socialist Union Foundation, the Hans Seidel Foundation in Munich was busy supporting the white population in Namibia, providing them with mobile cinemas and money to campaign, in a way that the German government at the time had no sympathy with. But they couldn't stop them, even though they were using German public money to promote the white community in Namibia while the Federal Government at that stage was busy trying to negotiate a transition of power.

They were very powerful instruments and when they pulled together in the same direction they could work. But it was fascinating and a really interesting new dimension to how you can promote track two and track three foreign policy in a slightly different way. And we to a degree are developing some of our own instruments that are not linked to the political parties to do this kind of stuff. But again as a fairly young diplomat it was interesting to experience that. And the broad range of German think tanks too. There's one I went to see in Freiburg that studied conflict. I went to meet the head of it, who parked his Porsche in the office carpark after picking me up from the train in Freiburg and then told me how he had spent the last six weeks in a foxhole in Lebanon studying inter-communal conflict in a Lebanese situation. I don't think we would find it easy to send think tankers into the field in quite that way. Another classic way in which the Germans do things that is very different from us: the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Eberhausen near Munich is very close to the German Intelligence Service Headquarters but acts as a planning staff for the Foreign Ministry for the broader more academic kind of work than the Foreign Ministry would have. But it's also a resource for the BND (German intelligence Service) and it still continues to this day. So part of my job was to get close to people in those foundations. Their importance in working with the German Government - how do you filter in a more strategic and academic perspective and one which is less the product of a government machine, conducted not by civil servants but by "academics and think tankers". The Americans have a lot of this too; we don't quite use our think tanks in the same way. To have a first long posting with that kind of breadth of input, thinking back on it, was a kind of rare privilege.

CP: The actual posting itself, how did you find it on a personal level?

SE: Quite difficult because it's never easy being close to the bottom of the heap of high-flying First Secretaries and Counsellors. The Embassy morning meeting was deeply hierarchical; you had to be a Counsellor to sit at the table and there were quite a large number of them in the building. Everyone else sat around the outside. The meeting was taken usually by the Minister. You kind of got passed over in the second row. Sometimes you got a grilling, which was good, sometimes you got ignored; sometimes you had an easy ride. But the Embassy in Bonn at the time had a reputation for not being a happy place and it was certainly exacting. Oliver had extremely high standards and so did Julian Bullard so they won't going to let anything slack through. The internal environment was stressful but it was a kind of high quality machine delivering stuff and delivering it properly.

CP: And the accommodation?

SE: Not great. It was alright for the First Secretaries and above. I remember going to John Le Carré's old house which was on the bank of the Rhine on the other side of the river and does have barges going by which would vibrate the floor boards as he says in "A Small Town in Germany". But for us I think the best thing you could say about the original jerry-built flats is that they were big. It was four years and there were fun things to do. There is the old story about Bonn that the best thing about it is that it's so easy to get out of, so you were close to Paris, Amsterdam, you can drive, and there is very good countryside around the Rhine and the Moselle and Cologne is quite a lively place. I wouldn't say it was the most exciting of social postings but it was certainly a good training.

CP: And after Bonn?

First Secretary, Republic of Ireland Department, 1982-83

SE: Back to London and slightly to my disquiet, the Republic of Ireland Department which was an odd thing as I was actually Assistant Head of Department. I was newly promoted to First Secretary and going straight into that kind of management role. It was headed by one of the Counsellors from Bonn who I think had asked for me. I wasn't particularly keen to go there, but I went. It was a slightly odd Department with some inbuilt management tensions. It had two bits of it. One which was run by a DS6 Officer, in old speak at the time, did the Overseas Northern Ireland information effort and the other bit of it, which I primarily ran, as

well as trying to maintain some overall supervision of the communications strategy, dealt with Northern Ireland policy and bilateral relations with the Republic and overtly it was all bilateral relations with the Republic. A lot of it was heavily intertwined with Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) was fairly recently set up, this was 1982, the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, really a time of high tension in the Province. It was a difficult time and although there was quite a large NIO politically-related dollop of people in Stormont, the NIO didn't quite have the reach back into London that it did subsequently. My opposite number was David Blatherwick who was an FCO secondee and who ran the political section in the NIO in Belfast. He ran a team of people who were basically doing what, in other circumstances, would have been a Chancery internal political role, advising the Secretary of State on the politics of Northern Ireland and the political parties. And another FCO secondee, Maureen MacGlashan, headed up the Assessments Group that dealt with Security and Intelligence. A lot of the time the RID job was engaged in trying to organise the Whitehall-related aspects of this. It was a fairly contentious time as some of the history of the period will show, between the various bits of the British Intelligence and Security apparatus.

My role was holding the ring in the middle and then running the bilateral relationship with the Republic which was quite difficult at the time. If memory serves, it was the time of the Haughey Premiership in Ireland, quite difficult. I didn't travel an awful lot but I do remember making one visit to Belfast and Dublin, not really quite understanding what was going on in Belfast at the time because it was complicated but finding it very interesting. It was the first time I'd been and the contrast between East and West Belfast – in East Belfast it was very prosperous, it still is with the Stormont building, then being driven around West Belfast in a beaten-up VW Beetle with the Community Liaison Officer looking at houses and the barricades and thinking "What's going on here?" It was a huge contrast. East Belfast looked relatively normal and it wasn't really until I was back in Dublin later and got to know the dynamics of Northern Ireland really well (in a much better period obviously) that you could attempt to understand some of the complexities going on under the surface there.

I remember being naughty and deciding that I would take the train to Dublin despite a security injunction that that was not allowed. I have a memory of eating greasy fried eggs

and bacon in the dining car and the next day the train was fire bombed. Then going down to Dublin. Most of the staff at the Embassy were living in a little cul de sac of houses near Dun Laoghaire and the security situation was very bad. People had to be very careful about what they did. The Embassy had bought this cul de sac of new built houses as a way of keeping everyone together and the Garda keeping an eye on it. So as far as I could tell from a brief visit that was an interestingly bad atmosphere.

Then I had a first taster call on the Department of Foreign Affairs. But again it's the way the Irish do business, as I was to learn up close and personal decades later. The Irish don't really expect British diplomats to go and have long talks in Foreign Ministry offices. They'll do the business outside in pubs, restaurants, rugby games. It was a first taster and I'm not really quite sure right up to this day what I thought of it but it was a kind of eye opening period of trying to get used to something completely different because this was not conventional foreign policy and the relationship between the two islands has never been conventional foreign policy, it's far too intertwined for that.

Private Secretary to Minister of State (Baroness Young) 1983-86

So fifteen months there and then rather to my boss's surprise - and somewhat to his dismay, I think - I was selected to be Private Secretary to Baroness Janet Young who was Geoffrey Howe's Deputy and spent two years and nine months in her Private Office.

CP: Was that a huge change?

SE: It was a complete change and a very interesting one. Janet had come to the Foreign Office after having been demoted from Leader of the House of Lords, essentially because the Government was losing too many votes. That didn't make her relations with Margaret Thatcher any easier but she still did have influence. Geoffrey Howe as Foreign Secretary was, I think, a bit discommoded to have a former Cabinet Minister as his Deputy, and it was Janet's first experience of foreign affairs, she'd not done it before. She was an absolutely lovely lady, I think slightly dismissed by the Office because she wasn't somebody who pushed forward great intellectual policy ideas but she was somebody who entirely knew how to empathise and create and build relationships. I think she was under appreciated because at

the time the Office was far too fixated on policy ideas and the thrusting white light of new initiatives whereas emotional intelligence counts for an awful lot.

Janet had a huge portfolio, she had bilateral relations with North and South America, bilateral relations with Europe and South Asia and Australasia and the Pacific but not necessarily responsibility for functional elements of that policy. And anyone who has to run bilateral relationships with the US is going to have a very hard time because actually it's so taken over by the functional world. It was a huge portfolio and quite difficult to get to grips with. For me it was a completely new experience, I was learning the job of a Private Secretary and she was learning the job of Minister of State. There were all the interactions with the other private offices and with the Secretary of State's Private Office and she came straight into this in the aftermath of the Falklands War. She was also an inveterate traveller so I got very used to aircraft seats.

I remember the first Christmas, it must have been of 1983, she was asked by the Prime Minister to do two things: to go to Grenada in the aftermath of the US intervention as the first British Minister to visit and then to go to the Falklands as the second British Minister after Mrs Thatcher had been there herself, just immediately after the conflict. We had a slightly bizarre journey, we flew from London to Bridgetown, got a plane to Grenada, spent two days in Grenada, went back to Bridgetown and flew to New York and had a breakneck chase around Kennedy Airport with somebody from the Consulate General in a baggage truck to make a connection to Dakar in Senegal. There was one flight a week I think with the French Airline Air Afrique. We spent a day and a night with the Ambassador in Dakar, flagged down a VC10 and flew to Ascension Island where we spent a day with the Governor and then did the trip to the Falklands with a C130 with two air inflight refuellings on the way down. That was interesting and noisy. Odd things strike you about it. I still have pictures from the cockpit of the Hercules and the inflight refuelling. We took off accompanied by a C130 tanker and a Victor tanker. The Victor refuelled the C130 halfway down and then refuelled us and then we carried on and the C130 refuelled us for a second time and peeled off and went back to Ascension and we made Port Stanley some seventeen or eighteen hours later. The inflight fuellings were a joy to behold particularly with a former jet bomber going as slow as it can and the C130 going as fast as it can to catch up. Because we were a VIP party they had bolted four old airline seats to the centre of the cabin floor and converted a large filing cabinet into a loo. So we were stuck in the middle with everyone else in canvas seats

down the sides and having to use a bucket in the back of the aircraft. So every time one of us got up to go to the loo there was a large cheer. The cubicle had a sign on the door saying "Civilians Only".

Down to the Falklands where the Minister wasn't received with glowing optimism by the islanders who perceived the Foreign Office as having wanted to sell them out, and we had an interesting and very illuminating four days. Rex Hunt was not deeply enthusiastic about what the Foreign Office was doing in relation to the Falklands so his reception was lukewarm, neither were the Islands Council pleased with the Foreign Office. They thought that the Foreign Office had sold them out and signalled that they would really like to give the islands back to Argentina. Then the Prime Minister and the Military had come to the rescue. There was uncertainty, at that point Rex Hunt was called the Civil Commissioner and he, and most of the islanders, would dearly have liked him to be back as Governor again, as he duly became. There were political tensions there in Port Stanley. When going out into Camp, the countryside, as we did for two or three days those tensions became magnified. The landscape is amazing but you've got small settlements of people and I remember vividly walking the battlefield at Goose Green and there were still field dressings and shell cases and detritus all over the place.

CP: And how did you feel?

SE: Well, I was still relatively young and was seeing the aftermath of a fight, which is not pleasant. You deeply understand why people feel the way they do when things like that have happened to them, which again came back to bite me in no uncertain terms on 9/11 in New York. You really understand. And that is something that policy-orientated diplomats would do well to learn and absorb. If you can't appreciate the horror and how conflict and politics impact on people's lives and feelings, conceptions and views then you are not doing your job as well as you should. So I can well understand how Americans felt the way they did about the Bush War on Global Terror following 9/11 and understand the way the Falkland Islanders feel the way they do following the Argentine invasion.

CP: Do you think they felt let down?

SE: Now they don't but at the time I think they did. If you look at what's going on currently with Argentine manoeuvrings and wriggings over the territorial sea in the South Atlantic and exclusive economic zones, you begin to understand why the Falkland Islanders will be watching very carefully what HMG does in relation to that.

But there was also the Boys Own Paper moments like flying out in a Wasp helicopter to a destroyer anchored in the Falklands Sound for lunch and being chucked out of the helicopter in a force four wind, while the helicopter left again, rapidly. Going to look at the elephant seals somewhere in West Falkland, the wild life is truly amazing. I didn't see the whales but I did see Rex Hunt's home movies about trips to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. One of the things I have yet to do in retirement is to go down to the Antarctic.

Those things make an impression and again some appreciation of what goes on in places like Ascension Island. I remember sitting on a milk crate behind the pilot as the VC10 came in to Wideawake Airfield with this enormous runway right in the middle of nowhere and you have a mountain pretty much in the middle of the island that gets green around 500 ft which is where the Administrator's house is and the farm. Lower down there is a kind of desert golf course. There is quite a large American airbase there. The Americans built the runway and then we built a lot more infrastructure after the Falklands War. Those quiet places that are of strategic importance although I think Ascension is less important now because of technology but at the time it was an important NASA tracking station for all sorts of reasons.

There are huge contrasts. On the second trip we made to the Falklands it was the turtle egg hatching season at Ascension. So we got off the RAF Tristar and got taken off to the beach by the Station Commander and watched the turtle crawling up to lay their eggs. The wonderful thing about military travel is that often it's quite conveniently timed, so while they were refuelling the aircraft and adjusting the freight load we saw this amazing manifestation.

I remember coming back after that first visit, which took us nearly two weeks, my daughter was then about two answered the door and ran away saying "Mummy, Mummy, who's that man?" Being a Private Secretary you spend a lot of time away and work really, really long hours and have some very interesting times.

It's very different from the other jobs because you are dealing with the output of the FCO machine rather than being part of that machine. Again, things happen. I remember Janet was Duty Minister at the time the Americans decided to launch the bombing raid on Libya. I got the call from Number 10 that the Prime Minister had had the request for overflight permission and would be grateful to know what the Foreign Office thought. I then phoned round and after about an hour established that what the Foreign Office thought was "be very careful". I called Number 10 back and said this is what we think and they said thank you very much but the Prime Minister had decided half an hour ago. Another lesson from that is that it never pays to be too careful because actually the fears that were going around the Foreign Office at that time about Arab retaliation and possibility of terrorist attacks if and when it became known that we had given overflight clearance for those flights, they never materialised. That is prudent contingency planning. To every action there is always a reaction but sometimes it is simply right to do things because they are the right things to do. And in the Libyan case it probably was right to have the courage of our convictions and not worry too much about what might happen. It's entirely right to think through how you would deal with things if they were to happen but not to be put off from doing something simply because of the potential repercussions, you need to make a balanced judgement. Judgements that allow you to do the right thing rather than always being worrying about the implications of doing it. To be considered and never losing sight of the overall strategic objective, so it comes back to knowing what it is you want to do, and in this context knowing what it is you should do and it's important to keep a strategic compass.

The other thing about working for a Minister with the breadth of portfolio that Janet had was the different techniques that are required. In Latin America there was a big job to be done in terms of trying to generate sympathy and understanding for the British position despite what the Argentines were doing to whip up regional sentiment against the UK over the Falklands. So we did quite a lot of travelling through Latin America and it wasn't always easy. I remember we thought we were going to Colombia and then we heard in the air on the way that we weren't welcome any more. That was partly because of some row involving a relative of the Colombian Ambassador in London who had incurred the Foreign Office's displeasure. But that had a benefit because we went to Peru and to Belize instead and that yielded some interesting insights into how Belize deals with Guatemala and what a preventative British military deployment meant at that time. We had a slightly surreal helicopter trip that involved going to visit a Ghurkha observation point on the Guatemalan

border where the Puma helicopter landed on a helipad that was about a foot wider than its undercarriage and suddenly, vertically, a Ghurkha Sergeant popped up out of the grass wearing a jungle hat, saluted and said “Memsahib, would you like a cup of tea?” Then we flew on and observed an exercise on one of the Belizean coastal towns and the helicopter flew out to a coral atoll, landed on a white sand beach. I remember getting off the helicopter, the loadmaster took off his flying suit and put on a white mess jacket, set up two card tables with a starched white table cloth and the mess silver, and eating lobster.

