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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR DEREK PLUMBLY KCMG,
RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY SUZANNE RICKETTS

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SR: Good morning, this is Suzanne Ricketts. It's 1 October 2018 and I'm recording Derek Plumbly. Now Derek, tell me, why did you join the Foreign Office?

DP: My childhood had been spent entirely in the UK. We never went on foreign holidays. Thanks to my parents and Hampshire County Council I did go on a school cruise to the Eastern Mediterranean, that was my first taste of foreign parts. I was enthused. I did PPE at university and, in so far as you specialise in an undergraduate degree, I did two papers in international relations. After university I taught English in Portugal for a year. Then I went with VSO to Pakistan where I taught in a secondary school in Sukkur on the Indus. That got me seriously thinking. I was evacuated after a year because of the war which broke up East and West Pakistan and had to think seriously about what I was going to do. I wanted to combine what I had been interested in at university with foreign travel - and maybe make up for all those years when I didn't venture much beyond the New Forest. So I applied and I was lucky.

1972 – 1973: UKMis New York, then Foreign Office

SR: You applied to the Foreign Office, not to Development?

DP: To the Foreign Office. That's the background. It was an interest in the issues, combined with enthusiasm for the parts I had visited - when I was in Pakistan, I travelled around the country and through Afghanistan with a backpack. I had acquired the taste.

SR: And they sent you straight off to the General Assembly in New York?

DP: Yes. I'm not sure whether it still survives, but it was routine at that time that two of the new entrants would go as reporting officers to New York. I went with Michael Arthur. I worked on the Special Political Committee. I say 'worked' but what one did was to take notes and sit in the seat occasionally when nobody else wanted to.

SR: Tremendously exciting for a new entrant!

DP: It was. You made contacts and got to enjoy the hubbub of it and learn a bit. It was a good way to start. We were three months in New York during the General Assembly and then Michael and I went back to the same room in the Foreign Office and worked there for the remainder of the year.

SR: That was UN Department?

DP: Yes.

SR: What was the Foreign Office like then?

DP: In my case it was quite welcoming. Most important is your immediate boss. Mine was Roger Martin. He was quite an independent spirit and encouraged us to do things and think for ourselves. I remember one piece of advice. I had written "I am afraid to tell you that..." He said, "Never say you're afraid!" which is not only a good drafting hint but also spoke to the spirit. If you're not going to give training – and the Office then gave virtually no formal training at all – to be dropped into it in the General Assembly and then to be doing UN work, which by definition means working with all sorts of people, countries and interests, for a period under somebody who gives you your head but also good guidance, is not bad.

SR: Did people have a bit more time then to show the youngsters the ropes?

DP: Yes, I never felt denied that sort of advice. The Deputy Head of Department, Tessa Solesby, was nice and a real UN expert. The Head of Department was a rather distant figure ... but the immediate care one had was good and sympathetic. It wasn't formally credible perhaps, or wouldn't today be considered so, but I think it was not a bad way to start.

SR: And you learnt about all the arcane procedures of drafting and sending things up?

DP: And deadlines, which had never been a great strength of mine in previous existences!

SR: And that was in King Charles Street?

DP: Yes it was.

1973 - 1975: Arabic language training in Lebanon and Jordan

SR: And then you were selected for Arabic. How did that come about?

DP: Well, we were given a hard language test. About half of us went on to do hard language training. I passed and we were asked what our preference was. My preference, having spent time in Pakistan ... I knew I wasn't going to get Urdu, but I had learnt a little Urdu and thought I could build on that so I wanted Hindi. But it was not to be. Hindi was off that year and Arabic was on. That determined my life, the whole of my career, my personal life, my children's lives. All shaped in that one conversation in which they said Hindi was off!

SR: So you went off to MECAS?

DP: I did. I drove to Shemlan. I made a serious mistake because I bought a Mini, not knowing that Minis were on the Arab boycott list. I wasn't turned back at the border of Syria or Lebanon, but if I had tried to take it with me to my job afterwards, I would have failed. I did a year and a half at MECAS. In some quarters in the Middle East even now, MECAS has a certain resonance. People of my age, and younger, in Lebanon know of it and talk of it as 'the spy school'. A loose term, but it wasn't long after Philby and others had been around in Lebanon. It was a very good language training that we received, both formal – we did classical Arabic half the time – and colloquial. To help with the colloquial, the option was there – which I took – of living with a family in the village. I lived with the village butcher, whose uncle was the Arab world's most famous historian of the day, Philip Hitti, and his family; half of the village were Hittis.

It was a good time to be in Lebanon, before the civil war. Beirut was the hub of the Middle East. But at MECAS the chance to get off and explore or enjoy the nightlife was limited to the weekends at best. Although it was the British Foreign Office school, we had students from the German, Australian, Canadian, Japanese and Swiss foreign services too, Japanese and other business people, Koreans ... some of whom one crossed paths with again in later life.

Having done the long course and the advanced course, I was surprised by somebody telling me that they wanted me to do more. Not because I had failed the course but because it was a time when there was a great deal of interest in the Arab world back in London, the post '73 oil boom. They had conceived the idea somewhere in the system of super Arabists and I was chosen to be the first. I don't think the concept lasted very long. I was given, on top of the year and half in Shemlan, 6 months in Amman at the Jordanian University. I had joined the Foreign Office rather late, so I was quite a mature student for a Jordanian university, in my mid-20s. I attended courses on history and subjects that interested me, made friends among the students and lived in Amman which I enjoyed. It was the only time in my postings in the Middle East that I spent that much time in Jordan though I had previously stayed there on a language break in Madaba.

SR: The town with the wonderful mosaics!

DP: Yes, I lived over a *muntaza*, a sort of cross between a pub and a garden restaurant, with the owner and his family and spent my time talking to the guests which was great. I did a similar stint in Egypt, in Alexandria. I don't think I'm a natural linguist, but I was literally immersed for two years. The books prescribed by MECAS were quite thoughtful ones too. Sayyid Qutb, for example, the Muslim Brothers thinker often depicted as the intellectual sponsor of the terrorism that was to come later, was on our reading list, not something you would necessarily expect in 1973.

All in all a pretty sound induction to Arabic and the Arab world, and one which served me well in later life.

1975 - 1977: Second, later First Secretary, British Embassy, Jeddah

SR: So then your days of being a student came to an end and you were posted to Jeddah.

DP: It was another long drive. I had a Vauxhall ...

SR: What happened to the Mini?

DP: I sold it to a man in a bar in Amman, returned to the UK and drove out to Jeddah in the Vauxhall.

What was it like in Jeddah? It was still the oil boom. One of the stories was that cement was being helicoptered in from ships because of the demand from the construction industry and the inadequacy of the facilities and the infrastructure. It was a hotspot in that way. It was also soon after the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, so one might have expected it to be unstable or there to be an atmosphere of uncertainty. I don't remember it like that, I have to say. The country was buoyed by the impact of the oil boom.

I was Vice-Consul, Press Officer, general gopher in the Embassy. I did political reporting, maintaining the personality index – I became a great expert on the genealogy of the Al Saud. I was occasionally used for consular purposes, although I wasn't working in the Consular Section, but there was a large, expanding British community. I found myself going to Asir in the south after somebody had committed suicide or the outskirts of Medina to get somebody out of jail after a traffic accident ... that sort of thing. As Press Officer I can't say that there was really a press or communications strategy in Saudi Arabia, with an infant press and a television service the introduction of which had been the reason for King Faisal's assassination – you weren't looking at a very pushy press strategy. But we reviewed the press and issued press releases and got to know the editors.

SR: Who were your Ambassadors? John Wilton was there, wasn't he?

DP: Yes, and before him, Alan Rothnie.

SR: Did you have much contact with them?

DP: Yes, I would take notes for some of their conversations. Although I was Jeddah based – at that time all the Embassies and the Foreign Ministry were in Jeddah – much of the business was in Riyadh. In addition to the other things I was doing, it was all hands to the pump trying to promote the British interest in a very rapidly expanding Saudi economy. There was great demand for advice and expertise: social insurance and traffic management were some of the issues I became expert in temporarily, facilitating visits from the UK and so on. Those discussions, and the meetings that the Ambassador had with officials other than the Foreign Ministry, were usually in Riyadh. We had a villa there – this was before the opening of representative offices which happened towards the end of my time – and we used it as a base to stay. One of my tasks was managing the villa so I probably spent rather more time in Riyadh than most colleagues.

SR: Tell me about the royal visit. Which royal was it?

DP: It was the Duke of Edinburgh who came towards the end of my time there. The relationship between the two royal families was an important strand in bilateral relations throughout my time dealing with Saudi Arabia. Part of the Duke's purpose was, I think, to do a reconnaissance for a possible visit by the Queen. I suspect he went away seeing some of the difficulties about how it could be done. Eventually it happened, but not in my time. She came in 1979 on Concorde and left on the Royal Yacht Britannia.

SR: Did the Duke's visit go without a hitch?

DP: Yes, it wasn't really that gruelling an experience, though I sprained my ankle running after the Duke and was ferried back to Jeddah at the end of it by John Wilton in the back seat of the Daimler.

All in all Jeddah in the mid-seventies was a good place in which to start work in the Arab world. The centrality of Saudi Arabia was obvious. Part of the Foreign Office's thinking at the time was I suspect to build a body of people with experience of serving there for the future. Almost all my business was conducted in Arabic. I acquired understanding which proved very useful in later life. I reappeared there at intervals of a decade or so in subsequent postings and one could pick up where one had left off! Literally, in some cases, because

people didn't change. That's not true today of course. But, during my career it was pretty much the case at the top.

1977 - 1980: First Secretary (Political), British Embassy, Cairo

SR: So you had two years in Saudi and then you went off to Cairo. Did you ask to go there or was that still in the days when Personnel told you where you were going?

DP: I don't think I ever asked to go anywhere! Jobs happened, really. You weren't bidding for jobs in the sense that people did later. I was very lucky, I think. After two years in Saudi I got the message to go to Cairo where the First Secretary job in Chancery needed to be filled. So I packed my Vauxhall onto a ferry and went to Suez. That was beginning of three years in Egypt.

In a way, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt then were shaped by what had happened in 1973. In Egypt the October War was seen as a victory, a reversal of what had happened in 1967. You had a self-confident President and change was under way: the switch from partnership with the Russians to being more open to governments in the West; an economic opening of sorts, the *infatih*; a broadening of political activity. My time coincided with exciting developments – Sadat's journey to Jerusalem and Camp David. The Foreign Ministry and the Arab League and the local press were particular focuses of my work, but I did domestic reporting too.

SR: Your Ambassador was Michael Weir?

DP: The first one was Willie Morris who had been Ambassador in Saudi Arabia before my time. Then, after him, Michael Weir who I had first seen as Head of Chancery in New York. Both, in their different ways, were impressive. Willie Morris was a warm person, a very good boss. He'd been in Egypt before, in the last days of the King. When the New Wafd came along its leader was Fouad Pasha Serageddin, who had been Minister of the Interior when Willie was previously in Cairo, I suppose in Chancery like me. Willie took a very dim view of what Serageddin had done at that time – when the police resisted the British in the Canal zone and so on. So he had no interest whatsoever in seeing him. I was delegated to see the Pasha, who fortuitously lived in a palace just across the road from the Embassy. I

would go and chat with him about the revival of political life in Egypt as he smoked his cigar in his dusty palace and planned the future.

The Egyptians though seemed to have put memories of those days behind them when it came to dealing with us. As part of the general opening to the outside world we were well seen. I remember one evening, in particular, note taking for Willie Morris. He was playing an intermediary role with Boutros Boutros Ghali, then the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, to help get Egyptian troops back from Cyprus after the shoot up in Larnaca when they tried to capture the Palestinians who had assassinated Youssef el Sebai ... And another when Sadat confided in us the details of the action he took to save the QE2 from Gaddafi.

