

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Peter Forbes Ricketts, Baron Ricketts, GCMG 2011 (KCMG 2003; CMG 1999); GCVO 2014

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF PETER FORBES RICKETTS, BARON RICKETTS, GCMG, GCVO, RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT.

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AW: This is 28 October 2016 and Lord Ricketts is in conversation with Abbey Wright. We are recording the recollections of your diplomatic career. Peter, you joined the Office in 1974, a new recruit at 21 - that was very young. Why did you decide to head off straight into diplomacy? Was it straight from University?

PR: It was. Looking back I think that I, as many young people, made those life changing decisions very lightly and without a lot of reflection. In my third year at university I found that friends were beginning to get jobs in the City and I suddenly thought that I'd better think about a career. I had two choices, journalism or the Foreign Office. The BBC offered me a news traineeship and the Foreign Office offered me a fast stream entry. I went to my tutor and said "Which do you think I should do?" He said "I should go for the Foreign Office because it's more structured as a career". Without much more thought that's what I decided to do. I'd always loved being abroad, travelling, loved going to France, from as early as I can remember and the idea of a career involving abroad appealed to me and that was really the basis I went in. I left university in the June and I was a new entrant in the August, still just 21.

AW: Did they send you straight off? Or was there any sort of induction, there was less in those days ...

Reporting Officer, UKMIS, New York, 1974

PR: Practically no induction, there was a two week course, but on the first day they pulled aside three of us, and there were twenty I think in my year, and they said "You three are going off to New York in a fortnight to be the reinforcers for the General Assembly". I had just taken out a lease on a room, so it was all a bit of a scramble, but within three weeks of joining the Foreign Office we were in downtown New York as reporting officers to the UN Mission for three months which was an absolutely extraordinary adventure, straight into the deep end in that fascinating and very intense world of the UN General Assembly and also able to live properly in downtown New York.

AW: Were there lots of exciting things going on at the UN?

PR: 1974 was the year of Palestine at the General Assembly and I was there for Arafat's famous speech with the rifle and the olive branch and making the case for a Palestinian state which was all pretty exciting. It was one year after the 1973 war. That was the big issue. I was quartered with the First Secretary who was dealing with the Middle East, Christopher Batterscombe, and he was very patient. In fact my main memory of those early months was how welcoming all the FCO people were to a complete newcomer who didn't have a clue what it was to be a diplomat and had really had no induction training. It was learning on the job and depended very much on patient desk officers to get you through which in my experience we had. The Permanent Representative was Ivor Richard, a political appointee, a barrister by background, formidable in the Security Council. He spent most of his time that autumn on Palestine: he was very worried that the situation, a year after the 1973 war, was still a tinder box. He described the famous Resolution 242 as more like an air raid shelter!

So three months in New York, learning all the time and then back to London for less than a year before going off on a first posting. I was in Central and Southern African Department on the South Africa desk as a new entrant. Again I depended totally on the forbearance and willingness to mentor of the Desk Officer who was Tony Ford. The British had just left the Simonstown Naval Base, so we were just at the end of that phase and it was a period of intense concern about apartheid, the homelands, and there was a Labour Government. There was a very fiery Junior Minister for Africa, Joan Lester, who terrified me! It was a very political desk to be on with huge public and Parliamentary interest with a very able Desk Officer running it and a great training ground for a youngster like myself.

Looking back on it there are so many things from that period that are no longer there in the Foreign Office at all. The working day was rhythmised by the distribution of telegrams because the telegram was the key instrument for getting information around. Letters were typed by a secretary on carbon copies, an original and at most four carbon copies and of course corrections had to be made on all of them. Letters were therefore very narrowly circulated so if you had something to say that needed to go to a wider audience it had to be a telegram. The telegram was the opposite. It sprayed around everyone. An incoming telegram would go from top to bottom of the Foreign Office depending on the distribution you put on it. So you had the two options, either of a very wide distribution or of a very narrow typed letter point-to-point that went off in the bag.

A department in those days followed the routine of telegram distribution. Nobody got into the Office before 9.30am because the first distribution was then. The Head of Department got one set, the Assistant Head of Department got one set and then the Third Room, as we were called, got a set between us. And that determined our day, what was in the telegrams, what the demands were, and by the end of the day you were sending off telegrams and putting things up to be approved with the answers to those things. There was a whole sub-structure of registries, of communicators, who were there to process this machine which was actually a very efficient communication machine. If an Ambassador abroad wanted to get a message back to the Foreign Office, a telegram would arrive within minutes, or hours at the latest, with the Foreign Secretary, the Desk Officer and lots of other people as well. It needed to be done carefully, and to be drafted properly to have impact. It was in a much more formal hierarchical system because before you sent a telegram off, either from the FCO outwards which committed the Foreign Secretary, or from the Embassy inwards you had to make sure it had the approval of the boss and it had to reflect the boss's view because everyone was going to assume that. The informal channel was the letters which were much slower because they had to go off in a bag. So the Desk Officer's routine was fixed around the telegram distributions and the bag.

For the bag to South Africa, I think there were two a week, there was a peak of work to get things into the bag and there was another peak when the bag came back in again. That whole way of doing business has gone. If you read the diaries of diplomats during the Second World War, I'm reading Alec Cadogan at the moment, it's exactly the same. It was the telegram and then often dictated by the top guy because he's been at the meeting with the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary. By the 1970s the work had been pushed down, originating, initiating was done by the Desk Officers but it was all carefully cleared and redrafted and corrected all the way up to the Foreign Secretary himself who would often sign off the telegram. A very different world, but a world in which the staffing was generous enough to allow some scope around the margins for the Desk Officer to push back his chair and talk to the new entrants and pass on the wisdom of the FCO, the way of doing things, the jokes, the culture, you absorbed it sitting at the desk every day. Looking back that period of seven months in the Southern African Section was better than any induction course could ever have been but it did depend on having the staff resources to give time to that which they saw as part of their job or at least the good ones did.

Third Secretary, Singapore, 1975-78

AW: Then you are posted to Singapore. Did you have any choice in that?

PW: No, absolutely not. I remember a circular from the Personnel Operations Department giving a biblical reference to, I think, Isaiah. When you looked up the reference it said “The Lord said go and he went. And the Lord said come back and he came back”. That was roughly how it was. One day my Assistant Head of Department called me in and said “Guess what? You’re going to Singapore in two months”. All the new entrants were posted around that time and I thought I was incredibly lucky and in fact I was. As it turned out it was ideal because I was the only young Third Secretary in a reasonably sized High Commission. I was the dogsbody that did everything: internal political reporting, ASEAN, social policy, I remember taking a long time to write a despatch on drugs in Singapore. It was great learning of the totality of what a medium sized mission did. I arrived with no real preparation, not much time and no language requirement, only detailed instructions as to what chinaware and things I should go out with for entertaining. My mother and I went out and bought Wedgwood china which I never used, as a bachelor in Singapore I did not do formal entertaining at home. But within a year of joining the Foreign Office I was in Singapore with a house, a car, an entertainment allowance and feeling very grown up, and I absolutely loved it.

It was a fascinating time to be in South East Asia, again just at the end of the British presence. The British Navy had just pulled out of the Dockyards in the North of Singapore, the Vietnam War was just over, South East Asia was awash with people who had been in Vietnam, journalists, diplomats, so there was a real feeling of just having come through that trauma. Singapore was in its lift off phase with Lee Kuan Yew laying the foundations for the huge economic success that Singapore had. His open liberal economic policy, his very interventionist social policy, social housing for all, he was gradually clearing the villages and building high rises. It was very cutting edge for its time. It was a laboratory really for economic and social change. It was fascinating to have free rein to go out and report that in really rather a journalistic sort of way. I wrote things to go back to London on what was happening in Singapore, I don’t know whether they were of any interest or not, but I thoroughly enjoyed doing them. Seeing social and economic policy being made in front of your eyes was enormous fun. That was three very happy years. There was an election which

Lee Kuan Yew's party the PAP won by a huge majority. There was one opposition MP who we used to know, a very nice Indian gentleman, completely harassed by the Government

AW: Who was your High Commissioner?

PR: The first one was Peter Tripp who was a Middle East specialist, and after Singapore he went on to Thailand before retiring. He was not the most energetic of High Commissioners. He had a rather distant hand on the tiller, he tended to retreat to the Residence for the afternoons and one would go and see him there, bringing a draft for him to agree. He was charming but quite remote for a Third Secretary. In those days places like Singapore were very well staffed. There was a Counsellor and there was a Head of Chancery. The Head of Chancery, who was my line manager, was a very wise, experienced, hand who'd been around a lot and he had the time to help me become a diplomat and show how you operate abroad, the role you have to learn, how to conduct yourself in a society where you suddenly become someone rather interesting and receive all sorts of invitations to events and you had to think "Why am I being invited?" The Head of Chancery was a mentor on what was appropriate and what wasn't. He kept me on the straight and narrow.

My second High Commissioner, at the end of my time, was John Hennings, a much more hands-on character. My main memory of him is of going into the office on a Saturday to find him typing furiously on an old upright typewriter, fag in mouth!

What I missed from that posting was the setting off up country with the Ambassador which you would get in a bigger country. When I talked to my counterparts in Malaysia or Indonesia they were off to the provinces. I didn't do that but I did work on ASEAN in its early days which the Singaporeans were very much in favour of. So we therefore had to think a bit about Chinese influence in the region, Japan's influence, so it was a very good training ground as a foreign policy analyst. You could do it without a great deal of background because Singapore was a very open place for a British diplomat. I count myself as very lucky with that posting.

UK Delegation, NATO, 1978-81

AW: So that was three years and then were you posted directly to NATO or did you come home?

PR: I went straight to NATO. One other flavour of Singapore, or any post far away, the distances felt much greater in those days. I had one home leave in three years, phone calls home were very expensive. Eighteen months and then one home leave. Singapore didn't get many telegrams with instructions to go and do things; mostly it was the arrival of the bag and whatever the department had sent out in the bag. Then the following day you had to get your material into the bag to go back to London so there was a flurry before the Queen's Messenger left. Then there were stacks of fascinating telegrams passing around on Asian subjects that were copied to Singapore, not a lot of urgent action required and a general feeling of being quite a long way from London.

When the Assistant Under Secretary came on a visit, he was a very big person, for Singapore. There were very rare Ministerial visits in my time, but when a senior official came, that would be a big moment for the High Commission.

I was then posted directly across to UKDel NATO - I think I had two weeks' briefing in London - into a totally different world, a very complex world and by the chance of postings they chose me to go to this security policy, political/military job which became a theme of my career ever afterwards. I think it was complete happenstance that I was picked out for that. I arrived in the autumn of 1978 straight from the Far East into the world of European security which was very active at that time, right in the middle of a rather difficult point in the Cold War. UKDel NATO was a very different place from the world of a High Commission in Asia where the rhythm of life was pretty acceptable, to a high powered, high intensity West European mission with Immediate telegrams flashing backwards and forwards and the whole multilateral life of NATO going on, Ministers coming out, very hardworking, long hours and fearsomely complex issues.

I was told that I was going to be the Desk Officer for the now largely forgotten negotiations, called the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks. I had to do a lot of mugging up in the few weeks I had before arriving and then I found myself as the Desk Officer for this East - West negotiation in which basically Americans represented the West and the Soviets represented the East but with a lot of machinery behind the scenes for all the other allies to align their positions. It became an enormously intricate negotiation. It had been going on for years by the time I arrived and it went on for several more years trying to build a model where each bloc in the Cold War could reduce its conventional forces in Europe with all sorts of checks and balances, safeguards and conditions built around it. Over time it got more and

more elaborate until it collapsed under its own weight and never got approved. At the time I was dealing with it there was a lot of Alliance coordination going on, it was enormously stimulating to be thrown into this world where you had the 15 NATO nations, meeting all the time in working groups. Walking down the hall to see your German, or French or American counterparts, because we were all in one big building and the multilateral life of colleagues and learning how to work in a committee, to learn how to help people when they needed it and to ask for their help when you needed it, thrash out consensus and so on. It was a great training ground. There were flurries of high powered activity when the Foreign Secretary would come for a Ministerial meeting and then there would be an MBFR issue in the middle of the night with telegrams coming in from Number 10, it all got very exciting. Now largely forgotten, it was one of those pivot points in the Cold War, when we were trying to persuade the Soviet Union to reduce their conventional forces. In the middle of that we got into the so-called Euro Missiles Crisis when the Russians started deploying nuclear medium range missiles called SS20s in the Eastern part of Europe.

AW: the mobile ones?

PR: Yes, the mobile ones. It was a big crisis in East-West relations and it was very threatening, particularly to Germany. What was NATO to do? We went into nearly a year of detailed and high powered negotiations, again where the Americans led, to deter the Russians from doing this, first of all by deciding to develop our own missile systems, the famous Pershings and the ground launched cruise missiles, but then offering immediately to negotiate away the whole lot. An extraordinary thing to do, looking back, to spend millions of dollars, mostly American money, on developing new missiles, bringing them into Europe, installing them and then saying to the Russians "Now let's talk about getting rid of the whole lot". Which is what happened. There was a famous point in the crisis known as the dual track decision, in the winter of 1979, when NATO decided both to deploy the missiles and then to negotiate them away. The decision was taken at a joint Foreign and Defence Ministers meeting at NATO, the first time this had been done. The negotiations were successful, long after I'd left NATO. It ended up in the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement which is still in force and which removes missiles of a certain range from Europe. It's been in force ever since. That gave me a real immersion in East-West issues and in security and defence. The particularity of UKDel NATO was that it was both FCO and MOD, both civilian and military. That was the start of my work with the MOD and with the Armed Forces which I found fascinating at the time and have done ever since. There we

were working as one team and I learned a lot about the whole political-military world and these negotiations, at the time, seemed very important and were part of managing East-West tensions at that time.

When I look back at that period now one of the very odd things is that Europe just didn't exist. There was no European voice in those negotiations. There were individual European countries but the EEC didn't play any part at all. There was no caucusing. There was no meeting of EU countries although it was a debate about threats to Europe, European countries just participated as members of NATO. There was no great surprise or concern shown about that except by the French who were always very iffy about MBFR, in fact they weren't participants. They stood on the sidelines and watched. They were never comfortable when the Americans were leading European security work, they always wanted there to be a European group, caucus, meeting where European views could be thrashed out. Now that sounds entirely reasonable but at that time everyone said "No, no, it will undermine the Alliance, no caucusing" and so the East-West issues were handled with the Americans in the lead and with the Europeans participating as individual countries.

AW: A huge change ...

PR: It's a huge change. At that time the predominant feeling was that Europe was best kept out of anything to do with security and defence. There had been an effort in the 1950s to bring Europe into the defence world, called the European Defence Community which had collapsed in the end because the French vetoed it and ever since then, 25 years on, there was a sort of taboo about any involvement of the EEC as it was called in defence and security. So the gap between UKRep Brussels and their world and UKDel NATO and our world was almost complete in those days. It changed over the years but in the 1970s it was like two separate planets.

AW: Personalities? Your bosses were Sir John Killick and Sir Clive Rose?

PR: They were two very different men but two very great men. To meet them as a young diplomat they felt extremely grand. Sir John Killick was grand in every way, tall, dashing, he'd been a paratroop officer at Arnhem and had fought against the German Ambassador at NATO who'd also been at Arnhem with the German forces. Across the Council table they were two titans. Killick was a gallant and distinguished man, he had been Ambassador in Russia, was a real East-West specialist, spoke Russian, a big personality, charming and

would always come down for the staff Friday night drinks and join us. I remember him sitting on a stool playing a guitar and singing. He was quite irascible, never to me, but he got pretty worked up about things. He was very dominant in the NATO Council. I think he was probably in the running to be PUS but didn't get it.

Sir Clive Rose came after him. He had been in the Cabinet Office, Deputy Secretary in that job advising the Prime Minister on nuclear things. He was very steeped in nuclear and defence policy but was a very different person. He was cautious, quiet, scholarly, rather reserved. But he was very formidable in his way as well. He was absolutely charming to me. I was the youngest member of the delegation and plenty of forbearance was shown and again there was time to explain why things were as they were. Both Ambassadors were capable of producing the most formidable telegrams very rapidly and firing them off when they thought something wasn't quite right or summing up a complex two or three day meeting with a magisterial seven or eight paragraph summary telegram just dictated at the end of a meeting. It was extraordinary for a young diplomat to see, real role models.

AW: It must have been fascinating to see how the same job could be done with a very different style but be done as effectively?

PR: Completely, that's completely right. One was the big showman dominating the Council, the other was the quiet man who intervened much less often but whenever he said anything everyone listened because it was always well thought out and powerful. He always knew every detail of the brief, whereas John Killick was a more broad brush sort of person but with formidable instincts. Both did the job really well and at a time when the NATO world and the East-West issues were probably as high priority for Ministers as the EEC issues were. Nowadays I think you must feel sitting in Brussels that a very large proportion of the attention in London goes towards the EU end of town. NATO has its moment but isn't in the limelight. But in those days NATO was very much in the limelight and the issues of the moment, the famous crisis over the Polish pipelines, the various negotiations with the Soviet Union, the Dual Track Decision, the response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, all of that were played out in NATO.

AW: What was living in Brussels like then?

PR: I met and married Suzanne while in Brussels but I arrived as a bachelor and I made sure that I inherited Robin Janvrin's bachelor flat right in the middle of town. In those days there

was quite a wide choice of flats, all rented, and so bachelors could live in flats right in the centre and families could have nice houses. It was very comfortable; Brussels has always been a comfortable city. NATO is a bit of an inconvenient place to get to. Although NATO was busy, we were still junior enough to have the time to mix quite widely. Suzanne worked in the bilateral Embassy so we had quite a number of Belgian friends and knew about Belgian politics as well, so I had a foot in two camps. They were happy formative years.

Desk Officer, Arab-Israel Desk, FCO, London 1981-83

AW: And then back to London?

