

DOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

David Summerhayes (born 29 September 1922)

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Interviewee: Mr David Michael Summerhayes CMG

Interviewer: Mrs Jill Sindall

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Why did you decide to join the Foreign Office?

My father Christopher Summerhayes had started his diplomatic career in the Levant Consular Service. My boyhood days had therefore been spent with my parents in Alexandria, Egypt, and Persia - at the Consulates in Hamadan and Shiraz - so I was quite adapted to the idea of travelling - I was used to that kind of life. When the Second World War came, I was sent as a young gunner officer to North Africa with the 1st Army fighting in Tunisia, and then to Italy where I transferred to the 8th Army, ending up the campaign in Austria. In May 1945 when the war ended I found myself doing occupation duties with 5th Corps in Carinthia. One day there came an Army order calling for officers to be selected to go to Jerusalem to learn Arabic, study Middle East history and become administrators in the Middle East. So I thought, that is right up my street, and applied for the interview, which meant going all the way from Austria back to Salerno - where I had landed in Italy a year and a half before. We went through a series of interviews and I was finally selected after a long process. 150 of us were reduced to, I think, about 8 or 9 in the end. I was lucky! So later that autumn I joined the Middle East Centre of Arab Studies, housed in the Old City of Jerusalem then still capital of Palestine. Following that I went up to Cambridge to read history and economics. At this stage I decided I would go into the Foreign Service and follow in my father's footsteps. I failed the FO exam on the first round; I didn't even pass the written papers. My tutor at Cambridge said: 'come on David, you really have to pull yourself together; you didn't do any preparation for that at all and you had better take it seriously' .So I tried again and got through -that was in January 1948. I soon had a letter from the Foreign Office reading: 'Dear Summerhayes, you have been selected for the Foreign Service and we would like you start work in two weeks time'! When I asked if I could stay to complete my degree before starting work at the FO, I had a very stern letter back: 'No, certainly not, if you want to do that you will have to sit the exam again'! I wasn't going to risk that after having failed on the first attempt. So later in January I arrived for my first day's work at the Foreign Office and very much to my surprise I was told to report to Western Department, - having Arabic and the Middle East as my main background. The Office has chosen to put me into its most august

department. We looked down on the door of No 10 Downing Street. But more seriously, I found myself with five countries under my care: France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Switzerland, which were half of the Western Department's area of responsibility. I asked if I would have some training? 'No, your predecessor will tell you what you have to do'. So I went along the corridor and found John Wilson, who I was taking over from. He said, 'Good, Summerhayes, I'm so glad that you have arrived. I am getting married and have a lot of shopping to do. I will be here for the first couple of days with you, but after that you'll just take over while I get on with preparations for my wedding and going to Ankara'. So there I was. I knew nothing really about Europe. I spoke some French and a little German, which I had learnt at school, but my whole orientation was to the Middle East really. And here I was looking after relations with our nearest neighbours in Europe. But that was how the Foreign Office did things in those days; they just expected you to get on with it.

I learnt a great deal during that first year in Western Department, which was fascinating, and I took part in some of the early talks when we were preparing the NATO Treaty. I didn't go to Washington where it was signed, but played a minor part. I saw NATO launched and got to know quite a lot about Belgium, Holland and France - where the government often changed overnight- and about Switzerland where all was stable and orderly. At the end of 1948 I was told by Personnel Department that I had done enough and my probation was ended. I would next to be posted as Third Secretary to the Embassy in Baghdad. I decided I would drive most of the way and I set off across France with a new car and then across the Syrian Desert following the oil pipeline. I arrived after a tremendous dust and thunderstorms in Baghdad with my car covered in mud and looking pretty decrepit.

What was it like in Baghdad in those days; the British had left in 1947?

My posting in Baghdad was during the latter days of Iraq's independence under the Hashemite family. We were all kept working very hard by Humphrey Trevelyan as our senior Counsellor. He was tremendously active, with all his experience of India behind him, cooperating with well-trained Iraqis on a new development plan. The whole future of Iraq then looked stable. There was British occupation to the extent that we still had the RAF at Habbaniyah. The young King Feisal was on the throne with his uncle Prince Abdul-Ilah as Regent. We spent much time getting in touch with Iraqi life and travelling around the country. I spent a lot of time in Kurdistan. Life was never dull and I was able to meet many

senior Iraqis, because at that time I was also Private Secretary to the Ambassador, Sir Harold Mack. The Prime Minister Nuri el Said used to come quite often and chat to the Ambassador. He was a very charming man and would talk to me in the Private Office if he had a few minutes to wait before the Ambassador was free. I had great admiration for him and for many of the other senior Iraqis. Iraq in those times was a land of great promise and the British were doing great things. We had excellent contacts. The Iraqi medical school was run on British lines and we had development experts in most of the Ministries. Yet only three years later Colonel Kassem conducted his terrible coup and started things on the downward trend. He destroyed the democratic system when he took over. Iraq always had two tendencies. One was a westernising tendency: to co-operate with Britain; we were then the major power in the Middle East and most of those in the government were prepared take advice from us. The other tendency was nationalism, which was prevalent among the younger officers, who thought in terms of 'kick out the British and we won't have these colonial usurpers taking over our country and running it for us'. That was the Kassem tendency and the weakness of Iraq's democracy was that it could not stand up to the attacks of the nationalists who so quickly gained power. It was a tragedy.

And what about the Kurds?

The Kurds were then quiescent. One could travel safely all over Kurdistan and mix with these splendid mountain people. I used to go up to Sulaymania and Mosul. We had a very active information department in the embassy in those days and we used to take film vans all over Kurdistan showing films of Britain. There were the two Kurdish tribes, the Barzanis and Talebanis. We shall see when Kurdistan now again becomes – as we hope - semi-independent, which of those two will come out on top.

Were there anti-British feelings?

There were the Iraqi nationalists who attacked us constantly in the press. If you read Freya Stark or you go back to Gertrude Bell, you find that Iraq had been torn apart by internal rivalries and nationalism ever since the British Army captured Baghdad in 1917. There has always been a nationalist element. That was the element in power under the Baath party supporting Saddam Hussein. It is going to be very interesting to see whether the moderates, the westerners, will be able to get a grip and save Iraq from that happening again. Let's hope,

we shall have rescued Iraq from dictatorship, but whether they will be capable of handling the situation in the future is another question.

Were you sad not to go back to the Middle East?

Yes, but then I quickly got caught up in Atlantic affairs, and I did not regret it afterwards. I had a very interesting subsequent career. But I should have liked to have gone back to the Middle East at some time, and I wondered why they didn't send me back, but of course after the Suez invasion – attack, whatever we call it, many of the British posts in the Middle East folded up and so there were many fewer opportunities to work in the Middle East. It wasn't until 10 years after Suez that we really got back on to full establishment in our diplomatic posts. That is perhaps why I never went back.

Then you went to Brussels. What were you doing in Brussels?

I was the Third Secretary in Brussels, later promoted to Second Secretary. I worked under George Jellicoe and Patrick Hancock and we were a very active Embassy. This was Brussels in the old days before it became a European and world centre with the European Union and NATO. In those days we had close bi-lateral dealings with Belgium under the Brussels Treaty – so it was just a straightforward diplomatic job.

So you enjoyed yourself there?

I enjoyed my time; it was the first time I had worked in Europe.

Were you married then?

No, I was still a bachelor.

You were actually there at the time of the formation of the EEC?

No that came much later when I was in The Hague.

But you were there when the European Coal and Steel Community was formed.

The Coal and Steel Committee, was then under discussion.

It was in 1952.

Yes. Of course in those times there was no conception at all in the Foreign Office that Britain would have to get into these things. This was not seen as our role; we should have influence but we could not get too directly involved. We saw virtue in Europe becoming more united and organising itself. Up to the fifties we and the Americans had been helping Europe to recover after the war - the Marshall Aid Programme - supporting European economic recovery and revival. We did not see it then as a political revival and we didn't see as far ahead as the French, who sought a way of bringing Europe together under their influence if not their control.

In 1953 you went back to the Foreign Office. What did you do there?

I was posted to PUSD - Permanent Under-Secretary's Department, one of the core departments of the Foreign Office and helped to set up the planning section, which then consisted of Ronnie Burrows and myself initially.

We also ran the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee; there had been a lot of criticism that the Foreign Office never looked ahead; that there was a lack of proper foresight and planning, with the Foreign Office only re-acting to events. The Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee was set up to rectify that and I found myself secretary to the planning committee. I think I got the job because while in Brussels I had written a series of papers about Belgian internal politics for the Ambassador. He must have mentioned this in his final report, so when I got back to the FO I found myself doing the same in the wider international field. And thanks to him I had a fascinating three years in the FO. We were not only preparing background-planning papers, but we also attended monthly meetings of all the Under-Secretaries to whom we submitted these papers for approval.

At the same time we were the Conference Section. We had to prepare briefs for all the major conferences that were held in those years. There was the Berlin Conference, the Bermuda Conference and several more. We were preparing long-term papers and also contributing to British co-operation in international conference work.

Did the reports you produced for PUSD have any effect?

Yes, I think it was very substantive work. If any Under-Secretary felt that a long-term look at an area would be valuable, we had a paper prepared by experts in the department - which was then submitted to the Under-Secretaries at their monthly meeting and approved or changed after long discussions.

Our work for the major conferences was also full of interest. I went to the Geneva Conference in 1954 with Sir Anthony Eden as a member of the secretariat. The Conference had been called to resolve a growing crisis over Communist attempts to seize control in Vietnam; this was soon after the Korean War against Communist China had ended. French colonial rule in Indo-China had just collapsed. America, Britain, France and members of the Commonwealth were confronting China backed by Soviet Russia.

We spent our days preparing briefing notes and speeches for the Secretary of State, before the afternoon plenary sessions at the Palais des Nations.

The Conference ended late in the summer and was a considerable personal success for Eden, who had pulled the Conference together and achieved agreement on Indochina and also on Korea. Of course both agreements in the end came apart, and did not prevent the later disaster of the Vietnam War. Though hailed at the time as an effective and useful Conference, the long-term results were less than good.

What was Eden like?

He was a much respected and well-liked person with unrivalled international experience going back to the 1930's. He had at that time just been remarried to Clarissa Churchill, a niece of Sir Winston's, and she came with him to Geneva; some people felt that he spent rather too much time with her and not enough with his delegation. But as an operator in the Conference he was outstanding, his knowledge, his background, his prestige and his energy were unequalled. I admired him very much.

Were you surprised he got the country into the Suez mess?

