

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

SHEINWALD, Sir Nigel Elton (born 26 June 1953)

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

Joined Diplomatic Service, 1976	pp 2-3
Japan Desk, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1976-77	p 3
Russian language training, 1977-78	pp 4-5
Third, later Second Secretary, Moscow, 1978-79	pp 5-15
Rhodesia/Zimbabwe Department, FCO, 1979-81	pp 16-18
Eastern European and Soviet Department, FCO, 1981-83	pp 18-21
First Secretary, Washington, 1983-87	pp 21-34
Deputy Head, Policy Planning Staff, FCO, 1987-89	-
European Community Department (Internal), FCO, 1989-92	<i>see below</i>
Counsellor and Head of Chancery, UK Perm. Rep. to EU, 1993-95	<i>see below</i>
Head of News Department, FCO, 1995-98	pp 57-67
Director, EU, FCO, 1998-2000	<i>see below</i>
Ambassador and UK Perm. Rep to EU, Brussels, 2000-03	<i>see below</i>
Foreign Policy and Defence Adviser to the Prime Minister, 2003-07	pp 69-85
Ambassador to the United States, 2007-12	pp 85-100
Prime Minister's Special Envoy on intelligence and law enforcement data sharing, 2014-15	-

The interview talks about Sir Nigel's work on Europe in general, 1989-2003, pp 35-57, rather than taking his individual posts separately.

BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR NIGEL SHEINWALD GCMG

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING

This is a recording for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning interviewing Sir Nigel Sheinwald on 5th July 2016.

CM: Nigel, we are going to begin at the start of your career when you were in Moscow, but before we come onto that, would you tell me how it was that you came to join the Foreign Office?

NS: I did a four-year course at university and I embarked on my last year not having thought at all about what I was going to do afterwards. I applied for a lot of things: I applied for the Civil Service; I applied for the Diplomatic Service; I applied for a lot of private sector things as well. I can't remember what I was rejected from, but I know I got a lot of offers from different places and our children think I was completely crazy not to go for Rothschild or one of the other places from which I could have retired years and years ago and not be carrying on working. But I chose the Foreign Office, I suppose, for two reasons, both pretty obvious ones, that I had a fairly untutored but firm commitment to public service: I liked the idea of working in the public sector and in the public interest and in a funny sort of way thought that would be simpler. And secondly, I had always been interested in international affairs, had naturally gravitated to that part of the newspaper when I was reading newspapers, and so it seemed the right thing to prioritize among the different things that were on offer. For me, it was always a little bit of a choice between doing one of these very serious jobs and doing what I had done a lot of at university, which was drama and directing plays. I decided fairly early on that I wasn't going to go into the theatre, just because I couldn't face years of sweeping stages in provincial reps and wanted to do something more quite early on. So I wasn't as it were following a passion, my passions were probably elsewhere, I was following an interest.

CM: You say it was a four-year course, was it a language course?

NS: I was doing Classics, Greats at Oxford. But as I say, I had not given it any thought and it was all an incredible flurry in the Michaelmas term, the autumn of '75.

CM: You didn't have any hesitation about choosing the Foreign Office over the Home Civil Service?

NS: No, no, that was clear, although I did apply for both and got into both, but I chose the Foreign Office over the Home Civil Service.

CM: And what did the Foreign Office start you off with?

Japan Desk, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1976-77

NS: I think I was lucky. I was put on the Japan desk. As you remember, in those days there was very little in the way of training. There was a two-week training course, as I recall, and then straight into Far Eastern Department and the Japan desk, where I succeeded Tony Brenton who years later was Ambassador in Moscow. I did that for a year. It was a fundamentally different time from what one knows of UK-Japan relations today: broadly a harmonious relationship, Japanese investment welcome in the UK, everyone clinging to the last word of the Keidanren, and the bosses of Hitachi and other companies, on what will happen after Britain leaves the European Union. It was very different in those days: a fractious relationship, import quotas, voluntary restraint arrangements, Japanese taking jobs from the industrial heartlands of the UK, and it took a long time, which I suppose was going on in that period, to construct a more progressive and less difficult relationship. But that was what was going on in my time. The Foreign Office at that time was very involved in trade and investment issues and so on. For me, in terms of what I ended up doing, what was good was it wasn't a country in which there was a huge Whitehall machinery, so the Foreign Office had a clear and significant role. But there was a Whitehall machinery all the same, and it introduced me very early to working with others in Whitehall, which I had to do, particularly with the Department of Trade and Industry. There was a lot of trade and economics and also a lot about Japanese politics which were going through an upheaval at the time and that was the bit that was perhaps most akin to studying Roman History or Greek History. There was a lot of personality politics and all the rest of it. Anyone interested in History would have enjoyed that phase of Japanese politics when new parties were growing up. I think it was a very good first job, because it had some substance to it and you had a certain sort of latitude because unlike, as we'll discuss, dealing with the Soviet Union in the Foreign Office, it wasn't a huge chunk of Foreign Office people and time.

CM: So you did that first job for a year or so ...

NS: A year.

CM ... before being offered the opportunity to do hard language training.

Russian language training, 1977-78

NS: Exactly. Classically, during the course of your first year, you'd do the hard language aptitude test, and if you passed that, then you'd get the choice of what were then the four hard foreign languages, maybe there are more these days, I don't know, but I opted for Russian. I'd done Russian at school, so I had some background. I had done it up to and just beyond O level and so I was keen to do that. I hadn't done it since school; I hadn't done it at all at university.

CM: Nigel, I ought to anchor this to a certain date. You joined ...

NS: I joined at the end of August '76 and I carried on in the Far Eastern Department until probably July/August '77 and then started my Russian language training, I would think, at the very beginning of September '77. It was a year's course, at Beaconsfield, in my case a little bit less: it went to June or July. There were a few Foreign Office people on the course, three or four, and then other diplomats. There was a Swiss diplomat; there was a Japanese diplomat; then there were people from the UK army. I don't think there were any from other services, because there were still separate training systems at that point. And some from other countries, I remember there were two Zairois officers on the course, and there must have been others, I just can't remember them.

CM: Was it a good course? Did you come out feeling you were really in command of the language?

NS: It was a good course, but it was inevitably structured to the needs of the Army interpreter. I suppose if you had an end person in mind, it would have been an Army interpreter working in the British Mission in Berlin and having to interpret mainly on military matters with Russians who were working on those issues. So there was a very military bent to the vocabulary; it was quite formal Russian. We were well equipped for reading official Russian and for speaking official Russian and you could interpret official Russian when you were in a fairly narrow band. What it did not equip us for was, what I realised at the time and what I certainly realised the moment I got to Moscow, was it didn't equip you for the speed of Russian social conversation, for colloquial Russian, which I don't think I ever completely

mastered. Obviously, you got better as you got more used to it, but of course there were limited opportunities in those days for having free and easy conversations with Russians. It was a rarity. So for the core skills which we'll come on to, which were reading a lot, analysing things a lot, doing the Kremlinology, which was essentially a sort of rigorous, analytical way of approaching power in the Soviet Union, for doing that, for doing official duties, it was OK. It just lapsed when you got into a more social setting.

CM: One year on the Japan desk, one year of the Russian language course. That takes us to '78. Was it then that you went out to Moscow?

Third, later Second Secretary, Moscow, 1978-79

NS: Yes, I think it was July or August of '78 and I went out as Third Secretary.

CM: And what were the duties of the Third Secretary in Moscow at that point?

Well, it was a bit of a ragbag. I suppose the core of the job was Soviet relations with Eastern Europe, so it was their empire. In a way it was internal to them and that affected what one was able to coax out of them. This was a secret part of their world. So that was the core of it: it was relations with Eastern Europe; it was the Warsaw Pact; it was the CMEA, which was the economic grouping which united - well, collected together - the Eastern European countries. And then I had a number of other things: I did Latin America; I did certain multi-lateral aspects of disarmament and I think I got those because no one else wanted them. Someone else did US-Soviet negotiations and SALT and all those things - that was much more important and interesting. I did the sort of stuff that was going on in Geneva: quite significant, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the sort of multi-lateral stuff. And the slightly unusual thing I did was that, and I think this was known before I started and I did some prep for it before I started, I was the British Olympic attaché. I was liaising with the British Olympic Association and formed a good relationship with a guy called Dick Palmer, who was the General Secretary of the BOA (British Olympic Association), and worked on that, and worked on preparations for the Moscow Olympics in 1980 throughout my time in Moscow. And that included something in my first year, in the summer of 1979, called the Spartakiad, which was their rehearsal for the Olympics which was the following year. Now there's a story there: a) I left in '79 but b) the British government tried to boycott the Olympics after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Prime Minister Thatcher tried to persuade the British Olympics Association not to send a team. They decided to send a team

regardless of what was going on in Afghanistan, but as a result, there was no official support from the Embassy in terms of the Olympics, so even if I'd stayed I wouldn't have been doing that job.

CM: Moscow in 1978 was a very different place from Moscow today. So let's start with some domestic details. Where were you living?

NS: I was living in an apartment block, a foreigners' apartment block, about five miles or so south of the centre. It was not one of our major concentrations. We had people dotted around apartment buildings around Moscow; there were three or four of them where the majority of our staff were living, but in this one I think there were only three families, two others, in the complex where I was living. It was a newer one, but newer doesn't mean clean and sparkling in the Soviet world. I think the flats were probably themselves a little bit better than the very, very old ones which the majority of the staff had. There were other international families there; I can't remember exactly but every nationality under the sun. There may well have been some non-diplomatic Brits, conceivably journalists or business people. Ulitsa Vavilova in the south. People know that because there was a market nearby, which was regarded as a bit of a magnet.

For me, it was the first time I had ever lived completely on my own. I'd been at home; I went to university where obviously you've got people round you; I then had two years living in a flat in London with friends and with my then girlfriend, now my wife. So I was by myself and had to introduce a certain order and method into doing things and in those days in Moscow everything took a long time. That's the thing you have to remember. My life was fairly simple, but to make sure that you had some food and everything else, there were certain shops that you went to and by and large you went to the foreign shops, the Gastronom shops, the foreign currency shops where you got most of your food and provisions. You'd do regular shops in those places and I think there was a shop in the British Embassy as well which people definitely used. That was supplemented by getting bread from local shops which was one bit of access that you did use to the ordinary Russian system, and this local market was a good place to get occasional and very, very rare fresh vegetables. You could get those in the Gastronom, but generally speaking not available to ordinary people in Moscow. But you could get them at markets at inflated prices from people who'd grown them a long way away from Moscow and brought them in to make a bit of money. That would be pickled cucumbers, vegetables, that sort of thing.

CM: I always divide people who lived in Moscow into two groups: the slavophiles for whom everything was wonderful even if it was hard, and the others who were bowed down by the gloom, the greyness of Communism, the climate and so on. Did you fall into either of these categories?

NS: I don't think I was a slavophile, because I don't think I met and formed close relationships with any Russians, to be honest about it, and I knew that at the time and I think that would be a sober judgement today. But I didn't dislike and I didn't feel oppressed by the atmosphere. I think married couples in that period, some married couples, found the atmosphere, in the sense that they were being eavesdropped on, extremely difficult to cope with and it definitely affected them and made them edgy. They didn't like it when they were travelling, or were in Moscow even, but certainly when they were travelling, they didn't like the sense of being tailed by Russians in cars. Frankly, it didn't worry me. I was by myself. I was living a very straightforward life and I didn't feel I was under any particular personal threat. I was aware of it, and you were made aware of it and that was part of what the Russian security authorities were trying to do. They were trying to spook you and to unsettle you, so you were conscious that things were moved around when you were away during the day. You were conscious of people listening into your phone calls, because there was just too much clicking and noises off when you were making phone calls back home or whatever. So it was very obvious. It didn't really trouble me, but I know it troubled other people. And then of course there were instances when I was there – it didn't happen to me but some of our colleagues, particularly the defence attachés, when they went off on their visits round the country, there were a couple of occasions when they came back, when they had actually been beaten up by Russian police, so there was a harsher side to this. It didn't engender an overly negative atmosphere, but that would be the talk of the Embassy, what had happened to those people when they came back roughed up. It's not a very pleasant thing.

CM: And what were your recreations? You weren't allowed to move around very much but there were things you could do in Moscow.

NS: Because the foreign community was rather hemmed in, it made a lot of its own amusement, so there was quite a lot of social activity. To get information and to do your job in Russia in that period, you were getting very, very little out of official contacts. If you walked into the Foreign Ministry, or if you walked into another ministry, you would get a very boring version of what had appeared in Pravda and was the official line. So the

Embassy circuit was a very important adjunct to work and not in any sense superfluous or discretionary; you had to do it. For what I was doing, dealing with Soviet relations with their Communist fraternal parties, it was essential to have good working relationships with people like the Yugoslavs, the Romanians, the Hungarians, all of whom had very practised diplomats who were prepared to show a little leg and to be a little bit more open in their description of their governments' relations with Russia, and problems in Russia, actually, because they were well plugged in on those things, than would be the case if you were talking to Soviet officials or to a Pole or a Bulgarian, countries that were more orthodox or closer to Russia and didn't have the same, more difficult relationships with Russia. So talking to those people was very important and you would try to see those people to some degree outside. But the foreign community generally was a source of information and if you wanted to know what was going on talking to a mixture of journalists and diplomats - American colleagues - was always an essential part of it. Some of that could be done during work, some of it would be done after. There was a lot of social activity. Then there were other things: the Embassy had a dacha and a group of us could rent the dacha for a week or a weekend and go out there. That was good and fun; people would have parties out there. People would go on a Sunday outside Moscow but still within the permitted area to a restaurant or to look at a church or whatever. Suzdal was a place I remember going to on a number of occasions; and the monastery within Moscow, Novodevichy. So there were places people used to go and then occasional theatre, occasional opera, all very cheap. I think more opera and ballet than theatre, and I remember going there quite a bit, including when visitors came. So there was enough. It was quite a busy life and as I was single I went out more often than I would necessarily have done than if I had had a family at home to go back to. I babysat; I did my first ever babysitting.

Curtis Keeble, who died a few years ago, was Ambassador. He'd been our ambassador in East Germany; he'd opened up our mission there. He was the first British Ambassador to East Germany. He'd been the Chief Clerk, the chief administration officer in the Foreign Office, now it's got a very fancy title, but that was the name in those days. He was a Russian speaker. I can't remember where he'd learned it. I don't think he'd served in Moscow before; he may have learned it during the war, or he may have had one of the other Eastern European languages first, I don't remember.

CM: It was the period of late Brezhnev, classic Cold War. Were you aware of any stirrings of what was to come later?

NS: It was the height of that period of immobilism in the Soviet Union. It was the end of the Brezhnev period; he was frequently ill, incapable of governing, it was pretty obvious. That was what all the jokes were about, about his regular periods of incapacity. He was General Secretary and President. It was difficult to know how ordinary Russians lived. I don't remember going to anyone's flat. I may have done it once or twice but very rarely. But from observing people on the streets, from going to shops, from going to markets, it was obvious that people lived a very, very hard life indeed. There was very little in the shops, and that regularly ran out. Even bread would run out. From what one knew of life in the apartments, the overcrowding in the apartments, families pushed together and so on, it was a pretty grim existence. But I have to say that I certainly didn't have the foresight or wisdom to spot that this was a system that would crack in just over a decade's time, or would start to liberalise five or six years after we were there. It felt pretty monolithic; it wasn't obvious that this was a weak power in some ways covering up. It seemed to be quite a strong and confident power. Maybe that was enhanced by the inevitable realities of diplomatic life, as you are dealing with the state and you are conscious of the attributes of military power and the security apparatus around you. So in a way you saw the strongest bits of the system. I don't recall any first hand examples of the stirrings of rebellion, protest and so on that you read about through literature and from what the research community found out about. But I don't think I ever saw any direct evidence of that. What you did see was the thirst for anything western; I should have mentioned that. Of course, the official line was that we were all hopelessly decadent and to be despised, but whenever you came across a Russian, whether it was popular music or personalities in the west or western food or cigarettes, there was of course huge excitement to lay their hands on it and get some exposure to that. So there were occasional appearances by rock stars – we had Elton John in my time there. And that was huge. No doubt a chosen audience, but a huge amount of interest in something like that happening. The huge amounts of money that ordinary Russians would pay for jeans, for blue jeans, which were a rarity in the Soviet Union at that stage. I felt I had a pretty partial picture of real life in the Soviet Union; that was partly because I was single; I don't think I was particularly daring in what I did. I was pretty busy at work. I had an active enough life, but I wasn't pushing the boundaries in terms of what I was allowed to do. I was conscious all the way through how constrained one's life was. I certainly felt at the time, and particularly looking back later, that one's life as a diplomat was quite a formal existence, that the tools of the trade were quite analytical. If diplomacy is about influencing people and building

relationships which are useful in real negotiations and making things happen - all the things that do normally happen in diplomacy, and in relations between countries - that was phenomenally difficult to make happen, certainly from a junior level, from the Embassy in Moscow. You were struggling to get good information; a lot of the information you had was dud and you knew it; a lot of the stuff you were being fed, was being fed for a purpose. Even with journalists, there were some who plainly had very good connections with the Russians and were being used by them to pass out lines of information which you had to parse; you had to analyse and assess. That was part of your job to try and work out what was likely to be truthful and what not. But you were all scrabbling around for crumbs off the table. Compared with what I would call normal diplomacy, what I was doing later, it was quite technical and arid. It was the best we could do in those circumstances.

CM: And of what did the bi-lateral relationship consist in those days?

NS: I think Britain had quite a thin bi-lateral relationship with the Soviet Union compared with our other European partners. We had less trade than France, Germany, Italy, by quite a long way. We were much less dependent on trade with Russia. There was a large imbalance in Russia's favour in any event, as there was in most of those relationships, and the UK government, both the Labour government which was in power when I arrived, and then particularly after Margaret Thatcher came to power in May of '79 when I was in the Embassy, of course, were very critical of the Soviet human rights' performance and Soviet expansionism internationally. We were among the most outspoken, open, in criticism of Russia, particularly after the Iron Lady's arrival, and that of course put us down the pecking order in terms of who was regarded as the most favoured partners of the Soviet Union in that period. So our relationship wasn't anything like what it was at different points after Gorbachev's arrival, though it has always gone up and down and been difficult, that UK-Russia relationship. I think it was at a fairly low point actually in the period that I was there. But my part of the Embassy was the political part, and our job was analysing and trying to have some impact, I think fairly limited, on foreign policy. You'd get instructions to go and talk to them about this and that, to go and compare notes on what was going on in Geneva in the Committee on Disarmament. Some things we collaborated on; we were partners on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, things like that, so it wasn't entirely adversarial and difficult. There were areas where we did work with them, but increasingly as we looked round the world, our perception was that Russia was causing a great deal of difficulty, particularly in the Third World, Somalia, throughout the developing world. That

came to a head later with their invasion of Afghanistan which happened in December '79 and then their crackdown in Poland which took place after I had left in December '81. There was a relationship; I don't think it was a particularly strong one. We were lucky when we got a First Deputy Foreign Minister coming to the Embassy. I don't think Gromyko ever came during my period, or anyone more senior. Occasionally, during visits you'd get a glimpse of someone more senior, Prime Minister Kosygin would appear if our Prime Minister appeared. We weren't feted as the other major European countries were.

CM: Did you manage, either for pleasure or for work, to travel?

NS: Yes, I did. With colleagues. For pleasure, I went to Kiev, to Leningrad, now Petersburg, a number of times. For work, we had a trip to the Caspian, a couple of trips I remember doing out to the south and to the Urals, with colleagues to look at things and get a feel for things. Pretty fuzzy objectives to be honest, as I recall. It was just a chance to see something. You meet the local mayor, you do this, you do that, you meet any local British society, whatever.

CM: Where there any people there whom you met who recurred later on, among the colleagues or the *chers collègues*?

NS: There were a couple of Russians whom I met there whom I dealt with later when a few years from that point I was dealing with Russia in the Foreign Office in London. It was the same group of Soviet officials dealing with the UK in their Foreign Ministry who were then posted to the Embassy in London or who were still working in the Second European Department in the Foreign Ministry in Moscow. I had some dealings with them when I was the Anglo-Soviet desk officer a little bit later on, '81 to '83. So there was that continuity, but they weren't people I met for any other reason. Apart from British colleagues whom I did keep in touch with over the years quite closely, there was a Danish official, who was probably a First Secretary then, who many years later was his prime minister's foreign policy adviser when I was doing the comparable job in London, so I came across him then. He then went to NATO. So we used to see him from time to time doing that. There were a couple of American journalists and a couple of British journalists that I kept in touch with for a number of years afterwards. But I am not sure how many other diplomatic colleagues ... no, no.

CM: What about the Olympics? What that rather fun?

NS: As long as I did it. It wouldn't have continued anyway because of what happened after the invasion of Afghanistan. It was very interesting being involved in a different part of Moscow life and Russian life. It wasn't what the Embassy normally did, so you got to see a different type of official, sports officials. There were two things I remember about that period, apart from them having quite close relations with the BOA (British Olympic Association), which I quite enjoyed and liked all those people, and tried to understand their requirements for the Games. We had a visit from the Duke of Edinburgh because he was President of the International Equestrian Federation. He visited Moscow as President of IEF (International Equestrian Federation) in the spring of '79 and there hadn't been a royal visit to Moscow of any kind for a very, very long time, so we had to handle this with some care. I think that we kept it very much on the tramlines of the IEF and Olympic preparations and so on. I think they were fairly advanced with their preparations, but I am not sure that the Duke of Edinburgh was wholly impressed with what he saw and there were some occasional moments of frankness, but that I guess is ultimately what the purpose of those visits is, to give some guidance to the people actually manufacturing the facilities. We were quite a long way, as I recall, outside the centre of Moscow for the equestrian facilities, looking at quite detailed aspects of the preparations: drainage, and all those things. I guess there must have been at least one non-equestrian event which we organised back in Moscow. That preoccupied me, as you can imagine, for a very, very long time, as I was in charge of that visit in the spring. That was the first time I ever had a photo of a member of the royal family or a prime minister or foreign secretary given to me.

Then in the summer, as I said, the summer of '79, the Russians had these rehearsal games called the Spartakiad, which the British team came out for. And that was my first exposure, my last exposure also, to British sports journalists. I was persuaded by the British Olympic Association to give them a sort of briefing on the state of the Games, and the state of the Russian preparations for the Olympics, and so on, which I did. And I was horrified to find, a couple of days later ... The British sporting press who had come there were all incredibly bored, because they had nothing to report until the Games actually started and they stitched me up completely. They turned the briefing into a very, very vivid occasion. They said they'd been summoned to a darkened room in the depths of the British Embassy to be given the secret briefing by a mystery British official. And they turned my very carefully constructed but occasionally slightly negative comments about the Russian preparations into a major story. So I was completely burned by that. Of course, it passed over within seconds,

but it did worry me a lot at the time. I don't think there were any official complaints from the Russians, but it just made me a bit embarrassed and a little bit nervous for a short period, because, as I say, it did pass very fast. But it was one of those first moments ... I dealt with the media a lot at subsequent moments of my career and got used to it, but that was my first exposure to a particular group of journalists who were, I think one of our former prime ministers used the word 'feral' of the media. And this pack of journalists clearly was. They hunted together and it taught me a very important lesson which was to be aware of what stage in the visit the journalist group is, and if they are desperately looking for a story make sure it's one you want to see, rather than one you fall into the trap of providing. It was just my naivety and complete inexperience really which led to that.

CM: Was drug-taking among Russian athletes an issue? Was it talked about then? They won with such amazing consistency.

NS: I don't recall it being talked about. It must have been out there as an issue. I just don't remember it. We won quite a few things in the Moscow Olympics. There were no Americans there in the end, but there were Brits and we won quite a few things. And we did quite well at the Spartakiad as well. It was exposure to a different world and sport's always fun so I quite enjoyed it while it lasted, though as I say I got burned by that one experience.