Slightly surreal but it all illustrates the importance of relationships because Janet was able to establish good personal relationships with the Peruvians, the Venezuelans at the time, the Brazilians, the Uruguayans, she was very good at talking to people and explaining things and generating empathy, emotional understanding and a response. Even if we couldn't persuade the Latin Americans to agree with UK policy over the Falklands I think there was a lot of success in persuading them to be less than warm to Argentine initiatives and to keep a lid on things, to moderate intemperate responses and to preserve port rights for British ships in places like Uruguay and just to manage the situation in a sensible and calm way. Partly with Latin America and the UK it's showing that we care and partly it's explaining policy and practice and what it means, why we're doing what we're doing. Explaining and engaging in a dialogue and you need a Minister who is good at that to do it well. There are little indicators as to whether you're succeeding or not. One nice one was that on Janet's birthday the Office would be filled with flowers from all the Latin American Ambassadors in London. Then you know you're getting somewhere.

Different places require different techniques. I remember going to a meeting of the South Pacific Forum in New Caledonia with her. She ended up having a bilateral with I think it was the Fijian Foreign Minister with the two of them sitting on deck chairs under a coconut tree with the two private secretaries squatting on the ground with notebooks. It was very informal and relaxed and you've got to be able to adapt to other people's cultures. It's two-way.

There are different levels of environment and different ways of doing things. I remember a trip to India, Pakistan and Nepal. The Indian system was quite bureaucratic so she was received at her Minister of State level and went round Delhi and had a perfectly good time. Then we went to Pakistan and ended up having tea with President Zia on the veranda of his

quarters in Rawalpindi with children running around. Zia had a daughter who had learning difficulties, so there was a big discussion about that. That provided a very good way of making some political points. Then on to Nepal where, completely different, the King was minded to establish a British public school outside Kathmandu for the Nepalese elite, this was way before the Maoists in Nepal appeared and changed the whole picture. And then back to Delhi. I remember leaving Delhi we got up early in the morning, got onto a BA Tristar to take us back. A pressure valve went and the aircraft filled with vapour, we dived down with oxygen masks coming down and then poodled around over the Rajasthan desert to dump fuel and then made an emergency landing back at Delhi. I remember turning up at the Residence and knocking on the door which was opened by the High Commissioner, who shall remain nameless, and said "Not you again"! Then I made a rather shaky phone call home.

I always liked India; it's overwhelming, full of contrasts. It's very politically targeted and not always friendly in foreign policy terms to the UK, because of the history but very friendly in other ways. I think it's changing now but then the Indian Armed Forces looked like British forces but they had very different views, very different equipment and very close connections to the Soviet Union in terms of arms supplies and equipment. So there was the whole Indo-Pak dynamic with, at that stage, the Soviet Union and China taking different sides. In a way that whole region has not quite shaken itself free of the Great Game mentality, I don't think. That's particularly true of Afghanistan and where that is, but we'll come back to that later on. It all comes back to spheres of influence and to Indo-Pak rivalry. We managed to fly from India to Pakistan which was difficult and then found ourselves stuck in Lahore for a night, unscheduled, and turned up looking slightly forlorn at the Government Guest House which they opened up in Lahore. It was immense and this whole majestic building was opened up and dusted off and we had a nice night and a tour of the big Mosque in Lahore before going on to Islamabad. Going back to visit in retirement, if you fly into the northern Indian airports they are all military bases with fighter aircraft and missiles all pointing West.

So a very good period but lots of time away and long hours in the Office. My son was born in 1985 and I remember Janet was doing a press interview and I suddenly got the call to come home please.

CP: So what happened next?

First Secretary, UKMis New York, 1986-90

SE: It was back to New York again, a reward for good behaviour and total exhaustion. I was posted back in the summer of 1986 as the First Secretary responsible for Africa and Asia. There were two Chancery First Secretaries, the other one concentrated on the Middle East, leaving aside all the disarmament stuff, so we would cover for each other. I sometimes was engaged peripherally on the Middle East but most of my time was on Africa, becoming an increasingly large UN preoccupation, and on Asia which manifested itself most prominently in Afghanistan at the time of the Soviet occupation. That was back to the Mission but this time in a substantive job.

Crispin Tickell arrived more or less the same time as I did and I left shortly before he did, so we had more or less four years of overlap as my Ambassador and Tom Richardson was Deputy for a lot of the time. It kind of felt different and back straight into the Security Council business which I hadn't done before but with a good dollop of General Assembly work as well. There were things that were partially familiar from my time in Bonn. Namibia was a key point but I think one of the more taxing things to do was to be Mrs Thatcher's man on Apartheid and again that had lots of ramifications for me, particularly with my African upbringing and deep unease about the substance of the policy. It was walking a tightrope between managing change in South Africa but without allowing things to get out of control. The Government did not by any means agree with the substance of Apartheid but did understand some of the pressures to which the South African Government was subject. It became a matter of managing that process and counter balancing some of the pressures from the UN which by that time were becoming quite extreme, sporting sanctions which came from the Special Committee against Apartheid in the UN General Assembly. That was one kind of element of what was going on.

The second big African thing was the Namibian transition to independence which happened while I was there. The third thing was Afghanistan and maintaining pressure on the Soviet Union to get out. We were part of the international coalition to get the Russians out.

This time I was working for a career Ambassador. Crispin had spent a long time in the Foreign Office and was a very lively, very intellectual guy, very interested in climate change. He's still very lively and bouncing around, I met him on Paddington Station a couple of months ago! We got on very well. He had come from being Mrs Thatcher's Climate Change Adviser and had written the first seminal book on climate change and the politics of climate change. All the while he was in New York he had this as a side issue. He had focussed on it and wanted to take it forward and it was beginning to feature on the economic side of the UN house. Also at the time I was there, there were beginnings of a new dialogue with Argentina on the Falklands. What goes around comes around. It's a kind of recurrent theme that the major themes in foreign policy rarely go away entirely, they come back to haunt you. I guess that some of the lessons we were talking about earlier came back again and got reinforced.

For me one of the important things was to get a feel for the Security Council and how the Security Council work is done and an impression of the dynamics between the various different groups on the Council. The non-permanent members of the Security Council will tell you that the Permanent Members are dreadful, run the place, don't tolerate dissent, regard their position as a God-given right which is no longer merited by the requirements of the current international scene and the whole thing is an anachronistic post-1945 construct that badly needs changing. In some ways that's true but I do think it's a mistake to think that the P5 automatically dictate. When I was there both in the late eighties and subsequently in 1998-2002, the P5 were very wary of dictating anything to anyone. Of course the P5 have views, interests, they want to see things through in the way they would like to see them through but even then there were hugely different views within the P5. I think it's also very important for people to remember that for a Security Council Resolution to pass it has to have nine positive votes, so just as a single member of the P5 can veto something, so the non-permanent members can prevent things from happening by refusing to vote in favour. So there's much more of a complicated dynamic there and it's not just all the P5 working together to stop things happening, although that can happen.

The other thing about the Council is that it has the most institutionalised way of informal consultations of any of the UN bodies. So what you see in Security Council meetings are formal set piece statements followed by the formal adoption of resolutions. The real work goes on in a small room just off the main Council chamber which I think is deliberately

designed to be uncomfortable. There is a small table where the fifteen members of the Council plus two advisers each sit down and have informal consultations which set the scene for whatever the Council is going to do. Those discussions are far more free ranging, far franker and it's where the bones of Presidential statements, Press statements and Resolutions are negotiated. But heaven forbid that Ambassadors will very often do that in great detail themselves. They will send off groups of experts to go and hammer out the texts in a kind of preparatory fashion. So there is a whole different dynamic and again it's all about relationships. As I was to find out later, the Perm Reps and the Deputy Perm Reps of Security Council countries almost spend more time with each other than they do with their spouses. They are not necessarily good relations but they are certainly working relations and they certainly know each other intimately and they know how each will respond to a given stimulus and how to provoke the arguments, so it's a different way of negotiating from the General Assembly, it has its own set of understandings and its own set of extremely close personal relationships, and you need to learn how to manipulate those.

CP: So it's unique ...

SE: Well it's unique in one sense but the NATO Council has a not dissimilar dynamic for a rather larger body doing different things. It's all about key decision making bodies and the way they operate and it's down to, again, personal relationships and persuasion, or not, depending on what you want.

I think the other thing about the Security Council is that it deals with security and life and death. Any body that disposes of the use of armed force has a slightly different decision making dynamic from a purely political body, because it's the blood and treasure of its members and other people on the line, so there needs to be some way, and it varies from body to body, of reflecting relative power, in the sense of hard power and commitment in the sense of putting your young people in harm's way. That was part of the reason for the veto and it's part of the reason why in NATO the NATO Council operates by consensus, although it's not an equal consensus because it's armed force and it's lives and it's national commitment in a very up close and personal way. So it's that kind of dynamic which I got a first taste of as a First Secretary sitting a few steps down from the top. So that's how it works and you have to be very conscious of it in how you behave in matters of international peace and security.

The other great thing that Crispin believed, and I think I agree with him, is that if you want to be a great power, you have to behave like one. That doesn't necessarily mean you are a great power but if you want to be seen like one, you have to act like one. There's a whole bundle of stuff in there about strategic world view, a bundle of stuff in there about being prepared to step up to the plate when the tyres hit the road and when things get really difficult. A lot of that came out in Iraq in 2003 and I think that's an intrinsically important part of the national debate that we're currently having about the EU, a lot of it is about what sort of a country do we want to be and how do we want to behave to make sure we can be that. People won't articulate it in that way but I think if you look at it in a UN Security Council context, that's very important. It's very important how the P5 behave and about how serious non-permanent members behave. And all of this comes out in the wash.

The other thing that is quite important is it's not always the most apparently powerful countries who provide the most influential negotiators in a Security Council context. When I was in New York in this period, if I have it right, for a while the most effective Perm Rep on the Security Council was the Gambian. A small country but he was extremely articulate, he had no particular axe to grind, no particular personal or national agenda, but his personal agenda was to work for the good of the Council rather than one or other of its members. He was well respected and if you needed to look for someone to broker a deal, very often he could do that more effectively than almost anyone else. People trusted him. If, as a Brit, you could get him to take up your case for you so you didn't have to say anything, that was obviously a very effective way of doing business because the substance was coming out but it wasn't tarred with any perceived UK baggage. That lesson was borne in on me at my last post at NATO where the baggage of the Iraq War, which was still there when I arrived in 2006, led to instinctive feelings of distrust of the UK and the US. Very often the best way for the British Ambassador to get something done was to say nothing and get somebody else to put the point for him. So that was something that came out of the first experience of the Security Council for me, although it took time to assimilate this. But it was very good to be in there at the working level, drafting the texts, drafting the resolutions and you could see what happened. But if I had a dollar for every time I started a negotiating process where the author of the resolution didn't know what they wanted to achieve in the first place, I'd be rich. It's amazing how many people don't do their homework properly before they start.

I suppose another lesson that comes out of all of this is the advantage that the UK has simply by speaking English. It's an advantage that the Americans don't necessarily share, sometimes the Australians and others do, but to have the facility to draft in English which is increasingly becoming the international *lingua franca* does give you an advantage. Again, this wasn't a lesson I learned at the time, but reflecting on it and looking back. Not speaking English doesn't necessarily give you an advantage when you are negotiating because actually non-native speakers often put clearer messages across than native speakers do because they need to simplify and be clear. So it's not necessarily an advantage to be a native speaker when you're yapping away at other people to try and convince them but it does help when you are doing the drafting and the writing and I think that's an important element of advantage.

I can't think of a UN Peacekeeping mandate resolution that has given the military everything that they would want. They like very clear direction and above all they like to know when they are going to leave and I can't think of a Security Council Resolution that really has had the clarity of mandate, the clarity of operational duration, and the clarity of objectives that most military men would like. They need precisely defined, achievable tasks. I think one of the key things in diplomatic/military interactions is that the military need to be convinced that this is an opportunity not a threat and allows them some freedom of manoeuvre to define their operating space. But that's not something that's easily appreciated. The trick is in bringing the two cultures, diplomatic and military together in a way that's productive.

On Afghanistan I well remember that I had the joy of spending a couple of one week periods of parading Afghan resistance fighters around the UN, much to the annoyance of the Russians. It was thought that it would be a good idea to bring them to New York and peddle them around the various delegations to have them say their piece. It was slightly surreal as one year I had Gulbuddin Hekmatyar come to New York - that "nice man" who subsequently went off to kill a BBC television camera man. He was a significant figure in the resistance and at that time was making a convincing case against the Soviets. Also, Ahmad Shah Massoud, the victor of Panjshir Valley, his picture is still plastered over one wall of Kabul Airport, but again the effectiveness of exposing people with a real and personal stake in these problems to an international audience can't be over-estimated. They were right at the sharp end and it was good to bring them to where the decisions were being taken. The fact that

those who have to participate in the decisions can see the effects and what's really going on on the ground is quite helpful sometimes, but it was a surreal part of my job there.

We've talked about the Security Council and then there is the General Assembly. There was one special session on Apartheid; it was either 1988 or 1989. Things in South Africa were coming to the point where the Mission was able to persuade London and Number 10 that it was worth engaging in the negotiation and to have some outcome that might be a consensus outcome and put pressure on the South African authorities to take that next step of further change rather than having a disagreed outcome which the UK would dissociate itself from and therefore attract further opprobrium. So we were given permission to engage in the negotiation of the declaration. That produced a number of interesting things but there was a significant caveat which was that we should be in the room when key negotiations were being carried out.

You will recall I said earlier that General Assembly negotiations were carried out through the EU. I wandered into UN coordination and again all the African experts knew each other very well and I put my instructions on the table and said "I'm afraid on this occasion our instructions do not allow the Presidency to negotiate without our presence". This caused my Italian colleague, who was a lovely man but very hung up on EU doctrine, to blow a fuse and there was endless ranting about how the UK was trying to get in the way of established EU structures and somehow subvert the system. The Presidency on that occasion was French, and we negotiated a deal that we would try and agree an EU common position. The President of the General Assembly had appointed the New Zealand Ambassador as Chairman of a group of friends who would then go and negotiate this declaration. It was agreed that the French would negotiate, there'd be an agreed common EU position and that I and the Dane, as a representative of the other end of the political spectrum, would go in and sit behind him but say nothing, observe only. So the New Zealand Ambassador convened this group of about 25 member states to negotiate all of this. She was a lovely lady, Anne Hercus, she would go round the table, late into the night and make a proposition, then the Frenchman would give the Presidency view and would look over his head at me and I would either nod or shake my head and roll my eyes to the heavens. My Danish colleague who was sitting next to me was a very good friend and knew that the overall interest in all of this was to get an outcome and so actually said nothing, or went to sleep, but didn't do anything. The Frenchman had an overall idea of what was going on but wasn't looking too carefully. We

went through about five nights of this negotiation by semaphore and in the end we came out with something that we judged acceptable. So I left the UN building at three in the morning, wrote a report, sent it back, slumped over my desk and went to sleep and then got a phone call from Number 10 who said “Stewart, very sorry, but it’s not good enough”. I told them that I had got exactly when they’d told me to get and there was a pause and they said “Yes, but we never thought you’d get it”. At that point I gave up, got Crispin out of bed, explained the situation and said “This is beyond my pay grade”. Over the next four hours or so he was able to persuade Number 10 that the disadvantages of disengaging at the last minute, having agreed to engage, outweighed the disadvantages of whatever might be in a consensus declaration. And so it proved, but it was a slightly hairy experience compounded by very long hours.