I was totally surprised. Because during the year before Suez, I had been working in the Levant Department. Earlier that autumn I had been posted to The Hague so I heard the news of the Franco-British intention to 'intervene against Egypt' from a BBC broadcast. The

decision seemed to come out of the blue, without any rhyme or reason. I was shocked, frankly, and I could never afterwards understand the rationale of what Eden did. My colleagues who had remained in Levant Department told me that they had considered resigning on the issue.

It was out of character?

It seemed completely out of character - against all our interests, suddenly to rush in and become a supporter of Israel. To use Israel as a vehicle for trying to put down Nasser was in the long run a grave mistake.

Suez happened while you were in The Hague?

I had spent a year in Levant Department, where I manned the Jordan desk and was glad to be dealing again with Middle East affairs; I shared a room with Donald Hawley who was responsible for all paperwork concerning Israel. Levant Department was important just then because we were trying to sort out the appalling refugee problem in the Middle East and provide a proper future for the Palestinians. There was a great deal of money available from UNRWA - United Nations Refugee Works and Relief Agency - and the Americans were then also prepared to put in a lot of effort. At that time they were supportive of Palestinian interests – before pressures in the US Congress and elsewhere turned US Government policy towards favouring Israel. If Suez hadn't changed the attitude of so many Arabs against the West, we might have had a better outcome. It set us back on Palestine completely and gave great encouragement to the Israelis who were seen as partners of the West.

During my time at the Jordan desk, the then still young King Hussein came to Britain on an official visit. He impressed me very much and went on to lead his Nation with great courage and skill. I also had meetings with Glubb Pasha, another great man who shortly afterwards had to resign as Commander of the Arab Legion because Hussein saw him as too much of a rival.

You then went on to The Hague; you did a commercial job there. Was that the only commercial job you did in the Service?

No, there was not much commercial work to be done in Reykjavik. My posting to The Hague was intended to broaden my experience. I not only enjoyed my new work but also had the real pleasure of getting to know life in Holland, making many friends and finally getting married there. I had spent two years in Belgium so I already knew a little about the Netherlands. My work was the building up of British trade. The Queen came for a State Visit and Prince Philip took a lot of interest. We had trade fairs and we were pushing British exports. Geoffrey Kirk, as the head of the Commercial Department, was determined to compensate for Britain's decision initially to stay outside the European Economic Community by building up our bilateral trade relations with Holland. We started the Anglo-Dutch Trade Council to promote British goods and closer ties with Britain. Shell and Unilever, and other big companies with a long established Anglo-Dutch board of management were extremely helpful to us. The Trade Council operated very effectively for the next twenty years.

I suppose there must have been a lot of pressure on people doing commercial work. Did you feel that pressure?

Yes, but I think our commercial organisation was not nearly as good then as it is now. The Board of Trade was not well organised on the export side. Nowadays our trade and commercial work is much better handled, and given much more prominence. In those times you felt, when you worked in a commercial department, that you were in a cinderella service. Quite rightly the idea was that any member of the Service who was considered capable of reaching the top ranks, had to have done all kinds of work, consular work, information work and commercial work as well as normal diplomatic work. But I had a very good time in The Hague and I of course I got married and I also had the chance to sail a great deal. I loved Holland and learnt Dutch and still feel the Netherlands to be my second home.

Was there a tremendous contrast between post-war continental Europe and Britain?

That applied when I was posted to Belgium in the early 1950's. I found myself in a land flowing in milk and honey. Everything was then available in Belgium, whereas in Britain under the Labour Government we were only just getting out of rationing.

And then you went to Reykjavik? You must have been quite astounded.

My posting to Reykjavik happened for rather idiosyncratic reasons. Andrew Gilchrist, who was then our Ambassador to Iceland, got himself posted to Reykjavik largely because he was a keen salmon fisherman. He had hoped to go there with a fishing rod in his hand; Reykjavik had the prospect of being a quiet and pleasant posting. But instead of that the Icelanders had fomented what was soon called the 'Cod War' by insisting on putting their sea fishing limit out to twelve miles. And Andrew found himself with a dispute on his hands and British trawlers being attacked. When our Royal Navy had to go up there and protect the trawlers, there were noisy demonstrations outside the Embassy. Andrew Gilchrist then somehow conceived the idea that the kind of man he needed to help him to cope with all this trouble was somebody who had military experience and was also a bachelor who would be able to get in touch with the Icelanders through meeting Icelandic girls, well known for their beauty. Anyway the lot fell on me because I was due to leave The Hague and the Office had not yet quite caught up with the fact of my getting married; Andrew certainly didn't know about it. When my wife, June, and I arrived in Reykjavik the first thing Andrew said to me was: 'well here you are, you have come with a wife, but that was not what I wanted at all, I really intended you to come here as a bachelor'. Anyway, June and I set up house in Reykjavik in the middle of the Cod War - it was quite difficult at times. We were a very small Embassy and under a lot of political pressure. We had the Royal Navy operating in the seas round Iceland, we had the Icelanders constantly protesting about what the Navy was doing and we were protesting about what the Icelanders were doing. It was pretty fraught but we made the best of it. We made friends with Americans who were most supportive of us. The Icelanders, from the President down, were all remarkably good to us personally and we gradually sorted things out.

After a long year of dispute and tension the decision was taken in London to negotiate and eventually Sir Harold Macmillan decided to play a role in the talks. Olafur Thors, the Icelandic Prime Minister, took the line that that he would not go to London but if Prime Minister Macmillan would be prepared to come to Reykjavik to see him, he would be delighted, which was pretty high-handed, considering that Iceland is a small country. Macmillan accepted that. He said: 'all right, I'll go to Reykjavik, but it will have to be on my way to the United States'. Within days he flew to Keflavik, the American air base in Iceland, met Olafur Thors and they had a very fruitful meeting together. Both were conservative party leaders and this gave them a bond and they sorted things out to the extent that the Icelanders were soon ready to sign an agreement. The principle of the agreement was that the Icelanders committed themselves not to put their fishing limits out to twenty miles or anywhere beyond

that without going to the International Court. Nonetheless only ten years later the wily Icelanders proceeded to put their fishing limits out to 50 miles, disregarding our agreement. And subsequently there was a third Cod War when they put their limits out to 200 miles. By then of course Iceland had full control over the best cod fishing area in the North Atlantic and now if you buy cod in the shops you'll find it all comes from Iceland - little of it caught by British fishermen. .

Were there international guidelines over who fishes where and how much?

What we should have had was better controls over the fishing net size, and then we and the Icelanders could have actually conserved the whole of the cod stock everywhere to our mutual benefit.

Well, so anyway, back to the FO. What were you doing in the Foreign Office in 1961?

After two years I was posted home to share the Russian desk in Northern Department. For the next two years. I was responsible for economic affairs in our relations with Soviet Russia and, Julian Bullard who was an expert who spoke Russian, had the Russian political desk. We sat opposite each other and we did the work together. Russia and northern Europe were completely new areas to me, so I had to absorb a whole new outline of policies, and learn to comment on Communism and economy of the Soviet Union.

And you went there a year after the Cuban missile crisis that must have been quite fascinating.

It was. I went three times to Moscow with Sir Alex Douglas-Home and others, and I got to know Russia quite well. Every month we prepared a widely read, confidential summary on trends and developments in the Soviet Bloc, which was circulated throughout NATO.

With hindsight, would you say that the British Government was slightly paranoid about the Soviet Union during the cold war?

The FO line was realistic but firm and was largely set by Tom Brimelow. He had served in Moscow during the war and in several East European posts before that. Until recently Head

of Northern Department, he had now become an Under-Secretary and our major expert in Soviet affairs. The Government was perhaps too impressed with Soviet power but always had to take account of the nuclear threat.

Talking about your visits to Moscow, perhaps you can tell me your impressions of Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, and how it was to deal with him?

The main difficulty was to get anything out of Molotov other than the word 'nyet.' He knew exactly how to play the negative in any situation. But Alec Douglas-Home was very adept at handling him. In our negotiations in Moscow Sir Alec was always friendly, forthcoming, and positive. When Molotov said 'nyet', he would just ignore the 'nyet' and carry on as though it hadn't been said and treat Molotov to a further round of positive thinking. In the end this had a beneficial effect. So I would say that Sir Alec handled the Russians in an expert way. Alec Douglas-Home was extremely good at personal relations and getting on with people. He did that to perfection. He was not perhaps so much of a backroom thinker, but he had excellent advisers to help him including Tom Brimelow, one of the giants in the formation of Anglo-Soviet relations, who was respected by the Russians, and spoke Russian perfectly. He handled our difficult diplomatic relations with great skill and gave all the right advice to the government.

Would you say that the combination of Sir Thomas Brimelow as a master of policy making and strategic thinking and Alec Douglas-Home, with his personal skills, together brought about an improvement in Russian-British relations?

It certainly did. I would say that was a period when the Russians respected us and, so far as it was possible to influence Soviet policy, we did so. But this was still a period when every decision of importance in the Soviet Union went up to the Politburo. Molotov was a member of the Politburo.

But how powerful would you say he was in the Politburo? Did he have a big role?

He had been Foreign Minister for many years, but his rigid attitude clearly was developed at an early stage. He had this negativism but at the same time a grasp of foreign policy, which gave him power inside the Politburo.

We were talking earlier about Sir Thomas Brimelow and we were discussing how foreign policy making was very much within the walls of the Foreign Office and you were saying how things changed under Margaret Thatcher when she developed this tremendous suspicion of the Foreign Office.

Yes, Margaret Thatcher, within months of taking over at No 10, developed an anti Foreign Office line. It was characteristic that she thought she had to be the ultimate decision maker. She wished to control all aspects of policy, not only home policy where she proved very successful but also foreign policy where frankly she hadn't much experience. I remember serving for a period under Lord Carrington. This was before the Falklands War, when Lord Carrington was very influential as a Foreign Secretary of high standing and much respected in the world, even much respected by Mrs Thatcher. Yet, even in those times he would say to us, you must not push me too far. I can only take up difficult questions with Mrs Thatcher at most once in a fortnight, not more often than that. So don't push me into trying.

Was Sir Thomas Brimelow a Whitehall mandarin of the traditional kind?

Yes, he was one of the very best.

And you had tremendous admiration for him?

I had great admiration for him; I thought he was one of the pillars of our foreign policy. In the days of the Cold War he was the person who essentially determined the line of our policy towards the Soviet Bloc.

And of course as you mentioned he was a fluent Russian speaker...

Yes, and he had many contacts of long standing on the Soviet side who knew him and respected him, they would listen to him in a way, which wasn't true of other countries' representatives. He became our Ambassador in Moscow of course.

Do you have anything else you would like to add on your time in Northern Department?