PR: Yes, by then I had been six years abroad and only in the Foreign Office for the initial nine months. I came back effectively as a First Secretary but very short of experience as to how the FCO itself worked. I think that pattern of bringing people in and then giving them a real grounding of life abroad with two different postings was good. I came back to the Arab-Israel desk, which was one of the classic First Secretary jobs. I took over from John Holmes and was thrown into the Middle East issues. I got back over the winter of 1981/82 and again into a high pressure job, now the head of a section with a couple of younger people working with me and dealing with the alarms and excursions of everyday on Arab-Israel policy. In my time, the early part of 1982, there was the withdrawal from Sinai by the Israelis and we were involved in the monitoring force that was set up to monitor their withdrawal. There was a lot of Ministerial interest in that and a lot of involvement of the Private Office. Then the summer of 1982 was a terrible time with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the massacres at Sabra and Chatila, the camps in Lebanon. There was Israeli bombardment of Beirut all of that summer. That was a very high stress summer and there I was learning a lot about Parliament, about PQs, about Ministerial demands for urgent briefing, about EEC coordination, it was called Political Cooperation in those days. It didn't happen in Brussels because Brussels was the Commission and Commission competence. Political Cooperation happened in capitals so we used to go around cities of each country that had the European Presidency who would host the meetings. There was a Middle East Working Group of Political Cooperation where, by great chance, neither my Head of Department or the Assistant thought it was interesting enough for them, so they sent me. I would go and sit representing the UK along with the Middle East experts from other capitals. I wasn't a Middle East expert but all through my career I've had this challenge of having to get on terms with and hold your own against real subject experts.

As someone who has come in with very little knowledge or background on the subject you have to learn quickly and get on top of the main points fast. I found myself an expert on the Arab-Israeli conflict quite quickly, at least for the immediate issues that we were dealing with. I was learning all the time through that and watching the FCO machine dealing with a subject that was always politically controversial and often in crisis. Whereas most of my peers were then sitting on desks dealing with a large country, the Arab-Israel dispute meant that I had a community of fifteen or twenty British Embassies in Arab countries plus Tel Aviv and the Western capitals all interested. It was a bit more like the NATO multilateral job, there was a big community out there, so our telegrams used to spray out to a large number of posts. I learned telegram etiquette, keeping posts in touch with things. Nothing would anger a distinguished and senior Ambassador in the Arab World more than not to be told what was going on in London and to find that you'd forgotten to copy out the material so that they could go and defend the British position. I was learning a lot there about the role of FCO coordinating and of giving sight to officers in the field, so that they could go and make the case for the UK. They needed the raw material, and that's what a lot of the job was doing.

AW: You talked earlier about when you were a new recruit and how the Desk Officers made time to help you in the Third Room. There's a lot going on here. Was there time for you to do the same? Or had the situation changed by then?

PR: It was still in the pre-cuts period and so, yes, I inherited that responsibility and I hope I carried it out. One of the new recruits who I had to deal with, I think in that job, was a young man called Matthew Rycroft. And at the other end of your desk you'd have your registry clerk, the other vital prop to life who often knew far more about the subject than the Desk Officer. Yes, the new recruit was right across from you and if you were sensible you used them properly giving them tasks to do. It was still very informal. I don't remember any management training - by then I had become a manager. There was absolutely no guidance at all. You learned by doing, or not doing and again your Assistant Head of Department would have a word if he thought you weren't getting it right. I remember I had to deal with a quite difficult discipline case that involved a registry officer but I just got on with it and you phoned Personnel if you wanted advice.

As part of this job I got for myself a probably entirely undeserved reputation for knowing about the PLO and the Palestinians and who it was OK to meet and who it wasn't OK to

meet. That continued to be relevant in my next job with Geoffrey Howe. But in the Arab/Israel job I found that the Foreign Secretary would sometimes ask “Is it alright for me to see this person? Is he on the right side of the line or has he advocated violence and should I not?” So I found myself an arbiter, talking to the Research Department as to whether these things were alright or not. Looking back, that was a bit alarming, an error in that could have been embarrassing, but it was good preparation for the next job.

Assistant Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, FCO, London, 1983-85

AW: You didn't leave London. You moved across to be Assistant Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary?

PR: What I did was follow John Holmes for a second time! I'm not sure that there was much more to it than that in terms of personnel decision. John had gone from the Arab-Israel Desk to the Private Office and that was a fairly classic route I think. When John came to move on they put two or three people to Geoffrey Howe to choose from and I was one of them. I had the most gentlemanly job interview you could ever imagine, five minutes of very polite chat with Geoffrey Howe in which he said “If you're prepared to have me, I'm prepared to have you” and then I was pitchforked into the Private Office which again was a complete change of life because certainly at that time it was totally all consuming. In this period we'd had our first child and by the time I joined the Private Office Edward was one year old. But there was no quarter given to that at all. When you joined the Private Office you were expected to be there until 10 o'clock at night, work over weekends and there was no question about it. If you took the job, that's what you did. I rather abandoned Suzanne with a very small child to throw myself into this job. We talked about it and decided that these things don't come round twice. Looking back I'm glad I did it but it was absolutely full on, Private Secretary jobs always have been, but in those days the late hours culture was a real problem and there was no real effort to do much about it.

Brian Fall was the Private Secretary. I had quite a large share of the world; I shared the world with the other Assistant Private Secretary who was Roger Bone when I first joined. The main chunks that I dealt with were the Middle East and the Far East, which at that point meant the Hong Kong negotiations, and the Americas (with the Falklands still a huge issue – this was 1983).

Just as a flavour of life in the Private Office, the first weekend when I was on duty as a new Private Secretary knowing nothing about anything, was the weekend of the bomb in Beirut that killed 241 American marines, and also the build up to the American invasion of Grenada, 23/24 October 1983, it's engraved in my mind. These two things were going on at the same time. In those days the Private Secretary was sent telegrams on a Sunday evening so that we were all up to speed for a Monday morning. On the Sunday evening there was this enormous pile of telegrams on my doorstep, there must have been 300 of them, flying in from the Caribbean with this building crisis in Grenada, the Lebanon bomb, I just wondered what on earth I'd taken on. There was no system for processing the information, you couldn't deal with emails as they came one by one, you just got a lump of telegrams and if it was really urgent then the Resident Clerk would phone you up and if necessary a courier would bring the telegrams round to you in a van there and then. But there were no secure communications at home at all. That was quite a baptism of fire and indeed in my first main week in the Office this Grenada crisis blew up which was very odd. There'd been a coup in Grenada and the Americans decided that to prevent bloodshed they were going to intervene militarily. Literally with two or three hours' notice to Margaret Thatcher, they went in. I do remember in Private Office – and this is true – that we got out Whitakers and looked it up and said “Hey, this is ours! This is a British Dependent territory, there's a Governor General!” The Governor General was evacuated by helicopter to an American aircraft carrier with a piece of paper saying that he'd agreed they should intervene. But as far as I can recall the FCO had no notice at all of the Americans going in. So in my first week we had this great flap going on, statements in the House, the Prime Minister very concerned. I learned that the Caribbean was also on my patch!

Geoffrey Howe was the most delightful man to work for. He never got flapped, never lost his temper. He was always equable, always fair-minded and incredibly hard-working. He expected everyone else to work as hard as he did but he was a very considerate boss. He knew me because I'd had this role as being the arbiter on who was OK on the Palestinian side and I carried on with that role in the Private Office but then took on these other crises as well.

The part of Geoffrey's life I didn't see was Europe, because that was dealt with by the other Assistant Private Secretary. So I am very conscious that at the same time that I was dealing with these issues Geoffrey Howe also had to handle very difficult negotiations with Number 10 and Margaret Thatcher and with Europe on the budget. He was carrying an enormous

load but he had enormous appetite for work. When I think now of the boxes we used to send him home with I can't believe that he accepted it. I don't think many modern Foreign Secretaries would. We often used to send him home with three large boxes full of paper to do over a weekend and often more than one overnight. He used to sit up to one or two o'clock in the morning doing his box. The disadvantage was that he used to have Capital Radio on and if there was any breaking news he would phone up and say "Have you heard ...?" And you probably hadn't heard because it was one or two in the morning. He really could do with very little sleep but he covered all of these issues with tremendous precision and calm and I think was a very calming influence on the Prime Minister. He would often go over and calm things down. Obviously on Europe they had big differences but on other issues he was very influential with her.

All this for me was under Brian Fall's watchful eye. I think Brian rightly tried to stand back from a lot of the detail and left his two Assistants to feed the Foreign Secretary with a lot of the material. Brian would concentrate on the big things of the day, watch the Parliamentary angle, the Whitehall politics, minding the Foreign Secretary's back. He was a brilliant speech writer and was able to produce the speeches that Geoffrey demanded that nobody else could and he was genuinely the adviser on the Foreign Secretary's shoulder where needed and I thought was very good at keeping his objectivity and not getting too enmeshed in the detail. It meant that the two Assistant Private Secretaries were able to deal direct with the boss; Brian never got in our way on that. We would go into Geoffrey Howe's room and talk to him about any issue in the overnight work he'd done. We would sit in with Foreign Ministers who were visiting, we got to know the man almost like a father/son relationship and Brian was very good at letting us do that.

We did have this late hours culture which meant that people with their coats on would come into the Private Office at 8, 9pm and drop off large submissions saying "There you are, that's for the box, I'm off home now" and then we would sit there for another two hours processing it. It's got more disciplined since then but there was no discipline then at all. By and large we provided that service and most particularly the Foreign Secretary did at great personal cost to himself. He had the peculiarity of reading absolutely everything that was put to him, including all the annexes and all the background papers. So you had to be really sure it was all in order because if you hadn't read it, he certainly would, sometimes coming back saying "I think there's an error on page 79 of annex 3". And there was, usually. No detail got past him. It was an enormous privilege to work with him.

The other subject that I worked most closely with him on was Hong Kong. When I joined the Private Office we were already embarked on the huge diplomatic effort of getting to an agreement with the Chinese on the future of Hong Kong. Mrs Thatcher had been to Beijing in 1982 and had effectively launched this two-year process that led to the Joint Declaration in December 1984. I joined that half-way through. There was a big structure in the FCO led by David Wilson as Under Secretary with Tony Galsworthy as his Head of Department, who worked up the detailed position for the negotiation together with the Hong Kong Government, led by the much-loved Governor Edward Youde (who later sadly died in office – in December 1985). Everything was also sent to Percy Cradock who was the great Ambassador in Beijing, a very dominant figure and a brilliant Chinese scholar. He later came back to the FCO as Deputy Under Secretary to pilot the policy through. So every day tens of dense telegrams passed between these three poles; London, Hong Kong and Beijing. All against tight deadlines, many involving very difficult judgements. We were negotiating with China to agree the detailed arrangements for the functioning of a capitalist enclave with a Communist State in China for fifty years. We were clear that we had to have an agreement with the Chinese because they could otherwise have exercised their right to reclaim Kowloon which would have meant that Hong Kong island was not viable on its own. The FCO was patiently negotiating with the Embassy and the Governor in Hong Kong this very detailed agreement of what would happen after the handover and what undertakings the Chinese would make, which meant they had to understand land law, the currency, every aspect of life in Hong Kong and agree that Hong Kong should continue with its own way of life, its own social and economic system for fifty years which they did by the end of 1984.

This was an enormous issue throughout 1984. I remember going out with Geoffrey Howe on two missions to Hong Kong and Beijing in April and in July which were “unveiling”, as he called it, so that each time we unveiled a little bit more about what Hong Kong was going to look like. When the negotiating team arrived in Hong Kong from London you felt that you had the future of that whole three million people in your hands. You were coming to unveil to them what their future was going to be under China, having had very little consultation. We couldn’t give them formal consultation rights because the Chinese wouldn’t have accepted it, so there had to be a very delicate process of talking to the Legislative Council, making sure the Governor’s Legislative Council were on board as we revealed a little bit more of what the outcome was going to be which was going to affect everyone’s life in Hong Kong. Hong Kong could have become very unstable, ungovernable,

which would have triggered a very aggressive Chinese reaction if they thought we were stirring up discontent in Hong Kong.

We had to manage a gradual revelation of the fact that Hong Kong was going to go back to Chinese sovereignty, there was no way of avoiding that, whilst keeping the place calm and reassuring people that we would have real solid guarantees for Hong Kong's way of life for fifty years. It was a very delicate mission and Geoffrey Howe often had to clear his lines overnight with the Prime Minister in London as the situation developed. Governor Youde bore a huge load in bringing Hong Kong along. We visited both in April and July, both Hong Kong and China, and then we went with Mrs Thatcher in 1984 to sign the Joint Declaration which I still have, kept it ever since, it still brings it back to me. This was the future of Hong Kong, all set out in a little book of mostly Chinese commitments of what they would do, every word carefully negotiated with us and then wrapped into a Joint Agreement between the two countries. It was a remarkable achievement where the finest detail of how Hong Kong was to operate was negotiated and agreed with China which had no practical experience of how a Capitalist system worked. In terms of commitment of resources, it was one of the big subjects of that period. Hong Kong did, with reservations, accept the outcome when Mrs Thatcher signed and I was there in the Great Hall of the People when she signed with Deng Xiaoping. We'll talk later about how things have turned out but that was a real classic bilateral diplomatic negotiation, of the kind that there aren't many nowadays. Now most negotiations are multilateral, the EU does them, or the UN or NATO. This was a bilateral British-Chinese very detailed but very high stakes negotiation that took the FCO far outside its normal comfort zone. The working groups had to understand the constitutional position, the legal position and then all the different social and economic aspects and then negotiate that with China. Then Geoffrey had to mug that up each time before he went to negotiate it.

AW: Had Len Appleyard taken over from Brian Fall by then?

PR: Yes, in the course of my time in the Private Office there was a transition from Brian Fall to Len Appleyard. Len Appleyard had Chinese experience which of course was very helpful and he became a very important part of the advising team in the FCO. Len had been Head of the Economic Relations Department before he came to the Private Office and I know that Geoffrey Howe had been very impressed by how he would get clear, concise, submissions, explaining very difficult economic issues, but economically literate in a way that this ex-

Chancellor of the Exchequer appreciated. Len impressed with his analytical capacity to reduce things to simple, sensible proportions and Geoffrey appreciated that.

Len had a different style as a Private Secretary, he was more a details man than Brian was and so for the Assistant Private Secretaries we sometimes had to elbow our way a bit to keep access to the boss, make sure we had our own satisfying chunk of work to do as well. His arrival was very timely on the China issue.

I did about eighteen months in the Private Office, October 1983 to early 1985, and by then the system was changing in the FCO. Photocopying had become a big issue but we still had the discipline of the submission that came up to the Foreign Secretary in a folder with annexes, he would annotate it. And there would be the annotations from everybody else as well. It was probably the last point where we had that clear paper-based discipline, where you could see what the Under Secretaries had commented on, then the Private Secretary might add a comment as well and the Foreign Secretary would see all this material and initial it if he agreed. I found the most satisfactory thing as a Private Secretary was when a dossier went into him and you got a clear decision – yes, we would do it or no, we wouldn't. You could minute out that the Foreign Secretary had decided. But with Geoffrey it was often "I can't decide this until I know xyz, abc". It was quite hard to get closure, there always seemed to be another step, which was a feature of the man, his great attention to detail and caution. But it was very satisfactory when you felt you had got to the end of a long and complex trail and you could sign it off, or refuse to sign it off. As far as I remember, that happened fairly rarely!

The Private Office took you over completely. You handed in your passport on Day 1 and you never really saw it again. Every time you travelled they would get your visa, you would just get on the plane, there would be a car waiting, all the bookings had been made, you just worked all the way through. There was a system which just took over your life. In some ways that's quite easy, you go to work in the morning and you might be in Hong Kong the next day, then Peking, then back home again. The infrastructure was Rolls Royce and no doubt it still is, but that was very striking for a young diplomat like myself. You were just absorbed into this very efficient machine and you realised the point was so that you could spend all your waking hours working!

AW: That's a lovely picture of Geoffrey Howe and of life in the Private Office. Have you any other recollections of him or of Elspeth Howe before we move on?

PR: I have a very clear recollection of how fond Geoffrey was of Chevening. It was quite close to his constituency which was in Surrey. He loved that house and he used it very well. I was very impressed that he would do these impossible weeks working eighteen hours a day and then he'd go down to Chevening and invite four couples to stay and then another four couples to Sunday lunch and have a really good weekend house party. He would be the life and soul of the party and occasionally Assistant Private Secretaries would be invited to the Sunday lunch brigade and you'd see him in a different role as a genial host, showing people around the house as if his family had had it for generations, relaxing, but relaxing by talking about issues. It was a very good vehicle for bonding with incoming Foreign Ministers and Geoffrey was very good at that. He had a great skill for building friendships internationally including unlikely people like the Chinese Foreign Minister, the Minister of the time became quite a firm friend. And also friendships across the political divide. He was very non-partisan in the sense that he had some good friends who were Labour MPs and he didn't make any secret of that, and they too would come and have lunch with him at the weekends feeling that on foreign policy you didn't need to be partisan about it, you could reach across the aisle and work with people on the Labour side. When he had sticky periods in the House of Commons I think that had helped him. He had one particularly sticky ride over a decision to ban GCHQ members from joining a trade union. In 1985 there was a Government decision that they weren't going to have the right – and that led to a very difficult Parliamentary period but I think the fact that he'd built strong bridges and friendships helped him.

Elsbeth was a significant presence for us in the Private Office. She was a forceful character herself and he respected her views and I think consulted her quite a bit. I was always amused to be told to put a note in his box to say "talk to my wife". In later years I came to understand that with the life he led he wouldn't necessarily remember to talk to his wife. But that normally produced a good result. She was very much part of his Chevening life as well and a major prop and support to him with a real interest in the substance of what he was doing as well. She came on some of the long Hong Kong visits with him which was a relief because he felt much happier when she was there and they could talk.

Because he was that sort of person, he kept in touch with his Private Secretaries long afterwards. So there was still a network of his boys, which was lovely. There was that human warmth in Geoffrey that was very important.

First Secretary, Washington, 1985-88

AW: Shall we cross the pond now and move on to Washington? It's early 1985, were you told you were going to Washington or have we reached the point where there was more choice? Have we reached the point of applications?

