

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

CHARLTON, Alan (born 21 June 1952)
CMG 1996; CVO 2007

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

West Africa Department, FCO, 1978–79	pp 5-14
Language training, 1979–81 (including visits to Syria)	pp 14-19
Amman, 1981–84	pp 19-32
Near East and North Africa Department, FCO, 1984–86	pp 34-41
British Military Government, Berlin, 1986–90	pp 42-58
Deputy Chief, Assessments Staff, Cabinet Office, 1991–93	pp 58-65
Head, Eastern Adriatic Unit, FCO, 1993–95	pp 65-75
Bosnia Contact Group Representative, 1995–96	pp 65-75
Political Counsellor, 1996–98	pp 75-88
Deputy Head of Mission, 1998–99, Bonn	pp 75-88
Deputy Head of Mission, Berlin, 1999–2000	pp 75-88
Director, South East Europe, FCO, 2001	pp 88-93
Director, Personnel, then HR Director, FCO, 2002–04	pp 138-145
Deputy Head of Mission, Washington, 2004–07, and Ambassador to Organisation of American States, 2006–07	pp 94-108
Ambassador to Brazil, 2008–13	pp 108-138

Reflections on the diplomatic service, pp 146-151, and on Jordan, pp 153-4

BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME
RECOLLECTIONS OF ALAN CHARLTON CMG CVO
RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY MOIRA GOLDSTAUB

Alan Charlton born 1952 in Stapleford Nottingham. Parents Henry and Eva Charlton. Married since 1974 to Judy. Children: James, Katy and Tim.

It's the 12th of February 2021 and Moira Goldstaub is in conversation with Alan Charlton CMG CVO.

Remembering his career at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

MG: Tell me Alan, where did it all begin? Can you take me back to the small Alan thinking about a career and were you a typical Carlton Browne of the FO type person in that that comedy film where your father was an ambassador and so on? What was it like?

AC: Well it's funny that you should mention that as I saw that film for the first time last week, I know what you mean!

The answer to that is no. My parents were ordinary folk. They both left school at 14 and my father was a butcher, my mother, who had worked as a bookbinder, then stayed at home. I had two sisters much older than me, one born before the war, one after, and I was the, I suppose, much wanted son who arrived rather late when they were already getting on. My father was in his forties. My mother in her late thirties.

I had what I felt was an idyllic childhood in the 1950s, which was very different from these days. There were no external influences of social media or computer games or whatever. You just went to play football with people on the street and on the rec and so on. I went to an ordinary primary school with mixed ability including a Down's syndrome child in my class who went straight through the years with me. Because that's what you did. It all felt like sunny days looking back.

When you talk about careers, I don't think I had any ideas whatsoever. I don't know if you've found that with other people. I did not give a thought to what I was going to do. I was rather calm and enjoying the moment.

But one thing important in terms of determining my options was when I was 11 and took the famous or infamous 11 Plus. I was deemed to be sufficiently bright to be put forward to go on a scholarship, a County Council scholarship, to Nottingham High School, which was one of those Direct Grant Schools which were part of the reforms of education from the 1944 Education Act. You had this tripartite system of state schools but also some children were sent to direct grant schools, so this was a school which was independent but a third of the children going there were on scholarships of some kind, either from the County as in my case Nottinghamshire, or the city of Nottingham, or from some of the local businesses. Raleigh, Boots and Players all gave bursaries.

I didn't think anything about this, these were just tracks I went along and I ended up there without any thought about it. But I was the only kid from our school who went there and the only kid from our neighbourhood who went there. So, it was a strange environment, even though it was only six miles away. I went on the bus every day. The reason it was, I suppose, life changing in that sense is that I found myself in a school which had very high academic aspirations. It basically measured its success in terms of how many people it got into Oxbridge every year. That was it. That was the yardstick and the schooling was academically forcing without question.

In some areas I floundered and in some areas I did well, but there's no doubt that had I gone to the local grammar school, for example, I don't think in those days I would have ended up in the FCO: it's very unlikely anyway. So that I suppose by the time I got to the end of my schooling it gave me a kind of higher aspiration. But I would say that even at 18, when I did go to Cambridge, I had no particular ideas about what I was going to do.

There were no role models for the Diplomatic Service in my family or friends or someone who had ever worked in London, let alone been in the Civil Service or the Foreign Office or even been in business. They were people who worked in mines or factories or shops or whatever. So, at the time it was important because my elder sister, who went to school in the late 40s and 50s, early 50s secondary school, she was

extremely bright as well, but at that time, certainly for girls, you know you left school at 15 or 16. That was it. Whereas my second sister, who was six years older than me, did go to a County grammar school and did actually go to University. But she left very soon because she didn't like it. Anyway, I was the first person ever in our family to get a University degree. And I was kind of aware of that and it made me think when I was at Cambridge, what shall I do? I studied languages because that's what I enjoyed; I did French and German, and I suppose that gave me a bit of a window on the outside world, also I was interested in in the international scene in politics. And it so came about that when the time when came you had to decide what to do, I did actually apply in my last year for the Civil Service /Diplomatic Service, and I took the first stage of the process, as you know there are two stages, I think it may still be the case, but there's the so called CISBE process, which applied to the Foreign Office as well, where you have two days of tests, and I did that and I passed it. Then I had a change of mind and decided I wanted to do something else - I don't know how I would describe it - perhaps more socially aware, and I decided that I would try to be a teacher instead so I then went on to do a postgraduate certificate of education at Leicester University. That took me away from the idea of the Foreign Office. I became a teacher, got married and we decided to take an opportunity to go and teach in Germany.

Germany was short of teachers at that time, and there was a company which was supplying trained teachers, qualified teachers from Britain, and we went over to the Ruhr area in Gelsenkirchen and I was there for two years. When I came back and I did a Post Graduate course in Linguistics and during this time I doubted I would be a good teacher. Certainly, I was bad at keeping control of kids, that's for sure, and I couldn't see myself even if we had a peripatetic life with the British Council, which in those days did supply teachers overseas, I couldn't see myself doing that forever. So, I, not with a great deal of thought, applied again for the Diplomatic Service and this time went through all the three stages. That's how I got to it really without a lot of thought, without any role models and not really ever quite expecting I would get there, but I did.

West Africa Department, FCO, 1978–79

MG: That takes us to the end of September, beginning of 1978, you went in 1978. So, what was your training then? Because it appears to be very variable from the people I've spoken to.

AC: I'm not probably all that well qualified to talk about it because as it happened the summer before I was due to start, I was due to start in August 78, I, with my wife and some other people went on a road trip around Portugal and Spain and when I when I got back I fell ill. I did manage to get into the office for a couple of days but I was not well. I was falling down in the street in fact.

And in the end, I just couldn't get up and to cut a long story short I was diagnosed with typhoid and taken to hospital and isolated for several weeks. So, I missed the training entirely. I always said to people when something went wrong later in my career 'How could you expect otherwise? I never had any training'.

I couldn't really tell you what the training was, but it was fairly short in those days anyway, but there were a few things that people did. The one thing I was aware of and was jealous of was there was a trip to Brussels. In those days a group of trainees went off on a trip to Brussels to see the work of the British Mission to the European Union. Apart from that though, I don't think I felt I had missed all that much. And so yes, the training was short. Obviously, it's much longer now and we can talk about that perhaps a bit later, but there was a general view anyway those days, not only in the Foreign Office, but certainly in the Foreign Office, which is what I experienced, which was that you learned on the job, that was it. You know you got in there, you sat at the desk and you were presented with tasks and you got on with them and learned. And if you didn't know what to do, you'd ask somebody and you would learn by getting things wrong. Basically, that was the way it was. And I don't think the training would have made a difference. It might have helped a little bit at the edges, but it would not have made that much difference; it was quite a searing experience, certainly a sharp experience, of having to get up to speed learning something new all the time.

MG: More so in your case, I would imagine. You emerge from hospital, convalescent from typhoid, and you're put in the West Africa Department. With no training and no presumably extensive knowledge of the Dark Continent, what was it like?

AC: Yes, well, extensive knowledge was never really required in any job that you did, well that's not quite true, but it wasn't necessarily expected when you began, often wasn't later on. You know you are expected to learn, that was the point and I do believe that the selection process not only for the Foreign Office but also for the fast stream of the civil service, Home Civil service, was really looking for people who would be able to pick things up. You know you weren't expected to be an expert on Africa or whatever it was. You were expected to find out as you went along.

I recovered from typhoid pretty quickly. In your twenties you do I think. I lost a lot of weight which was a good thing. So, I don't think I was experiencing any after effects by the time I was actually working. It was an interesting experience trying to think back on it now, and I've been fascinated reading some of the interviews with people, particularly those who were in the Foreign Office before my time. And I suppose everyone is in a period of transition, but for us we were certainly well before the information revolution. There were not only no computers, no word processors, there were no photocopiers, they were around somewhere, but they weren't around in the Foreign Office. The same I think with the fax; that was also something we didn't use. It did exist I think around and about, I know the famous Berrill report talked about replacing the Foreign Office by a fax machine!

You sat down at the desk and you had different coloured pieces of paper on which you wrote things on longhand, and some of those you may have needed to get typed, in which case you had to beg the services of one of the secretaries in the Department or the fearsome typing pool, which was something you would try to avoid if possible.

MG: The paper was colour coded, was it?

AC: Well, yes, so that's something I probably would have benefited from learning from my training course; so, if you are drafting a telegram, the telegram form was blue and it was set out in a certain way, and obviously I had to ask about what all these things

meant, these various things and so on. If you are writing on draft paper, the draft paper was also blue. So that's the way it was. Obviously, if you were writing other letters internally it might mean that there may have been different colours, and certainly the telegrams when they came round were different colours, depending on whether they were incoming, outgoing and the degree of urgency. This is a really important part of the daily routine, there was a telegram distribution three times a day, you got one in the morning which seemed to come round, if I remember correctly, around 9:30, so getting there early in the morning, you certainly had no advantage in terms of telegrams. And then there was one in the middle of the day, and then there was one in the afternoon and these telegram distributions were important moments in that some of them would relate to your work. Some would give you more background information and you needed to be alive to those. They would arrive in a folder you would be given by the by the messengers who went round. If the telegrams were particularly urgent - and people were very careful not to make things urgent unless they really were urgent – then they would be sent immediately to be on a desk by a certain time and they would come round specially outside the normal distribution three times a day, but those were in my particular bailiwick, in the West Africa department pretty rare, you know, we didn't have those sorts of urgent things. Learning the paperwork was actually the first thing you really needed to do and you also had to understand how things were done. You didn't use staples for example, staples were regarded as evil because if you staple papers together, other things could get hooked up in them or lost. So, you use the famous India tags and draft paper. That and the continuation of draft paper did have holes in the top left-hand corner for India tags.

MG: Is an India tag the same as a Treasury tag?

AC: I think it is yes, - a little tag with a shorter or longer coloured string in the middle with metal ends. You might have red or yellow or whatever; we called them India tags for some reason. Though I think they are called Treasury tags in the home Civil Service. And if you had paper that didn't have holes in the top left-hand corner, then you had a hole punch to create them. That was another part of your machinery. You had a hole punch and you use it because then you felt once you've got your tag in your piece of

paper, you felt safe that you have done your job and it was the same with the files. The files had these tags in them as well, which helped to fasten the papers in again, no staples, so these are the important things to learn to start with.

MG: You are in the West Africa Department, you're dealing with Nigeria and you're second Secretary in Chad. Tell me about the people around you and what the day to day telegrams were telling you about these places.

AC: Yes, the Department dealt with obviously quite a wide range of countries, some bigger and therefore more important like Nigeria and Ghana and some smaller like Chad and we had the usual system in those days of a Head of Department, an Assistant, who was the deputy, and they have their own offices, and then 'third rooms'. The third room was where the desk officers would be and I think we actually had three third rooms as it happened, but that depended on the size of the Department and in the room where I was there were three people. I was there as the neophyte, there was a more experienced fast stream officer there who really did the Nigeria work and was my supervisor and we had a Registry Clerk and again this is something which would be completely foreign to people nowadays. The Registry Clerk had a vital role.

MG: But what is it?

AC: Well, the Registry Clerk was responsible for keeping the papers. And in those days, one thing you learned very quickly was that record keeping was very, very, very important. So as the desk officer, when you had a piece of paper, you had to decide what to do and you would write on it. If you didn't need to take any further action, you would put an 'R' on it, which means Register and then PA - put away, - and then that would go. That would go into your out tray and would go to the Registry Officer and the Registry Officer would decide which of the Foreign Office files this should go on. Then the files were ranged in various ways. There might be, for example, a Nigeria oil file. There might be a Nigeria relation with African countries file, whatever it might be. You had files according to what the need was. Sometimes the Registry Officer would ask you, 'Do you think this this paper should go on this file or that file' and you would say what you thought but generally if they had a reasonable amount of experience, the Registry Officer would know themselves which file it should go on and it was really important

that they kept the files up to date and if they didn't, it was your job because I supervised the Registry Officer to make sure that they were doing it properly and quickly because the files were everything: the files told the story.

If you were asked to prepare some kind of submission for senior people or ministers on something that had blown up, you would need to refer to the files so you get hold of the necessary files and the file would tell you the story, the correspondence and things that have gone on in the last year and you had in the corridor cabinets which had previous years' files, for the previous three or four years, and if you needed things further back than that, you could get them out of storage fairly quickly. The files were a wonder. I think in many ways they were the most impressive thing I saw in the Foreign Office in my early years. This ability to get hold of a file and then really understand what had been going on and people wrote things with an idea that it was going to go on a file and it needed to be useful to people who come came after, this was kind of in the back of your mind all the time. So, the Registry Clerks were responsible for that, and if they were good, it was fine. If they weren't very good and chaotic, you probably had to spend quite a lot of time helping them along and geeing them up and so on because the last thing you wanted was for papers to go missing in the wrong file, because that was that. You wouldn't be able to find them again.

So yes, the Registry Clerk was the third person and typically the Registry Clerks were younger people. Not always but often in their late teens or early 20s. Quite a few of them were people who had come from far flung places in the UK, and they often lived for their first year or two or three in hostels in London. This was the big adventure for them. Ours was a young teenage lad. Most of them were men, there were some women, who were in the big city for the first time in their life. And they often they led rather harum scarum lives, but they seemed to enjoy themselves enormously, so that was the mixture. There's me, there's a more experienced person who has been in the office for a few years who was the head of section if you like, and then the Registry Clerk.

MG: And who is the Head of Department at that time?

AC: That Department was a man called John Johnson, and I don't know if he's been interviewed, he died a few years ago, but I think he may have been interviewed for this

at some point. Johnny Johnson was a lovely man. He was part of a breed which of course is now long gone, but existed then, a former colonial service officer. He'd been a district officer, for example, out in Kenya, and I didn't speak too much about it as I would have loved to have done but you know he was in position then having to make some very big decisions on things back in the old days of the Colonial Service. Then he made the transition into the Foreign Office; he was a real, real gentleman, very kind and always open to give advice.

I remember he invited me, he probably did this to all newcomers to the Department, he invited me round to his club for lunch, and this was a kind of new experience for a lad from Nottinghamshire going to a London club. I can't remember which one it was now - but one of those on Pall Mall and it was quite kind of stunning seeing all these men sitting round tables who obviously knew each other and they were men only in those days. But yes, I think he was a delightful man, he was in sort of mid-career then mid to late I suppose, and then went on to have a number of important postings afterwards. One thing I learnt immediately from him and indeed from everybody was the Foreign Office ethos that the door is always open - literally. So, if you have an office of your own which a Head of the Department would, or higher up, or even an assistant head of Department would normally have their own office, they never closed the door. If they close the door, it meant they were having a meeting and didn't want to be disturbed, so the doors that everyone had, right up to the top, were open most of the time and the rule was that you didn't knock, you walked in. You walked in whoever it was, however senior they were, you walked in the door so if you're walking into the Undersecretary's office you obviously needed a good reason to be doing it, but you would walk in, you wouldn't knock on the door, and they would look up and see you and you would say 'I brought this paper' or whatever it was and it was also first names, which perhaps might surprise some people nowadays that everyone called everybody by their first name, so I called the head of Department Johnny and you know it went for everybody.

I don't think I ever got to the point of being able to address the Permanent Under Secretary in those days, I don't think I would have dared to call him by his first name, but that was the rule.

MG: Who was the number two? Who was Johnny Johnson's number two?

AC: It was David Mackilligin. A nice mixture of the serious and amusing. He did “feel” and had strong views on issues, not always easy for a civil servant. He and his wife kindly invited me to their house south of the river.

MG: Tell me tell me about Sam Falle and his drafting. I hear about this drafting all the time.

AC: It was amazing. I mean people used to talk about it all the time, usually with some derision, but the fact was that he was the High Commissioner in Nigeria during my time and so in a very important post, important because it was not that long after the Nigerian Civil War which was in the earlier 1970s and had been in the headlines all the time. You know the Biafran war and the incredible death toll of all that. It was a difficult relationship. There is no doubt that there was a kind of post-colonial chip on the shoulder of some in Nigeria, rightly or wrongly, and it was important, particularly for our oil companies and their investment, so it was a big job and he was a really outgoing sort of man. You know, larger than life fella. It's hard to believe but certainly wouldn't do it nowadays, I mean then it was amazing, I think he used to go for runs around Lagos - not to be advised nowadays!

Anyway, he was a larger-than-life chap and he had this drafting style where his sentences were kind of machine gun like and short so if he had a sentence, his sentences were often five or six words long and a succession of these, it takes an enormous skill in drafting to be able to do it. And I say some people used to use to laugh at it, but actually I thought to myself, well, this is quite something and I did actually try to emulate it in one or two letters. It took me ages to write, but occasionally I do think back and say, yes, your sentences are getting long and self-important these days Alan, perhaps you ought to look at Sam Falle's style and I think ministers used to like it because it made his stuff very readable actually.

MG: Yes, you could take things in really easily. So that's the situation in London, you're surrounded by the multi-coloured bits of paper and you're not entirely sure what to do. When did you actually go to see Chad on the ground? And why did you go?

AC: Yes this is a situation which we don't have now in the Foreign Office, but for quite a number of years it was decided not only not to have a resident embassy in Chad, and then you know, there are a lot of countries in the world where we don't have resident embassies, so that in itself is no surprise, but not to have it served from a neighbouring country (which we do now, it's in Cameroon) and instead to situate it in London. I was told, anyway, the reason for this was that the Chadians would regard it as something quite positive to have a senior British diplomat in London who was titled as the Ambassador who would come out now and then to discuss matters of great weight with them; bilateral and African affairs more generally. Now, whether that was how they saw it or not, I do not know, but anyway, that was the rationale.

So, Johnny Johnson, the Head of Department, was the ambassador to Chad, his assistant, David Mackilligin was the number two, and I was the third person in the embassy as the third, and then actually soon to become Second, Secretary to Chad and I had in my desk drawer note paper headed Chad Embassy in French and English. On which I made replies to commercial enquiries and stuff like that occasionally one or two things from missionaries. So that was the set up at home and it didn't involve a lot of work to be honest, but we did commit ourselves to three visits a year.

And I did make the first two: one I went with Johnny Johnson and one with David Mackilligin. And it was quite extraordinary. I mean, I'd never been to Africa before. Never been anywhere outside a few places in Europe to that point and just arriving there and being hit by the heat in Ndjamenan Airport was quite extraordinary. I'd been shopping in London to get myself a tropical suit. I thought this is what you needed to do and I got one of those things I'd seen on the pictures you know someone with a sort of off-white suit, thinking that this is what people wore. It seemed the right thing to do at the time, and there was a Foreign Office grant to do it if you worked in tropical countries to buy tropical clothing and I managed to have enough just to buy a tropical suit anyway, so went and did this. We were met in Ndjamenan, we had an Honorary Consul there who

was a Belgian businessman. We had some meetings with Chadian government officials and so on and the thing I most remember because it was extraordinary, we also made an official visit - well, official is a big word for it - that we made a visit across the River to Cameroon to a little town called Kousseri. Not quite sure why we thought this was necessary, but we did and it was fun because we actually had a hollowed-out log that we went in, the two of us with someone to drive it. The river was quite flooded at the time and we had some hippos all around so it was quite extraordinary. I regaled people afterwards with my first diplomatic mission being by log.

MG: And what was the language you had to speak?.

AC: It was French. I learned something very important from that of which I was dimly aware before, but it was of course at this time the post-colonial era, it was relatively new. There was a big difference between former British colonies and former French colonies. The French colonies still felt quite French, and indeed the French Air Force still had six jet aircraft parked in Ndjamena airport, and they were supporting the then president of Chad against various rebel groups. Sort of thing we got out of more or less straight away. The British view was that when people are independent, they have to get on with it. The only restaurant which it felt safe to eat at was a very French restaurant. I took a Nigerian diplomat there thinking that a neighbouring country would have great views on Chad and so this was my first bit of diplomatic entertainment. I remember going there and having no idea about food I had steak tartare and I didn't really know what it was. I didn't realise it was uncooked and I was rather ill afterwards. And my guest had no idea what the menu meant. He wasn't used to it, didn't speak French, and didn't go into French restaurants either. So, I had what he had and he didn't really have much to tell me because he said I can't speak a word of French and I don't know what is going on basically.