No, I think that covers it. After I had served for two years in Northern Department I was promoted and made an Assistant in the Information Policy Department, where I had the particular role of liaison with the BBC External Services. My job was to keep in contact with the BBC at Bush House, to visit them frequently, to help them when required and to make sure they were well informed, because we were able to pass on to the BBC some of the confidential telegrams coming in daily from posts abroad. The other aspect of our co-operation with the BBC was that we had to authorize the BBC's annual budget for their External Services. Although the money came from the Treasury, it was supervised by the Foreign Office I had to argue the case with the Treasury if more money was to be spent. At the close of my period in that job, I had to do a major review of the many BBC External Services with Sir Thomas Rapp. We had to decide exactly how BBC money should be allocated to their 25 or more foreign language broadcasts to the different areas of the world and also towards new transmitters and other BBC services. At the time the BBC had the General Overseas Service – in English, the European Service, the Arabic Service and many others. We wanted to amalgamate the whole lot under one suitable title. At that time the Russians had started calling their overseas broadcasts 'The World Service'. I discussed this with various experts and decided this was a very good idea, so in the review I proposed that all BBC overseas programmes should go out under the more resounding title of the 'BBC World Service'. This was accepted and adopted a few months later.

Very proud of it too I should reckon.

Our collaboration with the BBC has always been close and effective and thanks to establishing the BBC World Service and the BBC's later move into world wide television, the External Services kept the BBC in the front rank of world broadcasts with a daily audience of millions overseas. By contrast the Voice of America, supported by the United States Government has lost its audience to CNN, a purely commercial service.

Did the BBC ever feel that the Foreign Office was trying to interfere with their policy or their broadcasting?

No. I don't think anyone inside the BBC thought that. But many listeners abroad believed that the BBC overseas broadcasts were controlled by the Foreign Office and that we dictated every word they used, which of course was untrue. However there were moments when we

had to face criticism because a BBC foreign language programme was seen as offending. For instance the BBC Arabic Service caused offence in Saudi Arabia by being frank about traditional practices regarding women and the brutal punishment of crime. We had a protest from the Saudi Government. But on the whole I would think the BBC were very careful to preserve their cherished position of independence.

Did any politician while you were in that department ever try to pressurise you over the BBC, for instance if there were representations by say the Saudis?

No, that never happened.

We decided to talk about your time as Consul General and Counsellor in Buenos Aires and then as Minister in Cape Town and Pretoria. Can you tell me something about your appointment to Argentina first of all and what you were doing there.

I was posted in 1965 as Consul General in Buenos Aires. My job was primarily to look after the British community, to give aid and support to British trade in Argentina and to offer any help I could to the political side of the Embassy in terms of contacts and improving relations. June and I were lucky to be sent to Buenos Aires when our two eldest children were just of school age – several good English schools were available for them. Head of Personnel Department had told me that he was sending me to ‘one of the best jobs in the Diplomatic Service’ and ‘you will find the British community will give you a great welcome’. So we packed up, started lessons in Spanish and travelled out by sea to Buenos Aires, to receive the promised warm welcome from the British Community, which proved to be both large and well organised. There were thought to be 35,000 Anglo-Argentines living in Argentina at that time, about 15,000 were actually registered. The community was full of energy; they were enthusiastic about their still important role in Argentine society. They had big land holdings, ‘estancias’, they were active in business and banking, they ran the meat packing business, and the shipping firms, which transported the meat, back to England. The community was spread all over Argentina, so my first task was to get to know them. June and I travelled by air and by road to many of the 23 provinces and we visited the scattered British communities including my Blake cousins who ran a large ‘estancia’ down in the south in the Santa Cruz province. John Blake was a leader in his community and put me right about all sorts of things when I first visited him. As Consul General I became an ex-officio member of many British

Community committees, particularly of the British Hospital, the Missions to Seamen and an extremely well run old peoples home. There were also school prizes to hand out on sports days, so the Community kept me busy. They were most hospitable, inviting us hither and thither, and to weekends at their splendid estancias.

Then you went on to be counsellor. How did that come about?

After two years in BA we had home leave and as usual before returning to post, I asked the FO if there had been any recent changes in Argentina I should know about. To my surprise I was told that I would be going back as political Counsellor, working directly under Sir Michael Creswell, but would also continue as Consul General until a replacement was found. So my immediate thought before leaving London was to get myself briefed about our never-ending dispute with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. I talked to people in the Foreign Office and then went to the Colonial Office who were at that time still handling Falkland affairs. I also went to meet people in the Falkland Islands Company in London, who urged me to visit the Islands - they knew that I had cousins living there, the Blake family, who would put me up. So when I got back to Buenos Aires, I talked to the Argentine Malvinas Department as they called it, and told them I intended to visit the Islands. They said: 'splendid, you can go and see our islands whenever you like, but please when you come back give us a personal report, because none of us are able to go there'. The Ambassador approved and I sailed down on the 'Darwin', from Montevideo - you couldn't go direct from Argentina to the Islands in those days. I arrived in Stanley Bay, which looked just like northwest Scotland, wonderful blue seas, white sands, and open hillsides, hardly any trees. Port Stanley also looked very Scottish; except that the houses all had corrugated iron roofs in red, blue, and green. I stayed at Government House with Sir Cosmo Haskard who gave me the orientation I needed.

The Falkland Islanders you met there? What was their reaction to you?

It was quite rare for them to meet somebody coming from Buenos Aires and this was the first time anyone had come from the Embassy. They were very conscious of the Argentine dimension: that Argentina was determined to pursue its claim to the Falkland Islands - Las Malvinas. So they wanted to hear about life on the mainland, and they were mistrustful of everything that the Argentines were doing. They resented especially that the Argentines made

no attempt to improve relations with the Islanders. Cosmo Haskard suggested that the best way to see the Islands was to fly around with the seaplane, delivering the weekly mail to the outlying farms and settlements. So I acted as co-pilot and threw out the bags of letters, as we passed over each farm. Sometimes we landed on the sea and were rowed ashore with larger packages. It was a new experience. I spent a week in the Falklands including visiting my Blake relations at Hill Cove on West Falkland. When I got back to Port Stanley the Governor told me, to my complete astonishment, that there had been a major development: 'there has been a news broadcast by the BBC from London that the British Foreign Secretary has met the Argentine Foreign Minister at the United Nations in New York and has had a discussion with him about possibly handing over the Falkland Islands to Argentina'.

Was this Stewart or Brown?

This was George Brown. This news, which reached the Falklanders only through a BBC broadcast, caused consternation in the Islands. They said: 'what on earth is all this about?' And they wanted to find out from me what the Foreign Office was up to.

And did you know? Had you heard anything about this?

It was a bombshell to me as much as it was to them. Our Embassy in Buenos Aires had not been consulted. It emerged later that this was part of a general policy, the Labour Government had adopted, of trying to divest itself of the few remaining parts of the British Empire. This would overcome the problem of constant sniping in the UN General Assembly about 'British colonialism'.

When you had your briefing in the Office, prior to going back as Counsellor, had you been given any inkling that this kind of thing was going to be pursued? Did you not feel that you had been left in a rather invidious position?

I certainly did. As I mentioned, we in the Embassy had not been given any prior warning about this, presumably because this was a policy which had been thought of only in relation to Britain's position at the UN. It certainly wasn't discussed with the Ambassador and it hadn't been discussed with the Governor either. The Falklanders could hardly believe that such a proposal had been made and that they hadn't been consulted. The Governor sent back

messages to London saying that this whole situation was extraordinary. He was then asked to return urgently to London for consultation. Since I had just finished the tour of the Islands and had experienced the strong reaction of the islanders to this news from London, he asked me whether I could come back with him on HMS 'Endurance'. So I spent the next three days on board, working on a report, which he asked me to give to Michael Creswell. When I reached Buenos Aires, the Ambassador approved the report and it was sent off to the Foreign Office. Sir Michael in turn was called back to London for consultations.

In the meantime Julian Amery MP had demanded a debate in Parliament; the Labour Government was severely criticised for discussing any possible transfer of sovereignty before the Islanders had had any chance of consultation or knowledge of what was being proposed. When he reached London, Michael Creswell was summoned to see the Foreign Secretary who, among other points, complained about my report from the Falklands saying: 'How can you be sure that this report by one of your junior people is an accurate assessment'? The Ambassador replied: 'I am sorry Foreign Secretary but I am not going to accept your criticism. I sent you an up-to-date report and I stand by what David Summerhayes has written'. The later story of the Falklands is well known. The debate in the House of Commons resulted in the Government giving a pledge that the consent of the Falkland Islanders would be obtained, before any change of status was sought. An effort was then made to open up communications between the Falklands and Argentina with a once monthly flight, so that people could go direct from the Islands to the mainland. And for a period that improvement in relations was maintained, but ultimately everything went wrong when years later General Galtieri took over and ordered the invasion of the Falklands.

What was interesting is that the Argentines agreed to join in an improvement in communications although the British Government had stipulated that if there was any change in the regime in the Falkland Islands it had to be with the Islanders' consent. To what do you attribute the flexible attitude? Did it mean that they were not so entrenched in their attitude at that time?

The Argentines remained just as entrenched, but they had begun to listen to the British point of view, which was that this whole question could only be decided on the basis of consent from the Falkland Islanders and that Argentina had better set about improving relations. It left in abeyance the Argentine claim to sovereignty. Later on, Galtieri and his Junta tried to short-circuit the whole thing by claiming sovereignty through military invasion.

Were the negotiations on this subject carried out at ministerial level, or by the Ambassador locally?

Partly it was done at the UN, partly in Buenos Aires.

And were you party to any of those negotiations?

No I wasn't, because later that year I was posted back to London. But I naturally have taken a continuing interest in the life and future of the Falklands.

What was the view of the British community in Argentina towards the Falkland Islanders? Were they sympathetic towards them or did they find them rather irritating?

The British community naturally wanted easy relations between Britain and Argentina and some of them were inclined to pooh pooh the objection of the Islanders becoming part of Argentina. They didn't altogether like the kind of government Argentina was providing but on the other hand they were prospering and were living a reasonable life and could not see why the Falklanders couldn't do the same. They had no idea what the Falklands was like, nor did they take into account that the Falklanders were 100% British in origin and didn't feel in any way linked to Argentina, nor had any reason to wish to transfer from British sovereignty.

Perhaps we could move on and talk about your work as counsellor. What was the atmosphere like in Argentina under the military regime?

The Peronist era had ended 5 years before I arrived. President Illia headed what was theoretically a democratic regime with parliament and senate. However, the economy was always in tatters, the Argentine peso was constantly falling and the general feeling in the country was that the government was a failure. The Generals, who were very strong in Argentina, had always played a major political role and finally decided that they would take over. One morning I drove past the Presidential Palace -Casa Rosada -, and saw an army tank with its gun pointing directly at the window of the President's Office. I walked over and asked the tank commander what was going on. He answered: 'It's a coup, we are going to remove Dr. Illia'. This was the beginning of another era of dictatorship under the military,

which was popular and rather effective to start off, but they too failed in handling the economy, and the decline in the peso led to further troubles.

