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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME
RECOLLECTIONS OF CHRISTOPHER LONG CMG
RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY MARTIN LAMPORT
EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER LONG

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ML: The date is 12 September 2018 and Martin Lamport is recording the recollections of Christopher Long. What led you to the Foreign Office?

CL: A multi-lingual background. My father was deputy head of modern languages at the best school in Belfast. His boss had a French wife. My father married their daughter, who had numerous cousins in France. So we always had French around at home - spoken, books, papers, magazines. I enjoyed Latin and Greek at school and was trained in Russian to interpreter standard in the Royal Navy. At Balliol I read Latin and Greek and then Arabic with Persian, continuing at Münster University in Westphalia, where I lived mostly in German. The FO was an obvious career choice.

In 1963 I began at the FO in the Arabian Department on the desk dealing with Bahrain and Qatar, of which I knew nothing. But even a very junior desk officer responsible for two small countries after a few weeks knows more about them than does anybody else in the Office; current experts on them are mostly deployed in the relevant posts abroad. The desk officer handling the papers in London is by definition always up to date. The highlight of my year was an official visit to London of the minuscule Ruler (later King) of Bahrain. He was received at high level, lunch with the Queen, dinner at Mansion House etc. I wrote the briefs for the visit and drafted the speeches of the Lord Mayor and the FCO Minister of State, Edward Heath.

MECAS, 1964-65 and British Embassy, Jedda, Saudi Arabia, 1965-67

In August 1964 I was posted to the FCO's Arabic school, the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies in Lebanon. In March 1965 I went on as third secretary to Jedda on the Red Sea, then diplomatic capital of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was then still primitive, and oil only just beginning to flow. Jedda's climate was oppressive. From April to October the average temperature was 80 degrees F and humidity 99 %. In the notional winter from December

until early March it was however delightful. The many visitors from London all came in these clement months, bankers, civil servants all saying “we heard Jeddah was tough, but it’s a perfect climate.” The summer heat was made worse by the FCO’s refusing us real air conditioners. These were only then being brought in the world over, firstly in the USA. Ours had to be British made, and could not cope with the heat. As Third Secretary I was responsible for political work under the Head of Chancery and Ambassador, plus media, news, broadcasting and British Council work. A year later Bill Fullerton arrived from MECAS to take over media work, which he did with flair. That year television was being introduced in Saudi Arabia. It was sensitive since Islam in principle bans portraying the human form. The imams were told that if they allowed television, they would be the ones appearing on TV screens propagating their messages. That settled it. Though the Foreign Ministry was in Jeddah, other ministries were in Riyadh and we often needed to deal with them too. There were no roads to the capital. So we had to fly to Riyadh at dawn (two hours in a Boeing 707), visit one or more ministries and then fly two more hours back. The task was often to deliver top level messages to the Defence Ministry on arms contracts from the Prime Minister or Defence Secretary. These had to be delivered personally to this or that prince, whose staff could not be trusted. I met the Minister of the Interior, Prince Fahd, later king, and on one occasion King Faisal himself. I often had to translate original English texts into Arabic. We had Pakistani translators in the Embassy, but not cleared for security who also were not trusted with sensitive material. So I had to type them myself on an Arabic keyboard, no small chore in a permanent heatwave. At Jeddah I learnt much from the Counsellor Bill Cranston whom I remember with the greatest respect.

STATE VISIT

After two Jeddah years I was posted to London in April 1967, a huge relief. This coincided with a five-day state visit by King Faisal to London. The Foreign Office fielded interpreters throughout the visit. I was on duty on the first and last days. The first began with a ride in a state carriage with the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and King Faisal up Constitution Hill on a glorious day to watch a gallop-past of the King’s Troop of the Royal Horse Artillery. It was amusing to ride as interpreter past the crowds, totally invisible to them. I interpreted trivial chat in the carriage and later at the LCC. Other FCO Arabists did more demanding sessions at the Mansion House and in Whitehall.

I then joined a ten-week Treasury Economics Course, set up to address the fact that many FCO and Home Civil Service officials in those days knew next to nothing of economics. In ten weeks we heard lectures from 35 various economists each of whom seemed to have a different tale to tell. Contact with other participants was more useful. Towards the end I was summoned to Personnel Dept. expecting to be told of my new job in London, which I had strongly requested. The personnel officer told me I was urgently needed in Venezuela!

I protested, he blustered and I foolishly caved in. So three weeks later I was on an eighteen-hour flight to Caracas for two years as Second Secretary there.

British Embassy, Caracas, Venezuela, 1967-68

Caracas was then a very attractive place, 3,000 feet above sea level and separated from Caribbean beaches by a 9,000-foot mountain range covered with tropical rain forest. Spanish was the first hurdle. I read a teach-yourself book on the flight out. On my first morning at the office - on duty alone telephones rang demanding replies in Spanish. With a smattering of holiday Italian a decade earlier, I found that the mixture worked quite well. Also foreigners in Caracas – even monoglot Yankees – soon absorbed reasonable Spanish.

The Embassy was far too big. It had three counsellors, the deputy to the ambassador, another heading a large Commercial team and a propaganda expert from WWII mostly absent in other regional countries propagating anti- Soviet Cold War propaganda, entirely futile in US-dominated Latin America. We all had three Defence attachés and an otiose Labour Attaché. My boss, the no.2 left for London two weeks later on mid-tour leave and medical treatment from which he never returned. A spare first secretary with special duties was asked to act as Head of Chancery, a task for which he had little skill and no appetite. I soon found myself doing the job and with it the embassy's political reporting and overall management. The defence attachés handled defence sales and numerous RN and RAF Caribbean visits, but had no briefing on how to or wish to cooperate with the rest of us. We were in short seriously over-staffed. We even had a token aid budget to spend in wealthy Venezuela. I had £25,000 per year to spend. I recall two projects, one supporting the health of pearl fishers in the Caribbean, and another to meet a request from Caracas city for help with their Fire Brigade. I brought out a senior member of the London Fire Brigade who advised them to buy scores of new British-made fire engines.

The climate was spring-like all year. Huge avocado pears were sold at every crossroad. You could pick limes in your garden and squeeze the juice straight into gin and tonic in the gentle sunshine. The social centre was the Country Club, where foreigners and locals played daily golf and bridge among a plutocratic international community. In their mid-twenties Swedes, Dutch, Danes, Germans and Americans and many friendly locals partied and week-ended on Caribbean beaches. A comfortable life. Little political reporting was needed. Venezuela had got rid of its previous military dictator, Perez Jimenez, by the election three years earlier, of an agreeable social democrat, Gonzalo Barrios. His time was now up and Rafael Caldera, a blameless centre-right democrat was running to replace him. The question then was whether Venezuela would be the first ever country in Latin America to enjoy a peaceful transition from one democratic government to another. My Canadian colleague and I agreed to do a joint report on it. We put much effort into an excellent piece of work.