It wasn't terribly encouraging. It was more, it was the kind of episode you read about in diplomatic stories sometimes, and they do actually happen. These rather weird stories. But what struck me about Chad was that not only was the government very French, but it was also a place where you basically had a ruling elite and everyone else lived in mud huts and actually to see that was quite striking. A place where there were almost no Brits

living at that time. A few missionaries and that was about it, but fascinating insight and I felt very fortunate to have that job. And this as my first job, because other people were not getting any trips abroad like that, and I thought if you joined the Foreign Office, you ought to be going to places like Chad that seemed like a good idea to me.

MG: Yes, you were lucky and that was because of there not being an embassy.

AC: But there weren't any other places where we had the embassy in London, that was the only one and it was discontinued, not immediately, but some years later as I say. So, I was very, very fortunate being there at that time.

MG: Well, you started in August. You said 1978 and you then went on to something else in 79. So, when did you finish your West African adventure? And then what did you do?

Language training, 1979–81

AC: I started August, as you say, and then I was away for six weeks being ill. Actually, I think I mentioned this in the book, but I was just reminding myself of today. Everyone on the training course was told that I would be joining them later because I had a virus and it occurred to me that if this was happening now, people would think it was Covid 19. If it happened in the 80s and 90s, people would think I had HIV. But in those days, it didn't carry either connotation, it was just a total mystery to people. It wasn't a virus actually. That was just made up by whoever was there as a typical Foreign Office way of not wanting to let any information go. I was away then for about six weeks. Then the idea was that in your first year you would do a year in a Department and then you will be posted off somewhere or you would do language training. In my case it was language training.

We were asked if we wanted to be considered for hard language training. I think a lot of people in my intake said yes. I certainly did. We were asked to put in a preference for what our hard languages would be? I put Chinese, Mandarin, first, Arabic last.

Mandarin because it was the time of the beginning of opening up after the Cultural Revolution in China and Deng Xiaoping had taken control after Mao and things were beginning to look more interesting. The Nixon Ping Pong diplomacy and then what

followed suggested that China was going to be the place of great interest over the coming years. So that seemed to me like a good bet. But for whatever reason I was chosen for Arabic and in those days, you didn't see what was going on and we just got a phone call and you were told and that was it. So yeah, so Arabic it was.

And that was after a year in the Department, so I left the following summer in '79.

MG: How did they set about the Arabic training? Did you go away, did you do it abroad? Did you do it in England and who oversaw it?

AC: Yes, well language training varied according to the language. For Arabic there had been a Middle East Centre for Arabic studies, the famous MECAS, in existence since just after the Second World War. It had started in Jerusalem initially, then Cairo briefly, but it ended up in Lebanon in a village called Shemlan just outside Beirut. Unfortunately, there had already been quite a lot of trouble in recent years around Beirut, civil wars and there had also been a couple of evacuations. At the time I started there had been an evacuation just a few months before from the school, so there were some people who had done their first year in effect and had just got their last six months to go because the courses were either nine months or 18 months in duration. These people, the course before us, had started in Shemlan in Beirut but had been evacuated back to London together with the Director of Studies.

This was a chap called Doug Galloway who was an academic from a Scottish University and an amazing man. The teaching staff were Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian during that time, and so there were, I think, five members of the teaching staff, one Palestinian, Farouq Shan'a, and a husband and wife team of Syrians and Lebanese, the Dallals, who came to London from Shemlan. We had those teachers plus Doug Galloway too. We did this in London in Palace Chambers.

Some older people will know about Palace Chambers. Younger people will have no idea. Palace Chambers is where Portcullis House now is, opposite the Houses of Parliament - just before Westminster Bridge. It was an old Civil Service building by Westminster tube station, which at that time had been condemned as unsafe. It had been used by the Home Office and various other people, and we were given some rooms on one of the

upper floors of this. I do remember that we were advised not to walk in the centre of the floors! It also used to rattle when a tube train travelled underneath - it was an interesting experience and that's where we were.

We had a course of study that was long practiced around a book called 'The Way Prepared'. This book is seared in the memory of many people in the Foreign Office, and of course it was written for people actually in Shemlan. So, your first forays into spoken Arabic will be: 'Can you tell me the way to Beirut, please?' 'How long does it take to drive to Jerusalem?' It seems slightly odd on a winter's day in London. However, that's what it was. We had that and the teaching style was conversational. Yes, you had to learn to speak. But also it was quite academic and grammatical and quite demanding. They expected a lot of you. Now for me, with a background of doing a degree in languages and then having added a second degree in linguistics, this was wonderful. I thought it was fantastic. Other people found it a bit tougher but got there in the end, whereas I thought this was an amazing thing to be paid full time to learn Arabic all day and you went in for your lessons in the morning and possibly in the afternoon. You went home, we did some homework and then went and did it all again. It was for me a joyous time really; and the idea was that, after the first nine months or so, you took a so-called intermediate exam and then if you stayed on for the second stage, you would then take the higher exam after 18 months, roughly or 15-18 months and then go out to post.

MG: Well according to your timetable you did the longer one, you obviously succeeded, and you mentioned these memorable language breaks in Syria. Were they part of the course, or serendipitous?

AC: I don't know whether they had these breaks, they probably did, I'm sure they did actually, when they were in Shemlan. But anyway, obviously they were even more necessary if you were learning it in London. And remember again this was before the days when you had videos or were able to watch Arabic TV. You could hear a bit of Arabic on the airwaves and that was about it. So yes, they were the language breaks and they had one in each course and both of them were in Syria.

Doug Galloway came with us and we stayed at a very old, faded hotel called the Orient Palace Hotel which was certainly not expensive, but it was in the centre of Damascus and

in those days - this is actually 1980/81 - Damascus was a great place to learn Arabic as there weren't any English speakers around and it was a kind of Mediterranean society in the sense of people sitting around in bars and cafes and talking to each other. You could just go in there and have a beer and some pistachio nuts and people would see you're obviously not a local and then be fascinated by the fact that this foreigner was learning Arabic and they talk to you and it was the kind of Arabic we had learned so the accents were familiar to us. And we used to get invited to things all the time. I got invited to a wedding and somebody's party and it was extraordinary. We went out once to one of the Palestinian refugee camps and I remember a young lad came and gave us his poetry book, he was so excited that we had done that.

And then on the second of these breaks, a couple of us, myself and Steve Martin, we also went to spend time with the Greek Catholic Bishop in South Syria, in Suweida and this was Easter time. Now we had not realized that Lent meant Lent then and when we got there we were just given things to eat out of cans, basically vegetables.

It was pretty weak fare, but the church services were amazing. You know the Easter services went on for three or four hours, lots of incense and people wandering in and out. You know children and what struck me was in those days and I hope some of this could survive, was that whether you were Christian, Muslim or Druze and of course there were several sects within those groups you would go and celebrate the main festivals of other religions. So in the church there were quite a few people who were Druze or Muslim Shia and Sunni, mostly Sunni in there in that part of Syria. It was fascinating meeting them.

I remember also, and I think I was on my own on this, without Steve I'm not sure. I was invited by a family out to their place and then they brought out a bottle of Johnnie Walker whisky and said, do you like whisky? Naturally I said yes, and then they poured me out what was a tumbler full! I mean a lot! A 1/3 of a bottle I would say of whisky and I had a few sips at this and then after we'd been there for a while they said, don't you like it? Of course they had no idea about drinking whisky and they had bought this from some market trader no doubt and they thought this was the idea of welcoming a Brit. So I had to drink more of it - quite a diplomatic task really. I had to judge how much whisky I

could get away with not drinking. I got through about half of it and felt pretty bad afterwards, but if it had been the whole of it I don't think I'd have got home.

So yes, it was a fascinating, fascinating time and going to Syria was very good for our language. Obviously, we were there to talk but we had one or two lessons as well. I mean, Doug would do a few classes with us. But basically we were out there on our own to go and talk; we had to be very aware, again, this is good diplomatic training, of the situation. Syria in those days was the Syria of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, and it was a very repressive regime, certainly repressive in terms of allowing no political dissent and allowing no dissent of any kind, really. So people didn't talk politics, they talked about anything else, but not politics. It was to an extent good for the minorities, because if you were a Christian, or Druze or Alawite or whatever, that was all fine. They only cared about power, but at the same time you had to be aware that you might be being followed. You know as a foreigner they might not trust you and you basically had to be reasonably careful, but there was no great security concern on the streets, certainly not, and it was a joy being in Damascus. And if you're learning Arabic, you come to appreciate the culture and history and going to some of the older parts of Damascus where some of the very early churches had been built at the Souq al-Hamadiyeh, which has been a marketplace for 2000 years. You had a great sense of this being such an important part of Arabism, this particular city, so it was a great pleasure to be there, but I have to admit it was also hard work and you felt a bit of a sense of relief when you came back.

MG: Do the Druze still exist?

AC: Yes, the Druze are mostly in Syria and Lebanon. They do exist. I don't know what the numbers are in Syria now. They will have decreased I imagine just as the numbers of Christians will have decreased considerably, but I imagine in Lebanon they are still very numerous.

MG: Is it a nationality or a religion?

AC: It's not a nationality, no; it's a belief, it's allied to Islam, but they don't regard themselves as Muslims. I could go get more details. It's not like being a Kurd or something like that who see themselves as a nation. It's a religious belief and the community comes with that and they have their own ways of doing things.

MG: So you did 18 months of this. You must have been pretty fluent.

AC: Yes, well I did have the advantage, as I said, of having learned languages and also about languages before and I did throw myself into it. I was one of the stars of the class, I suppose. I really, really enjoyed it and I was looking forward to using it in reality.

MG: What did the Foreign Office make of it then when you turned up having completed your course? What did they do? What did they say? Where would you like to go?

AC: That's not what happened in those days. I mean, we can talk a bit about personnel matters later on, but in those days you would have a meeting with your personnel officer and he would talk about your career in general terms. I can't remember if I was asked where I'd like to go in the Arab world. Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. I can't remember, but in any event, you knew that whatever you said, they would give you a call one day and tell you what it was. The idea was that the personnel people you imagined having a big chart on the wall somewhere, and they were moving people around. They had jobs to fill and they were putting people in particular slots and why they decided to send me to Jordan rather than Cairo or somewhere I have no idea.

Amman, 1981–84

MG: Were you pleased when you were sent to Amman in 1981, what did you think of it?

AC: Well actually at first when they rang me up, I don't know why, I thought it was Morocco and I went around telling people for a couple of days, until the formal letter came round and they said it was Jordan, Amman. I think I was fairly positive about it because I actually had visited Amman on one of these language trips; we did actually get a short visit to Amman, in a neighbouring country to Syria. Also in terms of the work that was likely, I thought to myself this is going to be interesting and the reason I say that is that when I started at the Foreign Office, there was a Labour Government and David

Owen was the Foreign Secretary, a very young Foreign Secretary. But then, after the election which Mrs. Thatcher won, we had Lord Carrington as the Foreign Secretary who was someone much admired and respected. I do recall him saying that there were three priorities for British diplomacy in his new term, one was Northern Ireland, which you probably won't think of as a Foreign Office issue, but was partly a Foreign Office issue. Another was Rhodesia which of course moved on because of the conference that happened a couple years later and independence. And the third was the Middle East. And the reason for that was we had the wars of 1967 and 73, which had been the centre of global attention and involved the Super Powers, the US and the Soviet Union backing different sides, and we had still memory of the Palestinian mandate and the British involvement in that area.

A lot of people were interested and expert in that part of the world, and then of course there was the Israel side of it with the Holocaust and their own community in the UK and so on. I thought to myself that this is a good place to be because Jordan is key to the Middle East process. It still formally claimed the West Bank and East Jerusalem which were territories conquered from it in 1967 by Israel. And it was regarded, rightly as it turned out, as a country likely at some point to make peace with Israel - the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty had just happened at that time. Jordan might be the next most likely, if not immediately, to find a way of concluding a peace with Israel. So I thought, yes, this would be great. On top of that, there had been the civil war between the Palestinians and Jordanians and Black September only just a couple years before so. This looked like it was going to be an interesting place to go.

I think most people in the Foreign Office, I may be wrong, but I would expect most people in the Foreign Office want to go to places which have interesting work of that kind.

MG: For those who don't know much about it, we have mentioned Damascus as so ancient a city and crossroads for routes of all kinds- travel routes. Is Amman a very ancient city as well?

AC: No it isn't; it does have, downtown, Roman remains, so there was a small Roman settlement there. No, the contrast between Amman and Damascus is very stark for that reason. Amman is basically a modern or modernish city, grown from very little over the last 100 years, whereas Damascus is very ancient going back into the mists of time. Certainly in terms of architecture Amman is very functional.

Apart from the little bit of road and downtown, there were some huddled souqs downtown, and as you went up the hills, concrete villas basically.

MG: Did you take your family? Did they go with you?

AC: Yes. I drove out alone so we had a car there and that was in itself a bit of adventure because I ended up getting arrested by the Syrians and detained by them for several days which caused an international incident. My family, at that time my wife and I had one child, flew over a bit later and actually it was a good place for someone with a young family to live. The climate was easy, didn't get terribly hot. Amman is about 2700 or 2800 feet above sea level, so it doesn't get hotter than say, 35 degrees. It has this period from April-May through to September-October, where it's blue sky every day and it doesn't rain a drop, and the temperature stays somewhere around 25 to 30 normally. The winters are not too bad. We did have snow a couple of times and the place just fell apart not being used to it, but generally it was fine so that was easy and, at that time there was still a fair-sized Christian community. There were shops where you could buy alcohol and pork and whatever and relations between Christians and Muslims were good. It wasn't really a problem, it was getting a little bit tenser because of the impact of the Iranian revolution which had happened just a couple years before. You started seeing during the time we were there groups of girls, women walking around and whereas some were wearing Western dress, others were covered up and wearing black. That started to happen about then.

But it was an easy place to get about in and you could travel around, there were fascinating places to visit; the desert castles or go down to Lawrence of Arabia country in Wadi Rum or Aqaba. And that was all lovely, and for family there were schools and my wife could drive around and yes it was a nice place to be.

MG: What was your accommodation like?

AC: We started out (this is something you've probably been aware of talking to people at the Foreign Office) you were allocated somewhere - that was it - and we were allocated the apartment, which our predecessor had had, which was in a block above where the owners were, so we had some steps to climb up. It was an apartment on one floor and it was fine.

We then had a bit of luck in that after our first year just about, and I did actually get promoted to 1st Secretary at that time, there was an opportunity to take over a villa which was by the Embassy club and this was because there had been a Development Officer there - we had a technical cooperation programme and these were experts in agriculture and other things and one of them, a senior one, that had this villa next to the club and he had left as the Development Division closed. I got my oar in quickly to say, well, you know this is available we would like it and yes we did get it. So that was lovely. It was a lovely, lovely place which had vines growing outside and we had a wonderful lemon tree where we got our own lemons and made lemonade from it.

We had another child not long after. Being next door to the Embassy club was wonderful. People came round for a game of tennis and Judy and the children went to the swimming pool.

MG: You didn't have to be in a compound then like in Saudi Arabia or anything like that, it was fairly free? I recall we always seemed to have had warm relations with Jordan. King Hussein was a regular visitor here in the UK. You said your wife could drive; you had a great deal more freedom than you would have had in other Arab countries.

AC: Certainly than in Saudi Arabia that's true. We didn't have a compound because there wasn't a particular security threat. Actually, the Embassy building itself was a place we rented from some company and it was on one of the roundabouts. The roundabouts were called circles and they were numbered as you went up the hill from downtown. So there was first Circle, 2nd Circle, 3rd Circle and our embassy was on 3rd Circle and during the time I was there we did actually have a bit of a scare in the sense that the police did find a

vehicle parked on waste ground nearby which we understood had some explosives in it and very quickly after I left, there was a plan to build a new embassy which was built. It was a kind of fortress Embassy not at a place where someone could drive a car in and blow the whole thing up. So we were fortunate. More difficult times came later. But yes then it was it free and easy to go around. People were very pleasant there were no real difficulties.

MG: Now you said that you had a controversial visit from the Queen; I don't associate the Queen with controversy!

AC: Yes, that's right. You mentioned that King Hussein was a regular visitor to the UK and we did have a very good relationship with Jordan. Now Jordan had been - the country that became Jordan, had been part of the British Mandate after the First World War and it became independent after the Second World War. But even after that there were British military advisers who were there until well into the 1950s and after that, as I mentioned, some people doing technical kinds of advice and so on.

And it so happened that King Hussein's second wife was British. Not that I had any contact with her. She was actually the daughter of one of our former Defence Attachés. Tony Gardner, was her name. She kept herself to herself and she is the present King Muhammed's mother. Hussein was educated in the UK and went to Sandhurst and it was from Sandhurst that he was hauled back to become King when his father was basically deposed in 1953. His father was probably mentally unstable. The UK had a good relationship with Jordan. It became an equal relationship and we certainly didn't feel we were preferred in some way to other countries, but it does make things easier. There were certain British traditions that you recognise that were around particularly in the armed forces, and the British were generally positively regarded. It's a long time ago now, so this was 1981 when I started, but I was the Arabist, if you like, there used to be this thing about having an Oriental Secretary in places like this. Now we didn't call it that in my day, but I was that kind of person who had the most Arabic among the British diplomatic staff.

And it was natural that I should receive any Sheikhs who came through Amman from other places, and one came round once from the Howeitat tribe, which is down in the

south of Jordan. He was a very old guy, he must have been in his eighties and he probably told this story so many times that it's been embellished in the telling, he told me how he fought with Lawrence after the First World War, and even guided my hand through his scalp of very sparse white hair to say 'And that's where the bullet passed through when we were storming Aqaba against the Turks'. Now this was then 60 years before, so the time frame would have worked for this guy. Whether it was true or not I have no idea, but there still was a bit of that left over - a bit of Lawrence of Arabia and some of the positive sides of the British presence there. On the other hand, there were also negative sides.

We were regarded as having failed to do our duty by the Palestinians in 1948, when we gave up the UN mandate and Israel was created, so it wasn't all plain sailing. But there are also certain British traditions. We used to have a cricket match every year with against the Palace, an annual cricket match against the Palace. I remember rather stupidly, very stupidly, I was umpiring at one stage and Prince Ra'ad, who was a cousin of the King, came out to bat. He was one of the people left over from the branch of the King's Hashemite family which had been the monarchy in Iraq. And I think it was the first ball or something and he was clearly l.b.w., leg before wicket - and I gave him out. That's a stupid thing to do. I mean, there's a lesson in Diplomacy for you. Here's a guy who is educated in Britain, has saved his cricket whites or whatever and it really wasn't necessary to give him out. I regret that to this day.

MG: So the Queen - you were telling me about the Queen.

AC: The Queen, and King Hussein did get on very well, that's quite clear. King Hussein was an easy man to get on with; he was very personable, very polite, gentle, listened to people and so on. And of course had had a pretty tough time in Jordan. Not always made the right decisions politically, but you know none of us are perfect.

There was the idea particularly after the Israel-Egypt agreement in 1979 that we ought to be encouraging Jordan, it was in a difficult position. It was under fire from the Palestinians, certainly under fire from the Syrians and Jordanians did believe that the

Syrians tried on several occasions to assassinate King Hussein. There was even a threat of invasion about the time I was there from Syria, perhaps backed by the Russians, as Syria was. So the idea was to encourage them, and when the idea came up I don't know because I wasn't involved in the genesis of this, that the Queen would visit Jordan and she was clearly very keen on the idea. Now this by then was 1984 and the idea came up in about '83 I think, or '82, and it was controversial for a number of reasons. I mean, not surprisingly, the Israelis didn't like it; but that was one side of it. There was also some feeling around in London that it wouldn't be safe, it was only a few years after Black September, after all. Should the Queen be going there? So it was controversial because it was thought to be politically risky and also would present a security risk.

It happened, and she spent five days in Jordan. I remember my most important contribution to this visit - I did a lot of the organising for it - but my main contribution was deciding on the dates. I did that based on the fact that this was my final summer in Jordan and the previous summers I'd been there, summer had always really kicked off in the last week in March, so I said that's the time to come. The weather will be beautiful. The rains will have stopped. It won't be hot but it should be sunny, and it turned out just like that. It was perfect. So that's my one great contribution and she came, but, unfortunately, in the run up to the visit there was a bomb explosion at the Intercontinental Hotel. Now in those days the Intercontinental Hotel was the only western style hotel there was in Jordan. Soon there were many others, but that was then the only one and it was quite close to the Embassy and immediately there was an upsurge of interest in UK newspapers on the lines 'Does this mean the Queen's visit may be cancelled?' I did get a call from someone who was quite a well-known journalist in the UK in a well-known newspaper - but I won't say who or which - who said if you don't tell me what the background to this is your name is going to be on the front page of the newspaper tomorrow, saying that you're part of a conspiracy allowing the Queen to travel into danger. Well, as a young diplomat I did find this quite alarming, but managed to at least keep my cool and it didn't actually happen that way. There was a lot of talk in London, but it was quite clear that the Queen wanted to come. And then at the end of the day there were security assessments done and they didn't lead to the view that it had to be cancelled and so she came and it was a huge success.

Everywhere she went it was just amazing. Their security was very strong; the roads were always lined with police and military. There's no doubt it was hugely good for UK Limited in terms of perception in Jordan. There were various aspects to it, as always with these visits to do with business and so on, which is not only about goodwill, so yes, that was an exciting time. One thing I remember particularly about it. The Ambassador then was Alan Urwick. He was an interesting man. In fact he only died a couple of years ago. He lived to a great age and his wife, Lady Marta, is still with us and she was the daughter of Peruvian diplomat.