While you were there under the military, was the regime feared? Were people disappearing?

Not at first, but soon after I left Argentina a left wing group, the Tupamaros, began kidnapping and shooting in an effort to unseat the government through terrorism. That led eventually to a military crack down on the Tupamaros by arresting them, usually in the middle of the night and sending them off to camps. Some of them, it was alleged, were thrown out of military planes over the ocean in the middle of the night and these atrocities led eventually to the downfall of the military regime.

Another question before we finish your stint in Buenos Aires: did you have any distinguished visitors to Buenos Aires while you were there? Any leading politicians or...?

Our most distinguished visit was HRH Prince Philip, for whom we arranged a garden party to meet the British community. We also had visits from Mr. Michael Stewart, at that time Foreign Secretary, and leading British industrialists who came to build up trade. We also had several successful visits by ships of the Royal Navy, and I played a part in organising programmes for them.

Do you remember that British herds were then infected by foot and mouth disease?

There was a major foot and mouth outbreak in the late 1960's, which had been traced back to meat shipped from Argentina. HMG banned all supplies of beef coming from Argentina, a grave setback to their meat industry- America and others naturally followed suit. Exports were only resumed after we imposed strict inspections of the local meat packinghouses organised through the Embassy.

What do you think that the most interesting and significant part of your job was during that period?

My visit to the Falkland Islands certainly stands out in my mind.

And your report?

Yes. That report must have had an impact. Unfortunately the whole Falkland Islands question was part and parcel of extremist Argentine politics. Whenever anything went wrong or there was political difficulty, the Argentines used to wave the 'Malvinas' flag, which perhaps would temporarily relieve them but it only made the whole thing worse from a British point of view.

So in a sense the Argentines found the Falkland Islands a rather useful diversionary tactic?

They did. That was the worst aspect of the whole problem.

I think we will finish on Buenos Aires there. So, David, in 1974 you went to Cape Town as Minister. Shortly after you went to Cape Town the Heath government fell and Wilson became Prime Minister from 1974-1976 and Jim Callaghan became Foreign Secretary, and you had three Foreign Secretaries while you were there, Jim Callaghan, Crosland and Owen. Did you have any qualms about going to South Africa? Any moral qualms?

None at all. I was a member of the Diplomatic Service and to go to a country where there was a major diplomatic problem and indeed one with moral dimensions merely made the whole situation more challenging. So I was very glad to be offered the job in South Africa and it was quite a step up to be sent to another demanding post. I was also delighted for my wife and family's sake. We knew about the glorious South African climate and the thought of living in Cape Town and in Pretoria sounded highly attractive to us in the middle of an English winter. In those days you could still book a passage on the beautiful Union Castle liners, which was another bonus.

The arrival of a new Minister in the Embassy was a matter of interest so we had reporters from the Cape Argus and the Cape Times on board to interview us. They soon found out that June was a descendant of Jan van Riebeeck, a founder of the Cape Colony. With the National Party then in power the early history of the Dutch colony before the British took over was a matter of some pride. So June was immediately elevated to being the heroine of the moment and the story that a descendant of van Riebeeck had come back as the wife of the British Minister got headlines the next day.

We arrived in mid-summer, the weather was glorious and the Cape scenery marvellous but I had immediately to concentrate on the political problems.

Who was the Ambassador?

Our Ambassador at that time was Sir James Bottomley. He had then served in South Africa for three years and was thoroughly experienced. We had an excellent staff in the Chancery and they set about briefing me. The British government was much concerned about the problems raised by 'apartheid' but had to take into account the interests of the very large English speaking community, many of whom were British passport holders, and also of the importance of British business connections - there were many large firms, as well as banks, still controlled from London. We could not, like some other countries, just condemn apartheid outright, or go along with the imposers of rigorous UN sanctions.

The British government tried to adopt a mediating role: try to persuade rather than drive South Africa towards the moral attitude regarded, in the rest of Europe and especially in America, as the right one. So we in the Embassy were a part of the effort to bring South Africa round to a proper sense of democracy and respect for the human rights of the black and the coloured people. That was the cornerstone of our policy and everything we did was based on that policy.

To summarise: we wanted to persuade South Africa, to come back into the modern world and at the same time to protect interests of British business. We weren't prepared to impose economic sanctions against South Africa, we weren't prepared to withdraw British capital or to destroy the prospects of British business, all of which was so important to both our countries.

That's rather interesting given the fact that Wilson's government was fairly left wing. Do you in retrospect find that rather surprising?

I don't think so. Our policy in the end has to be guided by what are the interests of Britain. In South Africa these interests certainly involved the proper recognition of the position of the very large number of British people living in South Africa, our long historic connection with South Africa, and our lasting contribution to South Africa's development. Under the Labour government Britain's economy was going down, the pound was under pressure and so maintaining our trade relations with South Africa was quite important. And also we respected

the efforts of the many enlightened people in South African society who were trying to bring about change through their own internal efforts. The Progressive Party and to some extent the United Party had been opposing apartheid ever since the National Party took power in 1948.

I am trying to remember my dates. Was Mandela in prison at that time?

Nelson Mandela was in prison. When I first arrived he was a little known figure, but his wife Winnie had begun her campaign to arouse world interest in him and the other black prisoners. She was a strikingly brave woman in those times; though she has come to grief since. Her courage in facing up to the National Party was admirable. She was then kept under a banning order in a distant village in the Cape and it was not possible to meet her although one could correspond with her. We did encourage her and the anti-apartheid movement. We met black leaders whenever possible and tried to understand their policies and help them in any way we could. John Vorster's Nationalist Government of course frowned upon any contact we had with the black opposition, so we had to be circumspect.

So were your contacts, I am talking now about your personal contacts with the black leaders at that time, were they restricted to official meetings or did you meet socially?

We could sometimes meet them socially although even this was not easy, social life was divided between white and black, there was very little mixing between the two. Black people were then not admitted in white establishments, hotels and restaurants. But we managed to get over that. We would meet them and have social contact with them wherever we could. But there was a limit to how much we could do this and some of them were rather cautious about meeting us because they were afraid that this would be reported to the police.

Which of the leaders did you particularly admire in that respect?

There were several areas of leadership. In the Cape, the Coloured leaders were making successful efforts to improve education and housing; but the Blacks didn't get on with the Coloureds, they lived in separate communities, and in Durban the Indian community was also making progress. In the Transvaal, the Black leaders were under great pressure and many had gone into exile with the ANC. The most accessible Black leaders were from the churches -

like Bishop Desmond Tutu - they had the greatest influence until years later when Mandela's release transformed the situation.

And of the white community, those who opposed apartheid, you often had contact with them. Can you describe the personalities you knew?

The outstanding personality in the Progressive Party was Helen Suzman who became a good friend of ours. She was leading the campaign to unseat the National Party. She was a Member of Parliament an impressive speaker and writer. She became a constant thorn in the side of the Afrikaners and with the other members of the Progressive Party played a very important role in reconciling black with white opinion. The United Party played a less effective role. Although they were the inheritors of the liberal Smuts tradition, the United Party had a very ambivalent attitude. They did not believe that black and white could effectively work together, so they were never in the same position as the Progressive Party who were prepared to go for complete democracy and was unequivocal. The United Party still looked back to the old policy of their party, a restricted vote, where only black people of a certain rank in society could vote. They didn't believe in majority rule.

And one always thinks, i.e. many of us who were not in the Embassy or in any official capacity in South Africa but as outsiders, one has always thought of the South African government and the apartheid system as being incredibly hard-line. Was that your experience or did you see any flexibility?

In 1975 the British and American governments, with backing from the United Nations, initiated a long series of negotiations with the Vorster Government in an attempt to bring South Africa forward on the race issue. These negotiations had considerable impact in South Africa; they changed public opinion and it helped South Africans to realise the weight of public and governmental pressure from the world outside. The Vorster Government had wide control over the media and tried to present the world outside as ruled by countries that were anti-South Africa or Communist. We had to try to persuade the South Africans that we were fundamentally with them but wished to see them change their system of government. Within the Afrikaans speaking community, there were already various divisions; there were many hard-liners, but also some who were inclined to be more conciliatory. The National

Party was, ruled by the hard-liners but gradually as time progressed the more enlightened element in the party gained influence. It was this element, which in the end transferred power – after Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison on Robben Island. Then it was seen that the forward-looking element in the National Party had triumphed. People didn't realise it but the Afrikaners had always been split.

And in the negotiations you were describing just now. Were you using a carrot or a stick in your negotiations with South Africa?

Our negotiations with South Africa had three aspects; the first was Rhodesia; we were trying to get the South Africans to be helpful over Ian Smith's rebellion, which had lasted over many years. Prime Minister Harold Wilson had twice met Ian Smith for face-to-face talks but these had failed. Our government was still imposing sanctions designed to force Smith to recognise Britain's right to restore colonial government and then transfer power by democratic process. The second aspect involved the United Nations. The United Nations had passed many resolutions against South Africa over apartheid, and we were trying to get implementation of these resolutions and to increase the influence of the United Nations on South Africa. The third aspect, which also involved the U.N., was the dispute concerning South West Africa. South Africa had continued to administer South West Africa – soon to be called Namibia – since after the Second World War. There was a constant pressure from New York to force South Africa to hand back power to the UN. So we were dealing with three major international disputes as well as other local problems when they arose. South Africa was going through an internal revolt with riots in Soweto and elsewhere.

I would just like to revert to the negotiations. The South Africans were prepared to negotiate because they wanted to take themselves out of this diplomatic isolation?

Yes the South African government were much concerned about the world's opinion of them although they claimed to be impervious to it. They were worried about trade restrictions. Many countries would not send ambassadors to South Africa. There were restrictions on South African freedom of movement and many airlines couldn't fly into South Africa.

Perhaps you would like to tell me about Soweto and Steve Biko?

Well, the Soweto problem first. There were two elements of internal policy in South Africa, which were causing much concern. One was the policy of setting up separate homelands for black people. The Afrikaners claimed that they were achieving internal separation in South Africa by giving each of the tribal groups a “homeland” where they could have their own government with their own form of development. The land allocated to them was so poor that the tribal people who were settled there faced poverty and social problems. I visited all the so-called homelands and met their leaders in order to write long reports for the Foreign Office.