The Embassy was a pretty buzzy place. Tony Brenton covered the economy. The Head of Chancery for the latter part of my time was David Blatherwick, who was quite a tough taskmaster. For reasons which will become obvious I was interested in the Copts. He cajoled me into writing a lengthy dispatch about their position in modern Egypt, which after much research I did. After I left, the Office agreed it should be published, which it was, under a pseudonym at their request, in the journal Middle Eastern Studies – my only foray, before now, into academia.

SR: And there was another royal visit?

DP: Yes, an illustration of the change in our relations. Another royal visit for me, but there had been no official royal visit to Egypt since the 1952 revolution. The visitor was Princess Alexandra, who was charming. She was graciously hosted, given dinner by President and Mrs Sadat and visited Upper Egypt: a leaf was turned in a way which was symbolically important. We had already had Lord Mountbatten on a private visit, staying in the Residence when his son-in-law, Lord Brabourne, was producing *Death on the Nile*, the Agatha Christie film with Peter Ustinov as Hercule Poirot. I had fun liaising a bit about that. Subsequently, the decision was taken to hold the première in the Metro cinema in Cairo to coincide with Princess Alexandra's visit. This required quite a lot of effort, turning a downtown cinema which had suffered over the years into a cinema where you could host Mrs Sadat and Princess Alexandra for the première. But it went well and passed without incident.

SR: Where had you met Nadia? You got married in 1979.

DP: We met in Cairo. She was teaching at the American University of Cairo. One of the teachers was a mutual friend. He introduced us at a performance of Hamlet at the Pyramids! Nadia and I married in 1979. It wasn't necessarily straightforward. Her father was an Egyptian novelist and script writer, Youssef Gohar, who had in his youth thrown stones at British troops. And I had as I recall to get permission from the Secretary of State. But it was given, all obstacles were overcome. We got married in a Coptic church and moved into a flat by the Nile close to Nadia's parents' home in Maadi, where we held the reception. The wedding ceremony was conducted by a Coptic bishop, Bishop Samuel, who was one of the leaders of the revival of monasticism and the Coptic church in the twentieth century. He became a good friend. Tragically, a year after we left, he was among those on the stand who were killed when President Sadat was assassinated.

1980 - 1982: Cyprus Desk Officer, South Eastern Department, FCO

SR: And then back to London. Something completely different?

DP: I didn't get out of the Mediterranean. I was the Cyprus desk officer in Southern European Department. It was a good training job, I think. After the Turkish invasion, people were trying to work out peace plans, with a substantial British interest. The only thing I really remember from it though is going to Cyprus with a mandate to look at our UNFICYP contribution and see if we could find savings by cutting the air component. A constant theme, as always. After a few rather bumpy helicopter rides, it was clear that cutting was not a good idea.

SR: But your Arabic was still good enough that you were asked to interpret for King Khalid.

DP: That is true. King Khalid came on a state visit in the early '80s and I was asked to interpret. What I particularly remember, I have to say, is interpreting for him at Newmarket. I think James Craig had the same experience with Prince Sultan. I looked at his reminiscences in the oral history project. I had to translate the same things for the King's ear, putting the mare to the stallion and so on, which certainly stretched my Arabic.

1982 - 1984: Head, Arabian Peninsula Section, Middle East Department, FCO

Next I was transferred to Middle East Department. I was head of the section which dealt with Saudi Arabia and Yemen. James Craig was the Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, so our relations were in safe hands though his time was marked at one end – just before I got the job – by the Death of a Princess affair and, at the other, just after I left I think, by the storm in a teacup over his leaked valedictory dispatch.

SR: David Miers was the Head of Department?

DP: Yes. Full of enthusiasm and a good Head of Department.

1984 – 1988: First Secretary, Trade Policy, British Embassy, Washington

SR: So by then you had spent four years in the Office in London. Then you had a complete change, going to work in Washington on trade policy.

DP: Well I certainly didn't ask for that. You could have written what I knew about trade policy on the back of a postage stamp, to be honest. It is – as we are discovering in the UK at the present moment – an extremely specialised area. You can emote about it but actually the rules are complex and the interests that can be affected are very large. I enjoyed the job. It was good to learn something new and it was a sort of diplomacy in which you might quickly see solid results. You could lobby for something, argue your case, and there would be an achievement or a reverse. Then you turned the page over and moved on to something else. It was one of those periods when there was a surge in protectionist pressures in the United States. As we were in the European Union we weren't actually doing the big picture multilateral stuff. But fending off particular threats to British interests, or promoting the particular interests of British companies or industries, was a national task in parallel with what the European Commission might be doing. We also followed the progress of trade legislation and so on, so I spent quite a bit of time working with people on the Hill as well as with the Trade Representative's office and the Department of Commerce. It helped sometimes that we were living in north west DC a few doors away from the trade counsel to the Senate Finance Committee who became a friend.

SR: And Washington was a fun place to be, wasn't it?

DP: Yes it was. Our two sons were born in Washington. It was a good place to have young children. A perfect family posting. It was the sort of work you could do within a normal working day. There wasn't the same demand for a reporting telegram the next morning as we had had in Cairo, for example.

That said a lot was happening. Specific issues ... two examples that came my way: US steel quotas – British Steel had entered into a contract to supply semi-finished steel to a new plant in Alabama and needed to get the quota to do it. That was a struggle, eventually successful, which involved mobilising the Senator concerned in Congress and so on. The other affected the British printing industry. It had campaigned to overcome a decades-old provision in American law which required material published in the United States to be printed there, the so-called manufacturing clause. The clause meant that British and other non-US printers had no access whatsoever to the US market. It clearly fitted ill with wider US trade policy. Lobby groups like the National Association of Manufacturers joined us in pressing – successfully – for its removal.

SR: And the personalities in the Embassy?

DP: Yes, the Embassy was bursting at the seams with talent! It was a fizzy time to be there, a good time, during the Reagan years: an optimistic time. Optimistic for most people but, in the field in which I was working you saw the other side too. I would disappear to different parts of the country to argue our case. I remember going to Johnstown Pennsylvania to make a speech to people where the main industry was steel and I visited the massive plants which had closed as the result of the pressure of cheaper imports.

1988 – 1992: Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy, Riyadh

SR: So once again you were summoned to Personnel and told you were going to Riyadh. You didn't bid for it?

DP: No. It wasn't something that happened that way. The Embassy was different, obviously. It had moved to Riyadh in the early '80s. We were located in the diplomatic quarter which meant that life was a little bit less constrained than it would have been for other expatriates. It was, rather like Washington, a surprisingly good place to be with a young family. Our children started school there.

SR: How did Nadia find it? For most spouses it's hard, isn't it?

DP: For Nadia – obviously she spoke the language; there were women's engagements, women's parties and so on, she could fit into that more easily than most. She also taught for a time at the women's university. Beyond that there was a mixed society in the city including Saudis who had perhaps lived overseas and who socialised more readily with people like ourselves. So it was quite lively in a social sense. And comfortable in terms of the conditions of life. Sun, quite a lot of sand and swimming pools. A lot of fun to be had in desert trips, exploring further afield outside Riyadh. We made lot of friends, Saudis and others. So for us, it was an enjoyable posting, and a good time to be there.

But ... we went on holiday in July 1990 and in August things happened. I cut short my leave. That was the defining moment in our second time in Saudi Arabia – the invasion of Kuwait and the response that had to be put together to the invasion.

I remember going back. Alan Munro was the Ambassador. I walked into the Embassy to join a meeting which he had just started about our response and what to do, reporting, the instructions we were getting and so on. For six months or more it was all consuming. First, there was a sense that Saudi Arabia itself was under threat. Where were the Iraqis going to stop? The Saudi Arabian National Guard, with a British adviser or two, stood their ground near the border. Then it was a question of how the Saudis would wish to respond to the invasion and how the international community would align themselves with them. The UK role was important and we had a resolute Ambassador in the shape of Alan who threw himself into it with gusto. It was a very solid British response from the beginning. And a solid response from the Saudis, from King Fahd in particular. His decision, his determination to stand up to the aggression and to put together the coalition which eventually ousted the Iraqis from Kuwait, was crucial. It was an exciting time to be working with Saudis, at the heart of the international response.

We were lucky: we had a good team which built up and expanded as the crisis unfolded. Alan Munro was much esteemed by everybody there: the military, the Saudis who honoured him after it was all over, and the Americans – with whose Ambassador, Chas Freeman, he was close. What I remember is the positivism of it all, which infused the team. My work covered political reporting, negotiating aspects of the British military presence and supporting, helping on the management of community issues, which were real. The British

presence in theatre grew very quickly, to 40,000 plus. I negotiated with the Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdul Rahman al Mansouri, agreements on the status of forces, and on host nation support whereby the Saudis would meet the costs of aspects of the deployment on the ground. We got a quite precise figure, I can't remember the exact number. As war became more and more inevitable, the focus was on the impact on the community, which stood pretty firm, I have to say. There was provision for evacuation and for the issue of gas masks to the people who remained because we were uncertain how Saddam would respond when war was eventually launched. All that went pretty smoothly, to be honest, right up to the actual move to military action in early '91.

SR: And your recollection of that time in work terms? Were you working flat out?

DP: Pretty much. Nadia and the kids were evacuated. The Embassy was reinforced with additional staff. On the eve of the war, London discovered a need for additional legal cover. It was authorised by the Security Council, but London wanted something that amounted to a declaration of war. I remember we had to go to see the King's Private Secretary, Muhammad Sulaiman, and develop a text and translate it into Arabic, all in the middle of the night.

A lot of stuff happened in the middle of the night, including the moment when the hostilities actually began. Scuds began to be launched at Riyadh and elsewhere. I remember on one occasion I had to put on a chemical warfare suit in order to walk to the Embassy to take a telegram. That was right at the beginning. Very soon it was worked out both that the Scuds were not very accurate and that he was not anyway going to use chemical weapons, given the certainty that the response would be immense. So that aspect, as the war took its course, was less concerning.

And of course it was all over quite quickly. Thankfully. In the immediate aftermath, we had a visit by John Major who had seen the troops in Kuwait and then came on to Riyadh to see the King and thank him for what was after all an enormous joint effort. We were waiting somewhere in the palace – I remember this particularly. We had the Minister of Petroleum, Hisham Nazer, as the Minister in attendance. I was the man in the middle. We had a very, very long wait to see the King! Fahd had many strengths but timekeeping wasn't one of them. Like most senior members of the Al Saud, he was rather a night person, which was when he really perked up. John Major had been doing a lot and had reason to get back to London rather quickly and his patience ran out. We got to the point at which he was writing

a short letter to the King saying how grateful he was for all Saudi Arabia had done but he had to depart. I was doing everything I could with Hisham Nazer to get the King in from the desert. The King did at the end bestir himself. He rushed in and it was all okay. They had a good meeting and the upshot was that on top of my host nation support agreement the King effectively wrote a cheque for a billion dollars to cover the cost of the British contribution to the campaign. John Major left, I think, a happy man!

The aftermath wasn't exactly an anti-climax. This was, after all a campaign which had achieved its objective precisely and was universally welcomed, except by Saddam and his cronies, one where the allied leadership, essentially Bush the father, decided that you did what you said you would do and no more. I got to pay my one and only visit ever to Iraq, as a fly on the wall at the discussions which took place between the military on the ceasefire: I can remember sitting on top of a sand dune with a helicopter crew, looking over it and being told "That's Ur of the Chaldees down there!" and also going into Kuwait as Michael Weston was re-establishing his Embassy there. It was quite exciting.