I reckon the average working hours during that period for a Chancery First Secretary were between 80 and 110 hours a week and you need to bear in mind that the way the system in New York works is that you start the day with instructions from London which are sent to you at 9 o’clock your time, roughly lunch-time in London. You go through the day and must absolutely always write things up that day in time to get them back for London’s breakfast tables so they have the morning left to turn them round and send you instructions. You knew you were in trouble if you were still in the office at 5 in the morning which was 10 o’clock London time because you were running out of time. This could get a bit draining after a while. I remember we had a Major on short-term secondment from the MOD to help with the planning of some military operations. He looked at me and said “What are you doing?” I said I was doing what I normally did and he said “Has the Foreign Office never thought of the tiredness – effectiveness - judgment equation?” Because you’re not at your sharpest and in the military world these would not have been trusted judgements other than in very exceptional war time circumstances. There wasn’t a lot we could do about it but we did try and scale down and gradually the Office, after that period, got into the position where there was a general ratcheting down on long hours. I think, though I don’t know, that this was part of the reason why the Mission expanded, more people were needed to have a basic work balance. The work also got bigger. So that was another lesson, the beginnings of how to maintain proper effectiveness. It is inevitable in big multilateral posts that the hours are always going to be difficult.

CP: On a personal level how did you find being back in New York?

SE: It was great. New York is a place that we love. Now I go back about every three months for one reason or another. It's one of those cities that if you've lived there it is very frustrating to go back as a visitor because there are things you do when you are actually living there that are quite difficult to do as a tourist. Manhattan is a bit like London in that there are a number of neighbourhoods strung together and then you go into the other boroughs and it's a series of villages strung together. Some things that are really nice about New York are quite difficult to do from a hotel room, like walking a dog in Central Park, going to your favourite deli or buying your dinner from Zabar's on the West Side and bringing it home to eat. Lovely place. It's changed, the profile of the shops is different, museums have changed and the property prices have rocketed.

It can be very lonely if you don't have friends and, yes, I think that's one point that is worth making. We were back as a family with young children and that provided an entrée into Americans because of the school and the PTA. While there are some very wonderful teachers in the New York public (state) system, it's not usually of a standard that you would readily put your kids into. So you are then left with private schools and the Office was at that time quite generous paying the fees but it neglected the fact that for US tax reasons New York school fees are set at a sub economic level and they expect parents to make up the difference with donations. Expected but not advertised, and expected in quite significant amounts so that became quite a source of tension. The Office paid in the end a little but another part of the payback was trying to do things through the PTA, so it was another odd dynamic of the US private school system that certainly wasn't apparent to the Treasury inspectors.

We had an Inspection in that period and because of the expenditure profile in Manhattan it always was quite complicated to try and make the standard allowance template stick. For the first time we had a laptop computer on the side of the staff group in the Mission with a spreadsheet. There were some hysterical negotiations with the inspectors who kept on offering us things that they knew wouldn't make the slightest difference because they would be ruled out in the way the allowances spreadsheet was calculated. Because we had a spreadsheet we were able to plug the figures in and tell instantly what the effect was. It took the Treasury team a long while to realise why they were getting very short shrift. When they did, they said "Fair cop" and started to negotiate in a more meaningful way. But it was an

early illustration of the power of technology. Computers had started to come in, both in the Office and at home. I remember I bought my first Commodore 64 in New York! People were starting to use the computers themselves in the Office, rather than the secretaries.

We had great fun and we travelled a lot. If you have to work hard you have to be allowed to play hard and we were pretty punctilious about taking leave. We visited lots of places, Hawaii quite a lot, it couldn't be further away from New York both literally and culturally and it was chilled out and warm and relaxed.

In June 1990 we left and took the short way home via Hawaii, stayed on three islands, then stayed with a Consul General in Seattle who was a friend, and I was deliberately not looking at any newspapers. I knew vaguely that I was coming back to Middle East Department. So we did our Hawaii thing, then got to Seattle in late July and our friend said "Are you sure you don't want to read the newspaper?" I said "Not really", and he said "Well, it was the Middle East Department you were going to wasn't it, Iraq and Kuwait doesn't look too great". I thought forget it, we are actually going to do Seattle.

We flew back in the first week in August still not bothering to do anything. We landed, went back to our house and within an hour the phone rang. It was the Office asking when I could go in. I said "in about two weeks' time" and they said "No, the Emergency Unit has been established and you are Deputy Head of it, when can you come in, would tomorrow do?"

Assistant Head Middle East Department and Deputy Head of Emergency Unit, FCO, 1990-1991

I was Deputy Head of the Emergency Unit for the 1990 Gulf War. That produced a whole new series of lessons. I suppose it took me forward from negotiating about conflict to managing actual conflict and it brought out very strongly the difference between normal life and crisis life. I started with Rob Young, who was Head of the Emergency Unit, lovely man, and we agreed that basically Rob would come in at about five in the morning and working through until six at night and go home, and I would come in roughly about eleven in the morning and work as long as I needed to work, which was some time between midnight and two or three in the morning. There was a period of 2-5 hours when neither of us was

around and we kind of figured that the unit could run without that kind of management oversight.

Then there was an issue of who did what and how we were going to organise the unit. I hadn't done that but there was a scratch structure of a political room, a defence room, which at that stage wasn't fully populated, a consular room and just as I got there it was being realised that there had to be a correspondence unit because members of the public were getting het up and Ministers were getting lots of letters and a shocking backlog had built up. You had all of this odd dynamic of having to balance all the various different elements of the crisis and the mainstream Foreign Office at the time. The political/policy bit was obvious, the consular bit was sort of obvious, and if the military were going to be involved you needed a defence unit, but the correspondence unit was a kind of new thing and that was situated in the rump bit of MED above ground that wasn't running the emergency. But it was brought back in as it became increasingly clear that it just wasn't working and there was a backlog of about 10,000 letters to reply to by November 1990 and it was becoming an embarrassment to Ministers and to Parliament. It was a very odd crisis because of the hostages and that in itself generated a huge amount of consular work. You found yourself doing very odd things and the way you distributed your time was not as you thought it would be.

CP: So it was firefighting?

SE: When you are engaged in a crisis you must always try and get yourself above the firefighting but there will always be a bit of it. The lesson is that unless you can actually have a clear set of policy objectives you will not succeed. If you get dragged into the firefighting that doesn't work and you lose clarity. There is that thing which the military call 'the fog of war' which is partly inevitable but partly you have to fight your way above it to deal with it.

It was relatively easy to decide what the response should be if Saddam was to use weapons of mass destruction against the Coalition, and the answer was quite obvious – there would be a devastating, retaliatory, attack.

We were coming close to Christmas 1990 and at that point there was a deliberate sharpening of the information effort and remember this was the first war that was fought partly through

CNN, messaging started to happen. Around mid-December the message coming out of the Coalition was that if Saddam did not leave, he would be forcibly removed and that would have implications for Iraq itself and the military was building up. Massive airpower was being deployed into Saudi Arabia and the region. It was being made perfectly clear that Saddam would be compelled to leave. By that stage a lot of the hostages, a lot of Embassy staff from Kuwait, but not all, were stuck in the Embassy in Baghdad. I remember close to Christmas Eve the FCO welfare people called me and said "Can you deal with this lady who is the wife of an Immigration Officer in Kuwait who is in the Baghdad Embassy and we cannot deal with her. She is telling us that we are about to kill her husband by bombing Baghdad, can you help?" I said I would speak to her and it literally took me five hours to get her to the point where she had pretty well exhausted herself and was on the point of collapsing. What I knew, but couldn't tell her, was that there was an evacuation planned to get people out of Baghdad and that it had all been worked out in exhaustive detail, but I couldn't tell her. I made a tactical mistake by allowing the conversation to drag on for five hours. You do have a duty of care and of management responsibility but on the other hand it's not a good use of the time of the then head of the unit. You have to make these decisions, and that was a mistake on my part and was the most difficult thing I think I had to do.

I remember a teleprinter conference in the middle of the night with Michael Weston who was the Ambassador in Kuwait, who was besieged at the time, with a Sergeant from the Paratroop Regiment sitting beside me. We were trying to explain to Michael over the teleprinter how to cut a jerry can in half in such a way so that he could use it with extra diesel fuel to boil water to cook pasta. They had significant supplies of tinned tuna and dried pasta and a swimming pool of water but they did not have gas for the conventional cooking stoves. It took about an hour to describe over the teleprinter link because we didn't want the Iraqis to know how difficult the situation in the building was.

It's these odd things you never think about that take up most of the time. Negotiating with the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury about his Christmas sermon as there was an issue over military chaplains. If you deployed troops to Saudi Arabia they would not have accepted chaplains because they were foreign religions coming into their country. We had worked this out. There was somewhat of an argument but we agreed that the chaplains would go as Moral Welfare Officers. Once the fighting started they would resume their role

because by then people would be past caring and the religious insignia would come back onto uniforms. Provision was made for those who wanted to have religious services in a tent with the door shut, but this could not be made public. The Archbishop of Canterbury was minded to preach a thundering sermon about how troops on the ground had been deprived of religious support ...

CP: But was he now aware...?

SE: No, and he couldn't really be made aware so there was an interesting influencing exercise about the content of his Christmas sermon, but it turned out alright in the end.

You probably won't remember but the Sun newspaper was banned from Saudi Arabia because it refused to stop printing the page 3 girls pictures which offended cultural sensibilities, so for a while there was a witch-hunt for the faceless diplomat who had banned the Sun! There are all these ramifications that come out of this that when you enter a crisis you don't think you are going to have to manage.

Then there is the issue of adjusting resource levels. Where do you get the people in to do the things you have to do? We've talked about the correspondence unit and that wasn't a problem because the Office is pretty good at just pulling people out of other things. I can well remember the night the air war was launched in January and I knew, and only two or three other people in the Office knew, that it was imminent. The build-up was perfectly normal. Until probably late November/early December of 1990 in the context of how the whole thing was managed this was still primarily a political and diplomatic crisis with a military adjunct. When you got to the point where fighting was pretty much inevitable, the balance shifted and it then became a military crisis with a political adjunct and the trick is always to know when to take back political control and I don't think we got it entirely right. But the build-up was fine. I managed to go home early that night in January and we managed to have dinner together but I knew that about midnight the phone would ring and the code word would be spoken down it and that meant the planes would be in the air. So that happened, I got into the car, drove into the Office and roughly in the twenty minutes I was driving the media had picked up overflights of the border into Iraq so while I was driving the whole thing became public. I knew two or three other staff knew and one consular guy knew. I got into the Office, the phones went wild and the switchboard jammed, mostly on

the consular side. That was probably inevitable because you could not have got in 25 consular desk officers without breaching operational security. But it took about an hour and a half to call them in. Not that there was much we could have done about it but the phone system was blitzed and it's another example of how crisis management differs from normal life.

When you know bombers are going in and you know a war starts then the real problem is how to stop it. These things throw up all sorts of difficult issues. I remember in the autumn dealing with the Americans through the MOD Emergency Unit over the issue of chemical and biological weapons. There was a problem because the Americans had run out of anthrax vaccine, there was an issue of how to deal with plague, we had better stocks of anthrax vaccine than they had and the Pentagon sent an Airforce General to talk about how on earth we were going to deal with the CBW threat. It was so sensitive to the Americans that they didn't trust the Embassy. So this guy turned up on a civil flight, took a taxi to the MOD and then left again without telling the US Embassy. I and my MOD colleagues attempted to sort something out.

CP: Did the American Embassy find out about it?

SE: They did and they weren't terribly amused but that was their problem not ours.

So again the policy elements of a crisis like this are just one small part of what you have to do. It's the things that you never think about and suddenly you are faced with making decisions. You have to think about how you take decisions under pressure as well and how you motivate your team. The team were fantastic. The desk officers came in on shifts and they would pull together. It's a very good illustration of the maxim that the reward for a job well done is more work and more responsibility.

There is also the question of training. Most of the military targeting decisions were the business of the defence section in the emergency unit but occasionally I'd get them. I'd look at them and use my common sense. But it wasn't until I found myself on a sabbatical at Harvard three years later that I got any training on just war theory, proportionality, the rules of war, what you can and can't do. But I did limited targeting on the hoof and was amazingly relieved to find I was unlikely to be hauled up before the International Criminal

Court for war crimes! There was a course in the Harvard Divinity School on the morality of war taught by a Harvard academic who happened to be a Catholic priest and had been one of the US gang of seven in the 1950s that devised deterrence theory. He taught this absolutely fantastic course about the morality of war from Sun Tzu to Brezezinski in just twelve weeks which went all the way through Just War Theory and the Doctrine of Proportionality and what you are allowed to do under the laws of war. There's a legal element to all of this and a codification of how you manage conflicts in a proper fashion.

I think the other thing to say about that period, and I hinted at it, is “when do you take back political control?” When we went to war, the job became about providing the political support the military commanders needed and the objective became a military one to win the war. But very early on you have to start thinking about what that means for the long term, if you can – but you might not be able to. We got to the point where the Iraqis had withdrawn from Kuwait - you remember the famous Turkey Shoot on the Baghdad to Basra highway. It came to the point of what to do next. I remember arguing with the State Department in Washington and Number 10 were arguing in parallel with the White House that the attack should continue for a little longer. When do you stop and when do you continue. Our view was that the Iraqis had not yet been sufficiently degraded to render them a zero threat. With hindsight, and it's easy with hindsight, you had two Republican Guard Battalions in Basra that remained partly functional and I think, again with hindsight, it would have been right to have the attacks continue for a couple more days to degrade the Iraqis into ineffectiveness. But the Americans were not having that; Colin Powell was getting very severe blow-back from the US Air Force who did not like shooting people up. There were issues of proportionality and war crimes and so on, so it stopped when it did. I suppose, with hindsight again, that the other mistake was that the Americans didn't put a political adviser close enough to Schwarzkopf in the ceasefire tent, so that when the Iraqis leant over and said “General we have wounded and we would like to use helicopters to take them out and we will not abuse this on my word as a military officer” and then they shook hands and agreed, of course a lot of those helicopters were used to get high ranking people and capabilities out of Basra.

CP: But they must have seen that?

SE: Well, did they? I don't know. To be really honest at the time I thought there would be a political adviser in reach. And he wasn't. He was two rows back. The military settled

this on terms of military honour. It was a question of how much can the politics inject itself into a final surrender negotiation and I think the lesson of that is it should. I think there was never a question of going further on into Baghdad really because that would have exceeded the UN Mandate and it was patently obvious that you would be biting off far more than you could ever chew but it is an illustration of that delicate balance that you have to get right about when does the whole thing become a political issue again and knowing when to intervene. But that's an art not a science and you have to be aware of it. It's never easy but the one thing you can certainly say is that history will say whether you got it right or not and you must be very well aware of what you're doing.

Then the Emergency Unit was wound down. I ended up going to the region, to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, about three weeks after the liberation. I had an interlude in Saudi Arabia getting used to it because I was going back to become Assistant Head of MED with responsibility for Saudi so that was a shock course in cultural acclimatisation as I'd never dealt with that part of the Arab world before. I remember going with the Embassy to hand over a petition to the Governor of Riyadh about some poor Brit who was in gaol for not paying a debt and chasing him around his office building and cornering him in the gents toilet because the convention in Saudi Arabia is that if you are a public figure you have to listen to people giving you petitions. So he would spend a lot of the time walking around the building away from his office so that he didn't get bothered by people until we eventually tracked him down and gave him this letter.

Then going into Kuwait, there was still a smell of smoke. Places that have been involved in a battle, as with New York after 9/11, smell of like that. I remember landing in Kuwait and it smelling of smoke and then going to the Residence which by then was partly normalised and beginning to talk to the Kuwaitis about what next. I think that the thing that made a real impression on me was the position of the Palestinians in Kuwait because a lot of them had put their lives seriously at risk to help Kuwaitis who were being hunted down by the Iraqis during the occupation, but some Kuwaitis thought they were all Iraqi traitors because some of them had helped the Iraqis but many hadn't. The Palestinians were under real pressure and I remember that a group of them sneaked into the Residence but they didn't want the Kuwaiti Police and Army who were around to see them come in. They basically sat and looked at me and said "Please help". They had no jobs and the Kuwaitis were looking for those who had helped the Iraqis and wanted to take action against them. They felt they were in danger and

were certainly under real economic pressure. I remember one of this group who came in to ask for help was an art historian who had written lots of books on Palestinian art. He said “This is all I have but I’d like you to take it as a gift” and there was this coffee table book. You can’t actually say no in those circumstances. It was really quite poignant and they convinced me to take a message back to London that something had to be said to the Kuwaiti authorities about that.