PR: Yes we have. I remember there were lists of upcoming jobs. There weren't interviews but there were lists of jobs you could bid against. Bidding out of the Private Office was usually a good way of landing what you wanted, so you had to be sure that you knew what you wanted. I went for what I suppose was the obvious thing which was a First Secretary job in Washington which felt like the right next step. Looking back perhaps it would have been sensible to have gone off to be a number two in a smaller embassy, but I went in to do essentially the sort of work that I had been doing, because my brief in Washington was part of the same things that I'd been doing in the Private Office. But I was also the Deputy JIC representative which meant that either the Representative of the JIC, who was Roger Bone, or I went every week down to the CIA, not to the derring-do side, but to bring assessments from the JIC and sit round and talk about the latest assessments of the situation in the Soviet Union or the Middle East, or whatever it was - this got me, for the first time, into the world of intelligence assessment and the intelligence community in the US.

It was in some ways a continuation of the high priority, foreign policy world because it was definitely a foreign policy job. Nigel Sheinwald was the internal political reporting officer so he did the US elections and the domestic political scene, Gus O'Donnell was the Treasury First Secretary dealing with the American economy and then there were three or four of us dealing with American foreign policy. I went back to being a cog in a much larger machine.

AW: But quite a glittering one!

PR: Yes, it was quite a glittering one. I think I had to have a few edges knocked off me because coming out of the Private Office you felt pretty important but it wasn't long in Washington before I was firmly back at my level in the groove. John Kerr was the Head of Chancery and there were at least two Ministers and the Ambassador was Oliver Wright when I first arrived. So again, a very grand superstructure and even though by then I was a First Secretary I was still very much a small cog in a large wheel. I tended to concentrate on my issues rather than try and become an expert in all aspects of the US because it was such an enormous canvas to paint on. For example during my time there was a lot of work on

China. There were the Tiananmen demonstrations which were a big point of the JIC coordination through those years. I continued to deal with Hong Kong and the Far East, also Russia and terrorism, including Middle East aspects such as the blockades going on in the Gulf of Iranian tankers and things.

What I remember most about that period in Washington was of a super well-oiled machine, a great deal of talent, a sense that we had to report on absolutely everything that happened in American foreign policy because it was bound to be relevant to London somewhere, so not much selectivity.

It was quite journalistic in some ways because we knew that whatever was going on London would be interested. We would go to the State Department, go and find someone in Congress who would comment on it and if we could get to the NSC staff, see them as well. When we had about three hearings on something, we would send a report on it. John Kerr was very strong on that. He didn't want us just to go down and talk to a State Department Desk Officer and report because often the State Department didn't know the full truth of what was going on, so he wanted us to work a bit harder and dig and make sure that London wasn't caught by surprise, because certainly in that period the Americans were quite capable of launching things at short notice, this was the Reagan period, and London was sometimes caught short by that which of course they didn't like. The Embassy was expected to try to worm our way into American inside thinking about dealing with the issues of the moment and make sure we gave London the heads up. And that was a good discipline - don't take the first view you get and lazily report that, dig under the surface and make sure you know what's really happening. That was the style of the Embassy and quite rightly given that the Americans had already surprised us over the Grenada invasion and were perfectly capable of surprising us again. For example, it was the period of first Star Wars work and quite a lot of sensitive thinking going on in the Administration that was important to us.

I was still a First Secretary so there was still a capacity to have some family life and enjoy America. We had a nice house and had two young children by then and we managed to do a bit of travelling and go to some conferences in some interesting places and immerse a bit in America outside Washington. I think as you got more senior in the Embassy it got harder to get away from Washington but as a First Secretary I could still do that.

They were good years but looking back I think I was so taken up with the foreign policy that I was following that I didn't really immerse as much as I might have done in the wider economic and political world that was going on around me. It was still quite compartmented is what I'm saying. It's got less compartmented since but the Embassy was physically very compartmented, with corridors and floors of different people doing different things. One could spend one's time in one's groove not really getting hands on the totality of what was going on.

AW: And your Ambassadors?

PR: Oliver Wright was Ambassador when I first arrived. He was imposing and distinguished, in manner and in career, since he'd held most of the senior jobs in the FCO. He had been a very successful Ambassador in Bonn, before being recalled from retirement to go to Washington. He concentrated on the White House and Congress and left John Kerr to do a very large proportion of the day to day reporting and work, he trusted him absolutely.

Antony Acland replaced him. Antony Acland moved out from being PUS to become Ambassador in Washington. A more details man. He had obviously come straight from London so he had a very good feel for what Whitehall needed but was a more hands on, directly involved, someone with great social presence (as had Oliver Wright in a different way). He could get anybody he wanted in Washington to come to the Residence, very much a major figure on the social scene as well as a serious force inside the Embassy. They were contrasting characters but the Embassy responded quite smoothly to that. It was a very high powered place with a lot of concentration of talent who went on to very senior jobs.

AW: And then all those Prime Ministerial visits?

PR: Constantly! There was a lot of traffic on the Reagan/Thatcher channel and she visited pretty often. We had to keep abreast of all that and in particular be sure that we knew exactly where Ronald Reagan was going to be on any particular issue which involved quite a lot of discreet telephoning to the National Security Council before the Prime Minister visited. It was years of optimism and economic growth and a sense that the Reagan/Thatcher deregulation and liberalisation of the economy was at the cutting edge of what was happening in the world.

AW: The other major things that happened whilst you were there - the terrible Chernobyl disaster and the loss of the Challenger spacecraft. They were quite close together?

PR: Yes they were quite close together. Chernobyl was exactly the kind of issue where the JIC Representative job came into its own because obviously the CIA had very good intelligence on what was happening there and I have vivid recollections of going to the CIA and studying with them the pictures they had showing the Chernobyl plant burning, helicopters flying over it and barges going down the river next to it with no apparent understanding of the risks of radiation, and a feel that there was a major disaster playing out in front of our eyes that the still Soviet Union was keeping from the world and not allowing the full facts, even to the effect of the way they were dealing with their own population around the area. It was very sobering. The analytical community on the two sides worked very closely over this as they did on Tiananmen Square which again was happening in a very closed society and it was an area where intelligence was helping policy makers a lot to know exactly what was going on. There was a strong appetite in London for what we were reporting from Washington on these things.

Challenger was one of those terrible days where suddenly everything stopped and everyone was glued to their television screens. A deep emotion washed across the country and there was a wonderful speech by Reagan where he caught the mood absolutely. It was something he could do. He had a genius for saying what ordinary people wanted said. It was the actor's skill partly. We all felt a terrible loss because the shuttle programme was at the cutting edge of technology, the Americans were leading the world, and then there was this disaster on prime time TV which shook everyone deeply. I thought that showed the real strength of Reagan as "the Leader" because when something like that happens the President has to find the words and he did. I think it helped the grieving that was going on around America that he did that. Reagan is often decried but he had a marvellous gift for sensing the public mood and expressing it.

Deputy Head of Security Policy, FCO, London, 1989-91

AW: When we finished last time Peter, you were about to come back to the Foreign Office, the engine room, as you describe it in your notes, in 1989 to be Deputy Head of Security Policy. Was it good to be coming home?

PR: 1989 was one of those turning points. I thought I was coming to a job to do one thing, particularly the multilateral arms control negotiations going on in Europe at that time, called the CFE negotiations, but within weeks of coming into the job the Berlin Wall fell and we were pitchforked into that extraordinary really disruptive period, where all the old certainties about the Cold War, division in Europe, two Germanys, the Warsaw Pact, all melted away. I was only a bit part player but I was in a very central area. The Head of the Department was Paul Lever who was the world's great expert on the CFE talks and multilateral arms control and that was his primary interest. When the Berlin Wall fell and work started in the FCO on our response under the Political Director John Weston, I was sent along as the Sec Pol representative to that group which turned out to be a creative, innovative, fruitful group developing policy from scratch, because this was completely unknown territory. Michael Jay went to the group representing the EU part of the office, and there were various other people on John Weston's group and I represented effectively the NATO issue, what were we going to do with NATO? What did the future hold as the Berlin Wall fell? I literally sat down with a blank piece of paper and tried to write a paper on the future of NATO now that there was no Berlin Wall.

What I remember most clearly from that period was how fast events moved because Helmut Kohl saw the opportunity to lock in a united Germany but also saw the risk of all the uncertainties, all the myriad issues, the huge movement of East Germans to West Germany that started immediately the Wall came down. So Kohl moved far faster than any of the other allies were ready to, and famously Mrs Thatcher and Mitterrand were caught in a rather negative position in the early months. But at my level we had this John Weston-led exercise in the FCO which rapidly became preparation for the Two Plus Four Talks between representatives of the two Germanys and the four Allied powers, UK, France, America and the Soviet Union. My input into that was trying to think about the future of NATO. Kohl made the running and very quickly he decided that West Germany would effectively take over East Germany which would be dissolved and merged into what became a unified Germany which would simply inherit the Federal Republic of Germany's membership of NATO. Kohl decided on the "one for one" convertibility of the Deutschmark and the East German Mark and all sorts of other steps. Kohl was a great simplifier. The others were really running to catch up with the facts that he was creating on the ground.

As far as NATO goes, obviously this was a huge opportunity but also quite a headache to get through all the processes and decide what NATO was for in the new world. Often I've

found in my career that things resolve themselves into the next step, the next meeting. We had in rapid succession a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting at Turnberry in Scotland and then the NATO Summit of July 1990, so this is still within about six months of the Berlin Wall falling. I vividly remember that President Reagan gave Mrs Thatcher the gift of “Why don’t you hold the NATO Summit in the UK?” with ten weeks’ notice and we had to scramble like mad to create a NATO Summit. In the end we had to use Lancaster House as it was the only place available, everywhere else was booked, and we built a tent city in Hyde Park for the media.

We pulled off this NATO Summit which was quite formative, transformational is perhaps a better word, for NATO. It was the end of confrontation and the beginning of cooperation with what was still the Warsaw Pact, hand of friendship extended to the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe. Re-reading the declaration from that Summit, the whole spirit was of reaching out to Gorbachev, trying to build bridges, put the past behind us, trying to push through the CFE negotiations to an agreement on force levels in Europe. It was a tremendously positive atmosphere. The Foreign Secretary was Douglas Hurd and he and the US Secretary of State Jim Baker were absolutely crucial in this with Genscher the German Foreign Minister. I remember the first night of the NATO Summit they sat up until very late in the night, drafting the Declaration. I then took it and posted it through Number 10’s letterbox at about 2am for Charles Powell and Mrs Thatcher to see in the morning. It was a historic moment and it launched European security in a different direction. It was thrilling to be part of that high-powered team, very ably led by John Weston, which rapidly translated this new opportunity into facts, into decisions on the expansion of NATO, and the admission of unified Germany into NATO and all that followed from that.

I feel very privileged to have been there. As a result of that, I wasn’t involved at all in the Gulf War which was also going on that same summer. We were so deeply into the whole process of NATO transformation that I carried on with that while others did the Gulf War, but I saw that going on around me. It was a highly stressful time for the FCO but a time of real optimism because the Gulf War also ended well and there was a sense of a real opportunity and that those promises of the CSCE process that had started in Helsinki for a more cooperative approach in Europe looked possible.

Counsellor, Head of Hong Kong Department, FCO, London, 1991-1994

I stayed in Security Policy Department until the spring of 1991 when I got promoted to Counsellor, as it was called, and moved into the Hong Kong business, or rather moved back into the Hong Kong business as I had been very involved, as I have discussed, with the whole Joint Declaration process in 1984 and I'd also been dealing with it in Washington so I was still fairly current.

AW: A lot of people talk about becoming Counsellor as feeling a real sea change in their careers. Did that feel like that for you?

PR: Yes it did. It was the moment you stepped from always being somebody's deputy, always in the chain, doing what other people wanted, to at least a point where you had your own team to organise as you like and task as you thought right. You were responsible upwards for the team. Hong Kong Department was an exciting place to be because in those days Hong Kong was a really central issue for the Foreign Office and for Whitehall. In the glory days of the Joint Declaration some of the very best brains in the whole of the organisation were on Hong Kong. Coming in in 1991 it was still a very strong team into which the Head of Hong Kong Department fitted. So yes, I found it liberating, and very rewarding and also something else which I found repeatedly in my career as I have said, I was a generalist coming into an area where there were some very deep specialists, in this case the "China gang".

The décor when I arrived: David Wilson was by now Governor of Hong Kong, William Ehrman was the Political Adviser, a classic role for the rising FCO sinologist, Robin McLaren was Ambassador in Beijing, Andrew Burns was my Assistant Under-Secretary, Director level, succeeded by Christopher Hum. Apart from Andrew, all were real experts on China, Chinese culture, Chinese negotiating style and on Hong Kong. David Wilson was the walking encyclopaedia on the Hong Kong negotiations, he knew every line of every agreement with the Chinese backwards. I was the generalist injected into that team really with the purpose of organising and working the machine in London so that it met the requirements, in particular with Ministers, because the China gang knew all the ins and outs of the negotiations with China but someone had to explain to Ministers what was going on and make sure that they were on board, keep the Governor informed of what was happening in London and be the link person between the London machine and Hong Kong and Beijing. A fascinating role. I found myself picking up the custom of sending personal

telegrams, Personal to the Governor from Ricketts because otherwise telegrams going into Hong Kong would be sprayed around the Hong Kong Government, hundreds of copies, and you certainly didn't want sensitive things there about what Ministers might or might not be thinking. So I had a personal channel with the Governor which was very important and made me feel somebody quite special. I actually got into the press for the first time, because the Hong Kong press - for them the Head of Hong Kong Department was quite an important person. I remember David Wilson saying to the Hong Kong press when I was appointed "He's a good chap". So that was in the South China Morning Post - "good chap". It was my first public exposure and it altogether felt very exciting and slightly scary and exposed.

There is a role for a generalist in that situation because you have to think about the political and Parliamentary angle, what Ministers wanted. I spent quite a lot of my time digesting eight-page fantastically detailed notes into two-page submissions that Douglas Hurd or Alistair Goodlad, the Minister of State, would look at.

There was also going on, and another source of great China expertise, the so-called Joint Liaison Group which was the body that was liaising and consulting between Britain and China in the run up to 1997 because we were now not quite in the final straight but getting very close to the handover. The Joint Liaison Group met in Hong Kong. Tony Galsworthy was the representative to it and the Hong Kong officials sat as members of the British Delegation because China wouldn't admit Hong Kong as a separate party. You can immediately see all the sensitivities of that. I also had to support and also was actually formally a member of the Joint Liaison Group which met every month in Hong Kong. I increasingly didn't go to those meetings because I didn't feel that I brought any specificity and other things came along as I will describe.

So I had both the Governor and the Ambassador in Beijing and also the Joint Liaison Group as my main customers and a lot of extremely technical and complex material because the closer we got to 1997 the more the Chinese became interested in absolutely everything that was done in Hong Kong.

It was very obvious from the start that the Chinese were deeply suspicious because they suspected that they would arrive in Hong Kong in 1997 and find the coffers empty, we'd have taken all the money, we'd have played all sorts of tricks on them and that they would come into a sort of wasteland. Slightly mirror-imaging perhaps the way they might have played it in reversed circumstances. Everything that the Governor David Wilson did was

viewed with suspicion by the Chinese and constant demands for more and more information in the Joint Liaison Group which involved Hong Kong officials in quite a difficult – almost a conflict of loyalty. They were Hong Kong Government officials, people born and brought up in Hong Kong, they were working for the British, and they were in the colonial system and the British were negotiating over their heads with the Chinese over the future of Hong Kong. All the detailed arrangements, from postal arrangements to land leases, to everything and they were having to make sure that the interests of Hong Kong were respected and understood while also being members of a British led team. Keeping the Hong Kong Government interest and the British interest aligned through those negotiations was really tricky. David Wilson, William Ehrman and the British officials in the Hong Kong Government all had a big burden of that and indeed Tony Galsworthy in the JLG. I think it's a tribute to them that all the way through that process we kept faith and I think we kept the confidence of the Hong Kong Civil Service that we were being straight and honest and that we weren't trading off Hong Kong's interests for the sake of our relations with China. But there was a constant worry that might be the case.

So it was fascinating, difficult and the issue that David Wilson was grappling with most in my first year was the airport. Anyone who has landed at the old Kai Tak Airport in Hong Kong knows that it was not viable as more and more aircraft landed and a new airport was urgently necessary. There were plans, a site identified, it involved flattening an island in Hong Kong Bay to build the airport and then an express way and a train link to get to it across a big bridge. All of that was obviously very expensive and all of that involving borrowing many billions of Hong Kong dollars. The Chinese were intensely suspicious that somehow this was going to land them with a vast millstone around their neck of debt and that the British would walk away. It's absurd to think now, given how successful Hong Kong is, how successful the airport is, how wealthy Hong Kong is, how all these investments have paid off, but in those days, 1991/2, the Chinese were very unfamiliar with capitalist markets and debt and were intensely suspicious. It took many many rounds of painful negotiation to persuade the Chinese that it was necessary, that borrowing this money was the right thing for Hong Kong and that it would pay off royally in the future. These negotiations happened all round the place. One of the most bizarre occasions for me was when Prime Minister John Major was at the Rio Earth Summit in 1991 and was having a bilateral with the Chinese Premier in Rio. Everybody said that of course Hong Kong was going to be a big issue and somebody had better go out there for this bilateral, and so I was detailed off to do a day trip

to Rio, which is quite a long way to sit in for an hour while John Major and the Chinese Premier talked about, and failed to agree about, particularly this issue of debt and how to fund the airport in the longer term. So that was one of the big issues.

The other one, of course, was how to move towards more what we called diplomatically “representative government”, i.e. some democracy, in Hong Kong given that Hong Kong had a colonial system of government with a very indirect representation in the Legislative Committee produced by the different business groups of Hong Kong electing members of this advisory Legislative Council. David Wilson saw that that couldn’t last and that over time there had to be more elections and more representative government. The Chinese, of course, were suspicious of that as well and put the brakes on wherever they could. So those were the sort of issues that David was dealing with in the fifth year of a very distinguished governorship.