That was really the end of that adventure. We left Riyadh months afterwards.

SR: How long had you been separated from the family then?

DP: I suppose it was about four months. The children went to school here in the UK but came back when the war was over.

1992 – 1996: Head of Chancery/Political Counsellor, UKMIS, New York

SR: Good morning. This is Suzanne Ricketts recording Derek Plumbly on October 23 2018. We finished last time, Derek, with Riyadh. You'd had an exciting time with the Kuwait invasion. So let's move on now to New York. You went as Head of Chancery and Political Counsellor in 1992.

DP: Yes, and I confess I had an exciting time there too! It was a very busy one. The United Nations was, for want of a better term, on a high. The Soviet Union had broken up. The Russians had taken their permanent seat in its place. The Gulf War had been won. People felt that the international community could achieve whatever objectives it set itself – at least that was the spirit of the times. Before I got there, the UK had chaired the first ever Security Council Summit and the Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, had published a paper 'Agenda for Peace' which looked to more active work in peacekeeping, preventive

diplomacy and peace-making on the part of the United Nations. So that was the upbeat backdrop at the beginning.

The UK was rather well-placed, really. We had in David Hannay an extraordinarily capable Permanent Representative who really throughout his time there and most of my time (I also overlapped with his successor, John Weston), was pretty much the acknowledged leader of the Council, the person who would find a way out, however deep the hole was. He had an assertive approach, but he was the go to man for the solution to a problem. He was deeply respected.

SR: Did he get on with the other Representatives, for example the Russian?

DP: Yes, he got on very well with them. Vorontsov was the Permanent Representative when I got there, then Lavrov. Russia was strongly represented. During my time the relationship became more complicated because there came to be more issues on which we differed, but we usually worked things out. Vorontsov was responsible for the one veto I suffered, ironically on UNFICYP financing. At the beginning of the day he told us he might not be able to vote for our text. Come the afternoon he told us he had been instructed to veto. Typically David decided to put the draft to the vote anyway, judging that a veto would carry a price and that afterwards the Russians would compromise.

Almost invariably, if it was a really serious issue, we'd start in the P5. David got on well with the French, particularly when we were joined at the hip on Bosnia. For most of my time the US Representative was Madeleine Albright. There were issues on which we were in lock step – Iraq and Libya for example – and the partnership then was very close indeed. The relationship with the Secretary General, Boutros Ghali, was clearly also important. At the beginning I think it was difficult. Boutros Ghali was also a trenchant person, with strong views and determined to preserve his independence as the senior official in the UN. But they worked it out and got on well.

My role as Head of Chancery was twofold really: first of all managing our Security Council business, effectively a chief of staff; but it also stretched to mission administration in so far as this was needed.

So that was the backdrop at the start. I could say more about the role?

SR: Yes, that would be interesting.

DP: Administration frankly didn't play that large a part. But it was important: we moved the mission during my time, from Third Avenue to Second Avenue. That was essential to get right, but others did the hard work. Politically the job involved liaison, in backup to the Permanent Representative, with the other Security Council missions and the key departments in the Secretariat concerned with Council business, including the Secretary General's office where Faiza Abounaga, who later became a minister in Egypt, was a very helpful contact. From time to time, P5 Political Counsellors would meet on issues like Cambodia, for example, or work on texts. I would also, with the Legal Adviser, Michael Wood, work in the margins of informal consultations in support of David. Getting paragraphs 5 or 331 right and helping to broker a deal, in the interests of consensus and the Security Council operating effectively, was a large part of one's mission. It was demanding and new to me; but I got into it and found it rewarding, even if you were always brokering compromises which might, in retrospect, seem less than perfect.

What I think is also worth underlining is just how busy we were. I can't remember the precise figures, but we produced – we, the Security Council (I think of it almost possessively!) – out of informal consultations, where the bulk of the work took place, almost half as many Council resolutions in those four years as were produced in the entire preceding forty years of the United Nations and probably a larger number of Presidential statements. The Security Council could speak and speak it did. More and more issues were being laid before it. The number of peacekeepers in the field went up sharply.

All this put a big burden on UKMIS staff. When I started, we had essentially two First Secretaries working on Council business, one doing the Middle East and the other the rest of the world. They were working frequently from 8 in the morning until midnight because of the proliferation of issues. Without a leader like David Hannay, I think morale would have gone through the floor. But actually it was very high. We felt we were achieving something. And, as time went on, staffing caught up. We were helped by the BBC who did a television programme, I think in 1994, called True Brits. One episode was on UKMIS and the United Nations. It showed the hours, and people working until midnight, including the Head of Chancery who was the guy who turned the lights out really, having approved the cables, and then came in first thing in the morning to see what the instructions were. It was all there, on

screen, but so too was the sense of achievement. Thankfully the mission expanded in my time to include a military adviser and additional political officers.

I spoke of the UN being on a high but it didn't take long for that to dissipate. My memory on individual issues is, at best, hazy, but a crucial development – and this was not on an issue which directly concerned or involved the UK, but it impacted the effectiveness of the Security Council's working – was what happened in Somalia. In June '93, less than a year into my time in New York, Pakistani peacekeepers were killed there. The Security Council responded very robustly. It was the only time I remember – it must have been at an odd time of day – when I found myself raising my hand and voting in Council on a resolution. The resolution targeted the Somali warlord Aideed who was presumed to be behind the killings. But it was only a matter of months before US helicopters were downed, US troops were killed and the US Administration backed off and Somalia relapsed into failed state-ness.

That experience coloured the Clinton Administration's attitude to UN peacekeeping, and was a key factor in the lowest point in my time in New York, the Council's response – or lack of it – to the genocide in Rwanda. Finding a way forward on that issue proved impossible for the Council. We were in lockdown. The New Zealand Permanent Representative, who was President for a significant part of the weeks when this was happening, Colin Keating, did a sterling job in keeping our nose to it and not letting us all go home. David Hannay, I remember at one point, when the idea of folding the remaining tiny peacekeeping force was put forward, was instrumental in blocking the idea before it got anywhere. But beyond that, nothing could be done in New York and the situation was effectively resolved by the intervention of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the RPF – Kagame and his people. It was a bad experience which went to show among other things how important it was, if you wanted to achieve anything, to have the US on side and committed.

The same could I suppose be said of Bosnia, which was a constant thread in Council business through my time there, and where the UK and France led in Council reflecting our contribution to UNPROFOR. Trying to find ways forward, and to sustain Council unity in the face of events, was a major part of our work. Eventually, because of what had happened on the ground in Srebrenica and afterwards, it was taken out of our hands – the Security Council's hands – effectively by the Americans engaging and the Dayton process starting.

Otherwise ..? Iraq, Libya. Libya was an issue where we had a strong P3 position. All of this, of course, in response to Lockerbie and to the downing of the French UTA airliner also by Libyan action. Sanctions were extended in my time and had effect on the Libyan leadership which would be seen later. On Iraq, Saddam played cat and mouse. One thing I was particularly involved in, of which I have a clear memory because it was a rather convoluted and very detailed negotiation, was the oil for food Resolution 986, which was adopted in 1995 and which, for all its faults, did provide a measure of humanitarian relief for Iraqis.

That's about it, I would say, really. I have highlighted the difficult moments but there were other successes for the United Nations too at that time, in Mozambique, Cambodia and so on. I learnt a lot more about the political geography of the world. But one heard less than one would expect, I have to say, from the United Nations itself, that's to say UN officials, during the interminable discussions in informal consultations. I worked behind the scenes, with Shashi Tharoor for example on Bosnia. But you could sit in consultations very easily all day, and well into the evening, on difficult subjects like Bosnia, without hearing from the Secretariat figures directly concerned. I got to know Boutros Ghali well later, and admired him, but as Secretary General he rarely came to the Council except for the formal meetings and wasn't keen on those responsible in the Secretariat, or his representatives in the field, doing so. You didn't get many briefings of the sort which, when I joined the United Nations later, were commonplace. I used to have to go and brief periodically, coming from Beirut for consultations, to talk through a report. That sort of thing rarely happened, which didn't help on issues like Somalia or Bosnia. It was a failing in the system under Boutros which was rectified by Kofi Annan.

SR: So, looking back on that posting to New York, it was very busy, very demanding, lots of crises to deal with. But did you enjoy it?

DP: Yes. It was exciting and stimulating. Day in, day out, fighting battles and, as often as not, winning them and engaging with really able people in the various missions. Each mission, when they joined the Security Council, would staff them up. I mentioned Colin Keating: his deputy, John McKinnon, was similarly able. Egypt joined the Security Council: Nabil Elaraby the PR became and still is a very good friend. You could see that these people were the cream of their service. The Italians were marvellous. If they had an objective, they would staff it through and secure whatever it was they were looking for, often the election of

an Italian to an important position. But nonetheless, you were really dealing with excellent people. In the Secretariat too. The people we had on our own staff were excellent. And we loved New York, including the kids who were at school there.

SR: But it doesn't sound as if you had much time to enjoy the opera and the museums and things if you were working all the time?

DP: No, not much. Nadia worked in the Metropolitan Museum and enjoyed it a lot. But I probably saw more of the museums or the theatre when I was working for the UN in Beirut and went back to New York every so often and could take time out to go and see them.

Actually, what you really needed to do was to disappear occasionally into the countryside. We rented a place in Beaverkill, way up in the Catskills, which was great except that on one occasion there was deep snow and ice and the Head of Chancery had to come back because there was an emergency Council meeting even though it was a weekend. We drove the family back. We were the only car on the highway, but we made it back to New York against all the traffic warnings. But going to the hills was an escape worth risking.

SR: And you did that most weekends?

DP: Not most weekends, but quite frequently when we could, either there or to Long Island.

1996 – 1997: International Drugs Coordinator, Director, Drugs and Crime

SR: So you had four years in New York and then a surprise posting. Tell me about your next role.

DP: I had rather thought that I would be going back to do something to do with the Middle East because that really was my expertise, although I had become broader in my reach, I suppose, in that I had been following all the issues of the hour insofar as they engaged the United Nations. But I was actually asked to go to a new post, that of International Drugs Coordinator and Director, Drugs and Crime. It was an initiative of Michael Howard's, the Home Secretary, who felt that we needed to up the level of our international engagement against the drugs trade, and that things were too compartmentalised with different agencies from the Home Office, through Customs, the police, DFID all involved. There was no integrated approach, so a unit was created in the Foreign Office in Matthew Parker Street which brought together staff from all these agencies. The unit was given the tasks of

increasing engagement with other governments and coordinating assistance to those that needed it, and writing a strategy for HMG to underpin that.

I headed the unit, reporting both to the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary. I started by assembling the staff, including later an FCO colleague who drafted the strategy, Dominic Asquith. I was the face of the operation, and needed to read myself in. It was not a subject I knew much about, I have to say. I had never visited many of the countries which were likely to be major partners. So I spent a year seeing very little of the family and going to all sorts of places with the objective both of familiarising myself and projecting, giving a senior profile to our engagement. I would disappear for a week at a time, visiting the small islands of the Caribbean, going to Mexico – I'd never been to Latin America before – Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela. You name it really... Afghanistan, Thailand, Pakistan. Not much by way of Arab activity though I did go to Morocco, visiting the Rif and crossing to Gibraltar. I also went to recipient countries, to the Netherlands given their particular approach and to the US. So I globetrotted which produced some fascinating moments, I suppose, of which I would recall two.