The Embassy was where the current Ambassador's residence is now. That building, that grand sugar millionaire's house on the banks of the Moscow River was where we had both the residence of the ambassador, which was on the first floor, and the embassy offices, which were for the most part on the ground floor and in a series of outbuildings. I was in the political section, in the Chancery. The internal political section of the Embassy was in a beautiful old library which still had lots of beautiful old books in it and this bureaucratic activity was going in what was clearly a former house, a rather grand house; the room I was in was much less decorative and ornamental than that. It was the Cold War. If you were going to talk about anything serious you went to one of the two safe rooms and that was just normal. There were representatives of our Security Services in the Embassy; you were conscious of that. If you wanted to have a quick conversation about something in the office, there were buttons under the desks in our room. You would press a button and a lot of cocktail noise would come through the loud speakers and you could have a five second conversation, to say when is the Ambassador coming down? If there was something you wanted to talk about that was more sensitive than just a couple of seconds, then you would go

to one of those special rooms. So the Embassy was a very weird combination of the rather grand: very, very dark panelled, ornate carving left over by this millionaire, combined with Heath Robinson-like modern bureaucratic paraphernalia on top of it. People sometimes working in very ornate offices. Then upstairs was a different world, a more elegant world, with some very beautiful rooms overlooking the Kremlin and overlooking the river. The Ambassador had his apartment up there and there were one or two spare rooms as well for visitors when they came. I didn't mention that one of my jobs in the Embassy was as the residual private secretary to the Ambassador. It was a part-time job. I can't remember whether I did it all through my first year. The norm would be that he would use the person from that bit of the Embassy who was responsible for that activity, but occasionally I did do it. And I certainly did some interpreting at lunches, never feeling very happy about that, but I did do it. I remember a couple of occasions when I was part of the meal rather than sitting behind, though I would have done my share of that as well on occasion. I never felt my Russian was great in all circumstances. It was fine for official events. If it was just Pravda-type language I would be fine, but if it was the Patriarch coming or something like that, I would have to mug up and even then I'd know I was going to have the occasional odd moment. I didn't have many occasions to improve my Russian, but I probably didn't do enough. Also as the private secretary there was a lot of contact with the domestic staff, the kitchen staff. I was in charge of the wine cellar, so I was trooping up and down the stairs the whole time, carrying bottles of wine. There were some very menial elements to it. It wasn't a very glamorous job being private secretary. But it was fine. And it was certainly a way of finding out what embassies were about. It was a good sort of induction thing to do because it gave you a bit more of an overview of the Embassy.

CM: I'm thinking about the way we all communicate so easily nowadays; how did you keep in touch with your family? Presumably you used the Bag.

NS: Yes, the Bag was of course a critical thing. I should have said this: the Bag was the critical moment in the week for the Embassy. There were two a week in Moscow and they were moments of high tension, for two reasons. First, because you had to get all the stuff that you were writing into the Bag, so there was a great flurry of activity, secretarial activity, drafting activity, intellectual activity, running up to the dispatch of the Bag. I think ours were Tuesday and Friday, the confidential Bag. Then the other tension was, of course, what would arrive and you would be waiting for things to arrive, you were waiting for the post in those days. Forget about the Diplomatic Bag, in ordinary life, if you were just living in London,

you'd expect things to be arriving by post and you'd be looking out for it in a way that people aren't any more. That was important. From Julia, now my wife, then my fiancée, obviously there was ... We would write very frequently to one another and you'd get one, two, three letters in a Bag, so that would happen. My parents would be writing constantly, other friends would write, so people would write and then at the weekend I tended to phone. I wouldn't phone the whole time, but very often at the weekend I'd phone my parents or I'd phone Julia. I don't think I would phone her during the week. I don't remember doing that. It was relatively easy; I don't remember having to book a call, though it wasn't always easy to get through. I used to type a lot of my letters. No doubt the Russians used to look at the ribbon afterwards and check that out. Both times in the week, after the Bag, the Dive Bar in the Embassy would be open and I think Wednesday lunchtimes and Friday evenings were the times in the Dive Bar. There would be some food which families would put together and drink and so on, coinciding with the arrival of the Bag. The Queen's Messenger of course was a figure that you'd be familiar with and he'd be looked after – I think it always was a he – over the weekend and you'd see him socially over the weekend before his flight back the next week. So it was a very particular world. Of course, there were stories about occasional incidents on the tarmac and bad Russian behaviour on receipt of the Bag and that was one of the things that everyone was on the look-out for: any obstruction of the Diplomatic Bag.

CM: You were in Moscow from '78 to '79. Was your posting for just one year?

NS: No, it should have been two years, but I had a car accident that the Russians held me responsible for, so I didn't go back after my summer holiday. It was thought better for me not to go back. It happened in Moscow. I think it was a genuine accident, but it appeared that the person whom I hit ran into the road and was probably drunk at the time. I don't think to this day that it was my fault, but that was their conclusion and of course it was done at a time when the overall relationship was under some pressure and there were lots of extraneous noises off, so it fell into a pattern of difficulty of that kind. The atmospherics in the relationship had been difficult in any event. There had been visa problems and everything else. It wasn't entirely surprising that they would take advantage of that to cause a bit of minor dislocation on our side. So I stayed in London and as a result of that, because I wouldn't have been able to do it otherwise, I got involved in the Lancaster House negotiations on Rhodesia, which were starting in the autumn of '79.

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe Department, FCO, 1979-81

So I had my holiday in whenever it was, August '79, I suppose. Then it was decided some time at the end of it that it would be better for me not to go back to Moscow, so I made arrangements for my stuff to be packed up and everything else, and then the Foreign Office pulled me into the Secretariat for the Lancaster House Conference on Rhodesia which was starting at some point during September of '79. It went on till Christmastime, until December, and then after that I got pulled into the Department in the Office that was dealing with Rhodesia, and then of course Zimbabwe, from the spring of 1980. I started off doing the Conference as a member of the Secretariat and if you look at the photos of the signature ceremony of the Lancaster House Conference, I was one of the members of the Secretariat holding the Agreement for Joshua Nkomo to sign. So I performed that role. We were note takers, essentially, and administrators for the Conference. Then I got dragged into the Department working with Charles Powell and the team there, working on Rhodesia. In my case, starting with the Lancaster House Conference, then working in Rhodesia Department, followed by Zimbabwe Unit, it was a year and a half. I saw through the first nine months of Zimbabwe as an independent state. In the circumstances I've described to you, I was thrust into this, having done no background reading or anything. But Rhodesia was the big issue of the day. For all of us who'd grown up interested in foreign policy or reading the newspapers since 1965, this was a huge issue in British foreign policy in a way that we can't really remember today because the Conference and Zimbabwe's independence, despite that country's problems to this day, resolved it as a preoccupying issue for the UK. I had to learn as I went along. Inevitably, when I was part of the Secretariat, you tended to see the more formal, in Bagehot terms the dignified aspects of this negotiation, not the behind-the-scenes stuff, not the power plays, not the real, in detail, negotiation, not the pressure, not the contacts with the backers in Africa and round the world that each side was doing. That was all done outside the room at meetings in the Foreign Office, at meetings in their hotels, wherever it was. What we saw in that first three months, in the period when the Lancaster House Conference was going on, were the negotiations, the formal sessions. Very often they would have a short formal session, then they might go off and hang around Lancaster House for another couple of hours and then everything would break up for the day. They might not return for a day or two days, and there'd be lots of bi-lateral meetings, or private meetings to push people along. I suppose, having had this experience of dealing with very, very important issues but from a very remote and intellectual view point in Moscow, it was

fascinating to see these politicians in the same room. Lord Carrington was the Chairman of the Conference. He was at the other end of the room from us. Then you'd have these extraordinary characters. You'd have Bishop Muzurewa; you'd have Ian Smith on the one side. You'd have Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo on the other. These were huge figures and you could see the differences between them. You could see differences within delegations. Some people more talented than others in each delegation; some very bright people. It was fascinating to watch.

Initially, I thought it was a pause in my career and I didn't really know quite how it would turn out, but pretty soon, seeing the quality of the people involved on our side and getting sucked into the Department ... I started working in the Department immediately after Lancaster House and then was working throughout the period of Lord Soames's administration in Salisbury, in Harare. I felt that I was working on a very, very important issue for the UK and although I personally wasn't constantly in touch with Lord Carrington, because I was in much too lowly a position for that, others in the Department were in and out of his office. Certainly for me it was my first exposure to taking legislation through Parliament. I dealt particularly with the House of Lords' side of things and it was just a good expansion of what you needed to do. The huge amount of diplomatic traffic that was involved, explaining what we were up to, to the Commonwealth, to the Americans, to our European colleagues, we were involved in all of that in that period, so it was an interesting thing to do. I remember over Christmas '79, the Lancaster House Conference had finished and our people were starting to deploy to Salisbury, to Harare, to get ahead of Lord Soames, and I was the duty officer for a weekend over Christmas. You suddenly realise you are being asked all sorts of questions you don't really know the answers to, but I was happily agreeing to helicopters here and planes there, and contracts here. It gave you a great sense of responsibility for something. And it was evident even then, with the exception of the Hong Kong negotiation which was to come, and our responsibility there, when you're dealing with a colonial responsibility it is a very, very different thing. Because you have that direct sense of responsibility and power and this one had huge ramifications for our foreign policy generally with many other parts of the world, but it was a very different thing, a much sharper sense of responsibility than I certainly felt when I was sitting in Moscow and felt so far removed from actual decision and actual decision makers. It was a little case study of the UK being in charge of something. In the full sweep of history not very important decisions, but they were big money decisions for me, never having had any experience of that before. Then

having to go through the whole business of legislating for Rhodesian independence, working with our Legal Advisers, handling the economic side of it, it was fascinating. But it was completely by chance and coincidental, because I would never have done that had I stayed in Moscow. But I think in the end it was probably a great thing to have done, and I was lucky to get involved. So I did that: the total was about eighteen months, but divided between the Conference, and then working in the Department in a more regular sort of job, and then turning the Department from this very, very big department which was in charge of the Rhodesia problem and negotiations through to the transition to something a bit more normal, which was a bi-lateral relationship with a newly independent country.

Eastern European and Soviet Department, FCO, 1981-83

I then started work early in 1981, probably January or February 1981, in the Eastern European and Soviet Department, in charge of the Anglo-Soviet part of that. I took over from Stephen Band as the Anglo-Soviet person. He'd been in Moscow with me and we were friends.

We were in a very large room and on the other side of that room and the Head of the East-West and Soviet Foreign Policy section was one David Manning. Anglo-Soviet meant the UK-Soviet relationship, the bi-lateral relationship plus the Soviet Union's internal affairs, dealing with the pressure groups which were worrying about dissidents and *refuseniks* and all of that, Soviet Union internal political and economic, and Anglo-Soviet. And then the other desk did the headier and in many ways more challenging thing of Soviet foreign policy, East-West relations, but the two interlinked, of course, as in a subject like the West Siberian gas pipeline, the pressure which America put on European companies not to participate in the building of this huge gas pipeline from Siberia through to western Europe - Mrs Thatcher opposed President Reagan on that one. I handled it because it was mainly to do with British firms and British commercial contracts with Russia and because it was more the economic side of things. But on the other side of the section, David did the handling of all the different aspects of Soviet foreign policy, arms control, all those sorts of things. But we were all in one huge, what was called Third Room.

CM: 1981 to 1983 was almost an even tougher time in Anglo-Soviet relations. Mrs Thatcher was in charge; she tried to prevent the British team from going to the Olympics in Moscow; there was Afghanistan. What were the big topics that you were involved in during that period?

NS: I think it would be true to say that the Foreign Office's main job in that period was working with the United States to maintain a united front and a raft of effective sanctions against Russia after Afghanistan and then against their role in the imposition of martial law in Poland in December '81. Working out the sanctions we were adopting, making sure they were applied around the UK system: that was part of my job. Dealing with the organisations in the UK which were worried about the situation of Russian dissidents and *refuseeniks*; meeting some of those people; trying to use international fora, like the CSCE (Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe) and others, to bring pressure to bear on Russia on their handling of dissidents; trying to get people freed through bi-lateral diplomatic representations which were done by the Embassy in Moscow. While at the same time - so all that's pretty unrelenting attempted pressure on the Soviets - while at the same time I think the Foreign Office attempt was always to maintain some channels of communication, to keep the essentials in place. Which we did. It wasn't at a particularly high level, but there would have been occasional contacts at foreign minister level and most often there was a very senior figure on the Russian side who was the head of their Second European Department, a man called Suslov. He would have been the equivalent of an undersecretary in our system, and his opposite number in our system would veer somewhere between a head of department and an undersecretary. We would maintain contact with him and his team and with the Deputy Foreign Minister responsible for relations with UK, and there the contact would have been with either one of our junior ministers or maybe with Julian Bullard who was the Political Director in the Foreign Office and the most senior official dealing with the Soviet Union on a continuous basis. He was of course deeply immersed in East-West relations, all aspects of it, and was the sort of guiding light for all of us in handling Russia during that period.

CM: I want to pick up on the refuseniks, because later people focussed on them as one of the elements that caused the Soviet Union to crumble. I suppose it went back to Basket 3 at Helsinki which, when it was set up, people didn't really think amounted to much. Can you talk a little bit about what you saw of this when you were in Soviet Department?

NS: The three baskets of the 1975 CSCE Final Act in Helsinki were to do with military security, economic security and the third basket was civil rights, human rights, all those things. It was a balance, and I imagine that during the negotiations, before my time, the Russians tried to resist having a basket dealing with those things on which they were on the defensive, certainly of equal weight with the other baskets that they were much happier with. They were much happier dealing with military security and disarmament and

confidence building measures on the one hand and on economic relations where they had quite a lot to gain from normalisation and greater trade access for their and Eastern European goods. So this was a balancing act and a compromise. But what it meant was that it was impossible from that moment on for the Russians to just sit back and say, 'that's none of your business,' when you came to them with a human rights issue, because you could say it was part of an international, multi-lateral instrument that we were both parties to and it was a legitimate area for raising concern. In a practical sense, unless it was handled sensitively by them, there would be an inevitable cooling in the other baskets. So it meant that though their reactions were usually negative and obdurate and unyielding, they nevertheless couldn't refuse to talk about it or to receive those demarches. It forced them to confront it and the fact that it was being raised and individuals' names were being mentioned, particularly by the Americans at the highest level, not so much by us, but we were part of it, gave strength to the victimised *refuseniks* back in Russia itself, the Sakharov family, all those people. The most famous down to the much less famous always found it a source of comfort and hope that their cause was not forgotten and was being taken up by Western governments. The *refuseniks* were so called because they were refused exit visas. As far as the Russian Jews were concerned the organisation I most remember was something called the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry. It wasn't a high powered political organisation; it was a group of women, Margaret Rigal was one of them, who were members of the Jewish community in London and elsewhere in Britain who felt very passionately about this subject and got a movement together. That was almost exclusively Jewish as I recall, but there were many other organisations that were involved: human rights organisations, arts organisations, or scientists' organisations in Sakharov's case, who were supporting the wider group.

CM: Were you aware of the groups that were going into the Soviet Union with religious texts, as well as with general support for refuseniks?

NS: Yes, we were conscious of that, people going in, at some risk to themselves, some people rather recklessly. We certainly didn't encourage people to take religious literature in because it was a very, very dangerous thing to do and they could easily have got into trouble themselves. Mostly it was just trying to help get people out, to get their conditions in prison alleviated, at a huge distance, with a very, very unwelcoming Soviet bureaucracy. I don't think much was happening at that period. Occasionally, I think, the door would open very slightly but it was nothing like the later period when Sharansky and those other people got out.

It was a time of stasis really. It was during this time that Brezhnev died and the start of funeral diplomacy. I remember going to a meeting with Francis Pym when he died (10 November 1982). There was all of that, Andropov then Chernenko died in 1984 and 1985. My period was one where obviously things were changing, because after Brezhnev things started to change somewhat, but it wasn't evident in behaviour, performance, whatever. You looked for it in Andropov. I remember we all heard that he was a jazz lover, and we thought, oh great, that must mean ... But he had been a former head of the KGB and everything else, so I think that we were kidding ourselves that there was any change. And he didn't last very long.

It's difficult to talk about this maybe, even thirty odd years later, but a lot of my job was to do with Soviet spies, working with the Security Services on their appreciation of what was going on in the Soviet Embassy in London and quite a few Soviet officials were expelled during that period, so it was a question of handling all that and handling the aftermath, trying to limit the impact on our Embassy. Usually it was going to be a tit-for-tat, but trying to end up feeling that you were one up, or if not numerically one up, that you'd done more damage than they'd inflicted on us. So it was that period of tit-for-tat expulsions, the Security Services keeping a very close eye on what the Russians here were doing, trying to identify those who were Intelligence rather than what their cover story said they were. With all this going on, nevertheless keeping up a relationship with the Soviet Embassy in London, contacts with the Soviet Embassy in London, not easy, never terribly candid or fruitful but keeping it going in some way. But it wasn't until Gorbachev that you started to have more open and serious conversations. Spotting him and Britain coming in first at that level was an achievement of British diplomacy and of British research excellence.

First Secretary, Washington, 1983-87

CM: Now we are in 1983, you'd been back in London almost four years, since '79, so it was time to go abroad again. In those days POD more or less ordained where you were going to go, were different possibilities put forward to you?

NS: I don't remember. What I do remember, is not that there was a choice, but that there were maybe one or two jobs coming up in Washington around that time and I remember thinking about one or two of the other ones. This was the one I wanted to do, which was the Internal Political and bi-lateral job, but there may have been talk about one of the other ones as well. I took over from Stephen Wall as First Secretary and the Ambassador was Oliver

Wright for the first three years and then Antony Acland in the fourth. The context was: Oliver Wright had only been there a year. His predecessor, Nico Henderson, had really become incredibly famous because of the Falklands, in '82, so a year had passed after that. Oliver was quite a flamboyant figure, but certainly nothing like as well known to a domestic British audience, as Nico Henderson had been. By that stage there was an established Thatcher-Reagan relationship.

My job, just to explain the elements of it, there were basically three elements which more or less cohered and were mutually reinforcing. The first part of it was internal American politics, so it was a classic diplomatic, internal political job, covering electoral politics, covering Congressional politics, covering state level politics round the country, trying to spot winners, trying to spot rising stars, to develop Parliamentary links, all those things. The second part was UK-US relations which for the most part meant nothing very glamorous: it was running the very big visits that happened, big royal visits, Mrs Thatcher's visits, visits by the Foreign Secretary, those were the ones that would fall to me and to the small visits team in the Embassy, which of course exists to this day, has to for a big Embassy. In those days it was two UK-based officers and now it is all locally based, just different, but it's the same concept. The third element was dealing with Northern Ireland which started off as a part of the UK-US overall relationship, but it was such a huge subject in itself. We also had in the Embassy someone from Northern Ireland who was a Press Officer, which was helpful. After this colleague left, it was decided to move the Northern Ireland person's job to New York, and her role was to deal with the New York based media, other media and some of the community groups. So I wasn't the only person dealing with it; there was also someone with a Northern Ireland accent, which was regarded as very important to try to get across the fact that it wasn't simply some act of British colonialism, so it was helpful having that person working alongside me. It was a big chunk of my time. I suppose that over the four years, 1984, the year of the presidential election was the year I devoted most to internal political. I covered it a bit in '86 with the mid-terms, but it was mostly '84 and covering the presidential election, we'll come to the detail of it. But internal relations was a constant and occasionally bi-lateral relations became a bit more than visits, it became more about the stuff of the UK-US relationship: how it was faring, more the theology of the relationship, where that was done at much more senior levels in the Embassy than mine, but I would contribute to that. So when there was a think piece going back from the Head of Chancery or the Ambassador because we were going through a rather difficult period, things like Grenada, when Reagan

invaded Grenada, a lot of thought given to how you bolstered the relationship after that, so I'd be part of that. For me most of it was the nuts and bolts of handling visits, running visits, making the most of visits, and sometimes some very big ones. Like when Margaret Thatcher came in '85 and made her speech to the joint session of Congress, that was a big event, and a big event in Congress's life as well.

CM: Let's take those points one by one. Let's start with the politics and the run up to the election in 1984. I don't suppose there was much doubt that Reagan would be re-elected.

NS: No, there probably wasn't. At no stage was there real doubt; there must have been moments when it looked a little bit closer. What I remember mostly was the early stages of looking at the Democratic race and that was interesting initially because Gary Hart who was the other main candidate in '83-'84 did do well in the New Hampshire primary; he collapsed very soon after that. But he made a bit of a surge. He was trying to look like President Kennedy: he had his hand in his pocket in exactly the same way. He came of course from a different part of the country, but he had a similar look, craggy good looks. And for a moment it looked as if he might come out ahead of Mondale, but then Mondale had this phrase, 'Where's the beef?' and if there'd been social media, that would have gone viral. There were lots of T shirts with 'Where's the beef?' I have to say that compared with the way we do domestic politics today, we do it today in a much more interesting way. I certainly as ambassador, and the team today, the first secretary and other members of the Embassy doing this, get out and get their hands much dirtier and wander round the early retail politics states very much more than I recall doing in those days. Partly because it was a very boring election, and was obviously so, but I don't remember going to any of these states in '84. I didn't go to New Hampshire; I didn't go to Iowa. I did go to the Conventions, but I didn't do any of the stuff on the ground, travelling on the aircraft or doing any of those things which our people do today, and is great fun, and important, both for the ambassador and for the first secretary political who runs the show and organises all those contacts. So I don't think it was as structured a way of approaching this as we would do today. Certainly I recall for the 2008 election, the key thing was trying to have some impact on the main candidates' policies, against the possibility that they became president. You wanted early contacts; you wanted to get connectivity between people in London and the emerging teams. You hoped to spot some of the people who might end up in senior cabinet or sub-cabinet positions. All those sorts of things we do today, I don't remember happening. Maybe it was because we expected Reagan to win; we expected a high measure of continuity. I am sure the Ambassador knew Mondale

and was in contact with Mondale to the extent he needed to be, because he had been a figure on the Washington scene.

CM: Who were your crucial contacts in the State Department and among journalists?

NS: I think I had a completely different set of contacts for each of the three things. On the internal political side, I knew some people in the White House. I'd inherited from Stephen and made myself some contacts who were the people really working for the political and branding side of the White House. These were the people working for Mike Deaver, the late Mike Deaver, who was one of the Reagan gurus, the image man for Reagan, who would frame the shot with Reagan wearing a leather jacket with the Arromanches beach behind him for the 1984 Normandy Landings visit, and so on. His team had been very much involved with the Queen's visit in 1983. Just before my arrival, there'd been a visit by the Queen and that had created a lot of contacts and good will for the UK and Stephen Wall had been the chief working level organiser of that visit, so I inherited and kept up with a number of the people he had worked with in the White House through that. A number of people who worked for Bush as Vice President, Bush 41, I knew a couple of people in his office, people in the White House, people in the Democratic National Committee, people in the Republican National Committee, staffers for the key congressmen, Geraldine Ferraro who was the running mate of Mondale. I happened to have made some connection with her before that; mainly for Northern Ireland reasons I knew her people. I knew her chief of staff from that period, so lots of people I happened to get to know were very useful. And then there were journalists, American journalists, and there were the pundits, as we have them today, there was a smaller group in those days, the people who would then write the very learned book on the psephology of the election, who'd gone into it in great detail. There was a guy called Dick Scammon, I remember, who ran one of the electoral organisations. A lot of election nerds, election junkies that I was in touch with. They didn't have things like the Cook Report then; everyone has their own report these days, but it was a similar little cluster of people who all knew each other and were all very pally together. And some of the British journalists were good on those subjects and I knew some of them. It was its own little eco-system really, domestic politics.

CM: What were the big visits during your time?

NS: Regular visits by Margaret Thatcher. I don't know how many there were, maybe four, maybe one a year at least in that period. Just before I arrived, she'd been for the G7 in

Williamsburg, but I think her first visit was very soon after I arrived; in the autumn of '83, I think she came. There must have been at least one in '84. She came in '85 for the speech to Congress, just after Reagan's re-election. That was a big thing, she made a big speech including about Ireland. She came to make a special visit after Reagan's visit to Reykjavik where he had promised a nuclear-free world that sent shivers down the spines of most of the people dealing with East-West relations and Arms Control and everything else in Whitehall. She came to rescue the day and bring Ronald Reagan back to the path of believing in nuclear deterrence and so on, which was a very important visit at Camp David which we organised. There was another one in '86 which was the 200th anniversary of our UK-US diplomatic relationship when the Thatchers and the Reagans both attended a big party at the Embassy.

CM: What was it like dealing with Mrs Thatcher and her team from the viewpoint of a first secretary in the Embassy?

NS: I was quite close to the team around her, Charles Powell and Bernard Ingham. I would always for some reason end up in the same car as Bernard Ingham and we would travel around together and he was always extremely friendly. Of course, my role while the visits were going on ... I would have co-ordinated the briefing and got the briefing telegrams out and so on, but I wouldn't have written that much of it myself. It was a huge Embassy-wide effort to get that stuff out. And my job during the visit was basically a logistical job, and I wasn't aiming to do much more than make sure that the trains and the cars ran on time. But I think that is an important job when a team comes to town. I would sit in the back row of a briefing meeting and watch the Ambassador and the team and the London team briefing Margaret Thatcher, so it was a great learning experience from that point of view, but I wouldn't speak at that sort of meeting and usually they weren't my subjects. We wouldn't be talking about Northern Ireland; we'd be talking about arms control or relations with Russia, or INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) or whatever it was. I can't say it was anything except easy to work with the team and by that stage they were an extremely tight and efficient, well organised group of people. Lord Armstrong, I suppose he wasn't a Lord in those days, he came on one of the trips, the trip in '84 or '85, so sometimes you got the Cabinet Secretary coming as well. Usually it would be the Principal Private Secretary, the Foreign Affairs Private Secretary; it would be Bernard Ingham; extremely rare for anyone from the Foreign Office to come, as is the case today, I suppose. And that was the tried and trusted way. And for '85 for the speech for the Joint Session of Congress was my first

exposure, and maybe Mrs Thatcher's first exposure, to the autocue, to that technology. There was a guy called Harvey Thomas, I think it was, who was her coach on using the autocue and this stuff was set up at the Embassy so she could practice on it. We had the same again many years later with Gordon Brown, practising on the autocue before a speech before a Joint Session of Congress.