At the beginning of 1992 as David’s tour of duty ended there was great uncertainty as to who would replace him, when the British General Election arrives in March of 1992, and Chris Patten loses his seat. Suddenly this major heavyweight Conservative figure was available. He was not in the House of Commons and so didn’t get the Ministerial job he would have had and very quickly John Major decided that there needed to be a politician in Hong Kong, it was becoming much more political, the issues of democracy in China were very political, and it was decided that Chris Patten should be the last Governor.

The first day he arrived at the FCO I met him on the steps outside and the very first thing he said to me was “I will not wear that hat”. Indeed, I think he got special permission from the Queen not to wear diplomatic uniform. We embarked on what turned out to be quite a major change between a classic Civil Service governor, a very distinguished China scholar in David Wilson to a modern, very senior politician, very close to the Prime Minister, who came and looked at it in a different way. I got an early sense of that when he came in and spent several weeks in the FCO briefing in with his team, including a very young Ed Llewellyn who was his special adviser. They sat in a room next to mine and we fed them all the briefs and the telegrams and they very quickly got up to speed. The Governor, on arrival in Hong Kong, traditionally made a short declaration to the Legislative Council on the next day, so we drafted the sort of thing that colonial governors had said down the decades about how honoured and delighted he was to be there, and so on. This disappeared into Patten’s team and emerged a few days later as a long visionary political statement about a shining city on

the hill, it was completely different. It was a politician's approach, he wanted to inspire and add passion. So we knew that we were dealing with a very different thing, although he was always very open to advice and took great care to listen and to understand and always worked very well with the Civil Service team. However, as soon as he got out there and paid his first visit to Beijing, he made it clear that he thought that democracy should move much more quickly and go further in Hong Kong than the Chinese were comfortable with. They were caught very much unprepared for that and very rapidly his relations with China deteriorated, famously. They said very insulting things about him in public and he became a real public enemy in Peking. So the whole context shifted, we were dealing with a big political figure as Governor who very quickly became very well loved in Hong Kong. People felt that he was really standing up for Hong Kong, that he was probably putting the balance slightly in a different place as between standing up for the interests of Hong Kong which he felt strongly included more democracy and Britain's relations with Beijing and the commercial relationship between the two. So we had a very turbulent period.

AW: This is a very fascinating period and hasn't been covered extensively in recollections as far as I know?

PR: No. This period is still sensitive.

AW: In your notes, you mentioned a bad moment over an exchange of letters?

PR: Yes, it's graven in my memory! Chris Patten's commitment to democracy and judgement that more democracy was the right course for Hong Kong led him into not just turbulence with Beijing but also with some of the older generation of China hands in the British Government, most notably Sir Percy Cradock who had been another of the architects of the Joint Declaration, who had been Ambassador in Beijing and had been working with Mrs Thatcher, and therefore by the time of the Major Government was retired. He was very vocally critical of Chris Patten in the press, indeed he ran something of a campaign against Chris Patten, on the grounds that he was endangering Hong Kong's future prosperity by pitching them into an outright confrontation with China. Chris Patten always believed that it would be better for Hong Kong to have a bit of democratic backbone because it was going to have to be quite resilient and robust with Peking as they moved forward and he felt it was always possible to stay short of something which led to real economic damage to Hong Kong. So there was a big difference of judgement there all of which was played out rather publicly.

The upshot of this push by Chris Patten (fully backed by the Prime Minister and by Douglas Hurd the Foreign Secretary who oversaw Chris Patten's activities in Hong Kong, who by and large thought that by having sent a major political figure, they should give him the benefit of the doubt, backing him all of the way) was that we launched into negotiations with Beijing on representative government essentially to try to move beyond the position that was set out in the Joint Declaration of 1984, which was a very restrictive one on the degree of democracy, and get it established that up to and then beyond 1997 there should be more directly elected members of the Legislative Council and more democracy in the system. This led to eighteen months of grinding negotiations, always in Beijing, seventeen rounds, I went to each round as the London representative, usually going to Hong Kong first because again we were negotiating Britain to China but with senior Hong Kong officials on our team and therefore we had to prepare each round of negotiations with the Governor and his team and then go to Peking and negotiate. It was an exhausting period and in that process, and this a comment really on the deterioration of record keeping and archiving in the FCO, it suddenly became apparent one Sunday that there had been some exchanges of letters between the Foreign Secretary and his Chinese counterpart two or three years before which impinged on the negotiations and which we didn't know about. The entire team in Hong Kong Department had turned over as had, I think, the team in the office of the new Governor, and nobody recalled the existence of these letters. The Chinese produced them one Sunday and there was great uproar, I had to cancel my leave, and there was a lot of turmoil for a few days while we digested the fact. In the end it did not affect the negotiations very much but it was an object lesson to me that you never know unless you do a really careful trawl of the files, what may be lurking from your predecessor's time that hasn't quite made it into the collective wisdom and that in a negotiation as complex as that, every word said on every occasion counted. The Chinese certainly remembered everything. It's probably a lesson that applies more widely as records become more and more internet based.

AW: Lack of corporate memory?

PR: Lack of corporate memory and even in the Hong Kong Government, which was pretty good at recording who had said what to who on every single occasion, there was a lapse of memory there. So that was a very bad moment but, as I say I don't think it affected the result one way or the other. The result of these negotiations was deadlock. Robin McLaren, as Ambassador in Beijing, carried a huge burden of being the representative in these negotiations, constantly having to balance the pressure in Hong Kong for more democracy

with our relations with China and how to find the right balance there. In the end there was no common ground between us and by the beginning of 1994 those negotiations broke down and so the steps towards greater democracy in Hong Kong happened without Chinese agreement. My successor in the job at Hong Kong Department took up that burden.

Looking back I think the period of Chris Patten's Governorship really did help Hong Kong to grow up because he brought a completely different approach to governing, much more communicating, much closer to the people than governors had traditionally been. He came with this burning passion for greater involvement by the community in the way they were governed which was obviously very popular among large numbers of Hong Kong people, it left the business community worried and not always on board but actually put Hong Kong in the position to then go on to the great success that it has known since 1997. I wasn't there for the handover, I'd moved on by then, but I watched from afar and I've watched Hong Kong ever since, and I really do think it's a credit to all those people who worked so hard to build the bases for the Joint Declaration and then in the subsequent years taking bold decisions, like building the new airport, that have given Hong Kong this huge prosperity and success in the years after 1997. We're now twenty years on and Hong Kong goes from strength to strength. I was a bit player in an enormously complex, sensitive and subtle series of negotiations that went on between London and Peking from 1982, when the process was launched under Mrs Thatcher, right up to the handover and beyond, because the Joint Liaison Group went on meeting until the end of 1999. That period was one which I think the British Civil Service can look back on with pride, it actually laid the foundations for Hong Kong to be more successful than any of us would have ever dared hope when we set out in that 1982/84 period.

Counsellor Finance and EU, Paris, 1994-94

AW: So you are moving on from Hong Kong issues and are off to Paris, again, did you apply for that? Or were you asked to do it?

PR: By this stage there was quite a good system of bidding for jobs. There were lists of jobs and I really wanted to get out of London because I'd been in London since 1989, a five year stint in heavy jobs and I wanted to go and do something in Europe and something completely different. When I saw on the list the Counsellor job in Paris that dealt with the EU, Finance, the Treasury and the Bank of England, I thought that would be a really interesting job. When I got the job I insisted, for the only time in my career, that I should have a bit of

time between jobs to go off and do some study. It's the only time I ever had a three month break between jobs. I spent some of that sitting in the Treasury doing rather made-up projects because they didn't know quite what to do with this FCO person, but mostly networking inside the Treasury, getting to know Gus O'Donnell who was the Chief Economist and Jon Cunliffe who was Head of Department, people who would be important later in my career, and how the Treasury worked and thought. And then a wonderful six weeks at the LSE doing their basic economics course because I'd never done economics. I did three weeks of macro economics and three weeks of micro, a sort of A Level in six weeks. There were a few other mature students like me and then lots of 21 year old Americans who were doing a foundation course. We were very competitive, I worked really hard, I was determined I was going to understand it and get good marks, so when all these youngsters went off and had a good time in London, I and a few other older folk worked hard. I did get the rudiments of economics in six weeks and I really enjoyed it. It was a moment of intellectual expansion and refreshment and learning something completely new, with a bit more time at home as well after the Hong Kong job, and I think stood me in very good stead actually.

I went to Paris in the summer of 1994 and found myself representing these Whitehall economic departments in Paris. Suzanne and I both already spoke French, although we worked on it while we were there to improve it. I much enjoyed digging into and understanding a major economy, having just done the fundamentals of economics, an economy very different from the UK, to understand how the French labour market works, to dig into State ownership of a lot of the industries and businesses, to look at their taxation policies, their monetary policy, all of those things was for me was very rewarding. At that time, in the mid-nineties, Britain was seen as a leader post-Thatcher, in deregulation, the Big Bang in the City of London, we were role models for modernising the economy. France was in a very different position but there was lots of opportunity to talk to groups about the British experience, how to run a deregulated economy and how our labour market worked. I was understanding and learning a lot about my own country in this period, reading White Papers about UK economic policy that I would never have done and then trying to explain that to the French and then getting inside the French system and alongside their economic ministries, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Bank of France, the business organisation the MEDEF, the trade unions, etc. Seeing a bit at first-hand how the tight

community of Finance Ministry officials worked together and central bankers as well and being at least partially accepted into those networks as the UK rep, all of that very satisfying.

AW: Who was your Ambassador?

PR: The Ambassador was Christopher Mallaby who was great, a fantastic intellectual, knew France backwards, was genuinely interested in these issues and regularly encouraged me to go out and write about fiscal policy or monetary policy or the labour markets. It was a very rewarding and satisfying time of intellectual expansion for me which I've always appreciated.

I had a strong team in Paris, Simon Fraser was my First Secretary, so lots of intellectual horsepower there. I also covered agriculture so I had to dig into the way the Common Agricultural Policy worked for French agriculture. I had an agricultural attaché who was very well versed in that. The labour attaché worked for me as well so I was head of a little team of specialists where again I was a generalist but benefitted a lot from all their expertise.

There was a lot going on in the world at that time. The election of President Chirac in May 1995 brought in a period of effective cooperation with Britain. He and John Major were very keen to see military cooperation in the Balkans crisis which I observed from sitting around the Ambassador's table at morning meetings rather than being involved. The thing that did involve me was Mad Cow Disease with my agricultural hat on. It was a complete nightmare and it got very bad in the last months of the Major Administration to the point where we were beginning to systematically veto all decisions in the EU unless we got our way on issues to do with Mad Cow Disease. The French were, of course, absolutely determined to keep it out of France and exclude UK meat. This put the Embassy in the front line of doing a lot of very tough explaining and justifying what we were doing. There was a lot of anger and incredulity on the French side that we had allowed this to happen and that things had got so bad. It was really in my last months in the job in Paris that I was completely taken over by Mad Cow Disease. John Major came to tell the French that we wouldn't allow anything else to be agreed in the EU unless we got our way on this issue. Non-cooperation, an empty seat, systematic vetoes, it was a bad period. Eventually the drastic measures taken in the UK got on top of the disease and things began to ease but it was a long time before the French accepted British beef back into France.

Deputy Political Adviser, FCO, London, 1997-2000

Overall it was a very happy and satisfying period and I got away for a few years from the mainstream FCO crisis management work, but wasn't able to stay away from it for very long because just before Tony Blair's election in 1997 I was pulled back. I was appointed Deputy Political Adviser and promoted to the equivalent now of Director, Deputy to Jeremy Greenstock the Political Director. I was pulled out early from my tour because I'd only done less than three years. As a family we regretted leaving Paris just as we felt we were getting our teeth into it, but it was too good a job to say no to and anyway I've never said no to jobs when they've been offered to me, it's not my way.

It was another step up and it felt quite different to be in the FCO at Director level, no longer in charge of your own team, all you really had was a secretary and you were then dependent on the departments to write briefs for you and to tell you what to say. It was a very odd feeling to have somebody else write a brief for me because I'd spent my entire career doing that for more senior people. Suddenly I was getting briefs to go off and negotiate something and that felt very different. Perhaps I should interpolate that at no stage during all this was I given any training on management, leadership, anything. There was no training or if there was I was always too busy to do it. I was always learning by doing, not such a bad way of doing it as long as you have got people above you who took the time to mentor you, and with Jeremy Greenstock I very much did and that continued when Emyr Jones-Parry took over from him. They both helped me as a new Director in making sure that I understood what it was to now to be in the FCO leadership cadre.

There were two main blocks of work that fell to the Deputy Political Director. This was a job created by Jeremy and first filled by Emyr Jones-Parry before me, when I think that Jeremy felt the job of Political Director had just got too big and heavy without there being a deputy who could do project work. The projects were the Balkans, then in major crisis, Cyprus, not quite in crisis but in one of its many phases of being busy, plus a lot of multilateral work.

Quickly enough the Balkans came to dominate everything in my life. I came in at the end of the Bosnia crisis, after the Dayton Agreement, the NATO Force IFOR was deployed so we weren't in hot crisis but what particularly involved me in my early months was the hunt for war criminals that were called in the jargon Pifwics (Persons Indicted for War Crimes). It was people sought by the International Criminal Tribunal in Yugoslavia for war

crimes. They were mostly Bosnian Serbs, some Bosnian Croats as well, and it was a rather exciting period to detain these suspected war criminals and turn them over to The Hague.

Bosnia was initially the focus but very quickly it became Kosovo because we had the Serbian militia violence in Kosovo in 1998, worsening in early 1999, the driving out of the Kosovo Albanians, three quarters of a million driven out in a few weeks. We had a series of efforts to bring international pressure to bear, starting with EU monitors in white overalls which failed and then moving on to the Rambouillet talks to try to bring Milosevic to accept that this was impossible. I was by then the point man on these issues working to Robin Cook the Foreign Secretary and I remember Robin Cook and Tony Blair getting increasingly exasperated as all the diplomatic efforts and appeals to Milosevic to stop increasing the pressure in Kosovo failed. The trigger event was the murder of thirty or forty Kosovo Albanians at a place called Racak in January 1999 which finally convinced Blair and Cook that this couldn't be allowed to go on. We went through a process of diplomatic negotiation first, the talks held in the Chateau of Rambouillet. The British and the French, Robin Cook and his French counterpart Vedrine were the co-chairs and the French made the chateau available. The Americans and the Russians worked with us and other members of the Contact Group trying to shepherd the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians together to reach some sort of a compromise which would prevent war. Two weeks of solid negotiations in a French chateau was very bizarre. I wasn't there all the time, I coxed and boxed with Emyr as the British representative, with Tom Phillips who was Head of the Eastern Adriatic Department (EAD).

It was very odd, wonderful French hospitality, complete intransigence on both sides, but also a feeling that when all the talks had finished the Serbs and Kosovars tended to get together in the bar because they had more in common with each other than they did with the rest of us. But nonetheless there was no agreement.

In the course of this there was, I think, the most bizarre event of my diplomatic life which I should just recount. The US negotiator Christopher Hill who was trying to pilot the negotiations at Rambouillet decided that he had to fly to see Milosevic one night to just try and make an effort to break the stalemate in the negotiations. He decided that he would take the British and French co-chairs with him and that turned out to be me and the French Political Director Gerard Herrera. He commandeered a US Air Force aircraft, and this was at a time of high tension with Belgrade, the Serbian forces were creating mayhem in Kosovo,

it was all very tense. We left the Chateau telling no-one where we were going (the EU Special Representative Petrisch found out and pursued us across the cobbles as we drove off!) So we went to Paris and got on this US Air Force jet and flew into Belgrade. We got there around midnight, and had a long meeting with Milosevic who was then under real threat of NATO military attack if he didn't pull back, and who was completely disconnected. He had no real interest in our warnings of what was about to befall him if he didn't pull his forces out of Kosovo. He told us that he dreamt about what he would do after he was out of power, he would take his grandchildren to Greece and live comfortably. We got no sense of any reality at all so after three or four hours we left and got back on the plane and by the morning we were back in the negotiations.

It was one last effort to make Milosevic see what was coming. He didn't take it. The negotiations broke down and then there was the NATO intervention in Kosovo which Tony Blair had been very prominent in pushing for against an initially reluctant President Clinton. NATO airstrikes for seventy four nights, at the end of which Milosevic agreed that he would pull his troops out and then the NATO ground forces went in and began the stage of stabilisation and of trying to put Kosovo back together again. It was a very intense period. The run up to military conflict is one where the FCO is running flat out and I was very heavily loaded through the period of Racak in January to the military intervention in April. But in the end a very successful military operation, no allied soldier killed, as there had been none killed in Bosnia. These NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo didn't lead to the loss of life and the injuries that later interventions did.

In all such crises, once the military intervention is underway the ball passes from the FCO to the military. We were still involved every day and every evening going to meetings with the MOD, but the lead was then with the MOD. We had been the lead for the three months in the build-up. When the fighting stops the ball comes back to the FCO and perhaps DFID to do work on the aftermath. That's the classic pattern which I've known in other conflicts, like Iraq. I learned in that period how the military works, their very rigorous planning, their ability to apply really serious numbers of people to thinking through how the operation is going to be run, to strategizing, to looking at what might go wrong and then the unrolling of a military operation. It was very impressive to see the military working like that. Defence Secretary George Robertson was very much in charge and every morning he held a meeting which I tended to go to. So it was a lesson for me as well as to how top level crisis management works in Whitehall when we are involved in military operations. Eventually it

produced the NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo and then the thing slightly fell down the priority list.

AW: How did you find Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary?

PR: I always found him a very good man to work for, I wouldn't like to have been opposing him in the House of Commons because he had a formidable forensic mind and a formidable capacity to defenestrate people. But to his officials I found him actually very courteous, thoughtful, demanding, very precise and always on top of his brief. He would Hoover up anything you put to him, he would master it. He had a good relationship with Hubert Vedrine, they appreciated each other and he was very centrally involved throughout the Kosovo process, always available to consult. I found him a very good boss to work for, unlike his public image. With his own team he was very loyal.