One was the only time in my life when I was ever shot at directly, as opposed to running around and being Scud-ed! That was in Colombia, in the Amazon basin, where the Colombians had helicoptered me to a place described as a cocaine factory which was just a clearing in the jungle with a few abandoned Wellington boots. So we landed our helicopter and then bang! From out of the jungle there came shots and I was hustled back into the helicopter. We took off fast, firing down at the people below. When I got back to London and told the Minister of State at the Foreign Office about this, he said that something similar had happened with him too. The theory was developed that actually this happened to all the visiting drug czars (I was always greeted in Latin America as the British drug czar), in order to show just how difficult the task was people were facing. I don't know whether that is true, it may just have been the Minister saying, "Come on, Plumbly, it's not as hairy as that!"

Another incident that I recall which, for colour, should not be lost, was in Afghanistan. I had been there before when I was a VSO in Pakistan. I had travelled around on foot and by bus, so I had a sense of the country and the extent to which things had been destroyed by war. Few buildings survived above the first storey. It was all pretty grim. I was with somebody from the High Commission in Islamabad. We drove as I recall from Quetta in Baluchistan to Kandahar. The object was to meet the Taliban who were then in control of much of

Afghanistan and to persuade them to stop permitting, drawing wealth from, opium trafficking. I sat with members of their Shura on the floor for hours. Some of them would come and go. I made my case, a moral case, but with the incentive that we could offer assistance to facilitate crop diversification. They listened and said that they understood the moral case but their essential message was that the end justifies the means and, to do what they wanted to do, they needed the money.

We developed the strategy, with Dominic's great assistance. It was balanced, putting money into cooperation and into developing alternative sources of income. We had seen good cases where that had been done, in Bolivia, for example. Equally, what you rapidly learnt was that the effect of such assistance typically was just to displace the opium or coca production to the next valley, even as pineapples were happily grown in the original one. We also developed substantial assistance programmes in policing, in Pakistan and Colombia and in the Caribbean.

After about a year in the job, the strategy was agreed. Ministers signed it off, programmes were in place. There was a change of government around that time, and coincidentally the Middle East Director post became vacant and I was picked for that. So I moved. But it had been an extraordinary experience. I enjoyed doing it, but I can't say that, even at the time, I was totally convinced. I'm convinced of the wisdom of combatting illicit trafficking, but I think there must be more sophisticated ways of reducing it which would include legalisation subject to controls of some of the drugs.

1997-2000: Director, Middle East and North Africa

SR: So then we move on to another busy job, Director Middle East and North Africa. Once again you were picked for this, you didn't apply?

DP: I never fought for a job. I can't recall applying for any of the jobs that I did. I just went where I was told! But I am glad that I was told to go to the places I went to. I did raise an eyebrow at Drugs and Crime, but after I did it I was grateful that I had done so.

Middle East Command was probably the most intellectually demanding job I did, in the sense that you were helping to make policy at a level where you were a key adviser to Ministers. Policy in the Middle East occupied a lot of their time, particularly the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. So it was busy as well as fulfilling and I was helped, obviously, as

always, by the people I had with me and I had good people. The Directorate consisted of two departments: Middle East Department was structured pretty much as it had been when I was a desk officer, covering the Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Iraq/Iran; and Near East and North Africa Department which covered the Levant and North Africa. We had as Heads of Department Edward Chaplin and William Patey in MED and Chris Prentice for a lot of the time in NENAD – you couldn't ask for better, to be honest. So I was very lucky. Very good people, with a lot of regional experience.

It was a fascinating time to take over because it was a new government, new Labour. Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary were very focused on the region. Mr Blair came to it with a view. But he also seemed keen to learn. I was asked to send books to Number 10. I remember sending Albert Hourani's *History of the Arab Peoples* as one he might like to see. It came back heavily leafed through.

The issues that were preoccupying us? The Middle East peace process and Iraq were obviously top of the list. Other stuff happened, but these were the two biggest issues.

On the peace process, Tony Blair obviously had a view as to the absolute importance of engaging the Israelis and keeping them onside, but he also wanted to understand more about the Palestinian dimension. On the Palestinian side, as often as not, his instinct would be to see how you could deliver economic benefit or whatever, rather than to address the core justice agenda.

Maybe we should start with the peace process. It was a constant theme during the time I was in the job. Oslo was the backdrop, but already the Palestinians could see no end to occupation and were deeply frustrated. Netanyahu was Prime Minister and had been for a few months when I took over. There was no sense of forward movement. Both Robin Cook and Tony Blair wanted to play a role, wanted to move it forward. I suppose key events were the visits they respectively undertook to the region in 1998. Robin Cook went in March and Tony Blair in April. They each visited multiple capitals but the main focus, the top of their agenda – though there were other issues, of course – was Israel-Palestine. I accompanied them on both the visits and was involved in the preparation of them.

Robin Cook's visit was bedevilled by bad luck. The weather was bad, so the plane was diverted. That messed up the programme somewhat. We went to Cyprus. We weren't supposed to go to Cyprus at all. We went to Damascus, the only time I ever sat with Hafez

Al-Assad. It was a three-hour meeting at least. This posed a great strain on some people in different ways, looking for the door after all the tea but it was an interesting experience. The real bad luck was in Israel, where Robin Cook was keen to visit an area where the Israelis, or Israeli settlers, planned to build homes for tens of thousands of people on the outskirts of Jerusalem in Har Homa (or in Arabic Jebel Abu Ghneim). The arrangements had been worked out by the Embassy but, at the last minute, the Israelis threw the cards in the air and Robin Cook went effectively without protection. There was rain – the weather was bad all the way through this visit. In the rain he found himself both barracked by settlers and engaging with local Palestinians, which wasn't part of the script. As a result, Netanyahu cancelled dinner with him.

So it became very important for Tony Blair to make sure that we didn't have anything like that on his visit. His visit was in a way build up – although it was not I think formally scripted with the Americans in that way – to a meeting in London in May between Madeleine Albright, as Secretary of State, Netanyahu and Arafat. (So perhaps with the Robin Cook visit Netanyahu wanted to show that he wasn't going to be pushed around?). There had been an aspiration, I think, on our part that we might get something solid out of it. There was talk about ports or airports in Gaza, where Yasser Arafat sat. But Dennis Ross, the American envoy, had communicated to me reluctance on the part of the Americans to get ahead of the game, to see deals struck or progress achieved on things like the port during the course of our visit. So it was more about trying to make sure that they all turned up for the London meeting. Indeed they did come, but the meeting itself was yet another one in which hopes were dashed and Arafat went away feeling he hadn't got anything out of it. Further efforts were made by the Clinton administration, obviously, but didn't break the logjam.

We played a significant role, I think, in 1999, because there was considerable British input – in which I was involved with the EU envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos – in getting an EU stand which pointed to a Palestinian state, talking of 'the right to which there could be no veto' of the Palestinians to establish a state of their own. The Berlin Declaration incorporating that language was adopted by the EU in March 1999: its purpose was to sustain the process and offer a measure of hope to the Palestinians.

One other thing that I might mention is the role of Michael Levy.

SR: He was quite a flamboyant character, wasn't he?

DP: Yes. His flamboyance conflicted with the wishes of the Number 10 team on the Prime Minister's visit to the region. One of my roles, other than reminding the Prime Minister to speak up for the Palestinians, was to stand in front of and obscure Michael Levy – I'm taller than him – when photographs were taken. This was by common agreement. I had nothing against Michael but he wasn't part of the official team.

SR: He'd been the Prime Minister's tennis partner, hadn't he?

DP: Yes, and a major fundraiser for the Labour Party. Later, he was appointed formally to be envoy for the Middle East, with support from Robin Cook. He was energetic, he tried. I was supportive of that, I must say. Actually, if you look at the record on Arab-Israeli issues during that period, you might say he came nearest to success. He went to Damascus several times. He saw Hafez Al-Assad who was almost at death's door at that point but keen to resolve, as part of his legacy, the issue of Syria's occupied territories in the Golan. Assad signalled to Michael a readiness to make peace if the Israelis were prepared to withdraw to the 1967 lines, as Michael records in his book. There was incredulity on the part of the Americans who, on all these issues, had the lead of course. But, nonetheless, it was the case. It was tested by them. They ran out of road but it was a glimmer of light, I think.

SR: Did he get on with Robin Cook?

DP: Robin Cook had a need to rebuild his bridges with the Israelis after the visit I described. I think Michael was instrumental in that. So yes, he did.

Otherwise a significant part of my work turned out to be restoring relations with countries with which we had had a difficult time. That happened on a number of fronts. One case where there was an opening was Iran. Hanging over our relationship with Iran, with which – unlike the Americans – we had sustained relations in the years after the revolution, was the Rushdie fatwa. After the publication of *Satanic Verses*, there had been Khomeini's *fatwa* on the author, Salman Rushdie. As a result we didn't have ambassadorial representation in Tehran. I'm a great believer in being represented and sustaining dialogue, as far as one can, everywhere. Iran was a very important player: it was important to be there and to understand it. With the election of Khatami as President of Iran, things became possible. There was a negotiation, the final stage of which I conducted with Iranian officials, to find language, as they were keen to do, to get out of this whole thing. Without actually cancelling the Ayatollah's fatwa – not something they were able to do explicitly – we found language that

made it very clear that the Iranians were not looking to encourage others to act on the fatwa, nor would they themselves do anything to do so. They went far enough for us to be confident of Salman Rushdie's safety. On the back of that, Robin Cook met the Iranian Foreign Minister in New York at the UN General Assembly in 1998. A statement was issued, Ambassadors were exchanged. I went to Tehran afterwards, when Nick Browne had taken up residence.

Similarly with Libya. Sanctions, which I mentioned earlier, had been imposed on Libya and had a chilling effect on their oil industry and communications with the outside world, because of the impact on aviation and oil supplies. Gadaffi was feeling increasingly vulnerable and he moved on the issues which were at the heart of the matter: the biggest and most difficult was the Lockerbie bombing. By 1999, he was ready to hand over the bombers ... that was negotiated by others, I wasn't directly involved. We were keen to open the Embassy in Tripoli again, which had been closed since 1984. Keen for all sorts of reasons, including WMD. The obstacle was the murder by Libyans, from their Embassy in London in 1984, of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, in response to which we had broken diplomatic relations. I had a number of meetings, in Rome and Geneva, with Gadaffi's close aide Abdul Aati el Obeidi with the aim of resolving the issue – securing compensation and recognition of responsibility, and access for the police to pursue their investigation which was still very much alive. That was very important for them and for the family, and it was secured satisfactorily. In July 1999 relations were restored.

The other case, which was quickly resolved, was Sudan, which in my day fell within the Middle East Command. I think it was in late 1998, after the American Embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi had been attacked by Al Qaeda. President Clinton was determined to respond with attacks on Al Qaeda-related targets in different places. One of the places he chose was Sudan, understandably you might think because, for a period – although not at that time – Osama bin Laden had taken refuge there. Indeed he had been welcomed and had invested there. The Americans had formed the view that a factory in Khartoum, a pharmaceutical factory, was one of those he had invested in and could be used to develop chemical weapons. It is now widely recognised that there was nothing untoward about the Al-Shifa factory. But the US had attacked it and the Prime Minister felt obliged to express support for what had happened. Poor Alan Goulty, who was the Ambassador there, sent a message saying, "Good shot, wrong target." He had to leave Khartoum but I had talks with,

as I recall the PUS equivalent in their MFA, and things were restored and I paid my first visit to Sudan.