The result was that as I found out later, that when it reached London the tour report was initialled off, half-read, by a junior desk officer. Our effort was entirely ignored. In short, London was not interested in Venezuela – an early signal of the weakness of the Latin American side of the FCO highlighted at the outbreak of the 1982 Falklands War. However that may be, I returned to London as a First Secretary in autumn 1968 to join the Near East and North Africa Dept where more rigour was observed.

Caracas had been fun, but was a poor career move. Clearly it was not worthwhile to serve at a post of no interest to London.

Near East and North African Dept (NENAD) 1968-1970

Back in the FCO in autumn 1968, I was promoted first secretary and given the desk dealing with Lebanon and Jordan in NENAD next to a colleague dealing with Israel. We had to handle several acute crises between 1968 and 1970: civil war in Jordan, PFLP terrorism and the Leila Khalid hijackings of EL AL, Swissair, TWA and PANAM airliners to Dawson's Field, a remote landing strip in the Jordanian desert. This last engaged the FCO crisis management machinery - (the "Emergency Unit") for a full month. The crisis had arisen in Jordan, so I was involved day by day throughout. As a Resident Clerk living in a free FCO flat with fifth floor views over St James's Park my two-minute walk to work eased some

burdens but added others to 24 hour duty in the unit. Edward Heath as Minister of State supervised the crisis and at last decided to free Leila Khaled into the Egyptian desert. His abject surrender was at once seen as a catastrophic error. Its execution required virtuoso planning to ensure that no more went wrong.

THE RESIDENT CLERKS

To be a Resident Clerk, (single officers only) was a rare bargain. I had, free of charge, one of six flats in the FCO building in exchange for doing one all-night duty 1700- 0800 each week plus one whole weekend's duty in six. Our most common tasks were consular support for the public outside office hours. The FCO took consular help seriously – it was important to public opinion and the media, as mass travel mushroomed. Other problems ranged from minor security incidents to oddities such as the death of an Ambassador in London or a faked kidnapping in Uganda. Most merely entailed urgent contacts with those responsible in Whitehall, at all levels.

Our High Commissioner in Kampala rang up one Sunday at dawn to tell me that his Consul had been kidnapped. I passed the news on to 10 Downing St, where Harold Wilson was at home for the weekend. No.10 replied that the PM wanted action taken – ideally action to be shown on television next evening. I was on the phone all day, at last located an East African security expert in Devon, brought him to the Home Office to renew his passport and had him driven by police car to Heathrow onto the runway to board a plane about to take off for Kampala - the whole screened live on BBC TV news. The value of this comedy was clear a few days later when it turned out that the consul had not been kidnapped at all, but had conspired with Ugandan friends to kidnap him to trade for UK visas. The consul was sacked. The PM and FCO had their publicity. Was it worth it?

TRANSFER TO POD – Personnel Operations Department, 1970-74

By 1970 my next transfer overseas was already looming. I asked POD to extend my home posting and within days the Head of the department invited me to join his team - an attractive offer of a role in inner FCO politics and in building the careers of my 6,500- plus colleagues in the world-wide Diplomatic Service. My first job in POD was to manage postings in Africa and the Middle East. One of my early visitors who called to discuss career prospects was Patricia Stanbridge, on her way to a political posting in Tel Aviv. We were married in September 1972 and she returned to London to join NENAD at the Israel desk. I had

meanwhile moved to handling postings within the FCO, placing with heads of department of various standing the best help available. Our POD team, chaired by an Assistant Head of department, prepared exhaustive monthly tables of planned postings, to be agreed at higher level. Our focus was on fairness, balance and discretion. I took a close interest in placing new entrants to the FCO, previously treated haphazardly. When I had joined in 1963, our reception was chaotic; untrained recruits distributed randomly and left to learn the job by osmosis. With Alan Munro, John Goulden from the recruitment section I set up new systems to assess, place and support each new batch of recruits. Some thrived at once; others were slower off the mark. But many of even these later reached the highest levels in the service.

I was impressed by the ethos of POD. We took immense trouble to balance people with jobs available, taking account of their ability and above all fair play. The most able were easiest to place, second or third-raters, unconscious of their standing, were the hardest. We held strongly that favouritism was a grave risk to morale and must be avoided. We firmly resisted the efforts of senior figures to place their favourites in plush postings.

Training was a POD growth area in the 1970s, matching what was being done in the outside world. The new Training Dept moved rapidly on from launching new recruits to providing management skills for mid-career officers rising into supervisory roles. A Head of Chancery course was set up for candidates to posts as assistant heads of FCO Departments or of political sections in overseas posts. To the surprise of many, the courses proved popular, stimulating and enjoyable for both participants and more senior officers. In short, POD policies, postings and promotion systems worked well for the FCO, though criticised by some as authoritarian.

REFORM ATTEMPTS

Not long after I left POD, several senior officers pressed for a less hermetic system in which they themselves could play a direct role. A new experimental system was introduced under which monthly lists of posts expected to become free were published and those due for a move had to apply directly for them. This soon caused problems: the now more senior selection board members were irregular in their participation, and inconsistent in their decisions, approving postings of applicants less suitable for them than alternatives likely to be listed next time round. Other candidates failed to get posts they wanted for which they were well qualified when stronger over-qualified rivals beat them to it. Those overlooked more than once or twice were naturally demoralised and those selected frustrated by missing posts

more suitable for them which became free soon after. The unreformed POD would have avoided these follies. The moral is: Reform does not always succeed. The lessons were ignored and errors repeated by the same people still later when they reached the top of the service. In the late 1980s, many more “reforms” were brought in, recommended by a commercial consultancy which ignored FCO’s traditional established culture, thus reversing the historic 19th century Northcote Trevelyan report on the public service. Cronyism and favouritism were the result, and a plague of self-promotion, marked by heavy use of elbows: a disaster in a world-wide service where any unfairness is all too visible. All this was invoked as competitive and akin to standard practice in banks and industry. I deplored it as Trevelyan would have done.