CP: Did you succeed?

SE: Whether we succeeded in having the desired effect I don’t know but we certainly succeeded in saying to the Kuwaitis “Hang on, you have to remember that a lot of your people owe their lives to people in that position who hid them”.

I came back and started to run the Department in a more normal mode. I didn’t actually have all that long because after a few months I was promoted and posted over to the Cabinet Office to do Europe.

CP: It’s 3 May 2016. At the end of our last session it was the end of the Gulf War.

SE: Before we move on to my next post I think the only other thing to say is that it was very interesting for me being parachuted as a non-arabist into a community of FCO specialists because most of the people working in the area did at least have some knowledge of Arabic and had been through Shemlan (MECAS). One nice thing was to get a farewell letter when I moved on from Graham Burton who at that time was Ambassador in UAE and it simply said “Dear Stewart, we never realised”. That was kind of a nice way to end.

Each area of FCO specialists has their own approach to the world and to be able to do well you’ve got to be able to communicate between the many cultures. As you move up the system I think part of the key is to assume the colouration of the area in which you are working and to understand what people actually mean when they talk about their particular parts of the world. It comes back to what we were talking about in the first session, which is listening carefully, knowing what you want and deciding how you are going to get it and what is really going to matter.

To go back to the Gulf War, there were some really serious cultural issues that we fought through the system as we prepared to go to war. One of those, which we talked about last

time, was the existence of military chaplains or not, another was the Sun and page 3. There was an enormous fight between Arabist and non-Arabist wings of the Foreign Office about whether or not page 3 should be allowed. In the end the Arabists won and, as I explained last time The Sun waged a war against the faceless bureaucrats who had stopped them providing support to our boys in the field. I thought, after listening carefully to the arguments, that it was justified because we relied on Saudi goodwill to base people there. The Arabists in the FCO were culturally sensitive and were just trying to persuade everyone else that they had to be culturally sensitive too. That is something that you ignore at your peril in today's age of instant communication. I think as you look at the real cultural differences that are arising over the Middle East and Gulf today, it's an illustration that they still exist and the way in which ISIS is using the internet and social media to fight back demonstrates they are just as aware of the potential of new media as we are, in fact probably more so. So cultural differences apply both ways and to countries and governments and to cultural differences within organisations. Within the Foreign Office there are still differences between the Middle Easterners and the Far Easterners and they have their own ways of looking at the world and their own way of communicating. That is particularly marked when you look at the relationship between the FCO, the MOD and DFID, each Department has its own cultural view of the universe and will put its own policy forward. When you get to the military there are very significant cultural differences which is why I'm so pleased in my post FCO life I spend so much time teaching the military.

Teaching was also a big part of the next posting I had which was the secondment to the European Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

European Secretariat, Cabinet Office, 1991-1993

I was promoted and was number three in the Secretariat, which was a traditional FCO slot. I was working for David Hadley who was Head of the Secretariat and Brian Bender who was the number two and went on to be Permanent Secretary in the DTI and other places.

It was a move across Downing Street but it was a whole new universe. The first time I'd done EU work, but EU work not from a Foreign Office perspective. I do think a posting in the Cabinet Office in the European Secretariat is a great asset to have had because you view the world from a central position which is more political and very substantive. The job for the European Secretariat was, and I presume still is, to hold the ring between the various

different Whitehall Departments, almost all of them with some sort of interest in EU work and the Foreign Office perspective only becomes part of the whole. The way in which the Secretariat was constructed and staffed gave the FCO an important but not a determinant role. I suspect that the FCO input has slipped slightly over the years as EU policy has become much more a bit of common Whitehall policy. The Treasury always has an enormous voice, given George Osborne's role in the renegotiation leading up to the Referendum. But in my day the Secretariat's work, and I suspect it still does, revolved around a weekly schedule which culminated on a Friday morning with a meeting co-chaired by the Head of the Secretariat and the UK Perm Rep in Brussels. So in my day it was known as a Kerr/Hadley.

A lot of the week went into deciding what had to be on the agenda of that meeting which was designed to sort out operational policy for the following week. That was the underlying rhythm of work in the Secretariat. John Kerr had a very big hand in setting that agenda so you had to balance the interests of the Cabinet Office with the interests of a very powerful Ambassador. He was influential and pushy, as John always would be. He pushed hard, quite rightly, because he needed to know what he had to do. Running in parallel with that was servicing the whole raft of Ministerial Cabinet Committee meetings on EU subjects and underneath them the network of officials' Cabinet Committee meetings. We also had the UK Presidency in 1992.

There was a budget negotiation that culminated at the Edinburgh European Council. There was an awful lot of work on the Working Time Directive. It covered the whole realm of Cabinet Office business and it required an ability to get to grips with a lot of difficult and complicated subjects, sorting out who did what not only among the desk officers but among the three of us in the senior management chain. Also knowing how the EU negotiates, it's very difficult and it's very complex. There were then the seeds of the arguments, as there are today, about the extent to which the Brits can get their way in this very complicated set up of competing institutions with competing powers under the Treaty and at that time the European Parliament was just beginning to mature. I remember big arguments about how if you wanted it to behave better, is the solution to give it more power and let it grow up or is the solution to constrain it so that it can do minimum damage? There are always ongoing debates. As the European institutions have evolved, and they have evolved a considerable way since then, it's a question of how far you want to go. The UK was pushing very hard on the Single Market at the time. But it was also pushing on legislation that it found deeply

difficult. I remember the Working Time Directive being the first of those but there were also awful arguments over Caribbean sugar and Caribbean bananas – the tension between trying to protect the Commonwealth banana producers versus the more usual EU markets in Latin and Central America. There are a number of Whitehall fiefdoms, the Treasury is the obvious one but there was MAFF with the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy was another, and then the FCO was trying to claim that external EU policy was Foreign Office business and the DTI was equally adamant that trade negotiation was its business. So the Cabinet Office role was to hold the ring and make sure that a fair outcome went to Ministers.

CP: Was it effective at that?

SE: I think it was effective because the policy mechanism by and large worked well but it was an awful lot of effort. The other bonus of the job was that for some of the time you got to take the Cabinet minutes of the EU discussion. And sometimes you got to sit in on other things. I remember sitting in on the Cabinet Meeting when the future of the mining industry was being discussed. Possibly the less said about that the better but it was a turbulent period.

I suppose the other thing that Whitehall has got much more used to now, and I make no judgement on whether it is a good thing or a bad thing, is the way in which EU negotiations work in the sense the key things, and perhaps even more than the key things, are done by Ministers on their own, without officials present. It's always been traditional for European Councils. But from the perspective of a civil servant it's much harder when you're not in the room. From the perspective of the Minister it's possibly much better but whether the outcomes are better remains to be seen.

CP: Much of the work is done before they get in there?

SE: Yes, but it's much more unpredictable. And that leads on to another truism about high levels of government and central government and it's that the issues, when push comes to shove, are much simpler but they are much more political and much less about the technical detail. Senior politicians are human beings and it's really important to remember that. A lot of the things they have to decide amongst themselves, whether it's at Cabinet level or European Council level, are highly dependent on personal relationships and decisions are made based on the relationships that build up between them. So if you are briefing for

Cabinet, for example, or a Cabinet Committee Meeting, the Departments involved will brief their Ministers quite heavily on the substance. Those Ministers will have a Departmental brief and it will be based, one hopes, on exhaustive analysis and policy recommendations and they will come to what they consider to be the right answer and people will have to argue it out. Those briefs are all copied to the Cabinet Office, that's part of the deal. The Cabinet Office briefs to the Prime Minister are not copied to anyone. The Cabinet Office will take a view on the relative merits of the case as between the various departments but they won't very often go too far into the substance. It will be much more about the background as to what the various different Ministers are thinking and the dynamics of that. So when you get to decisions in the centre, it's about the key points without going into the details of the substantive analysis unless there's a very special Prime Minister prepared to get his head around it all but there will be a lot about the dynamics. And similarly with briefs for the European Council there would be a lot, and I'm sure there still is, about where the other Heads of European Governments are coming from, what do they think and how are they going to approach this. So it's the how, not the why. It's negotiations between senior human beings and senior leaders. In my view it's the dynamics that are the important thing to get right. I think that's a pretty useful lesson to learn.

The other thing is strategic patience. If you are the leader of a government you have a strategy and in my view you should decide what you want to do and then stick to it. Don't get blown too far off course by things that go on on a day-to-day basis. That's harder than it was because of the new media and the speed at which things move in today's world but I think it's very important. And the personal handling of these meetings. I well remember John Major coming back from the European Council of 1992, the centre piece of which was the European budget negotiation. It boiled down basically to a clash between Germany and Spain over exactly what I forget now. But I remember John telling the end of Presidency party in Number 10 how he had made sure that tea was not served until a deal was done. This tended to aggravate Chancellor Kohl who needed regular nourishment. Sometimes meetings are not decided in the obvious way and you can nudge things along by the way you run the meeting.

That two years of my life was very interesting, you begin to learn the subtlety of negotiation and to learn what really matters when you move into politics and begin to learn what really makes key strategic decisions at the heart of government. The Cabinet Office is small so not

that many people get to experience it and it does jerk you out of your departmental view and you get a much better context about what the Foreign Office really means in the overall scheme of things. It doesn't necessarily make you very popular in the Foreign Office because sometimes there is the expectation that you are going to be the FCO man or woman, so you need to make it clear to your parent department who is paying your salary, and at that point it's not actually the FCO. You need to be able to maintain FCO confidence but actually I think most people are sensible enough to realise that if you are moving into a different area, your perspective is not totally FCO. When I was Ambassador at NATO later on, I had two political masters so my perspective had to be three ways, the FCO, the MOD and a healthy perspective about what the military were thinking.

Aside from that the European Secretariat was a hard slog so we didn't have the colourful aspects of FCO life. But people weren't expected to work unreasonably. If there was a European Council to prepare for then, of course, you had to get the briefing done, but it wasn't excessive like New York. But two years was fair enough and towards the end of my time I agitated to get out, I was ready for a change and I was lucky enough to be given a sabbatical at Harvard.

Harvard Sabbatical, 1993-1994

CP: How did the sabbatical come about?

SE: I kind of asked for it! I think one or two other jobs were tried first and they didn't happen, perhaps one or two people felt there was a need for decompression and to get out of the Cabinet Office/FCO relationship and go off and do something different. It was a remarkable opportunity and I was very lucky to have it. At that time it was a full diplomatic posting without representational allowances. So you still got the housing allowance and the cost of living allowance and you were living as a student.

It was great. The programme at Harvard was exceptional. It sits in what is now the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. It was established by Kissinger when he was at Harvard in the late 1950s. It's a programme that brings about twenty four practitioners into an academic environment for a year and they bounce off the academics. It's particularly interesting because the CFIA (as it was then) takes a rather more theoretical and academic approach to international policy than say the Kennedy School of Public Administration or the

Harvard Business School. They bring in middle level to senior practitioners. We had diplomats, we had a former Deputy Prime Minister of Trinidad. They were from all over the world. We had two British participants, one FCO civil servant and one from the MOD.

CP: We don't do anything like that in the UK?

SE: No we don't. And that's one of the merits of the US university system, it's always been very open to this. So mid-level diplomats, politicians, journalists and US military forming a group of 24. They were all ages. The youngest was probably a French lady who was about 35 but the rest of us ranged upwards to about sixties from a fairly broad range of countries too, which makes the Harvard alumni of this particular course very wide-ranging.

There were three elements to the course. You learn - so Chris and I both had what the US quaintly term "auditing rights". With the permission of the lecturer you could go and attend any university course you wanted in the Harvard area. You couldn't do the examinations and be graded but you could go and listen to the lectures. My wife Chris, who was interested in anthropology, had a year of Stephen Jay Gould and she got a lot out of that and I think still has the lecture notes.

There was a teaching element, so if you could interest people in what you had to offer you would get asked to do seminars in various faculties of Harvard. I remember one seminar that I did for the Kennedy School on what it felt like to run a war, having just come out of the Gulf War and what that was all about, and of UK views on Europe.

CP: Were they interested?

SE: Yes they were. And I still find with the work I do now with the Strategy Institute at Exeter, there's still a market for people who've done things to go and tell people what it's like and people do suck that up.

So there was the learning and the teaching and then there was the research. You had to produce a publishable article. I went off on what I thought was an interesting limb; the impact of IT on foreign ministries. Most of my colleagues settled on a traditional foreign policy issue and I think in more recent times the FCO has got a bit harder down on that and tend to send people to Harvard with the idea of writing a paper that is of direct relevance to the Office.

CP: Is that a bit limiting?

SE: Yes I think it can be but you can see the resource pull in the other direction. If you have a strategic issue you want examined and you are paying all this money to send somebody to the US for a year then it does make sense if you can marry it up with someone who wants to do it and have an interest in it. But my paper was on the impact of IT on foreign ministries. This was just at the time when Wang word processors were giving way to the early versions of Firecrest. You had to attract the interest of a member of the Harvard Faculty to sponsor you and provide access to people who would contribute to the research. I was fortunate enough in finding a couple of people who were interested, somebody in the Department of Mathematics of all places and somebody in the Kennedy School. My paper was called "From Quill Pen to Satellite" and was published as a pamphlet by Chatham House. I think it was about the second ever paper written on this subject because there are a number of key lessons for foreign ministries. If you suddenly remove geography, which is what email does, how do you run a widely dispersed organisation? It gives you amazing freedom that's now being exploited by the FCO by having desk officers for some subjects sitting abroad. Because the communications are now good enough to allow you to do that, if you cut out geography, you can make a lot more of your organisation. But you have to be clear about some of the constraints of running systems like that properly, because if they are not run properly they can get out of control. There's an important archiving point too, if you have paper files you write something and you know where you can find it, if you have electronic files it's very easy to write something and lose it completely.

There are big security issues but you have to risk manage. In those days there was a tendency to want to try and reduce the security risk to zero. A lot of very expensive, cumbersome, bespoke systems were created, a lot of which didn't always work and lost functionality. It's much better, in my view, to buy commercial but to make sure there is enough security built in. The other thing about IT is that if you have a system with 5,000 terminals all you have to do is break into one and you lose the lot. So there are big security issues, big sociological issues and policy handling issues out there, and I tried in 1994 to start to try and flag some of these points to a very un-IT-aware audience. Change like this is still happening now. For example in my current life, the Parole Board has only just gone electronic.

Picking that subject had a number of remarkable consequences partly in the people I saw, partly in the courses I chose and partly in exposing the way in which American approaches to foreign policy differ from the way Europeans approach it.

There still is a very different world view in America, or in Europe, depends which way you want to look at it. If you are the world's friendly neighbourhood superpower where interest in and knowledge of foreign policy is by and large generally more limited you are going to take a different perspective. Ordinary Americans tend not to be as interested in foreign policy. You only have to look at the percentage of US television that's devoted to international issues as opposed to the European percentages where it is much higher. US public interest is there in the big headlines things but it's not so much part of the US bloodstream as it would be in a continent with many more countries that are much smaller. If you look at US academic thinking the first difference is that they are much more susceptible to the Clausewitzian doctrine that "force is foreign policy by another means". The US has traditionally had a very strong military. The US approach to foreign policy is quite muscular. There will always be, lurking underneath, an element of compulsion somewhere whether that is military, economic or what. It's force, not to be used, but force as part of a foreign and security policy package. And the same thing will go with economic strength, that's part of US foreign policy and it's perfectly natural that it should be.