What else? As I said Iraq, along with Israel-Palestine, was the dominant issue. UNSCOM was led by a new and not very diplomatically nimble Head, Richard Butler, who had been the Australian Permanent Representative in New York when I was there. Previously UNSCOM had been headed by a very ... he might seem bumbling, but he was a very competent official, Ralf Ekeus. He knew how to operate with the Iraqis, to get past their obfuscation and sustain his mission, though he too had encountered major difficulties. The international community for the most part, including the French, were becoming increasingly impatient. Saddam felt that there was a situation he could exploit and the inspectors were denied access. The Americans believed things couldn't be allowed to go on as they were. The United Nations, in the shape of Kofi Annan, was keen to avert possible military action and find a way forward. It all came together towards the end of 1998 with Butler's withdrawal of UNSCOM. There were discussions including in Number 10 in which I took part. I remember one, late at night, with the Prime Minister. It's all been much explored by the Chilcot Report. The planes had taken off but Saddam backed down, even as the Prime Minister was speaking to Washington, and the decision was taken to call it off. In the end, in December, further provocation resulted in operation Desert Fox. For me, as somebody who had believed in Ekeus' approach, and working things through methodically, I must say it was a low point. But after what had happened, it was inevitable.

I spent the next year, really, trying to put the pieces together again. By which I mean to restore a measure of Security Council consensus as to how to proceed, to ensure that we could continue to pursue what remained our core policy, which was containment, so that Saddam couldn't develop weapons of mass destruction. Or keep them, on the assumption that he had some – which I confess I wasn't completely convinced of.

SR: Why not?

DP: Well, so much work had been done. Little had been found. But you couldn't prove a negative.

So really for the whole of 1999 the biggest concern of the Director, Middle East was to put arrangements in place which might ensure continuation of a successful containment policy. It became my personal top priority because it required action, not so much by Embassies, but

interaction at my level with opposite numbers, particularly in Paris, Washington and Moscow, all of which I visited after Desert Fox. I brought together Jean-Claude Cousseran, the French Middle East Director, and David Welch, the American Assistant Secretary for International Organisations, to discuss a mechanism which would provide ... the terms of art were a 'wider cage' and 'light at the end of the tunnel' in the sense that, were Saddam actually to cooperate with the agencies as required by Council Resolutions, there would be sanctions relief. I worked particularly closely with David Welch. He was similarly minded, though tugging towards the harder end of the spectrum while the French and Russians were sceptical but wanted the Security Council to be able to come together again. The product was Security Council Resolution 1284, a text which was sponsored by the United Kingdom alone, to set up a new agency, UNMOVIC, to replace UNSCOM. It was adopted by eleven votes: the French and the Russians abstained. They were on board but keen to show that they were still tugging in the other direction. That was my Christmas present in 1999! I went to Sweden to talk to Hans Blix whom we had identified as the ideal Head for UNMOVIC. He accepted and was approved as Head of the new agency, and, on that note, my engagement with Iraq effectively ended.

SR: A good note on which to finish. Thank you.

2000 - 2003: Ambassador, British Embassy, Riyadh

SR: Good morning. This is Suzanne Ricketts recording Derek Plumbly on October 20, 2018. Derek, at the end of our last session, you talked about being Director for Middle East and North Africa. You then moved on, back to a familiar place. You were appointed our man in Riyadh. Tell me about that.

DP: It was 2000, the middle of the year, in the summer. Even though we had both enjoyed our previous posting, there was a certain amount of foreboding I think. Partly because of leaving the children in boarding school – the first time that we had been away from them in that way. Secondly, I suppose, because we'd had a good time in New York and London. The restrictions, the limitations of life in Saudi Arabia loomed rather larger.

SR: Being the Ambassador is rather different, isn't it, from being a Head of Chancery for example? It comes with different responsibilities.

DP: It's true. You had less time to explore in the desert or whatever, something we greatly enjoyed. Nadia couldn't work. But she was one hundred percent supportive, and became very much involved- arranging for example a visit by the Crown Prince's daughter and friends of the National Museum to look at museum management in the UK.

And going there, there were obvious strengths: a close relationship between the two countries, a close defence relationship in particular; a big British expatriate community, over 30,000 strong at the time. I had – and an enormous asset it proved to be – the advantage of having served there six years already. From the previous time that we were there, we had very close, good Saudi friends, and access. I remember Crown Prince Abdullah saying at one particularly difficult time, “You're one of us”. Although I'm sure that people back home would hope you're not going native – that's always one of the themes – it was good that the Saudis understood my basic sympathy and that we knew each other well.

Things had changed. The King, first of all. King Fahd had a stroke several years before I got there, in 1995. He was incapacitated. The interpreter would say that His Majesty is delighted to see you and remembers with great affection ... but he didn't know whether I was the British Ambassador or the Belgian, really, or perhaps even whether I was an Ambassador at all. But he remained the King and that diminished, for most of my time there, the authority of the person who actually had to rule, at the head of the pyramid, the then Crown Prince Abdullah. It meant that governance was – even more than it had been at other times – multipolar, because other senior Princes had their own fiefdoms and powerful voices.

I should say a word about Abdullah because he featured very largely. He was a straightforward person, respected by Saudis and, I must say, by us too. He'd had a stutter. I remember one occasion, when I was Director I think, I found myself interpreting on the phone. I was in one place, Tony Blair was in another and he in another. He was still stuttering then and rarely got to the end of a sentence. So it was quite difficult to interpret and give the sense of what he was saying – he was being pushed on something he didn't wish to be pushed on, and it was even more elliptical. But he'd pretty well overcome that by the time I arrived as Ambassador. I think he worked very hard at being a good leader, but as I said his power was circumscribed.

He felt strongly about Palestine, particularly against the backdrop of the intifada in Palestine, and he gave George W Bush a hard time on it. In a way, our policies converged to a certain

extent, because Tony Blair was trying to press Bush to be more interested in the MEPP and so was Abdullah. He came up, of course, in 2002 with the Arab Peace Initiative. It was a bold move, declaring readiness to make peace with Israel, to recognise and accept it in return for the creation of a Palestinian state, and he got other Arabs to agree it. It is one of his achievements which still stands.

The biggest challenge he faced in the years I was Ambassador, though, was 9/11. Saudi Arabia was very lucky to have him then. The instinctive response of most Saudis to what had happened seemed to be “It can’t have been us”: they had all sorts of other explanations, the Israelis or whatever. I remember Baroness Symons coming out soon after the attack. I gave a dinner for her. There were a lot of Saudis round the table. She was astonished that not one of them could buy the fact that 15 Saudis had been responsible for this.

But Abdullah’s response was correct. That was very important for Saudi Arabia and its relationship with the United States, although 9/11 still greatly changed things in that relationship.

I was also lucky with the Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al Faisal. Almost every British Foreign Secretary I ever dealt with talked of Prince Saud as among the best of his counterparts. He was measured, skilful, reflective ... He had long since proved himself – peacemaking at the end of the civil war in Lebanon for example. Indeed he had become Foreign Minister in 1975 when I was starting in Jeddah as Second Secretary. He was Foreign Minister when I returned as Ambassador twenty five years later. When I was UN Special Coordinator in Lebanon in 2014 he was still Foreign Minister and still very helpful. It was extraordinary continuity. One wouldn’t necessarily have recommended it in other systems. But he was a very wise voice, I have to say.

Ghazi al Gosaibi was Ambassador in London at the beginning of my time there. He had been for a long period. He was a free-speaking diplomat who got into occasional trouble with the world press about some of the things he said. He was a liberal spirit, a reformer. He had been a modernising minister in the seventies and was brought back by Abdullah. He also was a great help. I’m saying all of this because, actually, I had a pretty difficult time. There were difficult issues to be addressed, which coloured the business side of the relationship. They were more difficult times than my earlier ones, even though the challenges during the Kuwait war had been great.

The other scene setting thing to say is that, in the eight years since I had last worked there, the voices of Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden had come to resonate more with some in Saudi Arabia, and indeed not just in Saudi Arabia, and that, although 9/11 was the headline, this had its impact too in acts of violence in the Kingdom.

Almost as soon as we got there, in November 2000, coincidentally during a visit by the Duke of York, a British citizen and his wife were driving home and a bomb exploded in their car. He was killed. It was the first of a number of attacks, individual shootings or bombings which took place during 2001, 2002 and 2003. Not all the attacks were lethal, but there was a pattern. In retrospect, clearly, the inspiration was as I've described. But that wasn't how the Saudi investigators initially read it. There were, inevitably, illicit expatriate bars in Riyadh. The victim had been in one. They posited from this that they were dealing with an alcohol trading war and arrested a Brit who had a background working in one of these places. A confession was obtained and that set the pattern. One or two other Brits were arrested, a Canadian, a Belgian. They were paraded on television. I was summoned by the Minister of the Interior in the middle of the night to hear the story. Over a period of months it became more elaborate. It was even alleged that the acts were on instructions from the Embassy!

This is all in the public domain. People involved in it have written their memoirs. Obviously, things had to be looked into carefully. Another British subject was injured in a bombing outside a bookstore in Riyadh a few months later. I mention him because he was arrested, similarly confessed, and then after six months was released and after he had left spoke about what had happened. The pattern became pretty clear.

Every visitor we had would raise the cases. I found lots of occasions to raise it myself, of course, and things did move. But once the story is out there, people – even including Crown Prince Abdullah – would not instinctively disbelieve their own policemen. Nonetheless by 2003 one felt that it was moving in the right direction. Then, substantively, the landscape changed because the terrorist campaign acquired a different character and proportion. In May 2003 there were bombings: three compounds were separately attacked in one night.

SR: When you mention compounds, were they British, expatriate, diplomatic?

DP: None of this was targeting Brits per se, but the British were among the largest Western expatriate communities, and they were targeting Westerners. Behind it, in the minds of those responsible, there was the societal influence of a large Western presence, and particularly - in

the beginning at least- an American military presence which was a *bête noire* for bin Laden and his friends. In the compound bombings 39 people were killed. I went to the Hamra compound the morning after the attack. Brits were affected. It was close to the British school. A locally engaged member of the Embassy staff – as I recall she was Lebanese – was affected in another of the compound bombings.

I think it had already dawned on the leadership that they had a more serious problem here. It wasn't just individual angry people and it certainly wasn't foreign alcohol traders. It was an endemic threat to Saudi Arabia that needed to be addressed. Saudis were amongst those who were injured and killed in the bombings as well. All this progressively changed things: from the Ministry of Interior being a place where I went to press a particularly difficult consular problem, it became – and certainly after my time was very much – a place where people went to talk together about how to address a common threat.

I left in August and the detainees came out the same week. I extended in order to make absolutely sure that they would leave. They were not pardoned and, for some, that remains an issue. They were released although, in at least one case, they had been very severely sentenced: at the time we hadn't been aware even that the legal process had reached that point. It was all very difficult, a shadow that hung over us. I don't want to overemphasise it. But it weighed on one throughout the time one was there.

We did, of course, have a lot of other issues. Saudi Arabia is a country where the commercial interest is very strong, obviously. The British Council is very active. The political activity – I talked about Palestine – both in terms of reporting on the occasionally opaque domestic scene, but also on Saudi views on wider regional issues ... there was a lot to be done. I had good support: Philip Parham as Commercial Counsellor and Simon McDonald and then Dominic Asquith as Deputy Heads of Mission. So I had a very strong team throughout my time.

The other big issue which hung over us at that time, after 9/11, was Iraq, specifically the determination of George Bush and Tony Blair to finish the issue and finally deal with Saddam Hussein or, rather, not deal with him but end the challenge that he and his system had presented. The link to 9/11 is not clear to me, I have to say, and wasn't at the time. But the Saudis were not in a very strong position to argue the case against what was proposed, which was either that he backs down and comes absolutely clean and gives up all his

weapons of mass destruction or ... and the or, from very soon after 9/11, was clearly military action. Abdullah's position was absolutely clear, that this was misguided, but his voice was unlikely, in the circumstances, to be as influential as it might have been in a different situation. But then in a different situation we wouldn't necessarily have been facing the problem.