Head of Chancery, British Embassy Budapest, 1974-77

In Personnel Dept I learned that the number two job at Budapest would come up in mid-1974. I had been interested in Hungary since the 1956 Budapest Rising which began the process of undermining the brutal Soviet occupation of the whole of Central and Eastern Europe ultimately completed in 1990. Hungary was full of historical and cultural interest (notably music) and strategically important. Communist Budapest was a gloomy and economically depressed police state. But one attraction was that the UK embassy was relatively large and well-staffed. My job would be unusually weighty for my first secretary rank, as Deputy Head of Mission; no. 2 to an able Ambassador, the hon. John Wilson, later Lord Moran, and chargé d’affaires when he was away.

My wife was justifiably dubious. She was expecting our first child. Life in Budapest would be arduous. But after much debate, six months of learning Hungarian in London and the birth of our daughter, we set off in late August for three years in Hungary.

Budapest made a good first impression in late summer, but soon relapsed into bitterly cold winter, often stifled by brown coal fog. The joke then was that if you came to Budapest from Paris, you would think you were in Moscow; and if from Moscow, you would think you were in Paris. War damage was still widely evident.

Diplomacy in all Soviet satellites was an uphill grind. Ordinary Hungarians were penalised for any contact with diplomats from NATO countries. We managed however to establish good friendships with several members of the Academy of Sciences whose international repute gave them protection from régime harassment. Pleasures were few: classical operas at minimal cost, contacts with bishops and Cardinal Lekai of the persecuted Catholic Church, excursions to historic towns across the country plus occasional trips across the border to Austria, Transylvania and Yugoslavia.

Hungarians who were communist party members (formally limited to 10% of the population) led marginally easier lives than ordinary people, though standards were low for all: they had access to special shops and slightly better holiday accommodation in state or factory hostels. But travel abroad was effectively barred for everyone except those travelling on official business and some world-class musicians and sportsmen, (provided that they left family members behind them). Others could apply once every three years for one-month tourist passports. These were granted only to candidates with an unblemished State Security record. Churchgoers or those suspect in other ways were refused a passport with no explanation given. Those allowed passports could take with them the equivalent of only five pounds in hard currency. In summer noisy columns of East-German-built Trabants or Romanian Dacias rattled towards the frontier into Austria, loaded to the gunwales with whole families and enough canned food to survive their whole holiday absence. These restrictions effectively imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain the mass of the Hungarian population. It was a revolting and massively unworthy régime for a European country of a thousand-year standing.

In the autumn of 1975, when John Wilson was away, we fielded a delegation of UK trade union leaders: Len Murray, TUC Secretary-General, Tom Jackson (NUPOW), Joe Gormley (NUM), Jimmy Knapp (NUR) and others, well-known thorns in the flesh of successive UK governments. They came as guests of the Hungarian government. Several top Politburo members (a rare honour) gave them a lavish banquet in a medieval castle at the Danube Bend. I was invited to represent the Ambassador. The assorted proletarian honorary barons, did the fullest honour to the local wine. In the year after Roy Hattersley made an official visit as Minister of State for Europe at the FCO in the Callaghan government. In a break in the programme we took him for a ride up the Danube to brief him on local problems and the varied persecution meted out to the Hungarian people. Our democratic grandee made it clear that he would not be adverse to exercising similar powers in a Labour UK government. Early

in 1977 John Wilson was transferred to Portugal and replaced by Richard Parsons, promoted from his post as head of POD. Our closing months at Budapest saw the birth of our first son, Patrick.

BELGRADE CONFERENCE 1977-1978

At the end of our Budapest posting, I was attached to the UK delegation at a six-month conference in Belgrade, the initial review meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, negotiated in Geneva and signed in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act which applied some easing of the travails of the Cold War between its 35 signatories. Richard Parsons was appointed to lead the delegation on a visiting basis from Budapest. I went down with him to work in its senior political committee and much enjoyed a first taste of multilateral diplomacy – a fascinating skill of its own of which I was to learn more at Geneva in 1980-83.

Counsellor, British Embassy, Damascus, 1978-80

Soon after New Year 1978 I was promoted counsellor and posted to Damascus as DHM to Ambassador James Craig, the FCO's best Arabic speaker. Syria was politically and strategically important, but we worried that life in Damascus might be as hard as in Budapest but with added Arab inefficiency. In the event it proved surprisingly attractive despite its proclaimed Ba'athist Arab-Socialist policies, a heavy East German presence and steadfast resistance to Israel. The dictatorial Alaouite régime pocketed a large slice of GDP but allowed the rest of the population with its many distinct minorities, various Christian communities, Muslims, Kurdish and even a small Jewish remnant, to live in relative freedom and prosperity. Syrians have always been the star traders of the Arab world. Their country had other great advantages: a very agreeable climate, several thousand years of history and culture, world-famous monuments (Krak des Chevaliers, the Omayyad Mosque, Palmyra, Bosra), a fine souq and many tourist opportunities. We started well: whereas in three years in Hungary we had been in half a dozen private homes, the score in Damascus was twice as much in the first few weeks, and continued, also with joyful weekend fresh-air lunch parties in the mountains along the border with Lebanon. And we were only 40 minutes by air from Cyprus, a wonderful bolthole in which to take a brief rest from Middle Eastern tensions.

The fall of the Shah in early 1979 and his replacement by Ayatollah Khomeini brought to the Levant a massive change in the balance of power in the Middle East. It led ultimately to the Syrian civil war sparked by the ill-fated “Arab Spring” of 2011, fanned from the start by massive Saudi and Qatari supplies of money and weaponry to the so-called “activist” rebels. It was thus in effect transformed into a proxy Sunni war against Shiite Iran. Western policy in Syria since has been uniformly useless and even harmful. Countries mired in civil war are not helped by bellicose foreign intervention. The UK ambassador at Damascus said at the start that it would all be over by Christmas, a view as wrong then as when it was first used in July 1914.

Back in 1978, Douglas Hurd, Minister of State at the FCO, visited in James Craig’s absence. I took him to call on President Hafez al-Assad, which lasted over an hour. We were impressed by the veteran dictator’s shrewd focus on the whole Middle East. Other UK politicians followed: David Steel, David Alton and several more. Syria was becoming recognised as a central player in the politics of the region.

In summer 1979 we had a Royal Naval visit, the first ever to Syria (alas never repeated since). HMS Dido called at Latakia, the Soviet Union’s sole Mediterranean naval base, to an ecstatic welcome from the local inhabitants. Her Commander RN Captain had a 1,200-ton warship, a crew of 220, a helicopter, and 40mm rocket launchers with missiles capable of obliterating Odessa with a single broadside. At the same age, and analogous rank in the public service I was outclassed, in command of two typists, four junior staff and no rockets.

In summer 1980, Patrick Wright replaced James Craig, and in October I was released for my dream posting at UKMIS Geneva.