I think he started, and he is not the only person like this, he started in SIS and then came into the Foreign Office, and he wasn't an Arabist by background, although he did speak some Arabic, and he'd obviously learned some along the way. What was really important for the Ambassador then was the relationship with the King, because the Ambassador would have a direct access to King Hussein and for me it was really exciting that he would come back, after his meeting with the King, and then sit down with me, usually as a kind of political secretary, dictate something to his secretary and would say; So what do you think of this? I said 'Wow is that really right?' and he'd say 'well yes'. So I felt very honoured to be brought into these conversations about really important matters. He was an important player obviously in the sense that he had the relationship with the King and obviously wanted the visit to happen. He was knighted on the visit. This was a big occasion, when they went down to Aqaba after a couple of days based in Amman, he was knighted there. There was a famous story he told against himself actually that they had the first part of the visit in Amman, and the second part was down in Aqaba, which is a bit more relaxed, and of an evening they showed some film of the previous day's activities and the Queen was said to have remarked at one point: "Oh look the ambassador was asleep then."

MG: It seems quite a long time, five days. You were very lucky because other Royal visits, maybe because she's getting older, seem to last the three days at the most. So it seems a very good length.

AC: Yes, it was more to do with the times I think than anything else. When the Queen visited Brazil, in 1968 if I remember correctly, it was about the best part of three weeks.

In those days, yes the visits tended to be longer. I mean the idea of just dropping in for a day or two is relatively new, so five days wasn't unusual for going out on a visit of this kind, but it did, having said that, make the statement that the visit mattered as it wasn't just going to be in and out.

MG: Did you have interesting banquets and things?

AC: Oh yes, all that sort of stuff. Yes, whether interesting or not I don't know. I, on the whole, I don't find them so. One thing I do remember was trying to explain black tie to Jordanians; there's no reason why they should understand what it meant.

MG: Was it in the dining room? When you saw President Gaddafi holding a banquet, the guests were entertained in a tent and would be lying down.

AC: He was a bit of an oddball, I suppose. No, it was more traditional. It was held at the Palace. In fact, the protocol of these occasions is that the host will host a dinner and the guest will host a return dinner. The King would certainly host a dinner early on, but as far as I recall the return dinner wasn't at the Embassy as we didn't have anywhere to hold it, or at the Ambassador's residence, which wasn't really big enough. I think that was also held at the Palace somewhere, the return dinner was there as well. If I remember right, I didn't actually go to either of them. I was too lowly, I think to be granted an invitation. There was a reception at the ambassador's residence for staff and my wife and I were presented to the Queen. She also received me at the end of the visit and gave me a pair of royal cuff links and a photo.

MG: Where did the Queen stay? Did she stay in the Palace then?

AC: Yes, she didn't stay at the Embassy or residence. They were not suitable and it's important in Arab culture to accept hospitality. She was put up by the King.

MG: You mentioned working with the US. What were they doing there?

AC: That was the beginning of something that became important throughout my time in the Foreign Office. The US Embassy was just down the road from the 3rd Circle, so less than five minutes' walk from the British embassy, not far from the Intercontinental hotel I mentioned before. At that time the US didn't have an Ambassador, because after the

Israel/Egypt Peace Agreement of 1979, all the Arab states had objected to this partial thing, selling the Palestinians out as they saw it, and they decided to downgrade diplomatic relations with the United States, in protest. The US embassy was headed by a Chargé d'Affaires, who was a senior diplomat and the rest of the Embassy was the same. But they were still a very important Embassy that was still well received, there weren't great feelings of enmity around really, except in more extreme circles. It wasn't that long I think, after I left, that they restored full diplomatic relations.

But there was one thing that the Americans couldn't do that I could. The US Embassy was not allowed to talk to the PLO, to the Palestine Liberation Organisation. I could do that, and the PLO did have an office in Jordan and, during my time, it became more and more significant as the relationship between Jordan and the PLO warmed up after the conflict that had been happening between them in the late 70s. I found I could go and speak to the PLO and then I had, if you like, something in terms of information to trade with the American Embassy. They were much better tuned in to the internal politics of Jordan and the beginnings of some fundamentalist trends and so that was really helpful. And actually the man I did this with at that time, the American diplomat, is still someone I know well today. In fact, I Face Timed him just yesterday in his retirement in Washington, so it just shows you that these relationships can last for a long time.

MG: Was Yasser Arafat around then?

AC: Yes he was, but not in Jordan. After the civil war he left Jordan. He came back I think once on a visit, but even that was very controversial. It took a while before relationships between Jordan and the PLO were good enough for Arafat to show his face in Jordan again. He spent time variously in the West Bank and in Lebanon, of course, but he wasn't in Jordan, he wasn't based in Jordan again after Black September.

MG: So could you explain about the PLO, did this become Hezbollah?

AC: No, Hezbollah is Shia, a religious group, in Lebanon. The PLO was just what it sounds like: an Organisation to liberate Palestine, to create a State of Palestine. It originated after the post Second World War conflicts which resulted in a State of Israel but no state of Palestine basically, even though the UN had agreed on the partition of the

Palestinian land under British mandate from 1922 to 1948. That didn't happen after the wars of '47/'48. And of course a lot of Palestinians were forced into exile from what became Israel and the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, and indeed at the time when I was living in Jordan the majority of the population of Jordan were Palestinian refugees from '48 and '67. So it had a very important domestic political aspect to it, and the PLO in those days was nonsectarian. So there were Christians, there were Shia and Sunni Muslims, I don't know if there were any Jews, probably not, seems unlikely but not impossible. I mean quite a few of their leaders at that time, were Christians, in fact.

Addendum to Amman posting

MG: You have described your idyllic setting in Amman and you have described your part in a very successful visit from the Queen. Were you involved in any other visits from the great and the good?

AC: Yes, my job was the Political Secretary, if you like, so I was the natural person to send out to the airport if people of some importance were coming. It was obviously not me if it was the Queen or the Duke of Edinburgh but I did meet other people. And this involved me in meeting some really distinguished people and the one I remember most was Sir Hugh Foot, Lord Caradon, who had been in the Labour Government in the 1960s and was well known in the Arab World for 'UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967' which remains the bedrock of a possible Peace between Israel and Palestine and he was the author of it. He was our Minister, and the permanent representative to the UN in New York at the time.

Well, he came and visited during my time in the 1980s. He was then retired, an old man, but he came to revisit his former haunts on what was then called the West Bank. He had been a Colonial governor in many places in Jamaica and Nigeria and during World War Two he had been in Palestine as a planning official and his experience went right back to the 1920s. So I couldn't resist asking about it and he said to me: "When I was a young man and I joined the Service there was an emergency in Palestine in 1929, an uprising, so they sent me out to Jerusalem. I went there. When I arrived in Jerusalem, they said

'Here's a gun and go out to Nablus, there's some fighting going on there; that was my introduction to Palestine!'

He was obviously held in high regard in Palestine in those days, even in the West Bank and he went over and visited people from the old Palestinian families there in Nablus and Jericho and so on. I was very struck by a man of this kind who also was a representative of a former era of British officials. As I mentioned, he had been a Governor in many places, including his last governorship when he was the very last governor in Cyprus, and Cyprus during those last years was not an easy place because there was a lot of fighting going on and the Greek organisation Enosis was looking for union with Greece and of course the Turks were resisting that. I was aware, and he did tell me, that you have to make decisions of life and death on people who have been arrested and it just made me realise that nowadays, even though we might complain about the decisions we had to take, but things were somewhat weightier in former times, and he was a lovely man and a very modest one.

And of course, he was part of the Foot family. His brother Dingle Foot, also a member of the Labour government, Hugh Foot and Michael Foot who was later leader of the Labour Party.

They were brothers. Michael was the youngest of the brothers, they were all a sort of liberal left-wing kind of people. They had very clear views on things and were very clever, I think they were all presidents of the Oxford Union in their time there.

They were obviously different in temperament but he was the one that I met and I was privileged to meet someone like that who, despite all the things he had done, was quite happy to talk to a junior diplomat at that time. By contrast, I must mention someone else, this was George Brown who was, of course, the deputy to Harold Wilson during the 1960s in the Labour government until he flounced out. So when I met him in the 1980s he was Lord George Brown and he had a certain reputation before he came, which I'm afraid he lived up to. It happened that his flight was delayed from Heathrow and that he was several hours late arriving, five or six hours, something like that, when he did arrive and it was by that time quite late and I can only say that he was very drunk. I saw him

through the formalities at the airport and went in the car with him to his hotel and he was regaling me with his mission, which was to go over to Iraq from Jordan.

At that time, the Iran Iraq War was going on and the only way to get into Iraq was overland and so to drive from Jordan, a long way, but he was going over there because he had had a cunning plan which was going to solve the Iran/Iraq conflict. So I listened, I was obviously aware of the background because it was part of the sort of things I was dealing with. I got to his hotel, and he insisted on going straight to the bar and having another drink, and he then collected the people who were around in the hotel at this time - it must have been 11:00 o'clock at night or even later. He collected whatever people there were around, and he started to regale them with his plan for peace in Iraq, and I left him later on as I realised that I wasn't a necessary part of the audience, and departed. The next day I heard that he had been taken ill, and indeed he had been taken off to hospital and the Ambassador had been alerted and I heard he spoke to the King about trying to look after him, anyway Lord George Brown went to the King Hussein hospital and was looked after there. No surprise really. He had serious liver problems at that time and it was regarded as touch and go whether he was going to survive. So he was in hospital for quite a long time before eventually recovering sufficiently to be moved. I remember speaking to his brother at one point on the phone about him coming over to see him, just in case there was not another opportunity. I think he died a few months later.

This is the sort of thing that, as a junior Member of Chancery, we had to do; to meet people and you never quite knew what was going to happen and some of them could be memorable for one reason and some for another. One of the great things I think of being a diplomat out in the field is that these things happen to you, and if you are the right temperament, to learn and to enjoy them.

MG: I think that that means you're probably the right sort of a person to be a diplomat! In my view it must have been unpleasant; you might have been worried because you might have thought that he'd be giving away secrets to his comrades in the bar and you would be wondering if you should silence him by pushing him up to his room. It does sound like something from Yes, Minister.

AC: Well, this was a long time after he been in government, so we're talking about the 1980s. He was in government for a few years after 1964, before he left the government, I can't remember what year it was but he was only around in government for two or three years before he became too difficult. So I suspect he wasn't party to all that much in the way of secrets, but here is a junior diplomat and here is a Lord, member of the House of Lords, and a former Deputy Prime Minister so, I don't think I did feel that it was my position to stop him in full flow, I don't think it would have been successful anyway. He did get up to his room, presumably, and then he was taken off on a stretcher from there. I don't know what happened after I left the bar.

There were lots of other visitors. I mean we had a lot of the Royals who came through, apart from the Queen. The Duke of Gloucester came for example, he was a part of the St. John's Eye Hospital Order and I remember he gave me a photograph of himself dressed in the robes of the order. He went down from there to Jerusalem. This is one of these ancient connections between London and Jerusalem if you like going back right to the Hospitallers' time.

The Duke of Edinburgh came, although I wasn't involved in that very much, but he was then President of the World Wildlife Fund and he went to reintroduce the ibex to the Jordanian desert. In his normal way he kept a low profile. He wasn't interested in publicity or seeing people ,who just want to meet up with him, apart from the Ambassador. He did what he came to do and left.

So yes, you have these people coming. It is true, I think as a diplomat that visitors are very much part of your life because they offer opportunities sometimes to get access in a country and to raise issues. They also create a lot of work and sometimes difficulties. I remember, we're going ahead slightly, but while we're on the subject, I remember once fielding the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, it was later in Germany and we'd got a few members of the German parliament to come over too. The embassies were then in Bonn. And one of the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee started off by saying, "well, well, gentlemen of the Bundestag", which is the German lower house, "does Germany still pose a threat to Britain?" I thought to myself that's not how a diplomat would start the conversation, that's treating them as if they were slightly

reformed Nazis. So you know you sometimes have these feelings that it is not going to be a good day!

MG: So you're having this nice time, lovely climate, lovely house, exciting things happening. Got an edge on the Americans, you must have felt really happy and then you get sent back to London.

AC: That's how it is, you know you're only there for the period of the posting and then, in my case I knew it was going to be three years, and that's what it was. Actually, for me, that's what I rather liked about the career in the Diplomatic Service. The idea that it had a framework, you could stay in the same organisation if you like, but it would always be changing, and you would have this change of scenery, London places, overseas, change of function. That for me was one of the attractions when I started out and turned out to be something that I really relished. So yes I think after three years we felt it was a good time to go back. That was OK. It wasn't a problem, but the one thing I suppose I didn't look forward to doing was the commute into London and the things everyone else had to do if you like.

MG: Yes I see, so what time of year in 1984 was it when you came back? Did you come back for an autumn or dreadful English winter or did you get the spring?

AC: Let me see, let me get this right. I came back in the summer. If I remember correctly, yes, my wife went before. She had flown back with the children and I stayed on because my immediate boss who was the Head of Chancery, the number two in the embassy, Peter Raftery, had taken his mid-tour leave so the Ambassador asked me to stay on to cover for him for about six weeks, I think, while he was away. That was a good opportunity to do some different kinds of work as well. Then I drove back.

I'm a glutton for punishment after the first time coming to Jordan from UK getting into trouble. But I did drive back to Britain. I drove in my little Vauxhall Chevette; it was six driving days plus an extra day spent in Istanbul.

MG: I'm amazed at how you lot all go by car to the most far flung places. It seems to be a trend.

AC: Well, I don't know whether I'd do it now. Well, I wouldn't do it now, but in those days it was a bit of a risk in that I had already been in big trouble when I'd driven out having been arrested by the Syrians, but going back I thought I was going to be OK. But one thing I didn't know was what it was going to be like driving through Turkey because I understood about the situation then in Turkey. Turkey had been through some difficult times in the years before that so that the road sometimes came to an end, you know? I was driving with an ordinary, rather underpowered British Vauxhall. Nowadays no one would have thought of doing it in less than a Land Rover or something, but I did it anyway. I was also slightly concerned whether I would find any petrol anywhere. People had told me that there was a great shortage but we were foolhardy in those days and did these things and it worked out OK and I did enjoy it, especially my day in Istanbul.

MG: I think that you are all intrepid and I think that must be part of the selection process that they see this side of people.

AC: Well, I think there's something in that, yes, I mean, whether how much they see it I don't know, but certainly one thing I get asked all the time when I do training courses with people is how can they get into the Foreign Office? And one thing I would say is that adaptability and resilience are important, and certainly when I was in HR it was something you were looking for in people. So yes, you don't want people to be foolhardy but you need to be able to ride a bit with the ups and downs, yes. I think in those days this was the 1980s and lots of people used to wander around. Before that, in the 70s they used to wander around Iran and Kashmir and those places, places which already by the time I'm talking about were not places you could really wander around in.

Near East and North Africa Department, FCO, 1984-86

MG: You've come back and it's sort of mid to late summer, and you're put on the Israel /Jordan desk so there's some sense in that. You said earlier that you didn't have to have

extensive knowledge, but you would by then have acquired extensive knowledge, wouldn't you?

AC: Yes it was Israel/Lebanon in fact not Jordan and I again felt myself fortunate to have this post because one of the big issues, during my time in Jordan, and in general in British foreign policy, was how to deal with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which happened in 1981, and its aftermath, and there were also talk about war crimes and so on. This was a tricky one to handle for the Foreign Office because we have this principle, that was the basic principle of the Middle East, of not supporting the acquisition of territory by force and Ariel Sharon had been the architect of this invasion and was regarded as a particularly hard character, and there had been a lot of suffering among people. The Israeli idea had been, and you can understand it from their security perspective as they were suffering rocket attacks and whatever from over the border in Lebanon, to invade and occupy half of it to stop these attacks on their country. I realized, coming back to the Foreign Office that now in 1984, three years later, there was an attempt to try and warm up relations with Israel again, not least because of the wish to push forward on the wider Middle East peace process. Mrs. Thatcher was certainly someone who was quite strongly pro-Israel and had a number of the Jewish organisations in her constituency and a number of Jewish members in her cabinet. She very much admired the get up and go of Jewish people she had met. But on the other hand, she could be critical when she wanted. She was keen herself to go and pay a visit to Israel and this was a time when, during Mrs. Thatcher's period, certainly as things went on, the Foreign Office probably had the least influence that I knew during my career. Basically Mrs. Thatcher liked to decide everything including the foreign policy and she often didn't ask for advice about things. She just went and did them. This she was perfectly at liberty to do. It was just not something people were terribly used to. Anyway, she very much wanted to do this. The Israeli politics of those days was very different from now. It was very much split between the kind of right and left, and so people like Shimon Peres from Labour he and people from the right-wing Likud side were sharing power. Politics in Israel have shifted much further to the right since that time.

We did have then Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin visit London and I remember sitting in the meeting with him with our Foreign Secretary. It was Geoffrey Howe. Geoffrey Howe was Foreign Secretary for a long-time during Mrs. Thatcher's period, before he was shuffled upstairs to Deputy Prime Minister and the rest is history as he was instrumental in ending Mrs. Thatcher's premiership. I remember Rabin, a former general, was a very impressive looking man; very piercing blue eyes. Whereas Geoffrey Howe was a nice man; a very able man, but certainly physically he was much less impressive let us say. At the meeting Geoffrey Howe sat looking a bit like a sack, and he fishes in his back pocket and offers Itzhak Rabin a cigarette. Itzhak looked at it with an appearance of, if not disgust, then disbelief.

Anyway, it was a very good conversation and it's the sort of thing I would do as the desk officer. You'd sit in to take a note. You prepare the brief before the meeting and you would take the notes of the meeting and then produce the record, and we did feel that we were getting somewhere towards the point when there would be a chance to try, and particularly with the Jordanians, to try and get some kind of peace process going again, and then Shimon Peres came, as Prime Minister, and then we had Yitzhak Shamir who was the kind of successor, if you like, to Menachem Begin on the Likud side and he was Prime Minister, he came and it was a very controversial visit because you know this was then 1985 or so and still in living memory of the British soldiers who had been killed by underground Jewish movements in what was then Palestine in the late 1940s. But he came and that was quite a successful visit, but the interesting aspect for me was that, and I wasn't at this meeting, but I remember preparing the brief and shouldn't think she read it at all, for Mrs. Thatcher's meeting with the Prime Minister Shamir, but apparently Shamir didn't get a word in edgeways. She basically told him it was an outrage. What they did, you know, was booby trapping soldiers' bodies and this sort of stuff and because he had never admitted he had been a member of the Jewish terrorist organisations at the time, and then she packed him off. I think she felt she needed to get that off her chest. But the fact was that we were then preparing visits by senior British people, including Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, to Israel thereafter which actually happened. Lebanon was also fascinating because of the turmoil of civil war and the impact of the Israeli invasion and then with Israel trying to move relations on. This is the first time I also got involved

with and understood that when you're doing diplomacy and Foreign Relations there is a domestic angle. A domestic angle because of course, other ministries may be involved. Maybe public opinion can be involved, but in this case it was the Jewish organisations and I was very close to people in the Israeli Embassy. There was a counsellor in particular, a Jew who had been born in Iraq and spoke Arabic. We spoke Arabic together which he loved. The Israeli Ambassador was an interesting man, originally a Mancunian I think, who went on to be one of the most senior diplomats in the Israeli service. And then I did meet the people from various other Jewish organisations. You got to understand their point of view and understand the domestic aspect, if you like, of policy on Israel. Not easy but fascinating.

MG: Yitzhak Rabin, he was assassinated wasn't he by a Jewish extremist? I'm not quite sure when because he was actually getting ready to make a peace treaty, wasn't he?

AC: Yes. That was into the 1990s. Yes, the man who did that certainly succeeded in what he was trying to achieve because it was a huge set back to the peace process; there certainly was a thought, and I wasn't directly involved in the policy at that time, but into the 1990s there was a thought that it was really going to happen. There really was going to be an Israel-Palestine Agreement. And it failed for two reasons, one the loss of Rabin and the other the inability of Yasser Arafat to get his own side together. People always said that Yasser Arafat was a politician who never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity, and I think that was true. But there were reasons for it. I mean, you needed a leader who had more power than he to be able to marshal the Palestinians to sign it. But it was close, it was really close and I think if Rabin had lived it might have happened.

MG: And from what you're saying, the conversations you were having at that time in the 84-86 period, you were in on the ground floor of it and fostering better relations and getting to know everybody. That sounds as if it was very important.

AC: Yes, you didn't know then if it was going to be important. And of course I was doing it from, my position as a middle engine room Foreign office person. We used to call them Grade 5, so they now are the people who are first secretary level, if you like, who are doing that grunt work. We weren't doing the personal diplomacy usually. That was generally done by people much more senior than ourselves. But we did have a clear

aim which was, wouldn't it be wonderful, fantastic if at last there could be an Israel-Palestine agreement.

MG: You did have compensations, you were making visits to Lebanon and the West Bank and Israel as well. Tell me a bit about those visits. What did you find in each of those countries?