AW: He had a bad start with Sierre Leone ...

PR: Yes he did, and as opposition in the House of Commons he was formidable, on Matrix Churchill and so on. He was a very effective Minister because he was very economical and concise. He knew what he wanted and didn't waste any time and tended to focus on just a few things that mattered to him at the time.

International Security Director, 1999-2000

So that took me to 1999. After the Kosovo War it felt a natural break point and so I was moved to the more structural job of International Security Director. As Deputy Political Director I didn't have any departments reporting specifically to me, perhaps it's better to say that it was a job that had a very light management load because it was conceived as a negotiating job where you would be hopping on a plane to go and present the British case in NATO, in the EU or bilateral meetings. I did a lot of travel to bilateral capitals and therefore I didn't have a Directorate because I was supposed to be a free flowing negotiator rather like the Political Director which in those days was a very policy-rich role. But I think people felt that I then needed a bit of experience of actually running a Directorate with all that goes with that, resource management, HR management and so on. I moved across to the International Security Director job which was responsible for NATO and security policy and also nuclear disarmament and also export licencing, the big export licencing business which involved a lot of people. I didn't spend very long there, about a year in total but enough to learn the rudiments of having to think about a Directorate-wide team and be responsible for the

running of a number of posts like UKDel NATO which reported to that job. I attended a lot of multilateral meetings, a lot of time dealing with Parliamentary aspects of export licencing which constantly threw up issues and problems. But then fairly quickly I was pulled out to become Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).

Chairman of the JIC, 2000-2001

AW: You have become the Chairman of the JIC, was that more fascinating than you expected?

PR: Yes. I wasn't terribly keen on the job because it sounded to me like perhaps to one side of the action rather than in the action, and a lot of process involved as well. But I certainly did find it more challenging and interesting than I had expected. I moved across in the summer of 2000 and I left the job at the beginning of September 2001. That is important to be precise about that because it was one week before 9/11. My period was just before 9/11.

What sort of job is it? Again, it was a different kind of job than I'd ever done before so I suppose in terms of broadening me out perhaps that was the motive for moving me, because I found myself Chairman of a senior Whitehall Committee and also getting to know the intelligence community, where intelligence could illuminate an issue and where it couldn't. Most people around the table were more senior than me, because this was a promotion for me to the DG level, quite young. I was still under fifty. Sitting around my table were the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies, the Chief of Defence Staff or very senior representatives of defence and intelligence, very senior people from the Government Departments. I felt I was conducting an orchestra where the players were more senior than me. It's obviously a job which involves overseeing a rigorous process and working to a tight weekly timetable. There was a sense of it being quite a tightly-packed process, as soon as you finish a range of papers one week, you go on to start to prepare a set on completely different issues the next one. Being the interface between this Whitehall world of assessment, the intelligence world but also people like the FCO Research Department, Defence Intelligence world and also the Prime Minister and senior Ministers and trying to make sure that the output of this big machine was relevant to what they were interested in. To be effective you really needed to have one foot on each side of the famous green baize door, clearly one in the Cabinet Office, taking an objective view and with formal accountability for warning of threats and ensuring that Ministers were informed in good time, but also a foot in Number 10, knowing what was on the Prime Minister's mind, what was on

the Foreign Secretary's mind, knowing what Cabinet Committees were looking at, and still ensuring that the product being generated was relevant, not biased by policy considerations and was being read. Both those sides of the job were really important.

On the chairing of the Committee, I hadn't had any training for that. I'd seen a lot of chair people in action over my years and I tried to make sure that as a Chairman, I didn't intervene too much but that I tried to focus people in the various discussions on the papers, not on drafting. Were we looking at the right issues? Were we looking at the right angles? Were we avoiding group think, and seeing the underlying trends? Then leave the drafting more to the staff. The tendency of all Whitehall committees is of course to get into drafting, with very senior people arguing over the drafting of a particular sentence. That's essential where it's a very sensitive judgement but most of the time it's not the best use of their time. So if a chairman can somehow move it on from how we are actually going to draft a sentence to what is the idea we are trying to underline to Ministers then that's good. The tradition in the JIC is that one doesn't record different views, leaving it to the Ministers to decide which they like, but to come to a reconciliation and to give them the best analysis we can even if there's been disagreement in getting there. Which is all fine as long as it doesn't become a bland fudge that disguises real differences. I had an excellent Chief of Assessment Staff in John Day who was very rigorous in ensuring that we chased out areas of difference and tested them and tried to make sure that when we came to judgements, they were quite sharp judgements, quite challenging, and made readers stop and think rather than papering over issues where there was genuine disagreement around Whitehall. I also had the option, which I used, of sending the Prime Minister a minute saying "Here is the JIC paper but you need to know that there are some pretty deep disagreements around the table". So the Prime Minister knew this even it didn't come out clearly in the paper.

I went regularly to Number 10. I didn't see as much of the Prime Minister as I should have done, looking back, but I saw his staff regularly for feedback. I did from time to time sit in the Overseas Policy Committee of the Cabinet to present the conclusion of the JIC paper and listen to the discussion to make sure we were targeting it right. I should have done more of that. In fact the access of the JIC Chairman has got better over the years to Ministerial discussions which is a good thing. We dealt with the sort of range of issues you'd expect, Middle East, Iraq was of course on the radar screen by then. Terrorism, we'd had the first terrorist attacks against US ships in the Gulf and international terrorism was very much on our radar screen. We did a lot of work on nuclear proliferation, trying to assess how far and

how fast nuclear proliferation was going and a whole range of other papers on topical issues, lots of country-specific issues like Russia. A very varied diet.

One particular difficult period I recall was the Chinese testing the arrival of the new US President in the incident they manufactured of forcing down one of the American surveillance planes on Hainan Island. There was a very tense stand-off for a few days when I was drawn in as a bit of a crisis manager into the Whitehall effort on that.

By and large there was a steady weekly round of producing assessments and then following them up to make sure they'd been useful before beginning the next round. There was a certain amount of travel to visit other allied intelligence communities because the JIC product was always very well read in the US, Canada and Australia and New Zealand and we had representatives of the allies on the JIC most of the time. So that was interesting to go and learn about the intelligence communities of the Five Eyes Allies but it was largely a Whitehall based job and one that I enjoyed more as I did it before I then moved on.

Political Director, FCO, London, 2001-2003

AW: It is 29th November 2016 and Peter Ricketts is recommencing his recollections of his diplomatic career. It was 2001 at our last break and you have become Political Director in Jack Straw's Foreign Office. You mentioned you wanted to have a word about the structure.

PR: Yes, the Political Director job in those days, and it's evolved a little bit since then, was that you essentially had no line manager responsibility for any bit of the Foreign Office but you floated free across all the Departments, depending upon the issue of the day. You were the lead negotiator for the Foreign Secretary on whatever crisis was on, whatever major issue he was particularly focussing on and so it was a job which had a particularly close link to the Foreign Secretary. I think I saw him every day when we were both in the Office and the issue of the day changed all the time. It was a job with a lot of travelling. There was a European network of Political Directors, in those days we didn't have the committee structures in Brussels to prepare for the EU Foreign Ministers Meetings, so that was done by Political Directors meeting once a month. There was a G7 Group, various Contact Groups, and all sorts of bilateral links. I had been the Deputy to Emyr Jones-Parry and then I took over from Emyr when he went to NATO (*originally said New York on tape, but later corrected*). I was expecting to deal with the full range of foreign policy issues but literally one week after I started the job there was 9/11. In fact I was in Jack Straw's office with

Geoff Hoon, the Defence Secretary, when we were called out to look at the television and to see pictures of the first aircraft having crashed in. We thought it was a terrible accident until the second aircraft hit at which point we knew we were in a huge incident. I remember Geoff Hoon saying that he thought he'd better get back to the MOD to look at our own air defences over London which was a slightly sobering moment for all of us. 9/11 really defined the next three months or so of my time because everything went into the reaction to that. For Jack Straw and for me the immediate agenda was set by the international concerting that went on. There was very rapidly a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, there was then a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers because NATO then activated Article Five, the collective defence guarantee in the Treaty, for the first time ever, we quickly went across to New York for a meeting in the Security Council and indeed a lot of the work was focused in the Security Council and the creation of a Counter Terrorism Committee with Jeremy Greenstock in the Chair.

Rather unexpectedly we were all having to make up policy on how to react to this massive attack on the US of all countries. If you think back to how extraordinary it was that the first time NATO had activated Article Five of its Treaty it was an attack on the US. I don't think anyone had seen that coming. At US prompting, work moved quickly to NATO and the start of military operations against Al Qaida in Afghanistan. By the end of 2001 we had got the first NATO operation there up and running. The thing that I remember most clearly from the first months of that job is what I'd call the concurrency of things. In other words stuff kept happening in parallel all the time so while I was very busy on counter terrorism, all sorts of other things were happening as well.

The second major strand of that early period was in the arcane world of European defence where we had been building, since the St Malo Summit with the French in 1988, an effort to relaunch European defence, first with the French and then more widely with the other European Union countries. All had gone very well up to the point where Turkey began to get very restive and demand access to the consultations and the decision making on possibly using European military forces which produced a counter reaction of course from the Greeks. Emyr who had enormous respect and standing in the Political Directors club had launched a personal initiative to try to resolve this problem of the Turks and the Greeks locking horns over a potential Turkish role. He'd got a long way through brokering an agreement purely really by personal energy and prestige with all the various players but he hadn't quite got to the end. He bequeathed to me in September 2001 the job of tying up this

agreement. So early on, in amongst all the counter terrorism stuff, I went out to Athens and to Ankara to continue Emyr's negotiation. I had a sinking feeling at that point that I was putting a toe into some very deep waters. Issues to do with Greek, Turkey and Cyprus which they had all lived throughout their careers and knew every nuance of, and I, as a newcomer, was having to try to come into this and broker an understanding between them. It was a pretty alarming feeling because we were touching on vital issues to all three of those. Cyprus was not yet a member of the EU but Greece and Turkey were both very conscious of Cyprus becoming a member of the EU and were both trying to protect their positions and Cyprus's position. I did quite a lot of shuttle diplomacy over that autumn to try to find a common ground between them. It's hard now to overstate the level of paranoia, and that's not to use too strong a word, in Ankara and Athens. In the case of Turkey they were determined to ensure that the EU could not be used to mount operations in Turkey's backyard, or even in Cyprus – and Greece worried that Turkey might somehow use NATO against Greek interests. The conspiracy theories were enormous. I laboured on the text, I almost got to an agreed text, we were then at the European Summit in Laeken in Belgium (December 2001) in amongst the King's Palace and his lovely greenhouses, the Greeks managed to put a spanner in this very complex and delicate text that I'd worked up and I had to go in and out of the European Council to advise Tony Blair and Jack Straw on this and it got stalemated and deadlocked. As an interesting example of how the EU process worked in those days, the then foreign policy Czar Javier Solana said "I'll take this over now, you've got it to this point" and the thing disappeared for nine months and reappeared at a European Council in October 2002 as a text which had lots of wrapping around it to keep the Greeks happy, lots of restatement of principles which was designed to encourage the feeling that they weren't giving anything away, then the Turks were eventually brought on board with a statement which effectively said both EU and NATO agree that neither side will attack the other. It was quite extraordinary that you had to have that. Emyr at NATO had worked out that he could get a deal there and we could get one in the EU and all this came together at a Copenhagen European Council at the end of 2002. An enormous labour giving a very delicately balanced set of rights for Turkey to be involved in consultations, if they wanted to, and to participate in future European Union military operations, but not to have decision making rights.

In the end European defence did not develop in that direction in the sense that the European Union has never looked like mobilising and deploying large military forces of the Kosovo or Bosnia type. It's done much smaller scale things which in no sense could be regarded as a

threat to anyone but it was all part of that period when following the St Malo Agreement we all had the idea that Europe might one day be deploying a large post conflict stabilising force and therefore issues of where it would go, how the Turks would be assured it wouldn't attack their interests had to be dealt with. It's a footnote in history now but it consumed an awful lot of time in that busy time in 2001-2.

To go back to my concurrency theme, through the summer and autumn of 2002 another major issue was brewing which was Iraq. And also there was an India/Pakistan stand-off going on leading to some pretty blood curdling threats of using nuclear force if one or other side was attacked.

That is a point I want to emphasise. In reading the Chilcot Report I did have the sense that we were all being judged on the assumption that we were doing nothing else throughout that period except Iraq. But actually it was a very crowded agenda all the way through 2002, and I've mentioned some of the things that kept us busy during that period, on top of which there was this building crisis in Iraq. The Political Director tends to become the sort of fulcrum for all of that because they all involved multilateral negotiations of one kind or another and a number of other routine ongoing things as well that have slipped now from my memory.

I do want to cover Iraq a little bit. Obviously the exhaustive detail is all in the Chilcot Report. When I read back through that and looked back at my own material, what came through to me most strongly is this. Throughout that period of 2002 as George Bush was beginning to really crank the handle and turning increasingly towards military action against Saddam Hussein, and Tony Blair was talking to him very regularly, famously at the Crawford Summit in April and then again in the summer, in the Foreign Office the focus of Jack Straw, myself and our team was very largely on the UN Security Council track. We secured one Resolution, 1441, in the autumn. For us this UN track really was a method of ensuring that we didn't have to go to war to bring Saddam Hussein to compliance with obligations, to give him the chance to do that by allowing in the weapons inspectors, by making clear to him that there could well be serious consequences if he didn't. All through that autumn I certainly myself believed, and I think Jack Straw believed, the likelihood was that Saddam Hussein would do enough to make it impossible for at least the UK to go to war. All the effort we put in over that autumn of 2002 first on 1441, then on the work involved to get a second Resolution in the early part of 2003, all of that was focused on the expectation that he would do enough to ward off conflict and live to fight another day.

I genuinely believed in the months leading up to the conflict, that Saddam Hussein would find a way to do enough to stave off the obvious imminent crisis that was gathering around him. The American muscle flexing and building up of forces was becoming all the more obvious throughout that period. The conundrum to me out of that period is why Saddam Hussein didn't do that. If it was true that he didn't have these weapons of mass destruction, or at least none in a state of readiness, why didn't he at some point or other concede access for the inspectors enough to make it impossible for us, or I think the Americans, to go to war? I think with hindsight he was playing a bluffing game, not least towards the rest of the Arab world and his own people, but it's still remarkable to me that he didn't take any step, especially in those closing weeks when the pressures were immense and the forces were gathering, to open up to the inspectors and show that he didn't have these weapons. Certainly all the material that we were seeing looked pretty convincing that he did.

Our focus was on a UN Resolution route which would give Saddam Hussein a ladder to climb down. But when it became more and more obvious that he wasn't going to climb down and a conflict was likely, our focus became getting a UN authorisation so that the UN themselves would run the post conflict period and we would be part of that, very much as had been done successfully in Bosnia and Kosovo. That's part of what the second Resolution at the beginning of 2003 was about. That also failed in those awful final days before the conflict and we found ourselves saddled with having to take responsibility for administering a large slice of Southern Iraq. But we were entirely dependent on decisions on how the occupation would be run, and what zone we would have, decisions taken very late in Washington. The whole atmosphere of Whitehall was against beginning a massive preparation for a situation which Ministers very much hoped wouldn't arise. Planning for failure in other words. Failure of the Resolutions, failure of the effort to get the UN into the lead. Nonetheless, we did arrive in that period as the war began without having got together in sufficient numbers the people, resources and material that turned out to be necessary. We worked very hard in parallel with the war to get together a number of administrators and experts and be prepared to take this on, the military having to do a lot of work in the early weeks. I think a lesson from that is the risk of group think, the risk that a team of people who work so tightly together and are so focussed on achieving the absolute priority for Ministers, which seemed to us to be the right priority as well, of UN action either to deter Saddam Hussein or to involve the UN in a leadership role in the post conflict period, focus on that

priority meant that we didn't do enough thinking about what if that isn't achievable and preparing in advance. The Iraq Inquiry was also a stark reminder for civil servants of the importance of writing down what passes between you and your Minister. I saw Jack Straw several times a day during the Iraq crisis. He knew exactly what the state of our preparations were for the post-conflict period. But I often didn't write down what passed between us. It would have been better if I had.

What Iraq did do was set off serious thinking and work in Whitehall on how we can get better at post conflict stabilisation. I remember writing a long minute to Jack Straw as my sign off minute at the end of my time as Political Director in the summer 2003 with the fresh experience of Iraq, which led on to the creation of what became known as the Stabilisation Unit in DFID to maintain a large database of people with varied skills who were interested to take on post-conflict work, to do some training and preparing so that the next time we would be in better shape. We'll come on to talk about Afghanistan but I do think that the provincial reconstruction teams, the regional civilian military teams in Afghanistan, did work much better than Iraq and are an illustration that we did learn the lesson of the failure to be able to take on Iraq.

Two other comments on that. First of all, my generation of officials had had no experience at all of taking on effectively a colonial administration of that kind. Bosnia and Kosovo had been UN led, and very effectively. You had to go back to 1945 and the administration of Germany in the immediate aftermath of the War, on which there was no expertise left in Whitehall at all. Our system didn't create the conditions really for us to take the time to study that and then go and build a structure ready to do that, of the kind that was put together for post-war Germany, even if the political climate had been willing to accept that that sort of work ought to go on. I think that's just a point of context that I certainly felt at the time, and one can easily see that with perfect foresight a whole Government Department might have been set up a year before to prepare for this. But that wasn't practical politics and indeed it still wasn't even a few weeks out from the conflict.