That was one side of it. The other was education and social policy. The Afrikaners were trying to spread the use of Afrikaans, to make it the principal language of all races in South Africa. The Blacks wanted to have English as their second language. In Soweto a regulation was adopted, that Afrikaans would be taught as the second language, and this was fiercely resisted. The schools went into boycott. I happened to go to Soweto on a visit from the Embassy on the very day that these troubles were beginning. I discovered that the schools were all closed and the authorities told me that there were ‘local difficulties’ but they would resolve them in a few days. It was the beginning of a state of open rebellion. The children refused to go back to school and began a boycott, which led to riots and shootings by the police. This caused outrage in the world at large and discredited South Africa severely

The death while in police custody of the civil right leader Steve Biko was another case. The South African police were often brutal in their methods when black people were arrested. The Black Consciousness Movement, which was quite separate from the ANC, was an intellectual movement, which tried to improve the blacks’ perception of their own racial qualities. A charismatic young man named Steve Biko was the leader of this movement. The police began to take an interest in him; he was arrested and thrown into prison where he was tortured. He refused to give the names of his colleagues, and eventually died in police custody. This was yet another outrage, and the Progressive Party led by Helen Suzman, decided that they would be present at the public funeral, attended by thousands in a football stadium near Port Elizabeth. I persuaded a group of my diplomatic colleagues to go with me to the funeral to show our respect for Steve Biko. And perhaps this did some good in terms of convincing the black people that we were all on their side.

Did you ever meet Steve Biko?

No, I had never met him.

It is interesting that you say that convinced the black people that you were hoping for better times and working for them. In your contact with black leaders, you say that British government policy was to represent British interests and not try to do anything precipitate in South Africa. Did the black leaders feel that Britain should take a more radical stand?

They certainly did. They were always trying to press us to take more drastic action, but they didn't realise the extent to which we were already, behind the scenes, putting quite severe pressure on South Africa. I think that our policy was right. The only result of imposing even more severe economic sanctions would have been that South African industry would have collapsed and black people would have been thrown out of work, and the repercussions for ordinary black people in South Africa would have been very bad. So I believe we were justified in trying to maintain trade and economic relations while at the same time putting strong international pressure. The enlightened elements in the Afrikaner National Party saw the light and eventually after the release of Mandela the situation changed in the direction we had hoped.

And what about people like Helen Suzman; did they feel that the British should have taken a radical stance?

No, I think that people like Helen Suzman and the other Progressive Party leaders who were in close contact with us, appreciated that we were doing as much as we could.

May we now move on to your involvement with Namibia while you were in South Africa? Perhaps you could tell me what your role was in the Namibian negotiations? Were they secret at this time, why was Britain involved and where did they take place?

With so many current problems on our plate and with the Ambassador very much involved with Rhodesia and other urgent political topics, he asked me to deputize for him in the U.N. dispute over the administration of Namibia. So he put me in touch with the leader of the National Party of Namibia, Dirk Mudge, who had come down to Cape Town to take part in a conference. Dirk Mudge then arranged that I would visit Namibia and do a conducted tour of the whole country, meet leading people, both black and white and get myself thoroughly

informed about the local scene. Which I did thanks to Dirk Mudge and his wife who were extremely hospitable and helpful. June went with me and we were flown by Dirk in his own plane. We visited the frontier area in the north where the tension was greatest. The South African army had been sent the year before over the border into Angola and had tried to take over power in Luanda. That invasion had in the end to be called off under heavy pressure from the US, Britain and Russia. I was at that time Chargé d'Affaires and had helped to negotiate the peaceful withdrawal of South African troops. So I was already to some extent well aware of the difficulties up there. The United Nations was still determined to take back the mandate from South Africa. In this they were being strongly supported by the other African countries. Negotiations with the South Africans began in Cape Town where we formed what came to be called the Contact Group in which we had representatives from Britain, from the United States, France and Canada. Either the British or American delegations in New York would send representatives who came in and helped us. Our role was to try to persuade the South Africans to do what the Union Nations wanted, which was to hand over power and hold elections for an independent Namibian Government.

Why was Britain involved and were they secret?

Britain was involved as a member of the Security Council and because we had always played a prominent role in trying to sort out problems in South Africa. The negotiations which took place in Cape Town, sometimes in Pretoria finally ended in success – but that was long after I left South Africa. The negotiations were secret in theory but of course everything the United Nations did was soon public knowledge.

Can you give us any insights into the progress of these negotiations?

It was a long process; the first and vital breakthrough made in my time was to persuade the South African Government to engage in negotiations at all. The South African forces were then still fighting a guerrilla war against SWAPO terrorists in northern Namibia. The negotiations also had to take into account the views of the local internal political parties in Namibia. There were about a dozen parties including the internal wing of SWAPO - the South West African Peoples' Organisation. The most active leaders of SWAPO had taken refuge abroad, and were being supported, rather like the ANC, by committed groups at the United Nations. SWAPO's internal representatives took part in talks with us in Windhoek.

And then we had representatives of the Hereros, the Ovambos and all the other tribal entities. On the other side of the table were the National Party and parties supporting the interests of the white people in South West Africa, as well as spokesmen for the coloured races. It was quite complicated

How long did these negotiations go on?

Our four nations Contact Group started the process, but it went on for many years. We used to take a team up to Windhoek and talk to the local parties on behalf of our governments. The UN eventually sent representatives to negotiate direct with the South African Government. Their meetings were somewhat fraught because South Africa accused the UN of giving support to SWAPO terrorists.

And how did our government look on them, as terrorists or freedom fighters?

Our government regarded them more as freedom fighters but gave them no direct support. Initially the South Africans were in full control, they had a large army in northern Namibia. They believed that they could carry on almost indefinitely running the country the way they did. Namibia was quite prosperous and was peaceful and apart from the SWAPO terrorist activity which was limited to the northern area on the borders of Angola.

Were there any differences among the Contact Group?

Yes, the Americans believed that we should put stronger pressure on the South Africans through the United Nations or by imposing sanctions. The British were in the middle ground; the French were rather dis-engaged, they didn't play any serious role; the Canadians played a very useful role in the negotiations, because they had much influence at the United Nations at that time,

And what were your impressions of the South West African Peoples' Organisation and the South African representatives?

I only met the internal SWAPO people who were playing a difficult hand as the spokesmen of an external terrorist organisation inside the country. Their leader Daniel Tjongarero, who we saw most often, was an able politician certainly played a positive part.

What about the South Africans themselves?

At the start the South Africans were very hard to move, the South African Army was seen to be in full control and still believed that they could defeat SWAPO. The Minister of Defence supported the Generals in their view that it was not necessary to have a political settlement. One of the key people was Dirk Mudge - by now my friend -, who had the entrée to the senior South African officials. It was he, I believe, who was the person who was really responsible for persuading the South Africans that for the good of everyone in the country, and especially for the minority white population, an agreement had to be achieved. He had the vision to see that it would be possible to do - what later happened in South Africa – to hand over to the principal opposition group and allowing the country to gain independence.

That is interesting. And to what extent did British politicians become directly involved?

At that time, no British politician was able to go either to Rhodesia or to South West Africa; Ambassadors took the view that they would be overstepping their role if they went to Windhoek. That is why I had to be the leader on the British side. The French didn't take that view; the French and the Canadian Ambassadors came to Windhoek on a few occasions.

Were there any differences in policy between officials and government ministers at home?

There was no disagreement on the main issue. We all felt that it was right to try to persuade the South Africans to hand over power and we worked in a united way to that end. .

Can you give us any insight into the differences that in detail were of any importance?

The important point was to be firm and determined in the negotiations with South Africans. It was a long and tedious process. When cabinet level negotiations began with John Vorster, the South African Prime Minister, he seemed to be with very much against any concessions. Later he changed his mind and we had the impression from his officials that he was beginning

to see the light. But then suddenly John Vorster died. His equally tough successor P.W. Botha was very much in the hands of the generals and so we had a setback. Eventually negotiations in New York succeeded in bringing South Africa round; The UN special representative, Marti Ahtisaari, was sent out, and a referendum held, followed by UN supervised elections, which were won by SWAPO. They took over power under Sam Nujoma the SWAPO leader. Dirk Mudge became the leader of the opposition in the new Namibian Parliament and became in effect the bridge between the blacks and the whites. Partly, I believe because of his moderating influence, power was transferred without an internal struggle. This was a remarkable achievement.

Finally, what was the atmosphere like between the South African side and SWAPO?

During the long years of negotiations the South Africans wouldn't have any dealing direct with SWAPO, although there were, latterly, some contacts at the UN.

Did Daniel Tjongarero actually sit in on these negotiations or not?

No. When we went to Windhoek as a Contact Group we met all the internal parties including Daniel Tjongarero's internal SWAPO, but we did not negotiate with them.

Is there anything else you would like to add about matters of interest in the behind the scenes negotiations?

There were plenty of setbacks but the final result was a well-managed transfer of power. Namibia now enjoys peace and prosperity and the internal situation in Namibia is probably better than in South Africa.

So you obviously played quite a large role in this. It must give you a degree of personal satisfaction?

I played a useful and satisfying part and it is satisfying that thanks to our mediation both South Africa and Namibia later became members of the Commonwealth along with South Africa.

So you had quite a tricky task in the sense of sort of calming down the Americans and you obviously worked closely with Dirk Mudge, but you also tried to oil the wheels as far as the South Africans were concerned?

Yes, that is about right. That is the role we sought to play; we had to maintain trust on all sides. We had to be trusted by the South Africans, trusted by the internal parties as far as possible, also trusted by the UN. The strong feeling at the UN was being stoked up all the time by external SWAPO. South Africa was then under attack not only over the question of Namibia but also over apartheid and oppression at home.

Presumably apartheid operated in South West Africa before it became Namibia?

It did, but to a much lesser extent, thanks partly to Dirk Mudge. The white population in South West Africa had always been resistant to the extremes of apartheid; inter-racial feeling was much better than in South Africa.

And what was the relationship like between Dirk Mudge and Daniel Tjongarero?

I don't think Dirk Mudge trusted Tjongarero. He thought him a man of straw, just a mouthpiece for external SWAPO and didn't believe Tjongarero had much influence with SWAPO leaders outside, but he was wrong in that. I think probably Tjongarero played a useful role as it turned out in the end. He was doing what he could in trying to reconcile the two sides.

Did the two men realise they had to get on together?

Tjongarero was not a major figure and not nearly as influential as Dirk Mudge. He had only rather limited support among the other black groups. The Hereros didn't get on with the Ovambos and the different tribal groups tended to work to their own particular interests. At a critical moment the Herero leader, Clemens Capuuo, was murdered, which showed up the acute divisions

We'll leave South Africa now and go back to your time as Head of Arms Control and Disarmament Department in the Foreign Office between 1970 and 1974. Can you tell us what was the remit of the Department and yours?

When I was posted back to London in April 1970, I was told that Ronald Hope-Jones had just resigned as Head of Disarmament Department over the issue of the use of C.S. gas by the British forces in Northern Ireland. I was to take over his job.