AC: Yes. Lebanon was in turmoil then as it has been for decades, really one of the things that I was always struck by was the ministerial nervousness in London about the safety of our Embassy in Beirut, and quite often on a Friday there would be a kind of emergency meeting with the junior minister on whether we should withdraw our Embassy staff because there had been some explosions or whatever, or some intelligence information suggesting our people might be in danger. And of course, it did happen in my time, although not at the British Embassy. The American Embassy was blown up and it so happened that our British Ambassador, David Miers, was in there at the time and we didn't know what had happened to him for a while. As the Lebanon desk officer I was in the business of doing hourly reports for Ministers on what we knew about what was going on and eventually David Miers did re-appear. He had been inside, during the blast, and he had got a few cuts and bruises. I think he had broken an arm as well, but he wasn't seriously injured and he did later come back, not in triumph I would say, but he certainly regaled us when he came back to London like a war hero. When I went there, I was very aware that I was one of the last people who dared to go through Beirut airport where people tended to get hijacked and also I was one of the last people who made a trip by road from Beirut to Damascus, which again was deemed just too unsafe not long after that.

And one of the things - I don't know if you know about this - one of the things I worked on a lot during that time was on the hostages. The FCO had a separate Department which had just been created called Security Coordination Department, which started as Security Coordination Unit headed by Graham Burton who was a wonderful larger than life character. They were looking at this as well as other security issues. The first of the hostages was a chap called Alec Collett who had been working for the UN with Palestinian refugees, who disappeared. I was in touch with his daughter Suzy, who lived

in London. Eventually we were sent, and I can't remember how we got this, a video which showed a number of people doing Islamic chants basically around what appeared to be a hanged man. I won't go into the gory details, but someone who had been executed. It was a bit grainy. We did show it. I remember watching it with her, to Suzy, and she thought it was her father. His wife lived in New York if I remember correctly, and she wasn't so sure when someone showed it to her. But anyway, probably it was him and we never recovered the body or any other trace of him. The hostages that are better known in Britain were the ones in Lebanon. Particularly John McCarthy and Terry Waite. Now I admit, though, I was trying to suppress this, there was a bit of irritation as well because we were telling everybody not to go to Lebanon. Particularly with Terry Waite because we told him several times not to go. But you have to put that to the side and think of these poor people who have been taken and that went on for a long time. We were scouring whatever information we could get and we got several false leads. I remember once there seemed to be someone from Cyprus who wanted to negotiate with us and we got talking with Security Coordination people on that. There was quite a lot of intelligence material around but fundamentally we didn't really know what had happened to them.

There was lot of effort put into these cases and they did have obviously a big resonance in public opinion in the UK, so there was a lot of briefing of ministers on where we were. We had a very clear policy and so we enunciated this several times, very clear policy on hostages, and this derived from a previous time going back to the 1970s when a woman called Leila Khaled had been involved in hostage taking.

We decided following that, that we would not negotiate with terrorists, people often didn't believe that that was a statement that we meant, but it was a statement that said what it meant. It didn't mean we didn't talk to them, so if the people wanted to talk to us, we were out to talk to them. But we weren't going to free somebody else out of prison, which is what Leila Khaled wanted, or give them £1,000,000 or whatever. That wasn't going to happen and because other countries didn't follow this policy, we felt that although this was not an easy line to keep to, we meant it, which we did, there would be always pressure to do things, but at the same time actually, if anything, it probably made

our people slightly safer than others overseas because people got to know this wasn't an easy way of getting themselves £1 million.

Anyway, we stuck to that. We made it very clear and whether that was a reason why the kidnapers never came to us we don't know. I think now it's quite clear there was a bit of a kidnapping industry and people were sometimes taken because they were spotted or taken by chance and passed onto other people. It was fantastic when, over time all these people did end up alive, after the Alec Collett incident. I think, in the end hostage taking probably became not so useful anymore. These people were harassed, obviously there was a lot of effort going on trying to chase down who they were and they probably felt that they were going to get caught out eventually. And, they weren't getting anything for it, so eventually the hostages were let out, but not after a long period of incarceration.

MG: What were your impressions of visiting Israel in the West Bank at that stage?

AC: Well, the West Bank. I am trying to stop myself seeing those as halcyon days. The West Bank still had, which I think is much less the case now, a lot of its traditional societal structures which were centuries old Christian and Muslim families. People who went back hundreds or thousands of years basically and very much a sense of respect of these old families. It struck me as amazing, for example, that the tradition at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Bethlehem, where a number of Christian traditions had a base, so it wasn't just one, it was half a dozen different Christian traditions had a base in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but the key to the Church was always held by a Sunni Muslim of a particular family and had been for centuries. But this was the only solution the feuding Christian sects could possibly agree on. And I remember going with a member of the Nuseibeh family, going with this chap with a huge key, it was mostly ceremonial nowadays, but those traditions I kind of loved.

Israel was fascinating, I thought Tel Aviv had the most exciting political environment I ever experienced. I met people who seemed to have endless energy and talked politics endlessly. It was just astonishing. Jerusalem I found slightly forbidding. I must say I found the Ultra-Orthodox Jews and the way they dealt with women in particular pretty objectionable, and of course, it was pretty uneasy with the Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the settlements nearby. However, you know the chance to visit Jerusalem was

magnificent. We did visit across the West Bank, and I did take my aged mother there when we were in Jordan, which I am always thankful I managed to do. It did take all day, but yes, they were fascinating times and Israel at that time was still the Israel that had kibbutz ideology still quite strong. Nowadays it's kind of faded away and certainly there were then a lot more Jews in the Israeli inner political decision-making areas who spoke Arabic than there are now.

That's sad that things have grown apart so much, but yes, a great job and I always thought to myself one day it would be great to be in the Embassy in Israel. It never happened but it would have been brilliant.

My Head of Department in Near Eastern and North Africa Department was Christopher Long, a clever and thoughtful man. The Assistant was Patrick Nixon. Both Christopher and Patrick would be excellent people to contribute to this Churchill College project. Patrick went on to have a very interesting further career. He was, it was used as a training video for a while, he was grilled during the Bobby Sands hunger strike. He was the information officer in Washington and he was grilled downline from New York with an earpiece, but he was on TV and he was questioned in a really tough way and the way he responded to it was admirable; probably not the way we would do it quite now I mean, he was probably a bit more combative than we would be right now, but he was combative in a reasonable way and didn't give any ground, but listened to what was being said and he was a really, really good person to talk to and he used to encourage me quite a lot because I was married, soon after I started we had a child and we moved house and I remember him saying he thought it was amazing that people could get to grips with a change of career, change of direction. New career, new job, moving house and having a child. But actually I think in your 20s you don't think about those things. You just get on with it. It didn't really occur to me but it was a good example of how someone in your hierarchy, how they can have a positive impact on you by thinking what your situation was like. I learned from that.

The 19th of March 2021, and Alan Charlton continues to recollect his career in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with Moira Goldstaub.

British Military Government, Berlin, 1986–90

MG: So I think we've arrived at 1986, and you're the Deputy Political Adviser, British Military Government Berlin? That sounds very important. What was it like living in Berlin? Tell me how you got there and what you found there.

AC: Well, first of all, to explain the job from the end of the war up to 1990, Berlin was legally under the occupation of the four wartime powers, including Britain, and so each of the powers, the Russians didn't play this game in the same way, but each of the Western powers certainly, in their sector of West Berlin as it was then, had a Commandant, a Military Commandant in charge. We had a British General who was the Commandant and we had a slightly uneasy situation in that this was a mixed military diplomatic mission, so we had the Commandant and his deputy was a senior diplomat, the Deputy Commandant, who was the Minister and deputy Commandant and I was one of the ones further down and I was formally an adviser to the Commandant, but actually part of the diplomatic mission, so you had a slightly strange situation but most of the time it worked very well actually. Occasionally there were differences let us say.

How did I get there? Well in those days there was no easy way to get there unless you went by air which was straight forward. The air corridors were, they became part of my job because they were maintained by the Western powers. The three corridors through East Germany, through which certain commercial aircraft flew had to be registered in UK, France or US, the powers; Lufthansa couldn't fly into Berlin in those days.

My wife and I, and our children - we had all three of them by that time – so we needed to get there some other way. So we drove: in those days right up to 1990, if you were driving in from West Germany, you would go through Checkpoint Alpha, which was the border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic

and was a British Military post and then you would go along the so called Central Corridor, one of the German autobahns until you got to Checkpoint Bravo, which was the checkpoint between the GDR and West Berlin and there you would be checked by Soviet soldiers and then you would go into West Berlin. So you could only drive along that corridor and you had a certain amount of time you were allowed to go along it. If you took too long then the Russians would suspect that you were up to no good and deviating and doing things you shouldn't do. If you broke down, then you had to try and call the British Military Police. Whatever you did, you were not supposed to get involved with the East German authorities, the East German police.

That's the way you got there and then you had special documentation which was signed by the Commandant, including in Russian, which gave your name and details of the passengers, of the car etc. If it was in a bad time, there were bad relations at particular times or some tiff going on between ourselves and the Soviets then if you missed a full stop off somewhere on this document, they would send you back till you got it corrected. That sort of game happened, but we got used to it.

If you were military, your passport was your uniform so you just wore uniform when you went through the corridor and that was your passport to the Soviet Union side. So, for the people like me who were civilian members of the Allied mission, we had special cards, Orange cards, which were signed by the Commandant which had your photo and my wife and children had these cards as well, which said we were members of the Allied forces which gave us this special authority to go through the corridor. So that's the way we got there.

It was 1986 and this was the only posting I had actually asked for. I wanted to go to Berlin again. I'd been there as a youngster in '71. And they actually sent me there. I couldn't believe it, it was fantastic. Really, really, exciting.

MG: So you were living in West Berlin? Who were you working with, presumably the other Allied powers?

AC: That's right, yes. Most of the accommodation that we had in West Berlin were houses and offices which were commandeered after the Second World War. We still had

Allied Law in Berlin in all that time in theory, although it was very lightly applied and the average Berliner didn't really notice. I used to drive every day from home to our headquarters, which was at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, the old Imperial Sports Ministry building behind the Olympic Stadium to be precise. Very much in that German style - Art Deco of 1930s - and I even found some old files stuck in the wall in my office, from the old days of the Imperial Sports Minister in the 1930s and various people who got sporting awards.

So that's where we drove in and who did we work with? Well first of all, we had to work with ourselves and make sure that we were working properly with our military colleagues. But then the three main groups of people we worked with were, first of all, yes the other allies, and my job was the kind of fulcrum in Western allied cooperation if you like. We used to have regular meetings, we had our own telex network between the three of us; a French Deputy Political Adviser, and a US Deputy Political Adviser, and we dealt with all the issues that were going on between ourselves at that kind of working level. So that was very interesting. And then the second group of people we worked with were of course the Soviets as they were called in those days - the fourth power, and that was less frequent, but sometimes intense when issues arose, we dealt with them for example, all the time in the Berlin Air Safety Centre that was the body which I mentioned before, which oversaw the air corridors coming into Berlin and the Russians were in there in the Berlin Air Safety Centre (physically in a commandeered building in West Berlin, where the Nazis had held infamous show trials), they had an element there and every flight that came in and out of Berlin, going to West Berlin or to the West, had to receive permission from the Soviet Union in theory, so they had to stamp the cards and I was in charge of that element there. We had an RAF Wing Commander who actually ran it, one of those people who knew about Air Traffic control and so on, but they used to report to me, so when there were problems and sometimes there were late at night, I'd get a call that we would have to try to sort it out.

So we were working with the Russians there, and we worked with them of course on Spandau Prison, which was in the British Sector of Berlin. That involved certainly meeting Soviet military on the issue of Spandau itself. I was always struck with the

Soviet view of Germany, among their military all our conversations were always in German because I didn't speak Russian: if you keep your Germans down, they said, we'll keep ours down. That was it briefly, as simple as that. You know the whole thing was rooted in the Great Patriotic War with 20 to 25 million Soviet citizens killed by Germany. That was it.

So we worked with them. We also worked with the Soviet Embassy over in East Berlin when there were political problems to deal with. These were often incidents at the wall where people had been killed or captured trying to escape to the West. I, or my superior the Political Adviser, would go over to the Soviet Embassy, particularly if it was a British month. We had a month each - the British, French and Americans - we rotated chairmanship, and whoever was in the chair would, after agreeing with the other two, go and deliver some protest and say: 'This happened at the wall at this place and the East German guards shot somebody, which is completely outrageous, so we expect you to do something about it'. And they didn't, but sometimes on behalf of the people who had been captured, trying to escape, sometimes we took these things right up to the Soviet Foreign Minister, they were actually regarded quite seriously. It was always an eerie feeling going to the Soviet Embassy. You were driven through Checkpoint Charlie in an official car and as soon as you got to Checkpoint Charlie, on the other side, it seemed to be like a spy film, November, cloudy, you could smell the petrol fumes from the Trabant cars. The street lighting didn't work very well. Then you drove the short distance to the Soviet Embassy and when you got in they stuck you in this sort of huge room and kept you waiting for half an hour or three quarters of an hour and you knew they were watching you. Eventually you would have your meeting with a Soviet diplomat - generally someone you had met before as they too had a team dedicated to contact with the western allies - which would be unproductive. They took on the role all the time, even though they said it was nothing to do with them because the GDR is sovereign, they would still play to the four-power legal situation to an extent, as they liked to remind the GDR that they were ultimately in charge.

The third group of people we worked with, which I hadn't really thought much about before I started the job, was the West Berliners themselves. Because time had moved on,

and West Berlin was a vibrant place. People had different views, but a lot of people in West Berlin had the view, wasn't it just time to accept reality to accept there were two German States and give up this pretence that Berlin will one day be unified and so we used to have meetings with the political parties in Berlin and all the people who said all these things actually, completely denied they ever said them after unification. But that's life.

I won't be naming names but even mayors of Berlin in later times were not always terribly helpful on these things. Then West Berliners also had complaints about if a British tank had broken down in the road somewhere and created a great traffic hold up. We tried to move our military vehicles in the middle of the night. We did churn up some of the fields in exercises occasionally. Then we had quite a trouble over cutting down trees to keep Gatow airport operational because we always had this thought that one day the airlift, you know from the late 1940s, or some other access to Berlin by air on a large scale might be needed. Berlin might be blockaded. Then we might need the airport to be operational and to maintain this we needed to cut down some trees. This created a great deal of problems with the German environmentalists. So those are the three groups; it was fascinating job I have to say.

MG: How did the wall strike you? Because when you were there before, was it being built?

AC: No it was built in 1961 and, when I'd gone before in 1971 I was only 19 at the time it had already been a reality for 10 years, and so by this time, when I arrived in 1986, the wall would have been there for 25 years which is a long time, obviously and it was regarded by most people as a fixture. We had a lot of official visitors, of course, to Berlin from Britain and they always wanted to go and see the wall and very often I would go, if they were reasonably senior people. I would go and take them over on a Saturday morning to one of the viewing platforms. It so happened that our sector, the British Sector, was by the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, and those areas which were particularly famous and which people knew about.

So we'd go to a viewing platform and we'd look over the wall and there wasn't very much to see over the other side of the wall because the East Germans had razed the

ground so I'd point out that that's where Hitler's Chancellery was, and that's where the Bunker was and so on a couple of hundred yards away. And I was very often asked the question by these people: 'Do you think the wall will ever come down?' and my answer was, which was a mixture of belief but also a sort of diplomatic answer if you like: "I'm sure it will one day, but I don't know when". I kind of did believe that, but it was a good answer anyway to give. A friend of mine, a German professor at the Free University and a great Anglophile, who was old enough to remember some of the really bad days in Berlin in the late 40s, early 50s, I was at his house once fairly well drunk with a group of people and we were talking about the wall. This was 1988. I was talking about the fact that there was increasing talk among Germans about the need to find a way forward, basically giving up on this four power status and I said to him, I felt sure that the wall would come down in the next few years – impossible to predict how many - either because the Allied Powers just decided to give up the ghost with Germany's increasing general view of just accepting reality, or because the things fell apart on the East German side, and because one thing that we saw going over there, which people in the West didn't see - you know people in Bonn - was that the GDR was supposed to be the 8th most important economy in the world then but it didn't feel like that when you went over there, it really didn't, and of course we all found out afterwards that the GDR was much less economically successful than it claimed to be. Even to this day this retired professor still tells me: 'You were the only person who knew the wall was coming down.' It wasn't quite like that, but anyway you should take credit for things you don't deserve because you get blamed for things you don't deserve to be blamed for.

During the time we are talking about when I went over to East Berlin you knew you would be followed everywhere; and you knew your phone calls made in West Berlin were being tapped by the Stasi and you knew people were very wary on the other side of talking to you in case they were thought to be, somehow, spies for the West or whatever.

The summer before last, my wife and I went to a wedding in the middle of East Germany. This was my wife's nephew who was getting married to an East German woman. They were living in Berlin and they decided to have the wedding in this rather idyllic rural setting about 50 miles outside Berlin.

Because a lot of her relatives didn't speak any English, they asked me would I officiate at the ceremony because I could speak both languages. It was an honour to do that.

Afterwards I got to talk to quite a few of the East German relatives and all of them said we realise we're much better off now, materially, we realise we can travel, but this unification thing was a terrible mistake. It was a takeover, we really resent it. It's interesting that 30 years on, still, that generation of people who were there in their 50s, that sort of generation upwards, quite a lot still feel that way. It will die out over time. And of course, all the youngsters speak very good English now.

MG: But you obviously were there for the fall of the wall and the unification. Now wasn't Mrs. Thatcher against the unification?

AC: Well, it was a great shame, indeed one of the regrets of my diplomatic career because I always felt that, of the three Western allies there, we were the ones who were the truest to the real mission, which was to hold the ring until such time as Germany and Berlin could be reunited. The French unsurprisingly, given the history, had their doubts about whether they wanted a unified Germany, given what had happened in three previous wars, and I've already said the view of the Soviet Union was very much that they wanted to keep things as they were. The Americans rather flipped here and there. I mean, Berlin was quite a good thing in terms of publicity in the US, and it was interesting when people were asked in the US in some of the central states about places in Europe, Berlin was one they recognised even for those who didn't recognise where Germany was. The Americans were well, on and off, but when it came to the wall coming down and then eventually the debate emerging very quickly about unification starting up, Mrs. Thatcher had decided that this would be a bad thing for a variety of reasons which a lot of academics pointed out. It could create a great deal of tension with the Soviet Union and might even create worse than that. There was concern about German revanchism, for a number of reasons, and in her typical style, this was towards the end of her time as Prime Minister when I think she got even more typical if you like, she said unification is not on the agenda. That was the kind of headline. Now the other Allies went through phases. President Mitterrand said early on that this would be a complete disaster, we can't possibly allow this, but he came round and by Christmas 1989 he came round to the view

that you have to face reality. So Mrs. Thatcher was out there in front sounding off, not noticing that the UK was becoming isolated on this issue. Of course, no one was powerful enough in the government to gainsay her. The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd didn't agree with her but wasn't in a position to change her mind: I don't know whether he tried.

I remember Douglas Hurd visiting Berlin not long after the wall came down. A tall and distinctive man with white hair and green overcoat which he had worn for donkeys' years. We actually lost him once when he went through the wall in the early days, he was sucked through in the crowd.

I think we have really been damaged by the impression that we were against unification as this has left a permanent stain on the bilateral relationship. I don't think Mrs. Thatcher's view affected our policy much nor the outcome because in the end you know even she had to accept reality. But that reputation of being against unification has stuck with us to this day in Germany.

MG: I just find it amazing. I mean, as an onlooker and not particularly well up in it. I just thought what a magnificent gesture it was for Helmut Kohl to take on and to do, you know, one mark for one öst mark.

AC: Helmut Kohl had seen this as his moment in history. He had done little himself to achieve it. It was achieved by the failure of the GDR regime to modernise itself even to the point where, you won't believe this, but there was a time towards the end of the GDR when it was illegal to buy the official Soviet newspapers Pravda and Tass in East Berlin. This was the time of perestroika, glasnost, and Gorbachev and the GDR got to the point which is clearly ridiculous, that their protector, the Soviet Union, was regarded as a problem. Well, once you get to that position, you haven't really got anywhere else to go. I mention this now, because it was one of the things that struck me most strongly. There was a time in 1989 when the Gorbachevs came to pay a visit to East Berlin. There was huge interest in this and I was able, because I was a member of allied forces to go across Checkpoint Charlie into the other side whenever I wanted with my orange card and I went through on an evening when Gorbachev was arriving just to see what was going on and take the temperature on the streets. It was extraordinary. He was in the Palace of the

People where GDR General Secretary Honecker used to meet people. Not very far into East Berlin just a walk from the wall, and there were crowds around, East Germans, who were shouting “Gorbi, Gorbi, Gorbi” and you have to get into the mindset of the East Germans, outright opposition or dissent was very dangerous because everyone was being watched. As we now know, about a third of the East Germans were informers. But how could you, how can you be prosecuted or otherwise punished, or your child's University Place be taken away or whatever, for shouting for the leader of the Soviet Union. But the message was very clear. The message was one saying that this Soviet leader was a force for change and our own leaders were not. I found it fascinating being in that crowd and then seeing the Stasi, the East German secret police, who you could always tell because they had these sort of regulation accoutrements that you see in spy films such as black leather coats. They actually didn't take action against this crowd. Instead, they concentrated on defending the wall. What they were worried about was some kind of move by groups of people to try and storm the wall, and then having to open fire on them and people being killed or whatever. I began to realise then that things were falling apart, but at that time if you told people in Bonn, including Helmut Kohl, that things were on the slide, they wouldn't have believed you. The difference being that the distance between Bonn and Berlin was huge and if you read history, actually right from Roman times, the border between East and West Germany was the border between civilization and the Barbarians and actually as far as a lot of people in West Germany were concerned, they still felt the same way!