CM: But it wasn't all sunshine all the time.

NS: No, no, no. Grenada was certainly the most overt rift, although the issue was in a way quite a small one, but it seemed to be a very, very poor way of treating your ally and more to the point, your ally who was in charge of the country they were invading. It was so brusquely and clumsily done by the Americans in every way and I think she was very, very clear with Reagan that he'd handled it wrongly and he was apologetic after the event, but it was all pretty deliberate while it was going on, I think. So we were coping with that and with a certain degree of post mortems within the Embassy about what happened, because obviously it's not something that you feel very comfortable about. It wasn't my particular area of the Embassy, so I just got the aftershock of it all, coming onto my radar as it were. That was the autumn of '83, quite early on in my time. But there were many other elements of friction. This is what always gets forgotten when you talk about Anglo-American relations. People talk about the cosy relationship, the alleged poodlism and all that, but they forget the transaction of often very, very difficult business when the interests of the two sides are not aligned. A lot, in Thatcher's time, of economic issues were not aligned: constant rows over air services which she got involved in and used to insist on negotiating directly with Reagan, because she always felt that she would do better dealing directly with Reagan on things than the machine dealing with their opposite numbers, so that sort of issue would get elevated to that level. The West Siberian gas pipeline I mentioned was another example of something in international economic diplomacy where she got very, very involved personally and where she was certainly not holding back in telling him that he was going down the wrong path and often he did listen. We're coming on to Ireland. There was a lot of resentment in Britain, not of Reagan because Reagan always supported us in spite of his Irish ancestry. It was very clear that he supported Thatcher and he supported the UK-US relationship; he had no truck with the IRA or anything. But there were elements in the Administration that felt differently, including in the White House, by the way. And there were strands in Irish-American communities who were directly supporting the IRA with money and with weapons and with everything else, and this was a pretty intolerable state of

affairs. We'll come back to talk about that in more detail, but it is an example of an area where there were difficult conversations with the Administration. It was regular and normal and rarely gets much coverage.

Northern Ireland was the third thing I dealt with and I'd say over my time in Washington was the single thing I spent most time on. My predecessor, Stephen Wall, had been through the most difficult period of the hunger strikes, that was '81 or thereabouts, a very, very difficult period in America as well. By the time I got there things had eased up somewhat after that and I think we were at the beginning of a different phase of the relationship back here, the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the increasing relationship between the UK and Irish governments over Northern Ireland and all that was starting, tentatively in that period, but it was starting. And I think that I was in a sense fortunate that by the time I was in Washington it was already clear that the Irish-American community was evolving and that there were parts of that community that we could deal with if we were smart about it. Irish Americans who had been much more successful, the middle class Irish American community, there were many involved in Washington and all round the country who were maybe suspicious of the UK, but much more prepared to engage than the classic urban New York working class Irish-American groups who fed the IRA and the support groups. And in Congress we had the Four Horsemen, that was Tip O'Neill, Ted Kennedy, Pat Moynihan and Chris Dodd, so the senior Democratic people who were critical of us but were anti-violence, anti-IRA. And that made a difference as it was a way for moderate Irish America and others interested in it to channel a concern about the situation in Northern Ireland and their support for the Republic of Ireland without crossing the line into support for the IRA. Now, along the way there were many, many problems over the use of plastic bullets in Northern Ireland, the allegation of religious discrimination in employment which led to the adoption in America of these things called the McBride principles which would have divested pension investments in Northern Ireland companies and so on, so we were running any number of battles and fights at any one time but as I saw it, and as the Embassy saw it and as the Ambassador saw it, the task was to try to work as closely as we could with those moderate voices. One of my jobs was to seek out in Washington some of these representatives of a more moderate Irish American point of view and I think, having been back as Ambassador since, and seen some of these people today, it's remarkable, that evolution, obviously because of the success of the Northern Ireland Agreement, but I think it started off getting better in the 1980s and I saw the beginning of that.

CM: Did you come up against personal hostility as a representative of the British Government?

NS: Occasionally. I didn't myself go round doing as much as in Irish community groups as I said this other colleague, based in New York, who was from Northern Ireland did. That was her job. And because she had an Irish accent, a Northern Irish accent, we always thought it was much better to do that, than for it to be a British official with a British accent and everything else. So I did some of it and yes, occasionally you'd come across hostility. And you'd come across it from people on the Hill, whether they were Irish American or very regularly not Irish American. Sometimes the most vociferous and the most anti-British and the most susceptible to IRA influence were Italian Americans. In Congress there was someone called Mario Biaggi who was often the ringleader of the pro-NORAIID (Irish Northern Aid Committee) groups. These were the working-class New York communities who were putting pressure on these congressmen and there was no tug at the other end of the rope for them. They didn't feel any inhibition about lashing out against us. It was obviously very difficult trying to deal with that. The antidote to it, as I say, was finding a new group of Irish Americans to try to relate to, to work as closely as you could with the moderate but still difficult voices in Congress: the Kennedys and everyone else, to stay as close as possible to the Administration who by and large were helpful, but there were people like Pat Buchanan in the White House, who had a very traditional Irish view of all of this. And there were those as well who would have liked to have put us under more pressure. I always felt that Reagan would back the UK government and would not want to turn this into a source of friction in a UK-US relationship which was much more important to him than dealing with the Irish issue. But that was never wholly to be taken for granted. Anyway, it was a very unusual issue to deal with in that period. You'll remember having been there and done it for four years, the feel of it is totally different now. Now it is a source of mutual congratulation and, really, recognition of what we have been able to do together to make this one issue go right. The other key thing that made it easier for us in Washington was that Margaret Thatcher and Garret Fitzgerald were working together on the Anglo-Irish Agreement and one of my only contributions that worked was that in the Embassy whenever we saw a draft of her speech to Congress, we said, 'as often as you can, please use the words, Garret and I, or Dr Fitzgerald and I. Get a sense across of how closely you are working together because that is the best protection for us, that we are working together with the Irish government, because Ted Kennedy and Tip O'Neill are not going to criticise the government in Dublin anything

like as directly as they would do ourselves.’ And that meant in terms of close working relationships, making sure that my Ambassador had a good working relationship with the Irish Ambassador and that I had a very good working relationship with everyone in the Irish Embassy and we were, as much as we could, seen to work together on things and we did. In the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Agreement we worked on the International Fund for Ireland to get American money for that, so those collaborative efforts were the best way I could see of diffusing the pressure which was being put on us from Irish America and from some others, but mainly from that source.

One of the frustrations for us was that we hadn’t managed to extradite back to the UK some IRA fugitives who’d taken refuge in America. They pleaded something called the Political Offence Exception to extradition. Once they’d been captured by the Americans and put in prison, we could never get them back because they claimed that their crimes were political and therefore were outside the ambit of our extradition treaty. We negotiated a supplementary extradition treaty, modelled on the arrangements we had in Europe, which basically said that there is no such thing as a political offence when you are dealing with two countries, like the UK and the US, which have mutual respect for each other’s judicial institutions. A crime is a crime and you’ve got to be able to extradite for it whatever the motive that someone gives. The crime should be tried in a court of law and you shouldn’t be prevented from doing that. That was initially incredibly controversial in Congress and Senator Biden, then a relatively junior senator on the Foreign Relations Committee, was a vehement opponent of it and thought that it was a very poor thing to do. But increasingly the United States saw the impact on America of Middle Eastern terrorism - we are talking about the period in the mid-80s when they were dealing with terrorism from Libya, the Berlin disco bombing, the murder of Leon Klinghofer on the *Achille Lauro*, a boat in the Mediterranean, various other acts of terrorism in Beirut. So America was starting to develop a reflex about terrorism for the first time. They hadn’t had any attacks on their own soil, but they were starting to see attacks on Americans outside the US. They started to realise, and we made this argument pretty directly ourselves, that they couldn’t have one set of rules themselves and another set of rules for when another country was being attacked by terrorists. We were able eventually to get a slightly modified form of this treaty through the US Congress in 1986, it must have been. That was a huge struggle to get it through and the key thing was finding people in the Senate who would be prepared to work with us on it. We found Senator Eagleton, a former presidential candidate, who was prepared to work on it, and we

worked with him and others to try to find a compromise way through and we were eventually successful. But it was a really fascinating insight into the way that you can get something done in the American system. It was very, very difficult to achieve, but you've got to get Americans behind it, you've got to get the White House behind it. It can't just be done because the UK wants it. You've got to develop that US domestic momentum behind something and find some very telling arguments to hit them with.

CM: On a personal level, you moved to America with Julia, you were married. Where did you live? What was life like on a domestic level?

NS: Yes, it was a hugely important period for our family. We got married in 1980, a year after I got back from Moscow, and when we arrived in Washington, Julia was already pregnant with our first son who was born in January of '84. Our second son was also born in Washington in November of '85 and when we left Julia was pregnant with our third son, who was born in the UK just after we got back in November 1987. So this was the period of our family getting created. Our oldest son went to Montessori school in America. We lived in Bethesda, so we were living the suburban American dream, where Julia was in the car pool. We used to go to events at the school; we used to shop at the supermarket. It was a glimpse of ordinary and regular and characteristic America of a kind that you never get as ambassador. Going back as ambassador was a hugely privileged position to be in, but you missed actually the normal side of life and the normal contacts that we had that first time round. We had a small, by American middle class standards, three-bedroom, detached house in Bethesda that had recently been rented, maybe bought, by the Embassy, furnished in a completely inadequate way by the Embassy. Many, many rows with the Embassy administration section about all of that. Much unhappiness. But it was fine: it had a little garden. That was our first ever house; we'd lived in an apartment in London before that. That's partly what we remember America for. We remember having tiny children, taking them out on excursions, and the huge amount of travel we did with the children when they were very, very young. We used to drive everywhere with them and go off on holiday to the Grand Canyon, saw America, crisscrossed America many, many times.

CM: Just making a contrast with your previous posting ...

NS: Working in Moscow at the end of the Cold War, of course it was important, and it felt important, but you felt detached from where things were really going on. It was very difficult to feel that you were impacting anyone or anything very directly. You were having an impact

on your own government with the quality of what you were doing, or analysing or whatever, but it wasn't quite the same. Partly Rhodesia, partly this, it was a much more direct political influencing that we were involved in and a huge array of available people who would talk to you quite openly about what was going on and at the top of our relationship, between the President and the Prime Minister, there was a) a liking and b) a candour in their contacts with each other and that set the level of my expectations from then on in. And you realised how personal relationships did matter. Whether I managed to construct a relationship with this or that person in the Irish-American community mattered a lot to me. And it did lead to things happening and to some promotion of our interests and some protection of interests. So that part of it, working out that part of diplomacy which is to do with personal qualities and integrity and so on, as opposed to being part of an enormous process and trying to understand that process, that came through to me very clearly as well.

CM: I imagine that doing internal politics you travelled quite a lot.

NS: Yes, and Northern Ireland because they both required it and I would do both. When I went to San Francisco, for example, one of the people I got to know best was the person in San Francisco who was the Assistant District Attorney for the Northern District of California, who was responsible for the extradition of one of the IRA suspects. I had a lot of contact with him, would go out to San Francisco from time to time. Obviously when I was there, I'd try to see some of the political people as well, to do that side of my job. My job required me to get out of Washington, so I can remember visits to New York, to Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Then the Conventions were in San Francisco and Dallas. We went on holiday all over the place, New Orleans, national parks in the West, so we did see quite a bit of the country. I guess I liked New England. We were very drawn to Boston. We had one weekend when we were up on the coast near Boston. We have friends who have a place up in Maine, so that's very easy for people here to relate to. And I love San Francisco. It was only in my most recent time in America when I went back as Ambassador that I got anything like feeling comfortable in Los Angeles. That was to me still a mystery in the 1980s, I couldn't work out how to cope with Los Angeles and I sort of got used to it by the time I ended up as Ambassador. I think it was because you see a different end of Los Angeles when you are ambassador. You see the classier end. The essential is getting out and about and getting beyond Washington. Washington is a very comfortable place to live but it isn't America, even today when it is a more cosmopolitan city than it was in the 80s. It isn't America and it's so important to get out. I saw some of our offices as well. You do as

ambassador but it was fun doing that as a middle level official as well, linking up with our people who covered internal politics and handled the Irish issue, because it is difficult to remember how many people were involved in handling Northern Ireland. It was a big effort for our Consuls General personally and for one or two of their staff, both because of the opposition, making sure that investment went to Northern Ireland from America was very difficult. Because the Republic of Ireland was battling to get American investment into the South and they were often semi-overtly using the problems in the North as a good reason not to go in that direction. So that was another thing that the Embassy network, the UK network in America had to be very active on. I visited Northern Ireland a couple of times as part of that, before I went and I think once during my time I went back to look around for familiarisation and to meet Northern Ireland politicians. One thing before we move on is during that period I think for the first time you started to see Northern Ireland politicians from the Protestant tradition coming regularly to America. We take this for granted today. We've got an executive in Northern Ireland where power is shared and we're used to seeing Ian Paisley, Peter Robinson, Arlene Foster, working with Sinn Fein political leadership. In the 80s it couldn't have been more different in the aftermath of the hunger strikes. We, of course, as a government had no contact with Sinn Fein. There were uneasy but functioning relationships with the SDLP who were over the whole time. John Hume was a constant visitor to the US. But we started to get the Unionist voice, we thought it was very important to get the Unionist voice heard in its own right. They shouldn't hear about Northern Ireland only from British politicians. Our Secretary of State came out regularly and in my time that was Jim Prior, followed by Douglas Hurd, followed by Tom King, three Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland that I worked very, very directly with. You had a very close relationship with them back in London and Belfast on those issues. Very important to get people out and there was someone in particular called Harold McCusker who died quite young. He used to come out regularly and he was a moderate, senior OUP politician. He used to come out and do the rounds and was respected because he was pretty moderate in his views. Ian Paisley used to come fairly regularly. We were never asked to organise his programmes, but he used to come out himself. It was the beginnings of the process and we would always encourage that to get groups of Northern Ireland politicians out. We would try to put them together with people from Congress, with people from the Irish American groups.

The Scots-Irish didn't really figure. The Catholic Irish American constituency that you mostly think about have many, many dozens of millions of people. But the Scots-Irish

community was from the start dispersed over the eastern part of America down from the north to the south in rural communities as well as cities and they didn't pack the same punch as the urban-based Irish American much poorer communities. They lost their identity much earlier, not entirely, but it was much less pronounced from a much earlier stage and there was certainly no expression of it, no representation of it politically. Occasionally books would be written about it and you'd bandy them around and you'd remind people how many American presidents had that background and there are a large number of them, but I'm not sure how much practical impact that had. It's a bit like the Commonwealth today. When it comes to it, it doesn't pack very much of a political punch, so it had to be handled with care. To be aware of it, to celebrate it when there were cultural events and so on. But not to overdo it and not to expect too much of it to come to our rescue on these issues. We had to work with an essentially Catholic Irish American community and find our best way through to them.

CM: The two Ambassadors. Oliver Wright: was it he or his wife who was very interested in drama?

NS: I think they both were, but it was particularly his wife, who had been an actress and still was an actress because she was very flamboyant, very striking, she dressed a bit like Isadora Duncan or something and she was very involved, was probably the first of the modern ambassadors' wives to be involved with the Folger which has continued. She used to act, not the whole time but occasionally, in Folger Shakespeare productions. The closeness of the relationship with the Folger was strengthened by her and that tradition has lasted all the way through. With the Shakespeare Theatre too. Antony Acland was a different sort of ambassador. They were both hugely experienced. Oliver had been ambassador in many places, several ambassadorships including in Germany was his most senior one before he went to Washington and he was very close to Reagan, an apostle really of the American West, the sunbelt, trying to explain the Reagan philosophy to London that was not maybe always very receptive to that, and he was a more outgoing personality. Antony Acland had been Permanent Secretary, the most senior position in the Foreign Office. I think he was Ambassador in Spain before that; he had been DUS Intelligence, so he had had a lot of contact with the United States, and of course had been part of the War Cabinet for the Falklands War, so a huge amount of relevant experience. But of course had arrived at a difficult time in his personal life because his wife had recently died. And I think that was a factor we were all very conscious of when he started. They were just different personalities, both hugely experienced. Antony would have come across to most people as more reserved

than Oliver Wright. Of course, Oliver was physically a bigger person in every way, but they both had that ability to connect. Antony Acland developed a very warm relationship with George Bush, initially as Vice President, which continued when he was President. He and Jenny, whom he got married to while he was in Washington, were very close to the Bushes all the way through and I think continue to see them to this day. They had different ways of doing things, but for me, obviously, I got used to the Oliver Wright way of doing things and had to adjust to a more low key style when Antony Acland arrived.

It was great fun. You really did feel on that Chancery corridor in Washington that you were one of a group of people who were working incredibly hard on things which were of great interest. You had some very, very high quality colleagues around you at the top of the Embassy – David Hannay was the Number 2, was the Minister, he was then whisked away to be the UK Perm Rep to the European Communities in Brussels, John Kerr was my Head of Chancery for most of the time, after Robin Renwick at the beginning, two people who went on to come back to Washington as Ambassador some years later. I took over from Stephen Wall, whom I took over from again much later in Brussels. These were working relationships that lasted the rest of my career in the service. This was the first of four times I worked for John Kerr - I worked for him directly twice after that on European affairs, once when he was Ambassador, and once later in London when he was PUS. Washington is always the centre of the foreign policy world and you had to be good enough to face up against the Americans that you were dealing with. I felt it was a very happy period, and a very enjoyable period. It didn't feel care-free, I wouldn't put it in those terms, but a very happy period when there was a reasonable balance between work and one's home life. I think from the outside we would have looked like a pretty hard working, pretty committed bunch. We were all men - the whole of the Chancery was men. There wasn't a single woman. There were women in executive and administrative roles but none of the substantive diplomatic positions were held by women. Very different from today. Among the big differences was UKREP I think from the earliest days because it was more of a civil service wide thing and because it was easier to combine it with home life in London and some people would go backwards and forwards or their spouses would go backwards and forwards, there was always a higher proportion of women in the UKREP set up. I mention UKREP because it is the one I am most familiar with, but it had a different feel and much more diverse from the start. Women were always involved in UKREP, so it's not just a generational thing, it's the type of work and the proximity to London. There must have been in the political section

half a dozen at second and first secretaries, three counsellors, two ministers, one general and one commercial and the IMF/World Bank person - compared with today that job had more of a foot in the Embassy than is the case today, because the person these days only really does the IMF.

CM: Today is 12 September 2016 and this is Catherine Manning recording the second interview with Nigel Sheinwald for the Diplomatic Oral History Programme. Nigel, we've decided that we are going to talk about 1987 to 2003, the middle period of your career, on a thematic basis and we are starting with Europe.

NS: Would it be a good idea for me to say what I did during that period? I had already been back in London after Washington for a couple of years in Planning Staff and then in '89, in the spring of '89, I started a job as the Deputy Head of the Internal European Union Department. We divided the department in two; they were both big departments and I was in the European Union Department (Internal). That for me was a conscious broadening of my expertise, because, having worked in America and worked on Soviet affairs and East-West relations, I felt really under-versed in Europe and the EU, which was at that stage a really booming industry and a positive area, because we had approached the Single Market with relative optimism, as a government and as a country. I thought that I ought to get to know what was going on in Europe and wanted to get into that. I started off in '89 and did that job until the end of 1992, or the very beginning of 1993, and then went to Brussels to the UK Representation to be the Head of the Political Section, which dealt with a lot of things, including the institutional issues in Europe. I was pulled out of that quite early, in 1995, to go back to London to be the Foreign Office Press Secretary. I did that for a few years and then returned to European affairs as the European Director in the Foreign Office from '98 to 2000 and was then sent in 2000 as Ambassador, UK Permanent Representative, to the EU, which I did until 2003. Over a fourteen year period, although it was broken by the spell in the Press Office – and in the Press Office, as perhaps we'll go on to discuss, a lot of the work was on Europe itself - I'd say I had a pretty uninterrupted period of working on European affairs.

If you think about that period politically and thematically, I would divide it into three. I would say the first couple of years were very much the end of the Thatcher prime ministership and the impact of her thinking on Europe and on British policy on Europe: that was one very distinct period. Then was the John Major period, including the conclusion of

the Maastricht negotiations, the whole period of internal dissent in the Conservative Party, leading up to the '97 election. Then the period of Tony Blair's prime ministership, '97 to the end of my time in UKRep in '2003.

Maybe it's just worth saying that at the beginning of that period, when I was working in London, I was at the coal face, doing the briefing for every big meeting, in a co-ordinating role within the Foreign Office, and also between the Foreign Office and the rest of Whitehall, as the Deputy Head of our Internal Department, which was the Department that did all the stuff that was really controversial on Europe. The External Department, in a way, was in much easier terrain politically, because foreign policy, trade, development were much less contested areas in British political life. The stuff we were doing was monetary union, agriculture, the budget, the single market, social affairs. All these areas, in their different ways, were bitterly contested within parties, between parties, in public opinion, with the media in the UK.

Of course, at the end of the Thatcher period, she had supported the Single European Act in the middle of the decade, with reluctance. She had welcomed the added competitiveness and the deregulatory elements in the single market programme, but had become increasingly hostile to European developments, which in the late 80s were reaching their high water mark. If you look back now, it's even clearer that Maastricht was the high water mark of European federalism and integration. We've been in a much more complicated phase ever since, leaving aside the British issue – I'm talking about European integration more broadly. I recall that phase as the phase in which the Foreign Office was constantly apprehensive and on permanent alert, alert for new initiatives coming from continental Europe; from Jacques Delors, who was the moving force behind a lot of these political and economic developments in Europe as the long-standing President of the Commission; from others in Europe who wanted particularly to accelerate the pace of integration in the economic and monetary area. Having created a single market the next real step for them, in logic, in political theory and in their political desires was to create a single currency. This was something which our Government, our business community and certainly our bankers wanted to be a long, slow evolutionary process, if it happened at all, which was being pushed politically, and for economic reasons, by the continental Europeans. We were always on the lookout for a new initiative, spurred on by the Commission or just generated by Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand. It was that phase of European integration when that trio, Delors, Kohl, Mitterrand, was a very powerful integrationist motor in Europe, the like of

which we have not seen since. In a way that was one of the reasons why the UK position became much easier after that generation moved on.

The second thing we were on the alert for, coming from the other side of the spectrum, was new initiatives or new obduracy or resistance from the Prime Minister and people around the Prime Minister, because, as I say, her own opinion of Europe was becoming more negative and bitter in that period '89-'90, towards the end of her prime ministership. It was, in the end, what caused the split in the Party and her eventual resignation. It was that period of her having to negotiate on economic and monetary union and the flanking policies that went with it, that became ultimately the Maastricht Treaty, when John Major had taken over. That was a very, very difficult position. It felt like a very defensive position, both for the Foreign Office, a lot of Whitehall and for the UK, because it was being done to us, rather than an agenda that we were at any stage comfortable with.

The second phase was the John Major period which began, very soon after he became Prime Minister, with a qualified victory at Maastricht. The Maastricht Treaty was the one which enshrined the process of creating an economic and monetary union; it advanced European co-operation in a number of other areas as well. It was a very big and very complicated treaty. He said at the end of it, 'Game, set and match.' In retrospect, it was certainly a tactical victory for him of some significance, because we managed to do two things: to allow European integration to go ahead, but on terms which were politically acceptable and quite advantageous for the UK. So we had an opt-in to the Euro, but were not obliged to join. That decision was perhaps more contestable and contested at the time than it seems now. It seems now like a very, very good decision that we didn't commit to join the Euro at that stage. At the time there were some who believed it was the wrong decision. But it gave us a huge amount of optionality and flexibility for the future, which was hugely advantageous.

CM: What about you? Did you think we should sign up for the Euro at that stage?

NS: I don't think I was sufficiently advanced in my own thinking or sufficiently plugged into senior-level thinking at that stage, certainly to have got to the position of thinking that we were on the wrong track. I didn't feel that at the time. I thought the deal we got at the end was a masterstroke, because what I feared, and what I was working on avoiding from my humble level was a complete confrontation, in which we either would be forced in (very unlikely) or had to absent ourselves from a huge chunk of European economic and monetary

policy-making from the start. Of course, the reality was that we got the best of both worlds. We carried on being part of the Ecofin Council, having a huge role to play in all those affairs, as our Chancellors of the Exchequer, Ken Clarke, Gordon Brown, showed in their periods in office, but without having to commit to actually joining the inner core of the single currency when it started in '99.

It seemed to me to be quite a last minute tactic in negotiation. It wasn't something that had been negotiated for years; it was something that came up in the months before Maastricht, as the final stage of the negotiation approached, and was negotiated rather secretly in the weeks and months beforehand and then was produced, as a rabbit from the hat, at Maastricht itself. That struck me as being a piece of very, very clever negotiation by officials and ultimately by the Prime Minister and Douglas Hurd, who was the Foreign Secretary of the day. So I certainly didn't feel at that time that it was wrong for us to have absented ourselves. I felt that it was a good and clever overall compromise. I felt a bit different later, but we can come on to that.