From September 2002 Iraq became the all-embracing issue for me, making a bit of time for the India/Pakistan crisis and completing the European defence tangle as well. It was a time of real worry inside the FCO, I remember the PUS asked me to convene an all staff town hall type of meeting in about November before the conflict to explain what we were doing, why, why we'd been brought to the point of preparing to be part of an American military

operation. We had a long discussion with a lot of people asking worried questions about the legal base and the moral basis and so on - all of which I think was entirely right and healthy to do. We had one FCO official resign as a matter of conscience, Elizabeth Wilmshurst, the Deputy Legal Adviser, who entirely properly as a matter of conscience, disagreed so strongly that she resigned. A lot of people had concerns but I think the fact that we were pursuing so vigorously the UN route and that the Brits had been so prominent in securing the major UN Resolution 1441 in the autumn, gave people the sense that whatever the basis of American policy, we were trying to ensure that we stayed within UN legitimacy. But it was a very stressful and exhausting time. In those final weeks I went with Jack Straw three times to New York by Concorde for the UN Security Council debates, including his famous confrontation with the French Foreign Minister de Villepin when they addressed each other across the table in Christian name terms, and a dramatic General Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, producing what he said was a piece of evidence about biological weapons in Iraq.

I felt throughout the crisis a strong sense of responsibility for putting together and leading a crisis team while thinking about the strain that everyone else was under. Don't forget that by the time the war broke out, there had been a crisis team meeting morning and evening for months. We went onto daily meetings of the crisis team in October or so and so we had six months of build up before even getting to conflict. Then we were at 24/7 working throughout the conflict. I think the FCO's crisis management procedures worked well and dovetailed well with the MOD. DFID were always outliers because of the attitude of Clare Short and in the following crisis management issues like Afghanistan DFID were much more part of it. In Iraq they were very much on the sidelines. We learned a lot of lessons about how to do crisis management and prepare for the aftermath of conflict which I think we then did put into force. But it was a pretty extraordinary period and certainly by the summer of 2003 I was absolutely exhausted and with the conflict over, the post conflict underway, Ministers decided that I would go out to NATO to replace Emyr and John Sawers, who was then the Ambassador in Cairo would come back to replace me as Political Director.

Permanent Representative to NATO, Brussels, 2003-2006

AW: So you are off to Brussels again but the NATO Residence is in strange location, I suppose it has to be near the NATO HQ, but it's a strange way to live in Brussels, at the end of the Northern Line, as it were?

PR: Yes, NATO itself is a strange place, about as far away from the EU as you can get and in my two times in NATO in the 1970s and 2003-2006 the NATO world and the EU world were very distinct worlds. You never really came across EU types and the NATO world was a sort of self-sufficient campus - big enough to be self-sustaining and self-regarding I suppose. We moved to different tempos and in different circles. The Perm Rep's Residence was inconveniently placed in Hoeilaart, (it's been sold now). The EU was in the middle, NATO was in the north and the NATO Ambassador's house was far out in the East, although a very nice area.

I arrived in NATO in the July of 2003. It was a welcome change of pace, but not really of substance, the subject matter rolled on really. But it was a fascinating opportunity to learn the game of a multilateral mission, and a special one at that because all the missions are in the same building in NATO. To go and see your American colleague, you walk down the hall and have a cup of coffee, and to see the Dutch you go down two floors and along a bit further. So it is a quite a claustrophobic world because the meetings, the lunches, the delegation work are all in the same building. You go in in the morning, out in the evening, and never go into the rest of Brussels at all. It means that it is very intense. It means that you get to know your NATO colleagues very well because we met in the NATO Council a lot; we spent a lot of hours together. They had the habit, which I didn't wholly approve of, of entertaining each other all the time as well. So you'd go out for dinner in the evening and meet three or four of your colleagues and their wives. It was a very powerful group experience. I got some very good advice from Emyr at starting; he said "You should aim to be one of the three best friends of all the other Perm Reps". I thought that was very good, because the Brit was often the one who had to be the sort of broker. We tended not to be out on an extreme one side or the other. We could normally be the ones who found the words in a communiqué or a declaration, solved everyone's problem. So I tried to follow Emyr's advice and be the one that Perm Reps would come to as a friend, and say they had a problem and they needed to get something in this text otherwise their Minister would have them for breakfast, and could I help ... I found it was a game of doing people favours so that they would do you a favour when you needed it. That's true in negotiating texts but also in the general life of NATO Council. Not always being the one who spoke early in the debate or tried to wipe the floor with other speakers, always trying to be courteous, letting others have their say, if necessary at great length, and being sufficiently close personally to the other

Perm Reps that one could act in that way. Emyr certainly had that position and over time I think I got there as well.

The Secretary General was George Robertson when I arrived. He was an inspirational Secretary General. He had the most deft use of British humour I have ever known, to lance any boil that he had to and he got through a lot of sticky moments with that great sense of humour.

The issue of the moment when I first arrived was still Iraq and in particular to begin to heal the wounds in NATO left by Iraq, where the UK and the US and one of two other countries like Spain had been very strong participants in the conflict, and we had been lobbying very strongly for a tough second Resolution in the weeks before the conflict. France and Germany had been absolutely in the other camp working with the Russians to prevent us from getting a second Resolution and so there were some pretty deep bitternesses - not too strong a word I think. But being professionals, everyone felt as 2003 dragged on that there was no point in NATO being split down the middle on this, and so we spent a lot of time trying to put together something slightly more constructive, looking to the future. This crystallised into an idea of a NATO Training Mission in Iraq which didn't require people to take a position on the past but looked to the future. By the time of the NATO Summit in Istanbul in July 2004, we had put together a package of a NATO Training Mission in Iraq which helped to heal the wounds in NATO and move NATO on from that very divisive period. In getting there, there were some tremendous rows in the NATO Council, mainly between my great American colleague Nick Burns and my delightful but very mercurial French colleague Benoit D'Aboville. Monsieur D'Aboville was a tremendous character, a specialist in NATO and Polmil work, and a ferocious defender of the French position. A lot of barbs flew between Nick Burns and Benoit d'Aboville with me in the middle trying to broker a solution between them all.

The other major issue of those years was the growing NATO role in Afghanistan. The theme of Western intervention continued in my career and Afghanistan started very small, indeed the first two years of the ISAF Mission (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan was not even run by NATO, it started off being headed by one ally in turn, first Germany and then Turkey. It came under NATO control just about as I arrived there in the summer of 2003. There was a decision in October that NATO would begin progressively to take over the so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams around Afghanistan from October of

2003. The UK started in the north, in the safest place in Afghanistan. The Germans had a PRT in a place called Kunduz, which was relatively peaceful and the British decided to go to Mazar-e-Sharif in the north as well. That was all fairly benign in those days and wasn't attracting a great deal of attention. George Robertson had to flog around NATO capitals trying to beg five helicopters in that autumn of 2003. People were sending small elements of forces to try to minimise the cost because Iraq was still a very heavy cost for many. But the decision in principle was taken (which would go on to have pretty major consequences) that progressively NATO would move around from area to area of Afghanistan. We spent a lot of time in the NATO Council learning about Afghanistan, studying it, hearing briefings about it and we were the first group of Permanent Representatives to go out there, we went in the autumn of 2003, about six of us who volunteered to go and look at this place that none of us knew. We flew off to the Gulf. We climbed into a Canadian Hercules aircraft, we flew for four hours and landed in Bagram Airbase, got out of the back of the planes and the Canadians who were running the place said "Uh uh, no, can't I'm afraid, there's been a security alert and you've got to get back on the plane and fly back to the Gulf". So we had literally half an hour on the ground, got back on the plane and flew four hours back to the Gulf arriving in a pretty worn kind of condition in the middle of the night. So the first mission of NATO Perm Reps was not a great success as we never got beyond the airfield. But, of course, over the years I made frequent trips, the NATO Council went out at least twice a year as NATO's footprint grew and we got to know the commanders, the bases. And of course we met Karzai and the politicians there quite a lot. It was very impressive to see the British military and the diplomats and the aid workers trying really hard to give Afghans a chance to modernise their country.

The critical point for the UK was when the decision was made to go to the south of Afghanistan. Now we are well into my period in NATO so it was the beginning of 2006 when Britain accepted to lead the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team. We took it over with General David Richards and his headquarters, the British-led Ace Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) headquarters from Rheindahlen in Germany. It was a major commitment at a time when we were still very stretched in Iraq, and for that period, about a year I think, the British Army had a brigade sized force in Iraq and a brigade sized force in Afghanistan.

Thinking back to why we took that decision, which then led to a long and very costly commitment in Helmand both in terms of lives and in money, Britain strongly supported the idea that NATO should increasingly take over the whole of Afghanistan. In that period the

threat from opium trafficking poppies to the Afghan economy and the opportunity for the Taliban to make a great deal of money from opium was very strong in people's minds. We were constantly being briefed on the opium harvest, the difficulty of controlling it, the money the traffickers made and how much of that got back to the Taliban, and the role of Iran and so on. It later dropped out of the debate as the NATO operation turned more into a counter insurgency fight against the Taliban but certainly, at the beginning, the idea that Helmand was ungoverned space, and in that space there were the Taliban and also a great deal of poppy growing, was a major feature. There was a strong sense in London that the Brits ought to front up and take on a really tough part of Afghanistan. We had had a relatively straightforward position in the north, no great fighting, no casualties I think. The Americans were in the south in Kandahar and, with the French, in the south east in the bad lands hunting Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden and I think there was quite a strong feeling in Whitehall with Ministers that Britain ought to get more stuck in and take on this very challenging task of Helmand. Those were the sorts of arguments that I recall being around. Certainly NATO was pressing hard for a major ally to take on Helmand Province which everyone knew was going to be a very difficult one. If Britain hadn't, I don't know who would have done. So there was a feeling that "We can't shirk this one". It did leave the British Armed Forces carrying a very heavy burden with others, including some of the small allies like the Baltic States who were very staunch in going with us into Helmand. I think history will have to decide whether the risks were measured fully enough, but those were the motives that I remember that were driving towards a decision to send in David Richards and the ARRC, and really get a grip on Helmand. The feeling was that we could do that if we put in significant forces and reduce the opium harvest and instil something like reasonable governance there. With hindsight, I think the risks were much greater and the difficulty of moving from an opium based trafficker economy, deeply corrupt, to something more like a well governed province was enormously bigger than we anticipated at the time.

The NATO Perm Rep job is a fascinating one because you are effectively representing the MOD as well as the FCO. The delegation is half and half military and civilian. It was an opportunity to work with some very bright military officers. One of the things I did while I was there was to insist on open planning our delegation and co-locating the military and the civilians in teams. There was a lot of reluctance to that culturally, as you can imagine, mostly from one particular constituency who liked their own offices, sticking in their own world, but actually when we did it, it was much better to have military staff officers working alongside

civilian desk officers on Iraq or Afghanistan or NATO modernisation or whatever issue it was. It very quickly became very popular.

Another thing that was going on through those years was NATO Enlargement. NATO took in ten new members in 2004, an enormous expansion, everything had to get bigger. Actually these countries had been Associate Members for some time, so they'd been sitting at the Council table as associate partners. They became full members and it was a very moving moment for them - the countries of Eastern Europe and the Baltic States for whom joining NATO was the ultimate assurance. We were also developing what we called our partnership programme with countries further beyond, countries like Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Georgia who aspired to be members of NATO one day. The NATO Cooperation Council was a council of about forty, the most enormous table you can imagine. Then there were countries who could have been NATO members if they'd wanted to, but chose not to be, particularly Finland and Sweden and Ireland who chose not to be members of NATO, but to all intents and purposes in all areas, including Afghanistan, were very active and good partners. So there was a very large club of those who were like minded and/or aspiring members of NATO and we did a lot of briefing of those.

Then there was the NATO-Russia Council which Tony Blair had set up in the early days of Mr Putin when hopes were high that it was going to be possible to work with Mr Putin and show him that NATO was not an adversary but Russia was welcome at the table for a range of issues. The NATO-Russia Council would be all NATO members plus Russia and not all NATO members on one side and Russia on the other side. It was set up in 2004 at a Summit in Rome which Mr Berlusconi laid on with great panache and it started in high hopes but very quickly it became obvious that we weren't going to be able to do very useful business in it, and over time it became more and more a place for mutual recrimination rather than for active cooperation. But the initial ambition was to show Russia that NATO wanted to have cooperation and work with Russia.

So it was a very large multilateral job. There were trips by the NATO Council to see all the various operations, so we went to Kosovo, we went to Iraq, Afghanistan and we went to some of the partner nations as well to spend a day in Skopje, for example. One had to stay abreast of the domestic politics of all those countries as well. For them NATO was a major part of their foreign policy.

The organisation that we were probably most distant from was the EU. We were just at the beginning of effort at NATO/EU cooperation. I've talked about the difficulty of finding a basis for the Turks to agree that NATO and the EU should work together. When Cyprus joined as part of the new members that made Turkey even more suspicious. We had an EU/NATO cooperation mechanism but the Turks and the Greeks between them put so many locks and bolts on it that in the end it was only able to talk about the one mission that the EU had taken over from NATO which was in Bosnia. So we used to have extremely boring meetings of this EU/NATO Cooperation Group where all we would hear was briefings about the situation in Bosnia, which didn't change very much, and anything else was ruled out either by Greece or by Turkey as part of this continuing struggle to ensure that neither could somehow gain some advantage over the other. So NATO-EU relations were intensely frustrating. The underlying tensions sometimes erupted. In particular, the French, Belgians, and Germans decided to try and bounce the EU into a move on EU defence (creating an HQ) which they knew would infuriate Washington and London. It did – as this was in the autumn of 2003, with Iraq still fresh. I had to do a lot of shuttle diplomacy between Burns and d'Aboville to calm tempers. NATO/EU relations never improved throughout my time in NATO, and indeed for a long time afterwards.

Permanent Under Secretary, FCO, London, 2006-2010

AW: So now you are coming home. What made you decide to throw your hat into the PUS ring?

PR: That's a good question! Genuinely it was not a job I ever thought I would be right for or would be right for me. I was hoping to go abroad again and become a bilateral Ambassador. There weren't very many opportunities as I was drawing to an end in NATO and the succession to Michael Jay was obviously an issue. The honest answer is that quite a lot of colleagues and friends said "You are going to run, aren't you?" They were obviously looking at me as a possible candidate in a way that I wasn't looking at myself. I remember a number of colleagues saying that. Jack Straw was still the Foreign Secretary and so I knew him very well, and in the end I just felt that if other people were looking at me in that way, it would be wrong to not at least give it a go. I really didn't think I would get the job because I thought there were others definitely more experienced and better qualified than me. But throughout my career I always tended to say yes I would have a go and when people asked me to run, I did. Jack Straw chaired the interview panel that also had Gus O'Donnell on it

and a couple of other independent people as well and to my great surprise I was offered the job. It's not a job you say no to if you are offered! But it hadn't been in my planning at all.

That was the first interview I think I have ever had after joining the Foreign Office. I had absolutely no idea about interview technique. I had a couple of coaching sessions from one of the very nice coaches that the FCO can lay on who told me basic things about interview technique and presenting yourself but it was the first time I'd had to think of myself as potentially the leader of a large organisation. I'd never had any training in leadership; suddenly I was chosen for the job of leading an organisation of 16,000 people and a budget of £2 billion. So I had to scramble to get some advice on how you do this leadership thing. I discovered that it works out if you are yourself and you behave with integrity and honesty and transparency and constantly think about the messages you are sending out, subliminally as well as intentionally, and you think about other people and how to motivate them. It's really commonsense.

I didn't have long to prepare because, unlike many PUSs who'd had a long run-up to the job, my NATO commitments took me up to more or less to the time that Michael Jay was going to retire. I'd carved out a bit of time to do some travelling and I got advice as to where I should go. I went to a couple of areas of the world that I didn't know well. Africa: I had a fascinating visit to Nigeria and Ethiopia. I went to Ibiza to see our Consulate coping with nightclubs, like Manumission, and what they would do if there was ever a mass consular emergency, which was a great immersion. I went to Thailand.

Then I came back and moved into the job in the July of 2006 by which time Jack Straw had just gone. In fact I was there with Michael Jay on the evening that Gordon Brown took over and Jack Straw was not renewed in the job and Margaret Beckett arrived. So Margaret Beckett and I arrived at about the same time. From having what would have been a Foreign Secretary who I knew very well, I had a Foreign Secretary that I didn't know at all, and who I don't think had expected to come to the Foreign Office. So there was quite a lot of mutual learning going on through that period.

I'm not going to try and reconstruct everything that happened in that four year period as PUS. But there are a couple of things, looking back, that come through to me. First of all, the sheer weight of the administrative load on a PUS, I'm sure others have said this, but you get an immense volume of work that comes to you because you are Head of the Diplomatic Service, and the head of a major Government Department, and a member of the Cabinet

Secretary's PermSec group leading the Civil Service, the workload on human resources, the workload on resources, financial resources, for which you are personally responsible and accountable to Parliament. Something I learned in my induction period is that, unlike in all other areas of work where the Minister is responsible to Parliament and officials are responsible for loyally carrying out Ministers' decisions, in the area of budgets, the Treasury hold the Permanent Secretary personally accountable and the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee in Parliament certainly represent a major factor in a PUS's life. So all of that means that the sheer physical workload is very heavy. A nightly box, two at weekends probably. I used to find that if you divide the weekend into four, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon, I would work three out of those four just to keep on top of the load and carve out a little bit of time for initiative taking. I emphasise the load because it really doesn't leave much time to keep abreast of the policy which is also going on around you and to take your own initiatives to intervene, to launch ideas, to question advice. I learned over the course of the job that you had to really work to get through the stuff you have to do in order to create space for the things you want to do, and particularly to inject yourself into the policy advice process enough to be interesting.