My dealings on it were largely with Prince Saud who, at each stage, was very clear about the risks and straightforward in his advice. As the drums of war beat louder and louder, he said it would be America's Boer War: America discovering the limits of its power as Britain did in the Boer War. The Saudis came up with ways out, suggestions to mitigate the situation at least. They argued strongly against an attempt to destroy the system altogether in one blow: if you have to do it, decapitate but don't dismantle. That, of course, was very sound advice and I put it all back to London but I can't say it was listened to.

I remember meetings with both Saud and with Prince Abdul Aziz, Abdullah's son, who was at that time an adviser to him and later Vice Foreign Minister. As I recall we sought some Saudi assistance with transit and basing. For all their misgivings, it was granted.

As an Ambassador, you have to make the best case you can. I confess I did not foresee the degree of chaos that followed the war. The concerns I had can be seen in a letter I sent to the PUS, which has been published with the Chilcot report. I said containment was a good policy and we should stick with it if we possibly could. We might aspire to regime change but we shouldn't set out ourselves to achieve it. Military action would be deeply unpopular in the Arab world as a whole and provide further food for extremists. That was my view: I had come to be pretty sceptical about the WMD thing, but that's immaterial really. I fed the thought in with people who came our way. But these weren't messages that people wanted to hear, frankly.

So those were the things that coloured my third stay in Saudi Arabia. But we still managed to have a good time, I must say, in the sense that the friendships continued, the family came out in the holidays, and the desert trips were resumed when we could. When I look back on it in work terms though, maybe my initial foreboding was correct, though I certainly couldn't have foreseen what happened precisely.

SR: Did you ever feel under threat?

DP: It's funny, isn't it? Until I was UN representative in Lebanon, I never had personal protection. Maybe I should have done? But I don't really recall feeling under threat, although the acts of individual violence were horrible.

2003 - 2007: Ambassador, British Embassy, Cairo

SR: And so then you went on to another ambassadorial post, back to Cairo.

DP: Yes, I think it was a surprise in that I wasn't sure, with an Egyptian wife, that it was something which would happen. But for both of us, it was a delight! It was a country that we knew much more intimately than could have been the case in other circumstances. And it was a good time to be there.

Let's start with the circumstances of our life in Cairo. It was obviously nice for us because we had family there which was great.

SR: Was the Residence a wonderful building?

DP: Yes, it was built in the late nineteenth century for Lord Cromer who, in many ways, was the effective ruler of Egypt at the time. It was built to impress. Churchill was a repeat visitor during the Second World War. The garden then stretched to the Nile. Part of it was taken by Abdul Nasser to make a road by the river. But the garden is still large. The Chancery is adjacent to it. Of course we were very lucky to have the opportunity to live in a house like that. Beyond the fact that it was nice for us though, the house was a strong diplomatic tool. VIP visitors could stay there. Egyptians wanted to come to it. We had a place we could use for all sorts of events, not just diplomatic dinners. The Egyptian breast cancer campaign, the Paralympics ... we would host fundraising events in the garden or in the house. It creates sympathy and brings more and more people in.

Next to the house Lord Kitchener, who also was Consul General in the days when the relationship was very different, had built a ballroom which had fallen out of use. It turned out that the cheapest thing to do with it, because there was discussion about knocking it down which would have been a security issue because of lack of stand-off and so on, was to give it a coat of paint and use it occasionally for conferences and meetings and lectures and so on. The Residence was good for the mission. It was a lovely place to be, I have to say, but it's also an asset, a historic building, and it's marvellous that it has been supported.

SR: But occasionally the Treasury thinks of selling these buildings ...

DP: Yes, but it would have been challenged, the original site was I think a gift from the Egyptian government. It would not be straightforward. In any event the house is of real historical importance both for Egypt and the UK and it remains a great asset for UK plc in Egypt.

SR: Tell me about the political scene.

DP: It bears saying not just that our relations were good but they were also strong in very substantive ways. The UK still is, if you look at cumulative investment, and was then, way ahead of any other country as an investor in Egypt, the largest source of foreign direct investment. Big in the oil and gas sector with BP, British Gas and Shell. HSBC and Barclays were there, Vodafone, Cadbury, Unilever ... Trading relations and the commercial and investment relationship were all very strong. And tourism. We were the largest source of foreign tourists and tourism is, of course, vital to the Egyptian economy: one million UK tourists a year in the time that I was there. So there was a strong consular and commercial side to the mission's work.

We had – and still have – a very strong interest in Egypt's stability. Apart from anything else, because of its geographical position, its relative size and proximity and its weight in the Arab world. So, for all these reasons it was important to get the reporting and the messaging right. We were lucky that there were no very serious bilateral irritants in the relationship.

President Mubarak was 75 when I got there. He was still engaged but didn't have to push himself. He was a genial and welcoming person when one saw him, good-humoured. He'd been doing the job for a long time, and was by nature cautious. Nonetheless Egypt was, one felt, changing in those days, and on the whole for the good. His wife, Suzanne, actively promoted women's issues, from the ability to pass on nationality to combatting FGM. She has come in for criticism since. But in many ways she was an active player for good causes. Mubarak had been the target of demonstrations when he visited the UK and had no interest in repeating the experiment. But his wife (who had a Welsh mother) was I think instinctively well disposed.

Important, in terms of my own contacts, was Gamal Mubarak, their younger son who was playing an increasingly important part in setting the domestic policy agenda. Gamal had

been inspired by looking outside, and by his own experience there. He referred to Tony Blair's Third Way and was at first looking to push both economic and political reform, which in the interests of stability, I must say, looked a good thing. The Americans, post 9/11, were busy pushing their own 'Broader Middle East' agenda in a somewhat prescriptive way. Our resources in this area were modest. Egypt – during my time – became ineligible for development assistance. We didn't have the enormous programme budgets that are now available to the Foreign Office to support stabilisation or security interests. So it was really a question of acts of presence, diplomatic engagement, gently encouraging liberalisation ...

On the economic side a vigorous economic team led by Youssef Boutros Ghali and Mahmoud Moheiddin made real advances in terms of privatisation and reform. The economy grew quite impressively. As a large investor it was possible for us to speak in support and to have people to the Embassy, as we did regularly, for discussions with the business community and so on.

In terms of political reform, I was reminded only the other day that I was the only Ambassador to turn up in 2004 at the launch of a new secular (for want of a better word) opposition party, Hizb El Ghad. Without adopting the prescriptive approach of the Americans, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy engaged usefully if modestly. They had a programme blessed by the Speaker which brought together parliamentarians of all tendencies, leftist oppositionists, Wafdists, Muslim Brothers, the governing NDP.

These were themes through my first two years in Cairo. In the second half of 2005, the UK had the Presidency of the European Union. This coincided with presidential and parliamentary elections in Egypt. They were different from earlier ones. In a nod perhaps to US pressure the Presidential election was direct and contested, with the El Ghad party fielding their leader as a candidate against President Mubarak and other candidates running too; previously Presidents had been chosen by Parliament and then approved by referendum.

There was no Egyptian desire to have formal election monitoring. We had EU meetings which I chaired which helped coordinate our local 'observation' of what was going on so as to inform EU and member state reactions.

The parliamentary elections took place towards the end of the year. The Muslim Brothers were not running – formally speaking the movement was proscribed – but as independents

they got 20% of the seats. There was a presence of other opposition parties too though the space available to them was limited and the complaints were legion.

All in all though, up to this point you could describe things as moving. But the relative success of the Muslim Brother candidates had a chilling effect, I think, on the interest of the NDP reformers, led by Gamal Mubarak, in political reform. Parliamentarians were active. The media were more open and diverse than they had been. But the leadership pulled back from political reform.

You asked about the Muslim Brothers more specifically. Contact with them was an issue. There was leaked correspondence, which was publicly quoted in the New Statesman later. My view – reflected in that – was that from all sorts of angles it made no sense for us actually to run after them. I met one or two of their parliamentarians but didn't go beyond that.

What else to say? I haven't mentioned foreign policy. It is a good example of an area where having been there before helped because both the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amre Moussa, and the Foreign Minister for most of the time I was there, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, were people I had known when I was a young First Secretary in shorts! The difficult time was 2006, during the invasion of Lebanon. Mubarak at first was probably not totally sorry to think that Hezbollah might be cut down to size, but the mood changed as the campaign went on and on and the displacement in Lebanon was deep and serious. People were understandably very angry. The UK and the US were criticised for their reluctance to call for a ceasefire. I and my American colleague at the time disappeared to the North coast, basically to avoid having to speak or address the issue, because there wasn't anything we could usefully say.

SR: Another difficult moment must have been the bombing in Sharm al-Sheikh?

DP: Yes, there were one or two lesser terrorist attacks. That in July 2005 in Sharm al-Sheikh was of a different order. It was the biggest terrorist attack in Egypt since the Luxor killings in the '90s. 88 people were killed, most of them Egyptians. Amongst the tourists who were killed the largest number were British. I and the consular staff drove across Sinai in the night to be there. At first, it wasn't clear how many people had died or who had died: people were looking for information. It was very testing dealing with families who had been impacted in this way – horrible for them. You offer the support you can and being there instantly with consular support is a vital part of what embassies do.

SR: It's important if the Foreign Secretary can say that the Ambassador is on his/her way or on site.

DP: Yes, there's that element, but not just that. It's being there to hold hands, to put people in touch with people, to arrange for people to be moved if they have to be and to consider the advice that is going to be given. This has to be done on the spot, to be honest. This attack occurred just after the terrorist bombings in London, in the summer of 2005. That, I think, influenced the way it was seen. You're right, I did have my phone conversations with the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. I did speak on the Today programme. Then you have to think about consular advice. The decision that was taken was to describe the circumstances and the nature of the threat, but not to say 'Don't go' – in the light of all the facts obviously but also I think in the knowledge that terror could strike anywhere: indeed it had just struck King's Cross with similar impact.

What else to say? We had a lot of visitors. Egypt is the sort of country people like to visit. I talked about President Mubarak already, his personality and access to him. That was certainly helped by the fact that we had a good number of visitors and that the Prime Minister of the day, Tony Blair, chose to spend Christmas every year we were there in Sharm al-Sheikh with his family. One would greet him, he would go and stay in the same place basically – a hotel with a good view of the sea – to soak up the sun. At the beginning of the visit or at the end, or both, there would be interaction with the Mubaraks – a dinner, a meeting or whatever. This was brilliant for me and seemed to work very well. It wasn't our initiative. It was something that the Blair family had chosen to do, with advice initially from my predecessor.

Otherwise, I should mention Tessa Jowell who came out in 2005. It was the peak of the campaign to get the Olympics to London and she did a really good job, I have to say. I mentioned how we were always trying to get people into the house. Thanks to her we got all the sporting elite and sporting bureaucracy of Egypt. We got the Olympics to London by a narrow margin: Egypt had two votes. It's a secret ballot so you can never know whether you actually have swung it or not, but the Egyptians did absolutely promise us their votes.

The last visit I would mention is that of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall in March 2006. It was their first official visit anywhere as a married couple. It was great for all of us. Nadia I think was probably the perfect introducer to Egyptian society. It was a full

programme. We'd been working on the establishment of the British University in Egypt, which has grown and prospered since. The Prince of Wales opened it with Mrs Mubarak. He gave an excellent and well attended speech at the Azhar. Apart from the obvious functions in Cairo, we took them to the desert, specifically to the Siwa oasis, where there is a marvellous eco-lodge, and he held an 'environmental summit' in the desert. We had the Egyptian Minister of the Environment and various Egyptian environmentalists who talked about the challenges and threats, which are very real in Egypt with its large population and vulnerability to climate change. They also visited Alamein, the Commonwealth Graves there, as we did in October each year on the anniversary of the battle.