It would be too simplistic to say that Americans tend to see foreign policy in black and white, they don't. But they tend to see foreign policy from the perspective of a very large country with a lot of power that will expect to get its own way. There is a different mix in how it gets its own way between that and how a European country would expect to get its own way. Their expectations are different and American expectations are probably higher. There is also a very strong moral streak in US foreign policy which is perhaps a bit less pronounced in Europe and which dates back to the Wilson Doctrine at the turn of the century – that America overseas must do what is right. So there are different threads here, and sitting in Harvard among a more academically orientated part of the international community brought it home to me.

The year I was at Harvard was the year that Sam Huntington, a member of the CFIA faculty, published "The Clash of Civilizations" which is the first of a number of books he wrote about really foreign policy and conflict being underpinned by civilization and religious issues which he found were pretty difficult to reconcile. I can remember that the twenty four CFIA

Fellows sat down and read this. It caused a lot of controversy when it came out and the practitioners among us got quite irritated by it and said “No, it’s not like that”. There were a number of very critical articles written in periodicals like ‘Foreign Policy’ chipping away at the theory. I remember the response of the Center was to organise an internal seminar in 1994 which Sam chaired with the practitioners and the academic staff, and it was contentious. It was so contentious that nobody talked to each other for about a month. I think the academic staff felt a sense of solidarity with Sam. There was quite an argument around the table, it got quite heated, but then that’s what university is for. If you think that civilizational differences underpin conflict, then you’re in the Sam Huntington school.

So that was the first really great thing about Harvard – it gave you a really good appreciation of the differences of world perspective.

CP: But the practitioners saw a different view?

SE: Yes well, on this particular point the foreign practitioners took a different view, including my Canadian colleague. Generally speaking if you look at Canadian diplomats because they are not the North American superpower they tend to take a view which is a bit more close to the Europeans. The Europeans would say it’s not civilisations, it’s interests. A country’s foreign policy is going to be based on its interests. I don’t think that Sam would argue that foreign policy wasn’t based on interests but I think he would say that underpinning it all are some key cultural issues.

So that was bubbling away and it was great fun. But in general terms it was a marvellous opportunity to observe what makes American foreign policy tick and why the thinking is different to European thinking.

The second thing was to appreciate what the American university system does and how different it is from the system in Europe. Harvard was the place at that time where a lot of people went when their party was not in political administration, not in office. It’s part of the difference in the way American and European government is run. In the US when the Administration changes, the whole senior level changes and American universities are the places where many people who go in and out of public office come from. So that has a number of consequences. Firstly it means that American universities are very well connected into the political environment. They can be influential but it depends on how

many of the people are out and not in sympathy, but then those who are in are still connected and have very close links on the politics and government side, and industry too, into whichever Administration is in power at the time. So that was an eye opener as well. So with Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Berkeley, the big American universities, there is a sort of ebb and flow and that has implications for the courses that are taught.

The two courses that I audited which really stick in my mind were the one I talked about earlier on the Morality of War taught in the Divinity School by a Roman Catholic priest. He was also an academic at Georgetown and other places who had been one of the gang of seven who had devised Deterrence Theory in the late 1950s. That was a stunning experience.

The other course I remember was simply called “Command and Control and Intelligence” and it was jointly run by the Kennedy School and Department of Mathematics. It was a post graduate seminar and essentially what it consisted of was a selection of brown bag lunches (where you brought your own sandwiches) and someone at a senior level of the intelligence community in Washington would come up and talk about whatever was on their minds at the time. There were a group of about fifteen of us. There was some set reading. One of my fellow participants was a former East German submarine captain so I wasn’t sure how he had got through the net, but they did take a bit of care over who they let in. I remember my first set text was the Marine Corps Manual of War Fighting which had been put together by the then Commandant General of the Marine Corps in a Chairman Mao-sized pocket edition. When you read it, it was slightly terrifying because it started off with Sun Tzu, a Chinese military philosopher from about 2000 years ago, and worked through Clausewitz to modern war theory. It was a 50-page condensed version and I paraphrase violently but what it said was “Mistakes happen, learn from them”. So that taught you a bit about the Marine Corps approach to life.

The people coming up from Washington were amazingly frank which is another example of the American system – it’s part of this interaction between government and academia. I doubt whether in many universities in the UK, you’d have a course taught on Command Control and Intelligence. I remember on one occasion a three-star general who was responsible for developing the US Armed Forces modern communication system called JSTARS, came up to talk about where it was going. At the point we still had view-graphs and an overhead projector. You had a transparency which was plonked onto the light and it came up on the screen. The General plonked the first view-graph down and it was

“Classified Top Secret, No Foreign Eyes”. I spluttered and said “General do you mean that?” He got out a felt pen and crossed the classification out.

The other thing I remember is that I asked one of my academic sponsors who I should go and talk to about my project. “How about going to see Lawrence Eagleburger?” who had just left office as Deputy Secretary of State and “How about going to see the Director of the National Security Agency?” Doors opened. I did manage a telephone call with Eagleburger who was charming, polite, welcoming and open. I didn’t quite manage the Director of the NSA but I did manage the Deputy Director and drove down and had an hour with him in Fort Meade, Maryland which is the headquarters of the NSA, talking, amongst other things, about the NSA’s interactions with Microsoft over the development of I think at that point, of Windows 3. In an earlier cycle of the debate we’re having now about encryption, the NSA were attempting to get Microsoft to write a back door into their operating system so that the government could tap it if necessary. There was an interesting battle going on with Microsoft agreeing to take some NSA software code writers to help develop the basic operating system code and then sending them back every three months as not being bright enough to keep up with their own people. But the issue of security of IT and the ability of government agencies to crack it is going on now twenty years later.

We travelled a lot. The Canadians paid for the CFIA Fellows to go from one side of Canada to the other in the fall which was a bonding trip. We started off in Ottawa, went east to Quebec then all across Canada through the Rockies down to Vancouver. The contrast between Quebec in the East and francophone Canada and the issues that were preoccupying them with what was going on in British Columbia was enlightening. Somehow Ottawa has to balance it all in the middle.

The Americans flew us from one side of the States to the other in January and we could pick our own itinerary, so we had some arguments over that. I remember having meetings in Washington in the middle of a blizzard and we ended up in Los Angeles just after an earthquake. We’d gone via the headquarters of the Seventh US Air Force in Tucson to talk about drug interdiction operations in the southern hemisphere but happened to be next door to the ‘desert boneyard’ where all the old aircraft are parked. When we went they were busily chopping the wings off the B52s to comply with one of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties.

Finally, Japanese money paid for us to go to Moscow, Tokyo and Seoul. The Japanese had money for our group to visit Japan and were prepared to be flexible enough so we had four days in Moscow, went to a Russian foreign policy seminar at IMEMO which was Kim Philby's academic institution in Moscow and then flew to Tokyo. We visited the foreign ministry and then took the train to a factory building robots near Mt Fuji. Most of the work was done by other robots. Everything was painted yellow, both factory and robots. Then we flew up to Korea and went up to the ceasefire line on the border.

It was a really interesting year, well worthwhile.

Political Counsellor, UKDel NATO, 1994-97

Then it was my first posting at NATO and into a different world. I was Political Counsellor in the Delegation in Brussels in 1994, a very contrasting international organisation; it was not the UN and a different structure of representation at that time. There were two separate organisations within the same delegation: a civilian delegation and the Office of the UK Military Representative, working side by side along the same corridor but with different sorts of bureaucracies. My role there has since been cut, but I was Political Counsellor. I was dealing with the day to day political business of the Alliance, being the representative on the NATO Political Committee, and I had working alongside me a Defence Counsellor who was an MOD civil servant. We both worked up to the Deputy Perm Rep and the Perm Rep. The military had its own military structure feeding into the Military Committee. We worked together but there were more differences than there are now where the organisation is completely integrated and much better for it. I took through the last three years of that integration process when I was there as Perm Rep. It was a long process, but ultimately it paid dividends.

That was my first experience of working directly with the military and trying to get a handle on the culture and the differences between them and diplomats and civil servants. I had my first realisation of what the military have to do to get to a policy related post that most FCO people would find as a starting point and the very considerably different depth of life experience that comes in getting there for the military. For example, one of the military desk officers had commanded a nuclear submarine before he came to the Delegation and found himself working as a desk officer servicing some of the subsidiary bodies to the Military Committee. That was a really good opportunity at middle level in the Delegation to try and

appreciate some of the differences and also to appreciate some of the differences between the FCO and the MOD and the way in which the two sets of civil servants thought, which again is different. The MOD people have a much more extensive experience in finance and programme management, project management, running things and perhaps less on policy. The MOD has a practical approach and the FCO does more policy and less administration and has less money to spend. It's interesting how that marks out a difference in the Departments' approach.

I think NATO and the UN are an interesting contrast. They each have strengths and weaknesses. Like the Security Council, NATO deals with force and nations' blood and treasure. While the Security Council has the veto as a way of making sure that those who have proportionately more to contribute have more control over these areas, NATO operates by consensus. There are the two different ways of applying what you have to apply to make such organisations work. So in NATO a different sort of negotiation is required but consensus is not always equal. You could and did find yourselves in a situation where Luxembourg was holding up an agreement. Everyone has to agree but in NATO consensus is not always equal consensus. The UN and the Security Council were not like minded whereas you assume that an organisation like NATO is like minded. Ultimately when push comes to shove consensus works because people will give things up in exchange for other things and agreement emerges, but it takes a while. It's very important, as with the UN, that in a slightly different way a lot of the negotiation will go on outside the committee room, it's the same in that sense and it became even more pronounced when I went back to NATO as Perm Rep. As with the Security Council, members of the NATO North Atlantic Council spend an awful lot of time together, so they get to know each other very well and that makes it easier to work things out.

The other thing is that in those days NATO was much smaller than it is now. It was a smaller alliance and at that stage the Berlin Wall had come down and the Soviet Union had disintegrated so there was great change and uncertainty. Uncertainty is not good in security policy. You need certainty and predictability. In the early years after German Reunification, when you had a Russia that was going through considerable economic turmoil and reinventing itself, there was pressure on NATO to reinvent itself. There was the Eastern European issue - not at the point of those countries coming into the Alliance - but of what is NATO going to do about Eastern Europe? What is NATO for if there is no threat from the

Soviet Union or Russia? What is NATO defending against? Russia still perceives NATO as an offensive threat, nothing is actually further from the truth but you can understand with over 50 or 60 years of propaganda that Russians think that way. It's all about spheres of influence, being a superpower, having its own area that it protects, so it's a very different philosophy. At the time I was there, 1994-97, there was a big underlying question mark about what NATO was for. There was NATO activity in the Balkans, was it going to become a crisis management organisation? If so, what implications did that have for the UN and for NATO's relationship with Russia. A big time of uncertainty. As so often when you are going through times of uncertainty, you don't see the picture particularly clearly yourself. Again, it's fog of war, slightly confusing.

So those are my memories about that period. The beginnings of change, lack of clarity, and also how did NATO interact with the EU? There was a European Security and Defence Policy but how did that fit? Should the EU have a security and defence policy role? Foreign policy was accepted, but there was a big controversy about defence. It still isn't resolved but there is more clarity about it. This was before the second Iraq War which was a serious blow to the credibility of some Allies and by the time I came back to NATO in 2006 the repercussions of that were all still there.

After three and a bit years I was looking for another job. I failed to get appointed as Robin Cook's Private Secretary which, with hindsight, wasn't an entirely unwelcome outcome. I remember going to Amsterdam and having an interview with him in the margins of the Amsterdam European Summit. I came back and wasn't sure what I'd be doing next so we decided to go off to South Africa on holiday. We flew off, landed in Johannesburg, drove down to the Drakensberg Mountains and I got a phone call on the day we arrived from Rob Young, who was Chief Clerk at the time. He said "Stewart, where are you?" I told him I was in South Africa and he said "When can you come home?" So I said "That depends". He explained that there had been some discussion after the arrival of the Blair Government who had realised that they had four Summit meetings to hold between September 1997 and July 1998; the CHOGM in Edinburgh, the EU/ASEAN meeting in London in March 1998, the G8 Summit in Birmingham a bit later on in the year and the European Council in Cardiff. There had been a discussion at Ministerial level about how these meetings were going to be organised - remember this was an era of doing things differently and of "Cool Britannia". At one particular meeting it had been felt that the classic approach to these summits, as

evidenced by the FCO Protocol Department, wasn't going to cut it and the solution to this had been to appoint Liz Symons as a Minister of State in the Foreign Office with responsibility for summit meetings. Liz had then decided she needed a Director to support her. My name had been mentioned and could I get on a plane tomorrow? I talked to the family and called Rob back, hopping from rock to rock in the Drakensberg Mountains to find a mobile signal. The deal was that we could finish our holiday, go back to Brussels and I would start work at the end of the following week. We flew back and arrived in London on the day Princess Diana died. I can well remember sitting in the shuttle going through the Channel tunnel thinking "what on earth is happening?". We essentially packed up in four days flat and Chris stayed on for an extra week. I arrived back in late August 1997 with CHOGM due in four weeks' time and the rather uncomfortable knowledge that there was a summit meeting happening that I could do very little about.

Director of Conferences, FCO, 1997-1998

It was a very interesting position to be in and the way it worked out was that Liz Symons handled the Ministerial level discussion and was basically in direct touch with Number 10 over the various issues. There were major contractors engaged for the four summit meetings and I had the job of managing all of that, in theory it was practical arrangements but in practice it went a lot further than that. Underneath me I had the old style protocol element of the FCO.

There was a big project/contractor element. It had been decided that we would get commercial sponsorship for these meetings because the new Government wanted them to be much more significant and different from the classic summit meeting model. It didn't ever quite turn out in the way one thought it was going to. At one point I had 400 contractors' staff working for me. Two or three different companies were contracted to run the different summit meetings. It was all about having confidence in them and maintaining an appropriate degree of control over them which was something I'd never done before, so I had to take advice. I insisted on having a little team around me so I got Ian Whitting who came across from Information Department, a very sound, very level-headed DS6 and his role was to help me brainstorm, keep these competing elements at bay and also to handle the Information Department information work in conjunction with News Department. Linda Jackson, who was a very experienced PA, came and helped keep things sane.

There were all sorts of different elements to balance. EUDCI and the EU Presidency Unit had considerable input to the Cardiff European Council, ERD and Nick Westcott to the policy input to the G8 and the South East Asian people with ASEAN. And with CHOGM, and I really was along for the ride with that one, the Commonwealth Secretariat thought they were running it, which was another issue.

The relationship with Number 10 was interesting. There were several competing influence blocks in Number 10. You had the classic Private Office, you had Alastair Campbell and the News Department and the classic news operation there, Maggie Cleaver who was an FCO secondee and was responsible for the stage management of events and managing the Information Department work, Fiona Miller who was Cherie Blair's Private Secretary. Cherie had a considerable input to parts of this process, particularly when there were wives' programmes to be thought about as at the G8 in Birmingham. Last, but by no means least, was Angie Hunter who was Tony Blair's Personal Secretary. If you really wanted him to do something, you talked to Angie. She and Liz Symons were fortunately very close. It was all about relationships and building up a relationship with all these elements of Number 10 so they had reasonable confidence in what you were doing against a backdrop of the "classic FCO" having been found wanting.

They were prepared to take CHOGM as it came and then grumble about it because they quite sensibly realised that there wasn't much that they could do, but it gave them a datum point to decide what they wanted to do differently. It was the era of spin, an era of opinion management.

The EU Presidency logo was designed as a result of a competition involving children from each of the EU nations who happened to be in London at the time. They were asked to paint a star symbolising their country and the winners were put onto the Presidency flag. That was fine until the Italians took umbrage at the fact that the painting for Italy was of star showing a pizza. The poor kid who painted it was the son of a Carabinieri who was posted at the Italian Embassy and rapidly got posted away. Throughout the entire Presidency there were periodic protests about this 'insult' to the Italian nation.