UKMIS Geneva, 1980–83

While New York is the centre of UN politics, a hive of tense debates, Geneva is the centre of positive UN work on technical and humanitarian subjects; notably refugees (UNHCR), labour (ILO), intellectual property (WIPO), world trade (GATT, later WTO), Third World development (UNCTAD, now defunct), health (WHO), nuclear disarmament, conciliation and peacekeeping; and the home town of the Swiss-based International Red Cross (ICRC). Human rights is divided between Geneva and New York handled more fruitfully in summer sessions at Geneva where the atmosphere is more constructive than in New York.

Multilateral diplomacy is a special skill; building consensus among governments from round the world, when and how to intervene and agree practical decisions. Friendly contacts made in one Geneva forum are valuable in other areas too in a diplomatic community where New York point-scoring gives way to the search for common ground.

GATT/WTO is the sole exception, with its tough negotiations among senior visitors from capitals. Officials living in Geneva for WTO work support their own visiting plenipotentiaries.

The head of the UK Mission – (Permanent Representative = PR) at all the organisations to which the UK is accredited in Geneva in 1980 was Peter Marshall. I was his deputy for all except GATT.

With many areas of interest and action, it was impossible for PRs to cover them all personally. They tended to specialise in subjects of current interest to their governments. DHMs had to cover subjects their PR had no time for, to support them in other ways, to manage the rest of their Mission's staff working on other areas, and to handle urgent problems arising when the PR was busy at the Palais des Nations. Peter Marshall chose to concentrate on refugee problems, then a major concern in South East Asia (Hong Kong boat people and others). He had been elected chairman of the main committee of missions interested in refugee problems.

My US opposite number and I jointly ran the "Geneva Group", a working committee of the main UN donors to UN agencies with an interest in coordinating their aid policies.

Many DHMs became involved with organisations of special interest to them. My own was the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), the centre of the world Red Cross movement, a key element in Switzerland's historic policy of neutrality and of philanthropic aid for victims of conflict, prisoners of war and wider humanitarian problems. The Red Cross was born of an initiative of a Geneva traveller, Henri Dunant, shocked by massive casualties at the French/ Austrian battle of Solferino of 1859. My ICRC contacts arose from hunger striking IRA prisoners in Belfast, then an acute worry for HMG. The ICRC offered to mediate. The offer was accepted at once. I had to settle the rules with the ICRC. I was impressed by them and in many later contacts with them, in Geneva itself during the 1982 Falklands War, when they helped over Falkland refugees, Argentinian prisoners and protection of hospital ships under the Geneva Conventions on War and Armed Conflict.

Late in 1982 Peter Marshall left Geneva to become Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. I was relieved to end a very agreeable and worthwhile tour in Geneva in October 1983 to return to the FCO to succeed Oliver Miles as head of the department where I had worked years before, Near East and North Africa Dept.

Head of NENAD, FCO, 1983–85

Amid the tensions of Arab/Israel, Syria, Egypt and the Maghreb, oil-rich Libya was our major headache. Muammar Gaddafi, its vicious dictator, had reduced Libya to a slave state. Dissenters were arrested, tortured, stripped of their property, and rarely emerged alive. He had wider ambitions and began to send shiploads of weapons and explosives to the IRA in Ireland - of which our intelligence services were soon aware.

Libyan exiles who had taken refuge London demonstrated regularly against his tyranny outside the Libyan People's Bureau (LPB) (Gaddafi's name for the former Libyan embassy) in St James's Square, London. Gaddafi bitterly resented these and the LPB staff complained with increasing vigour to the Home Office, demanding that demonstrations should be banned, demands routinely refused on grounds of freedom of speech.

On 17 April 1984, a small peaceful demonstration was taking place outside the LPB, accompanied by a policewoman, WPC Yvonne Fletcher, when shots were fired from inside the LPB, one of which one killed her.

This led to a dramatic instant break in diplomatic relations with the closing of the PB and the UK Embassy in Tripoli. NENAD played a central role in the process; in COBRA meetings ably chaired by Leon Britton in Mrs Thatcher's absence in the Far East.

There was massive UK media response and over 30,000 letters from the public, shocked to see the LPB staff one of whom (but it was not known which) had been the killer being escorted safe and sound by British police out of the LPB direct to Heathrow. Our UK embassy team in Tripoli had to be repatriated in parallel, and we had serious concern that Gaddafi might attempt to block or delay them. A private unofficial personal representative called without warning at the FCO saying he had a personal message from Gaddafi and demanding to meet a UK official. I was instructed to field him and tell him in the clearest Arabic that diplomatic relations no longer existed so that he could not be received. He asserted that Gaddafi now regretted what had happened and wished to cancel the break in diplomatic relations, resume friendly dealings with UK across the board, and offer £1,000 in

cash as compensation for the death of WPC Fletcher. This weird offer reflected Bedouin traditions of paying “blood money” to settle a death with no further ado. I told him that we could not consider this. He called again next day to repeat his message and I gave him the same reply.

We ended by having the Libyan aircraft loaded and waiting on the runway at LHR and ensuring that the BA flight had taken off at Tripoli before allowing the Libyans to leave for home.

This was the short-term end of the crisis, but it led later to much more; notably the Libyan terrorist murder of several US soldiers in Germany, the US bombing of Libya from UK air bases in May 1986 and not least the Lockerbie bombing on 21/12.1988 of Pan am flight 103 to Detroit from Frankfurt together with renewed Libyan efforts to smuggle weapons to the IRA, duly frustrated by the RN.

Meanwhile NENAD was busy with Arab terrorism, Arab/Israel and the Middle East in general. FCO Minister of State Richard Luce chaired in Tunis an internal conference to review area policy. Tunis was then the temporary base of Arafat and the PLA after being bombed out of camps in Beirut by Israeli aircraft as part of Israel’s occupation of South Lebanon. Our conference agreed on ideas which alas were never realised. Soon after, I accompanied Richard Luce on a visit to Khartoum, the first such contact with Sudan for many years. Stephen Egerton, AUS for the Middle East and I visited Moscow for talks with Soviet experts on the Middle East. More to the point, the Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe visited Cyprus, Beirut, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia with a large party including me. All this was standard well-intentioned diplomatic activity which as often in the Near East was meant to signal goodwill but achieved little.

I myself was at this point entering the zone of another posting probably as an ambassador. But fate gave me a surprise in the shape of a sudden return to the FCO’s central administration.