SR: In your notes, you asked the question 'What went wrong?'

DP: Yes, although we were to a certain extent in a gilded cage, with family in Egypt you do see and get to know every side of Egyptian society. We would go to places and meet people who had a very hard life indeed. But, certainly in our earlier years there you felt that Egypt was on a reasonably positive, modernising trajectory. You could see how things might move forward in a peaceful, progressive way. So what did go wrong? The biggest thing, which you could see towards the end of our time there, was the Mubaraks' failure to focus on the issue of the succession properly and to kill the rumour that Gamal was going to become the successor. I used to see Gamal in Air Force House, which is where he sat, rather than in the party headquarters, though his position in the NDP was his claim to a political role. His office was relatively modest but there was something princely about the exclusivity of it all which helped to foster the idea, I think perhaps wrongly, that this was the President's plan. I don't think he had settled the issue in his mind. But I do think the failure to settle on a sustainable succession – whether a transition to a civilian leader, or a retired member of the military or whatever – was an important factor. I described Mubarak's engagement, his geniality and his good sense. But as he grew older, and certainly in the years after I left, I think he disengaged more. Things politically moved in a harsher direction after the 2005 elections, feeding the sort of complaints that animated the revolution, when it occurred in 2011, about police brutality and so on. And, though the economy continued to grow, the poor failed to feel the benefits. So all of these are I think factors, but it's not really my story.

2008 - 2011: Chairman, the Assessment and Evaluation Commission, Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Sudan

SR: Good morning. It's 20 November, 2018. Derek, we finished our last session with your time in Egypt. But you had a surprise in 2008. Tell me how it happened

DP: It actually came in the latter part of 2007. We were planning to retire, because I was about to turn 60 and that was the rule at the time. I hadn't really thought about what I might do next because I'd been quite busy in Cairo. Andrew Lloyd, who was at that time the Director for Africa, rang me to say that people were looking for someone to fill the post of Chair of the Assessment and Evaluation Commission in Sudan. The Chair would be resident there. The Office were interested in providing somebody. I jumped at it. I was enthusiastic about the idea of doing something full time and substantial, and of working in a totally new capacity, on a peace agreement and in a country which, although I had visited it once, I didn't really know.

The background was that the Commission, which was established as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South in Sudan, had been in place for the first three years of the implementation of that agreement (which was signed in 2004) but a crisis had arisen. The movement which represented the Southerners, the SPLM, had withdrawn from the Commission towards the end of 2007 because of delays in implementation. Not only did they withdraw from the Commission, but also from the government of national unity which consisted of them and the ruling party in the North, the NCP. The Chairman of the Commission, the AEC as it was known, Tom Vraalsen – a former minister in Norway – resigned in protest at what he saw as the NCP's lack of cooperation. The SPLM had since returned to government but the Commission was leaderless and its staff – such staff as it had – had largely dispersed. So that was the situation I was going to jump into.

My appointment was made formally, not by the British government - although I was nominated by them to fill Tom's place and paid by FCO, but by President Bashir and Salva Kir, the leader of the South. The Chair of the Commission was independent. The United Kingdom continued to be represented on the Commission by the British Ambassador in Khartoum. The membership consisted of the witnesses to the peace agreement: the Troika which had strongly supported the original negotiations, that is to say the UK, the US and

Norway, plus Italy which had been the Chair of the Friends Group, and the Netherlands; the UN, the EU, the African Union and the Arab League; the regional governments which had led the negotiation, Kenya and Ethiopia representing the sub-regional grouping IGAD; plus the Sudanese parties, that is to say the SPLM and the NCP. The Commission's mandate stemmed from the first protocol of the CPA, the Machakos Protocol. It was to oversee the implementation of the Peace Agreement through the interim period of six years leading up to a self-determination referendum in the South. The Agreement covered a wealth of measures by way of democratisation, security sector reform, wealth-sharing and so on that were to take place during this interim period. The declared objective was to make unity attractive but with the option of independence for South Sudan at the end of the period, subject to the will of the people of South.

In Tom Vraalsen's time, the pattern of the Commission's meetings had been set as once a month with representation by the two parties at ministerial level: the South had ministers present in the Khartoum government and they tended to be the Southerners who came, notably Kosti Manibe, who went on to be Finance Minister of the South. Other attendees included Angelina Teny, the wife of Riek Machar, then Vice-President of the South, and Pagan Amum, the Secretary General of the SPLM. From the North, we regularly had a Minister, Idrees Abdul Qadir; one of the prime negotiators of the original CPA who was the head of a think tank in Khartoum, Said el Khatib; and others who would come along for particular subjects. International participation was at ambassadorial level though sometimes people would send Sudan envoys from capitals if they had them.

The Commission had been pretty comprehensively deadlocked in Tom Vraalsen's time. It had proved incapable of agreeing anything by way of texts or recommendations - which was part of its purpose, to bring people together, assess progress, and find a way through problems or differences as they arose. There were sub-groups which looked at wealth-sharing; power-sharing; security sector issues; and issues in three areas in the North - Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which were due to have a process of popular consultation towards the end of the interim period, and Abyei, where there was supposed to be a referendum to coincide with the referendum in the South, to decide whether it went South or North. Abyei's resident population was largely Dinka but a nomadic Arab tribe from South Kordofan, the Misseriya, crossed the area every year with their cattle.

The Commission worked alongside the UN. The very large UN peacekeeping operation in the country – UNMIS – were, as I said, represented on the Commission and they facilitated field visits and so on. When I was appointed, early in 2008, we were approaching the mid point in the CPA implementation period.

SR: Did you have a support staff to help you?

DP: Well, I didn't when I got there, because they'd all beetled off with Tom Vraalsen! There was a locally engaged staff, some of whom had held the fort during the weeks when there would otherwise have been a complete emptiness in the building the Commission occupied in Khartoum. The first task was to set about assembling a team. The Norwegians, the Brits, the Americans were good in funding posts and helping me to locate people to join the Commission. I found a really good Chief of Staff who was paid for by the Norwegians. He was British, Simon Giverin, and had worked at the European Commission. His wife is a Norwegian diplomat. A brilliant economic officer, Laura James, was located by the Brits. She had been working with a think tank in London and knew the economic aspects of the CPA backwards. I decided that we must have representation on the ground in Juba too. That had never been accomplished although it had always been an objective. The Americans stepped forward and provided the funding and backup necessary for a presence on the ground in Juba. The Swiss chipped in and provided a Head of Office there, Rainer Baudendistel, who had worked on an earlier peace process in South Kordofan. So I had really good staff. The Kenyans were supposed to provide a Deputy Chair, and did towards the end of the interim period. Everybody became much more animated towards the end!

But we were faced with quite a high hill to climb from the outset. As I have said, the Commission had never succeeded in producing an agreed report. There was a list that had been produced at one point – X, Y and Z had been done. But there was no report in continuous prose with recommendations and the other things you might expect, because the principle had been established of consensus, and the group, involving the two parties as well as the internationals, could never come to agreement. The main requirement, the only specific requirement other than oversight, specifically laid on the AEC in the Protocol and the Agreement, was to produce a mid-term evaluation of progress achieved and, by implication, pointing up what needed to be done. I was given by the Brits – very kindly, again – a pen. We set to. The target was to do it in three or four months, by the middle of the year. We succeeded, to the amazement of the United Nations. We drafted and secured the cooperation

of the parties and got a comprehensive and substantial report agreed, with recommendations on all of the issues.

It wasn't just producing a mid-term evaluation. We were also confronted with a couple of immediate crises, one of which was over the census. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement provided for a census, North and South, to be the basis first for democratic elections and then for the referendum in the South. The South had objected to the terms on which the census was being conducted. But in truth nobody wanted the ship to sink. There was a strong shared interest, in the shape of oil produced in the South and exported through the North which had produced an unprecedented spurt of economic growth. And in the South, you had this sense of people coming together, albeit in a very challenged way, trying to build a nation. They didn't want things to fall apart. The shock to the system which had occurred in 2007 also helped us, I think. It impelled people like my friends Said el Khatib and Kosti Manibe to be accommodating on the mid-term evaluation. And also the internationals, to put their shoulders to the wheel again. All of this, I think, contributed to resolution of the census problem. It was settled through something the Commission had never tried before: an emergency meeting. A formula was devised there which was taken by me to a joint meeting with President Bashir and Salva Kir. The census was held and everybody respected its results, which was great.

The biggest thing that happened in those first months though related to Abyei, the border area in the North, home to the Ngok Dinka, where a referendum was due to take place at the end of the implementation period. There was fighting between the Sudanese army and locals. Things got very bad, the worst fighting since the beginning of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This was in May 2008. We had another emergency meeting, at which the principals both came from the tribes at the heart of the issue, Deng Alor from the Ngok Dinka, who was at that time Foreign Minister of Sudan, and Dirdiri Muhammad Ahmed a Misseriya who is now the Foreign Minister but at that time was legal adviser to the Northern team. The decision taken was that we must go and have a look at it. So the Ambassadors and myself and Dirdiri and Deng Alor took off. We went to Muglad which is the Misseriya centre in Kordofan and spent a night there and argued with the leaders of the tribe about what had happened. We went to Abyei itself, where the *tukuls*, the homes of the people, were still burning. It was shocking. Abyei town, a town of tens of thousands of people, had been more or less cleared. UNMIS had sat there and done nothing. Both Dirdiri and Deng were, I think,

really shocked by what they saw. Decent people. We came back to Khartoum with recommendations the essence of which were that the parties must talk and work to resolve this. And they did. It took them maybe a couple of weeks to sit down and, as people do in these situations, produce a roadmap.

I haven't gone into the details of the dispute, but it was twofold, beyond the friction between the two communities: the first issue was what constitutes the Abyei area referred to in the Protocol; and the second is who are the people of Abyei who should be entitled to vote – clearly they are the Ngok Dinka, but what about the Misseriya, to what extent are they entitled to vote? “Where is Abyei” was a really big problem partly because a significant slice of the oil production in Sudan, virtually all of that which actually took place north of the presumed border, was in the Abyei area as defined by the Abyei Boundary Commission set up immediately after the Agreement. That Commission's report had been summarily rejected by the North on the grounds that they had exceeded their mandate and misinterpreted the Agreement.

So, to resolve the dispute, you first had to find out where Abyei was and then to decide who was entitled to vote in a referendum and finally to arrange the referendum. In the meantime, you had to enable the two communities to live in peace together, and get people back to their homes. The parties' road map at least addressed the questions. Peace returned to Abyei, at least for a time. Things did settle down. The issue of where Abyei was, they decided, should be put to arbitration, by the Court of Arbitration in The Hague. I'll come later to how it all actually ended up. But I must say that, by late 2008, you felt that you were making a difference and that you were working with people who were sophisticated, speaking to real interests, but capable of resolving problems.

We settled into Khartoum during all of this. Nadia came and joined me. We found a flat by the Blue Nile in an area called Kfourri. We loved life in Khartoum. Over time, I had a place in Juba too, but we spent more of our time in Khartoum. That's where most of the meetings of the Commission took place, though not all of them. We held meetings in the South and I would go there regularly to talk to leaders and to gauge the temperature, to see what we ought to be focusing on. Sometimes Nadia went with me.