Then there were the venues. Edinburgh had been agreed long beforehand for CHOGM, but the Government was absolutely clear that they wanted to get most of the meetings out of London. So that introduced a whole new dimension. Each of the meetings had a different

size and quality and calibre, where could you put them? It was decided that ASEAN was in some ways the least complicated and it was decided to hold that at the QE2 Centre in London. The G8 went to Birmingham because the Birmingham Conference Centre could hold it but that there would be a retreat somewhere near Birmingham. Eventually we settled on Weston Park which has been used for a number of high-level meetings since, but this was the first time it was used in this way. Arrangements were greatly complicated by an NGO that was orchestrated by a number of very respectable people who wanted the G8 to write off its entire debt to the developing world and were planning to blockade the leaders in the conference centre and not let them out until they had agreed to do so.

Because Scotland had had CHOGM, Wales had to have Cardiff. That involved converting one of the old buildings in the centre of Cardiff into a functioning conference centre, almost from scratch. There were considerable challenges, therein lies lots of stories. There was a desire to hold a cultural event attached to each of these meetings. In Edinburgh it was fairly simple, there was a theatre performance. For the others, when people started complaining about the costs Number 10 wanted the cultural events privately financed. Initially they had grand ideas of having Cirque du Soleil perform outside the front of Buckingham Palace with crowds watching in St James's and Green Park. I found myself turned into an event organiser and narrowly failed to make Cirque du Soleil happen over a dispute over television rebroadcast rights. We ended up having a combination of the Paul McCartney Theatre School in Liverpool and Vanessa-Mae as an Asian violinist give a performance in the Picture Gallery in Buckingham Palace, commercially financed. That involved me sitting down with theatre promoters, in that case Cameron Mackintosh, and taking advice on how to make things happen. There was another promoter for a concert for the G8 in Birmingham.

It was also decided to hold a national competition with the Design Council to design official gifts for the Summit. I ended up working with the Design Council and having to judge 200 entries which were winnowed down to about 20 that I took into Number 10 where the Prime Minister and Mrs Blair picked out the winning six.

Other things happened. We had a consultation with the ASEANs over how to organise the layout for the ASEAN meeting in the QE2 Centre. There was a lot of feeling amongst them that they didn't want a conference table, it's not the way South East Asians do things. They wanted armchairs and coffee tables. There must have been about 40 delegates so it involved pacing out the conference room and deciding if armchairs would fit. We commissioned a

young British furniture designer to make the armchairs and to design special coffee tables that would have room for papers and work from a functional point of view.

The Lord Chancellor decided to give the ASEAN Summit lunch. There had been controversy over his apartment in the House of Lords and specifically the bespoke wallpaper that was commissioned to match the Pugin building. We had to get the Leaders across from the Conference Centre and the way up to the apartment involved a number of narrow staircases. A way had to be found to get all the Heads of State in and out of the dining room and to put them in places where they would have enough room to sit. So you found yourself in that odd position of trying to make things work and fit.

Two things happened. I remember talking to one of the European Heads of State on the way over to the House of Lords and asking if he had enjoyed the Summit. He looked at me, groaned and said “No”. I asked what was wrong and he said “I want a conference table, they can see my knees”. I soothed, and eventually got him to admit that the armchairs were comfortable.

At the end of the meeting one of the Asian Ministers congratulated the Prime Minister on how comfortable the armchairs were and said that he wished he could take his home. So the next day we bundled it up and sent it to the Embassy and had it shipped back as a gift. These things happen. After the cultural event that evening, there were drinks afterwards for the Queen and the Prime Minister and I remember the next day the newspapers had a picture of the Queen talking to a punk rocker in a purple wig. The Palace rang me up the next morning to say “Wasn’t it fantastic!”

In Birmingham the debt demonstration happened to take place on the day the Heads of Government were at Weston Park, but I didn’t tell the organisers that until a few hours before and they were mildly upset to find that they were barricading an empty conference centre. Things weren’t helped by the fact that Reclaim the Streets, an anarchist group, had burnt a couple of cars in Birmingham that evening. The West Midlands Police closed the motorway, the M6, to get the Summit participants out to Weston Park. The house is marvellous but when you are dealing with a Summit like this you have to deal with advance parties from the Russians and the Americans. The US Secret Service are notoriously difficult to deal with so I decided I would have the US and Russian recce teams spend a night at Weston Park, which the leaders could not do because of timing. I gave them a nice dinner and there was not a

word out of either side, they went off like lambs but they got quite difficult later on, as they do. At the Summit we limited the numbers of people in the actual house to, I think it was, one plus one and one plus two for the Americans. There were several other stables and courtyards around the house where we put a hundred other hangers on and three nuclear briefcases.

The morning session finished and Clinton and Trudeau decided to go off for a walk. The grounds had already been thoroughly monitored and swept and every conceivable pathway was protected but I loved the expressions on the faces of the US Secret Service agents when they discovered they'd lost the President. There was a certain amount of panic. That was also the occasion on which Clinton and Blair gave a first joint interview on the Good Friday process in Northern Ireland, so it was quite significant from the point of view of politics and non G-eightery. It wasn't discussed in the Summit but it was a bilateral deal and the first time that Clinton had said something publicly with Blair, so it was a very valuable piece of support for the whole thing. So it does illustrate how you can use these summits to achieve other things.

Cardiff was the most technically difficult meeting of them all because of having to make a working conference centre from scratch within an old building. Labour Party politics intervened because there were two separate administrations, Cardiff City and Cardiff County and the Welsh Office. Peter Hain was the Welsh Secretary. There were certain political differences between him and the Mayor of Cardiff which very rapidly escalated when Nelson Mandela decided he was going to come to Cardiff as part of his farewell tour to say goodbye to the European leaders. Given Peter Hain's past involvement with Southern Africa and a long Welsh Labour Party tradition of involvement in the anti-Apartheid movement, these differences resulted in a nightmare negotiation of who would do what with Mandela at various stages of the programme.

What was so nice was that Mandela took time at the end, as he was leaving, to talk to my own staff. I remember one of them burst into tears when he came over and shook her hand. That for me was actually the most satisfying thing of the lot.

CP: Did you meet Mandela?

SE: Yes, I took him round. He was so impressive and somebody who really cared.

CP: The other thing I wanted to ask was about the relationship between the Foreign Office and Number 10 at the time ...

SE: Yes, interesting. I think there was a move on the part of Number 10 to take a more definitive and forward role in areas of foreign policy that interested them. But I think that's been a noticeable phenomenon ever since the Thatcher era. I think there is always this balance between Number 10 and the Foreign Office and it is continually shifting and it goes backwards and forwards. Certainly the creation of the National Security Council under the current Government has created a different way of policy formulation with a much more enhanced coordination role, so whether that means the Foreign Office's influence is decreasing or increasingly is entirely a matter for the circumstances at the time. Overall I do think that the FCO's influence on policy making is probably reduced and recent Government decisions to create a number of joint units on counter terrorism, security policy, counter proliferation and other things where the Departments advising Ministers are made up of units of mixed Departments, I think it's an open question about what that will mean for individual Departments and Departmental influence.

CP: So we will draw a line under that and move on to when you went to New York?

Deputy Permanent Representative, UKMis, New York, 1998-2002

SE: I was sent back to New York after the Summit meetings were over and the job of Director Conferences vanished. That was quite a new phase. Firstly the role of Deputy in New York carries Ambassadorial rank. Apart from UKRep, it's the only Mission that has two Ambassadors in it. Of course one of them is the boss and one is the deputy but the fact of life is that in these big multilateral posts there is more than enough for one Ambassador to do and in New York there is the requirement to staff the Security Council 365 days a year, and there is simply too much work for one. Jeremy Greenstock arrived very much at the same time as I did so we were new in there together. I'd had previous UN postings, Jeremy hadn't but learned very quickly. You operate as a double-headed, four-armed Ambassador although the Perm Rep is obviously the boss and the Deputy slots in behind him.

CP: Do you have your own specific roles?

SE: That depends on how the PermRep wants to organise it. The two of us tended to do everything when the other one wasn't there and although that can be a bit frustrating at the time it's probably a sensible thing because it means that the two of you have to be up to speed on everything and the Deputy needs to be ready to step into the breach when the PermRep isn't there. Jeremy was an excellent boss and we did work as a team.

Lots of things were happening. We had 9/11, we had the Millennium Summit for the General Assembly. It was a radical period in terms of peacekeeping, African problems mushroomed at the time and the whole international scene was shifting.

CP: You were in New York at the time of 9/11?

SE: It was an extraordinary time. Everyone has their own stories about it. We had come back from holiday and arrived the day before from Central America. My wife was due to go and buy our daughter a new laptop from a shop only a quarter of a mile away from the World Trade Center that morning, 9/11. It was also World Peace Day, which is not generally known, and there was a ceremony due to take place in the UN Garden when the Secretary General would ring the World Peace Bell which the Japanese had given a couple of decades before. I turned up at about 8.15am and had a Security Council meeting afterwards, we waited and we waited and Kofi Annan didn't turn up. Then I noticed smoke drifting across the East River. I thought I had waited around long enough, went into the building and found it empty and then went and found a phone and called home. The first thing my wife did was to ask me where I was, so I told her I was at the UN and she asked me "What are you doing there? It's been evacuated".

CP: So they'd evacuated the building and forgot to check the garden?

SE: Yes! So at that point I went back to the Mission and at that stage all we knew was that a plane had flown into one of the Twin Towers and there were still stories going on at that stage that it had been an accident with a light aircraft. Then the second plane went into the second tower and at that point I got a worried phone call from London asking if I was alright and if anyone was hurt. They explained what had happened and I told them that we were at least a couple of miles away from the World Trade Center and they weren't to worry, on that account anyway. Then the whole thing started to flow into its rather bizarre progression. It was very chaotic, it's the fog of war. After the second plane hit the second tower half of

New York's mobile phone connections went down, half the landlines went down, oddly enough the Mission's communications remained relatively intact but the Consulate's did not, they are in a separate building and they were the ones who had executive responsibility for all of this as a bilateral incident, not a multilateral one. So for a while we were relaying messages between London and the Consulate and that, in practice, went on for several days.

As far as the UN Mission was concerned, we spent the morning trying to come to terms with what was happening, there was then a Security Council press statement agreed by telephone because the Council couldn't meet because the building was closed obviously. A first press statement was issued by the French President of the Council on the afternoon of 9/11. We, the Americans and the French talked about what to do next. We being Brits and always planning ahead tried our hands at a first draft of a Security Council Resolution in the afternoon, which we then showed to the Americans and the French. The Americans suggested a rewrite of concept so as to avoid the usual formal use of language of a UN Chapter Seven Resolution but came up with some text that had exactly the same effect without using the traditional language. It was language which didn't appear to be actually invoking the full panoply of the UN Charter immediately, that came later. The way in which the Resolution eventually turned out was drafted in such a way as to give the Americans very wide ranging authority under Chapter Seven to take action in respect of what had happened on 9/11. The French, who were President of the Council, wished to take the Resolution through so on the morning of 12 September; the Council met in a small meeting and adopted the Resolution. I think it holds the world record from introduction to adoption of about 90 minutes because there was a palpable sense of shock. I didn't go to the Council Meeting but if you look on You Tube there are some moving photographs of a small number of people in the Council Chamber just standing in tribute. The shock was so palpable that people were ready to do almost anything.

While that was going on I went to see the Chef de Cabinet of the General Assembly, who happened to be Ban Ki-moon. (The President that year was a former Korean Prime Minister.) I went and asked what he was thinking the General Assembly might do about this. He told me they hadn't quite thought so I gently suggested that the Security Council was meeting in the morning and it might be appropriate for the General Assembly to meet in the afternoon and show it was taking some action. He looked at me then and asked what they should do. I said "You could adopt a Resolution, and here are a few elements". I gave

him a piece of paper and then left. It's interesting the way things work, but by three o'clock that afternoon the General Assembly was in session and adopted a Resolution that was not too dissimilar from the piece of paper I'd given him. One lesson from all of this is that if you pick your time you can often achieve large results in diplomacy.

Then we got into other things and for me it became very largely a question of managing the Mission. It taught me quite a lot about human dynamics, working in a crisis and how things basically changed. I don't think there was anyone in New York who wasn't affected by 9/11. The initial casualty estimates were much higher than the final figures but I can't think of a single person who wasn't affected in some way or been in the Twin Towers at the time. In our case the pilot of the plane that went into the Pentagon was the brother of a good friend of ours. But in the meantime the most difficult problem within the Mission was to make staff feel they were doing something useful because this was not primarily an UKMis issue. People wanted to help, were struggling to find how they could help and were getting very upset when the position on that wasn't clear. There was a job to do to maintain communications between the Consulate and the outside world while their telephones were down. In the end we ended up drafting in spouses of staff to help on the telephone switchboard, usually on the late night shifts. While keeping people motivated and making them realise that the UN had to go on and that there was a considerable role for the Organisation in taking part in the response to 9/11.

There were also a number of other staff problems simply because of where we had put our people in apartments. We had two families with young children both of whom had had a grandstand view of the second plane going into the second tower as they had their breakfast. One of those families had previously experienced the Kyoto Earthquake and became rapidly very uncomfortable about living in a skyscraper, so something had to be done to accommodate that. Two or three days after 9/11, you will recall a plane crashed on takeoff from Kennedy, once flights had restarted. We also had the problem of anthrax, some guy sending white powder in envelopes. People were keen to have a sense of reassurance and some guidance. There was a palpable sense of threat and people were not unnaturally concerned that they were in a place that had become a target.

I think the psychological element of all of this can't be under estimated. As managers you have to keep the team going in quite adverse conditions. Although this wasn't a war zone in the traditional sense of the word, when something as appalling and horrible as 9/11 happens

there are some distinct psychological changes. Very odd things were happening in the city, Manhattan below 14th Street was closed off for about a month and the Consulate had negotiated a deal with a church quite close to the World Trade Center where British families could go and leave flowers and get fairly close to the whole thing. But it was only reachable by subway, parts surrounding it were closed off, so there was the issue of managing that. Union Square just above 14th St was quite moving. It became the place where people sought information about their loved ones, people were missing, it took months and months before the whereabouts of everybody who had been in or close to the Twin Towers could be identified. There were notice boards, photographs, people seeking information, and a police clearing house. Interestingly, because New York is New York and Manhattan has the highest ratio of dogs per square foot on the planet, one of the earliest things people realised was that there were going to be dogs locked in apartments and that the owners weren't coming back. Two or three days after 9/11, ordinary people did sweeps of apartment blocks looking for animals and Union Square became a dog rehoming centre for a while, which was really quite sweet. It was amazing to see how people respond to the deeply unpleasant and unusual.

For a very long time, for months, all people could talk about was where they had been on 9/11. There was a tremendous outpouring of fellow feeling and US appreciation for UK solidarity. I remember we were invited to dinner in early October with our Park Avenue neighbours, who were rich property developers. We walked in to find their dining room festooned with Union Jacks. The main issue was to keep the Mission functioning, the staff motivated and pointing in the right direction. This illustrated the validity of the reward for a job well done is more responsibility and that keeps people going. It's traumatic but if you are working in a high pressure environment it's a strong motivating factor and it does keep staff going. The most important thing is to feel that you are being useful and that you have a role dealing with something that is both very important but appalling.