Chief Inspector and Deputy Chief Clerk, 1985-88

In autumn 1985 the then FCO Chief Inspector and deputy to the Chief Clerk, (the overall head of the FCO Administration) left his post unexpectedly and a successor was urgently needed. This was an ambassador level Under-Secretary post, involved in managing all the FCO personnel and resources of posts abroad. The Treasury was then introducing new

inspection systems throughout Whitehall; and the FCO, though not a high-budget ministry, was attracting closer Treasury interest. To run a widely deployed service requires adequate human and financial resources. Well trained FCO inspectors visited posts abroad and home departments on a regular basis. Managing the system faced two main challenges: to show the Treasury that we were doing the job rigorously and to reassure FCO staff at home and abroad that our mission was to help them and not to save money at all costs. Inspectors are proverbially feared (cf. Gogol's masterpiece "The Government Inspector").

As Chief Inspector, I did little direct inspecting myself. But I was asked by the Treasury to start by doing a personal survey of the 30+ Under Secretaries, all the top level officials of the FCO. This was an interesting exercise to inflict on my new colleagues, of whom I had to abolish one, whose post was otiose, as he readily acknowledged.

The larger overseas posts were inspected by teams of two or three inspectors – mid-career DS counsellors. In the closing days of some inspections, I visited the post under scrutiny to confirm that all had gone well and delivered sensible results. When the final reports were ready I held meetings for all in the FCO concerned with the posts inspected, before asking the PUS to endorse them. As air travel became more affordable, I visited some of the major posts under inspection in Asia and beyond; a bonus in understanding the wider world.

My duties as DCC included supervision of several personnel departments – POD, Training Department, the recruiters in PPD and a share with successive Chief Clerks Mark Russell and John Whitehead and the PUS in processing the top level postings at home and abroad. I also represented the FCO on a Whitehall committee of Home Civil Service Departments led by the Civil Service Department, steeped in pseudo modern management doctrine under pressure from Lord Rothschild's Policy Review Staff. Its ideology spread to the FCO after John Whitehead and I had moved on, when our successors commissioned a commercial report on the FCO. It totally ignored our ethos and provided excuses for a posse of ambitious younger colleagues to challenge traditional promotion systems. The inevitable consequence was intrigue and favouritism. Another by-product was bureaucratic target-setting and performance-rating. Other HCS reforms included the introduction of bonus payments and separate salary-setting for senior posts, also private sector ploys entirely unsuited to the FCO.

British Ambassador to Switzerland 1988–92

My next posting was as ambassador at Berne. At the heart of Europe, the Swiss Confederation (population (ca. 8.5 m) is one of the most successful countries in the world. The roots of today's Switzerland date back to the thirteenth century AD when three mountain cantons near the Gotthard Pass signed a formal agreement that each would go to the defence of any other which was attacked from outside. The agreement, codified in the 1481 treaty of Stans, specified that each member canton must fully respect all the freedoms, rights and customs of the others. Mutual respect has been the foundation of Switzerland's stability and self-confidence ever since. The William Tell legend is well known as the classic assertion of Swiss toughness and self-reliance.

For many centuries Switzerland remained an impoverished agricultural nation whose tough mountain farmers served as mercenaries in the recurring summer wars of many European powers, while avoiding embroilment in the causes of conflict. This was their only real source of hard currency. Only in the nineteenth century did solid industrial development arrive, chemicals and pharmaceuticals in Basle, watch and clock manufacture in the winter months, financial services and tourism. Switzerland now produces advanced engineering products, pharmaceuticals and international banking to the highest standards.

UK- Swiss relations have since the nineteenth century been close in trade, banking and tourism and sustained by a large and influential British community. Switzerland remains the world's outstanding model of effective prosperous democratic government. Its now 26 cantons keep their distinct traditions and diverse cultures, and live and work in several official languages. The citizens of every canton maintain their historic respect for those of every other. The referendum system, operating at communal/ cantonal/ and federal levels, gives voters ultimate control of government at all levels, defusing residual tensions. Referendum results are accepted without challenge. Everyone respects what the Sovereign People has decided. Consensus-seeking has been ingrained in the Swiss since the 13th century. The contrast with the dictatorial EU is painfully clear. As a prosperous and self-confident country in the heart of Europe, today's Switzerland faces massive EU pressure to sign up to EU domination. The Swiss people are strongly opposed, but the federal government feels a need to coordinate policy with the EU in many technical areas. In my years in Berne the Swiss/EU dialogue was of close interest to Whitehall: one of my main chores was to report on it to London. So I was always in close contact with the Swiss

negotiators who set off monthly for Brussels armed with fresh ideas on how to address agonising problems, only to return empty-handed, depressed and humiliated by the contempt they had experienced from the EC. As I write in 2020, similar EU arrogance is on open display in the post-Brexit UK-EU dealings of 2020.

An early bonus for me in Berne was to hear of the projected World Economic Forum (WEF) then approaching its opening session in January 1989. It is now a major annual high-profile business, political and media jamboree, owned and run by Professor Klaus Schwab of Geneva. At the start he invited to Davos as guests the ambassadors to Switzerland of major countries, clearly with the aim of encouraging us to help bring political and business stars from our own capitals to take part in following years. Attendance at the first session was unimpressive, with a dull Belgian minister addressing a sparse audience. It was however clear to me that the format would suit UK politicians down to the ground. I pestered the FCO to induce a UK minister, preferably a Cabinet member, to take part next time. Cecil Parkinson responded and duly shone, after which others followed, exponential growth took over and the WEF grew into the \$multi-million world showpiece it now is. I enjoyed being a guest at the next few sessions and in breaks in the programme skiing above Davos with Swiss captains of industry and bankers, and lavish meals with international media and PR tycoons.

Numerous British ministers and VIPs came to Switzerland during our tour on working or political visits, notably Douglas Hogg (Trade), George Younger (Defence), Douglas Hurd (Northern Ireland), Cecil Parkinson (Transport), Geoffrey Howe, Malcolm Rifkind (FCO) and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her husband.

SEPTCENTENARY CELEBRATIONS 1991

Three special visitors came to honour the seventh centenary of the Swiss confederation: Lord Chancellor Mackay of Clashfern, H of C Speaker Bernard Weatherill and the Prince of Wales. These celebrations were studiously Swiss: of top quality but understated and deliberately economical to avoid any criticism of overspending. One highlight event was held high in the Alps above the Rütli Meadow where William Tell had with his crossbow shot the legendary apple from his son's head. Lord Chancellor Mackay, Speaker Weatherill and I sat together on a peak above Lake Lucerne while scores of Alpenhorns trumpeted their fanfares across the valleys from distant peaks; a life-long ultimate tourist experience.