Then the Major period, starting with Maastricht, as we've discussed, produced a compromise on Britain and the single currency, but in all the other baskets, the extension of majority voting, the way in which justice and home affairs and foreign policy co-operation would be handled, in most of those areas there had been huge fights in the negotiations and we found an acceptable and really quite advantageous way through. And for foreign policy and work on police and judicial co-operation and all those things, we made sure that they were handled inter-governmentally, so that the institutions of the Community were much less involved in those areas which were much more sensitive from a national political decision-making vantage point. That was the key negotiation at that stage, to make sure that member states' own prerogatives and own sensitive areas of activity on defence and foreign policy and so on were not interfered with in the way that majority voting on commerce and business and agriculture and everything else was done. So that was an achievement for John Major early in his prime ministership. It was accompanied by a massive, a very significant, re-calibration of the positioning of the UK in relation to Europe after Margaret Thatcher, the Bruges Speech in '87, and this tortured period at the end. John Major came in and made a speech in Germany in which he said he wanted Britain to be a leading player in the European Union, at its heart where we belonged. Some of the language Margaret Thatcher had used, but it had been overtaken by the divisions and negative approach of the final stage of her prime ministership.

After that it was a question of dealing with the aftermath of the Danish rejection of Maastricht, which had huge complications for us as well, because we held the Presidency. We had a parliamentary process for ratifying Maastricht which had to be suspended while all the uncertainty was resolved. We as the UK - this is the second half of '92 - as the Presidency, had to try to sort the Danish problem out, which was done very skilfully by British diplomats, led by Michael Jay in London and John Kerr in Brussels, and by the senior figures in the European administration. It was done cleverly and well, working with the Danes and others. Maastricht went through, but of course it went through against a background of a huge amount of disagreement within the Conservative Party. It was the period of the 'Bastards', who were part of the John Major administration, who were undermining the unity of Government policy-making on Europe from within, combined with a degree of successful opportunism by Labour, who saw that they had an opportunity to divide the Government and create pressure for change, which they did in that long period between the '92 election and the '97 election. So it was a period in which on a number of votes the Government was beaten; it had a very narrow majority after the '92 election and Labour essentially, (although it was more pro-European in those days,) was prepared to work with the knowledge that there were Conservative dissenters who would make it very difficult for the Government to maintain a majority.

All that really came together in the mid 90s with the problem over British beef: the BSE crisis, which we've largely forgotten now, thankfully. The BSE crisis (I can't remember the exact date it started - I associate it with the middle of the decade) quickly escalated into a major political crisis in which the UK, frustrated by the beef ban imposed by the European veterinary and agricultural authorities, lashed out at the other Europeans and started a programme of blocking other measures, other completely unrelated pieces of legislation and activity, in order to put pressure on our partners in Europe to compromise on the beef issue. That was largely unsuccessful, though there were some minor deals done at the very back end of the Major administration.

That Beef War, that blocking, that sense of Britain being genuinely isolated in Europe, was the image that was taken into the '97 election and it was undoubtedly one of the many factors in the victory which the Labour Party enjoyed in the polls in '97. That was an extraordinary period. For someone who had always been in a pragmatic way quite pro-European, (I was the FCO Spokesman at that point) it was certainly a very difficult period to hold the line, as we all had to do, against a very sceptical British, international, and European media, who

thought our Government had really gone over the top and made matters worse by this very confrontational approach. So that was going to take me through to the end of the Major period, and then you get into '97 and the Blair government coming in.

At that stage, with a much more pro-European government coming in, (even Robin Cook, coming in as Foreign Secretary, who had a tradition of being rather Euro-sceptic in his personal approach, was, by contrast with the end of the Conservative administration, rather pro-European on all the issues) I certainly felt two things: first of all, I felt that the Euroscepticism of Britain of the 1990s would rapidly become a thing of the past; so I was incredibly over-optimistic in that respect. I thought that we'd left behind that very morbid, introspective, anti-European period of policy making of the mid 90s. Of course, that did last for a while, but not for very long. It was a much more deep-seated virus and condition than that, as we've seen in the last decade or so.

The second thing I thought was that it was possible that we would join the Euro. In '97 it was certainly being talked about very much more. It was one of the first things that the new Government paid attention to, but because of Gordon Brown's opposition in the Treasury, by the autumn of '97 as I recall, we had established the position that we were not going to go in immediately. We had a process, which the Treasury set in place, for reviewing our progress against various metrics. Although at the time you might have thought this was capable of allowing someone to reach a positive conclusion at the end, very rapidly it became clear that these were killer amendments; that it would be very, very difficult, given the way that the Treasury and many others in the UK were approaching this, ever to get to a position where we would actually join. So I would say in that period between '97 and 2000 it was becoming increasingly obvious that, although perhaps our economy was better adapted to joining the Euro than it had been ten or twenty years before, that the political likelihood of that happening was receding. I think there was a moment when I felt it could have happened and I would personally have been quite pleased, although I don't think I went through the arguments – I was, as I said, mainly in our Press Office at that time and not working directly on European affairs – in phenomenal detail, but instinctively I would have been sympathetic at that stage.

CM: Did you feel that arguments against the Euro from the Treasury and the review that they put in place were genuinely based on economic reasoning or were they based on a more deep-seated, non-economic feeling of hostility, something more visceral?

NS: Probably a bit of both, but mainly it was their view of the British economy and the differences between the British and European economies, particularly in relation to our being an oil-producing country, at that stage quite a significant energy and oil-producing country, but also the position of the City of London and our relatively small agricultural sector compared with the continent; these were more pronounced differences in the late 90s that they are today. I felt that they were reasonable points, probably being exaggerated somewhat, but it was mainly a view of the British economy which was fair, but which probably did, even then, exaggerate the differences, and certainly took a snapshot of the UK economy and cast it forward, rather than thinking of the ways in which the UK economy might adapt. I don't think there was very much thought given at all at the time about the impact on the rest of Europe of the UK not going in. I think, in retrospect, if the UK had gone in within the first five years of the Euro's existence, it would have helped the stability of the Euro. But I don't think that was a factor at all. It was really about us.

CM: There weren't any prognostications of disaster for the Euro as a whole as a single currency without a single banking system, for example?

NS: I think that there were always questions about that from the Bank of England. There were always questions about that from monetary economists in the academic community. There was a big debate, you'll recall, about that even then. I don't think that was the key; I don't think it was being tethered to a monetary corpse that worried the Treasury. At that stage, when they were making these decisions and recommendations in the late 90s, the Euro hadn't started; it was still in preparation. Generally speaking, the European economy was doing pretty well. We were still in the phase when the core European economies were magnets and beacons, rather than the very much more mixed, negative picture we see today in the wake of the financial crisis, the Euro crisis and so on, so that was less of a factor. It was simply that our own economy and our own financial structures here in the UK were not well adapted for membership of the Euro and it would not be good for the UK economy. That was a decision, the full scope of which only became apparent really in the latter years of the 1990s. It started with a process, but the process was one which was clearly going to produce an annual report for a number of years. But it was very unlikely, certainly by the time I got to Brussels in the year 2000, it was very, very unlikely to mean that we would go in in the foreseeable future. That has remained the position with even greater clarity ever since.

The tonal change in '97 was very significant. One of the first things I was involved in as Robin Cook's Press Secretary, I think his first Monday or Tuesday in office, was going to Brussels and formally signing the UK up for the process of joining the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty. We'd opted out. That was one of John Major's compromises: to allow the new Social Chapter to go ahead, but the UK opted out of it. This was opting us back in, so it was a major step in bringing the UK back into the main stream of European negotiating, and more generally, it was a period of the UK to some degree taking advantage of a lapse in leadership elsewhere in Europe. As Chancellor Kohl's time came to an end and after Mitterrand's departure and Chirac's arrival, and Delors' departure, there was a more fluid position in terms of continental European leadership. Blair, coming in with an enormous majority, representing the Centre Left in politics, was aligned with the Centre Left in other European countries, but also in the United States. He arrived with a big tail wind and '97-'98 was a period when the UK was asserting its aspiration to be a leading player in Europe. That was an exciting period to be part of it. I got involved in that when I took over the European Directorate of the Foreign Office in the summer of '98, having done that long period in our Press Office. I did that for a couple of years and then went to Brussels.

I was going to spend a bit of time talking about the main thing that I did when I was Ambassador, which was bringing to a conclusion a process which had begun soon after the re-unification of Germany and the end of the Cold War, the business of bringing the first of the Central European countries into the European Union. There had been a number of stages in that process during the 1990s and negotiations had formally opened, I can't remember exactly when, in '98 it probably was, having had various agreements between the EU and those Central European countries in the earlier part of the 90s. There were a number of things going on while I was in Brussels, in a number of other areas which were very demanding, like financial services, and justice and home affairs co-operation, like the European arrest warrant, but the single biggest negotiation I was personally involved in was the enlargement negotiations, which ultimately brought ten new countries, mostly Central Europeans, as well as Malta and Cyprus, into the EU. They formally came in in 2004.

CM: This was a process that the UK had promoted on the basis that we preferred wider rather than deeper. Is that roughly right?

NS: Yes, we always favoured European enlargement. I suppose that goes back decades, in that we favoured our own inclusion in the 1960s, so we'd always been favourable to the EU

adapting and expanding and for some that was a deliberate way of diluting at the same time. For others, and I think I'd put myself in this camp, it was a belief that at best, the European process needed to embrace both further co-operation and integration on the one hand and widening on the other, and that widening would make the integration process easier to handle from the UK point of view. Not that it would stop completely, because I didn't feel that you could stop it. It was just too big an impulse in the rest of the EU and there were sound economic reasons for at least some of it. But I felt that expansion would bring a bigger range of economies, interests, political feelings into the EU and that would mean that some of the more politically naive, romantic views of federalism would be tempered by the new reality of a wider and more diverse Europe. So I felt that the two processes had to go hand in hand.

At that point in the early 2000s the big show in town was the enlargement negotiation process. Without going into full detail - it's a very complicated process - you have a series of negotiating chapters and I was the lead negotiator at the senior official level for the UK. Then, of course, all the really difficult issues get pushed up to the Finance Minister, Foreign Minister level and ultimately to the Head of Government level. It was at the Copenhagen European Council, at the end of 2002, that all this finally came together and the deal was done on the basis of a new set of financial figures for an enlarged Europe. That was the big thing that I was involved in. The UK was indeed a motor in ensuring that the first wave of enlargement was a big wave. We'd started negotiating with a smaller number of Central European countries, just the core countries, and then expanded the negotiations in, I think, 1999, just after the Kosovo conflict, because we felt that all those countries that had been intimately involved in the Balkans conflict needed the stability which earlier membership of the EU would bring. So the UK was an advocate for making that first wave of enlargement a larger one.

CM: Security issues played a part in the thinking here?

NS: Yes, very much so. The ultimate rationale for the Central European expansion was indeed to bed the new Europe down and provide some stability and calm, so that you didn't get fragmentation and the economic race to the bottom which you've had in the parts of Eastern Europe which haven't had much of a European integration process. And setting democratic standards, which was not straightforward in all countries. In Slovakia in the very late 90s there was a very difficult situation, which arose with an autocratic prime minister,

Meciar, who came in and, very fortunately, was kicked out again before important decisions had to be made on the European side, but otherwise we would have had real problems.

We had problems also in that period, just by the way, with Austria, where a Far Right party was part of the government and the EU had to respond to that. We didn't go overboard, but we had just to stand back a little bit until ultimately that government collapsed. So those problems have always been there and they are of course coming back now: we have this election going on in Austria and the Far Right is, not rampant, in Europe, but it's certainly a bigger factor than it was at that stage.

So the enlargement process was the big thing that I was involved in. It was difficult for everyone; it was probably most difficult for France. They were the most ideologically suspicious of enlargement and the impact it would have on the core EU. They were probably right, and certainly from the point of view of their interest; they seemed to be left behind a bit in that phase at the very beginning of the first decade of the century.

One of the issues there has had profound implications for the UK's membership of the EU, and that is migration. That's always a big issue and it was going to be a big issue in this negotiation. It's traditional in enlargement negotiations for there to be transition periods before the full weight of European membership comes through. That's done sometimes to aid the integration of the new member state and sometimes it's there to protect the existing member states. In this case there was a transition period of a certain number of years, I can't remember how many years, five or seven years, which was allowed in the Treaty, which most member states took advantage of. The UK, and I think a couple of others, decided, in order to help the new countries of Central Europe and indeed help their own economies, that they would dispense with transition periods and admit workers coming from Poland and the other Central European countries right from the start, from the moment of accession in 2004.

A lot of them had already arrived, by the way, because a lot of these countries had sent people here much earlier on, under the earlier transitional agreements that the EU had had, so it wasn't a completely new phenomenon. But there was a surge. It was underestimated by the Home Office and by our experts in the early 2000s when we were making the decision. The scale of the influx of central European workers was underestimated, but that was a very, very fateful decision that was made, because it's quite clear that at the local level, in terms of health and education and transport, insufficient preparation and adaptation were

made for the arrival of what turned into new communities. That has lived with us ever since and was plainly a big factor in our referendum just a few months ago.

I was part of that process of decision-making, led of course by domestic departments here, the Home Office, but supported by us in Brussels. I was behind the decision in Brussels, supported it, and continue to support it. Unlike the Labour Party today, or Ed Miliband when he was the Leader of the Opposition, I don't think it was the wrong decision. I think it was the right decision, but that we should clearly have had better analytical projections of what was going to happen, and seeing what happened, clearly it would have been much better if bigger resources had gone in to the relatively small pockets in our agricultural communities, in our coastal communities, and to some degree in our cities, which were most affected by the arrival of large numbers of Central Europeans. I think it could have been managed very, very much better. I don't think it was the wrong fundamental decision. At that stage the UK economy was doing very well, and was certainly capable of absorbing that number of new workers, and indeed, even today we have such low unemployment rates, it isn't an employment or economic problem. It's a social, cultural and political problem. But that was the big thing.

CM: Can I just ask you a question? You've talked about the different periods in our relationship with Europe, the different attitudes of different governments. Conversely, did Europe have different attitudes to us at different times during the long, fifteen-year period during which you were intimately involved in Europe. Clearly, we were seen as a blocker in the middle period. Can you trace different attitudes?

NS: Very much so. I think there was a huge change, and of course it is difficult to characterise simply views in the rest of Europe, because they were, as they are today, divided in many ways by nationality and by political class and so on. But running all the way through has been some resentment in the European political class and the European institutions of the UK always having a distinctive, odd-man-out sort of position. That's been there to some degree with every British government since we joined in the 1970s. It's just been expressed in different ways. It was expressed particularly fiercely in Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership, in the early stages over the budget, in the latter stages over the pace of European monetary integration. John Major was in retrospect a transitional stage really, coping with the end of Thatcher and then being rocked by a series of internal disputes. The Labour government of Blair was a chance to set us on a much more positive

path on Europe generally, and the conundrum, the exam question was, Can you do that, can you be positive, forward, a leader in Europe and not be a member of the single currency? In the early years, it seemed as though that would be possible. I think the conclusion today would be much more nuanced and balanced and divided opinions would exist on it, because the Euro has become so much more difficult as a currency and as the Eurozone economy has been affected adversely by everything that's happened in the last five to ten years. The value of our European Union membership has seemed to some in this country to be much less, because we are not in the Euro and not at the negotiating table when the most important decisions are being made. And with the Eurozone creating an extra layer of integration around itself, how would the rest of the EU cope.

CM: Throughout your time the attitude in the European institutions and at governmental level was that the UK was always out on a limb, even more so than other countries like Sweden and Denmark which also resisted going into the Euro?

NS: That is the case. There were periods when it seemed to be going differently. I think the period in the late 90s soon after the Labour government came in there was a fundamentally different tone. You could argue there was less effective leadership elsewhere in Europe, so the UK was catapulted to the front. But the key thing about the UK is that it is a big member state. Big member states make bigger waves. The French, the Germans in their different ways, also make waves in the EU, but from their fundamental position of membership and leadership in the EU, they're given greater latitude. Because we've always been the odd one out and the difficult partner, as a big member state that image gets magnified.

CM: Did this rub off on you personally? Did you feel that the EU regarded you and your colleagues as troublemakers and un-European?

NS: No. I think that at the time I was doing it, when I was Europe Director in the late 1990s and Ambassador to the EU in 2000 to 2003, in that period, the stropky Brits caricature was much less than it had been and much less than it is now, and has been for the past few years. We were in, not exactly a honeymoon period, but we were in a period when there was much more British leadership, when on most of the issues we were leading the way, certainly on enlargement, on the budget, on the single market, on the European arrest warrant - we backed that more than any other country. European foreign policy and security, an area of natural British strength in Europe, working instinctively very closely with the French and a number of others, that was another area where we were seen as always on the front foot. I

think I was lucky that I was there in the period when some of the old myths had been punctured to some degree, so it was a much more balanced picture of the UK that we were putting forward in those days.

There was a more nuanced view of Europe emerging in France and Germany as well, with Chirac in charge and Jospin as his prime minister, which led to a lot of friction within France, having the two of them co-habiting at that point. In Germany there was a centre-left Chancellor who was reasonably well aligned in the early years to Tony Blair. (Of course that changed, not least because of Iraq, but it was there in the early period.) We certainly bared our fangs in different negotiations, particularly anything to do with money, or to do with anything which was a direct attack on national sovereignty, all talk of European armies and things like that we would have to quell very, very quickly. But for the most part, over the vast majority of what the European Union did, during that first five, six years of the Blair government, the UK was seen as striking a different posture on European affairs, much more forward and with a genuine position, as with France and Germany, as leaders of this complicated project.

I was going to say just two things about negotiating. There's lots of literature about this, so I won't go into it too deeply. What you are involved in as Ambassador to the EU is this thing called the Committee of Permanent Representatives. There are two variants of this: one is where the ambassadors are, where they have their own set of issues, which is mainly to do with the political construction of Europe, the institutions and constitutional matters, and then leading in to foreign policy, security and defence, economic, monetary and financial affairs, justice and home affairs, and a number of other areas.

The deputy ambassadors had, in a way, an even wider span of subjects, because they dealt with all the single market subjects, plus environment, transport, social affairs, research. All the Council meetings in those areas were handled by the deputies, so both were part of a big sausage machine producing draft legislation, draft agreements, going up to the Council of Ministers.

As Ambassador, you are at the apex of the official level of negotiating. You try to sort out as much as you can at your level, and then the undecided issues, the most difficult issues, would go to ministers to sort out. Each ambassador has an assistant and the group of assistants, named after one of the earlier incumbents, who was a Signor Antici, that is, the Antici Group, prepares the meetings for the ambassadors. I did that job when I was in Brussels the first

time in the 1990s and, of course, I had my own Antici when I was back as Ambassador in 2000. So it is very structured. COREPER was then, and probably still is, the most coherent negotiating forum in the EU. It was where a great deal of the real business got done. Until enlargement, in my time, it was fifteen countries. That is a manageable number of people round a table. It was probably the last time. When it gets above twenty, certainly when it gets above twenty five, it is very difficult to conduct the sort of the negotiations that we did conduct in the decades before I was there. COREPER was more powerful in the decades before, when it was smaller and maybe when the areas under discussion were a bit smaller than they are today. But it was still, in my time, a place where you could get things done, where ambassadors would negotiate, under the instructions sent by their governments, but with an element of margin for manoeuvre which is essential in any big multi-lateral negotiation. I really enjoyed negotiating. I enjoyed having the United Kingdom name plate in front of me. I'd done it when I was there the first time round in Brussels. I think negotiating is an essential part of being a diplomat and in any multi-lateral institution you've got no choice but to negotiate. You're negotiating texts and in every way the atmosphere is a negotiating atmosphere.

CM: Was the negotiation one of all fifteen of you round the table or did you built coalitions?

NS: Very much a mixture of both. The most skilful people round the table would mix the two and they would do so even while the negotiation was going on. Classically, in any room like that, whether you are in NATO, or EU or the UN, any of these forums, you would see that there is a formal round going on, with people on the microphone, speaking to the whole room and then you'd see people in huddles, round the room, trying to sort things out. I'd say one very important and hardly surprising or startling conclusion from all that is of course that the big countries are very important. They have the biggest voting weights; they have a lot of real power, both at the official negotiating level, but particularly when their heads of government get involved. The bigger beasts do tend to be the prime ministers with big countries and big populations and economies behind them.

But certainly at the COREPER level and at official level, it's very often the smaller countries, which maybe don't have such big interests at stake, or haven't staked out their position so bluntly and overtly, who are the ones best placed to be the finders of compromise, the ones who are most adept in the final stage of a negotiation. In my time some of the most skilful diplomats were from the smaller countries, from Denmark, from the Netherlands, from

Ireland. They were just very good at it, and maybe just had a bit less at stake at the rhetorical level and the substantive level than the bigger countries. As a British diplomat you have to build your alliances with a mixture of people. I always found that it was very important to ensure that you were on good terms personally and also totally plugged into the people whose economic interests were not naturally your own. Of course there is in the EU a natural coalition of northern liberals who want open trade policies, who are tough on budget discipline. That would be us, the Dutch, the Germans, the Scandinavians, the Irish (maybe less the Irish on budget discipline traditionally, but a lot on the other things.) I found, mainly because I got on very well personally with them, that keeping in touch with my Spanish opposite number and my Greek opposite number, was very, very important. You could find ways through. Very important because those countries had their share of the presidency; they had their share of difficult issues. Spain was the fifth largest economy in the EU at that stage and was quite an aggressive negotiator on its own economic interest; it was a very important country to understand and find ways through with. We had to co-operate with them on Gibraltar on top of that. You have to have a way of dealing with everyone round the table. It would be totally wrong to rely only on one country. Germany in those days was not as dominant a player as it is today, but it was still plainly the most important country in the EU. Any British ambassador would have to have a good working relationship with his German opposite number. You couldn't rely only on that. Very often in negotiations, because of the cumbersome German internal process, the German position was often very late being advertised to the rest of us, because it took them so long in Berlin to come to a position on some of the detailed issues under negotiation. So that was another opportunity for those countries which had worked out their position quickly: you could get in ahead. It wasn't at all a rubber stamp on what the Germans wanted.

I would say that, comparing that with bi-lateral diplomacy which I came to do again when I was in Washington as Ambassador a few years after I was in Brussels, one of the disappointments for me of Washington the second time round was how little negotiation was involved. There was lots of talking to people, and if you believe that everything you do is a negotiation, then of course there was a lot of negotiation, but it wasn't what I would call negotiation. It wasn't structured; it didn't lead to a fully negotiated end result in terms of a piece of legislation or a treaty or a text which was going to be important to the two countries. I think it is interesting that, certainly in my time in Washington, there was relatively little in the way of formal negotiation.

CM: So you really preferred being Ambassador to the EU?

NS: No. The two are just totally different. I would have enjoyed Washington even more if there had been a strand which involved a more formal prolonged negotiation on a series of issues over the four and a half years that I was there. Because I think that is what diplomacy is ultimately about. I did a lot of lobbying, a lot of public diplomacy, a lot of talking in private and sharing insights and pushing the White House, the State Department, the Treasury in this direction or that, but it fell a little bit short of what I was used to in the multi-lateral sphere. I think that is the impression of a lot of people who've come from NATO, or the EU or the UN, it's just a very different thing being a bi-lateral diplomat. You're challenged on a very different set of fronts. It's still a very difficult job, but you're missing a little bit there.

CM: Earlier, when we were talking about Moscow you described the social events which were a very important part of the diplomatic system of exchange of information. How did the social aspect of diplomacy work in the EU? Were dinners just the negotiating table with food service? Was there a big difference here between bi-lateral and multi-lateral posts?

NS: Yes, huge. For me, Brussels EU had a very, very small social element. There was a bit, but for the most part you had a much smaller number of key opposite numbers than you do in a bi-lateral setting. It is one of both the attractions and limitations of something like the EU, the same would go for NATO. You know your core interlocutors; they're your opposite numbers round the negotiating table: in my case the other ambassadors of the EU. There would be the twenty or thirty absolutely top people in the Commission beyond the Commissioners themselves, maybe a smaller number of top officials in the Parliament and Council, plus a good number of MEPs that you needed to know. It was known universe of commissioners, senior officials, opposite numbers in the other representations and a small number of business people and representatives beyond that. Plus the media. I think when you're dealing with a country, you're dealing with something that is much more nebulous and much more difficult to feel that you are on top of in any sense. It's completely open-ended, especially if you're dealing with a huge country like the United States, three hundred plus million people, with a deliberately decentralised political structure where people come out of nowhere and are suddenly hugely powerful; a presidential system where you can't spot who's going to be coming into the frame, a business community which is spread over this huge continental democracy. It's a very, very big contrast with Brussels. In Brussels you spend most of your time, sometimes four days a week, sometimes two, but in my recollection no

less than two, sitting in a room. It wasn't smoke-filled by that stage: smoking had been banned in the 1990s. But it was a room with a large number of people round the table, and when you went off for a meal it was with an agenda and with another set of issues to discuss. Sometimes you'd go off as ambassadors just by yourselves, without any officials, to hammer something out more personally, which was difficult to do in front of a large crowd.