MG: Yes, I can understand their feeling that because they were bearing the brunt of the cost of it all. But what I find paradoxical is the fact that, at that time they were all shouting Gorbi and wanting him to loosen things up, but they still have a residual animosity towards the freedom that they obtained. I don't understand that.

AC: I think it would be explained by these people who put it to me in this way in that it wasn't unification that was the problem; or of getting rid of a completely ossified and outdated regime. It was the fact it was a takeover by West Germany. In other words, if it had been a genuine attempt to try and push the two countries together including what was best of the East Germany. The East German Constitution, the social system for example,

the achievements of that state which people felt existed certainly in the social arena, but instead it was a takeover and the reason it was a takeover was that it was easiest and safest way to do it. There was debate about this at the time for a little while, but in the end, they just used as the starting point the Constitution of the then West Germany, which allowed them to add on the East German states. The individual East German states and Berlin became part of the one Germany. The result was not a new state but another bigger West Germany in effect. The GDR became extra states in what was West Germany and that resulted in the feeling that you haven't changed anything. All the stuff from before West Germany was there and you haven't changed anything and you have to remember also that some of this still sticks to this day a little bit.

There was all sorts of black propaganda in the years of the GDR produced by the East Germans. We, living in West Berlin could access East German TV. We watched it occasionally. I don't know how much the East Germans actually ever watched it. There was a propaganda programme called Der Schwarze Kanal – the Black Channel - and the only thing you could compare it to would be Lord Haw Haw from the Second World War. It was saying to people in the East that the West had been overtaken by drugs, the women raped, the poorest and weakest neglected – West Germany was a violent, completely unconscionable place and all they cared about is money. This sort of thing had a bit of an impact on people's minds, creating feeling that this was an awful place to be. Some people might be better-off, but society was amoral and there was violence and God knows what. There was a feeling that things were more prim and proper in East Germany, people behaved better with each other, even if the state was brutal. On the other hand most East Germans watched western TV including the adverts for wonderful luxury products like good soap powder and fruit such as bananas.

MG: They were informing on one another. I don't understand it. I mean, this is the nation that 30 years before, 40 years before entered Alsace Lorraine, taking that back and had no hesitation in taking back the bits of Poland and the Sudeten lands. They were all getting the West German treatment imposed on them and that was fine, so I find it extraordinary!

AC: Yes, I think it will fade over time and it has been a huge effort from the West to keep paying, 30 years, on subsidies to parts of the east which are not doing very well economically. In fact the West Germans have paid quite a lot for the restoration of some of the areas in the East which are now underpopulated towns so you see some of these beautiful facades which are not used. It's a matter of money I suppose in the end. It will turn out fine, I expect. I don't think the younger generation have the same hang ups on the whole and I say some areas, some of the towns and cities in East Germany, are doing well. Berlin is different in that many parts of what was formerly East Berlin have now become very desirable places to live because although it took some time and properties were in a particularly bad state of repair, people were able to buy them and do them up and put them in order. It is still true that quite a few of Osis, so called, the old East Berliners live in these rather boring concrete flats towards the edge of East Berlin.

In the 1980s, it was a fantastic time to be in Berlin. The city had the energy and the night life that you see, in the old films of the twenties and thirties. It was a seven-day week place, you know, the bars and the clubs and whatever were open all night. There was this feeling of living for today. It was also a young population, because quite a lot of West German men had left West Germany, gone to live in Berlin to dodge the draft. Whether because on principle they didn't want to do it because as a man you were still likely to be called up to the Bundeswehr for a couple of years. Some of these people lived quite alternative lifestyles. The Greens did increasingly well. There was a bit of a clash between that and the old West Berlin establishment.

It was a place full of contradictions but vibrant and exciting and alive. And people wanted to visit you and see some of these things which was fantastic. Also, there were great weird things that you just couldn't imagine now. I mentioned the air corridors and the land corridors. There was also a British military train which ran every day from West Berlin to West Germany. Once it reached East German territory we had to get rid of the locomotive and take an East German locomotive and all this kind of thing and it was controlled by the Soviet military on this journey. It went over to the West and you could basically spend half a day in Braunschweig and then come back again. It ran, once a day; you got on in the morning and you had breakfast beautifully served by British military

personnel with a menu and everything else, and you had a snack before you got there; you went around Braunschweig a while and when you got back on the train you had a later snack and then before you got off, you had dinner with wine which had British Military Train label on it, they had their own Bordeaux and everything. It was very grand and the point of having this train at all was to keep the line open, so obviously, if necessary, it could be used as a troop transporter. This was part of our job really to keep open these access routes one way or another in case things went wrong. But it did result in some strange things.

MG: Tell me about poor old Rudolf Hess.

AC: Yes, well I mentioned Spandau before. As you know, after the war there were the Nuremberg War trials at which a number of senior people were convicted, some executed and seven were sent for terms of imprisonment in Spandau Prison in Berlin. This was chosen because it was usable: there were not that many usable buildings in Berlin at that time. So there were seven of them, and including Doenitz who had been the last leader of Germany before the war ended. There was Albert Speer, who was an amazing character and is someone I would have loved to talk to because he was the young clever architect who worked with Hitler and became Armaments Minister during the war and made a huge difference to the later German war effort. Very clever man and if you watch that ITV series World of War, you can see interviews with him. A very clever man, unfortunately he died relatively young after his release. He died in London of a heart attack after giving some interviews.

Anyway, there were seven of them and after 20 years all had been released apart from Rudolf Hess because he had been sentenced to life imprisonment. The Soviets had insisted throughout that he ought to be executed, having been the Deputy Fuehrer. They were upset by that, but they accepted in the end because the other three allies said no, we don't think so. Life imprisonment for them had to mean life. There was talk over the years about releasing Rudolf Hess but the Soviets always said this is not going to happen; people would not stand for this in Russia.

So the chap was still there when I arrived. He had been there by that time for 40 years and he was an old man. The only person there for 20 years. There was a regime between

the four allies, each other had one month in charge of the prison, although the basic work was done by the Brits as it was in our sector. When it was a British month we used to go on prison visits and I did go on one occasion with our Commandant to visit Hess: this was a very standard thing where according to the rules, you had to address him by his prison number, you weren't allowed to use his name. So you would say "Prisoner No.7 any complaints?" He would stand up and say whatever he had to say. I think he spent most of his time watching football on TV and then, because he was the only prisoner left there, he also had this portacabin in the grounds and a little garden to tend. Not surprisingly over the years he asked increasingly if he could just be left alone in the portacabin rather than have somebody with him all the time and that was allowed. They'd go and check on him every 15 - 20 minutes, so he used to stay there. He was regularly unwell and we always said on our side that he was always unwell on a Monday because then it would wreck the whole week. If he declared himself ill, and the doctor said he had to go to hospital, he went to the British Military Hospital in Charlottenburg because it was in our sector and there had to be a convoy of all Four Allies. That was the protocol and he had to be guarded well when he was inside the hospital and there would be an incredible kerfuffle! And so when in 1987 we suddenly got the news that he died, he seems to have killed himself and it was a Friday, we thought yeah, this isn't the normal thing, it's a Friday and he's always ill on a Monday!

It was an extraordinary thing that, just a few months before, I'd actually been working with some of our people on the plan for when he died. Obviously, the need for planning had existed for a long time, but it had changed over time because originally the Soviets had said that his ashes needed to be scattered to the four winds. But then eventually they had come round to our view that we should send his body to Bavaria to his family. His wife and his son who occasionally visited him in prison, lived there and so of course there needed to be a plan for how he's going to get there, which kind of consisted of the Americans flying him down to Grafenwöhr by military plane. Having lived in Germany myself before, I mentioned at one point to my own people that if we're going to get him on a plane, we've got to make sure that he has proper documentation, because having lived in Germany, I do know that everybody basically has an address which is registered with the police. Some way has to be found to show that he was resident in Germany.

This fellow had not been resident in Germany. The last place he was resident was probably Britain when he was imprisoned after his flight from Germany in 1941. So it's going to be a problem with getting the right certification for his death and to get the Germans to certify it they will say what's his legal address? This might or might not be a problem but we wanted to be sure everything would go smoothly. We could solve the problem by getting somebody over from the British Army on the Rhine. The British forces in West Germany had registrars of births, deaths and marriages. So we included in the plan that a registrar would come over and he would register the death. So that's why Rudolf Hess had a British death certificate. Anyway, we did all of that, he went back to Grafenwöhr and was buried there. Interestingly, his family only had the lease of the plot for so many years – I don't know how many years that they'd got the plot for, but once that period expired, the local authorities down there insisted that the headstone be taken away because it had become something of a tryst for the wrong kind of visitors. So if you look online now, you'll probably see a photograph of his stone which says 'We dared to do it' or something like that, but it's no longer there, they didn't want that. Now, the prison itself was part of the plan because we were also worried about people taking bits of the prison and putting them on their mantelpiece and saying this is where Rudolf Hess lived. So we demolished it, I think we ended up putting all the rubble in the North Sea somewhere; it didn't stay in Berlin. And we built a forces supermarket on the site, which was pretty ghastly, and which became known as Hessco's.

MG: It's a sad story, isn't it? Because I don't see him as ever being, I know he was deputy Führer, but he was never a dynamic kind of guy or someone with any sort of intellectual input into the Nazi regime, like as you say Speer or the others Göbbels and Göring and he sort of carried the can didn't he?

AC: It is a sad story but he was deputy Führer and obviously a very strong supporter of Hitler in his rise in the early years. He was a Brownshirt. He was side by side; he was very important to Hitler in the early years. There's no doubt though that, as time moved on, and when you go into the later 1930s, and certainly when you start getting into the war, he was already a person of relatively little influence, his title didn't mean much. Martin Bormann was really the right-hand person in many ways and of course in terms of

power Göbbels and Göring were the powerful people. Nonetheless he believed in all this stuff. There's no question about it. But you know there was this oddity about him and when you see the film reels of the Nuremberg war trials it is clear that the guy was not quite of sound mind and that was definitely part of the decision, I think, that he wouldn't be executed. People were not sure even though he was regarded and cleared as fit to plead, there was something odd about him and when you read Albert Speer's diary of his time in Spandau, clearly all of them, all the other prisoners there, regarded Hess as half crazy.

I should mention that, although this time is gone now, there was a theory around, and of course nowadays we're used to these sorts of conspiracy theories and fake news, that it wasn't really Rudolf Hess in prison. And the idea was that Rudolf Hess had been killed by the British or somebody and this guy here had sort of carried on his time there and it was not really him. We even had a former British military doctor who had worked for a time in the British Military Hospital who claimed that he had examined him and his wartime wound (he did actually have a bullet wound in his lung from World War One) did not appear to be there. All of these things were denied and proof was adduced and so on but it didn't stop this guy selling two books, or claiming this for a crime of war. I always said to speakers who came and said to me that it's not really Hess that his wife seems to think it is him as she visits. Also it is difficult to get a look alike who was willing to be incarcerated for 40 years! We also said that if somebody had agreed to this arrangement, you think they might just have spoken up by now and been released.

MG: So while you were there, you were the political adviser to the Military government, I'm assuming that there were lots of jollies, mess nights, cracking evenings. What was that sort of thing like? Did you mingle with the military a great deal?

AC: Yes, there was some of that, although having a young family I didn't get involved in that so very much, but it did exist. Certainly some of the military used to have spare time and I met some interesting people, and of course the families tended to meet because our kids went to the military school at Charlottenburg: our first son and daughter actually went there so they would meet the children of some of the military there. We went on a few excursions but we weren't involved too much in that sort of military side of messes

and so on. No, but some of the military side was really fascinating. I had a particular role working with the Royal Military Police which I found to be an amazing institution. One of their jobs in our sector was to liaise with the West Berlin police and the Soviet military over wall incidents. The wall had often been built by the East Germans 20, 30, 40, 50 yards back from the actual boundary and some desperate West Berliners who knew this saw it as a way of committing suicide so they would drive their cars against the wall, knowing that the West German police and ambulance services were not allowed to go in there because it was actually East Berlin territory. So the Royal Military Police would often liaise with, actually not with the East Germans officially, they tried to get a Soviet officer to come and sometimes it would come back to me and I would ring up the Soviet Embassy saying look can you just quickly tell the East Germans that the Royal Military Police are going to go into that area just to pick up this dead body, or this chap who is ill or injured and the ambulances needed to go in; and they always said it is nothing to do with us but they would do it. We had to make sure that it didn't create some kind of incident; we needed to tell them about it.

We also had some wonderful military parades. There was a Queen's Birthday Parade every year. I could attach a painting of what we did at this, it was very grand. We had the Olympic Stadium and the area around, the area next to it was called the Maifeld which was the Olympic polo field in 1936 and that was fantastic for a parade. And every year we would have a member of the Royal family who would come and take the Salute. In 1987 it was the Queen because it was the 700th anniversary of Berlin and Gorbachev came back and so did President Reagan, he gave his wall speech, and Mitterrand came. It was a big deal. So these parades were rather grand and I remember inviting my mother to come and this was one of the highlights of her life to see this military parade and going to all the fancy things that you did around that. Fly overs with Red White and Blue and all the rest of it.

MG: Did you have to wear a uniform or a hat with plumes in it or anything?

AC: No, no, we don't have any of those things, actually I should say that diplomatic uniforms still exist, but they only exist in very few places, and they're mostly places that, just about all places now, where the host government or the host people insist on it. So

for example our Governor in the Falkland Islands has the uniform, a plumed hat and a sword, it's all paid for by the administration. It's the same in Gibraltar, they have it because the locals like it.

Our Ambassador in Germany still had the legal position for us of being Ambassador to the whole of Germany, including East Germany in legal terms, even though we had an Embassy in East Berlin from the 1970s. And our Ambassador would come and he would wear diplomatic uniform for that one occasion when we had the Queen's Birthday Parade. The Ambassador was Christopher Mallaby at that time.

Deputy Chief, Assessments Staff, Cabinet Office, 1991–93

MG: So were you sorry to come back? You were brought back in 1990 to become the Deputy Chief of the Assessments Staff Cabinet Office. Was Mrs. Charlton sorry to return?

AC: I ended up having four and a half years in Berlin at this time and I felt very fortunate that I'd been able to be there at all, and then be there for the time of the wall coming down and actually I left just a couple of days after Unification Day on the 3rd of October 1990. As for my wife and family, I think they felt it was time to come back and we were kind of ready for it, but we certainly look back on it very happily. When I came back, actually, it was an interesting time in the UK because I got back into the Foreign Office and very soon afterwards Mrs. Thatcher had resigned. I remember going out of the office of an evening and seeing Douglas Hurd on Clive Steps, this was a bit further along after the resignation, talking to the media about his throwing his hat into the ring for the second round of voting for the new leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. So I had a feeling I'd been in Berlin at a wonderful time, an historic time and I'd come back to a very interesting time in Britain as well, when the Prime Minister was changing. Mrs. Thatcher had been Prime Minister for so long it was hard to remember any time before it.

MG: You came back and it was the Iraq /Kuwait war, it couldn't have been more different. You are an Arabist, you speak the language. So that must have been very helpful - wasn't it?

AC: It's the reason that I was brought over into that job. I actually had another job that I was given when I started, but within two weeks I was asked to go over and work in the Assessments Staff because this war is going to happen and it was for the reason you mentioned being someone with some experience of the Arab world. It was an extraordinary war in the sense that you kind of felt it was going to happen, there was a small chance only by this stage that it might not have happened, but everything we knew about Saddam Hussein suggested he wasn't going to back down and leave Kuwait unless he was forced to. But it was a lot more in the sense that you could choose when it was going to start because it was up to the Allies really, when they were going to decide that we're going to start the bombing campaign, and then so I got in there with a feeling that the people in very senior positions did actually know when it will start and anyway we were given the tip off and had a bit of time to prepare. We were a mixed group of people from various parts of government and the military and there was an ARAF Commodore who organised us in a way only the military can. So whereas at the Foreign Office there was an ethos very much to work until you drop when there's a crisis on, he said, no, we could be doing this for months and we need to work in shifts, so we need to drop all the other work. So all sort of things that wouldn't come naturally to the Foreign Office - to drop all the other work. And in fact we took everybody off other work except for one person who was dealing with the small matter of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which was kind of in progress then and over by the end of the year.

We worked in shifts for the next few months during the war and its aftermath.

Fascinating time. We were not dealing with the policy, our job was to assess what was going on, both in terms of on the ground and also in in diplomacy. Our main product, although we did individual assessments on various things, but our main product every day was a report for the War Cabinet and we had to have this done by 7:30 in the morning so it could then be discussed at the various levels so actually the War Cabinet could have it at about 9:00 o'clock, which meant working overnight and it was quite different from previous jobs, but equally exciting.

MG: Did you have to go out there at all?

AC: No we were very much in it where we were, the centre of the web, so all the information, the intelligence, opinions from around Whitehall, from places like Porton Down, everywhere, came to us. We dealt with very, very highly classified information, more highly classified than you would see even as a senior diplomat normally and you were very focused on the job and you soon learnt that you have to be honest all the time; the assessment had to be honest. A lot of it for me, as a deputy chief was chairing meetings. So I have a meeting with people round the table from various parts of Whitehall, from the Ministry of Defence, maybe from the Treasury, experts from the Foreign Office. Maybe people were looking at chemical weapons issues with certain people from Porton Down there and whatever, and the idea was to get the best out of these people, produce a short document which could deal with the particular issue and then it would go to the very senior leadership. The leadership for the reports from the assessment staff were numbered. Number 2 was the Prime Minister, so you can guess who number 1 was. They were short, they were always short. Now we had wonderful people involved. One person in particular was Sir Percy Cradock. The name might not mean anything to you, but Percy Cradock by then, talking about 1990, was an almost legendary figure. He had been a part time Foreign Affairs adviser to Mrs. Thatcher for a number of years. Before that he'd been British Ambassador to China and had a very distinguished diplomatic career. He'd become well known for his strong views about the China /Hong Kong issue. But I have to say, and I am not the only person who said this, you know when you met this man you thought God, they don't make them like this anymore; this guy is so super intelligent but also has people skills as well. Once the immediate emergency on Iraq/ Kuwait subsided, we started to do other work. Part of my bailiwick was China/Hong Kong, which of course was a big issue after the Tiananmen Square uprising and we were moving over towards the date when we said we would hand over Hong Kong to China at the end of the 99-year lease.

I had a certain trepidation, as you can imagine, chairing assessment groups and producing assessments on China/ Hong Kong when I had the world's greatest living expert who was in charge of the assessment staff and was also at that time still part time adviser to the

Prime Minister and he was just so ... he never once played that card saying, I have actually seen all this before, but he was just wonderful. I remember once he said to me because he knew I was a German speaker, he said well what I like about your assessment is that it is durchkomponiert, it's composed throughout. He was an amazing man and he chaired the Joint Intelligence Committee, which still exists to this day - it has changed a bit but is still basically the same. It started up after the war. It has very grand people on it so you'll have the person in charge of the Secret Intelligence Service 'C' there, the person in charge of GCHQ will be there; the person in charge of security services MI5, Stella Rimington in those days, she would be there. That was the rank and you'd have the Under Secretary in charge of Political Affairs at the Foreign Office and they have to be there in person. They couldn't send representatives, Percy Cradock would never have allowed that.

These people sat like little school children in front of Percy. It was extraordinary. And the way he would deal with anything he thought was askew was to lift an eyebrow. He was not frightening in any sense. It was just his natural authority and the fact that they knew that this person knew everything a lot better than they did.

He was a wonderful man. Sadly he is no longer with us. The one thing I learned after a while, and I was there a couple of years, but I learned this the first year was not to plan anything during the last week of June or first week of July, because Percy was at retirement age. He was in his late 60s, I suppose and so, although he was working full time in these two jobs, he did regard it as his privilege to take leave when he wanted and he wouldn't work during Wimbledon. The three things that were important in his life were tennis, his wife and his roses.

MG: How did you find working with John Major?

AC: Yes, John Major, I always liked John Major. Now people will say he wasn't the Prime Minister Mrs. Thatcher was; they really were very different people. First of all he did personally come and see us in the Assessments Staff so we did see him. I remember once he came round on a Saturday morning and it was clear that he was about to go off to Lords for the cricket. I had a quick chat with him about that. He was very clear about what he wanted always and later on, when I was dealing with Yugoslavia, he was very

hands on actually with some of the detail and he could be quite tough when things went wrong. He was certainly no pushover.

He had to take over from Mrs. Thatcher. There was no doubt in my mind that had he not taken over the Conservative Party they would have lost that election. They just won it, and then, not long into his time you suddenly had the terrible currency crises, and so on. And the trouble was from that point on in 1992 the whole government was holed beneath the water, so he spent four of his five years as Prime Minister on the back foot domestically. Foreign policy, which I was involved in, was another matter so I did feel he was quite brave actually to manage to carry on the Maastricht legislation. It must have been terrible being mauled all that time in Parliament; really hard, really difficult. So I liked him and I bumped into him a few times later on in my career and had a lunch or whatever and I always found him wonderful company I must say. A very ordinary man, that was part of his charm being Mr. Anybody. He was clearly much more able than he was given credit for. Because of his background and so on people tended to disparage him. His father was a ne'er do well and he had no grand education like most Prime Ministers have. He was a good guy and I still think when he's on TV again nowadays he talks a lot of sense. It doesn't mean that you agree with everything he says, but you can see where he's coming from and that it is sincerely meant. I think during this period I should just say that he was very clear in what he wanted and he and George Bush snr, who were the two key players on the other side of the war, they worked well together. You might say it was a bit of a mis-match with George Bush, a patrician figure, very wealthy, and this ordinary man. But it worked and one thing I want to say is that at the end of the actual fighting war there was a moment when people were wondering when do we call it off? There had been a huge fight down in the south of Iraq and a lot of the regular Iraqi army - as opposed to the Republican Guards - had melted away and people were saying that if we carried this on for another 36 hours we would have completely destroyed the Republican Guard as well, there will be no possibility of any kind of authoritarian regime starting up again. But George Bush had been in the second world war and they were of the view that this was going to kill tens of thousands of people and it wasn't justifiable. George Bush called it a turkey shoot and John Major agreed with him. They took the view from the top, with a lot of people below saying we need to carry

this on a little longer, that we should stop it now. I have to admit that a part of me was a little disappointed but on reflection I thought that is what leaders are for to make these difficult decisions.