THE VISIT OF THE PRINCE OF WALES

The Swiss also invited junior members of the main royal families in Europe – from Spain, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden etc who turned up en masse. A reception was held for them in an architectural miracle: an aluminium structure shaped like a circus tent designed by the internationally admired Swiss architect Mario Botta. This too was deliberately economical, being designed to be taken down and reused elsewhere in years to come. Prince Charles was the star of the occasion, the central focus of the media and the recognised senior guest invited to deliver the keynote speech, which he did with his customary flair.

VISIT OF MRS THATCHER

In early 1991 the Swiss began to press for a visit by the UK Prime Minister, no doubt influenced by her Bruges speech. Her visit took place in mid-September as the last leg of a triad to Budapest, Prague and Berne. Mrs Thatcher had long been a warm admirer of the Swiss and had a good friend in Lady Glover, widow of Sir Douglas Glover MP who had sponsored her as Margaret Roberts MP when she was first elected to the H of C. The Thatchers had often visited Lady Glover on summer breaks. Our visitors arrived at Berne's mini-airport on a Wednesday afternoon in a small aircraft. We gave a relaxed and very cheerful party in the evening with selected local friends. Next morning we set off at 0800 in a special train to Basle to visit Ciba-Geigy, a major chemical and pharmaceutical firm with large research facilities in the UK. Mrs Thatcher greatly enjoyed her visit. As a chemistry graduate herself she enjoyed the high technicality of their research briefing. Back in Berne she had a robust discussion with the Federal Council, the inner cabinet of the federal government who were more than happy with her views on the EU. Next day we were in Zurich to meet top bankers and businessmen at a Swiss banquet and in the evening on to spend the next day at Lady Glover's house. This ended the official programme, so I said goodbye to the PM and mentioned that I would see her off at the Zurich airport on Sunday morning as spelled out in the visit programme. She said "You must not do that." I said, "Why not?" She said, "You have your family and your children and you have been looking after me for the last three days continuously. I see no need for you to come to the airport". I said that I must see her safely off my territory. She said, "The Consul General can do it." She said, "I categorically forbid you to come to the airport." I naturally gave in. The Consul General was happy too.

At home in Berne on Sunday evening the phone rang from Downing Street and Mrs Thatcher said “Ambassador, I just wanted to reassure you that I am safely home, that it all went well and I am most grateful to you for all you did for us.” She sounded like an aged aunt just home from a family week away.

British Ambassador to Cairo, 1992-95

In April 1992 I was transferred on promotion to Cairo, the largest UK embassy in the Middle East. The embassy residence there was built in 1894 for Lord Cromer and thus was now over-due for extensive reconstruction and refurbishment. The contractors wanted us to move in to a villa in Zamalek for the duration of the works. I saw this as a recipe for delay and chose the Forth Bridge option, moving from one bedroom to another as the works progressed. With twelve double bedroom suites to choose from, this was easier than it sounds.

CAIRO: ROYAL VISITS: THE PRINCESS OF WALES

Princess Diana arrived in our second week in an aircraft of the Queen’s Flight for a five-day stay in the house. This was her first solo royal venture. It was very happy, a great success locally and a world media sensation. Her programme included a blind school in central Cairo, other social visits, a meeting with President Mubarak, lunch with his wife, a visit to the Tutankhamun exhibition in the National Museum and two whole-day trips in her aircraft to Luxor and Aswan.

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF ALAMEIN

In late summer 1992 was due the 50th annual commemoration, widely expected to be the last, at the Second World War cemeteries on the site of Montgomery’s break-through victory of El Alamein in 1942. It was to be a very large event, involving Prime Minister John Major, the Duke of Kent, Defence Secretary Rifkind, the Chiefs of Staff of all three UK armed forces, comedian Harry Secombe at the head of 1500 veterans, a military band, dozens of peers and MPs, a Royal Navy frigate at Alexandria complete with helicopter, and representatives of France, Greece, Australia, New Zealand and even Italy and Germany. This was a massive assembly and a huge logistic challenge in a vast desert in hot summer, an unforgettable experience for all participants. Three days, however, before it began, a lone terrorist shot dead a British girl and wounded her boyfriend near the town of Minya in Middle Egypt. This was the start of a long-term terrorist campaign targeting the tourist industry, a major source of revenue for Egypt from the 300,000 British tourists expected each year, the largest national

group of foreign visitors. It was the top subject on John Major's agenda when I took him to see President Mubarak immediately after his arrival from London. Throughout his three-day visit John Major was clearly more concerned by UK politics, notably anti-EU Brexit pressures building up in Parliament, than by anything else, much less the politics of the Middle East.

POLITICS IN EGYPT AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Mubarak and his military regime lived in great comfort among his 70 million poverty-stricken subjects. Corruption was rife, the intelligence services and police unbridled, justice in tatters and the periodic elections a farce. His overriding policy was to remain in office at all costs, scrounging money from Gulf Arab states and the USA, EU and any other conceivable donor. US support for Egypt was almost entirely in the form of subsidised weapons made by US industry to reward Mubarak's reputed moderation (i.e. passivity) on the Arab-Israel dispute. There was a tacit US/EU agreement that the US, as the only power able to influence Israel, would lead on Arab-Israel, and that the EU would pay the costs of repairing damage caused by periodic Arab/Israel clashes. The US diplomats heading the US role all had close personal links in Jerusalem. The "Peace Process" was thus at deadlock, leaving Israel entirely free to extend and consolidate its grip on occupied Palestinian territory.

The Egyptian economy was largely stagnant. One hopeful sign was that the UK had by early 1992 agreed with the Egyptian government the outlines of a Cable and Wireless bid of \$850 million to install in Cairo the first mobile telephone network in the Middle East, a major prospective stimulus for the Egyptian economy. We duly agreed the last details in autumn 1992 and the contract was ready for Mubarak's signature. But after three months of mysterious prevarication we learned that Mubarak had been warned by his intelligence services that the proposed network could not be hacked by their security-based eavesdropping. It was therefore quietly dropped, regardless of the damage to Egyptian trade and industry. Democracy, peace-making and prosperity were thus all in suspense. The internal terrorist campaign grew steadily over the next few years, monitored in a new FCO Travel Advice system originated in my embassy and long since applied world-wide. Under Mubarak and his current successor, Field Marshal Sisi, Egypt has continued steadily down a path of heavy repression and static economic growth.