CM: Normally you had people sitting behind you?

NS: Normally, in an ambassadors' negotiation round the table, I think there was a maximum of six people per delegation. Often it wasn't as many as that. Certainly, in a ministerial negotiation you'd have your six people, three seats at the table and three behind. It may be less today, as we've enlarged, but then you'd come down to a smaller number. The reality is that, to the extent that there is a social part, i.e. you're eating, it's just an extension of the negotiations and would go on very, very late at night.

Then you'd get back home and you'd have an enormous dossier of papers to prepare for and read and ring people up and talk to them in the middle of the night, preparing for the next day of negotiations. So it's end to end, wall to wall negotiations, whether it's in the COREPER setting where you're the negotiator, or whether as your minister's senior adviser, sitting on his or her right hand and taking them through the business of the day. And that's a very continuous, unending process in Brussels. One other thing I should at least make mention of, for the record, is that one part of this is negotiating with your partners ie the European institutions as well as the other countries. But an equally important part of it is negotiating with yourself, negotiating with the rest of Whitehall.

The UK representation in Brussels, really from the time we joined in the 1970s, was always seen as an extension of Whitehall. More than any other bit of decision making on any other aspect of British international relations, you're totally plugged in as UKRep and the UK Representation is a mini-Whitehall. Any government department that has any significant government business is going to be represented there one way or another, or have the option of being represented there. It doesn't have a Foreign Office ethos; it never has. Its allegiance is to all the departments of Whitehall. Everyone is also connected to the Cabinet Office which has always had a big co-ordinating role on European affairs, right back to the 1970s. The tradition for the UK Representative was that he always went back on a Friday for consultations in London which were named after him and the Head of the European

Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. In my time that was Stephen Wall, so the meetings were called Wall-Sheinwald, just as earlier there had been Kerr-Hadley or Wall-Bostock.

CM: I was going to ask you about this. Your four postings to do with Europe, one in London followed by one in Brussels and again London followed by Brussels, how different was it for you personally whether you were based in London or whether you were based in Brussels?

NS: In Brussels you feel the sharper end of the responsibility, certainly as Ambassador. You feel that responsibility because you've got to deliver the outcome. If you end up with a decision in Whitehall on a Friday for a Foreign Affairs Council the following week, 'This is what we can accept; this is what we can't accept,' you have to go back and tell the team, 'That's what we're expected to do.' And hopefully, with the ministers concerned, deliver it. So the stakes are quite high when you are actually in Brussels, because that's ultimately where you'll see the denouement. It's a little bit more remote in London. Certainly, as Ambassador, a little bit less when I was there the first time, you're dealing with the whole panoply, most areas of British public policy one way or the other.

I also saw it as part of my job to try to make sure that Whitehall were plugged into the European policy process. I would spend each Friday partly in this rather structured two or three hour meeting in the Cabinet Office, dealing with the issues of the day. But I would then, either before or after that meeting, go and see other people, go and see other ministers, try and take them through what was coming up. I spent a lot of time trying to advance the interests of British officials who had worked in UKRep. Very often if you'd done three or four years in UKRep, when you got back it was quite difficult to re-integrate into your parent department. I wanted to alert Permanent Secretaries and other senior officials around Whitehall to the need to encourage the best people to go to Brussels, but then to reward them afterwards and reintegrate them properly and make the most of what they'd done. That was difficult.

CM: A personal question. Your time as ambassador to the EU was at a relatively good time for Britain in the EU. Was it seriously stressful?

NS: Yes, I think it was quite stressful. But in terms of personal pressure, I have no doubt that working for four years in No. 10 was the most difficult, just because you worked closely with the Prime Minister and other senior ministers on a minute by minute, day by day basis, and

the issues that I was dealing with there were literally issues of war and peace and life and death, so it was more full of pressure. You feel pressure in Brussels not least from the continuous nature of the negotiations, the fact that you don't get a moment to draw breath between negotiating on justice and home affairs one day and then into the next meeting of COREPER the next with very little break. There's a lot to cover in an often quite enervating negotiating environment, stuck in one room with a whole load of the same people day after day can be a bit dispiriting and difficult. Driving up and down to Luxemburg for Council meetings three months of the year, you waste a lot of time doing that. Yes, I would say that, after No. 10, it was the most stressful job I did, probably more stressful than being Ambassador in Washington, just in terms of personal pressure and direct responsibility for what was going on.

Dealing with others, in my time in Europe, I saw Jacques Delors operating in my first years in Brussels, but more remotely.

CM: Was he a good negotiator or was he someone who just had a very strong vision for Europe?

NS: I think I was too junior at that stage to see him up close. I think he was quite a good negotiator: the big issues of the 1980s always ended in an agreement. European negotiations do tend to go on a bit, but they do reach a conclusion. That's one of the interesting things about the European process is that you do get there in the end. Painful to get there, but you do get there in the end. The Single European Act, Maastricht, they were done on Delors' watch. I wasn't personally involved in either of those, but I saw Delors operating. I was at the Edinburgh European Council when he was still Commission President. He was effective, but it was mainly this clarity of vision and a very big intellect, combined with an outstanding staff led by Pascal Lamy, that was a very powerful machine in Brussels. He was succeeded by Jacques Santer who had been elected: he was serial Prime Minister of Luxemburg, a much less driven character, who was more avuncular in his attitude to his opposite numbers and to people like me in the background, but clearly had less of a vision. He was someone who'd emerged from a contested appointment process for the Presidency. The UK, John Major, had blocked the candidate supported by France and Germany, the then Belgian Prime Minister, Jean-Luc Dehaene, and Santer had emerged as the compromise candidate. He had a fairly undistinguished five years, competent but undistinguished, as Commission President and was then succeeded by Romano Prodi who we, the UK, Tony Blair's administration,

supported. He was someone Blair knew, centre Left, he'd been Prime Minister during Blair's period, seen as sound on economic issues, having been an economics professor before he went into politics, but he was ultimately a disappointing figure as Commission President. He was probably overmatched by the scale of political, economic and administrative issues that he had to face. He came in with a lot of hope on his shoulders because the previous Commission had essentially been voted out early after various scandals and problems that had arisen.

As the UK representative, you have to service and advise the ministers coming through on a regular basis. It's the same in the UN and NATO and the other big international organisations, but in Europe there is a rhythm which means you see people very, very frequently. So the people I would see most frequently were successive Foreign Secretaries, Home Secretaries, Chancellors of the Exchequer and, of course, Prime Ministers, whom you would see at least four times a year at Council meetings and a lot between times at sessions in London.

CM: Do any of them stand out in your memory for any particular reason?

NS: I think that although of course a caricature has emerged in Britain on the lips of the Leave Campaign, the reality is that our Prime Ministers and other ministers, and our professional negotiating civil servants, have actually been very successful negotiators over the past thirty or forty years. What John Major did almost encapsulated a style of negotiation which kept British special interests protected at the same time as allowing us to assume a forward and leadership role in areas of European affairs where we could lead and where we had a strong positive agenda, like the single market or the budget or foreign policy or defence or whatever it was, subjects where Britain had a lot to offer and less inhibitions. At the same time we protected our position on politics, police and judicial affairs and on the single currency particularly. I think we've been successful negotiators. All British Prime Ministers in their different ways, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, (I don't know about Theresa May, I haven't seen her in operation as Prime Minister), they've all spent time learning their briefs; they've all been as well briefed, well versed in the subjects under discussion as anyone round the negotiating table.

French, German, Italian leaders would regularly show up for Council meetings much less well prepared, much less versed in the subject matter than our leaders, so I'd give them all of them credit for putting in the hard hours. It's well known about Margaret Thatcher, that's

one thing that comes out so clearly in Charles Moore's biography, and in many other contemporary accounts of her, but maybe less known of her successors, that they really did work hard at it and in the big negotiations made sure that British interests were protected.

In the budget negotiations and in everything else, there were areas where we had to compromise, but 'compromise' cannot by itself be a dirty word when you're dealing in this case with 27 other countries. You could say that the country that has compromised the most in Europe is not Britain, but over the past ten years much more France and Germany. The irony for me in all this is that Britain is leaving the European Union at the point where by any objective standards we ought to be most comfortable in it. Because the EU is now much less federalist, much less integrationist, much more attuned to the need for member states to be in charge - despite the fact that the Parliament has more power. The biggest negotiations are managed by the member states themselves and the UK's core interests on the single currency, on tax, on education, on health, on foreign policy, on defence, on all the big things of our national life are protected in the EU, either because we have a veto, or because it's not part of the European system.

The distorted view that came across in the campaign was that a) every aspect of our life was governed by aliens from Brussels and that b) in any negotiation the UK was going to fail, be worsted by these cunning foreigners. Both are not true. Somehow that more complicated reality never got through to our public. I think the failure to put forward a positive view of our role in Europe, and the failure to take part in a debate on immigration and simply to leave that to the other side, were two of the reasons that the Remain side lost the referendum campaign.

One thing I would mention is about where we lived in Brussels. When I was there as Ambassador, the British Perm Rep's house was on Rue Ducale, which is in the old central area of Brussels, near the Palace, the equivalent of living in Belgrave Square, a few doors down from the American ambassador, next to the Swiss ambassador. That house, traditionally, since the Second World War, had been the house of the British bi-lateral ambassador to Belgium, until the 1990s. At that point there had been a coup which had been engineered by the then Europe minister, Tristan Garel Jones in the early 90s. He was coming very, very regularly to Brussels for Council meetings and negotiations and stayed in what was then the house of the British EU ambassador out in the southern suburbs of Brussels. It used to take him an hour, an hour and a half, to get in through the traffic in the morning. He

decided that was not fair on him and not fair on other ministers who were coming to the European Union meetings. So he effected something which was very unpopular with the British ambassador to Belgium of the day and his successors, but which was very popular with all ministers who were coming to European meetings. He did a swap and from the early 90s onwards that house in central Brussels was the house of the UK Permanent Representative, as it is today. So we lived about a mile away from the European Quarter of Brussels in an extraordinarily eccentric house.

CM: Nigel, we're starting again after a short break and you want to begin by talking about Iraq and Brussels.

NS: Just as a bridge between Brussels in 2003 and starting in No. 10 in the late summer of 2003. Of course, Brussels wasn't where the key decisions on Iraq were being made, but the divisions over Iraq were very apparent in Brussels and worried me a great deal. I think the important thing to remember in all this is that the UK wasn't isolated. It wasn't like a budget battle or an agriculture battle; it wasn't the rest of the EU, 14 against 1. The European Union was genuinely split down the middle, or actually in reality probably split into three camps. There was a significant, probably the most significant group, was in favour of supporting the Americans. I'm talking really about the period end of 2002 into 2003, because at that stage it was the UK with Italy, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Denmark, and lot of the central European countries and that was probably the largest single group. On the other side, opposing what the Americans were doing, and ultimately did, were France, Germany, Belgium, Greece. I don't know where Luxembourg was. It was a relatively small number of countries. There was a significant group of countries which were uneasy, but which withheld a firm opinion one way or another. I would include in that group Ireland - Ireland, with its very strong links with the United States, was reluctant to come out overtly against the war - and the Scandinavian countries like Sweden. I don't think those countries were opposed in the same way as France and Germany. They definitely weren't in the French and German camp, and I say this partly because of course the British media gave the impression at the time that it was a division against us, like a normal European battle. It really wasn't; it was a bit more complicated than that and it is worth making that clear.

The position changed over time. Spain in 2004 had a change of government and moved into the anti-camp, and so on. But at the point when the war was being prepared and in the

immediate aftermath of the invasion, in my time in Brussels, that was it. I worried about the way in which the divisions over this issue affected as it were the European balance of power. It undoubtedly made it more difficult for us because it showed the UK again as, when the chips were down, supporting America rather than trying to find a European consensus. A European consensus on that issue would have been enormously difficult to achieve, but it was another thing used in the rhetoric of Europe as showing a lack of British commitment to the fundamentals of European construction. So it was an interesting little, I wouldn't say vignette, as it was more than a vignette, at the end of my time in Brussels.

CM: Were there any direct effects? Did you feel it in any negotiations at that period leading up to the Iraq War?

NS: I think it affected the atmospherics which were becoming increasingly apparent in 2002, which really got going about the time of the invasion. I think that already affected the end of the enlargement negotiations. The relations between Blair and Chirac and Schroeder began to sour over this period. It probably started in 2002 as the trend of events started to become clearer. And it certainly cemented a sort of different reality in Europe, so the comfortable position that we had had in many respects was made more complicated. It didn't minoritize us instantly, but it was just a little bit more complicated after that.

One of the first things I did when I moved to No. 10 in the autumn of 2003 was working with Stephen Wall on a tri-lateral initiative around the subject of European Defence precisely to try, in the aftermath of the Iraq war, to re-cement the trio at the top of the European Union, working with France and Germany on those issues, so that division in the leadership of Europe didn't perpetuate itself. We were partially successful with that, but by then the personal relationships between Blair, Chirac and Schroeder were much more difficult.

Then you got into 2005 when, repeating what had happened in the 90s, Tony Blair blocked another Franco-German candidate for the head of the European Commission. This time it was Guy Verhofstadt and as a result of that Barroso became the Head of the Commission. That was done very, very much against the will of Schroeder and Chirac who were really fed up with Tony Blair over that ultimately successful manoeuvre.

CM: Nigel, there's another fascinating aspect of this period of your career, which is your time as head of News Department. I hope you would like to say something about working with

the media, how you handled some of the very difficult issues that came up. Then perhaps we could finally talk about the three foreign secretaries you worked with as Spokesman?

Head of News Department, FCO, 1995-98

NS: I started in News Department in January of '95 and I went through to July of '98 so I did a long, it felt like long, three and a half year stint, working, as you say, for three foreign secretaries. I was chosen by Douglas Hurd and ended up working for Robin Cook, with Malcolm Rifkind in the middle. We'll come back to them at the end.

I'd known Douglas Hurd first of all when he was a Foreign Office minister and then when he was Northern Ireland Secretary and Home Secretary - he visited Washington when I was in the Embassy there and I got to know him a bit as a result of those visits and saw him when I was back in the UK. It was while I was in Brussels, in my first job in Brussels, working in the political section there as Head of Chancery, that he asked me whether I would come back to London earlier than I had anticipated to be his Press Secretary, a job which was becoming vacant. That's how I started.

There are a few things to say about it. The first is that the Foreign Office tradition was different from the rest of Whitehall. The rest of Whitehall tended to have as their press secretaries, their Head of Press, people who were part of the Government Information Service. They were part of a cadre of press officers who performed these roles round Whitehall. The Foreign Office had always had the tradition of having someone who was a serving diplomat, a professional, doing the job, which had both pros and cons. The advantages of it were that you were more familiar perhaps with the subject matter, the substance of foreign policy, and could speak more authoritatively on that. On the other hand, you had no experience of dealing day by day, minute by minute with the media. You didn't know the tricks of the trade when you started; you didn't know many of the people. So certainly in dealing with the Lobby, the political journalists around Whitehall, those who did this in the Government Information Service would have known a lot of the people, had personal relationships with them, known the rules of the game. That wasn't the case when I started, and when my predecessors had started, in News Department. By and large, the team in News Department in those days were similarly career Diplomatic Service people. We did actually have a couple of people from the Government Information Service who came in during my time, which I thought was a good idea because it brought in people who were more versed in the techniques of handling the media, because, as in any trade, there are tools

of the trade which you need to know about. So that's the first thing. There was a difference between the FCO and elsewhere.

Second, I think we were in a very distinct phase in terms of the evolution of the media. We'd moved from a media very much based on structured time-sensitive journalism, where there were deadlines at the end of the day. We were moving into a world which was dominated still by the print media and by increasingly 24 hour television. It was the period just before the advent of digital media and minute by minute social media and the world that we have today. It was in a middle phase. We were in a phase when you would talk about the CNN factor, which had maybe emerged in the Gulf War in '91, so 24 hour news, a huge amount of attention on the big issues of the day, less attention on others: the media couldn't focus on everything. So we were in that middle phase really between the older world, a more predictable, structured world and the chaotic world we live in today.

Similarly with the people who covered us. We were in a transition, because traditionally in the past the Foreign Office had had essentially its own Lobby. It had had a series of rather powerful, sometimes quite grand, diplomatic editors who worked for each of the papers, came along to all the briefings, would travel reverently with the Foreign Secretary whenever he went on his travels. It was, I wouldn't exactly say a charmed circle, but it was a known group of people who you dealt with very regularly.

By the time I was doing it in the mid 90s, that was already fragmenting, as fewer and fewer newspapers had nominated diplomatic editors and more and more of the power in the media was moving from the specialists to the political lobby, to the people who covered Westminster who dipped into other issues as they popped up.

I'd say certainly now there are still some diplomatic editors around, but they tend not to be the really senior figures of old, of the 70s and 80s. Now it's still a good job, but it's often one which people would do on their way up in the print media system. I found myself having to deal with a lot of people, some who were still doing the diplomatic editor jobs. The broadsheets, all of them, still had such an appointment, but most of the other papers didn't. So you were mixing and matching, but increasingly getting to know the Lobby, who were more involved in covering foreign policy and diplomatic issues, getting to know columnists, the classic opinion formers, to make sure that they were aware of what we were doing. We had quite a structured programme in those days, with the Foreign Secretary, first Douglas

Hurd, then Malcolm Rifkind and Robin Cook, seeing people on a regular basis to try to make sure that everyone was plugged into the FCO.

If there's one lesson I learned - tried to learn anyway, I think you only do these things imperfectly - in dealing with the media over three and a half years, is that, particularly when you're dealing with international news, it's very, very difficult to predict what's going to be on your agenda day by day, because you're responding to events and sometimes with a very, very short and testing deadline in terms getting out our opinion of what was happening.

Even allowing for that, what we tried to do in the Press Office - and I suppose this was particularly as time went on, and particularly once a more demanding Labour government came in in '97 - was try at least to have some issues where you were as it were on the front foot, and trying to dictate your own agenda, so you were not totally at the mercy day by day of whatever events are on, reacting to whatever the media is trying to follow, whether they are doing it in a feral way or more in a more civilised way doesn't really matter. It's just the difference, trying to get a balance between an offensive agenda and a mainly defensive one. One has to be realistic: with foreign policy there's going to be a big reactive element. But it is important to have a Press Office which is trying to achieve things as well as defend.

I think in terms of tone, there's no doubt that we felt pretty hunkered down in the latter stages of the Major government. It was quite a difficult period for the government in Westminster. It was obvious that at the next election the government would struggle to get another majority. The issues that we were talking about were ones that were very problematic: it was the Beef War in Brussels, handling the Balkans or the Middle East. There weren't a lot of things where the UK and the rest of the international community were on the front foot. Handling the media was largely reactive and there wasn't a new way of handling things. The ministers themselves, who have to set the tone on this, because they're the ones who have to perform in front of the media - our tradition is never to allow officials to appear on the media themselves - were essentially happy with a more conventional way of doing things.

That changed when Blair and his fellow ministers came into power in '97, because they had a media style which was more thought through and aggressive. In Peter Mandelson you had a guru of media handling, vastly experienced in media handling, who had the job essentially at the head of Government Information Services from the Cabinet Office. I remember very

early on in the Labour government, May or June of '97, he gathered all the government's press officers together to tell us how it was going to be from then on, at a time when everyone was supposed to be a spin doctor, which was not really the way that I'd see the role, but you had to adapt to a different world. I suppose what was interesting was that many of the things which we were already doing in the Foreign Office at that stage, by the middle '97, were things which Labour people coming in had already decided was the way it had to go: to have a sense of an agenda that we were trying to promote and having some knowledge of the substance as well. These were quite helpful things with a new government coming in.

Slightly to my surprise I survived the changes, not only the change from Douglas Hurd to Malcolm Rifkind, but also the change to the Labour government in '97. I think I was one of relatively few Whitehall chief press officers who survived the transition, because most people were moved on. A lot of former journalists came in at that point as departmental spokespersons, as they were seen to be more attuned to the media and have more of a sense of trying proactively to get out the messages and the priorities of the new government as they came in. The personification of that was Alistair Campbell coming and taking over at No. 10. Civil servants had done that job between the time that Bernard Ingham left and '97 and round Whitehall there was a lot of churn in the press officer cadre.

In Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary, we had one of the most talented and most quick witted public performers of the day. He had become famous for his lightning reaction to the Scott Report on Arms to Iraq, when he'd absorbed the twenty volumes of the report in three seconds and produced a coruscating attack on the government in the House of Commons. He had been clearly a major figure in the Labour opposition in the 90s and with Gordon Brown and Blair was part of a sort of a loose and not entirely friendly triumvirate at the top of the Labour government as it formed in '97. He was very, very demanding as far as handling the media was concerned. That was his number one priority in opposition and coming into government getting the right messages across at the right time was absolutely fundamental to him. So I suppose at that stage the Press Office was exposed to new ministers more intimately and directly than most parts of the Foreign Office, because we had to spend more time with ministers, working out what they wanted to say and how they were going to say it and how to prioritise and sequence the different parts of their agenda in those months after their victory.

I remember that being quite a torrid, but quite a successful time, not least for the Foreign Office as an institution, because one of the things that ministers wanted to do - and very much what the PUS of the day, John Coles, wanted to do - was to use that moment to open up the Foreign Office a bit and get wider recognition of the role of the FCO. We had Open Days and all sorts of activities which were going in that direction. That was quite a successful period, late 90s, for getting a more positive media attitude for the FCO, away from cocktail parties and attacks on spending and the traditional stereotype of a Foreign Office official. I think we did make some impact on that, briefly and temporarily, as unfortunately it keeps coming back.

CM: Were there particular issues which were difficult to handle, leading to conflict with the media because of persistent reporting in an unsympathetic way?

NS: A few. The big issue when I arrived in '95 was clearly the Balkans, and it was Bosnia at that stage more than any other part of the Balkans, and we were approaching that period which was the pits really: Srebrenica and the massacres of Bosnian Muslims in the summer of that year. Douglas Hurd himself left in the summer of '95 and one of Malcolm Rifkind's first acts was to chair a big conference in London on Bosnia in the second half of '95. I remember that very well. It was an incredibly difficult period, to get across a sense of regaining the initiative after Srebrenica. Eventually that was the period when NATO airpower was finally used against Milosevic and it was the beginning of a period of success, leading to the Dayton Agreement at the end of '95. I think Malcolm Rifkind was quite energetic. Having come from the MOD, he knew the subject inside out and really brought a new energy to it. That was the issue I remember very clearly having to get used to in my first six months: being the Press Officer at a big international conference with a very sceptical media, a very harsh international backdrop with the most awful things happening on the ground as a policy which had plainly been struggling for some time. That's one example.

I mentioned earlier the period of '96 which was the Beef War, when we were on an airplane with Malcolm Rifkind, travelling round Europe with Douglas Hogg who was Agriculture Secretary, trying to put across our ideas on the Beef War against a very sceptical British and international media. The right of centre newspapers were sort of supporting the government, but it wasn't clear that what the government was doing was very successful, but they were certainly supporting it, taking a tough line. That was what ministers wanted to do and wanted to get our point of view across to. Over time, by the time the Labour government got in, we

were able reasonably quickly to negotiate a progressive lifting of the ban. But it was very tough. We weren't the only ones dealing with it, because obviously No. 10 was involved and Agriculture. But it was a big thing for us.

I think that the Robin Cook period, partly because the Press was out to get him and partly because of the difficulty of the issues, was extremely difficult. The Sandline issue, forgotten now. This was connections between the Foreign Office and a company that used mercenaries in Africa, I can't remember the details now, but that was quite awkward. He took a very firm line against it. That was regarded by some in the Office as disloyal to them, because he initiated an inquiry into what had been going on. That was one thing in his time, which affected the press handling for me as well.

The trip to India and Pakistan was when Robin Cook was accompanying the Queen on her visit there in '97 which was the fiftieth anniversary of Independence, a very, very big visit. It came immediately after the news of Robin Cook's affair and separation from his wife, which took place in August of '97. The tradition in those days was that when the Foreign Secretary went with the Queen on one of these visits that he didn't take a press person with him. I think that may have meant that less attention was being paid to the moment by moment handling of the media. The Press were out to get him and I didn't go on that trip; I was back here. One of the changes that was made after that was that a Press Officer did always accompany the Foreign Secretary on those visits, because when a storm gets going you need someone on the spot to try to douse things down. He got into trouble by saying something that was very forward on Kashmir when he was in Pakistan and that was then attacked by the Indian media and Indian government officials as the Queen and her party moved to India. That was really very difficult for Robin Cook and very difficult for our High Commission in Delhi as well. It was a bit of a diplomatic nightmare.

There are thousands of things going on when you are head of News Department. The fun of it is jumping from issue to issue. You can't do it if you are not prepared to work very, very closely with ministers. You see ministers up close and personal more than any other person apart from their private secretary.