MG: At the time, in the British press, there was a lot about carrying on to Baghdad and getting rid of Saddam Hussein. Afterwards when we did invade Iraq, in 2003 people were saying that it was George W Bush finishing off what his father should have done.

AC: Well his father was very clear, and John Major agreed, that we had an objective to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and that had been achieved. The idea of then going on to an unplanned – because that is what it would have been - move to Baghdad or somewhere would lead to consequences which were unpredictable and they were not prepared to go there. It was only in subsequent years when Saddam played so many tricks with the UN Security Council and so on that people got so frustrated after years and years of this that they started to say that it was a mistake. But looking back I think it was what leaders are for; they had an objective which they obtained, further action was unplanned and the consequences unknown so let's not go there.

That was probably the right decision although part of me thought let's finish the job. In the second world war people had decided very clearly in the middle of the war that the only solution would be the unconditional surrender of Germany because that's how Germany was. That was not where we were on Iraq. I did feel it was a sign of strong leadership. Whether you agree with it or not.

MG: So at this time you have listed, rather sinisterly, the break-up of Yugoslavia. How did that come about?

AC: Well, I should say that when we started to resume looking at the rest of the world - it's the same now with the pandemic I suppose – it's amazing that things that you thought were important had disappeared from view and were no longer news anymore. We started to do our assessments on other issues. We had four deputy chiefs of the Assessments Staff and we divided up the world. The one who was deputy for that part of Europe, Yugoslavia, Gloria Craig, she was from the Ministry of Defence and she produced a paper for the Joint Intelligence Committee in 1991/2. It talked about Bosnia and I

remember this and thinking “crumbs yes” and dim memories of 1878 and the Congress of Berlin. The paper said that Yugoslavia could unravel and the one place where it could be completely unpredictable and could lead to very serious consequences was Bosnia because of its ethnic mix. I remember Percy Cradock, who was chairing the meeting as usual, congratulating her on it being well thought through and being succinct and then he said the mind recoiled that people could be so stupid. The sense was this war would not actually achieve anything, but it was his view of human nature that this was possible, even though it didn't make any sense in terms of advantage for people.

So that was happening on the side, and of course as time went on into 1990/1991 it was starting to become a serious matter, and famously the European Union got involved with it, it was going to be the Time of Europe, which flopped horribly. Almost as badly as the recent Commission President meeting with Putin to be honest. So there was a kind of feeling what happens next. And of course what happened was that John Major, taking over the presidency of the European Union in 1992, felt very much that it was something the UK ought to be involved with because people were starting to die. There was trouble in Slovenia, trouble in Croatia and now there were incipient conflicts happening within Bosnia and I think it probably will turn out to be the last top foreign policy, foreign security policy issue in the world that the UK led on ever, I think. Because at that time George H W Bush had just stepped down. Clinton became President and wanted nothing to do with this; he started out with a fairly isolationist standpoint along the post-Vietnam line of no more foreign entanglements, so the Americans did not want to get involved. The Russians were at that point very much in disarray following dissolution of the Soviet Union, as time went on that became less so and so there was no feeling of any grip and the EU, I don't want to be too disparaging of the EU as I have spent a lot of my time working with them, was very ineffectual so he, with the Presidency of the European Council grabbed it and he managed to persuade the French, like UK permanent members of the UN Security Council, to take a view on this and get involved and that is what happened. So the first part of dealing with Yugoslavia was very much a French /UK thing; both in terms of driving policy, the Security Council at the UN, talking to the various players in the area and also setting up monitoring of the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia. It went on from there because then we were very much in the lead in getting the

UN force into Bosnia, which had this restricted mandate to basically ensure that the convoys of relief supplies and medical supplies would get through.

Well, there's a long story to tell about that so it's really where I came into that I mean when I left the Assessments Staff.

Head, Eastern Adriatic Unit, FCO, 1993–95, and Bosnia Contact Group Representative, 1995–96

MG: You became the Head of the Eastern Adriatic unit.

AC: I did, but I had one of these marvellous moments, that all people in the Foreign Office probably appreciate at some point where they wanted me to take on a job in personnel – I had been in my post in the Cabinet Office for two years and so I could expect to move on – and I said I've been eating 'red meat' for the last 10 years and I really don't want to do this personnel job now and they were quite upset. Then I was put on a list of three to be private secretary to the Prince of Wales and I said to them 'I'm not really sure that I want to do this and I suspect that you have already got your candidate earmarked'. Anyway I did actually go to Balmoral for an interview with the Prince of Wales but I didn't get the job, just as well really as I don't think that I was really suited to it, and then I was kind of put out to grass for a short while on so called 'gardening leave'. I didn't know what was going to happen and then, eventually, after two or three weeks I got a phone call saying we need a new Head of the Eastern Adriatic Unit and we want you to do it, so I said I know nothing about Yugoslavia and they said that's the case for everybody at the moment. I should say, in parenthesis, that if you went back a bit in time we had one desk officer in the Foreign Office for Yugoslavia and that was probably not all that s/he did; so we were all learning about it and I came into it then in 1993. It was very fast moving and we soon had a very large number of people; we had a policy section which was very important when you are dealing with lots of people like the EU and with the UN and then the UN appointed David Owen and Cyrus Vance as Chairs of that process, the peace process, so I used to see a lot of David Owen in that role. Then we had a section that dealt with Operations. We had recruited and deployed European Community monitors. And then we had a whole section which dealt with correspondence. You can't believe the amount of letters, and of course this was before

the day of the email. We received huge numbers of letters from the public and also parliamentary letters and what have you and they all came to us. A letter to the Queen about Bosnia, a letter to the Prime Minister - all came to us. We had to produce draft replies, it was a huge amount of work. I remember once we had a call from the constituency secretary of the Prime Minister saying that there was a letter from somebody and they wanted it responded to and we had to go through all these thousands of letters, on our hands and knees on the floor, until we found it. It became quite a big operation and after a short while I started to hold meetings every morning at 9:30, where people from other parts of the Foreign Office and indeed outside, such as the Ministry of Defence, would come along just as a co-ordination of what we were doing today. So there would be 20 or 30 people at this half hour meeting. I became the centre of the web which was both exhilarating and alarming at the same time, but it was the issue of the day. I remember Douglas Hurd saying that in two of his years as Foreign Secretary he spent two thirds of his time solely on that. Which was quite remarkable.

MG: Where did Douglas Hogg fit in?

AC: Douglas Hogg was a Minister of State, a junior minister, and you divide up the world and its issues between these junior ministers and his area included Yugoslavia, so that is where he came into this. He was quite an experienced chap already and I saw a great deal of him, he was really engaged. I also went on a couple of trips with him over to the region.

MG: Did you have to go on many visits? Tell me about those.

AC: Yes I did a bit of that, I remember going around to several places with Douglas Hogg. We went to Belgrade, Zagreb. Sarajevo was a bit difficult most of the time because of the war. I particularly remember our going on a visit to Croatia to Zagreb, and we went to see the President, President Tudjman at that time, he was fairly right wing and he had re-introduced a lot of formerly fascist symbols into the flag and things like the currency. He was pretty hardline. When we came out Douglas, who was I think himself a lawyer and son of Lord Hailsham, who had been Lord Chancellor, said to me 'You know Alan I think that man should probably be hanged.' On another occasion, one of the other issues we were dealing with was Macedonia which was one of the breakaway states from

Yugoslavia and it was in a very difficult position because it was small and contested. The Greeks did not like the use of the name Macedonia and that debate has only recently been settled by the way, last year in fact, and it is now known, I think as “North Macedonia.” I was very much involved with this, the UK was leading policy on it and there was a real fear that Macedonia could dissolve and disappear over a weekend, with terrible consequences. One of the stabilising measures we looked to was to get it accepted as a member of the UN. The EU countries were very split on this. Greece would not agree; the Germans were against it and very unhelpful. But we succeeded in the end and it was accepted by the UN but until last year we had to accept that it would be called The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a temporary measure. This ‘temporary measure’ lasted 20 years!

Later on I went with Douglas Hogg to Skopje and we went to see President Gligarov and together with his Foreign Minister, and our new Ambassador, Tony Millson, we were the first western country to appoint an Ambassador to the new state, and I remember having a glass of wine with just four or five others. It was that kind of diplomacy, very personal, very much on the edge, where you are trying to achieve something. We had no Embassy building of course, but as it happens the Germans had had a consulate and they allowed us a room in their consulate for our new Ambassador to work from.

MG: Who was your US Diplomatic equivalent; who were you dealing with on that side?

AC: Well there were a number over time. Later on when the Americans did get involved, the Big Cheese was involved and that was above my level. The person I did work with a lot was a person called Chuck Redman who was a very good colleague. We had meetings with Douglas Hurd every day on Bosnia, which required me to send an agenda in the next half hour with headings and this was a regular occurrence. It was clear that Douglas Hurd had an overall view of how things should develop and he wanted the Americans to become more involved and this was going to be quite difficult to achieve with the new Clinton administration and the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. Their view was that they were ready to bomb the place and they were ready to lift sanctions and that was it but we said we have got people on the ground and we are trying to protect people from harm. Allowing people to have weapons will not necessarily solve

the problem, that was in 1993. So it took time and it was really in stages; I got involved in some secret diplomacy, secret in the sense that it was not publicised. I was involved in a small group with the French and then a new German came along, Michael Steiner and he was brilliant: very dynamic and, although he was a relatively junior official, he had a big part in turning German policy around on Bosnia. And then we started to have more meetings with the Americans. We had secret meetings with them at first and as time wore on it became more open. Nothing would have been achieved if the Americans had not been on board. The reason for that was that we needed their power but also the problem was that the parties in Yugoslavia were very good at finding a weak spot. If they could they would go over our heads to the Americans or they would involve the French or the Germans in some way. So you really needed a united front and it took us some time until that was achieved. It was what I regard as real practical diplomacy: you set out to try to achieve these things even though you have no idea how long it is going to take. You try to gain peoples' trust, you put the arguments and the embassy in Washington was important for this network. By the time the Americans were fully involved in 1995 it was clear that what was achieved could not have been without American power.

MG: I'm interested that you don't mention the Russians. You say that they were busy handling the break-up of the Soviet empire. Historically the Russians were always the allies of the Serbs and the Bosnians. Did they come into it at all?

AC: They did, at first, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, we were all wondering whether this would lead to a new dynamic. In the United Nations Security Council, for example, you could hope that you could do things co-operatively and to some extent that happened for a while, there was much more a feeling of things being possible and that was certainly true to some extent over the former Yugoslavia but there is no doubt that things hardened over time. Certainly the Serbs felt that historically the Russians had been their protectors and it was the Orthodox religion that they had in common as well as distrust of the US. The Russians played that game to a certain extent but only to a limited extent. By the time we got to the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995 they were not helpful but nothing like to the extent to which they would be difficult now. They were not blocking

things outright. There was this period between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the arrival of Vladimir Putin to absolute power - less than 10 years - when Russia tried to do things it had never done before and do things in a more western democratic style. They have now reverted to a Tsar. Putin is really a Tsar, in fact everyone from Stalin up to Gorbachev has been. We used to talk to them a fair bit and sometimes they would be quite helpful. For a time we appointed a contact group of senior officials: it was David Manning for a time actually on the UK side, and they went round with the Russians as well as the Americans and the French and Germans talking to Karadzic and people like this. So we did work with the Russians; it worked to some extent although less well over time. We could never do that now.

MG: You mention a list of names. Lord Owen I know. At this point in time, 1996, we still had a Conservative government so he was not acting as a minister. Was he an appointee?

AC: Yes, I mentioned that at the time John Major had taken a lot of interest in this topic, starting with the UK Presidency of the EU, in the second half of 1992, and there was a decision that we needed to get involved with the EU, the UN as well and John Major and David Owen were pictured on the cover of *Private Eye* outside Number 10 (I'm not sure exactly when this was), talking about his becoming co-chair of the UN peace talks. John Major is saying this is an impossible job and David Owen saying 'I'm your man'! David Owen seemed to tackle impossible tasks so the feeling went, throughout his career. He had an office on Queen Anne's Gate and I used to walk over to see him from the Foreign Office across the park- a five-minute walk- the meetings used to last an hour or more and he would spend the first 45 minutes berating me basically and citing the ridiculous things that the British Government was doing or whatever. Then the last 10 or 15 minutes would be pragmatic, very practical ideas about what we were going to do. He also had a kind of charm about him and I recall he wrote a very gracious letter to the Foreign Office about me when I left this job. A lot of people would not have bothered.

MG: I know some of the names on the list you have for this time but not all. For instance who was Len Appleyard?

AC: Len Appleyard was the Under Secretary of Political Affairs, the Political Director. He'd been private secretary to the Foreign Secretary in the 1980s. When I first started out on Bosnia he was basically the top Foreign Office official I had to work with. Afterwards he was Ambassador to China. Unfortunately he is mostly remembered in public memory for his office. The office is well known, a gracious room with a chaise longue and it appeared that when the office was closed for lunch he had been having 'Ugandan discussions' with his secretary who was a middle-aged lady. This came out after he had left to take up his foreign post. The Daily Mail had a headline 'Our Man in Bonking'. He was a very practiced official and one thing I learned from him was how to write concisely. I learnt a lot from him. Pauline Neville-Jones took over from Len Appleyard as Political Director, the first time a woman had held the role. She has been made a Dame and she went on to become a government minister. Working with Pauline was a roller-coaster ride as she worked phenomenally hard. She was there at all times of day and night. She was a person who was full of ideas. She had so many ideas that it was difficult to work out at times which one was the main one! She could be hard to follow and was a hard task master. Len Appleyard had been too close to his secretary in the outer office, with Pauline I remember there were girls in the outer office and I spoke to one who was on her first day, it was 9:00 pm and she was close to tears and I suggested she should go home but she said she couldn't as she had not been given permission. I spent a lot of time going down to her office and meeting and talking to her. She was very strong and forceful and made for that job. At the end of her time and my time in this job she was offered the chance to be the Ambassador to Germany but she turned it down, she felt it was a slight. She wanted to be Ambassador to France so she left the Foreign Office and was doing other things thereafter. This was a shame as she would have actually been a very good Ambassador to Germany and no doubt she could have been Ambassador to France after that and after that the Ambassador at the UN but she sadly left before any of that could happen.

MG: What about Glynne Evans and Roger Bone?

AC: Well, Roger Bone has given his memoirs to the Churchill Archive and he doesn't mention this period at all but I remember him because he was the assistant undersecretary

sandwiched between me and Pauline Neville-Jones. There was no room for him to do much! He kept out of it with great elegance. He was a very clever man and when he retired he spent a long time being the representative of Boeing in the UK and would be seen on TV occasionally. He was such a gentleman; I was in a kerfuffle working late, as ever, one summer night, and I was meant to go to the Queen's Diplomatic Reception. I had my rented white tie outfit and was ready to walk across St James's Park but I couldn't get the studs to work and I saw Roger in the corridor and I asked him for his help in getting me into the penguin suit and with the studs and he did. He was such a nice man. Another colleague at that time was Glynne Evans. She was a force of nature of a different kind. She was the Head of the United Nations Department which was a very big department and did what it says on the tin. It dealt with all parts of the UN. She got very involved with the Bosnia thing early on, before I came into it. She started on policy to do with the UN force, which was almost her creation in some ways. She had strong relationships with our military, with the Ministry of Defence and serving officers too. She was a very forceful person and it wasn't always easy to deal with someone like that. Even Pauline Neville-Jones was easier to deal with. But in many ways she was the key person on Bosnia for some time until things started to move away from the UN and I must say she was the hardest worker I have ever encountered and a very able woman. She had Latin American, as well as Welsh, parentage and went there in the end I think. She had a great sense of style. In those days, if you had an important job you might be able to park your car in the FCO courtyard and she had a red sports car and she would come out of it in her very smart dress and you always heard her coming because of her high heels clicking along the stone floors in the corridors and she always dressed as if she was about to be presented to the Queen, always very stylish. The Foreign Office can be a very drab place so it is good to have the colour of someone with a sense of style. Most people look very grey I must say. It is more colourful now because we have many more women and they are now Ambassadors in important embassies.

MG: We are coming to the end of this section. I would like you to tell me about your role in the Dayton Peace Conference and the Paris Agreement on Bosnia.

AC: Yes, well the basic idea on trying to find a way forward on Bosnia had been around since I started early in 1993 and David Owen and Cyrus Vance had started. The idea was that it would not be solved by military means either by one group or another winning a war in Bosnia or outside forces doing that, and in any event it was only going to last if an agreement about what to do was made. So right from that time of the Vance /Owen accords we stuck to the line that we had to have a peace agreement between all the parties. Now we may not like them or trust them, Milosevic and Karadzic, both of whom I had met, but it was the only way forward. The Americans did not start from that position but by 1995 they had started to come round to it without necessarily saying that that was what they were doing but it is what they did. We had a period in 1995 when we and the French ratcheted things up a bit and we did put in a force in Bosnia which was not peace keeping but there to respond quite violently to any breaches of UN resolutions and this was kind of accepted at the UN, we had a basis for it. This was the French attitude, you either get out or you get in basically and eventually we went along with it and I think it helped to convince the Americans that we were serious about getting an agreement, not afraid to counteract bad behaviour. It took a while but eventually we got to the Dayton talks and Peace agreement. We had to have them on board and Dick Holbrooke, who was the lead man on their side, had been around for a long time and he had come back in a relatively middle-ranking position as Assistant Secretary, but he had real pull and he was a magnetic personality, very clever, a bully and definitely the man for the job. I remember we had a meeting in September 1995, when we were getting close to the Dayton Talks but we didn't know exactly when the talks were going to happen, we had a meeting in the US office to the UN so there was Dick Holbrooke and Pauline Neville-Jones and the French there and the Germans. I don't think the Russians were there, and a point came up and Holbrooke had already shooed out the US Ambassador, Madeleine Albright, not an inconsiderable personality, and then he picked up the phone and rang the President and he, President Clinton answered immediately. This was done for effect and it worked, showing that the full power of the US was now engaged on this. Some of us had rather hoped that we would be going to Miami for the negotiations as it was an easier place to get to from Europe, but the view prevailed that we needed to be somewhere distant where we would be isolated and we would not be

prevailed upon by the press every minute to give views which would complicate things. So we ended up on the Wright-Patterson Airforce base in Dayton, Ohio which was a long way from anywhere, it was big, it was functional, we wouldn't be staying too long, and it was cold! We had barracks for accommodation. The Americans had a big team of lawyers but we were restricted, ourselves the Russians, the French and Germans to six people each. Then there were others, Milosevic was there and Karadzic, some of the time. They were not there themselves all the time but they had teams who were. The discussions were led by the Americans and their huge team of lawyers and they had these heads of agreement and I have to say I thought it was hugely ambitious what they were trying to achieve, it was going beyond the plan, to have chapters on things including war crimes which was a bit like turkeys voting for Christmas really for Milosevic voting for a War Crimes Tribunal! It was pretty grinding, there were meetings going on all the time and the way the time difference works meant that we would finish what we were doing fairly late in the evening and sometimes we were still writing reports when people were coming into the office in London at 7:30 am when it was 2:30 our time and we would talk to them as well. I must say it was pretty tiring. There were all sorts of ups and downs and I will just mention one strategy that the Americans produced at one point. When it seemed that things were at an impasse, they said to us tonight we are going to put all our bags onto the road outside and tell the parties we are leaving, that there is no point in carrying this on any further, we will just consider what to do, go into a different mode. So they did all this, I don't know whether it was taken seriously or not but it certainly had some impact. They also got the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, to come over; they got the President to ring once or twice, trying to move these people along and there was quite a lot of stick as well as carrot going on. Eventually, after three weeks at this place, which was certainly a lot longer than most people would want to be there, we got to the Agreement. This happened very dramatically really and it is one thing I will never forget really, I was not in the room at the time but I heard about it shortly afterwards, but the big problem on the map was how you were going to divide Bosnia between the Bosnian Croat and Muslim sides and the Bosnian Serb side and the city of Sarajevo which had always been a very mixed city ethnically. For whatever reason, one day, late morning Milosevic walked into the American area and looked at the map and said let the

Bosniacs (the Muslims) have it, they deserve it. That solved all the problems, and thinking back, we had among our number a legal adviser, and he took books with him on how other cities are run, for example how Brussels is run which is very complicated and Jerusalem under the Israeli-Palestine agreement and thankfully none of this was needed. Milosevic just signed it away, and made things possible. In the end there was quite a lot of arms up backs. One senior member of the Bosnian Serb delegation did have a seizure when he was told he was going to be asked to sign this document by Milosevic in no uncertain terms.