The Department had been formed when Britain joined the Ten Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva during the 1960s. Harold Wilson's Government had recently appointed a new Minister for Disarmament, Alun Chalfont, an active politician who was determined to make a big impression in UN meetings on disarmament. Now he had me as his principal adviser, who knew nothing about the business at all. Within days Chalfont rang me and said: Look I am going off to Ottawa to have meetings with the Canadians and I shall then be going to Washington; 'I would like you to come along. I realise you are still playing yourself in, but at least if you come with me you'll learn a lot on the way'. So we set off to Ottawa and had very friendly talks with the Canadians and indeed I did learn a good deal. A week after we returned Chalfont rang up and said: 'I am going to Geneva in two days time with Solly Zuckerman - then Chief Scientific Adviser at the Ministry of Defence. I am going over to find out what is going on in the 40 Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva and I would like you to come with me'. We set off by private jet to Geneva and again I was thrown in at the deep end. From then on I ran the Department with Chalfont playing a very active role. A year later Chalfont became Minister of State and I had become well accustomed to the work. I had to supervise the work of our delegation at the 40 Nation Conference in Geneva also give instructions to our delegation in New York, during the UN General Assembly.

Our main objective at that period was to achieve international agreement on treaties to ban the use of biological and chemical weapons. Britain was not at that time directly involved in the nuclear side of disarmament where the Americans were leading. The Biological Weapons Convention was signed in 1972, and we then had the task of getting this Convention ratified and approved in Parliament. The principal opponent of the BW Convention at that time was Tam Dalyell, a Scottish MP, who has remained a thorn in flesh of many governments up to the present day. He believed it had no proper verification provisions, in which he was actually quite justified. But in the end we completed ratification and the BW Convention came into effect soon after my time in the Department.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, which we also had under negotiation was much more contentious. The Americans, like the Russians, still had a large chemical stockpile. American support was therefore vital to us in these negotiations.

I just want to go back to this Biological Warfare Convention. Unlike the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, China and France acceded. Why was this? And was their accession regarded as a major area of progress by other signatories?

Negotiations on the limitation of nuclear weapons were far more important in terms of world strategy because this was a time of tense rivalry between the United States and Russia in the Cold War. We were under threat from Soviet nuclear weapons unless we maintained our own nuclear capability at a similar level. America was the principal nuclear power. Britain, France and China were minor nuclear powers. The agreement reached in Geneva on the BW Convention helped to improve the atmosphere in East/West relations.

You mentioned that your predecessor in the Department had resigned because of his objections to the use of CS gas. Did you have reservations yourself and what was the attitude of other signatories to the Convention on the British use of CS gas?

The Americans supported our position; some other countries were against it. I considered that the British government was correct. CS gas was not toxic unless it was used in an intense way - it was an irritant - not a killing gas. So that's why the British government thought it was justified in using the CS gas as a riot control agent in Northern Ireland. There was quite a scientific battle over the question of CS gas, also a vociferous UN lobby against its use.

I ask this in terms of the use of Agent Orange as well, do you not consider and perhaps others consider that the use of CS gas and Agent Orange in Vietnam contravened at least the spirit if not the terms of the Geneva Convention?

That is a controversial question. The Americans in the end regretted their use of Agent Orange in the same way they regretted using napalm. The American government justified the use on grounds of military necessity. They were mistaken in thinking that it would help them win the war. It didn't in the end. At the United Nations the prevalent feeling against the United States weighed against them. Nevertheless they did go ahead and the American forces

got authority to use both Agent Orange, napalm and CS gas in the face of a great deal of world protest.

And did the Americans not consider that they had contravened the Geneva Convention?

They didn't. The American government maintained, that the Geneva Convention did not restrict the use of these substances.

SALT I was negotiated in 1973 during your term of office. Was our government kept informed by the American government about the progress of it all?

Yes, we were kept informed and we supported the Americans in their aim of reducing the number of strategic nuclear weapons; they had to judge what was safe to cut without endangering the nuclear balance. One of the problems of the SALT Treaty - Strategic Arms Limitation Talks - was always verification, making sure that if you reduced the weapons the other side had done the same. The Americans and the Russians finally worked out a system of mutual inspections, which enabled them to check on each other. That took years of negotiations. They did eventually achieve it and signed the SALT I Treaty. Then they went on to SALT II.

Did your Department play any role at all in this?

Hardly any. We were kept informed, but we weren't involved in the negotiations.

And your term in London coincided, as you said with the Wilson government with Jim Callaghan as Foreign Secretary. Were there any differences over policy about arms control and disarmament between officials and ministers?

I can't recall in detail, but obviously there were some differences. Sir Thomas Brimelow, who was the Under Secretary in charge at that time, was very able in ironing out problems.

What about other Labour MPs such as Tam Dalyell? I mean the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament movement was pretty active at that time?

The NGOs, the non-government organisations, took a much more radical line on all questions of disarmament. There was a strong NGO lobby led by CND for general and complete disarmament, motivated by pacifism and an idealistic wish to get rid of all weapons. The British government, whether Conservatives or Labour were in office, did not accept that point of view, so there was always tension with the NGOs.

To what extent did you feel that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister and the ministers at a more junior level thought they had to placate these NGOs?

That became one of my main concerns later when I became Disarmament Adviser. At the time when I was Head of Disarmament Department, I was sometimes invited to take part in NGO conferences and other meetings where we had close contact with NGOs. This helped to keep the understanding alive between the two sides. We never achieved agreement because the NGOs were always for going the whole hog, whereas the British Government rightly held the view that Britain's security rested on being as strong as any potential enemy. We would not take the risk of disarming without proper verification.

I wanted to ask what the relationship was like between your Department and the Ministry of Defence? Where there any tensions between the Foreign Office and the Ministry?

There were tensions but we got on well together. The MOD naturally took the back seat on disarmament questions. Their role in life was to keep Britain militarily strong and capable of defending itself and therefore, as a whole, they took a more sceptical line about disarmament than the Foreign Office. We always had a Military Adviser in our Delegation in Geneva and whenever an important decision was to be taken we exchanged information and agreed everything with the MOD.

Did you feel that the officials or ministers that you dealt with in the Ministry of Defence were open with you?

They were. They obviously did consider sometimes that we were going too fast, that we were risking Britain's strategic interests by agreeing to this or that disarmament proposal. But there was a natural tension between the two sides. We were upholding two different principles; they had the duty of maintaining our strength and defensive power while the

Foreign Office was trying to negotiate treaties, which in the long run would help us to reduce numbers of weapons. There were tensions, but they were well handled.

As you said several times the relationship between Britain and America was very important, Kissinger was Secretary of State and he and Jim Callaghan enjoyed a close relationship. Jim Callaghan was a great admirer of Kissinger, wasn't he? But what about Wilson's relationship with Nixon.

I did not have the impression that Wilson had good relationships across the Atlantic. The latter part of my time as Head of Disarmament Department was served under the Conservative government of Ted Heath.

And when Heath became Prime Minister, how did you get on?

Sir Alec Douglas Home was Foreign Secretary and Edward Heath was Prime Minister. That was a constructive period. I found the Conservative Ministers to be very effective, they were more cautious perhaps than Chalfont and Wilson would have been.

So you felt that the Conservatives rather put the brake on disarmament issues, did you?

I wouldn't say they put the brake on but they were never inclined to rush into things. They were more concerned with defence issues than with disarmament.

So are you saying that you thought that the Wilson government went too fast in this direction?

No, They were perhaps more idealistic, more inclined to push for agreements in the United Nations. The appointment of Alun Chalfont as Minister of Disarmament had been designed to show the world that Britain stood by the United Nations. Labour policy was always pro UN.

Did you go along with that? Did that reflect your own thinking?

I had no strong view one-way or the other. One just worked away at the coalface and did one's best.

So what would you say was the most challenging aspect of the job and were there any high points or low points?

The most challenging aspect probably was the FCO relationship with the MOD, keeping a balance between the two aspects of policy; that is between defence and negotiations. The other aspect was working with our Delegation in Geneva and trying to keep them well informed. We had to be in constant touch with them, and be sure that when we sent instructions, these were properly worked out in relation to the work of our allies.

Did you ever think that the Committee in Geneva became rather independent minded?

Yes, on occasions they did. Sometimes we had to try and restrain them; sometimes we had to push them. Depending on the issue. Our UK delegation was always very active and the United Kingdom played a very important and influential role both in Geneva and at the UN in New York; we were forever pushing the Americans along because they were very hesitant and still are.

And what about successes and failures during your time as Head of Department? Anything stand out?

Our only outstanding success was the adoption of the Biological Weapons Convention. The Non-Proliferation Treaty had been the previous major success of the negotiations in Geneva. I went with Edward Heath when he signed the ratification document. The Non-Proliferation Treaty remains to this day one of the principal bastions of the balance of power at the nuclear level.

And failures or disappointments, shall I say?

Our main disappointment was over chemical weapons. We had a very frustrating time trying to agree a text. The Americans and Russians both had large stockpiles of CW and many countries were reluctant to allow adequate access to inspectors. The chemical weapons negotiations were dragging badly.

So when you say we had problems with these, do you mean the British?

I mean the British and others like the Swedes who were trying very hard to promote agreement.

So you would say we were the leaders in the field?

We were one of the leaders.

Can we now talk about your time as Ambassador and Leader of UKDEL to the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva from 1979 to 1982? What was your role in this job? What was the history of, and remit of, the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva?

My role now was to negotiate as UK representative in a large UN Committee and in the same disarmament field that I already knew well from four years earlier. Not much had changed. I had the advantage of living and working in Geneva through spring and summer sessions of the 40 Nation Committee. In the autumn I took my whole delegation to New York to sit and work in the United Nations General Assembly and the UN First Committee on Disarmament where all the world's nations were represented – except Switzerland. Because of the underlying political divisions in the UN and in Geneva, and because the number of countries participating was so large and unwieldy, we adopted the practice of combining in groups. The Western Group covered the NATO countries plus Australia and Japan; the Soviet and East European Group, comprised all the countries under Soviet influence. Then there was the Neutral and Non-aligned Group - the largest so that they could always outvote the rest of us - and finally, China. The Chinese Ambassador used to say: “we are group of one”. These four groups inevitably took opposite sides in the East/West confrontation, which was one of the major features of life at that time. Any statement made by an Ambassador of the Western Group would immediately be set upon and contested by members of the Soviet or East European Group; and vice versa. The Neutral Non-aligned Group regarded themselves as the guardians of the old-fashioned concept of achieving general and complete disarmament. It is perhaps worth recording how this came about.