CM: On that subject, you worked with three foreign secretaries in your three years in News Department. Can you compare and contrast? What were their attitudes to the press? How did they cope under press pressure?

NS: They were all very different personalities, and I would say by the time I was dealing with them, by the time I was Press Secretary and they were Foreign Secretary, they were extremely seasoned politicians, all of them. Douglas Hurd by that stage was literally at the end of his career, so I was his Press Secretary in his last six months as a Minister in '95. He had a clear way of handling the media, a clear position on European affairs and all the other big issues of the day, so it was really the end of a very settled period of handling the media. Because I had known him quite well for ten years at that point, I had always seen a more human side of Douglas Hurd than perhaps a lot of the Foreign Office had. But some in the Office thought he was rather formal, although he was very supportive of the FCO, having been a diplomat himself. He had some very good press connections, particularly with some of the grander figures on the press scene, and a pretty structured way of handling it. And he had very good special advisers who had been with him for a long time, who had their own connections with Parliament and with the media. It was very clear what Douglas Hurd believed and where he was positioning himself, particularly on the European issue.

Malcolm Rifkind, when he came in, was seen I think by many as a continuity figure on Europe, but in practice he positioned himself somewhere between the traditional Douglas Hurd position and the more Eurosceptic wing of the party. There was more conscious, careful positioning, some element of trimming, in his approach. Given that the party was the way it was, that was not entirely surprising. He was always much more sceptical about the Euro, not about Britain going in so much as whether the Euro could ever succeed. We were talking before about the inherent fragility of the Euro. He certainly believed that even in the 90s. I remember him giving an early interview on the Today programme when he said that very explicitly, that the euro was very unlikely to succeed, which surprised me because Douglas Hurd wouldn't have said that. He would have said something more neutral, I think, on that subject. All of them were very fluent and articulate in their own ways, but Malcolm had that extraordinary natural fluency and ability to improvise and speak on more or less any theme, which he has to this day. He regularly speaks without a note, and doesn't need a huge amount of preparation.

Robin Cook hadn't had a Cabinet position before and had been one of those who had held different positions in opposition for many, many years. He had been part of the Labour opposition all the way through that 18 year period of Conservative administration. He had a lot of experience of handling the media; he knew a lot of people; he'd been on a lot of

programmes. So all were incredibly experienced and knew what they were doing, but their styles were inevitably different. Robin, I suppose, more pugnacious than the others.

CM: And because of the break up of his marriage, he was perhaps more attacked for non-FCO reasons?

NS: Very much so. We had to handle that very carefully. I and the other professional members of the Press Office, the Foreign Office members of the Press Office, did not handle anything to do with his private life. That was handled by his special advisers who dealt directly with the media, as all special advisers do. That was a good thing. I didn't want to get involved in all of that. I think it probably made Robin Cook more cautious about the media, more defensive, sometimes angry with them, because they did intrude on his private life. There was a period when they were chasing him and his future wife, Gaynor, around quite a lot, and I think they felt very hounded by the media at different points in this saga, before he was divorced and he and Gaynor got married. There was maybe a bit of defensiveness which crept in at times, not something one couldn't understand because he was under a lot of personal and political pressure from the media at that stage. There was a lot of lampooning of him and mocking of him, during that period.

I think in those first few months it was difficult for him to move from opposition to government, to have to deal with this huge volume of paper, which he didn't like, made light of, and kept quoting the famous Ernest Bevin story about being given his first set of five red boxes overnight. The Private Secretary put a note in the box saying, 'Foreign Secretary, you might like to go through these overnight.' The boxes came back pretty much unlooked at the next morning with answer, 'A kind thought, but sadly erroneous.' Robin was always quoting that. He didn't want to be swamped by paper; he didn't want to be, what he saw as, captive of the machinery of the Foreign Office as an institution.

Actually, what happened over time, after all the personal difficulties he went through in the autumn of '97 and into '98 because of the break up of his marriage, was that he became in a way a more conventional Foreign Secretary, and put in more and more time on doing things that every senior Cabinet minister has got to do. That culminated, I think, in the sort of relationships he had with his opposite numbers which were very successful, with Madeleine Albright, with Joschka Fischer, Hubert Vedrine and all that generation of other foreign ministers. He had very good relationships with them and they genuinely liked him. But also

his input on the war in Kosovo in '99 was serious and thorough and thought through and based on a lot of elbow grease and sheer hard work, which in a crisis you need to do.

It's difficult to sum up the differences, but plainly they were very different characters and personalities and as I say, as Press Secretary you see them close up. You see people very early in the morning, very late at night. You trundle along at 7 o'clock in the morning to go through the papers with them before a Today programme interview. You see them in their pyjamas; you see their spouses and partners; you see their kids. You're stuck in the back of a radio car with them doing interviews. You're the first one to give them their review, and to know whether they really want a review or they would rather you just shut up.

I enjoyed it, although, as with everything with dealing with the media, not everything is deep and intellectual. A lot of it is about dealing with the moment, a lot of it is about common sense and with the very, very practical side of it. What I liked about it, ultimately, was also that in one way or another with press work you soon know how you're getting on. Very quickly. With a lot of what we do in foreign policy, it's quite nebulous and long term, and you feel that you're putting a lot in and it's not really obvious what's coming out. With the Press you'll know in a day or two, whether they're printing, either factually or with some analysis, the sort of things we were briefing them on. If you've got a big Foreign Office announcement one day of what the Foreign Secretary's going to spend his whole day doing, which might have a No. 10 element to it, or whatever, you want that on the front page of the newspapers and reported as favourably as possible. You can sort of measure that, whether it's happening or not. And if you're on the most prestigious slot on the Today programme and you run all the way through the day at the head of the BBC News, in a way which isn't an attack, you feel, OK, well that worked. That's what you try to do as a press team, to replicate that on an industrial scale, and work out how to get your story across in the best way.

You had to be a bit the grit in the oyster as well. In any big organisation it's a good thing when there are parts of the organisation which have a licence to dissent and to ask questions. In the Foreign Office, one bit of it that had that licence was the Planning Staff. Part of their job was to open things up and to say, What if? Or to say, Is that really right? and offer alternatives. I enjoyed that when I was in the Planning Staff in the 80s. The other bit of the Office which had that licence was the Press Office. A bit like with the Planning Staff, there was a duty on all parts of the Office to consult at an early stage of any

bit of policy formulation and you had to look at it from a different angle from the person writing the policy in the Balkans Department, or the Russian Department or the European Department or whatever it was. Your job was to try and give advice on how it would play, and what the problems were, and the opportunities. And ministers inevitably would want to produce something which would make an impact and which would be at worst manageable and at best successful for them. Sometimes the advice that came from the Press Office, it wouldn't always come from me personally, but it would come from the Press team, would be unpopular with other departments because it would be picking holes in what they were saying, one way or the other. Very often it was a case of our saying that you have to be open about things. If there's a problem with something, you are better off getting things out early, under your own terms and on your own initiative and on your own timing, than waiting for some horrible story to emerge and to have to be defensive later. That classic point was one that we regularly had to handle. But there were more complicated media handling issues which we obviously had to handle.

CM: Nigel, you highlighted the fact that in 1997 the incoming Labour government did make a change. One of the policies that the Labour government was interested in for the Civil Service was promoting diversity, to have more ethnic minorities and more women at higher levels. I wondered how successful they were and what difference it made to the Foreign Office itself.

NS: I think it was a factor and it certainly was an ambition of the Labour government. It wasn't *not* an ambition of Douglas Hurd or Malcolm Rifkind. They wouldn't have been in any way averse or unsupportive, but it wasn't something that they talked about a lot. It was a much bigger thing with the Labour ministers coming in to inject a programme of reform into the Foreign Office. Partly it was opening it up. I remember Robin Cook making a big splash with a story about his office. He wasn't terribly keen on this very grand office. There wasn't much he could do about it: that was the Foreign Secretary's office. There was this very ornate bookcase which had beautiful leather tomes in it. He took everything out of it and put in a lot of modern things, promoting modern Britain. That was making, he thought, a statement. As I said, opening up the Foreign Office, bringing in schools from more disadvantaged areas to look at the Foreign Office and having schemes for people being able to have secondments and some knowledge of it; open days; and the accent on greater diversity. These things are going to take time and I would have thought that in the first five years of the Labour administration there probably were more women in senior positions, as

ambassadors or in the FCO, but it wouldn't have been a huge change. Just as it isn't today. There are more women as senior ambassadors; we have a woman ambassador in China. We didn't have any women in a senior position in those days. We've got senior women as Directors General in the Foreign Office today, 2016, maybe one in the late 90s. We had had the setback in the 1990s of our most senior woman diplomat at that stage, Pauline Neville-Jones, leaving the Foreign Office because she wasn't appointed to the job that she wanted, and speaking very publicly and negatively of the Foreign Office as a result. I think that set back the public image. I think that was at the end of the Conservative administration.

CM: What about the long hours' culture? Did promoting women make a difference to this?

NS: I think it made some difference to it, but also social changes affect the Foreign Office too and a lot of that came from within families. People were just not prepared to do that as much as they were. I think it still exists in bits of the Foreign Office; I'm not sure that it has gone completely. But it was certainly around in big chunks of my life and in the UK Representation in Brussels. That wasn't our culture; that was the European culture and short of upping sticks and leaving your negotiating table, it's difficult to know how you deal with it. I think in the Foreign Office the truth is there has been a very gradual diversification and in many ways it's painfully slow. I found one of the rewarding things about working in UKRep and working in No. 10 was that gender and broader diversity was much more apparent in those settings than in the case of the Diplomatic Service. I'm hoping that the Foreign Office of today will take several steps further. One issue was always how many women would stay on if they married and had children, and that's where people tended to drop out. I think there is now more of a sense of people having career paths that make that possible, and people either keeping going, or returning to the Office, because the policies are more sophisticated than before and because also there are wider range of jobs for people to go to. And people work in different ways now. There have been so many cases in the last twenty years of Foreign Office couples, for example, of the women carrying on and the men taking a back seat for a while. So I think it has evened itself out rather better, but if you look at the profile of the organisation, the numbers are still going to be pretty small, small compared with the Home Civil Service, even though there is quite a long way to go there as well.

CM: This is a recording for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning interviewing Sir Nigel Sheinwald on 10 January 2017.

Nigel, we've come to our last session and we have some big events ahead of us. We're going to start in 2003 when you moved from being the UK Permanent Representative to the EU and came to No. 10 to be the Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, who was Mr Blair. This was a very dramatic moment because the war in Iraq had already started when you arrived. Would you like to take it from there?

NS: It's worth maybe just pausing on that moment because you're absolutely right I started in August of 2003. I had been appointed to the job at the beginning of 2003, so I had known from before the actual conflict in Iraq that I was going to be doing the job. I started briefing myself, and using some of the Defence people in NATO to give me regular briefings on the conflict as it unfolded in the spring and summer of that year. By the time I started in No. 10 in many ways the die had been cast. So I started with the main job of working out in Whitehall how to handle the post-conflict mess that we found ourselves in. It was a very different situation from the one that my predecessor, David Manning, encountered, where you were in the process of moving from 9/11 through the various stages of the pre-Iraq process. It was, perhaps, less politically fraught, superficially certainly less contentious, because at that stage everyone should have been thinking about the welfare of Iraq and trying to make things better, but of course we suffered all the way through from the fall-out from the war, both internationally and in terms of the political, security and economic situation in Iraq. I took over just as the, I would say, severity of the security situation became apparent. I took over I think a week or two weeks after the assassination of the UN Representative, de Mello, just after one of the first attacks on a major shrine in Najaf in August of 03. I started just at the time that we started to see things slipping beyond our control on the security side. A very difficult moment.

Shall I say a word or two about general impressions of No. 10? Even coming from UKRep, where you dealt with quite a wide range of issues, including quite a lot of foreign policy and security, it was, of course, a very, very steep learning curve. Although I was familiar with the big issues, particularly from a European policy perspective, of course, there were many angles to them on the defence and intelligence side which weren't part of life in the EU side of Brussels, and of course the breadth of what you had to deal with in No. 10, for whoever is doing those jobs in No. 10, is what strikes you immediately. In my first few months Iraq was

obviously the dominant issue, but in addition to Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya where we were at that stage preparing for the announcement that was made at the end of 2003 by Gaddafi of the renunciation of weapons of mass destruction. There was a huge amount of preparation for that in the summer and autumn of 2003 which my predecessor had started. There was a lot of work on Europe and European defence. One of the corollaries of the Iraq conflict had been the divisions between the major European powers, principally between the UK on the one side and France and Germany on the other. We had an initiative in the autumn of 2003 to try to, in a very uneasy way, re-cement relationships between those three, with a tri-lateral summit, involving the Prime Minister, the French President and the German Chancellor, and an initiative to try to get European defence back on track again, after the fragmentation over the Iraq period. I was very much involved in that and a lot of shuttle diplomacy back to Paris and Berlin, with Stephen Wall, the European Union Adviser to the Prime Minister at that stage. We also started in that autumn to prepare for the Presidency of the G8 which the UK was going to assume in 2005. We started thinking about it then, and that meant getting up to speed on issues like climate change and development and money for Africa and AIDS, some of which I was familiar with and other parts of which you had to get stuck in to from the start. I think for anyone starting in that sort of job at the centre of government, however broad their previous experience, you're hit by the number of things you have to deal with at once. That was I think my first impression.

Iraq was the preoccupying issue. It was an issue of huge political moment for the Prime Minister, for Cabinet, it was the number one foreign policy issue for a long time, not really all the way through, but certainly for those first couple of years in No. 10, it dominated our agenda completely. I think it was already apparent in the autumn of 2003 that we found it difficult, and I would say that in the end we found it impossible to catch up. It always felt as though the security situation was spinning out of control ahead of us and whatever efforts we made to improve our intelligence, to improve our coordination, to reorient our political effort, whatever it was, it never seemed enough to regain the initiative and regain political and security control. There were moments when that got better or got worse over the four year period that I was in No. 10, but I would say that feeling that we all had in the autumn of 2003 that we were dealing with a fundamentally different security situation from maybe what had been expected in advance. That I think never left us. The Americans at that stage, the Administration, the President, had a much rosier picture of what was going on in Iraq than the UK did. That perception gap narrowed over the years, but it narrowed incredibly slowly and

one of the problems we always had working as a coalition was being a junior partner in a coalition which was still suffused by a high degree of optimism about the situation in Iraq, which was in the end completely defied by the facts. But it took a long time for the realities to sink in, given that particularly the Vice President and the Defense Secretary at the time, running through to 2006, were committed to a rosy view and were not prepared to see how badly things were going.

I am quite fatalistic about it now when I look back on it. I think that whenever Saddam had been toppled, however he'd been toppled, if we hadn't gone in, it would have happened at some point, I think there would have been a huge amount of violence in Iraq and a period of uncertainty, turbulence in every way. But I suspect, I can't tell, but I suspect that it would have been less severe than with foreign occupation, and after the conflict, some of the mistakes that were made by the occupying powers in those early months. I think the conflict and the occupation made it worse. But I don't think it was completely avoidable in any situation in which Saddam was toppled, which he would have been at some point. Some of the decisions that were made were plainly mistakes – the most obvious one being the early decision on de-Ba'athification, the lack of any political outreach to the Sunni community, which the UK pushed but which the Americans were very slow to realise the importance of. They came round in the end, because by the time President Bush realised how seriously things had disintegrated in Iraq, so by the end of 2005 into 2006, particularly after the mid-term elections in 2006, by that stage he was prepared to look for a fundamentally different policy and the policy when it came in the so-called Surge, led by Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus, had at its core an outreach policy particularly to the Sunnis, also to some degree to the Shia which was a very real echo of the sort of things the UK had been saying since the autumn of 2003, but the Americans didn't put their weight behind these things until relatively late in the process. So this sense of always playing catch-up and never quite succeeding in playing catch-up, however much we improved our operation on the ground, that was one description, maybe a superficial one, of those few years.

The other side of it was dealing with Whitehall and dealing with allies. Dealing with Whitehall was in some senses easier than in the pre-conflict situation because Clare Short and Robin Cook had both resigned from government. Ministers were not divided on the fundamental issue of whether we should be going to war in Iraq; it had happened. The issue was how we handled the aftermath, and that wasn't itself particularly controversial. The issue really for me was more of which ministers were really committed to this and were

putting their own effort and resources in demanding that from their ministries. I think that was very, very patchy in the period afterwards. It was the number one on the Prime Minister's agenda; I'm not sure that was shared across Whitehall. They weren't in a Churchillian, 'action this day' frame of mind. That was still the frame of mind in No. 10, with the Prime Minister and his core team there. There was a certain amount of fatigue around Whitehall, which grew as time went on. For those of us working at the centre and trying to coordinate and galvanise things effectively, that was obviously quite dispiriting. That isn't to say that there weren't comparative successes. I wouldn't say absolute successes because we have to judge success by the way we left Iraq and the situation today, but there were relative successes. The UK was given quite a lot of latitude by the US in terms of the international handling of Iraq and we did, over time, manage to get the international community back on board to a large extent, as people became invested in the future success of Iraq and saw the strategic threat to the region arising from an unstable Iraq. So getting the French and Germans slowly to get back involved, to support political initiatives, regional initiatives and so on was very hard, but that was what we tried to do, to get UN authority for what we were doing, to get the Americans to realise that they had to surrender control first in a legal and formal way and then gradually in a real way, to give the Iraqis the sense of empowerment and control over their armed forces and their economic decisions and so on. I'm compressing a number of years into brief comments. That was something where the UK did have a positive influence on American and allied policy. From the start, from the summer/autumn of '03, we had a particular role in relation to Sunni outreach. Jeremy Greenstock's deputy at that stage, David Richmond, was an Arabist and was given that role within the coalition authority under Jerry Bremmer. He began that process. It was tough and counter-intuitive for the Americans at that stage to put their eggs in that basket, because there wasn't much sympathy for reaching out to the Sunnis who were causing a huge amount of harm, damage, violence across the country. But it needed to be part of the strategy and very, very gradually it got embedded with the senior generals who came on the American side. Ultimately the arch-priest really of that policy was Petraeus himself.

So that was a few words on Iraq and maybe it's worth mentioning two other sides to the job: one side in relation to Iraq and to other trouble spots in the world was that, as the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser, it was expected that you would get involved personally in a role as emissary, as negotiator, as contact point, in a lot of very, very difficult

environments. Over my four years at No. 10, I spent a lot of time in Iraq, spent some time dealing secretly and confidentially with some of the Sunni politicians close to the insurgency, had a series of meetings with them to encourage them to get involved in the political process and to discourage others from continuing the violence. That at that stage for a time had an impact. I was also involved with meetings with President Assad in Syria, with negotiations when our hostages were taken, our naval hostages were taken in Iran in 2007. You get involved when you're working in that type of job in No. 10 as part of the UK team engaged in negotiation and applying political pressure in difficult situations. That would be another part of the job, particularly in relation to the Middle East, and particularly with Libya.

Libya was a cooperative effort between our intelligence community, No. 10, the Foreign Office and other parts of Whitehall. The idea was to persuade Gaddafi to give up his nuclear and chemical weapons. The idea came from a number of sources, not least from Gaddafi himself, but that was before my time. In my predecessor's time there was – I am not quite sure which way round it was – but I believe at least in the early stages, there was a contact made on Gaddafi's part, seeing what was going on in Iraq, not wanting to be the next country invaded, to see whether some accommodation could be reached. Negotiation was conducted with Gaddafi and his team, if that's the right word, which led to his announcement in December 2003, that he was renouncing his weapons. I wasn't involved at that stage directly in the negotiations with the Libyans, at least not until the very, very latter stages of it. In the aftermath of the decision I was involved pretty much constantly all the way through the rest of my time in No. 10, in being one of the link people with Gaddafi and his family and with his officials to try to handle the aftermath of the decision and try to construct a different relationship between Libya and the Western world. The reason he went into this was that he was told that if you give up these weapons we will help you to get into the main stream and help you to build a defensive strategy which will leave you no worse off in relation to threats which you may perceive to be around you. That was the obligation we had on our side, to work very closely with them. I don't know how many visits I made. Tony Blair made two visits to Libya in his time as Prime Minister, both of which I was involved with and prepared and I made a number of other visits separately with colleagues from No. 10 to try to keep the relationship ticking along in the right way and ultimately the result was ... We now know what the result was. I think you can say two or three things. Number one: think how much worse it would have been to have Libya disintegrating after a popular revolution in possession of a large cache of nuclear and chemical weapons, so it was a great thing for us to

have persuaded him to give them up and to remove them, which is what the Americans and we did in 2004. That amounts to an enormous vindication of the initiative in 2003. But what we didn't succeed in doing was bringing Libya into the mainstream, and the main reason for that, in very broad brush terms, was the reluctance of Gaddafi to reform and to change his system and his inability, once the revolution in Libya began, to do anything than double down on violence and repression. He therefore put himself beyond the pale and created the terrible confrontation which ended in his own assassination. Not an outcome we could have foreseen in 2003, but I think from a western point of view, very important to have taken his weapons of mass destruction out of the equation. Dealing with this difficult range of mainly Middle-Eastern actors, often people without democratic credentials with a lot of blood on their hands, was part of the job.

CM: Did you meet Gaddafi personally? What were your impressions of him?

NS: I think that when he was dealing with the UK, with our Prime Minister, with me, with other officials, I think that maybe we saw the more rational side of Gaddafi. I am not saying it was a perfectly rational side, and meetings always had their exotic moments, but I think it was obvious what he was doing in his own way, in a very tentative way, trying to move towards the west with a very large amount of intellectual and other baggage, his view of the world was eccentric, his sources of information were probably very narrow and partial, you weren't dealing with someone who was basing their opinions and judgments on the same set of factors as most leaders in the West. He expressed himself always in terms that surprised you. They weren't the conventional way that we would judge things. But in his own terms there was a certain logic in what he was doing. I felt during that three or four years, things were moving very, very slowly and broadly in the right direction. But plainly the verdict of history will be that when tested, in 2011, he was not the only tyrant who was totally overwhelmed by the situation and unable to cope except through violence.

CM: Could you assess how far he wanted to change because he wanted to support his personal control and security and how far because he thought it was good for Libya as a whole? Or did he conflate the two?

NS: I would think he conflated the two completely. Of course, his family and the differences between his children and in particular whether Saif al Gaddafi, one of his sons, who lived in London part of the time and was by Libyan standards a reformer and pro-Western reformer, whether he would clearly be his successor and whether he would win the internal arguments

over the direction of Libya economically and politically. That waxed and waned in the time that I was in No. 10, but ultimately I don't think it was clear that the reform party, the reform wing of the Libyan state was winning those arguments, because there were a lot of people around, going back to the Revolution itself, among Gaddafi's kitchen cabinet, who were still there and wanted to pursue very, very narrow and conservative and repressive policies. So that debate was being played out the whole time. I think Gaddafi would have seen the two things as inextricably linked. He would have seen the future of Libya and his personal and his family's future as linked. One could in theory imagine circumstances in which it could have been handled differently and peacefully and by transitions and those sorts of things, but that is very, very tough when you have no background in democracy or in modern methods of winning and then using popular consent. It's very difficult to move from a situation in which those levers are not used in the normal run of things to a situation in which you're suddenly confronted with the need to make very, very big and existential decisions.

CM: There's no record of a country making that transition at least in the Middle East.

NS: We'll have to see what happens in Iran. That would be another potential test if the Rouhani faction in Iran, over a period of time, if he wins his re-election this year, if that leads to a broader, less clerically dominated democracy. It is a form of democracy; it's just a partial one. In the Iranian electoral system, there is no doubt some rigging of results, but there are also elements of free expression, sometimes very open debate and expression. Their media is both controlled and open in different ways and at different times.

Now I was going to go on to say that another important part of the No 10 job, taking up a great deal of time, and it would be the same now with the National Security Adviser, you are the point of contact with people doing the equivalent job in other governments. In terms of importance and of regularity of contact, first of all, of course, the White House, the National Security Adviser in the White House, that was Condi Rice for my first year and a half at No. 10 and then Steve Hadley her deputy, became the National Security Adviser after Bush's re-election in 2004. I knew him from when he was the Deputy, so that was an easy transition for me. So that was incredibly important. The intensity and intimacy of the relationship between the British Foreign Policy Adviser and the National Security Adviser in America had increased enormously post-9/11 under David Manning. I kept that going as best I could after I started, but of course, as time went on, the intensity reduced as we got further away from the conflict itself. The issues became a little bit more settled and clearer, but there was

still, by comparison with any period in the past or any period over the past few years, there was an extraordinary intensity of contact between the two offices. At the top level in my time at No. 10 there was on average a video conference or a phone call, video conference being the preferred medium, a video conference between Prime Minister and President Bush, about every fortnight, which is a remarkable strike rate, which I don't think has continued under any of Tony Blair's successors. It was partly a function of the post-9/11, post-Iraq atmospherics, partly a question of taste and desire for contact on President Bush's part and the UK Prime Minister's part. Of course, contact alone doesn't prove that you're winning the argument, but it gives you the opportunity to what George Bush would call 'co-strategize'. That's what he thought of his sessions with Blair. His advisers used to roll their eyes sometimes at these video conferences, which would sometimes go on for an hour or longer. It was just a chance for these two leaders to run through their way of handling things, their way of thinking about things. I think George Bush found that very, very useful. He could get some of that from his own team, but I think Blair gave him an added dimension of advice and debate and dialogue, which he wasn't getting internally.