MG: Is this what led to the Paris Agreement?

AC: Yes, the agreement between the sides was initialed at Dayton but there was also a tradition that once you have got an agreement you also have a Treaty signed by senior people; in other words you get a document which is initialed by the likes of Dick Holbrooke and Pauline Neville-Jones, but they are not the grand panjandrums. The French very much wanted a piece of the action, so they said let's have the Treaty of Paris and the Germans wanted a part so they said we will have a follow-up conference which did happen just outside Bonn in late December. That was Pauline Neville-Jones's last appearance before she retired. London wanted its piece of the action, a conference on how to implement the agreement and this conference was to set up a body, which existed for a long time on Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, involving the British, French, Americans etc. but also a few others which I had to arrange, soon after the end of the Dayton Conference when I got back, with John Major presiding over this International Meeting in Lancaster House on this follow up. So we all had a piece of the action.

MG: When was Paddy Ashdown involved? Was he involved in this or was it later on?

AC: Paddy Ashdown was involved later. When I came back to this area in 2001, the organisation which we had set up in Lancaster House in 1995 was responsible for appointing a High Representative in Bosnia and this job had been set up by the Dayton peace accords. The first person we had as the High Representative was Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister of Sweden who had been very much involved in discussions on Bosnia. He used to come and sit in my office and was the first I remember in the 1990s, to use a laptop which he used to put on my desk. By 2001/2 we needed another one and

we thought that Paddy Ashdown was the right man and we knew he was interested. I had to persuade the others in Europe that he was the right man and he did a very good job.

Alan Charlton, 3 Friday 26 March 2021

Alan Charlton is continuing his recollections of his life in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Political Counsellor, 1996–98; Deputy Head of Mission, 1998–99, Bonn; Deputy Head of Mission, Berlin, 1999–2000

MG: Alan, we are now in 1996. You've come from being in the UK, dealing with the very thorny problem of the eastern Adriatic and you are now Counsellor and going on to greater things, as you will explain, in Germany. How were things there in 1996?

AC: Well, it was an interesting time to go back because it was towards the end of John Major's time as Prime Minister and, as I said earlier, I had a lot of sympathy with John Major, but he must be one of the only Prime Ministers who knew for most of his term that he was going to lose the next election, and he was very brave in the way he held up, despite all the in-fighting that happened. So when I went there, we knew the election was going to be the following year and we knew we'd probably have Tony Blair in power, so that was the thought of something new happening then. As far as Germany was concerned, we were still in Bonn and Bonn was still, as John Le Carré put it, "a small town in Germany". It's quite extraordinary to think about it now, when you see all the grand, imperial-like buildings in Berlin, that they had a temporary Foreign Ministry, deliberately so, no security, you could walk in and out there, anyone could, really, and there was this feeling of provinciality about Bonn which was very touching. We lived by the Rhine and the barges chugged by quietly, and life went on in the convivial atmosphere of the Rhineland, very gemütlich as they say in German...

MG: Siebengebirge ...

AC: Siebengebirge nearby and Carneval, which I had experienced when I had been there as a youngster in 1971 in Cologne, is all important, so it did feel like a change of pace going from London to Bonn but on the other hand Germany was an important country and I was keen to get back to working overseas. There was plenty to do! One thing we were trying to do was to bring the Germans more into partnership on foreign affairs issues. They had been, ever since the war really, very reluctant to put their heads above the parapet, but since unification they had been taking a bit more interest, so that was one of the main things I was doing, trying to talk to them about the big foreign policy issues of the day and encourage them to become more front-line players than they had been.

MG: Is Helmut Kohl still in charge at that stage or had he given way to someone else?

AC: That's right, he was around, it was running up to an election also in Germany, although that was the following year and it wasn't until 1998, I think, when the government changed to the Social Democrat Gerhard Schroeder. And that was a big change, actually, because Gerhard Schröder was a bit of an unknown, I think even up to this day people don't really know what he stands for. I think he was one of those people, not unusual, people say it about Presidents of the United States, Prime Ministers of Britain, that he wanted to be the top man, he didn't necessarily have a strong ideology, he was certainly influenced by his own background which was not a straightforward, not an easy one, he hadn't come up the easy way, but he was a pragmatist, and so that was interesting looking forward to that, whereas Helmut Kohl had his own ways and, as we know, didn't get on very well with Margaret Thatcher, was reasonable with John Major, but there was the thought that that change, after our election and after theirs, could be very good. And that was actually a bit of a theme, I would say, because when Tony Blair came in, he was very keen to have the UK at the "heart of Europe", OK, that's just a phrase, but he meant it, he wanted Britain to be part of the decision-making Triumvirate, if you like, with France and Germany, and Schroeder's arrival made that more likely because Kohl was always going to be standing hand-in-hand with Mitterrand, and he was always very French-leaning. With Schroeder that wasn't always necessarily his first instinct, so there was an opportunity there and it did look for the time that I was there that that was beginning to happen a bit. A young chap called David Miliband who looked

about 18, I have to say, and was in fact only in his 20s then, was in the backroom staff of Number 10 when Blair was elected, came over and actually talked as a party man, a Labour Party man, to the Social Democrats about the Labour Party's successful election strategy, so there was an idea of trying to help the SPD win the election, without getting out of sync with Kohl - I don't think that really happened. So there were great hopes which did go forward, and there was a time, I think, when the French were even a little bit worried that they might be being pushed out a bit from their central position in Europe together with the Germans, or at least sharing with the UK, and I think in the end it didn't work. One thing, of course, which was a problem, was the decision not to join the Euro. This was a very important German-French project, or French-German project really, and Tony Blair, I think, instinctively would have liked to have joined the Euro for political reasons but was persuaded by Gordon Brown and the party generally that this was not going to go down terribly well and if there were some kind of referendum probably wouldn't work, so he kind of put it on ice and, as we know, it never happened. I think that although it was possible for the UK to be at the centre of Europe without that, it wasn't going to be the same, because this was such an important project for the French and Germans. We had, one thing I'll just mention here, the BSE crisis at that time, which kind of tested our European credentials. I won't go into the whole nine yards, but BSE was a crisis of Britain's making because of the feedstuff we gave to animals, to cows, and there were hundreds of people who ended up dying. Our exports of beef were banned around the world, including in Europe, and the problem was that, once we'd changed things and it was deemed safe by the scientists for young animals and products from them to be exported and indeed we managed to get through the EU a decision to relax the ban for younger animal products, the French, in their usual way, they regard Europe as theirs, and if they don't like the rules they don't obey them, simple as that, and they weren't going to obey this one. The Germans were caught more in a quandary because they understood the importance of rulemaking but I suppose public opinion was not very favourable and so this was quite difficult for us, trying to be Euro-friendly and having partnership, and yet there was this terrible battle over getting the Europeans, including the Germans, to even obey the directives from their own European Commission. It's extraordinary, it's a great example in diplomacy, how you never know what's going to be

the big issue. I had no idea, when I went there in 1996, that I was going to need to learn the German words for 'rendering' and 'tallow' and 'bull-semen' and all sorts of things like that which became the great issue. I remember Paul Lever, who was then our Economic Under-Secretary, travelled round with the Chief Veterinary Officer and an official from the Ministry of Agriculture, and he said, I never realised this is what I would be doing as the main Foreign Office person on economic issues. But there it was, and that's just an example, and one of the wonders of diplomacy, that you never quite know what's going to be top, just as no-one knew, a year and two months ago, that we would be dominated by a pandemic this last year. That made Germany interesting, that this was a big issue, and there was a big tussle over this and how to play it. I suppose the other big thing during my time was the impending move of the Embassy from Bonn to Berlin.

MG: Yes, I was going to ask you - because that seems the obvious thing, that seems to have had a long birth - how far had they got when you arrived?

AC: Well, it had a long birth and it was controversial because, if you lived in Bonn, I remember one of our local staff, a woman who was a translator in her late thirties, with the prospect of moving to Berlin she had spoken to her mother and her mother had given a reaction which was rather like a lot of people in that part of the world, "Berlin, that's half way to Siberia"; there was this feeling that it may be Germany, but it wasn't anything 'we' felt comfortable with. It is a long way, physically, but, right from Roman times, there's been a bit of a border where the division was between East and West Germany and so it wasn't a natural thing, and when the vote came up in the German parliament it was very close about whether to stay in Bonn or to move to Berlin. There were lots of compensations given to Bonn in terms of money and some government functions stayed in Bonn, at least for a while. I always thought, particularly as I'd been in Berlin during those days leading up to the fall of the wall, that it would have been completely wrong-headed not to move to Berlin. We'd worked, or some of us had worked, ever since the war for the unification of Berlin and not to go back to Berlin as the capital would have seemed completely absurd and it would have been a terrible betrayal of the East Germans who, as I explained before, already felt rather let down by the way unification happened so I'm glad it happened, and it did happen, but there was a

long preparation for it yes, that's right, and we finally had a date of Summer 1999 as when the German government was going to start operating and the federal parliament was going to start operating from Berlin.

MG: Was that building, the Bundestag, that's got 'Ein Volk' written on the front or 'to the folk' or something, that was there, and that wasn't being used as the seat of government?

AC: That was the Reichstag in older days and it was there from the late-Victorian period after Germany was unified in 1870 and became the Imperial German Parliament. Famously it was burned down during the early Hitler period, allegedly by a Dutch fanatic...

MG: aka Hitler...

AC: But it was quite convenient in that Hitler, having been elected by democracy, wasn't very keen on it continuing, so the building had not been used as Germany's parliament since 1933, I suppose, and famously at the end of the war the Russians put the red flag on top of it, it was the great signal of the victory over Germany. During the time from 1945 up to when they moved back in 1999 it was repaired and restored some extent and used for some meetings, but The Federal Republic had its parliament in Bonn and the GDR its parliament, the Volkskammer, in East Berlin. In fact, to be honest, some of our secret services used it as a look-out point for looking over the East in those days because it was in our sector, it was right on the border with East Berlin, right by the river Spree. What happened then once the decision had been taken to move the capital, well, not move the capital, the capital was there, from 1990, move the seat of government to Berlin, it was then revamped in a big way and Norman Foster famously created the new cupola, the new dome, which you could walk inside right up to the top, in preparation for the German parliament convening there full time and that being its seat, which it has been ever since.

MG: What was the building they had in Bonn, then, and what's happened to that, I mean, was it big?

AC: Well like a lot of buildings around there it was kind of temporary and it found another use, so there were lots of compensations, as I say, for Bonn, a lot of government

functions stayed in Bonn for a while or permanently or new functions went there. There were one or two kind of UN, development kind of functions, so they found a use for the buildings. Actually, our own Embassy I should mention now - Churchill had agreed, back in the 1950s, that we probably did need an Embassy in Bonn and it wasn't just going to last for two or three years until the seat of government could return to Berlin, so we had a building there that we'd used ever since and we ended up selling it prior to moving. Before doing that we had a closing-down ceremony which I'll just mention because the idea came up ... Paul Lever was by that time the Ambassador, is that right, no?

MG: You had Nigel Bloomfield.

AC: Yes, we had Nigel Bloomfield first and then he retired and then, by this time, it was Paul Lever who'd been involved in the BSE thing, but he became Ambassador later on ... anyway we invited John Le Carré to come and close the Embassy down because famously his novel, *A Small Town in Germany*, a lot of it was centred on the Embassy, actually on a trolley that mysteriously had got caught in the ground floor, and we didn't know whether he'd agree and he wrote back saying, well that's very sporting of you and I'd love to come. He was saying that because it didn't put Bonn or Germany in a great light because the basis of the story, set in the early 1960s, was a sort of fascist uprising in Germany. Anyway, he came and we put a tent out in front of the Embassy building, which was in the book, and we had a party there, and he went to his old house because he had been working in the Embassy for a while in the early 1960s, and the Ambassador had a dinner for him, and he was an amazing raconteur as you can imagine, that was tremendous fun having him along for that, and was a fitting end to our time in Bonn.

MG: So who designed the Embassy, did you just buy some building that existed or did you build new or was Norman Foster involved?

AC: No, we built new and there's a bit of backstory in the sense that the plot of our former Embassy in Berlin up to the beginning of the war was in Wilhelmstrasse. Now Wilhelmstrasse it's important to mention is like Whitehall, there were a lot of government buildings and in fact opposite our Embassy plot was Göring's Air Ministry, the old building, and the old building's still there today, obviously with a different use.

MG: Isn't that where the Gestapo was also?

AC: No, the Gestapo were elsewhere: the cellar where they tortured people was nearby and is now a museum. So, we had the plot still, but the Embassy building had been damaged during the war and then eventually was knocked down. It was in old East Berlin, so we didn't have use of it. In fact we had been involved, in my previous time in Berlin, in negotiations, indirect negotiations with the East Germans, about giving up this plot in return for a plot we could use for a new Embassy building in East Berlin, because the Embassy building we had at that time on Unter den Linden was pretty basic, but anyway those things didn't come to fruition, and it's a good job too because it enabled us, when unification happened, to lay claim to the plot and rebuild the Embassy on it. There was a competition, to answer your question, an architectural competition for building the Embassy which the Wilford firm won to build it, so we had one of these fancy PFI things whereby Norman Wilford would build it, and then we had a company which would basically run it, which was very modern in those days, had some disadvantages, in that when we first got there it seemed we had to turn the lights out at a certain time in the evening and things like that! I think in the end there were talks, and they actually bought it back because it wasn't actually financially very sensible in the long term, but we had an amazingly funky building, very modern architecture, which the Queen came to open in the year 2000.

MG: Well tell me about that.

AC: So we moved in 1999 and we were working in our old Embassy building in the GDR until the new Embassy building was finished, and of the three former Western allies we were the first to actually complete our new Embassy building and the Queen came in 2000 for a modern kind of visit. I explained, that when she came to Jordan it was five days and that was kind of normal in those days; this was very much a visit of 24 or 36 hours, one night only, and so she and the Duke of Edinburgh came along and opened the Embassy. I don't know what they thought of the funky architecture, but they did their thing in the normal way. It was Paul Lever who was Ambassador by then, he had a dinner. In fact, he vacated his residence so that the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh could stay there with their staff, he thought that was the simplest thing to do, and then there was

a dinner, hosted by him or the Queen, I'm not sure which really, in the evening, but very small, just about 16 people, which was quite memorable. I do remember the Duke of Edinburgh playing one of his party tricks which he loved to do - he was a great character I must say - and he came down the stairs and walked up, I was talking to a German general who was there who had been commander of the NATO forces I think in Kosovo, and he said to this general, "I'm sure I've met you before but I can't remember the name, that's the funny thing about Alzheimer's, you meet new people every day", and the poor old German general had no idea how to take this - at which point the Duke of Edinburgh sort of walked off, having had his fun. I suppose nowadays it wouldn't kind of 'pass' as PC, probably in those days it didn't.

MG: You said that the dinner was small, just for 16, but you obviously had German potentates and high-ups there.

AC: Yes, there were, I think the German Foreign Minister was there, for example, I can't remember exactly who was there, but it was that sort of occasion, and I think everyone was aware and wondering what this new Berlin as the seat of government would mean for Germany, and we were quite pleased that we had got off to a fast start in getting our new Embassy open very quickly. Actually, one of the interesting things, it wasn't long after all that that I actually left Berlin, but two of the last things that I recall there, one that we had a call from the mother of a rising politician called Angela Merkel, and of course she lived in the East, and she had rung the Embassy to say, wouldn't it be wonderful if she and her women's church group could come and visit the Embassy, 'their' Embassy as they saw it, in the old East, and we were in the process of arranging that I remember when I left. And the other thing was that the Embassy had a massive space inside and the idea was, originally, I think security provisions make it difficult now, that this was going to be rented out for events for other people, and again it's a modern idea, a sort of PFI, and we did get talking to a British theatrical impresario about putting an Oscar Wilde play on there in the evening - it seems incredible to think - but he was really taken by it - and it didn't happen in the end but, again, how things move on in diplomacy ... that you'd be talking about the Embassy being used for a theatrical production.

MG: No, it wouldn't happen, no. So did the building work for those working in it? It wasn't too hot or too cold ...

AC: Like all modern buildings, you had the feeling, I certainly had the feeling, that every suggestion you made was knocked down because the architect said it couldn't happen. That always seemed to be the problem. There weren't enough loos, for one thing, particularly for the women, that was one problem we had, and some of the offices were a bit small, but basically the inside of the building was this sort of grand space going up several floors, and outside on corridors you had all the building, so the idea was that the offices were kind of peripheral to the building, but actually I think on the whole it worked. We had some good artwork there. I remember getting into a bit of trouble with the permanent under-secretary about this. He rang me while I was in charge of the Embassy, I was actually on a treadmill in the gym, and said, "if you think we're going to pay for this artwork you've got another think coming, you're going to have to raise the money". So we had to find some way of raising the money for the artwork which was planned. One of the pieces which was there, which is still there, was a sculpture of two intertwining columns and very quickly, although I think people have tried very hard to damp this down, these two columns became known as 'two diplomats: bitter and twisted'.

MG: Oh dear! So what was Nigel Bloomfield like to work under when you were there?

AC: Nigel Bloomfield was a real gentleman. He had been an army officer earlier on. He had been in Berlin during the days of the so-called Brixmis. Brixmis was the British Mission to the Russians basically, part of the post-war deal with the four wartime allies, that they had groups of soldiers who were formally accredited to the other allies and, in the case of the Soviets in the West, and the British, the French and the Americans in the East, actually went around, ferreting around, seeing what military things they could find out to the extent that they could get away with it, but they were based in West Berlin so he was part of that. He later became our Ambassador to East Germany, to the GDR, and then Ambassador to West Germany, so that was kind of a unique triangle, and he was a wonderful gentleman, a wonderful guy.

MG: Fluent German?

AC: Yes, his German was pretty good, and he'd been a great athlete in his time, I think when he was in the army he was a tennis and squash champion and, although he had arthritic hips, I still played some tennis with him, he was my partner: even though he couldn't move sideways he was still much better than I was who could run up and down perfectly well! So he was a lovely guy. It was not long ago he died, actually, but he was such a kind and gentle man and actually, for him, when he left I think the BSE crisis was looming up and I think he was rather, I wouldn't say sad, but he did find it not the greatest note on which to go and he became sixty and retired and left. One of the nicest men you could ever meet: old-style gentleman.

MG: And Paul Lever, this was his first Ambassadorship presumably?

AC: Paul was one of the ... it's important to realise that, even in these times, you got promoted and you didn't expect to get to a certain point until you were a certain age really, however good you were. Paul Lever and Jeremy Greenstock were two people who had been promoted to the Under-secretary / Director General level, if you like, at a relatively young age, in their forties by God! So Paul was very much upwardly mobile. He wasn't a Germanist and didn't speak much German although obviously he did try to learn and he had no idea where he might go as an Ambassador after being Under Secretary at FCO - his background was more political and military affairs - somewhere like NATO would have been more logical in some ways but that's the way it happens in the service, if a big job comes up and you get a chance of it you go for it. And he still writes occasional letters, I notice, in *The Times*, I haven't spoken to him for three or four years now, and actually his wife, Pat, a bit younger than him, she also worked in the Embassy as well, in a middle-ranking role, she was another great person, and they were people who really saw things as they were and actually the letters he writes nowadays in *The Times* are not the normal views of a Foreign Office person, which tend to be very friendly towards the post you had. He's quite critical of the Germans and always was, it's quite interesting, that's the way he saw it, a great analyst, I think.

MG: What were the problems with the Germans, then, as you and he would perceive them?

AC: Well I think it depends on what time you are talking about, but there is a feeling in Germany, which you can understand, that the European Union was the answer to their problem of Germany after the Second World War: how do you reconcile all the surrounding countries which have reason to fear you to the rise again of Germany, which happened pretty fast, because there was a lot of capital around in Germany, even though there was the devastation of the war, and it didn't take Germany long to come back roaring in the early 1950s. The European Union was an answer to that, that you could surround yourself in a body, give up a certain amount of sovereignty and also be very generous towards your neighbours. The problem for the UK was, always, whether it was a Conservative or a Labour government, particularly Conservative governments of the 1990s, for example, and then David Cameron, that the Germans expected that others would play this game, too, and to understand that this wasn't necessarily seen the same way by the Brits. Tony Blair tried very much to solve the problem by becoming part of the leadership, but that kind of fell away after his time and we came back, as you know, to the kind of Euro-scepticism that has always been around and which could never exist in Germany. The Germans have always found it very hard to understand it. I remember Malcolm Rifkind, who was Foreign Secretary during the time I was in Germany this time, he said once in a speech that the problem with the plans for the European Union was that the footprints all lead into the cave and there are none leading out, in other words there was only one direction and that was greater federal power, which instinctively the UK wasn't happy with, so I think that was always the problem with Europe, it wasn't so much the Europe we joined, it was the Europe it was becoming and some people were happy with that and some people weren't. I think that always meant that there was a slight friction because the Germans felt that we weren't really inside in what was, for them, very, very important.

MG: There are two issues there. I don't understand this claim to greater federal closeness in a way, because somewhere like France always kicks against it and the people they've got in now, Hungary also, so I can see that the Germans might believe in it ... and then of course there's a historical attitude towards the Germans on the British side that they've got it in them. Bomber Harris wanted to bomb all their cultural art museums,

libraries, the lot, so that they couldn't arise Phoenix-like yet again to cause another world war because that's inherent in them; it's not really right though, is it?