One of the great frustrations of the job in the period that I did it was that I didn't feel I did have enough opportunity to do policy work, partly for reasons of time; time management of the PUS is different to that of other senior people in the FCO. For example every Wednesday morning there is a meeting of all the Permanent Secretaries of Whitehall, and that's part of your wider Whitehall role. You have the wonderful privilege of being with Her Majesty for presentation of credentials by Ambassadors. You have a few minutes with the Queen yourself which is very special. You have the FCO Board, Appointments Board, Parliamentary hearings. I used to work on the principle of having one overseas visit a month but that would often take you out for the good part of a week if you were going somewhere far away. By and large, I thought that the PUS ought to visit the places that Ministers weren't going to, so difficult or inaccessible places to show staff they were appreciated. All of that eats time out of the diary and I tended to take home a box of work in the evening and then discover that important submissions had gone up to Ministers, been decided and gone down again, the Minister had answered Parliamentary questions, or he'd seen the US Secretary of State and I'd had no time to inject a thought. I also chose not to be constantly with the Foreign Secretary. I could have been if I'd decided I had to be, but very

often quite rightly the DGs or Directors were dealing direct with Ministers, and I was busy running the organisation, not actually being part of the policy operation which is ironic because that's what I'd been trained for. I'd spent thirty years being a policy animal and then suddenly didn't have time. I say that because when I was National Security Adviser I deliberately decided to involve the Permanent Secretary group more in policy making and I set up my National Security Council Officials Group, which was the sort of understudy group to the Ministers and met on the day after Ministers met to go through papers for the following week and also try to do some strategic thinking. That was very much influenced by the fact that I had felt this frustration as PUS and not being able to have as much input into policy as I'd hoped for. I think that's now taken off as a new Whitehall Forum when Permanent Secretaries from all the National Security Departments sit together and actually get into the policy. They love it. I would have loved it.

So there were frustrations with the job, but it was a unique experience to take on and lead the Foreign Office and feel that range of talented people wanting to help you run the FCO as best you could. I gave a lot of time to the HR side because I've always felt that if you motivate people and make them feel that they are going to fulfil their potential and that they are listened to and that people are thinking about them, you get so much more back. You amplify your own influence and impact considerably. So I spent a lot of time communicating in all sorts of ways, having all-staff meetings, going around Departments, whenever I was in embassies talking to staff. I obviously spent a long time on the personnel appointments systems. I tried to open it up and to make sure that our posting decisions and our promotion decisions were made in a way that was supporting the approach that we were setting out – more women into senior jobs, more diverse people of all kinds, promoting some younger people more quickly because the signal you send through postings and promotions is the most powerful signal in the whole organisation. You can communicate until you are blue in the face, but if you then don't follow that through into appointing the sort of people who model the behaviour you are advocating, then it doesn't work.

I spent a lot of time on the idea of trying to inspire women to aspire to the more senior roles. We had, I think still have, the problem of women not wanting to take on the SMS level roles, choosing not to take on the challenge. To crack that and find role models among the senior women who showed that you could indeed have a family and come back and continue on into major senior roles was important. I think we made some progress. It was still too slow but I think we set the pattern that is now meaning that women are really moving through

into the senior roles, which I'm delighted to see. I think we sowed the seeds a bit during my time as PUS, and certainly to get the machine thinking like that and to really ensure that it feeds through into decisions requires a lot of energy and time.

The resourcing side of the FCO was again something that I don't feel I'd had enough preparation on, and looking back I would probably have insisted on more time to train for that and to prepare for it because one becomes responsible for decisions on massive projects. In my time we were rolling out the second round of the Firecrest IT system, called Future Firecrest. It was a huge Government IT project just of the kind that could fall flat on its face. It didn't, but we had our moments with it and I didn't really feel that I'd had the preparation to spot when projects were going off the rails and something needed to be done. Of course the answer is to surround yourself with the people who can help you with that, and we got better at that. In my time we hired a professional Director for IT. We hired a Director General for the whole resources side who was a trained accountant, which helped a lot. An enormous help on the FCO Board was to have Non-Executive Directors. I had two excellent ones. A senior partner from KPMG, Alistair Johnson, who chaired the Audit Committee. He was a tremendous support, never insisting but always willing to flag up a concern: "That's not how we would have done it". "Are you sure we're happy with that?" or "How are we going to ensure that these fine words are carried through and its going to happen like that?" The second one was an executive from BUPA, Alison Platt, who was particularly interested in the HR side. This inspirational woman was tremendously successful in her own career and was ceaselessly out around the FCO promoting the message. She also sat on our Senior Appointments Board keeping us absolutely honest in terms of our decisions. Those two were a breath of fresh air on the FCO Board, which was otherwise made up of the senior officials in the FCO. They brought professionalism to the way we approached some of our project work. I think it's got even more professional since then. Thank heavens we managed to we avoid disasters.

The FCO Board met every month and it took up a lot of my time. We weren't good at keeping the scale of the papers down, so there was a lot of paperwork. I think it had already improved with the arrival of these Non-Executive Directors and now of course the Board structure is different. But that was a major part of my life and I spent a lot of time as PUS worrying about the money and the budget. Because of this personal responsibility to Parliament, the PUS watches the numbers very carefully. Government accounting is a weird business in itself. One of my Non-Executive Directors talked about the end of year budget

process being like trying to land a helicopter on the deck of a moving ship, because so many things moved about and there were so many things you had no control over, and yet you were expected to land your budget never overspent but not more than about half or one percent underspent. Otherwise, if you were overspent you were in serious trouble, and if you were underspent they would knock off the money the following year. You had this sense of enormous responsibility with not much power over actually how it was going to happen, certainly in the final months of the year and there was always the looming threat of the Public Accounts Committee hearings when anything went wrong, and the level of tolerance, what the accountants call the level of materiality, is effectively zero. A few pounds misspent somewhere in the world and potentially you are in trouble. Inevitably I had to deal with one or two frauds and problems over the budget in embassies far and wide, which, quite rightly, kept the PUS awake at night because you knew you were going to be held responsible. Certainly those who came in from the private sector didn't recognise Government accounting as anything they were used to and did think that we were held, with hindsight, to ridiculous levels of tolerance in a system where there were so many moving parts and so little control over them.

I had to get the FCO intact through the Gordon Brown period. Margaret Beckett didn't stay very long and then David Miliband came in, and towards the end of my period in 2008/9 we came under a tremendous squeeze for the budget because of the financial crisis and because of austerity, and we had to carry our share of the burden. At that time as well the Treasury took off the cover that they had provided over sterling movements against foreign currencies. Just then, sterling fell off the cliff of the financial crisis and we found ourselves uncovered and unhedged. No doubt I should have insisted that immediately we went out into the market and hedged. But there were Treasury rules, and by the time we got their agreement we were £50 million, or more, short because of the fall of sterling. Late in the year, that's tough to find. So I fought a long and rather grinding battle to get the Treasury to accept that they would have to make up that shortfall, but also we had to really squeeze expenditure which led to tough decisions like reductions in the generosity of some allowances and scaling back on a lot of in year spending which is always difficult in posts. That was a very painful exercise and I got a lot of not very polite feedback on the impact of this on people, which hurt me a lot because I was also trying to do my best for the FCO in these very difficult circumstances. We didn't get a lot of sympathy, I must say, from the Treasury in those days. Eventually, we did get some grudging acknowledgement that

we'd suffered a completely unreasonable hit and then when the Conservatives came in in 2010 they put back in place the proper Treasury cover for Sterling losses. But that was a very uncomfortable period.

AW: You said you wanted to talk about David Miliband?

PR: Yes. David Miliband was a very inspiring and exciting Foreign Secretary to work with. He wasn't particularly interested in the detailed running of the FCO and the HR issues; he was a big policy person and brought in a very fresh and hands-on approach. He wanted us to modernise our whole approach to setting our objectives and we worked with him very intensely in his first weeks and months to reduce the number of objectives the Foreign Office had, to simplify them. I think we got it down to nine. I see now it's at three which is even better of course. We had an elaborate plan to have our nine objectives and then to have the various activities flowing from them and so on. He was a tremendous communicator in all of this. He was very into analysis of the changing world, of the impact of the internet, of new ways of working, reaching out beyond Government and really inspired staff with his approach and was very respected internationally. The Foreign Office always likes to have a Foreign Secretary who commands respect. Intellectually he must have been one of the brightest Foreign Ministers on the circuit. He worked extremely hard and I think was a very good thing for the Foreign Office because he got us to think about ways of doing diplomacy in the social networking age which we hadn't thought of before, and I think he enjoyed his time with us and was a very powerful voice for us in the wider Government and around the world. I very much enjoyed working for David Miliband.

AW: Did the Leadership Conferences start on your and his watch?

PR: No, I think Michael Jay started them but I certainly carried them on, the annual gathering of the clans which became more and more a feature of life, you're quite right. We got the Prime Minister to come together with other Ministers, business leaders. Separately the spouses met. The DSFA are an important part of the FCO family. (I always regarded the FCO as a family.) Having the spouses come to the conferences and have their own meetings, people running residences around the world could come and share experiences and more experienced people could help the lesser experienced. The Leadership Conferences were a big feature and took quite a lot of planning, but they were well worthwhile. And again the sense that a PUS gets of the fantastic breadth and depth of talent and energy and enthusiasm, if it can just be directed right, was very powerful. In the last years of the Labour

Government it has to be said that it was a fairly gloomy time. Financial crisis, budget squeezes, austerity, and all that, so we were having to manage that in the final years. I think with the arrival of William Hague, when I moved on, it moved into a different period but, yes, the Leadership Conferences were good. We also used to get back regularly a group of the senior Ambassadors for quarterly strategy type meetings, which were useful as well. Certainly there had been a sea change over the ten or twelve years before I came into the job in the relationship between London and the senior Ambassadors. In the past it had been grand Ambassadors regarding London and the Administration as a complete nuisance, and why couldn't they be left to get on with running their show. Michael Jay and then I worked hard to instil the idea that we were a collective leadership group at home and abroad, all pointing in the same direction and all communicating the same messages. Things like the Senior Leaders Group were useful in making sure that that community saw themselves as part of the overall leadership of the FCO, not panjandrams out there who had to be given what they asked for. I caricature a bit, but not much. It was a very supportive group in my time.

Overall I look back on those years as a blizzard of activity. The people issues were the ones I came out finding the most stimulating, and the satisfaction of encouraging somebody more junior to aspire and then seeing them move up into a more senior job and make a success of it, is one of the most satisfying aspects of this funny thing that people call leadership.

National Security Adviser, London, 2010-2012

AW: It's the 5th of January in the brand new year of 2017 and we are resuming your recollections of your diplomatic career. At our last session we finished with your role as PUS and now you are going on to be the UK's first National Security Adviser. How did all that come about, Peter?

PR: When David Cameron became Leader of the Opposition he and one or two close associates, like Pauline Neville-Jones, made clear that they wanted to reform the way that the Government did coordination of its international policy, call it national security policy, by setting up something like the Americans have, a National Security Council. In their years in opposition they did quite a lot of work on that, and in fact they published a Green Paper with all sorts of ideas including creating a National Security Adviser figure.

When the election of 2010 was looming up, as Permanent Secretary under the usual arrangements I was allowed to go and talk to William Hague, who was the Shadow Foreign Secretary, about their plans, if they were elected, to make sure we were prepared. One of the things we talked about was how to go about setting up a National Security Council. I gave William Hague some ideas about how I thought it might run effectively, and one of the ideas was that it should be run by a civil servant not a Minister because I was quite clear that if you put a Minister into that job there would immediately be friction with the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and others. A couple of months before the election it was clear that they were casting around for who should this National Security Adviser figure be. I didn't want the job because I'd already been PUS for four years, and I was quite looking forward to retiring and moving on to do something else. I made that clear. But as the weeks went by it was obvious that they didn't have anybody who quite fitted the bill, and eyes were increasingly turning in my direction. In the end I decided that if I fitted the bill then it was my duty to say I was at least willing to do it for a period. So just before the election, and again all very discreetly, because it all depended on whether the Conservatives would win, I said "Alright, if you want me I'm willing to serve but I don't want to serve for very long because I've already done four quite tough years at the centre, so I'd only like to do it for eighteen months or two years". I got signals back that that was how they were going to go.

On the morning that the new Government was formed, after the coalition negotiations, I got a call from the Prime Minister to say would I come across the road and be National Security Adviser? And, indeed, would I do that today because he had undertaken that the first meeting of the NSC was going to be on the first day of the Government? It felt almost like becoming a sort of Minister because instead of a PUS who normally leaves the job in a very organised and predicted way, has a successor lined up and has a programme of farewell visits, says goodbye to the Service and so on, I literally packed up a bag and walked across the road to Downing Street and set up shop. I took a couple of members of my staff from the PUS's office and we set up as the brand new National Security Adviser. We had all the problems of setting up. I had had my eye on a very nice set of offices but when they created the job of Deputy Prime Minister, they were immediately lost and so I had to find a cubby hole somewhere and my little private office set up in what had been the Cabinet Secretary's tea-making room. I decided from the outset that I wanted to be in the Cabinet Office and not in Number 10 because in Number 10 everyone exists to support the Prime Minister in the hourly battles that Prime Ministers have to fight, and there is a very strong atmosphere of crisis

management and firefighting. I wanted to be outside that but still very close to the Prime Minister, so I found a place alongside the Cabinet Secretary physically which also fitted because the way I saw the job as a sort of equivalent of the Cabinet Secretary dealing with the international side of things. So we set up shop there and we reorganised the Cabinet Office staff who were already there into a National Security Secretariat, we reinforced it a bit, and we embarked on holding meetings of the National Security Council. There was one on the first day of the Government.

I spent eighteen months creating the role of National Security Adviser which is a mixture of different things. It is partly and mainly the secretary to a National Security Council, choosing the issues with the Prime Minister that come to the agenda, organising an interesting flow of papers and obviously sitting in and taking notes of the meetings and ensuring follow-up. It was clear that David Cameron wanted all the difficult issues to do with security and defence and foreign policy to come to his NSC, so an early issue for us was Afghanistan because there were decisions to take about ending the British commitment in Afghanistan. But another one was the Strategic Defence and Security Review that the Government were pledged to do in the first six months, and we did that. I was effectively the coordinator and editor of it with inputs from all the Departments and there were a series of NSC meetings on that difficult range of issues, choices to be made and defence cuts, where to put extra money, where to direct money against the threats we saw. So we had a great deal of work on Afghanistan and on SDSR as we called it. We organised a big step forward on UK /French defence cooperation which I was then able to take on when I was Ambassador in Paris. And we dealt with crises as they came along, and principally the Libya conflict which the Prime Minister decided to run through the National Security Council. We held 62 meetings of the NSC in that five-month period. There was criticism of the PM for micro-managing but I think it's always going to be the case in modern war that a Prime Minister will want to be very closely informed of what is going on, and he used that NSC to make sure that he got the full advice and was able then to take decisions.

We learned quite quickly that what the Prime Minister wanted was not a sort of rather formal Cabinet Committee with Ministers bringing papers and setting them out, then a stately discussion and then a summing them up, but a much more interactive session where the senior advisers would put their views, they would be challenged, there would be debate and cross questioning, and Ministers would then try and dig down to what the real issues were and take decisions. So it became a very interesting forum. We had the Chief of the Defence

Staff around the table, the heads of the intelligence agencies, the Chairman of the JIC, myself and later my successor as Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, all there to advise and open up issues and then allow Ministers to take decisions. So it was a very stimulating environment, we covered a great deal of ground, this was all from a very much standing start, and I think it actually proved to be a very good vehicle for making sure that all aspects of policy were considered. For example, on counter terrorism the Home Secretary was obviously the leading Minister but there were defence issues, intelligence issues, and all sorts of people who had an angle, and we gradually got a group of Ministers who developed a common base of experiences of dealing with all this range of subjects. I'm glad to see that the NSC has been continued under Theresa May and I hope it's there to stay.

AW: How were the other Departments with it initially? Did everybody cooperate and it all slotted in fairly seamlessly or was there any sense of "they're stepping on my toes"?

PR: That's a good question. I think because Conservative politicians had worked it out in opposition it meant that they came in with all the senior political figures on side. It then took on a new and perhaps unexpected role of coalition management because it was one of the places where they could discuss awkward coalition subjects like the balance between security and individual privacy and rights. I think it's true to say that some of the Ministries, Departments like the FCO and the MOD, were a bit wary of it because it looked like encroaching on their territory. I don't think it ever was the Prime Minister's intention to encroach, but he did want to make sure that everyone was linked into it and bringing the most interesting and most difficult policy decisions to the NSC. I hope quite quickly that the Departments worked out that it actually could be a vehicle for getting their issues in front of the senior Ministers and decided. Part of the NSA role was to be seen as an honest broker by all the Ministers around the table: I had to be a neutral Secretary who served the interests of all. There was obviously a little bit of resentment in the MOD that it was the Cabinet Office who were coordinating the big Defence and Security Review, but again we did it mostly on the basis of advice that we got from them and then put together with that of other Departments. I think that the appointment of a civil servant rather than a Minister was important because if it had been a Minister sitting in that seat there definitely would have been a lot of push back from Departments. Quite quickly people learned to work with the system and found that certainly with the Prime Minister David Cameron it was the vehicle for scrutinising and taking decisions on things. Each Prime Minister will use it in their own way but I hope they will stick with it and regard it as a durable change because it's a more

systematic way of dealing with this whole area now that national security covers such a wide range of things. By having a fixed weekly meeting after the Cabinet people got into the habit of going to it and seeing it as a place where decisions were taken.

So that was a big part of the role but it wasn't the only part. There was also a part which was as the Prime Minister's roving envoy. I tried not to do too much of that because I felt my job was to organise and get this National Security Council off the ground. If I was always away travelling, I wouldn't be able to do that. But I did some. The Prime Minister was very keen to use me to go to awkward places where there was a heavy defence and security agenda, so Pakistan for example, where there was the Afghanistan conflict, some of the Gulf countries where there were defence and security issues, and it was a way of him maintaining a private dialogue with people in addition to, not cutting across, the senior Ministers. But that was quite time consuming.

Then there was the expectation that I travelled with the Prime Minister on his big trips. There were visits to Washington, lots of visits to Afghanistan, big visits to the Middle East and the Gulf just after the Egypt crisis and the fall of Mubarak, a whole series of fascinating visits to summits of different sizes because another of the roles of the NSC was to be one of a club of other advisers to heads of government. Not all were National Security Advisers, obviously the American equivalent was very close, there were similar sort of people in Canada, Australia, India, Israel. In Europe they tended to be Foreign Policy Advisers in the Elysée or the German Chancellor's Office but we made a club together and we talked regularly on the phone and whenever I was at summits I would go and see my counterparts in the other delegations. So we did a lot of business that way as well.