Stuff happened towards the end of 2008 and early 2009 which made things more difficult. I'm thinking particularly of the intervention ... the actions of the International Criminal

Court. Even as the CPA was signed in 2004 there was trouble in Darfur. It became more and more serious to the point at which President Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court and an arrest warrant issued in respect of Darfur. I've described going to see Bashir over the census – such contact didn't happen after that. It wasn't that I was unwilling to go, but others were: the Western members of the Commission had no contact with him, and he stood back from dealings with people like me. So that was a complication. It sucked energy out of the implementation process, not just in the sense that contact with the North at the top attenuated. If you were looking to punish the President, you could not easily at the same time offer him incentives to cooperate in CPA implementation.

So we went into a less supercharged period, although I have to say that at every other level in the North, including that of the Vice President, Ali Osman Taha, who had been the Northern signatory of the peace treaty, my access was unchanged. In the South I would usually see Salva Kir when I visited. The parties continued to talk, including in the AEC. They remained in government together. The frictions were there. But business was conducted normally, including with the international partners.

Milestones passed? Well, the Permanent Court of Arbitration did rule on Abyei. Their ruling was accepted by both parties and Abyei moved forward a step. And elections were held in 2010 across North and South Sudan. I wouldn't say they were the freest and fairest elections in the world, but they were monitored by people like the Carter Foundation. It too was an important step forward in implementation of the Agreement.

But it had been pretty clear from the moment when I got to Sudan, and now was very patently clear, that the part of the Agreement which had committed Sudan, both North and South, to working to make unity attractive would come to nothing. I guess really it was evident, almost from the point at which John Garang died. He had had a fine vision, of a New Sudan. He had the charisma and the authority, perhaps, to persuade his own people, and even to influence the North, at least to make an effort in that direction. Salva Kir had no such interest, nor did most of his followers. The provisions which were written into the Agreement about reconciliation and joint institutions and so on to make unity attractive had withered during the implementation period. The stark truth was that the Southerners were headed towards one goal which was independence. A referendum and then independence.

It's strange that this didn't really strike home in the North. People were busy with the economic boom. It was only in the last couple of years that the sense appeared to strike home that people should perhaps try, if not to make unity attractive, then at least to mitigate the impact of separation. We encouraged something which Ali Osman Taha and Riek Machar led, an initiative based on the idea of 'tamazzuj', intermingling, so that even if the two countries were to move apart, the border would be soft and so on. Meetings were held in that sense in border areas, a couple of big ones with grandees there.

That spirit actually does inform some of the arrangements which we began to discuss soon after, about what might happen after the referendum. We went on with our meetings and field trips and so on, with a particular focus on the border areas especially Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile; but the biggest story of the last eighteen months I spent in Sudan was preparing for after the referendum, and trying to ensure that the peace between North and South which had been cemented by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the ending of 60 years of war, would be protected. That was the overriding concern.

To that end, I should stand back and say that throughout my time we worked closely with IGAD and the African Union. I attended at least one IGAD summit and reported to the African Union in Addis Ababa regularly, to their Peace and Security Committee, on the progress of CPA implementation. The African Union had a mediation effort in Darfur led by a High Level Panel chaired by Thabo Mbeki. After the elections the Panel's remit was extended. It was empowered to facilitate post-referendum arrangements, including the difficult issues in the event of a vote for independence such as:

- the assets and debts of the Sudanese state;
- oil (produced in the South but has to come out via the North) and how to share the proceeds, and to what extent, after independence;
- security along the border ... we were talking about splitting Africa's largest country and one of its longest borders, as yet un-demarcated, and how it was to be demarcated and managed ... we had pointed towards soft borders and so on but these things needed to be agreed;
- and then what would happen in Abyei, where there was supposed to be a referendum, and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile? The two states were covered by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on the understanding that they would remain in the North but that their people had the right to a popular consultation process designed to

protect their unique identity. The SPLM had armed fighters in both. They were living in peace and you had joint governments there, just as you had a joint government in Khartoum. But how would these arrangements survive the split, if and when it came? The SPLM forces in South Kordofan and Blue Nile were integrated with, and under the command of, senior officers sitting Juba. How would all that be managed?

These were among the things which needed to be addressed: the nature of the relationship, and then these knotty issues at the heart of what would inevitably be a painful separation. And then there was the question of how we should all work at it. Thabo Mbeki's Panel, a three-person panel of eminent people from Africa, was charged with leading the process as facilitator. The AEC, and the Western governments in particular which supported it, what was their role?

As it happened, Western governments by and large, at the beginning of this phase, had taken their eyes off the issue. If you weren't in the headlines, you weren't going to get the attention of Presidents and Prime Ministers and so on. On top of which there was the ICC issue in Darfur, meaning that the West didn't have that much to give. And the AEC itself had no particular mandate in this area. Nonetheless, I felt we should have a role, and member governments, IGAD as well as Western, when approached were supportive. We had a capable staff and could be the channel for the funding and logistic support needed for the negotiations. It was discussed and in June 2010, after the elections, an MoU was agreed which gave the AEC and IGAD a support function for Mbeki.

To be frank Thabo Mbeki was not naturally a man to trust Westerners on an inherently African problem. He would speak, often at length, in a way which would emphasise the African-ness of the issue. Nonetheless trust was happily more than established. The Panel were, of course, dependent to some extent on the material support we were able to give. And some of our people – Laura James for example – were pivotal as advisors in the talks. The Norwegians played a key role in facilitating the discussion of the oil issue as a whole. It was all hands to the pump and we ended up being very well integrated. We wouldn't all necessarily have agreed with Mbeki's priorities: he was instinctively resistant to the idea of deep separation, a view I shared to some extent. But we all worked well together.

Which all implies we got all sorts of agreements but we didn't, of course, because the climate was not conducive to it. The South, on oil for example, thought that their hand would be stronger after independence than it was before it, so agreeing detailed arrangements on oil before was not really going to happen. Demarcating a border of the length I've described in a continent where most borders aren't demarcated anyway was not going to happen in months either. And quite apart from the Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile issues adjacent to the border, we had very substantial areas along it which were disputed: those were not going to be resolved hastily. But useful principles were established as to the soft border, freedom of movement, the rights of people from both sides to continue to work and conduct business, the management of Sudan's very substantial international debts and rights to property – Embassies overseas, or whatever – these types of things were successfully addressed. Not quickly, because there was a certain amount of dancing around the issues before the referendum. But after the referendum, in the last few months, the process accelerated.

The referendum itself, in January 2011, is another memory. It was well run by a self standing Referendum Commission chaired by a distinguished Northern lawyer. There were lots of international monitors. Nadia and I joined them. It was an uplifting experience. In Equatoria on the day we saw the enthusiasm with which people voted. President Bashir had visited Juba just before the referendum, and the biggest fear, that somehow the outcome would be contested by the North, was allayed. It was clear that the North wasn't going to do that. There were elements in the North which even breathed a sigh of relief at the thought that the Southerners, largely Christian and holding the state to particular norms which were not theirs, were departing.

After that we had two or three months of negotiations in Bishoftu in Ethiopia. Some things were agreed, as I have described. In the two months before the actual Independence Day (which was in July 2011), things became hotter. Yes, the North had acquiesced in the independence of the South, but it had not seen fit to provide for continuing arrangements for Blue Nile and South Kordofan. The CPA-prescribed process, popular consultation, had happened in Blue Nile but not in Kordofan, where even the elections were delayed. And in Kordofan in particular the state government had split. The SPLM there, led by Abdul Aziz al Helou, was set to retreat to the hills, threatening renewed conflict in the two states. Separately, in Abyei, no referendum was held, because – although the parties had agreed where the area was – they could not agree who was going to vote. So Abyei was in limbo,

the Sudanese army moved in and there was serious fighting. In the last few weeks, those became the greatest challenges: what would happen in the two areas and in Abyei.

We were all in Addis Ababa for the final stage of the discussions. The Ethiopians had come to fill the facilitating role the Kenyans played at the beginning of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Meles Zenawi in person, in the final stages, did a great deal to paper over the cracks, or better, to provide the glue which held things together. In Abyei, the agreement was that there would be a United Nations force, just for this relatively small area. It would consist entirely of Ethiopians. So UNISFA was formed and the problem was parked.

In South Kordofan and Blue Nile, too, there was very serious fighting in the final stages. The North sent their number 3, Nafie, to Addis to negotiate with Malik Agar, the Governor of Blue Nile, representing the SPLM in the North. The talks went right down to the wire and were perhaps the most troubling and difficult episode in the final stage. Alex de Waal – a great Sudan expert who was part of the team – helped broker them. Supporting governments like the Americans were also there: right at the end, they became much more engaged than they had been during the earlier stages. Nafie and Malik reached an agreement which would have provided for continuation of the CPA arrangements in the two areas. But it was rejected by the Sudanese army who refused to accept the continued presence of another armed element there. So, as the South moved to independence, it did so with conflict continuing in the North.

Nonetheless, we all repaired to Juba where the celebrations were amazing. There were Crown Princes and Presidents, George Clooney and anybody you've ever heard of! In the week before, I submitted a final report with recommendations for the future. It was accepted by the two parties, though I guess they just filed it away. I deposited our files in the Sudanese national archive and gave copies to the Southerners and we packed our bags and left. The Commission, its assets and some of its staff were passed on to IGAD, effectively to the Ethiopians who were coordinating for IGAD. The Commission model has continued to be followed in the troubles that have developed since in South Sudan.

If you look back at it, I have to say, these were for the most part good years for Sudan and the South. Our overriding objective, which was to establish a basis for a peaceful relationship between North and South, was eventually established. There was trouble afterwards but they negotiated their way through it. As we speak, according to the press, Salva Kir finds himself

trying to encourage reconciliation inside the North and Bashir has been busy promoting peace in the South. It's reached that point in peaceful coexistence. South Kordofan and Blue Nile remain wounds to be healed, although there are ceasefires, as does Abyei. But the biggest tragedy, of course, is what has happened in the South since, and that clearly colours the whole of my story. The AEC's focus was North/South and what happened along the border. Development agencies and the UN in the South were more focused on change there, but there was a reluctance to challenge the South, I think, about its preparations for life after independence. People were so committed to achieving independence that giving robust advice to Salva Kir, for example, didn't happen in the way it should: there was a presumption of virtue, if you see what I mean. There is a lot here for people in future to reflect on. Nonetheless it was an extraordinary experience.

As in Cairo, I got lucky after we left Khartoum. Some months after I packed my bags, I was contacted by the UN. They had an urgent need to find somebody to represent the Secretary General in Lebanon in succession to Michael Williams. I interviewed for the job and was accepted. In January 2012 Nadia and I moved to Beirut and I served there for three years as the UN Special Coordinator, the political face of the UN presence across the country. Full circle, in a sense, returning to Lebanon forty years after my start there. Not an episode to be covered here, not quite history yet, very busy against the backdrop of the Syrian crisis, but a happy landing for us following on from Khartoum and Juba.

SR: Yes indeed. Very interesting. Before we finish, is there anything you would like to say about your career as a whole? Do you have any reflections on the Office?

DP: I'm not sure that trying to apply the wisdom of the past to present arrangements is necessarily that useful, though it's difficult, of course, to resist the temptation! I regret the devaluing or diminishing of the weight given to regional expertise and knowledge. I regret the fact that we often seem at this moment – although it hasn't always been the case in the time since I left – not to have the bandwidth to address issues like the Sudanese one I've just described, as there is such a preoccupation with our own domestic concerns. It conflicts with the global vision we are alleged to aspire to.

But these are passing gripes. I'm very grateful to the Office and grateful to my colleagues for giving me all the opportunities I had in what were some very exciting postings. I think I will leave it at that!

SR: A very good note on which to stop. Thank you so much.