The White House was a hugely important, I won't say target because that makes it sound too aggressive, but it is a very, very important relationship for No. 10 and the Cabinet Office to maintain. That was done at my level; it was done through others in No. 10 working with others in the National Security Council and in the Cabinet Office as well. That was important, but not just with the White House, but with presidential advisers, prime ministers' advisers, in a number of other countries: obviously, the main European countries, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and a number of others, most of the EU countries I would have known and had regular contact with their Foreign Policy Advisers or Diplomatic Counsellors. And then a number of other countries were important, too. Probably the most important and most personally friendly was with a succession of Indian National Security Advisers. Again that was an initiative started by my predecessor at the time of real potential danger and conflict in India-Pakistan relations. There had been a great deal of diplomatic activity involving India, Pakistan, the UK and US. The US government was in close touch with the India and Pakistan governments. We too kept in touch with the Americans through the period I was in No 10 and encouraged the Americans and the Indians themselves to move into this negotiation on India's nuclear programme and enabling them to move faster on their civil nuclear programme, lifting some of the sanctions which had been imposed after the tests in the late '90s. That was a huge initiative which turned out to be a US-Indian initiative. But

there was a great deal of backing for it from London and we also involved the French at that stage. It was very much an international activity behind the scenes, as a result of which I got to know my three National Security Adviser colleagues on the Indian side very well, particularly the last of them, M. K. Narayanan, whom I still see to this day, although he's, I think, twenty years older than me. Whenever the Prime Minister would go to a country, you'd always make a bee-line for the person doing an equivalent job, so Brazil or Indonesia, or whatever it was, there's usually someone performing that national security adviser/foreign policy adviser role whom it was my job to link up with.

CM: Did you find that in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion there were constraints or because of all your links to European countries, your relations were good?

NS: I think there was a lot of tension and strain with the offices of the French and German leaders at that stage, but I think it did help that I had been in Brussels for three years, I was known to be part of the European cadre in our government and I think it helped that deep down the other leaders realised that Tony Blair was a pro-European leader. British, so he wasn't going to be a federalist, or go overboard on Europe, but he was very, very committed to the UK playing a full role in the European Union and not just on the economic issues, but on the foreign policy and security issues as well, which is why, as I say, we had this initiative on European Defence in the autumn of 2003 which continued and which found its way ultimately into the Lisbon Treaty. I think it helped that I knew people from my previous European roles in the German Chancellery and in the Elysée and in the Matignon. I'd known those people in that phase of my career and personally put a lot of effort into trying to move into a more cooperative relationship. Gradually, that happened. There's no doubt it was easier once Angela Merkel took over from Schroeder in 2005. I think that was a critical moment, not least because the team around her was unaffected by the deep divisions over both Iraq and European policy which had turned the rather close relationship between Schroeder and Blair in the late '90s into a poisonous one over the period that I was working for the Prime Minister. I might say in a way that the Blair-Schroeder relationship was poorer at that stage than his relationship with Chirac which maybe would surprise people. But it felt to me, because it had been more of a family relationship to begin with on the centre-left of politics, that when it all went wrong over Iraq and a number of European issues as well, it was very bitter between them. That was another very, very important part of the job.

Lastly, maybe a word about No. 10 and the role. There was some criticism in the UK when Tony Blair decided in 2001 to create the role of a foreign policy adviser and to give that role initially to David Manning, a more senior role than had been the case previously in No. 10 and to bring together the roles in No. 10 and the Cabinet Office to provide a single source of advice to him on foreign, defence and security policy. I suppose the criticism had been that it was part of the Blair sofa diplomacy way of conducting government, that it was more of a personalisation of the advice that he was receiving and, certainly for some former civil servants who were quite purist in their approach to government structures, it was an innovation that they didn't like. I believed then and I still believe now, that that was a misunderstanding and the criticism was quite fundamentally wrong. It would have been fair if Blair had appointed not David Manning and me and our successors, from the civil service, from the public service, but people from the Labour Party or academics that he particularly liked. But we were people who brought to the job decades of experience within government; we were loyal to government not to the Labour Party or to Tony Blair personally. I certainly saw it as my job to ensure that the best advice from around Whitehall was given to the Prime Minister in an honest and direct way. I think this was a way of achieving that and avoiding actually a sense of the Prime Minister getting one set of advice from his personal, political team and another set of advice from the Foreign Office or from officials. It was a way of bringing everything together in a more coordinated approach.

CM: How did you handle being Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat?

NS: I had exactly the same structure as was set up in 2001 with David Manning. So I was concurrently the Foreign Policy and Defence Adviser to the Prime Minister and the Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat. It was the majority of the job which is now the National Security Adviser post. The difference being that I didn't have a direct role on domestic security and on international security, which both David and I were involved in, that was a shared responsibility with the Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office. Now of course it's all handled under the role of the National Security Adviser in the Cabinet Office.

CM: And did things work well for you?

NS: I think things worked pretty well. I think there was still a feeling in the Foreign Office that over a period of time (and this probably goes back to the period before 9/11) more and more foreign policy decision making was coming out of No. 10 and that the team in No. 10

was a strong one and certainly after 9/11, a great deal of the activity was generated from within No. 10, from the Prime Minister, from David Manning, from others in the Cabinet Office and the team there. To my mind that was inevitable, too. With a Prime Minister who is experienced and has been through a series of foreign policy tests in the way that Tony Blair had by 2003, who was in his second term, I think it is inevitable that after six years plus of being Prime Minister, there will be greater confidence about the international role. After 9/11 in any event, events had conspired to catapult Blair into a position of huge international prominence. To some degree he already had that in Europe and internationally after '97, but *a fortiori* after 9/11. So I think to the extent that there was a grievance about that it was probably a misunderstanding of what would have been a reality anyway. But there's no doubt that 9/11 itself was a catalyst for consolidating the central running of foreign policy which would have been in most governments, when you're presented with a threat and with a sudden change of that kind, that is what I would guess happened in most countries that were intimately involved.

CM: Was the OD Secretariat basically run by your deputy, because your work load must have been enormous?

NS: I regarded myself as Head of the Secretariat. I had, as David Manning had, a very senior deputy secretary, director general level deputy, who handled a lot of the process side of running a Secretariat and supporting Cabinet committees and everything else. I always tried to divide the work in a way that befitted having a very senior official working with you. I certainly regarded myself as the Head of the Secretariat but I was delighted that there was someone to take some of the strain. Certainly in the early period I really would say that in terms of the division of responsibility I did more on Iraq and the Deputy Head of the Secretariat did more on Afghanistan and we divided it in that way. That obviously changed as Afghanistan became a bigger priority for the UK later in Blair's premiership.

CM: One of the roles of the Heads of the Secretariats in the Cabinet Office is taking Cabinet minutes. Was that one of your jobs?

NS: Sometimes. My recollection is that it was mostly done by my Deputy, by Desmond Bowen and then by Margaret Aldred. I sat in on every Cabinet Meeting that I was around for.

CM: Are there any comments you can make about how far Cabinet government was still alive in that period?

NS: It was. A couple of things to say about this: in my period, the period that I saw, 2003 to 2007, four years of the Blair premiership, of course, having a relatively young Prime Minister means that there is a bit less formality in what is still a very formal system. But it didn't mean that meetings were unminuted; it didn't mean that the wrong people were in the room; it didn't mean that the Prime Minister wasn't being advised by other ministers and top officials, defence advisers. Exactly the opposite, and certainly throughout my time, and as far as I know certainly the period before, the correct civil service procedures were adopted all the way through, as we see from Chilcot. The reason that you've got millions of documents in Chilcot was because they were written and it's possible to chart exactly what happened in No. 10 simply because everything was recorded and done according to the correct civil service standards. I think that most Prime Ministers in situations where there is a war, or where there is a big security threat, tend to use both Cabinet and smaller committees. Certainly that was the case during the Falklands War; there was a Falklands War Cabinet. Going back to war time, the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, there were many ministers who worked very closely with the Prime Minister on specific things and that was certainly the case in the Blair period. But one of the other things that was going on in 2003, when I took over, was that in the aftermath of the 2001 election and criticism of sofa government and everything else and with the new agenda on public service reform which Blair advertised as his number one priority for the second term, there was actually a bit of a resurgence of effort at the more formal side of Cabinet government, with more Cabinet sub-committees, more being pushed through Cabinet, and certainly on the foreign policy side we had the full set of meetings and everything in Cabinet and in Cabinet sub-committees all the way through. It's for other people to comment on where the real decisions were made. I felt they were made ultimately, when there was a big decision for Cabinet like going into Helmand in Afghanistan, or not, in 2006, that was a Cabinet decision, plainly and was set up in that way, and very differently from the way it was possible to handle that in the period leading up to the Iraq conflict.

CM: There was a vote in Parliament over going into Iraq.

NS: There was. There wasn't a vote in Parliament, but there would have been parliamentary debates over going into Helmand in 2006. Cabinet is important because that is where the

formal decisions are made and where you get a broader degree of backing for controversial policies - the full range of ministers taking collective political responsibility. I think that a Prime Minister's views are also affected by his meetings with individual ministers, but also by talking to his generals, his intelligence chiefs, his senior policy advisers which Tony Blair liked to do and I think was assiduous in having really regular, sometimes punishing, meetings, scheduled meetings, to keep himself up to date and to make sure that he was getting the most up to date advice from people who knew the situation on the ground in Iraq or wherever he happened to be. That was his style; it wasn't sofa government; it wasn't loose or informal or whatever. But I think he felt that there was a time for him to talk to his ministerial colleagues and certainly that there was a need for Cabinet on big decisions and big debates, but he also wanted the chance to sit down with the people who knew the stuff inside out and whose job it was to know the stuff inside out and meet them on a direct and personal basis. I don't think there's anything wrong with that and I'd be amazed if it had changed.

CM: Now, very important, we come to the G8. Was it the G8 by then or the G7?

NS: It had become the G8 and of course it is now back to the G7 because of the Ukraine and everything else. It was the G8. It was interesting because Blair was criticised throughout this period for being the poodle of America and having too collusive a relationship with George Bush, but he actually chose as the twin big agenda items of his G8 Presidency, he chose two issues which were very problematic from the American point of view. First of all, to try and build, after the American decision to back out of Kyoto, to try and build a new international consensus on climate change, number one, which was directed very much at the heart of the American Administration and, number two, to try and raise international aid-giving particularly to Africa, but more generally, increasing development budgets round the rich world. Again, not directed solely at America, but America very much in his view. On the second of those, it turned out to be much easier to persuade Bush, because it turned out that there was a constituency within the White House and on the right of American politics which was incredibly generous on AIDS and other development and health issues. Bush actually pushed American policy in a direction of very, very much greater structure and generosity on those issues than had been seen before, even under Clinton.

CM: Under Bush America gave more money to Africa than ever before. I don't know whether it was maintained.

NS: Yes, so I think Blair had a role in that. We worked very closely with a coalition of people in the States to put pressure on the Administration and others. As I say, we found that there were people in the White House we hadn't really associated with this agenda who were very, very well attuned to it. One person I'd mention is Michael Gerson, the President's speech writer at the time, very close to President Bush, very much involved in the Bush White House, who became an absolutely passionate advocate for generosity towards Africa and an expansive American programme on disease control and everything else. I think that side of it worked. There was a lot of negotiation, pushing and pulling, not just with America but with the other countries. I can't remember the details now but we got a very, very large number and a very big commitment out of the Gleneagles Summit, in July of '05.

It was much more difficult on climate change. But I personally believe that Bush sensed that he had gone too far on climate change. I think that although he never fundamentally changed his position, he saw that in his very hard opposition to action on climate change, which he had expressed immediately after his election in 2001 and had expressed in his first meetings with European leaders in the summer of 2001, he realised that he had gone too far; that there was need for greater international cooperation on this. He wanted two things which I think our presidency of the G8 introduced into the equation more. First of all, a more technology-led approach, realising that you needed to put a lot of money into research, into new technologies, into what we're now talking about perfectly normally and automatically, issues like wind power and battery cars and so on, which were very much in their infancy in those days. So he was very much in favour of a market-led, technology-led element in policy. In terms of international cooperation, his reserve was that the Americans should not be expected to do things that China and India and the emerging economies were not prepared to do. So what you saw beginning ten years ago, in the run up to our Presidency of the G8, was starting to involve China, India and the other BRIC countries in this process. So what we did in Gleneagles for the first time was have this G8 + 5 format, where we brought in India, China, South Africa, Brazil and we actually brought in Mexico as well, so that they could actually be part of it. Russia was part of it already. It was uneasy to begin with, because they were half in and half out and they didn't like that second-class status, but it led ultimately to the decision made in the midst of the financial crisis to move to a G20 for economic discussions. It was the beginning of bringing China and India in particular into the room and making clear that they had to be part of the deal and the arrangements and the old way of focussing only on the OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and

Development) countries just wouldn't work. Ultimately we see that it takes a long time for these things to come to fruition, but if you look at Paris, the structure of the Paris Agreement, I think you can see the seeds of that in the middle of the noughties, as we confronted this problem area in American policy.

Of course, no one remembers Gleneagles for any of that. What you remember it for was that on the first morning we had the news of the bombs in London. My recollection is, I'm sure it'll be in lots of memoirs, my recollection is that we were just finishing off a bi-lateral meeting, either with the Chinese President or President Bush, I think it was the Chinese President, when word first came through that something had happened, on the tube this was. Initially, it wasn't clear what it was, but as the minutes passed, it became clearer. There were lots of phone calls going back to the Cabinet Office and Home Office and so on, so it became clear that it was a series of terrorist incidents. I was one of those who went back with the Prime Minister to London in the middle of that day, took part in a series of meetings and then we got back to Gleneagles that evening. The Prime Minister's Sherpa for the G8, Sherpa for the meeting, Michael Jay, now Lord Jay, had taken over the chair in the Prime Minister's absence and rather remarkably had chaired the dinner with George Bush and everyone else. So I think that's one of the highlights of Michael Jay's career, being in charge of this group of world leaders for about eight hours. We managed. Because of Blair's quite remarkable speaking skills and presence, the messages which came out of Gleneagles were messages of international solidarity and absolute clarity about not being deterred by this. We didn't call off the meeting; we carried on with the meeting. It had the same substantive outcome, but of course, fused into the outcome, was this determination to deal with yet another wave of international terrorism. We got a lot of support from the other leaders who were present there and were able to express their support for the UK in that awful, awful moment.

It's just one of those laws of life and laws of politics that at the moment when things seem to be going well, we suffered a national tragedy. We'd just won the Olympics. I had been with the Prime Minister in Singapore. We'd come back to Scotland, we'd heard that London had been chosen for the Olympics. That was an amazing achievement for London, but also for the Prime Minister without whose negotiating skills we definitely wouldn't have got it, because it was his pressure on members of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and negotiations with them that sealed it in a very narrow race. We knew that we were going to get a good outcome on aid and a reasonable outcome on climate, but of course, it felt very

different the moment this terrible thing happened. To this day I don't know whether it was deliberately timed to coincide with the G8 Summit. I can't imagine it would have been material to the plotters. In any event the determination was not to allow everything that had gone into the Summit to be frittered away, because of this terrible attack. But it changed the Summit fundamentally for everyone involved.

Final word about the atmospherics in No. 10. I really enjoyed working in No. 10. It's very buzzy, action-oriented, brain-storming atmosphere. There is an element of greater informality about it, because it is smaller. In my time it wasn't a place riven in any sense by personal rivalries. The relationships between the civil service advisers, like myself, and the political advisers to the Prime Minister, they were all fluent and sensibly managed and of course there are big egos in any centre of government, but I myself didn't see that in the No. 10 I worked in. I give particular credit to Jonathan Powell, who was the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, who I thought played a remarkable role of being the coordinator of the No. 10 machine and all the different successors that Jonathan has had doing versions of that role in No. 10 since in the three prime ministers we've had since then, I don't think have performed the role as capably as Jonathan did, a very difficult role, covering such an enormous water front. I think he helped the Prime Minister to make No. 10 work well. For all the criticisms of Blair for sofa government and being too informal, the reality was that he was an incredibly hard worker and one of my abiding memories of No. 10 is whatever I was doing at the weekend, always, almost every weekend, by the end of Sunday afternoon, you would start getting things back from the weekend box and the Prime Minister. You'd start seeing things coming back from the Garden Room, the Prime Minister's comments on this or that, or one of his weekend epistles to his senior team, saying what his worries were, what he saw as the big issues for the next week, or the next six months or whatever. This was a Prime Minister who, whether he was at No. 10 or Chequers, worked incredibly hard and gave a very great sense of direction and purpose to the team and the ministerial team beyond. I am sure that took its toll, not least given the political pressures on him. He was a good boss to work for as far as I and my civil service team were concerned. He gave us a lot of his time and whenever we needed to see him we always managed to get in. That to me was the advantage of actually sitting on the No. 10 real estate. It's different now. The National Security Adviser sits in the Cabinet Office. I think that's a mistake. I think that location does matter and it is helpful to be right on the spot and to be part of those informal, as well as formal, interactions between the Prime Minister and his or her top team, very early, being part of the No. 10 morning

rituals. It is very important to ensure, from my perspective, that your stuff is front and centre on the Prime Minister's desk. There are a thousand other distractions, but making sure that quality time is given to the international agenda - with Blair, given the importance of that to him in terms of his political fortunes, it was never going to be anything other than his intention - but of course that's always the requirement.

CM: We are starting the recording again after a short break. Nigel, you've left No. 10 and we are about to move to your period as Ambassador to the United States where you arrived in the autumn of 2007. George Bush was still President.

NS: Correct and just as further context there had been a change of Prime Minister in the UK. I saw Tony Blair through to the end of his time as Prime Minister and I left at the same time as he did in June 2007. Gordon Brown took over, so as I prepared in those few months between June and the beginning of October for Washington, part of that was a series of meetings with Gordon Brown. He was actually very generous with his time in that period. It was not exactly a completely new government, but a new government all the same, with ministers in different positions, a new Foreign Secretary and so on. That was part of it. Gordon Brown had had his first meeting with President Bush. From the outside anyway, it seemed like a rather uneasy meeting in July of 2007 which my predecessor had organised. I arrived in the autumn of 2007, my predecessor again was David Manning, so I started in October of 2007 and as you say it was still George Bush. He had another fifteen months or so to go as President. And as I'm sure David found when he went to Washington in 2003, it was an enormous advantage starting with President Bush and his team to have known a number of them, obviously in a different context, to have known a number of them from the time at No. 10. For four years of No. 10 I had been part of the contacts with President Bush that Prime Minister Blair had had, both personal meetings in DC and in London and round the world, the regular video conferences when each team is up on screen, so I was to some extent a familiar entity when I arrived, unlike most ambassadors who arrive and don't know the people that they're dealing with. I knew a number of people, particularly on the foreign policy and security side of the Bush team, the National Security Adviser, the senior echelons of the State Department, the Pentagon, the Intelligence agencies, so it was an enormous bonus to arrive in DC with that under one's belt already. The Bushes were very, very welcoming, in a personal sense. They'd had an excellent relationship with our predecessors, and it was clear that they wanted to be personally friendly, as well as do the right thing by the UK. In our time, our year and a quarter, we would regularly get invited to

the White House, sometimes to big things, sometimes to quite small things, which I don't know that other ambassadors to DC would have enjoyed that level of access and warmth, which I think was accorded to the UK throughout that period.

I took the view that with an election coming, an election in which no one from the current Administration would be running for the presidency, the important thing for the Embassy and for the UK, was not to take for granted the relationship we had with the Bush Administration, but I didn't need to invest a huge amount of my time in that given that they were coming to an end and the relationships were already pretty solid. So I threw myself into trying to understand the contours of the 2008 presidential election and from the time I arrived in 2007 got involved as much as I could following the candidates on the campaign trail, meeting as many of them and their close advisers as one could. Of course, that is a winnowing down period, because when I arrived the favourites were probably Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton. Very rapidly it became clear that John McCain would come through on the Republican side. Fortunately, he was one of the people I had met very early on and kept very close with his policy team. The Embassy and I personally put a lot of effort into contacts with both Obama's and Clinton's teams and with them themselves. I don't know if I was the only ambassador who had a private meeting with then Senator Obama on the campaign trail, but that was one thing which we asked for and got fairly early in the process. I had met him a couple of times before, once at No. 10 and once in Washington when Tony Blair had been visiting Washington and he was one of the Senators that my predecessor had invited to a meeting with Tony Blair, so I'd met him briefly in that context as well. It wasn't my first meeting with Obama, but it was my first meeting with just two of us in the room, as it were. His team was notably welcoming of contact with the UK. We had a very good, full, quite substantive relationship with them, talking about issues like Iran, trade policy, and as 2008 advanced, handling aspects of the financial crisis. They were very open to policy discussion all the way through. Hillary Clinton's campaign people, I found, were more closed, less responsive not only to the UK but to other embassies trying to get close to them. As 2008 advanced, although both Hillary and Obama were candidates until she conceded in June of 2008, it was pretty obvious from quite early on, from February/March onwards, that he would be the candidate.

The Embassy's ability to connect to the three campaigns at that stage, was shown by the visit which Gordon Brown made in the spring of 2008 where we managed, remarkably, to get each of the candidates in Washington that day and we had Clinton, McCain and Obama all visit

the Embassy to see Gordon Brown, one after the other, and identical shots of each of them with Gordon Brown walking down the beautiful Lutyens main corridor of the Embassy. That was very important to ensure complete equivalence of treatment between the three of them. But it was a good effort by the Embassy team to achieve. So that was good. It looked good in all the broadsheets the following day. Understanding the campaign, getting close to the candidates is the bread and butter of that sort of bi-lateral diplomacy and, of course, Obama came to London as part of his tour in July 2008. It was quite difficult to restrain our government from going overboard and from welcoming him as a victor even before the election. Other governments found exactly the same pressures, since he went rather triumphantly round Europe. That was the context for his Berlin speech to a huge outdoor audience in July 2008. Of course, there was no ill will at all towards John McCain who on many policies had a very progressive, on climate change for example, had quite a progressive point of view. He was an independent voice in American international policies. But I think it would be wrong to disguise the fact that there was a huge amount of interest in and support for Obama privately among British politicians from both sides I would say throughout that period, particularly on the Labour side. That was what I saw as the big priority for the Embassy, handling the transition, doing the sort of things that are happening now (January 2017), in obviously very, very different circumstances, trying to get our present government close to the Trump Administration. In a different way, every British government has to do that with incoming American administrations. It's handled differently according to the personalities and politics involved, but the essential business of trying to get our two systems to begin to interact, to set up the personal relationships between ministers, the Prime Minister and the President obviously, but other ministers and their opposite numbers on the American side, top teams on both sides, to begin that gelling process that you want in UK-US relations. That process starts the moment the election is called and you go through both good and bad moments in the three month transition period, when you're trying to get people together. It's quite hard given that the American team, the transition team, is under great pressure itself, with many, many demands on them. The job is to get the UK as close to the front of the queue as you possibly can and that's what we managed to do, so that Gordon Brown, when he visited DC in the spring of 2009 was, I think, the first European leader to visit the White House, and probably the first allied leader after Japan and Canada. That was mission accomplished for Gordon Brown and for the Embassy. Gordon Brown had actually had a relationship with George Bush, which I think in the end had surprised both of them. It

had been friendlier and more productive and they had found common cause on more things than you would ever have guessed from that very uneasy first meeting in July of 07. I think at that stage Gordon Brown's priority was to show that he was different from Blair, that he wanted to evince awkwardness deliberately, he didn't want to look as if he was comfortable in George Bush's presence, and he succeeded in that because he looked thoroughly uncomfortable. I thought it was painful to watch that on the television. But actually they got to know and respect each other more than I had anticipated. I think that was a good thing. Gordon Brown, in a way more than any recent prime minister, has a really deep understanding and affection for the United States. Obviously it is difficult to compare with previous leaders, but I can't believe that anyone has read more about America, has a feel for America, particularly political liberal America of course, but his feeling for American history and passionate interest in America and admiration for America really came through. That was something I had to use and to channel and I hadn't appreciated quite how deep it was before I started the transition myself from working in No. 10 to going out to Washington. He was also very keen to establish a relationship and a special relationship with Obama from the early days and was not always treated as well as he could have been by the Obama White House. They were still in campaign mode and they were still being run by their handlers and diary people. They were a little bit casual with Gordon Brown in the first year or so of the Obama Administration. As I say, we managed to get an early spot in the schedule for a meeting at the White House, but the White House did not handle the British media with any finesse, rather the opposite. And we had a good and quite a substantial meeting by the standards that the Obama White House offered in those days. But the British press inevitably saw a big difference from the more expansive style that George Bush had showed to successive British leaders. So that was awkward in PR terms. The UK media tends to be looking for a slight in UK-US relations and they sensed one early on with Obama. There was all that nonsense about gifts as well. The Obama White House hadn't thought about gifts. Gordon Brown had gone out of his way to give something that was very, very well thought through. Obama and White House had clearly not bothered at all and in the end gave him a couple of CDs or something equally casual. I don't think that was thought through. I don't think it had much to do with Obama personally. It was inexperience in the team, not enough grown-ups around. This is where the discontinuity in the American system comes through, because no one at senior levels would have been the same as under Bush. That was a mistake made. And compounded in the autumn when Gordon Brown was at the

UN. Unfortunately, I wasn't at the UN that year. His team asked for a meeting with Obama, which they initially refused, and you had the spectre of Gordon Brown scurrying through a hotel kitchen with Obama on their way to a meeting, which looked again as though Obama wasn't giving Gordon Brown the amount of time that a key ally deserved. Again, I think this was casualness and wrong priorities on the part of the Obama scheduling team. They won't have thought twice about it and they should have done. Being leader of the alliance and being number one in the world means you've got to understand other countries' and allies' politics, to understand the harm you do by looking casual and dismissive. Not least because I kept reminding everyone how badly they'd handled this, they I think in the months after that rapidly realised that they needed to accord a more dignified position to Gordon and they did in future gatherings, but of course, the May election of 2010 in the UK intervened. I'd spent a lot of time getting it agreed with the White House that whoever won our election, whether it was Gordon Brown returning, or David Cameron being elected we'd get off on the front foot, on the right basis, with whoever became our next Prime Minister. In the end it was David Cameron in a coalition government and Barack Obama phoned him, because we were monitoring the TV screens, literally the moment he walked across the threshold of No. 10, because we'd arranged it all so carefully with the White House. The White House were incredibly receptive in that early phase in 2010 of showing that the relationship was going well. At their first meeting in Toronto in the margins of the G8 Summit in June 2010, the White House and Obama personally went out of their way to welcome David Cameron and his team. They gave him a helicopter ride. They did all the things you do, small and superficial things maybe, but they were intended to and did reassure the British media that this was a relationship that the Americans were going to take seriously and they avoided the pitfalls and the mistakes they'd made in handling Gordon Brown in that early period.