When the United Nations General Assembly was established in 1946 after the Second World War, the Disarmament Committee was the first committee to be formed with the General Assembly devoted to the idea of general and complete disarmament. That was an idealist

task, quite beyond the possibilities of the time, because of the degree of armed confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the NATO countries. The Soviet bloc from the start adopted the propaganda line that they were ready for general disarmament. They blamed the Western group for obstruction. There had been almost total deadlock until the 18 Nations Disarmament Committee - ENDC - was set up in Geneva in the early 1960's and began negotiations on a more practical basis. This ENDC was the predecessor of our 40 Nation Committee and they had negotiated the Partial Test Ban – no more tests in the earth's atmosphere - and the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970.

I suppose to some extent you have already discussed what relations were like but can you recall any moments of deep division and who were the most difficult and who were the most co-operative members?

There was always a deep division, arising inevitably from the political and strategic confrontation between the Communist Soviet bloc and the NATO countries. The most difficult to deal with from our point of view were naturally the Soviet bloc countries. China was neutral and relatively co-operative. Our committee was therefore unable to discuss nuclear disarmament in any practical way and out of this impasse arose the American effort, to get nuclear arms control going on a bilateral basis. In 1965 they began with the Russians what were called Strategic Arms Limitations Talks. The SALT I negotiations were followed by the SALT II round. All these 'arms control' talks were based on the principal of reinforcing nuclear deterrence and achieving nuclear deterrence between the Soviet bloc and NATO at a lower level of weapons.

In Geneva we had what we called the multilateral disarmament negotiations. Our work in the CD was often tedious and frustrating. We had endless meetings where we had to reconcile a great disparity of opinions. Different countries had their different aims, and we had to try and match the Soviet initiatives with initiatives on our side. Soviet initiatives always were self-serving rather than designed to actually produce results. They wanted to present themselves as the main proponents of disarmament and thereby gain votes from the neutral and non-aligned. We made progress only on the treaty to ban chemical weapons and some other minor projects.

Did work with the committee eventually seem more like an intellectual exercise rather than an attempt to deal with reality would you say?

That was certainly the view of all of us in the Western Group. The Americans had started their bilateral arms control talks with the Russians largely because they felt that what was being done in Geneva and New York was an intellectual exercise. It is true to say that much more was achieved in the end through the bilateral negotiations than we achieved, certainly in the time I was with the CD.

Because the Americans continue to have this view of the UN in general, don't they - that it is a talking shop?

In many ways it was a justified view. The Americans were anyhow strong enough to take an independent line although they were often criticised for their attitude especially by the neutral and non-aligned. We supported the American point of view and we did our best to help them along.

Because you felt that the bilateral was more valuable, did that have a rather demotivating affect on you and your work?

I think it is right to say that was always at the back of one's mind. In the conference I was always seated between the American Ambassador on my left and the Soviet Ambassador on my right. I was naturally the close ally of to my neighbour on the left – the American – but I had to maintain a good relationship, as far as I could, with my Soviet colleague, a Georgian. He was an amusing and intelligent former professor called Victor Issrealyan with whom we got on with very well socially. When I left Geneva after four years he was guest at a farewell dinner for me given by the Japanese Ambassador. He made a speech and said: 'I would like David Summerhayes to know that I have used his attitude in the Geneva discussions as an example in the academic exercises which I conduct, when I go back to Moscow and teach at our foreign affairs school'. So I was rather pleased about that!

I am sure you were! So, this talking shop aspect of the committee presumably is what you regard as its weakness. What would you regard as its strengths?

Although we signally neither failed to stop the scourge of war in so many parts of the world nor the disastrous consequences of the production and distribution of small arms, we did

ensure that all countries were focussing on what possibilities there were of achieving arms control and disarmament. This became an important aspect of inter-government policy. And we kept alive the hopes of a world in which nuclear weapons would be reduced. We encouraged a general effort towards world control of armaments. On specifics, we preserved the validity of the Non-Proliferation Treaty; we made progress on the Chemical Weapons Treaty and we reinforced the Biological Weapons Treaty plus some other minor aspects of arms control. At the time it seemed very frustrating but over four years I think we achieved quite a lot thanks to the able and dedicated staff working with me in our Delegation. We always had very good support from Ministers who visited us periodically in Geneva. Mrs. Thatcher came in 1981 and she also spoke powerfully at a special disarmament session at the UN in New York, just after the Falklands War.

We'll move on to more general things. The 1970s oil crisis led to an increased growth in the use of nuclear energy. What pressure was exerted by the UK on countries who developed a nuclear capability, for example Israel, to submit to visits by the International Atomic Energy Authority, or to sign up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty for example Brazil, Israel, India, Pakistan and so on?

The oil crisis certainly increased the demand for nuclear energy; it also gave a great impetus to the efforts to extend the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Many countries wished to develop nuclear energy for peaceful uses, for production of electricity or other civil purposes, and had to give access to the IAEA to visit their nuclear sites. We were putting a lot of pressure on those countries, notably Israel, India, Pakistan and South Africa who had not yet joined the NPT.

What was their reaction to this pressure?

South Africa eventually joined the NPT. India and Pakistan never did. Brazil complied without signing. Israel has stood out defiantly ever since. Other countries, which had signed the NPT, such as Iran and Iraq, went on developing nuclear capabilities of a minor kind, without declaring them. That is what led on to the crisis we have had with Iran and Iraq in recent years.

So nuclear proliferation presumably was the major preoccupation of those involved in arms control and disarmament during your time?

It was one of the major preoccupations. Chemical disarmament was the other issue that we spent a great deal of time on.

And had biological and chemical WMD problem assumed the importance it has now?

I believe that the dangers of any widespread use of chemical and biological weapons have always been grossly exaggerated in the press. The press and the media generally have always played up the danger from chemical weapons. There is a particularly terrible memory of the use of gas in the First World War. Therefore we have a strong public consciousness of the threat of chemical weapons but in my view the degree of threat was always highly exaggerated. Since the Geneva Protocol was signed in 1926 chemical weapons have never been used in large quantity. In the Iraq-Iran war, after some hundreds of soldiers had suffered attack by chemical weapons, both sides gave up use of CW because it was seen to be ineffective militarily. Use of chemical weapons on a big scale by Iraq is highly unlikely.

On the subject of biological weapons: Although signatories agreed to the ban on BW warfare in 1972, prohibition of chemical weapons in warfare was more difficult to negotiate because of American objections, some say because of research in the field is of commercial value. What would you say were the major hurdles?

It is true that the ban on biological weapons negotiated in 1972 was achieved on the basis that biological weapons were not a serious military threat, and stringent verification measures were not therefore necessary. But when we came to discussing chemical warfare, the problem of inspections became paramount. All countries, but especially the United States, took the view that we had to have a really complex and complete inspection procedure to make sure that no countries could develop, stockpile or use chemical weapons. And that meant inspecting chemical industries in all countries. The United States was very reluctant to see inspectors visiting their chemical plants, for reasons of commercial secrecy. Eventually agreement was reached and those inspection processes are now in place. But some important countries, including the United States, still have not ratified the agreement. The problems of

inspection have been dramatically shown by the recent search for WMD in Iraq. It is actually very difficult to prove whether a country has or has not any chemical warfare capability.

There has been controversy about the supply of chemical and biological weapons by the West to Iraq during the 1988-89 Iraq-Iran War: what do you know about this? Was it a matter of concern to the committee in Geneva? And did it lead to differences between the committee and say, the US and British governments?

No actual chemical weapons were supplied to Iraq. There was the Scott inquiry in the UK over the allegations of supply of other types of arms to Iraq.

Going back to more general things. In the 1980s there were talks on the comprehensive test ban treaty. President Reagan ended the talks. Why was that?

Again the problem was inspection. The Partial Test Ban Treaty signed in the 1960s; thanks largely to work done by Sir Harold Macmillan eliminated the testing of nuclear warheads in space. The comprehensive test ban would go further and eliminate testing underground. The comprehensive test ban negotiations became bogged down in controversy over the degree to which it was possible to detect very small underground tests. The United States pulled out of the talks because they thought that the procedures for detecting underground tests were not adequate. The British government supported the test ban throughout the time I was in Geneva. I made the final report on the comprehensive test ban negotiations just before the closure in 1982.

How efficacious would you consider the Partial Test Ban treaty was, and is in avoidance of nuclear war? Do you feel that the achievements in the arms control and disarmament area at the end of the Cold War have been undermined by global terrorism and events such as the attack in New York of 11 September 2001?

That is a big question. My broad answer is that these are two quite distinct aspects of the threat to our future, posed by conventional arms and nuclear weapons. The danger of nuclear weapons was acute during the Cold War. Since the Cold War ended the pressure on nuclear disarmament has very much lessened. It is still very important to pursue nuclear non-proliferation - preventing nuclear weapons from getting into the hands of more countries.

India and Pakistan now have nuclear weapons. North Korea is thought to have developed a capability. Israel certainly has the capability and the weapons. But the pressure over the world as a whole is much less now that the nuclear confrontation between the NATO alliance and the Warsaw Pact has been eliminated. The problem of global terrorism is the new menace. When I was in Geneva we never talked about terrorism. An event such as 11 September (2001) had not even been visualised. Now we see terrorism as the greater threat.

Some say that the increase of terrorist or freedom fighter activity worldwide has demonstrated that arms of one kind or another will always find their way into the hands of rogue groups. Was this a major concern during your work on arms control and disarmament?

It was. But we were not talking then in terms of terrorism. We were talking in terms of preventing arms getting into the hands of liberation movements or underground movements.

Not freedom fighters?

Our main worry at that time in the CD was that we were not able to do anything about the kinds of weapons that were killing most people around the world, namely small arms, mines, weapons in the hands of either liberation movements or internal revolts. But we found it impossible to introduce any serious discussion to control the trade in small arms. Most of the African countries, and even the neutral and non-aligned countries, refused to discuss the subject and said this would be an intrusion on their right to defend themselves. The Soviet bloc, at the time were exporting arms - Kalashnikovs and all the rest - at a terrific rate, and some countries in the West like the French, were also exporting arms. Britain and the United States too were exporting arms but under very strict control. So the whole question of small arms was a major issue, which was never usefully discussed. No successful way of controlling the trade and export of small arms was ever found. We talk of weapons of mass destruction - WMD - but the real weapons of mass destruction are small arms not nuclear weapons.

Finally on this subject, did you have contact with the UN Weapons Inspectorate and if so how would you rate it?

We only had contact with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. Saddam Hussein had not come on the scene then and so the need for inspections in Iraq had not arisen at that time.

There were, I believe, biological weapons inspections in Russia in the 1980s?

The Soviet Government would never have allowed any inspectors to go inside Russia and the Biological Weapons treaty didn't provide for an inspection.

So can we now move on to your time as Disarmament Adviser from 1983 to 1990? Was the role of Disarmament Adviser a new one and to whom did you report?