There are some quite moving vignettes. Our neighbours' daughter was getting married and they had booked the Waldorf Astoria for a society wedding. But that year Davos had decided to come to New York and came to the Waldorf as a gesture of solidarity, it must have been around November. This family being this family, the Waldorf approached them and said "We will pay to fly the wedding party of 600 to any of our hotels anywhere you want, take them to Hawaii, at our expense". The bride turned around and said "No, we have a

contract and you can't break it". So the Saturday night of Davos, the entire conference cleared out and went down to Greenwich Village while this wedding happened. We were on the guest list and I remember we had to take a bus from the Park Avenue Synagogue to the Waldorf through several layers of security cordon and then had a wild wedding party in the Starlight Ballroom until 2am and then walked home on a cold winter's night, through the same security.

I think you can only survive this kind of pressure for a certain amount of time and there comes a point where normality has to reassert itself. I think for us it was when we got a call from our friend whose brother had been the pilot of the plane that went into the Pentagon to say "The funeral is in Arlington in a week's time and you're coming". We said "We didn't know him, we know you, but we're not close family". She said "No, you're a British diplomat and you're coming". He was a naval reserve pilot, his family were military, his Dad and Mum were both buried at Arlington. For a while there was a stupid question as to whether or not he would have his own plot or have to share his family's. To me the answer to that is dead simple and it takes three seconds. But it took the Pentagon a few days and a lot of pressure. So we drove down to DC in early December, we went to the ceremony which was incredibly moving. The service was in the chapel at Arlington and then a long walk through the cemetery behind the gun carriage and a riderless horse and then the interment which the American Military does extremely well. I then felt "this has got to stop, its time you got back to normality".

After we drove back to New York I felt a lot better and normal service was resumed. But 9/11 did represent a major turning point in international politics. It was the beginning of George Bush's "Global War on Terror", it represented a major change in the way in which the international community approached terrorism, managed it, dealt with it, all sorts of new financial control mechanisms, all which went far wider than the UN but which impacted on the job we were doing. It happened at the middle of the posting and it was a paradigm shift and interesting to be there at the time, but difficult, and it produced some very interesting challenges and lessons and it led onto more ramifications and interventions in Afghanistan and so on which determined the next twenty years.

So it was an interesting time, but not the only interesting issue. I would highlight a couple of things. The Millennium Summit was a very big issue for the General Assembly, a very big

Declaration and it was part of the time when we worked hard to change the way that major UN documents were negotiated. We were very fortunate that year in having a courageous Namibian as Chairman of the General Assembly and we put quite a lot of effort into persuading him that the Millennium Declaration should be short, sweet and crisp and that any document of this sort that was negotiated line by line would just end up defaulting to the lowest common denominator and be a mess. He was then prepared to work on the basis of a series of Presidential texts.

CP: What was it trying to achieve?

SE: It was the precursor of the Millennium Development Goals to try and lift the developing world out of poverty. Poverty eradication was the key thing at the time. The Millennium Declaration set the scene for the Millennium Development Goals which then moved on to the next set of development goals which were adopted in New York last year. So it was a fairly pivotal event. At first all sorts of things got thrown into the Declaration but it was winnowed down. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the President of the Assembly, gathered a small group of advisers around him and had a small group of friendly countries, of whom we were one, and in something that was a new departure for the UN, developed the Declaration through a series of drafts which were produced under his own authority. He then tabled them and had meetings for anyone who wanted to come and comment on them. They weren't drafting comments; they were comments of concept if they thought he hadn't got a paragraph quite right. He would sit there, listen, take notes, go away and produce an amended version of the draft and the same thing would happen all over again. I spent quite a lot of effort encouraging his office to maintain that approach and it worked really well, until we got to the last bit of the draft where it was all agreed barring a section on nuclear disarmament, on which I got very clear instructions from London. At that point it switched into drafting mode because there were only about two sentences at issue. I remember losing heavily and having to go back with my tail between my legs. It was not terminal, I think the whole thing overall was acceptable. It was a very good illustration of how if you manipulate or can prod negotiations in the right way in an organisation like the UN, you can make progress.

That began to happen again on a number of Security Council issues, and the one I know best was East Timor. During that period the Council was also beginning to get out and about more, so if there was a problem area it would go and visit it. It was a really good idea which

had been disused for twenty or thirty years and suddenly the Council picked up its bags and went out again. The Secretariat had very presciently divined the need to start getting ready for something over East Timor, it didn't know quite what. It had approached some Security Council members and some non-Security Council members who had a key stake in the problem, the most prominent of which was Australia, and convened a group of friends to start to think about what to do next. As the situation got worse and Indonesian troops moved in and there was rioting in Dili, that group became quite helpful because it was a mixed bag of Security Council members and non-Security Council members. It was not an issue on which there were differences between Permanent Security Council members, so there wasn't a US/Russia clash for example. The Council became quite content to take its cue from the output of this group of friends, because it trusted us. Rather on the model of Middle East resolutions which tend to be drafted outside the Council but with input from Palestine and a number of other people, the Council was content to allow the group to make suggestions, put texts on the table and basically to orchestrate the running of the Council.

When the crisis was seriously brewing and Dili was in flames the Council sent a mission to Jakarta and to Dili, and Jeremy Greenstock took part in that. I think that high level diplomacy was pivotal in persuading the Indonesians to accept UN intervention. There had been elections which had then been contested and the Indonesian army had moved in to take control of Dili. There had been a UN monitoring mission which was a non-military mission which had been pulled back. The Security Council mission was pivotal in getting the Indonesians to accept that something military had to be done. There was nothing in the UN system to generate a UN force quickly enough and the only solution was a coalition of the willing, led by Australia. That would not have happened had the group of friends not existed.

I participated in a second Security Council mission a few months later after INTERFET, the Coalition force had deployed into Dili. We were able to travel throughout a fair amount of East Timor to see what had happened and then went over to West Timor where I think I owe my life to a UN Security Guard. We'd been through refugee camps in West Timor full of those who were very anti Timorese independence. I lagged behind and could feel a mob gathering around me but fortunately this UN security guard got me and frog marched me back to the rest of the party. We flew on to Jakarta. It was a very interesting experience of a crisis environment and very far removed from diplomacy sitting around a meeting table in New York. The UN was very fortunate in having a first rate Representative in East Timor at

the time in the form of Sergio Vieira de Mello who was a fantastic, charismatic Brazilian and was sadly blown up in Iraq and killed several years later. His death caused a huge trauma and ripple through the UN and caused them to take seriously issues about the security of their own personnel in conflict areas.

It was a really interesting time to be in New York, things were happening, procedures were changing, the international situation was changing and at that stage the UN was acting fairly reasonably in response. There have been ups and downs since, clearly the interventions in Iraq in 2003 onwards were a major blow to confidence and it took an awful long time for trust to be rebuilt and redeveloped and in many respects it still hasn't been. It was a very good first Ambassadorial posting to have.

Another trend that I detected, although I only saw a small part of the system, was a recognition by the FCO that you could use multilateral Ambassadors to take bilateral agendas forward outside the New York environment and that sometimes somebody coming from New York or Brussels, particularly when it was an issue that wasn't particularly suitable for a Minister, could have a good and disproportionate affect. I think the way that I remember this clearly was being sent off to Angola to really make a point that we didn't approve of the way that Angolans were treating civil society, we didn't like the corruption, we didn't like the way some of our aid projects were being diverted. I was asked to go. I remember being escorted in from the airport by a bunch of Gurkha security guards and having to queue up not to be vaccinated against yellow fever on the way in. I went to see a couple of aid projects, saw somebody in the Foreign Ministry, saw Embassy contacts, attended a meeting of civil society NGOs, and the Government obviously didn't like our message. I was quite chuffed to hear a couple of months later that there had been a meeting between an Angolan Government representative and the PUS and the Angolans had complained about some of the things I'd said. Michael Jay smiled at them and said "He was acting precisely under instructions". It's another interesting lesson for the use of diplomatic instruments; you don't have to do it in classical form. If it's useful to send somebody representing the UK at an international organisation to talk about things that are the business of that international organisation then why not, if it's cheaper and as effective.

This came back to hit me when I was at NATO and made at least one visit to Ghana, ostensibly to talk at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Centre but actually to try and help our

High Commissioner deal with some issues that had arisen over the withdrawal of British aid to the Annan Centre which had impacted on our relationship with Ghana. The fact that I'd come gave the High Commissioner an excuse to have a dinner and get everyone involved in the Ghana security operations together in one place and have some discussions which then resolved a number of different things. It was useful. Play your diplomatic cards effectively.

One other interesting aspect of the management of the Mission was that at the time the Service was becoming more diverse and was more accepting of different people, different lifestyles. Because New York was perceived to be a safe testing ground, we were often sent people who fell into that category, sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. The Americans can be very difficult over unmarried diplomatic spouses or partners. At the time I was there the US Marriage Act was quite clear that there could be no automatic visa entitlement for unmarried partners. One of the issues that we had to deal with in the Mission was couples coming out together, recognised as such by the Office, but the unmarried unofficial half only had limited access to the US ...

CP: Did that include gay couples?

SE: Yes, particularly, also the Marriage Act hit them particularly badly and I suspect still does. We did have a situation where the non-FCO employed half had to leave the US every six months to renew their visas and then come back. The difficulties also for them in finding employment were enormous. Employment was possible if they became a member of locally engaged staff at the Mission or the Consulate but that wasn't always possible, and if they wanted to get a job outside they had to go through the whole process of normal immigration checks, employers having to prove that the job couldn't be done by an American. So one of the interesting contradictions here is that places that you think are easy, aren't always easy. This made the job of those who were having to administer and manage the Mission that much more complicated. We had a joint management department covering both the Mission and the Consulate to cover part of that but these welfare issues took place against the background of the very high pressure environment we've talked about earlier. It illustrates some of the complexities of running a Diplomatic Service in a difficult environment.

Sabbatical at Yale, 2002

I had a short sabbatical at Yale because the Office wanted my successor Adam Thomson to be there for the beginning of the General Assembly and at that stage didn't have a job for me to go to. At the same time there was a very laudable wish to be a bit more open about the sum of the foreign policy initiatives we'd engaged in. I was lucky in being able to negotiate a three-month sabbatical at Yale to write up my experiences on East Timor for a book about the UN Security Council that was being published about a year later. It was a much less elaborate period than at Harvard where there was an organised programme, but for me it was very interesting. I found myself a desk in the International Relations Center at Yale and sat down to write a chapter for an academic publication. It was quite a good decompression period as well, but odd in the difference of lifestyles having moved from a Park Avenue apartment in Manhattan to a winter holiday let in Branford, Connecticut.

I had three very happy months, but also noticing the differences between Harvard and Yale, two very distinct and different institutions with different approaches to academia and a less organised academic environment. It was difficult after a regimented diplomatic posting to an unregimented 'write five pages a day' lifestyle, but it was a nice, brief interlude to rest after New York and produce a piece of reasonably well regarded academic work which was then disputed by another player in the East Timor game. I think it was helpful in exposing a bit some of the inside workings of UN diplomacy and the workings of the group of friends that we've talked about earlier, which was new and innovative for the Security Council. Equally, the comment that appears alongside my article in the book (which was written by Ian Martin who was the Secretary General's Representative at the time of the Timorese elections) illustrates the feeling on the ground in East Timor that New York simply wasn't delivering what they needed and to a degree that was entirely justifiable ...

(CP: What was the book?

SE: It was a study of the Security Council published by the International Peace Academy).

... Similar things came back to haunt me at NATO where I think part of these feelings are inevitable because those operating in the field see things very differently from those at Headquarters, feelings of non-delivery and being asked to do the impossible. I think to a degree that's almost inevitable when you are running a peace operation or a military

operation, a foreign intervention because the policy making dimension is very different from the operation at a tactical level and if you have to do a strategic deal in a place like the Security Council or the NATO Council sometimes imprecision is the key to it. But the last thing that those who have to institute an operation on the ground want or need is imprecision. And the trick is to get them to accept that as an opportunity, not a threat because imprecision gives them a certain amount of room to do what they think is right. And I think that is another enduring lesson that comes out of all of this for me and it certainly had an impact in a NATO context later on.

CP: And then you got posted to Dublin?

HM Ambassador, Dublin, 2003-2006

SE: Yes, I was released from multilateral diplomacy into a very special and particular bilateral world. It was a very good time. The final ramifications of the Good Friday Agreement were being worked through, the Celtic Tiger was still roaring, albeit in a slightly muted way, so economic times were good in the Republic. It was a sustained period of economic growth. A lot of the basic economic building blocks had been undertaken with the EU and other support and were coming to pass, road improvements, and the North/South politics were better. Dublin is a singular post. We mattered. The British Ambassador in Dublin was, and still is, a public figure. One had to get used, very quickly, to the fact that it's a very small society and that whatever you did would be watched.

There was, and to a degree still is, a security threat which meant living with close protection for the first time in my career. It was provided by the Garda, the Irish Police. We paid an advance visit in early 2003 to see Ivor Roberts, my predecessor. We had lunch in the Residence, Glencairn, which is a Foreign Office legend. It's a large, mock Scottish castle that when the UK first moved in had 43 acres of gardens and grounds and when we were there had about six. It had been sold, a number of years before we moved in, on delayed completion and that's still where it's at. As we were having lunch with the Roberts's, my wife looked out of the window and saw a couple of people studying the roses outside with things on their backs. "Are those gardeners?" she asked. No they were actually armed police in the grounds. So we lived with armed police in the grounds 24 hours a day and I had a team of four Garda protection officers, three of whom were obligingly called Jim when

I arrived. The kids had different nicknames for each of the three Jims and for some reason the Garda team always seemed to have two with the same name at any given time. It was unusual going out to a restaurant where there was a policeman on the door and the sniffer dogs had gone in beforehand. It became irksome and wearing, and I didn't think, and still don't think, that the threat justified it. But it's very difficult where you've had the assassinations of Christopher Ewart-Biggs and Earl Mountbatten to persuade the security authorities to take their foot off the pedal because nobody would want another incident like that, least of all me. It had got to the point by my third year where I'd managed to dispense with close protection in Northern Ireland, but still had it in the Republic. People need to take a prudent view of all of this but when I first went, it took three cars to take the family dog for a walk, and we eventually got it down to two. I have to say that the Irish Police are very good at close protection, they know when to be close and when not to be, when to vanish and when not to vanish. The one thing that was clearly set out was that nobody came inside the house. I would not have liked that. I found that I could take it for about six weeks at a time and then I would hop on a plane and come to Britain.

It was a very interesting role, late stage counter insurgency, a very close bilateral economic relationship, a very supportive relationship in all sorts of areas and actually underneath the political requirements and a bad history of 800 years of colonialism, we are very close. There are almost more people of Irish descent living in Britain than there are in the Republic. It's similar in the US. The closeness is very interesting and the cultures are very different. The first thing people will say to you in Ireland is "Where are you from?" and that boils down basically to a potted family history but you have to be very careful as British Ambassador in Dublin, and avoid any hint of anything that could be construed as being patronising. You need to be culturally sensitive, you need to enjoy the people and the environment, which I happen to do, we still have lots of friends there and go back fairly frequently.

I had two key roles at that period. The first was to promote trade, economic development and investment. It's not widely known that Ireland is our fourth or fifth largest trade partner and for a while when I was there Ireland was the second largest inward investor into the UK. So there's a huge economic stake. It was quite important to allow the economic relationships to develop. And then there was a whole process of cementing the reconciliation both between north and south and east and west. There's a marvellous thing called The Council of the Isles, which has the Republic, Northern Ireland, the UK and all the

Crown Dependencies, the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey and so on, represented on it to discuss issues of common concern. It was a process of cementing reconciliation and of practical cooperation. When I was there, for example, an agreement was negotiated about emergency ambulance cover between north and south on the island of Ireland. It was very satisfying to see that when there was a major road accident west of Dublin, ambulances from Northern Ireland automatically and without difficulty covered emergency calls in the north of the Republic to allow Irish ambulances to go to the aid of that road accident.