Among Egypt's and indeed the world's best in quality but least known cultural treasures is Saint Catherine's Monastery of Mount Sinai, founded in 400 AD and situated at the foot of

Mount Sinai, where Moses twice received the Ten Commandments. When they arrived in Sinai from the Nejd in 639 AD, Arab invaders led by Caliph Omar posed an acute threat to the monastery, but after talks with the monks, Omar called off his troops and gave the monastery a document formally respecting its religious status, which has been honoured by the local Muslims ever since. It is now a world heritage site ruled as an autonomous Greek Orthodox Abbey by Arch-Abbot Damianos wholly independently of the Orthodox Church. When I visited the Arch-Abbot I found him deeply concerned about tourists and other modern pressures and the risk that his monastery's treasures might be appropriated by the Egyptian state. These included its millennial collections of unique documents, several of the oldest original surviving manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments, and ancient painted icons dating from before the 8th century Byzantine Iconoclasm. He accepted my invitation to Cairo to lunch at my Residence with EU ambassadors to discuss how we might be of help to him, perhaps not least by signalling European interest and readiness to intervene if the monastery needed support. The ploy succeeded. The Arch-Abbot invited the entire group to visit the monastery en masse. When the Prince of Wales visited Egypt in March 1995, he too took a strong personal interest in the monastery as described below.

In mid-September 1994, Cairo was host to a large international conference, the final preparation meeting for the Conference on Population and Development (CPD) due to be held in 1995 in Peking. This was designed to be the climax of a multi-year UN family planning campaign, whose aim was to couple Third World Development funding with obligatory (for aid recipients) birth control, largely led by US manufacturing and "philanthropic" (Bill Gates) interests and thus had considerable emotional charge, most participants expecting unanimous endorsement of their proposals with the exception only of several Latin American countries and a strong observer delegation from the Vatican. Overseas Development Minister Lynda Chalker led the UK delegation. In accordance with standard protocol I was designated her deputy. I had worked with Lady Chalker in London and admired her work. I introduced her to the Vatican delegation. The conference proved an electrifying experience. The main speaker at the first plenary session, the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, delivered a tough exposé of the advanced Nordic countries' pro-contraception stance, which the mass of the delegates applauded. The second speaker, however, the Pakistan premier Benazir Bhutto, took an entirely different line, arguing that to force contraception on the Third World was unacceptable for Muslim women and a grave

breach of women's rights in general. By its close, the Conference had agreed compromise conclusions very different from the Nordic donor countries' plans.

Throughout our stay in Cairo we were much visited by UK ministers conscious of Egypt's tourist attractions and its location at an easy staging point for long-distance flights. They came on short private visits as uninvited guests on their way to or back from Africa or the Far East. Some came to Egypt as official guests of their Egyptian counterparts, notably Douglas Hurd, Lord Mackay of Clashfern (cf Berne supra) invited by the Egyptian minister of Justice. At around that time my genial naval attaché, Commander Peter Blanchford RN told me that the Suez Canal Authority had for the first time given permission for the Royal Yacht HMS Britannia to pass through the Suez Canal on her way to the Far East for Royal visits there and to return the same way. He said that her captain wished to invite us and our family to travel on his ship on her way south. This was a great treat for my wife and me and our two sons, then on holiday in Cairo. We joined Britannia at Suez and lunched in great style on board as we sailed quietly to half way down the canal at Ismailiya. When we disembarked there, Blanchford told me that the Captain had offered a similar treat for suitable Egyptian guests during Britannia's return passage six weeks later, when Lord Mackay was to be in Cairo as guest of the Egyptian justice minister. So we were able to offer on Britannia the usual return hospitality for a visiting British minister. Given the historic and emotional importance to Egypt of the Suez Canal (built by De Lesseps in 1869 and nationalised by Nasser in 1956), this was a very special treat for the Egyptian guests, the Justice Minister and several others, all of whom had asked to be included, with their wives. Coming on board at Ismailiya and landing at Suez, they were blissfully happy guests.

Other particularly successful visit from home – thanks to the British Council and my Welsh Guards defence attaché – was a two-week tour of Egypt by the band of the Welsh Guards, the last British soldiers to parade through Cairo when UK forces vacated Egypt in 1957, and now the first to return in happier times. They retraced their previous route across the Nile, played at tourist events across the country, beat a ceremonial retreat at a banquet in the Residence and after careful security planning played to spellbound crowds for a full hour at midnight in Cairo's historic centre.

By 1995 I developed ill-timed health problems, accentuated by Cairo's serious air pollution, and it was decided that I should move back to Budapest until retirement at age 60, then strictly imposed by the FCO. My last major Cairo experience was therefore yet another

Royal visit, this one by the Prince of Wales, as a return for Mubarak's state visit to London in July 1991.

VISIT OF THE PRINCE OF WALES TO EGYPT, MARCH 1995

The full programme included the usual obligatory items: calls on President Mubarak, religious leaders Christian and Muslim (the Coptic Pope Shenouda, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the president of the Islamic university etc), military parades, the classic tourist sites at Luxor, which HRH much enjoyed, and official entertainment. I proposed that he should also visit Saint Catherine's Monastery, an unprecedented innovation with full Egyptian government approval. So on his last day in Egypt, Prince Charles flew to Sinai, where he was ecstatically received by the monastic community. To the Arch-Abbot's surprised delight, the Prince insisted on attending a full Orthodox liturgy, including at its climax ceremonial veneration by the whole community of the Monastery's principal historic relic, the skull of its martyred Patron Saint. The direct participants were all much moved, none more so than the Prince. The direct result was that on his return to London Prince Charles established a new charitable foundation of his own: the Saint Catherine Foundation with a mandate to support the monastery and its historic treasures. The new Foundation, generously supported among others by Greek shipping magnates resident in London, has since its inception given substantial continuing financial, technical and academic life-support to the Monastery and its treasured collections.

Ambassador to Hungary, 1995-98

After medical treatment in London, and detailed briefing in London and Brussels (NATO), I arrived in Budapest in June 1995.

We found it dramatically different from its gloom as a Soviet satellite. The economy was buzzing: fully stocked shops, hordes of tourists, permanent traffic jams and line after line of new construction sites. This reflected heavy investment financed by the London-based European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) established in 1990-1 on the fall of the Berlin Wall, and privatisation, largely by private companies from the USA, Canada, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland and the UK, but above all Germany, reflecting the close links with the GDR in Soviet times. The process offered considerable scope for government intervention and opportunity for accepting commission fees.