One of the mysteries running through this and this is the shallower end of diplomacy is the mystery of the Churchill bust. After 9/11 the Government Art Collection in the UK and Tony Blair had loaned a bust of Churchill to the White House which sat in the Oval Office for the rest of George Bush's term. Everyone expected that to come back after the Bush term. The Government Art Collection had been in touch with the White House about it; it was all going ahead. When it did go ahead, and returned to the Embassy, the Telegraph and other papers turned this into an example of the Obama presidency turning against the UK, because Obama's father had been Kenyan, was anti-colonialist and everything else, this was turned into a sort of case study of Obama being fundamentally different and outside the tradition of

reverence for Churchill and the special relationship. Vastly overdone. No one expected the bust to continue in the White House. But the White House could have helped their cause by explaining what was going on, and in fact, unbeknownst to any of us, the White House had its own cast of the same bust, which they'd owned for years and their version, the American version of the same bust, was in the private quarters, upstairs in the White House, for the Obama administration, which Obama showed to David Cameron when he went to the private quarters in July 2010 and none of us had even really been aware that it had been there. The White House had not made this clear. The White House did at some point brief British media on this, but it was of much less interest, of course, than the earlier story that the UK and Churchill personally were being dissed by an anti-colonialist president. So anyway, I mention this, not because I think it is that important, but it does affect the atmospherics and it becomes a sort of urban myth, which is so difficult to deal with once it takes root. The White House, as I say, didn't help themselves by putting it to bed at a much earlier period.

The Obamas were always perfectly friendly and nice to us, but it was a different relationship, not just for me as British Ambassador, but I think all the ambassadors who had been close to America, who'd had some personal access to Bush found it different with the Obamas, partly perhaps because they had young children, partly because they accorded less importance to maybe relationships with the diplomatic community. We used to see the Obamas at the big White House events, but we were never invited to anything small with the family, or anything like that, as we had been in the Bush period. That was a difference. It didn't make a huge difference professionally, because all the contacts, the professional contacts with Obama personally, and some contacts with Michelle Obama too, had been perfectly friendly and correct and productive. But there was a difference, a difference of tone and atmospherics, which I think everyone noticed throughout the Obama presidency. After George Bush and Laura left the White House we saw them down in Dallas in their home for lunch and even a couple of years ago when I was out in Dallas on business I went to see him in his new Library, so he just remains remarkably friendly and regards that link with people from the UK and from that period in his time in office as important to him.

CM: The Secretary of State under Obama was Hillary Clinton. You'd found her team not very helpful during the campaign. How did you find her during her time as Secretary of State?

NS: Very open to us and to the Embassy. At that stage what's important is her relationship with her opposite number. She got on fantastically well with David Miliband. They were different generations. David by that stage had been in government in different roles, had been a minister, Foreign Secretary since 2007; he'd been in the role for a while by the time she took over and had a very clear view of the role. She responded to that and got their top teams together very, very early on and always had a very good relationship with him. She was quite public in saying how much she admired David Miliband and enjoyed their meetings, far beyond what was the formal diplomatic thing to say. So I think that worked extremely well. It took her time to get up to speed, inevitably. For all her familiarity with the generality of foreign policy issues from being First Lady and on the campaign trail, sitting in the seat is very, very different. You saw her getting up to speed and working through the issues in the first months in office. There was a lot of contact and she had a very good team of people around her. She made sure we were introduced to them at a very early stage, and so on. I think David Miliband had an extraordinarily easy access to her in person, on the phone all the way through. Maybe the personal relationship didn't have the same warmth, but William Hague had a very good relationship with her too. Those were the two I saw in her time in the State Department.

Policy issues. I think your time as Ambassador is a funny mix. I was never one for metrics and for working out in advance exactly how I was going to divide my time, but there's a constant tension between different pressures – Washington, the rest of the US, and ensuring that you contribute fully to the policy debate in London too. As Ambassador you've got a double role which is performing and being very active in the country to which you're accredited, but you also want to be feeding useful, relevant, impactful material into ministers and senior officials in London to affect policy and improve policy making, that's the dual part of any senior diplomatic post. The policy issues that were uppermost in my time in DC, I'd start with the economic issues because the financial crisis was beginning as I arrived. The mortgage crisis, the real estate started to make itself apparent in the summer of 2007 and it became a fully fledged crisis over the course of 2007 and 2008 and then I suppose Lehman Brothers was the autumn of 2008 and really came to dominate the latter stages of the presidential campaign in 2008. The policy and the international response to that and the domestic response were the number one issues of the day. In Gordon Brown we had a Prime Minister who had been for ten years Chancellor of the Exchequer, very well known and generally respected on the international scene for his understanding of the issues and grasp of

policy, with a very clear view from the moment that the crisis erupted in 2008 that one element in the response needed to be solid international coordination. So he was pushing the White House to gear up the G20, to take a role which would parallel and support all the national efforts that were going on. This was the era of the bail outs and the huge amount of money that was going into supporting the financial sector in each of our economies, but he wanted to see some sort of international architecture to support that and give it meaning and direction for the future, which was undoubtedly right. The White House was a little slow in moving to that. Hank Paulson did in the end agree to it and put his shoulder to the wheel and they did hold a G20 Summit in November of 2008 which Gordon Brown came to and Gordon Brown very much saw himself as in the cockpit handling not single handed but handling the international response to the financial crisis and encouraging that degree of coordination using new international bodies and new international instruments to support national policy-making, increasing transparency, helping with international bail outs and so on. That continued into the Obama administration. I think the Obama team realised the UK had a very, very strong position on all of this. They were learning themselves, so they maybe sometimes felt that they were lectured at and were being handed a British script which they were expected to observe and respect, but I think actually British ministers and Gordon Brown personally were simply trying to move things forward, given that we had a G20 Summit ourselves to host in the spring of 2009 and that was Obama's first big foreign trip after the inauguration. He might have visited Mexico or something, but in terms of a major trip abroad London and Europe were first. Obama visited London in April in 2009 for the G20 Summit and met the Queen and began that side of the President's relationship, which became a surprisingly close and personally warm and friendly relationship with the whole Obama family. I would say that the word that was used a lot in Whitehall was that the Prime Minister and his team were quite needy in their desire to get in to establish a very, very close working relationship with the Obama White House. They wanted to move faster than I think the White House people were comfortable with in those early months. They weren't wrong to try to do that, because the world needed very quick, very solid and fluent international coordination on the financial crisis. It was just maybe a misunderstanding of the speed with which any incoming American team can operate. On the substance, most of what Gordon Brown was suggesting in terms of stimulus was very much the policy that the Obama team were propounding themselves. The first thing that Obama pushed through in the spring of

2009 was the big stimulus package which went through Congress, really as his first act as President.

Handling the financial crisis, setting up the international machinery, trying to make international trade the beneficiary, not the victim, of the crisis, trying to promote that, avoiding protectionism as much as one could: those were the priorities of the UK Government which we as the Embassy had to promote on the Hill and with the Administration over that period. With some difficulty, because of course there is a protectionist urge at times like that, and there was another surge of Buy America provisions that went into the stimulus legislation and other legislation which we had to counter and defang as much as we could. Round the country, I saw it as a priority for the Embassy and for me as Ambassador personally, to promote the cause of open trade at regional, state and federal levels to make clear how damaging it would be if America closed itself off and tightened its procurement and trade rules. At the same time Americans always have something of a double standard, imagining they're the most open economy and anti-protectionist country in the world, when in fact, there are consistently strong protectionist sentiments and actions in the US. We're entering a phase now (January 2017) with the new Trump Administration when unfortunately that may prove to be tested rather more than we would like here in the UK.

On the foreign policy areas, without going into great detail on them all, I would say that over my four/five years, Afghanistan rather than Iraq was probably the top issue. Iraq was already becoming a issue where the prime consideration for the end of the Bush period and the beginning of the Obama period was making the Surge effective in Iraq, but then having a withdrawal timetable, which Obama of course promoted when he got into power. On Afghanistan, Obama started with the Surge policy and then moved to a withdrawal policy. For the UK, handling that and encouraging the US Administration to take the process of outreach and reconciliation and working for a political settlement with the Taliban, that was the big priority for the British Government and for the Embassy, often with a sceptical American Intelligence community because they were, as in Iraq, worried about reaching out to the people who were causing the violence and mayhem in the first place. But that eventually became American policy as well. Next, Iran. By this stage P5 +1, or the EU 3+3 talks were well advanced, but that went through many, many phases. Obama came into power believing that there could be a quick deal with Iran on the nuclear programme, but then Ahmadinejad was elected and that made it much more difficult after that. He also

thought that an early move forward on the Middle East Peace Process would be possible, pretty much in his first year. That wasn't to be. American policy, as we continue to see today, towards the Middle East Peace Process was unsuccessful and a source of some debate with the UK and with some other European countries. Lastly, throughout my time as Ambassador, dealing with terrorism, dealing with the way in which the Al-Qaeda franchise evolved and morphed during that period, was an important part of the Embassy's work as well.

Running throughout the Obama Presidency, but particularly after the Arab Spring of 2011, was the debate about Obama's foreign policy and his determination, after the disappointments of Iraq and Afghanistan, to use American military power more sparingly. At the time of the action against Libya in spring 2011, this was called 'leading from behind' by a senior White House official. Other commentators called it 'strategic reticence' or 'strategic restraint'. Probably the most telling case study was Obama's decision in 2013 (after my time as Ambassador) not to take action over Syrian use of chemical weapons despite having threatened Syria publicly with a certain US reaction if they crossed this 'red line'.

It's too soon to give a balanced view of Obama's foreign policy doctrine. At the time I sympathised with a desire to be more deliberate and cautious in matters of war and peace. I saw that as inevitable after Iraq and Afghanistan. The same pressures for retrenchment and concentrating on the home front were at play in Britain. I also saw the policy case for the Asia Pivot and the desire to focus on long term US interests in the Asia-Pacific region, and not allow American policy to become over-concentrated on the Middle East. But there's no doubt that, whatever the background, the Obama Administration came to be seen as having lost its way on foreign policy and America's role in the world. Obama's personal style, sometimes openly describing his personal doubts and uncertainties, added to that impression, and contrasted with the self-confidence and aggression of Putin, and the 'New China' assertiveness of President Xi. So while I felt that the Obama Presidency had its successes eg the Iran nuclear deal and the normalisation of relations with Cuba, overall Obama had not succeeded in defining a new style of effective American leadership. Rather the US looked powerless to affect the huge changes taking place in international relations, the sense of gathering uncertainty and turbulence, and of a new international disorder emerging slowly and unclearly from two decades of American dominance. As America's closest ally, these

changes affected the UK and sapped our own confidence in our world view, more than other countries.

As Ambassador, a key role was to promote UK-US relations, exploiting the breadth of the relationship, and being personally active in each of the baskets of activity: cultural, political, economic, trade, investment, all those things important to an ambassador. A particular thing which had been started when I was in No. 10 and when David Manning was Ambassador was trying to make it easier for our defence companies to trade with each other, to get the defence sector more integrated between the UK and the US. It was surprising, after working together on the battlefield and being such close allies and taking such political heat in the UK for our support for the United States and the Iraq War and the Afghanistan operations, that those things weren't easier. There were continuing problems of intelligence cooperation and defence cooperation, defence equipment cooperation, but we'd agreed during Bush's second term a defence trade cooperation treaty between the UK and the US which would make it easier for two way defence trade. That had been put to the US Senate, and there was not opposition to it, it just hadn't got the necessary momentum behind it. So it was a big part of my first couple of years in the Embassy, trying to get the treaty approved. I think in David Manning's time it was an extradition treaty which took a hell of a long time to get through. In my time it was this bit of left over business on defence trade cooperation. We eventually did get it approved early in the Obama Administration. But what an enormous heave to get through something that everyone thought was desirable and necessary. It is just so difficult to get things through the US Senate. The trick is ultimately it has to be done by the Administration itself. We had to do a lot of it ourselves as the UK, but the people on the Hill have got to feel that it's part of their bargain, part of their terms of trade with the White House, they've got to feel that the White House and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense are behind it. Because it's a chaotic process, there'll always be staffers and individual senators who come up with their own particular point of view on something; people have got to scurry around and put out this fire and that fire, but we eventually got it through.

On a rather broader level, one of the other things that I found in this period was that there was a great deal of policy attention, intellectual attention in Britain and elsewhere about the rise of China, the rise of the other emerging economies and whether American was going to be eclipsed in the post-Iraq, post-financial crisis world. What was the future going to look like? Fareed Zakaria, one of America's best, most accomplished pundits on TV and in print,

wrote a book called *The Post-American World* and there was a tendency in London during this period to believe that America was in irreversible decline and to underestimate the vitality of the American economy and the continuing importance of the United States economically, in trade terms and in foreign policy and security. I suppose one task of the Embassy was to provide the analytical base to understand the continuing crucial role of America across the waterfront. I don't know whether we were successful or not, but I regarded it as very important to try and get that point of view across. You hear less about it now. I think what you do see, because of Obama's reticence in foreign policy and his selective approach to the use of force and the worry about American leadership and in the Trump world, it's a question whether the whole international structure, the international order, values-based alliances etc are up for grabs. But given the state of the world economically, there's no questioning now the vitality of the American economy. It is pulling the world economy through, not the other way round. The technological base, the power of the American financial sector, America's benign demographics, all these things give an enormous economic strength for the rest of the century. That is better understood than a faddish point of view in the UK perceived five, six, seven years ago, which we as an Embassy had to counter to some degree. It fed through to resource decisions in 2010-2011, when there was a new public expenditure round. More foreign policy money, Foreign Office money was going to go to China, India, Brazil. Fair enough, but where do you take it from? Everyone agreed you could take something out of the European network, but there was an attempt to reduce support for the US network and we in the Embassy successfully resisted that. But there was a moment when the trade and investment case for continuing to keep a significant platform in the United States was not understood in London and we had to work very, very hard at it, to make sure that was understood. We were helped by a fantastic chart in *The Economist* one week which put the Chinese or Indian or one of the other BRIC economies against a map of the United States and showed just how prosperous the United States is and how individual states of America compared with most national economies. California I think still has got an economy that would be in the top ten of nations.

So those were some of the policy issues, there must have been other ones as well. The Special Relationship itself, it's a term that most ambassadors don't like to use too much. I think that when I broke it down, I didn't see in my time in Washington a competitor to Britain in terms of a single country which had a closer or more material overall

relationship. The component parts in our relationship are very broad and that's rarely understood. We think primarily of the defence, intelligence, foreign policy core, the nuclear weapons core, that's very, very important, but beyond that there's the trade and investment relationship; there's a very high level of economic integration between the UK and US. We are still each other's number one investment partners. We still have very, very high levels of trade. America is still Britain's biggest overseas market. In addition to that, various cultural and soft power interconnections are enormous, difficult to chart, certainly difficult to claim that government has a lot to do with them, but they are things which support the overall relationship. You see it every year with the Golden Globes and the Oscars and everything else, there is that social and cultural interpenetration which is hugely important, and comes together in something like the educational relationship. Talking about the future, it is remarkable that the UK remains, even today, even now in 2017, it is the country that most Americans go to for higher education attachments abroad, more than the emerging economies, more than other advanced economies. So that degree of research collaboration, that degree of undergraduate exchange is hugely important for the future and the future relationship, which is why I always thought that these scholarship programmes, Marshall, Rhodes, Fulbright, Gates, all of those things, hugely important for the UK to the extent that we were the funders to keep those up and to attach importance to them. I don't think there was any competitor to the UK in terms of that overall relationship. But at the same time, you have to accept, number one, both the UK and the US individually have declining power compared with heyday of, in the UK's case, the early part of the 20th century. Certainly compared with the 1940s and 50s we have very much less power than we had then, and whereas in the 1940s if the UK and the US agreed on something, it had a better chance of becoming globally acceptable, than today. We're less consequential as a pairing than before. And the UK has itself lost a great deal of power and will lose more as a result of leaving the European Union. Other countries have become more important to the United States, but I would say on a more sectoral rather than across the board basis. So I think Germany has for certainly the last half decade, been the most important European country to the United States economically. Potentially, that's been the case for quite some time now, as the largest European economy, but particularly with the UK out of the Euro and with the Euro crisis such an enormous preoccupation for the United States, their link with Merkel, their link with the German financial community and with the European Central Bank were of enormous importance to them. The UK is less important to the US in terms of economic and

financial policy internationally than it was before. In terms of security there's no doubt that Japan and Israel are phenomenally important, and Saudi Arabia, regional security allies for the United States. They don't have the same global axis of cooperation that the UK has. Then there are other countries which have emotional, cultural, social relationships which are special for the United States, like Ireland, or Italy or Poland. Most recent British ambassadors to the US that I'm aware of have been cautious about using the term 'special relationship', because it summons up expectations which are unrealistic in today's world. But I certainly felt in my time in Washington, that as the British Ambassador you had a particular role in Washington policy life and Washington social life, that you were listened to, that the UK still had remarkable access, particularly in the foreign policy, intelligence, defence, security areas, that there was no one other country that had somehow had eclipsed us in terms of either affection or importance in the United States. All the opinion polls continued to show that the UK is regarded as the most important American ally, and in terms of popularity comes after Canada. So I think there's a lot for us to be confident about and positive about, but to be a bit careful about that phrase, though I think that there is substance behind it and meaning behind it.

A couple of small things: I mentioned earlier, when you're Ambassador in Washington you're pointing in a number of different directions at once, you're going to have to juggle your priorities, that's the same in any job. In Washington you've got a UK facing part of the job. You've got to spend time in London with ministers and with senior officials and business. In America you're going to spend most of your time in Washington DC, not least fielding ministers and other visitors, but you have to give enough time, and I think all my predecessors and all my successors are going to be doing this, you have to spend enough time out in the rest of the United States, because this is a great continental market and a great continental democracy and you can't do it all from 3100 Massachusetts Avenue or from trailing round the Capitol Hill or the White House. So getting out and about is very important, devoting the time to that. I loved doing it. The diversity of American life, the vitality of American people and American business and culture comes through in every visit outside DC. But you have to devote the time to it and it can be exhausting, as you're travelling around. I used to regard going to New York almost part of my core activities given its importance particularly for our business and financial interests. I used to try to go up there as much as I could and would be ready to go up there on the train for a short couple of meetings, not just spending significant periods there. I would also try to make regular visits

to the other main business centres, so Chicago and Los Angeles and Texas and one or two others. But of course never enough. You always feel that you're short changing the other side of the job when you're juggling priorities in that way. It's a very, very important balance to try to strike. One regret, I think I mentioned in one of our earlier discussions when we were talking about Brussels, I never found myself doing any sustained, structured negotiating in my time in Washington. I do think that is one of the big changes in diplomacy. I've just been reading the Foreign Office Documents charting the foundation of NATO and the negotiations leading up to the signature of the Washington Treaty in 1949. It was negotiated by a group of ambassadors in Washington, by Oliver Franks and by his French, Belgian and other colleagues working with the State Department and that was the negotiating committee. You just can't imagine that happening today. There is constant interaction with the Administration of course. Sometimes you get called in together in a group. You might do things informally. We had an informal group of European countries working with the State Department on Asia-Pacific policies. We had a group with one or two European countries and some of the Arab ambassadors, talking about Middle Eastern issues, but not negotiating, not negotiating with the Administration. I think that day is over. If there were ever a new NATO Treaty being negotiated it would either be done in Brussels, or it would be done by officials, special teams, special sherpas, whatever it was, it wouldn't be left to bilateral ambassadors. Ambassadors, I think, have come down in the pecking order somewhat in that respect compared with before. In those days the ambassadors were in place and they got on with it.

Of course, treaties are often very much more technical than they were in those days as well, so if you're doing a treaty on international financial instruments very few ambassadors would be able to summon up the expertise to do that. That was the only area that I thought a capability wasn't being exploited. For the most part, this was a challenging, physically demanding, intellectually demanding job, though I would say, with less pressure, less of a sense of personal pressure and ultimately of personal responsibility, than working in No. 10 or indeed than working as Permanent Representative in Brussels.

CM: And in Washington you are very well supported both in the office and at home. It was a Rolls Royce organisation.

NS: I think it was. UKRep EU in policy terms was that, because it was very high-powered with a very, very big team, but of course you didn't have, because it was multi-lateral

diplomacy, you didn't have the breadth of activity, you didn't have the service side of foreign policy; you didn't have consular, visa; you didn't have trade promotion, investment promotion. You certainly didn't have anything like the developed social programme and promotional programme that comes with running a big embassy and big residence. So that side of it was totally different in DC. As you say, it was a Rolls Royce machine which kept going and one was conscious of that at the time and even more conscious after the event.

CM: Now, Nigel, I'm going to ask you an impossible question. If you think of your career, which started out with East-West relations during the Cold War, which was the big subject at that time, moved on to the EU, which was the core part of your career, and then you did three very high-powered jobs: UKRep, No. 10 Foreign Policy Adviser and Ambassador in Washington. Which one did you enjoy most?

NS: I think I enjoyed Washington the most. Partly because I felt the personal pressure a little bit less. I was older, a bit more experienced. I think in No. 10 you feel chronic unease and you are always at the sharp end of something terrible. UKRep doesn't have too many light moments. It's a grind. So I think overall in terms of enjoyment and variety, I think Washington. But Washington is probably of the three ultimately the least demanding in terms of intellectual and policy input.

I want to finish with one a broader reflection on the periods when I was in Brussels, in No. 10, in Washington, periods when things were not going right for the UK and US, it was the period of Iraq and Afghanistan and ultimately, though this happened after I left the foreign service, of decline in support in the UK for the European Union, which led to our decision to leave last year. What I enjoyed throughout my career in the Foreign Office, but particularly those last jobs, was that we were expected to be activist and to exercise a sort of responsible and forward view of the British role in the world and to get involved in international issues. We got involved, sometimes successfully, sometimes, in some cases, tragically, not. Mistakes plainly made. What I worry about now is two things. First we see a crumbling of the order and structures and values which our foreign policy had depended on. Plainly things don't stand still, but what we are facing now is a sharper potential change than we've seen in fifty or sixty years and I think there are some very worrying elements in that. But connected with that and second, I worry about a Foreign Office and a British foreign policy machine which has lost a bit of spark and optimism because of the fatalism about policy at the moment. Foreign ministries around the world have ceded power to treasuries and finance

ministries and chancelleries and prime ministers' offices. For all sorts of reasons, I think our successors feel very hemmed in by politics and the environment in which they are operating and I fear that it is a less rewarding and a less active and fruitful environment for people to operate in. That's what really does worry me for my otherwise incredibly capable successors. There's just a change of atmospherics compared with ten years ago, which I think affects the Foreign Office and other parts of the foreign policy making machine of today.

CM: Nigel, thank you very much indeed.