I was asked to take on the role of Disarmament Adviser in the Foreign Office soon after I retired from Geneva. There was great concern in the Office about the heightened debate in Britain on nuclear weapons. The early 1980s was the period of the great CND - Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament - marches. The churches had become involved because CND was setting up Christian CND branches. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie had come to Geneva just a few months before I left and told me of his concern about a committee, set up by the Anglican Synod to write a report on 'The Church and the Bomb'. This was to be published shortly, and Dr. Runcie was worried that there would be a confrontation. The government would disapprove of the attitude taken in the report and that would place him as Archbishop - who had to co-operate with the government and the Queen - in a most unwelcome position. Many in the churches were convinced by CND views and felt that the Church should support an immediate demand that the British government voluntarily ban all nuclear weapons. Archbishop Runcie asked me to come and see him as soon as I got back to London; He wanted me to briefly become part of his staff. I mentioned this in the Foreign Office and the response was 'It could perhaps be valuable but we feel the need to employ you to deal with the whole "peace movement" now very strong in this country. We would like you to become a new Adviser in the Foreign Office, to tackle the nuclear debate within the UK and internationally'. I was appointed initially for six months but the work in the end continued for ten years - trying to reconcile these peace groups to the British government's view that nuclear weapons had to be maintained. I set up regular meetings between Ministers and NGOs, especially the UN sponsored ones, and I went on lecture tours and spoke to peace groups. People could invite me to address their groups, also at schools, and universities,

which I did countrywide. I also gave help to the NATO Information Service and the Ministry of Defence in combating CND propaganda. This developed into quite a major occupation, to convince people that the government's defence and nuclear policy was the right one.

I am fascinated because the CND had been active for years before. Why was it deemed necessary to counteract their propaganda at this point?

Because the CND marches were growing in size. There were times when 500,000 people marched through London - CND claimed a million. It had become a major public issue. I couldn't do much as a single individual but I may have helped to alleviate the problem. Mrs Thatcher and her Ministers of course played the leading role.

So in a sense you were there to take the heat off FCO officials?

Yes, that is right.

Did you have any dealings with any Members of Parliament, some of whom were very active in these things?

No, I was not involved with Members of Parliament. My role was to contact all the 'peace groups', countrywide, who were anti-NATO, or anti-nuclear. There were also important pro-NATO organisations, which supported the government, so I was in touch with them and I tried to give them up to date information.

How were you received by organisations opposed to you as it were and nuclear weapons? Were they antagonistic?

I never imposed myself on them. I always went to meetings by invitation. We generally had very reasonable discussions but there were times when extremists in CND took the floor and I then faced some pretty tough questioning.

Did you enjoy this job?

Not always. It was often difficult.

What did you find most difficult?

Facing up to the extremists. It was almost impossible to convince them. I could talk day and night, they wouldn't agree. They insisted that nuclear weapons were a threat to humanity.

Was it more difficult dealing with the churches?

Opinion among church groups was idealistic and often pacifist but the Bishops and church leaders on the whole supported government policy.

But there were some CND supporters, weren't there?

There were a few. The then Bishop of Salisbury was particularly strong in his support for CND.

Do you have anything else to add?

I have mentioned my joint work with the Ministry of Defence. Once a year the MOD organised a NATO briefing tour in the UK and I joined a team of naval, military and arms control experts speaking to audiences in the major cities. I was also invited by the NATO Information Service to take part in their meetings in Brussels. The longest and most memorable tour I undertook was in 1991 as a NATO envoy to Russia and the Baltic States after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. NATO had just established the North Atlantic Co-operation Council designed to bring the Russians and the East Europeans into a discussion with NATO about the future. I travelled to Moscow, St Petersburg -Leningrad as it was then - Kiev, and the Baltic States to assure them that NATO was now neutral as far as they were concerned; we were no longer to be seen as their enemy.

Ambassador of Peace.

Yes, it was a satisfactory message to be able to bring to them after the ending of the 'Cold War'. With another senior NATO official, I had the unique experience of going as the first representatives of a Western country to address the Soviet War College in Moscow, the Naval

College in St Petersburg and the Naval College in Kiev. We spoke to literally hundreds of senior Russian military and top rank naval officers, who had been brought up in the Soviet doctrine of conflict with NATO. We came to tell them that we would now be their friends! And it took a bit of doing, but they received us very well. We had a few awkward questions though they listened to us with care and attention.

How did you do this actually? Did you stand on a platform?

We had to stand on platforms in a succession of large halls with all these senior officers in front of us. They were asked to attend and they all did. Bram Tristram, my NATO colleague from the Netherlands did a lot of the talking. A First Secretary accompanied us from the British Embassy who interpreted for us.

And so did you give a speech or was it a question and answer?

We both gave speeches and then answered questions.

How many questions did you field? What sort of questions did they ask?

The most difficult questions came from the naval officers. They were convinced that NATO spy-planes were still being sent over the Russian Baltic fleet. We told them that American satellite traverses over Russia were a routine procedure and not designed to find the Baltic fleet. In fact, the day before we had been taken to see a part of the Baltic fleet, and had been told that the ships were mostly unfit to go to sea!

Did this come as a surprise?

It did. One must remember that in those times we had the impression that the Soviet forces were enormously strong and a great threat to us especially at sea. What we found in Leningrad docks was nothing like that!

Weren't you surprised that our intelligence hadn't revealed this?

I was.

So that's quite a commentary on our own intelligence, in a sense.

Yes, I think our intelligence was quite often at fault. The same thing has happened in Iraq. We had been unable to monitor effectively because of very restricted access over many years.

So you would advocate constant diplomatic contact no matter how differing our views are with the country.

Absolutely. That is the great virtue of having Embassies around the world. We should always try to maintain diplomatic contact. I believe that diplomats are now withdrawn too readily.

Countries like the USSR we did have diplomatic relations, didn't we?

We did. But the Russians and other communist countries maintained a very high degree of secrecy

Just to finish off with these meetings. Were there any other questions that surprised you or floored you at the meetings that you held when you were there to proclaim the end of the Cold War?

The remarkable thing was that they seemed to accept the changed world situation without demur. You would hardly have expected this after all those years of Cold War tension and propaganda. General Rodionov, Director of the War College, who later became Soviet Defence Minister under Gorbachev, received us in his very grand offices. He chatted to us over drinks and said "You will get some difficult questions when you go down and meet the Colonels but I am glad you have come".

Excellent. That's very good. How very satisfying.

The world is sometimes more civilized than it appears to be. I really think we suffer from exaggeration in many aspects of international conflict.

So that came at the end of your diplomatic service. You must have been delighted. Can we just go on to a few general questions about your career, what changes did you observe in the nature of the Diplomatic Service during your career?

When I first joined in the 1940s the atmosphere in the Foreign Office was remarkably relaxed and informal. We were not expected to arrive for work in the morning before half past nine sometimes even ten o'clock. We could expect to leave at half past six unless we were caught with a parliamentary question and we could all go out to a sociable lunch. Nowadays our successors have to be there at eight o'clock and they don't leave until half past eight at night. They have sandwiches at the desk, they sit in front of computers and life is mostly in a rush. Nevertheless I still think the Foreign Office a most efficient organisation, one of the best we have in the country. When I was serving abroad as Ambassador in international meetings, I could always be sure that the instructions I received from the Foreign Office would be timely and relevant. By comparison with my foreign colleagues, especially the Americans, I felt again and again, that I was being well served by officials at home.

Why do you think people have to work such long hours now, compared to when you started?

I think this is true throughout the Civil Service, not only the Foreign Office. More pressure is being put on the Civil Service. The government is expecting more and more for less and less. It is the way modern society is organised; the same thing is going on in business.

Do you think the increase of pressure is due to the lack of funds?

The Service is and always has been under pressure from the Treasury. As far as welfare is concerned the Service has been greatly improved. When I joined there was hardly any welfare, or training when serving at home in the FO. By contrast upon arrival in one of the larger posts much more help was available. There was an Administration Officer, who helped you to find a house and gave assistance in many other ways.

Did our entry into the EU have a profound effect on the work you did?

Not a profound effect, because we are still conducting our own foreign policy, although we do it in a collaborative way now within the EU. When the UK joined the European Union we adopted the practice of monthly meetings with our EU partners. To keep your EU colleagues informed became part of the routine, but we seldom had any common policy, we just kept in touch with each other. As time goes on this kind of cooperation is being reinforced and there is more active collaboration. The same practice has been going on for countless years within the Commonwealth. We had even closer collaboration with the Commonwealth countries and in some areas we also had very close collaboration with the United States. When I was working in Geneva my closest contact was with my US colleagues. We kept each other informed about our instructions and many things were done jointly.

Did any of the Government inspired reports on the work of the Foreign Office have any significant effect on you or your own work?

Very much so! The Plowden Report had the most effect because it established a very much better system of support for members of the Service in many fields. At the time it was being drafted, I was Secretary of the Diplomatic Service Association - the association of men and women in the diplomatic grades - and we used that Plowden Report to get better arrangements for boarding school allowances and other help to families serving abroad. The Duncan Report and other later reports were of much less value.

Did you feel the Diplomatic Service was more or less efficient by the time your retired?

The Service was certainly efficient throughout the time that I was there. But today the Service is very much improved from the point of view of the welfare available and its care of staff. In modern times there are all sorts of support activities, which work for the wives and the families, as well as for the officers. So efficiency has improved on the management side. Whether this makes it easier for the Service to operate effectively I am not certain. It seems to me that the problem of posting people nowadays must be very complex.

Which brings me on to my last question. Why are there so few female senior diplomats, would you say? And do you think there will ever be female PUS?

Today more than 50% of the entrants to the Service are female. In the diplomatic grades, the proportion of women used to be very low. Why so few women reach the grade of ambassador is partly a practical question: some posts abroad are not considered suitable for women; posts in the Arab countries are not open to female ambassadors. But for the rest it is inevitable that many women who join the Service leave before they reach the senior ranks because of marriage. It seems that women are very satisfied with work at the middle grades but in the top grades - as I think in business and other careers - women don't have the motivation to take on the most responsible jobs. And I can think of many excellent female colleagues who I worked with, but on the whole I don't believe that we shall ever see the stage where we shall have a lot of female ambassadors.

So? Will there ever be female PUS?

There might well be. I think it would be a very suitable job for a woman. It is the service abroad which is perhaps more daunting to women - I am speaking from a male point of view and that is how I observed it. Anyway, I think women make a wonderful contribution to the Service and the talent shown by women in the Foreign Service is remarkable. Women are very good diplomats. As good as, and sometimes better than men, they are more inclined to handle people with tact and understanding.

That concludes our series of interviews. Thank you for agreeing to talk about your diplomatic career and for giving us so much of your time.