A lot can be done in terms of simple practical cooperation, practical negotiation but symbolism plays an enormous role and, oddly enough, military symbolism. I would make sure that there were regular ship visits to Dublin and every nine months or so *Illustrious* or *Ocean* or one of the Navy's larger ships would come into Dublin. There would be a fairly standard pattern to all of this, we'd do something useful. The last time *Illustrious* came, we organised a seminar on disaster relief because she'd been engaged in that in the Caribbean and knew how to do it. It was interesting because word got out about *Illustrious*'s role in the Iraq War, so there were quite serious protests. Some Irish NGOs were calling on other Irish NGOs to boycott the seminar. Interestingly, the majority of the Irish NGOs said "No. We have a lot to learn, this is a good thing". So the protest subsided and that was an interesting index of the developing level of the relationship. The Captain of whatever ship it was visiting would throw a large party and a number of senior Irish Ministers and officials would come and enjoy themselves. On one occasion we got the band of the Royal Irish Regiment to beat the Retreat so we had the quixotic situation of a British naval ship in an Irish harbour with a British Irish regiment beating a naval retreat. People loved it. Similarly for the Queen's Birthday Party I would bring the band of the Royal Irish down and we would have a British Irish regiment performing British military ceremonial on British diplomatic territory in the Republic. I had a deal with the bandmaster when I first came, you know that the first part of the ceremony of Beating the Retreat is fairly free flowing, so you could play whatever marching music you want, then you hit the evening hymn and it becomes very formal. So in my first year there were mostly British military marching tunes, by the end they were Irish Republican ones. People watched and appreciated that.

Similarly I was fortunate to be there on the 90th Anniversary of the Easter Rising. I was approached by the Foreign Ministry to say that there was going to be a Parade and was I coming? I said "Of course, I'll come, why wouldn't I? The territorial claim to Northern

Ireland had been renounced under the Good Friday Agreement, we were friendly neighbours". But I noted that the 90th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme fell a week or so later and that they had never officially commemorated it. They said they would think about that. A few days later they called me back and said they were issuing a commemorative booklet for the Easter Rising, and would also issue one for the Somme and a first day cover. They also suggested it would be a good idea to have a ceremony involving the President and the Cabinet in the British War Ceremony in Dublin. Great! So that happened and in one of those kind of weirdly symbolic things we had an Irish Army band providing music for a British military commemoration.

Symbolism makes such a difference. If you look at what happened during the Queen's State Visit, very nice symbolism, she laid a wreath in the Irish Garden of Remembrance and went to Croke Park which is the home of the Irish Gaelic Athletics Association. Those things make a huge amount of difference. I think the other thing about working in Ireland is the use of informal channels to do work. If I asked to pay a call at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they looked a bit shocked and seemed to reserve formal office calls for when they wanted to deliver a telling-off. Informal chats were done everywhere. Shortly after we arrived Ireland hosted the Special Olympics. It was lovely, the British team came across and we gave them a party in the Residence grounds, they were all lovely people. I walked into Croke Park for the Opening of the Special Olympics and who should I encounter but the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in full uniform who'd come down. At rugby matches usually the Northern Ireland Secretary, a good dollop of politicians and the police and the army commander would appear and talk quite naturally to their Irish counterparts.

It was an interesting and productive time, instant access, lots of good friends. If you wanted to make things happen in terms of a North-South reconciliation issue, you could. Personal relations were very important and essential and the same also applied north of the border. I made it my business to go to Belfast very frequently; the Irish swallowed a bit, but didn't really mind, they knew they couldn't do anything about it. In terms of working relationships I had three masters in the sense of the Foreign Secretary nominally, the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Northern Ireland Office who probably gave me most work coming out of Whitehall or Belfast. There was a complex network of North/South relationships to manage and then strategic issues in Number 10. Again it was very important to be known in

Northern Ireland. I remember being in Dublin for Ian Paisley's first visit, he insisted on meeting Irish politicians in the safety of British territory in the Embassy. They were fine with that.

There was enormous fellow feeling. I remember on 7/7, that was the day of the Waterford Tall Ships Race and we were down in Waterford having lunch on a three-masted schooner. We heard the news of the bombings in London on the radio driving back and the next thing I knew was a phone call in the car from the President who said how appalled she was and what could she do. She turned up at the Embassy the next day to sign the Book of Condolence, and again, the symbolism and very genuine solidarity.

A final illustration of how things work in Ireland, when I presented credentials to Mary McAleese, the first things she said was "You must come and learn some Irish". So I said "Of course, but please don't expect me to master it". She herself was a very good Irish speaker. There are three sorts of Irish and they are all slightly different, they all have different vocabulary and it's a complicated language construction. There is an Irish Centre in Donegal in a small town called Gleann Cholm Cille in Southern Donegal which is a serious academic institution, but for a week each year it runs a course for everyone (beginners to advanced) and about 150 people turn up, including Mary McAleese every year. It's a small village with three pubs but for that week every year (my American colleague was also invited) it suddenly had three close protection teams foisted on it in the three pubs, in two of which there was music and dancing every night. We did Irish in the mornings, some suitable activity in the afternoon (walking or set dancing) and an evening lecture in the pubs until the early hours. It was a very good way of getting to know Mary McAleese and her husband very closely. We usually ended up having a nightcap and a piece of cake in her rented house after each evening and then went on to the pubs where the close protection team tended to hand out the drinks. I've forgotten most of the Irish now but I did get to level two by the end of three years.

CP: Did you use your Irish?

SE: No not really. I remember we were invited back for the State Visit. The language is important because it symbolises the Irish nation. On the night before the State Banquet in Dublin Castle we were having dinner with Mary McAleese's Irish tutor who had become a

good friend of ours. He looked at me rather wistfully and said “Wouldn’t it be nice if the Queen could say a few words of Irish at the State Banquet. We’ve been told she only speaks French occasionally and it’s out of the question.” I said that I thought that was true and it was very unlikely. Blow me down, she got up to speak and delivered the first paragraph of her speech in Irish, nicely orchestrated by my successor. That of itself had a tremendous impact because it indicated that the UK was willing to acknowledge Irish cultural requirements. It was a very well organised visit and I think a lot of good came out of it.

The other issue that I recall having to deal with was Sellafield and the issue of nuclear waste supposedly polluting the Irish Sea. I visited Sellafield regularly and made a point of eating seafood but I could never persuade the Irish Energy Minister to make a similar visit himself.

CP: Do you think their concerns were valid?

SE: No, I think Sellafield operated pretty much within accepted international tolerances. There are difficult and old installations in Sellafield which do present a number of problems to remediate but that’s nothing to do with waste outside the plant. The radioactivity produced by radon which is common in the island of Ireland would far exceed anything that Sellafield would emit. It was difficult to persuade them although we did manage to sign a bilateral on the exchange of nuclear information which helped quite a lot. That was the single formal treaty I managed to sign whilst I was in Dublin.

UK Permanent Representative to NATO, 2006-2010

I moved on at short notice again having been appointed UK PermRep to NATO in 2006, the last and possibly the most challenging post of the career, coming back full circle. I took over from Peter Ricketts as he was posted back to London to be PUS. Peter had started the process of unifying, integrating the Delegation. I mentioned earlier that when I was at NATO before there were two separate organisations, the Diplomatic Delegation and the office of the Military Representative. The Canadians for many years had operated one joint delegation. Peter had taken a look at it and quite correctly concluded that it was cheaper, better and more effective to integrate the staff.

When I left they were just putting the final touches to the open plan offices within a rather inconvenient Delegation space. I think it has the longest single corridor in the overseas estate, it's about 80 metres from one end to the other with offices on either side of it. They had begun to finalise the design of open plan offices and I came in to the last two years of making that process happen. There wasn't too much building work because you couldn't do much with the rooms which were very large, but it was a question of listening very carefully to staff about who would sit where and, because the various sections were being amalgamated, which jobs should be civilian and which jobs should be military. One had to listen very carefully, work very closely with the Military Representative (and I had two very excellent ones) finding out what staff grumbles were and letting them come up with practical solutions. That process is surprisingly complex.

The other big issue for me was the travel time and I probably erred in travelling too much. I think on average I was out of Brussels about a week each month. Partly that was because NATO had so many operations going and in this context Afghanistan obviously was the largest element of it all but there was also a lot of political dialogue with NATO partners ranging well into the Stans, down into the Balkans and the process of assimilating new Allies. When I got there the first tranche of Eastern European members had arrived and a second tranche (Albania and so on) joined while I was there. So there was a lot of work to do and there was a fairly robust schedule of Ministerial meetings, three or four Defence Ministers meetings a year, three or four Foreign Ministers meetings a year and a Summit most years. Since I left there has been more of an effort, rather like in the EU, to have as many meetings as possible in Brussels but while I was there at least one or two Defence Ministers meetings took place in capitals. There was something of a travelling circus and a communique negotiating treadmill and all under the consensus rule that we talked about earlier.

CP: Did that become more difficult with more members?

SE: Well, yes and no. It really depended on the subject matter. I think the most difficult thing was not necessarily getting consensus over the communique but in maintaining interest and commitment with Allies who were less enthusiastic about the operational requirements of Afghanistan. Almost the entire time, there was almost always a shortage of troops who were prepared to go in and tackle the difficult areas of Afghanistan. There was a big NATO Coalition but for part of the time there were more non-NATO states participating than NATO

states, but in small numbers. You had a theatre where you had very difficult operational environments in the south and east and not so difficult in the west and north. There was an annual NAC visit to Afghanistan but I used to go with SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) more frequently. If you talked nicely to the military they would give you space on their planes. I would be in Afghanistan twice or three times more every year, usually going with SACEUR.

There was lots of pressure at NATO and continuing distrust caused by Iraq. When I got there in 2003 there was still real feeling on the part of some Allies that the Brits and the Americans couldn't really be trusted. I was told by a former PermRep who I talked to before I went, "Stewart, do you know the best way of getting your way as UK PermRep to NATO?" I said "No, tell me". He said "Say as little as possible and get other people to put your points for you". A lot of the time spent in Brussels was persuading people of the merits of the case and letting them take it forward.

Another part of working at NATO is also how closely how the Allied PermReps and the Deputy PermReps get to know each other. And that's like the Security Council in New York, they'll almost spend more time with each other than they will with their spouses. Negotiating, especially when you're in a consensus environment, involves getting to know other people very well so you can judge how they'll react and you can best judge how to get the right answers out of them.

The Delegation was another post where I had multiple masters. I worked equally for the Foreign and Defence Secretaries in London because of the integration of the Military Delegation and, in any case, I had to pay attention to what CDS wanted and then also Number 10 when you moved into NATO Summit territory. The OD Secretariat, as it then was, took a very keen interest in what was going on and had their own requirements for NATO policy. A complicated set of reporting lines back. Almost always the MOD would be wanting to take a closer interest in the day-to-day stuff than the FCO did. They had operational and financial issues, the MOD is responsible for a large part of the NATO budget and the FCO has a smaller responsibility for the NATO civil budget. So there are different resource interests. Now that Security Policy Department is becoming a joint unit between the FCO and the MOD there may be a more integrated approach; we'll see.

Another aspect of the job was knowing and understanding the senior military. I'd begun to do that before when I was there as Political Counsellor but it became absolutely essential as PermRep. You had to do quite a bit of cultivation of the Chairman of the Military Committee in Brussels and his deputy, get to know the key military commands, SACEUR in Mons down the road, always an American Four Star and figure out ways to get round his outer office. The Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia, who initially was an American and then became a French Four Star when France re-joined the integrated military structure in 2009, and then the two operational headquarters commanders in Brunssum in the Netherlands and Naples, and then - as and when - the operational commanders in places like Afghanistan.

CP: How did you find working with the military?

SE: Very interesting. Senior generals are very bright people, so it's more a question of getting over cultural sensitivities and getting them to be flexible within the chain of command, getting them to accept, as most of them will, that communication is all and informal communication is very useful. But again it comes back to building relationships of trust and confidence. That was another big element of the job. I'd simply remark that with American generals, American Four Stars in particular, they tend to take their own people with them from job to job as staff and that staff tends to build a wall around them. But if you can get to know them and get them to give you their personal email addresses then they become willing and open to react very quickly.

Another underlying theme of the NATO job was Russia; there were lots of issues with Russia, particularly over Ukraine and Georgia. There was a form of dialogue mechanism in the shape of the NATO Russia Council, but it became very difficult to use because of inbred Russian suspicions of NATO. The mistrust is probably slightly less with the military because they do at least understand each other as professionals and more within the political. I think it comes down more to huge numbers of decades of Soviet propaganda about what NATO was. Because the Russians tend to see the world in terms of spheres of influence, they regard NATO as a threat, an offensive body, rather than a defensive body which is what it really is. Trying to deal with the Russians was very difficult and they made interesting choices of Ambassadors to NATO. For the first two years I was there, there was a former KGB border guard general who did very little, wasn't trusted and kept very quiet. He was

then replaced by Dmitry Rogozin who is now Deputy Prime Minister in Moscow, activist, right wing, military historian, flamboyant, very tough. He used to regularly send members of the NAC a bottle of specially labelled Peacekeeper Vodka. There were huge amounts of distrust. I remember Putin delivering very unpleasant sermons and messages to a NATO Russia Council Summit Meeting in Bucharest in 2008 in respect of Ukraine and Georgia, similarly, Sergei Lavrov being particularly tough when we paid a visit to St Petersburg and Moscow.

I remember going into Georgia shortly after the Russian invasion and being taken up to Gori near the border and seeing the mess the Russians had made of the Georgian military base there and being quite astonished how difficult they'd found it to blow it up. They had set a number of explosive charges which hadn't had the desired effect so they had satisfied themselves with looting all the plastic plumbing and taking it back over the border. So again in these conflict situations there is an element of the ridiculous sometimes.

The last thing I did at NATO was help set in hand the negotiation of the new Strategic Concept in preparation for the Strasbourg Summit in 2009 which set it in hand and then elaborated it in 2010. It's an interesting illustration of how these things work. I had been getting worried for some time that the existing Strategic Concept, which is essentially the Alliance's mission statement, was outdated.

CP: When had the last version been written?

SE: It must have been ten years earlier and the world had changed. There was no Soviet Union anymore and a much better defined NATO role in crisis management and so on. The first thing I had to do was to convince London that an effort to rework it was a good idea. Once I'd done that and got the go ahead to talk to a number of Allies, then the next thing to do was to convince the Secretary General that it was a good idea. I did go and talk to him privately but again in overt NATO meetings I said very little and took the advice of my predecessor and really got other people to argue it was a good idea. Then we moved into the negotiation of a Declaration for the Strasbourg Summit that essentially set in hand the process to renegotiate a new Strategic Concept. There were all sorts of issues about who should hold the pen, not necessarily in terms of the Declaration but in the writing of the new Strategic

Concept. We set our Deputies to work to negotiate a first draft. We finally got to the point of having to negotiate the final difficult issues among Ambassadors.

CP: So then you retired?

SE: Yes I retired.

CP: So at the end of your career, looking back on it? ...

SE: I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I always think that the best test of all of this is whether you can think of a job that you'd rather be doing and my answer to that is No.

CP: And your wife as well?

SE: Yes I think so. By the time we'd finished we'd been abroad for probably fourteen of our last seventeen years and that was getting too much, we needed to come back. I think that was probably enough.

CP: You picked up a number of decorations along the way?

SE: Right place at the right time. I don't think there are too many diplomats who get one for a War Honours List, so my first one was for the Gulf War in 1990.

CP: You must have been very proud.

SE: Yes, you are always pleased to get something like that and at least it is the significance of the fact that someone somewhere thinks it's a job done well.

CP: Did you go to the Palace?

SE: Yes, for all three of them. The family were very pleased and it was very nice for my father in particular that he was able to come to the last investiture when I was knighted and he was pleased about that.

CP: Unless you can think of anything else, that's it! Thank you very much.