One particularly impressive development site was that of the new Central European University (CEU) in the middle of downtown Pest, endowed by the American billionaire George Soros. It was controversial from the start: separate from and incompatible with Hungary's network of historic universities, countrywide and including three world-class ones in Budapest itself. The CEU was aimed at students from the wider region, offering scholarships to non-Hungarian students and paying its teaching staff substantially more than the salaries paid at Hungarian universities. For a few years, Soros selected and financed some dozen Hungarian students at Oxford, among them Viktor Orban. Soros visited Budapest annually to inspect his investments and employees and was soon openly pursuing policies unpopular with Hungarian politicians. He was therefore widely seen as an egoistic intruder pursuing his own political interests, rather than a benefactor. I met him once in his local HQ, a hotel which he built for his own use. I was escorting a BBC director who came from London to ask for help from Soros in financing a modest BBC project to establish a local radio network in Romania. Soros asked how much we wanted; our visitor said \$100,000; Soros at once agreed and asked if we had any other requests. This was perhaps not so much a benevolent offer as a bid to take control of a promising BBC venture.

The internal political scene was less positive. In Hungary politics has always been confrontational, with substantial student and intellectual involvement as in the 1956 Budapest Rising. The 1990-94 interim government led by Jozsef Antall's Democratic Forum had begun well but collapsed with his death in 1993. In 1994 the two largest left-wing opposition parties regained power with the votes of many pensioners, impoverished by Antall's well intentioned but disorganised régime. The leading coalition party was the Hungarian Socialist Party ("reform communists" who now claimed that they had always been social democrats at heart). They had craftily held on to the huge resources of the former communist party. The junior partner was the SzDSz, "Free Democrats", many of them close to previous communists but including some new more respectable figures and former student activists, now proclaiming Western liberal attitudes. The two coalition partners shared control of most local and municipal government, in Budapest and across the country. They thus knew where the bodies were buried, i.e. how state and municipal properties were officially controlled, and how they could be prepared for privatisation.

Among the several opposition parties were a small Christian Democratic party, Fidesz, a centre-right "Citizens' party" led by Viktor Orban, who had earlier been in SzDSz but had left them in 1994 (they never forgave him) to found his own party; the historic pre-WWII

Smallholders' Party, now rapidly falling apart; and an avowedly right-wing nationalist party, Jobbik, never more than marginal.

HUNGARY AND NATO

An early diversion for me in autumn 1995 was an invitation from Sir Michael Quinlan, the UK's leading defence expert, to join in a weekend conference at the Ditchley Foundation, of which he had become director on retiring from his post as Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence. The subject was to be the possible enlargement of NATO after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, its Soviet counterpart. Ditchley meetings are for informal high-level discussion by politicians, officials and academic experts. Hungary was known to be interested in NATO membership as its current socialist Prime Minister, Gyula Horn, had made clear some years earlier. But his government had not yet decided how to take the subject forward. Several NATO members were also uncertain. The UK was inclined to hold back, to avoid generating Russian resistance. The doubters stressed article 5 of the NATO charter which prescribed that the accession of a new member must add to NATO's defence capacity and not reduce it. This principle was later flagrantly breached with the admission of the three Baltic States. It was however then still in place. The Hungarian government were invited to send a representative to Ditchley but had declined as they were not yet able to take a firm stance on its theme. Michael Quinlan told me that none of the other participants knew Hungary and asked me to fill the gap with evidence on the prospects as seen from Budapest – not representing HMG, but on a personal basis. I learned privately that two of my senior FCO colleagues occupying relevant posts in London and at NATO HQ were firmly opposed to the early admission of Hungary and would expect me to keep in line with their ill-conceived policy. I had received no instructions on the point and so was free to undermine it. I reminded the conference that over the last thousand years Hungary's historic role in Central Europe had been based on its strategic location and on deploying its own resources to defend the south-eastern borders of Europe against Balkan and Ottoman anti-Christian pressure from the South. This policy had cost Hungary in consequence a century and a half of ruinous Turkish occupation. Moreover, the 1956 Budapest rising had been the first serious blow against the Iron Curtain and had left many thousands of Hungarian refugees living in the UK, USA, Canada and other NATO countries. I suggested that to exclude Hungary from NATO membership at this stage would be politically hazardous in the West and catastrophically upset public opinion in Hungary. Ditchley conferences do not end with votes: a summary record is kept of their conclusions. The results of this one became clear in 1998 (see below).

FOREIGN HELP

The UK, France, Austria and Germany were all actively involved in providing substantial cultural and technical aid to liberated Hungary. Our embassy was well placed in this area. We had a strong home team, many of them Hungarian speakers. Outstanding among them were my gifted deputy, Christopher Prentice and Defence Attaché Howard Stephens, who had taken an unprecedented postgraduate degree at Hungary's Military Academy. We also had a well-staffed and well-funded Know How Fund to use in Hungary, an ODA support-team to advise on privatisation, an annual quota of FCO scholarships for graduate study in the UK and a long-established British Council library to give educational advice. The Cabinet Office was providing individual tuition for senior Hungarian civil servants, which brought Sir Robin Butler to visit us in our first week. In the declining years of the Major government, we had no ministerial-level visits from London - only two opposition shadow ministers - Robin Cook and John Prescott, invited on party to party terms. Soon after Labour won the 1997 elections Robin Cook, now Foreign Secretary returned on a full-scale official visit.

ACCESSION TO NATO

The US Embassy were naturally keen to support and increase US influence in Hungary, but inhibited by the *idée fixe* in both the State Department and the US Democratic Party that Hungary, as a temporary (forced) ally of Nazi Germany in WWII, still bore some guilt for the crimes of the short-lived Arrow Cross puppet regime in 1944 when hundreds Hungarian Jews were killed and many others sent to Auschwitz. This was a perennial theme for the New York Times where it still lingers. My US colleague, though loyal to US policy, found this frustrating and worked hard to make the case in Washington for Hungary's early admission to NATO. When the Hungarian government called a national referendum on this subject in 1997, he and I joined (at the foreign minister's request) in some of the many public meetings held around the country to brief voters on the case for NATO. The referendum was agreed by a large margin. By good fortune, in early 1997 the USAF was in urgent need of a secure working air base to enable General Wesley Clark to seize control of the air at the start of the Kosovo war with Serbia, then impending. This the Hungarian government provided at short notice an incomplete air base at Taszar near Pecs and Hungary's border with Croatia. I and my US colleague visited the general at Taszar to inspect the huge engineering works going on

there at US expense. After that, Hungary's immediate accession to NATO was never in doubt.

DEPARTURE 1998

In early April 1998, amid strong polling predictions that Orbán's party would win the national elections due to be held later in the month, we left Budapest on retirement. Christopher Prentice and Howard Stephens arranged a memorable send-off for us in the street in front of the Embassy to say goodbye to the Embassy staff, British and local. Its highlight was a drum-beating appearance by the Hungarian Army's largest brass band, which marched and counter-marched up and down the street. It was a delightful farewell, to see us off on our drive across Europe to England to start a new life in Oxfordshire. There was indeed life after retirement.