I suppose one of the most exciting moments was being phoned up one night at 3am, saying "We need to wake up the Prime Minister for urgent information." Having checked fairly carefully that it really was urgent, President Obama then called the Prime Minister to announce the killing of Osama Bin Laden. That was quite a phone call but we didn't have too many of those. That was obviously part of the role as well, if there was some huge crisis people would come to me first before waking up the Prime Minister.

It was a fascinating role. There were other important, less urgent sometimes, aspects. I was the line manager for the intelligence heads because I was the coordinating point and did their annual reports, which was interesting! And the budgets for the intelligence agencies were put together in the Cabinet Office and presented as one.

I felt very much that a National Security Council needed a group of senior people who could prepare properly for it and make sure Ministers got good papers and that they were followed up correctly. I suggested right at the beginning that we set up a group of Permanent Secretaries of all the Departments on the National Security Council, which I called my NSC Officials Group. It reflected as well the feeling I've discussed in relation to the Permanent Under-Secretary job in the FCO that Permanent Secretaries didn't do enough policy. They did an awful lot of managing, leading, communicating in their Departments but policy tended to be done by people one level below and around them because they were always busy doing something else. So I set up this NSC Officials Group, which I think has proved to be a real success, partly because Permanent Secretaries loved to get their hands on policy and become once again part of the policy chain to Ministers, and partly because in addition to looking at papers going through to the NSC we sometimes met to talk about longer term issues that we couldn't interest Ministers in or weren't finding their way onto the Ministerial agenda. There is always a tension between Ministers wanting to do the urgent and needing sometimes to focus on the important but not urgent. So I did a series of meetings with this Officials Group looking at longer term policy and then feeding reports through to Ministers. It's one way of tackling that conundrum that has always been there of Ministers not always wanting to get away from the immediate policy onto the longer term issues.

So it was a fascinating job, access to David Cameron was very precious. He was a very good man to work for, quick, decisive, knew his own mind, very open to argument and debate, and indeed insisted on debate. A stimulating person to work near. I found his whole Number 10 team very welcoming and I got on well with them, and with Gus O'Donnell who was the Cabinet Secretary and again who didn't see me as any kind of threat or competition, but rather helping him with the absolutely impossible load that a Cabinet Secretary has now by taking off him some of the issues that he knew less well. Foreign policy, intelligence, security issues were not his expertise and he welcomed someone who could give them more attention than he could, including things like line managing the intelligence agencies. So it was a harmonious duo that Gus and I ran together and I do hope and believe that we've set up a structure there that other Prime Ministers will now use, sustainable for the future, because the world is now so complex and the threats so intertwined, that I think it's a reform that was needed. And although Prime Ministers will vary in the way they use it, I think it's probably here to stay.

I did the job for a bit less than two years there which was probably a bit too short. But I'd already done four years as Permanent Secretary so that would make six years overall in these top 24/7 Whitehall jobs, enough for anyone! So I handed that job on to Kim Darroch and the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary very kindly agreed that I should go off for one last posting in Paris which took me beyond sixty, but that's allowed now in the Civil Service and I'm really glad that I did. Typically, having done the Permanent Secretary and now this NSC job, the normal thing would have been to retire. But it would have been a huge pity for me to have missed that wonderful opportunity to be a bilateral Ambassador for the one and only time in my career.

AW: NATO was clearly a wonderful job for you but it wasn't bilateral and very different?

PR: Yes they are very different and I would have been sad not to have done that.

HM Ambassador, Paris, 2012-2016

PR: So I got to Paris in early February of 2012 and I do think that the big bilateral Ambassador jobs are probably the ones that test your widest range of skills as a diplomat. You need your Whitehall warrior skills because in these jobs you are obviously constantly seeing Ministers and advising them on a whole range of issues. I will come back to the whole range of issues point. But also you suddenly become a public figure, the figure who has to front up to the media in the country you're serving in and find yourself doing live television and radio and constant speeches, public communication. Even as a Permanent Under-Secretary one didn't really do live broadcast media in the way that is absolutely normal for a bilateral Ambassador. There was the business world, day to day contact with senior commercial figures and the whole consular response issue. I made a point of meeting all of the senior Ministers, a good range of Parliamentarians and the top civil servants in the main Departments. I wanted to be able to talk to them if I needed to, but for most of the time, contact with the French officials went on at lower levels, which was right. One of the people I got to know well was a certain Emmanuel Macron at the Elysée!

AW: And an absolutely amazing place to do it in?

PR: Yes, its extraordinary all round. A wonderful Residence, we were lucky enough to be there for the 200th Anniversary of it being British, it was bought in 1814, just before Waterloo. That is an enormous resource and of course you have a responsibility to use it properly because it's iconic in every sense, including to the press who keep a very close eye

on how it's used and is it being used efficiently and your annual hospitality returns and the amount you spent on champagne, how you used your chefs - all that is very carefully scrutinised publicly, so there is a real responsibility to use that house well and efficiently. I think we averaged 13,000 visitors a year through the house, so it was pretty busy. There were endless Ministerial visits, many royal visits and constant, nightly receptions for British business or promoting Britain in all sorts of different ways and a lot of contact making amongst senior French people. The great thing was that you could invite anybody and because the house had a reputation as a wonderful place, with wonderful hospitality and a warm reception, anybody from the most senior French people downwards would come.

It was also a management issue in itself because it was like running a boutique hotel with a staff of 18 who themselves needed to be managed, and really only the Ambassador can do that. Make sure that the load is not impossible, make sure we were prioritising among all the bids that come in to use the house. If you go with a spouse or a partner that becomes, as you know, a dual role, and the more so the bigger the operation, so a fascinating opportunity for a couple to work as a couple, probably for the first time in their careers. We set up some new systems to try and do that, and by and large I think it worked very well and we found it very satisfying. If you can personalise the way you organise events it certainly helps. People notice and it is definitely a tool to do the job because the people who begin at the start of your posting as contacts, with a bit of luck by the end of it are friends. And it's a very efficient way of not only seeing large numbers of people but also of having constant small breakfasts and lunches where you can have one to one contact with politicians or senior business figures, and really do useful business for the UK.

So the Residence was one whole dimension, but then because it's right next door to the office, you literally go through a hole in the wall, and there's a whole life going on there which is the Embassy life where, as with other European countries, it covers the entire range of Government work. Obviously there are all aspects of trade and commercial relations. In my time we did a lot on energy and the agreements with the French EDF electricity provider to build the new Hinkley Point Power Station in the UK, a huge £16 billion project, long term UK/French cooperation.

We did a lot to build up UK/French defence, picking up where I left off in the National Security Council, and I think we've got that on a good footing for the future both in terms of the two armed forces and also defence equipment. It helped me in Paris that I had held a job

so close to the PM as his national security adviser and had been the leading official in London on the relaunch of UK/French defence cooperation with the Lancaster House treaties of 2010. This meant that I knew the Elysée team very well, and although they changed fairly quickly with the arrival of the Hollande administration, still I was regarded as a bit of defence specialist. So when it came time for the French to work out their new Defence White Paper in 2013, they decided to have one Brit and one German on their Advisory Commission. I was asked to take this role for the UK which gave me exceptional access to a group of 40 of topmost French officials and experts, including the military Chiefs of Staff, the top civil servants and academics. We met regularly for six months and debated every aspect of French defence and security policy. The German representative rarely showed up. Because I speak French and I knew most of the participants, they more or less regarded me as one of them and did not hold back in their arguments with each other. It was interesting to compare the British process of 2010 with the French one of 2013. The French assembled a wider group, including more experts from outside the government, to discuss every aspect on the basis of lengthy papers, from the big conceptual issues to assumptions and plans for use of the Armed Forces. We had a less structured process of involving those outside the government. But when it came to drafting the White Paper, we did discuss parts of the text with some of the experts from the London think tanks, whereas the French held the actual draft very close, and it did not come to the advisory group. This exercise added to my credibility in defence and security circles the rest of my time in Paris, and also gave me every insight into the different administrative cultures in our two capitals.

Climate change was another subject with the world climate change conference COP 21 in Paris just before we left at the end of 2015. There was counter terrorism obviously. There was Calais where I worked very closely with the then Home Secretary and saw at close quarters how impressive she was at making a personal link with her French counterpart and handling a really difficult issue with migrants trying to get onto the ferries and the trains, blockages of the port and the Eurotunnel, both by migrants and at one point by the striking seamen in the run up to the British General Election. As soon as you get blockages you get Operation Stack on the M25 and it's a huge domestic issue, so you become a big priority for the Government as a whole. That's one of the things about a job like Ambassador in Paris; your own issues can suddenly become UK domestic issues very quickly. I worked very closely with Theresa May on that. We managed to keep the French with us on doing an enormous amount to keep the port and the Euro Tunnel terminal secure from these migrants

who were flocking into the awful Jungle Camp and causing havoc in Calais and wanted to come to the UK. The French remained staunchly supportive of keeping the migrants away from the port and the Eurotunnel so that transport links could continue, and the best way of deterring more migrants was to make clear that you couldn't get to the UK. But that was not a given and it took a lot of work to keep that going.

In general it was a very happy time but there were bitter sweet moments. One of course was the terrorist attacks that we lived through. The attack on the newspaper Charlie Hebdo and then the terrible mass attacks at the Bataclan and the Stade de France, where one saw the resilience of the French people that they weren't going to accept this sort of intimidation from terrorists and quite quickly life got back to normal. But in the hours and days afterwards we ran a crisis unit to deal with the British casualties and constant demands from the press to know what was going on, and then visits by political leaders to come and pay tribute. It was a very emotional and stressful time, as were the consular crises. We had a whole series of coach crashes, for example, an aircraft crash in the Alps, all sorts of things which led to numbers of British people losing their lives and needing us again to set up emergency teams. I found that a very emotional part of the job because you are dealing with people who are at a crisis in their lives or suffering bereavement. But in a way it was very satisfying as well to feel that you had given them something, helped them in some way.

AW: But the pressure with media today, who can be on the spot as quickly as you can ...

PR: Absolutely constant. I worked out fairly quickly that the role of the Ambassador in a consular emergency was not to go and appear at peoples' bedsides; by and large they didn't want that, they wanted our wonderful consular staff to do that. The role of the Ambassador really was to get there, deal with the authorities and deal with the media and protect the consular staff from that pressure of media work. So I developed the rule of thumb, which I think has more or less been adopted by the Office, that if Sky News went, I went. Whether or not we thought it was a serious consular incident, if we heard that the media were deploying then that was an absolute signal to get there because I didn't want the media there without me, leaving my consular staff exposed to having to run the gamut of the cameras and so on. We tended to over react by going first and if it turned out not to be such a serious incident coming back again. The shortest route to career disaster by an Ambassador is not to be there when the media are suddenly covering a major consular event and Ministers are saying "Where is the Ambassador?" That's far more career limiting than a problem handling

a policy issue, because it's so public and the media turn very quickly onto "Why wasn't the Ambassador there?"

We had a whole series of those but we had an excellent consular staff, all locally employed, and they responded very well. They appreciated, I think, that the Ambassador was prepared to turn out at any time of the day or night when something happened. One really did live on one's mobile just waiting for the next call, which meant that you throw away whatever you are doing at the time and dash off into the furthest reaches of France. We always made sure we had a party at the Residence after to say thank you to all the volunteers who had been involved, and I think staff found it very satisfying as well.

It was a thrill to have your own tightly-knit team to lead as an Ambassador and to make sure that they understood what we were all for, what we were all doing and that we were genuinely one team no matter wherever people came from and what their backgrounds were, and I think the Embassy did feel like that. We are very lucky that our Embassies abroad are able to recruit talented and motivated staff locally to work with the civil servants sent from London. In Paris it was 80% local staff. The Embassy quite literally would not have run without them.

AW: You had the 70th Anniversary of D Day while you were there?

PR: Yes we did and that was one of the highpoints. The Queen had the habit of coming for the tenth anniversaries, she'd been to the 40th, 50th, 60th and so she came for the 70th Anniversary. We did a full dress State Visit around that with a period in Paris and then a period up on the beaches in Normandy. Six months of planning to get to the point where we had everything planned down to the last detail, in the way the Palace like it. But once that was done and every guest list was agreed and every movement plan was in place, the visit just rolls through without any problem and one can just enjoy it. The Queen is so calm and well organised and the Palace operation is so Rolls Royce that you don't need to worry once the visit is going. Having the Queen to stay in one's house is (pause) stressful, but the Royal couple were charming and they had such an affectionate reception in France. That's one of the things I learned, that the French love the British Royal Family. A lot of people know a lot about them, follow them carefully, and love to have the Queen in France. To have shouts of "Vive La Reine" in the streets of Paris was extraordinary, alongside President Hollande who looked a little bit nonplussed sometimes at this. The Queen made an enormous impact including in Normandy where she was one of, I think, eighteen Heads of State at the

Normandy Landing Commemorations. They showed some documentary footage of the period including the Queen in uniform in 1944 which was greeted with loud applause. Everyone was very touched by that. The City of Paris agreed to name a flower market after the Queen which is a very rare thing. For the flower market they renamed it Marché aux Fleurs Reine Elizabeth II and I think the Queen was happy, we had a very happy visit. We had a garden party; it was wonderful to have a Queen's Birthday Party with the Queen!

We also had Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall and we had a number of Royal visitors and again that went down very well with the French. That was a welcome side and one that perhaps I hadn't quite expected to be such a positive in the relationship. It really was. When the Royal Family come, they really do a good job.

I was there through a period where we started with President Sarkozy and then quite soon after I arrived he lost the election and President Hollande came in. One of the things that I am quite pleased to have done was to have made sure that even though it was a Socialist Government and then the David Cameron-led Government in the UK, we had a pretty good level of cooperation going on, even on issues like Europe. At the point where I left, the French were in pretty constructive mood about working with us on changes in the EU. I think that if Brexit had gone differently and David Cameron had won the vote, we would have had French support for tackling the sort of reforms that were needed. So that was an area – and again it wasn't a given, it wasn't obvious – where a French Socialist Government and a Conservative-led British Government would work well together. In fact they did on the whole range of issues that I've described and that's perhaps worth noting. It's all been overtaken now by Brexit and things have moved on, but up to that point I think that perhaps we had persuaded the French that they should work with us. Since I've left we are in a different position but that's certainly how it felt up to the point where I left.

I left the Diplomatic Service at the beginning of 2016 after forty one and half years, without regrets but with an enormous feeling of satisfaction and gratitude that I'd been able to finish in that job.

AW: And the changes that you have seen ...

PR: Yes, it is quite extraordinary when you think back, how things have changed over the decades. I joined in 1974, and as I said at the outset, the telegram dominated everything in

terms of the FCO's work. If you sent a letter only four or five people might see it and only a week later. The speed of communication and the sharing of information is completely different, messengers literally used to walk around the Office with boxes with papers in them. And there were no mobile phones. So the whole set up of communicating, distributing and absorbing information was different. Partly because of that, it was a much more hierarchical place. The people at the top were extremely busy because everything funnelled up through them and further down probably people were less busy, less stressed but the corollary of that meant they had more time to train and to teach people at the bottom.

AW: Earlier on in your recollections you speak about the lack of official training but that there were periods of mentoring – people had time to mentor their younger colleagues, but that's moved on ...

PR: Yes, that's what I feel very much. Looking back I had almost no training but in the Third Room we weren't constantly under pressure. There were times when the First Secretary could put his feet on the desk and reminisce, or take a draft and explain why it wasn't right, how it could be made better, help people through and recount office traditions, how things were done and why which was very valuable but it did require colleagues to have a bit of time. I was very fortunate with the bosses I had, they did have a bit of time. It has changed. Partly for the better, partly for the worse. The training is better I'm sure, but for on the job mentoring there is much less time to do that. Record keeping has changed of course with the loss of files and filing systems but the distribution of information is so much better now. The Office is managed better now. In the 1970s no attention was paid to leading and motivating staff. Some senior people were bullies. There were almost no women apart from secretaries (in my intake of 20, there were four women; only one stayed long in the FCO).

I think all of that is relevant to how diplomacy is done and of course the range of diplomacy has extended enormously as well. And that's in the space of one career.

A diplomatic career makes particular demands on spouses /partners and children. There aren't many careers that expect you to uproot your life and your family every 3-4 years and move somewhere you may not want to go (and for some may barely have heard of!). There are compensations of course: variety, the chance to live in other cultures and normally a good package of accommodation and entrée to the local scene (though the deal has got worse for staff recently). But the FCO always expected the job to come first (at least I found this so). I

have talked about the long hours and weekend working in the Private Office, which is part of the deal in taking it on. But looking back, all our married life has been spent with me often working late, regular duty officer stints with weekends frequently interrupted, and (in the senior jobs) an assumption that you were always on call, holidays included. The telephone call which can change all our plans has been a feature of our life as long as I can remember. All this is a strain, particularly when you have young children. Schools are an issue. We went down the boarding school route: not something we would ever have done if we had not had the mobility obligation of the FCO.

Nowadays spouses and partners have many more options on the extent they allow the FCO to interfere with careers, and how they arrange their lives, which can only be a good thing. Our experience has been that it is very satisfying to operate as a couple on postings abroad, which is a partial compensation for the long working days away from home which busy London jobs impose on FCO staff. Even as junior diplomats we entertained at home, finding that a good way to turn contacts into friends, and involving Suzanne in my life and interesting people in the country we were serving in. We later had two Head of Mission roles, where Suzanne chose to play a big role in how the Residences did events, adding a personal touch which guests really appreciated. Again, there are now many different solutions for diplomatic couples, but operating as a team when abroad made me more effective and gave us both a lot of satisfaction.

I look back on it as an amazing career. I never had a job that I wasn't satisfied with and stimulated by, which is quite a note on which to bow out of the Diplomatic Service. I have very much enjoyed doing this exercise as well. I think it's a very valuable thing to do and if this kind of recollections are any use to anybody then I'm very glad to have done them.

AW: Peter, thank you so very much.