AC: No, but we weren't alone in that. There was, famously, during the war, one of the things I had to look at when I was in Germany, particularly when I was in Berlin the previous time, was the planning during the war for post-war Germany and there was the so-called Morgenthau Plan, Morgenthau was a US treasury secretary I think, which was basically to de-industrialise Germany as a way of preventing it ever being a problem again and the Russians certainly went along with this and in their part of Germany they did cart a lot of machinery back to Russia during that time, and certainly the French were not against that at all, so it wasn't only the UK that had that kind of view. The French have always, their challenge, which they are certainly succeeding in doing now, was to have the European Union as a way of binding Germany in, so that's the way they saw it, bind Germany in, and that was the idea of the Euro, which Germany instinctively didn't like but Helmut Kohl thought yes, this is the right thing to do, with being in the European Union, and now with Emmanuel Macron, Macron sees himself as the leader, almost the emperor of Europe, with the decline of Angela Merkel, going into retirement, and he certainly has had a big impact on policy so, as long as the French feel that they are driving the policy, then they're comfortable enough. If they're not driving it then, as you say, they won't go along with it anyway, and I'm afraid people like the Hungarians and others, they will shout and whatever but at the end of the day they want the money, and so they tend to go along with things.

MG: Tell me about your houses, because I like to know about the domestic side, so in Bonn it's a nice, little almost, as you say, backwater, what was your house like there?

AC: In Bonn we had, again, to the victor the spoils, we and the Americans and the French, we had accommodation which was requisitioned after the Second World War. So I lived in a house which was, I guess, probably first used by some army officer in the post-war period. It was quite a functional house, but big. Then when I became the deputy chief of mission I moved into this wonderful villa and I've got lots of photos of it around here now, actually, a wonderful villa by the Rhine which was a beautiful, beautiful place, which again, when we moved on to Berlin, these things were all given

up. The Germans, after unification, let us keep a certain number of these things for good will and then, when we moved on, they reverted back to the German state. Similarly the Embassy was like that, although actually the Embassy we did own and there was a lot of fuss about selling it afterwards, so yes we had quite grand places to live in in Bonn, we certainly weren't slumming it.

MG: But in Berlin how was it? Because there are a lot of parks, aren't there, in Berlin, but are there lakes, I'm rather ignorant, is there a big river in Berlin?

AC: There is a river, it's not so much of a big one, the Spree, and then there's the river Havel, but there are a lot of lakes and that's one of the glories of Berlin that you can walk through this chain of lakes for miles and miles and miles in the old West, and in the old East there are also lakes, too, so there's lots of beautiful woodland and lake walking you can do. We had good housing, again we inherited quite a bit of the former estate of the occupying power, although now we were actually paying rent for these things, so there was that, but over time quite a few of these things were given up and people found other places to live. For me it was straightforward because when I was in Berlin 1986-1990 I mentioned we had a Minister who was in charge of the diplomatic side, working with the general, the commandant, well his house in Taubertstrasse became, during my time, the Deputy Head of Mission's house, so I moved into the house of my old boss, it was a villa from the late Victorian, early twentieth century time, which I think had been owned by a Jewish family and then taken over by the Nazis, and then came into our possession, so I had a villa not far from the woods, as you mention, from the Grunewald, so I had a nice place to live, can't complain.

MG: And did you have many political visits from, you've mentioned Malcom Rifkind, I mean if they were trying to get closer, that was more under Blair perhaps, but before then?

AC: Yes, we had quite a few, it was nothing like later when I was in Washington, but we had quite a lot, both ministers and parliamentary visits and others and actually, probably one of the things you've heard from doing these interviews was that visits are always both a great opportunity, because you get access to people and the chance to air certain issues, but also a lot of hard work.

MG: Planning and so on, I can imagine. So how did you come to come back? What happened? You'd been there four years, so I suppose you had to think about coming back.

AC: Yes, absolutely I'd had my time there and going back to Germany was great, I enjoyed it, culturally as well - I had a season ticket to the Berliner Philharmonie which I had before when I was there and going there was great and I knew quite a lot of the Embassy staff including the local staff and we used to, there was big group of us actually, who all went out to learn how to do ballroom dancing which is a very typical German thing and in Berlin they've got these wonderful, hip places, often former factory buildings which they have converted and a lot of the ballroom dancing goes on to very modern kinds of music. It was a lot of fun, but the time had come, I'd been there for four years and I expected I'd be going back to London, that was the expectation and so it turned out.

Director, South East Europe, FCO, 2001

MG: So you came back as Director of South East Europe.

AC: Yes, this was - the Director level jobs were obviously important and in a sense this was a bit of a left-over from the old days of the EAU, only at a higher level. It wasn't only the old Bosnia but also included Kosovo, Albania and so on, but fundamentally you were still dealing mostly with the problems of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia plus Albania. We talked earlier of getting Paddy Ashdown as the High Representative in Bosnia but also, increasingly, Kosovo, which was a problem that had been, obviously the war there in 1999, and Macedonia, where I'd been involved earlier, as I mentioned, and had a lot of sympathy for them where things were looking very grim and it looked as though there might well be, in fact it looked almost certain at one time, that there'd be some kind of civil war between the people of Albanian heritage there and the people of, whatever you want to call them, Macedonian heritage, which is not a term that either the Bulgarians or the Greeks like to accept. One of the things I felt was achieved during that time, through a lot of diplomacy and talking to people and also some use of the Intelligence Services, it proved possible to avoid what could have been a bloody and drawn-out conflict and I remember we got someone late on to work out in Treasury-style

language how much money had been saved by our effort to avert a civil war in Macedonia, it's all a bit ifs and buts, but it also told me one thing that things that don't happen, things which are prevented, are always forgotten, and that's why I'm mentioning it now because actually it was the most important issue at the time in that job.

MG: Yes, I understand that and, as you said previously, it's only recently that they are now called North Macedonia which sounds like a station rather than a country and I never understand really where it is - Alexander the Great was Macedonian, wasn't he?

AC: Yes that's right, and the problem with the word Macedonian was that the Greeks felt it was part of their national heritage, the Bulgarians always felt that the Macedonians were ethnically mostly Bulgarian and it had been part of the Ottoman Empire in the old days, but where it was, was in the southern part of Yugoslavia, next to Greece and Bulgaria, relatively small, and the dissolution of Yugoslavia created these problems, and similarly the problem of Kosovo - similar in the sense of being a left-over problem, even to this day, because Kosovo was part, not only of Yugoslavia, but it was part of Serbia, Serbia was part of Yugoslavia but Kosovo was part of Serbia and, as often happens, history is very important in those areas and, for people in Serbia, Kosovo was Serb and it was part of their history, and one of their greatest defeats, unfortunately, (the history of Serbia is littered with defeats which seem to be the main milestones), was actually in Kosovo in 1389, and this date is written on the heart of every Serb. So the idea of losing Kosovo to Albanians and other people was horrendous. And it took a lot of effort, mostly before my time in this job, to quieten things down there and, even to this day, Kosovo is an independent state in our view, but its independence has not been recognised by many countries of the world, including some countries in the European Union I might say, and so it remains unfinished business. I also had Albania as I mentioned.

MG: I was going to say, what was it like? Paint me a picture of visits to Albania, because you hear about Enver Hoxha and the terrible regime.

AC: Yes, well the first time I'd been there had been back in the early nineties and at that time, when Hoxha had just disappeared, there were no cars there, everyone went round on bikes and it felt more like it was part of the third world somewhere or the moon, it didn't feel like part of Europe at all. By the time it got into the 2000s, there were too

many cars there and, as my German colleague said who was quite a wag, and he said this in a speech to people, that there were not only a lot of cars there, but 'I recognise a lot of them as belonging to my friends in Germany'. There was quite a business in stealing cars to order and then driving them down to Italy and getting them via the ferry from Brindisi over to Albania. And the roads outside Tirana, the capital, were death traps I mean, really, you didn't want to be going around on those, going through the mountains on these roads. I did go on a couple of occasions and talked to the Albanian government, who were very open, obviously, to cooperation and the trouble was that a lot of them were not exactly clean in terms of their hands, it wasn't quite clear what sort of scams they were up to. But I think on one occasion when also it coincided with a visit by the England football team who were playing Albania, I went to the match with the Albanian cabinet, even though I was only a middle-ranking official in the FCO I was regarded as important enough to go along with the President and everyone else and sit and watch this game, which England won. But I was very struck that, at this match, there were so many banners from Kosovo, Albanians from Kosovo proclaiming their independence - they'd made this journey which, as the crow flies, doesn't look very far but must have taken them a whole day, because of the state of the roads then, to go and watch this match and it underlined to me the strength of feeling about the Albanians in Kosovo.

MG: How many thousands of people, I don't know what the population of Kosovo is, but what percentage would be roughly Albanian and what Bulgarian?

AC: It's a good question and probably controversial, but more than half, I would have thought, a lot anyway, so ethnically there were a lot of Albanians who lived there. But the other thing about Albania was still that if you travelled out towards the coast, you still saw everywhere these military installations, concrete bunkers, which Enver Hoxha had created because he was sure that he was going to be invaded by the British or Americans or whatever and that was the mindset of the people at that time. The other weird thing, and I don't know if you know this, was that, certainly in the early times I went there, the one Britain everyone had heard of was Norman Wisdom. Now that sounds odd but, during Hoxha's time, there were no Western films shown in Albania except there'd been a decision to show Norman Wisdom films because he was regarded as this plucky little

common man who managed to fight through the class system, and he did visit several times and was fêted, he used to live in retirement in the Isle of Man, but came several times, it was bizarre!

MG: Maybe that's our greatest legacy: the dinner for one in Germany and Norman Wisdom in Albania.

AC: Well, you have to work with what you've got!

MG: Were the people kind of brainwashed? I mean, was it more like North Korea in a way? How was it there, and how have they thrown it off? Because I notice that, in East Germany, there's still a bit of this - overmanning and communist ideals lingering.

AC: Well, in Albania it was during the Hoxha period, to a much greater extent, more like North Korea as you say, the attempt to cut the people off and people were not given access to influencers from outside, they couldn't travel and so on, and it was pretty poor as well, it was more like third world living standards. Once the shackles were off and Hoxha had gone and also with the general loosening up of things and even chaos in former Yugoslavia, Albania became, as often happens, basically 'who dares wins', so there were all sorts of people who had all sorts of businesses and this that and the other, so it was a great release in a way and I think it's still settling down. Their ambition was always, right from the beginning, to become part of the European Union, but they still haven't managed to meet the criteria either politically or economically for that, but that's where they would like to head. The Greeks as well had a bit of a problem with Albania, so that was another factor.

MG: Did you have to go and see them about it?

AC: Yes, you had to a bit. There were quite a few so-called Albanians living in Greece, although the Greeks never admitted that, they didn't like that. It was a tricky little problem and we had one or two legacy issues as well from the Second World War, there was a whole gold thing about returning some gold to Albania, which took an age to talk about, but it was obviously at the periphery of British foreign policy but it was an interesting little period dealing with Albania and seeing its transition into, eventually it will be, something more mainstream European.

MG: A very mundane question: can you fly direct to Albania, or do you have to go via somewhere?

AC: I'm sure you can now, when I first went there you had to get a plane from Austria so I remember I used to fly out and sometimes change at Frankfurt and then into Vienna and then get a flight down to Tirana, there weren't many flights, but I'm sure there are lots of flights now from all over the place. And of course, we're not in that mode right now because of the pandemic, but in terms of holidays it has a lot to offer because there is a beautiful coastline, a lot of - one legacy from the British in the older days was archaeology, the British archaeologists who did a lot of work in sites, and there still are some wonderful archaeological sites there. And of course you go down on to the coast in certain parts and you look over and there, very close by, is Corfu, which is extraordinary, it must have been amazing that, in the old days, you had Corfu, with all its western holiday makers there, when you were cut off in Albania.

MG: So reverting to what was happening with Paddy Ashdown, you've mentioned that Bosnia was Serb, and that they wanted Kosovo, how did he fit into all this, what was he doing?

AC: Well, once we had the peace agreement in 1995, the Dayton peace conference, which I was at, that Dick Holbrooke the American had forced through, there was a machinery for managing Bosnia agreed at the following conference in London, for which I was responsible, to organise, it was regarded that there needed to be not so much an international government, there were elections there, but there needed to be an international presence which oversaw the peace settlement which delicately tried to balance the interests of the majority Bosniacs (Muslims) and the Croats and the Serbs there. The centrepiece of this international machinery was the so-called High Representative who was appointed by an institution of international representatives which we'd actually set up in London after the Dayton peace conference. The first person to do this job, as I've mentioned before, was Carl Bildt, the former Swedish Prime Minister and, by the time I got back in the job by 2000 then they were looking for a new person and Paddy Ashdown was known to be interested in doing it and one of the instructions I got from on high was to support his candidacy, which I did, and he was appointed. So he

was interested in the issue and, given his military background and his own personal charisma, was quite well suited in that sense to what was a pretty tough job, actually, of dealing with these competing factions and also deal with the international community which was trying to help and not often in the same way! Obviously, there were cross-currents all the time between what the Russians wanted, what the Americans wanted and so on and so forth, so he did that job with Ed Llewellyn as his secretary at that time, who is now the Ambassador in France. So that was Paddy Ashdown, but I only lasted a year in that job because it was coming to the point when this separate job just for South East Europe was becoming a bit passé, and also I was asked to do something else which I think we are going to talk about later on.

MG: Yes, now who was your Foreign Secretary at that stage, because you've mentioned Malcolm Rifkind, but he would have gone...

AC: Yes, well we had Robin Cook, of course, who was around.

MG: How did you get on with him, and what was his take on Bosnia?

AC: He was an incredibly clever man, but certainly had his own views and I'm trying to remember in my mind, in fact I should have looked this up, but I can't remember when he actually stepped down and we had other Foreign Secretaries, but basically policy towards Bosnia and South East Europe didn't really change that much between the Conservative administration up to 1997 and afterwards. This was true in general on many foreign policy issues, that there wasn't a huge difference between the two parties, Conservative and Labour Party, except on Europe, on the basic things, it was more a matter of detail and one or two issues at the side where things differed, so we didn't really feel a great difference with the change of administration in 1997 and with new Foreign Secretaries.

MG: And at that stage the aid budget wasn't within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was it, it was separate then?

AC: Well what happened was that during my career it had gone in and out, and during Conservative governments from the time I was in the Foreign Office from the late 1970s it was a separate Ministry, and during Labour governments it wasn't. And so the Labour

government of 1997 was quite a big change because Clare Short was appointed the new Secretary of State for International Development, a separate Ministry, and under her it became *very* separate, it really staked itself out as being separate and not in any way under the influence of the Foreign Office or the Foreign Secretary and staked out its own aims and so on, so it did feel very separate by the time I was doing this job in 2000-2001. Since that time, by degrees, there has been more cooperation and merger and now actually a merger since September 2019.

MG: It's all gone back again now, hasn't it?

AC: It's gone back in a big way because there used to be this thing called the Overseas Development Administration, which was part of the Foreign Office during the Conservative governments of the late twentieth century, but now there's not even that, it's become merged as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and, as I understand it, they are still struggling with what that means on policy, staffing and organisation.

Deputy Head of Mission, Washington, 2004–07, and Ambassador to Organisation of American States, 2006–07

MG: Yes, I can imagine. Well you seem, up to that point, to have had a quite coherent career in that you'd been to Germany a couple of times, you'd been involved in Yugoslavia and Bosnia and it all made sense and it was playing to your strengths language wise and you then had a different job, which I'd like to take at the end. So you've got to 2004: Deputy Head of Mission, Washington! Now that's a real change, isn't it? What led to that, and what does it involve being Deputy Head of Mission, is that Number Two?

AC: Yes, that's the Number Two, it used just to be called Minister and it still was Minister and Deputy Head of Mission, so it was a promotion in terms of rank in the Foreign Office. As I was coming up to going abroad again, then my thought had been I would be going off to be Ambassador somewhere, that was the standard thing. I'd been the deputy, the Number Two in Germany before, which is a big place, so I'd go off and

be Ambassador somewhere. There were one or two places which I was quite interested in and I think everyone before me and after me in that job had done precisely that. But I was asked by David Manning, who I'd known well during my time on Bosnia and liked enormously, and also by the Permanent Under-Secretary, would I go and do this Number Two job in Washington and my first thought was, actually does this really make sense for me? They talked me round, anyway, and I didn't regret it because the fact is that, of all the bilateral Embassies in the world, this is the place you want to be and, when I went, the relationship between the UK and the US, although not entirely straight forward, was very, very close. The Blair-Clinton and the Blair-early Bush years were incredibly close. There had been the Iraq war which was both close but also divisive so we had to deal with some of the backwash from that, and in any event, you felt in Washington that you were dealing with all the world's foreign policy issues, because everything involved the Americans and you were talking to people who really had influence, so it felt like it really mattered, it really mattered much more than being in Germany talking about foreign policy, for example. And on top of that the job gave you high-level access to people to do that, but also you were the conductor of the orchestra of the whole British presence in the United States, which was considerable, so we had a very large Embassy in Washington, with a lot of people from the Ministry of Defence in particular but also some from other government departments, we had representatives from the new Scottish government for example there, and Treasury and so on, and then there were all the consulates around the United States, ten of them, and my job really was being the line manager for all those consul generals around the place and all the leaders of all the various parts of the Embassy functions, the political function, the economic function, the military and all the rest of it, so it was a fascinating job in that regard. And then, of course, when the Ambassador wasn't there, you were in charge of the Embassy, and that was going to be quite a bit of time that he would have to be out of Washington or on holiday or whatever. So it was a job with big scope and fascinating, so I didn't regret it at all, even though it meant being a Number Two again. The thing was I would not have done it if the Ambassador had been anyone else but David Manning, it was entirely because someone I respected so much, whom I knew, who had amazing access, I mean he really could see the top people, easily, and they respected him, and I knew I got on with

him, and he wanted me to do it so ... Had it been anyone else, I would have said no, and would have gone off to be Ambassador at some middle-ranking place but, as it turned out, it was a good decision.

MG: It was a culture-shock, I imagine?

AC: Well, up to a point. I'd been to the States before, particularly talking to the Americans on Bosnia business in the past, so I'm not entirely unused to being there, but yes, one of the things I often found myself saying to people coming in to the Embassy after I'd arrived, was that it seems all so terribly familiar but do be careful because not everything is the same as UK, and we used to talk about some of the things that you need to watch out for. But I found it a wonderful place to live, we had a lovely house which was not far from the Embassy, and we had staff, we had a residence, it was an Ambassadorial residence, the second one in Washington, if you like, and we put up a lot of Ministers and other people, so we had a lot of visitors. The difference was with somewhere say like Germany where people could make day trips or go off somewhere else, if you were coming over to the States you weren't coming on a day trip.

MG: You describe it as Whitehall on the Potomac, what do you mean by that?

AC: Because all government departments had an interest in business in Washington and some of them actually had people or local staff who represented their interests in the Embassy, other times it was dealing direct with them so, for example, when I went back to London for a trip, I would always call a meeting with the whole of the Ministries around Whitehall, saying 'anyone who wants to come to this meeting, do', and so you'd probably have a dozen, fifteen people from different Ministries there, just to find out what was on their minds and what they wanted doing, what was important to them in the relationship with the US. It also worked in an overload way too because government ministers always wanted to come to Washington and go and see people, whether they had real business to do or not, actually, I think for some of them it just looked good, and sometimes, particularly after I'd been there a little while, I found myself saying, when I got called by some Private Secretary of a Junior Minister in some ministry, 'I'm afraid we can't really deal with the Minister then, we've got two cabinet ministers in town then and it's just not going to be possible', and then anyway, "I'm afraid the Americans don't

really understand Junior Ministers, that they won't get as good access as our First Secretaries" and people in London whose Ministers were bursting to visit the US officially were put out by this, but you had to be quite straight with people, that really this wasn't going to happen unless they had a really good reason. They'd complain about it or whatever, but that's the way it was, because we had *so* many visitors all the time coming through and in order to deal with the people who really mattered well, you couldn't be having endless people who had just been promoted to Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Ministry of God Knows What who just fancied coming out to Washington for a few days.

MG: So did you have all these people who are household names, like Condoleezza Rice and John Bolton, what were they like to deal with?

AC: Well John Bolton was then in the State Department, and he was the Under Secretary for military and defence and intelligence affairs. And, of course, with my predecessor, he'd had a lot to do with him during the Iraq war. The Iraq war was over by the time I arrived, although obviously there was still the backwash. I used to go and see John Bolton quite a lot and John Bolton, you can only describe him as a sort of arch-conservative, that's what he is, and he very much had his own views on things and was always looking to hold people to account. But he actually was a person who believed in government, and he knew he was part of bureaucracy and to some extent had to behave like that, and he was an absolute old-fashioned gentleman of the American kind that you don't see very often, unfailingly polite, always on time, and even if he disagreed with you, which was very often the case. And so I found him fascinating to deal with and of course he's had a reputation of being fiercely right wing and so on and a bit of a maverick, and it's true he's always had his own views and he's never stayed in one job very long, he moved on after not all that long at that time in the George W Bush administration, and he's always got a home somewhere else because Americans like him, both Democrats and Republicans or others, often move between government, academia, think tanks, and sometimes, though not in the Bolton case, also business; there's a kind of acceptance, for people of talent, that they can move between these things fairly freely in a way that's much less common in the UK. And so I don't think that John Bolton ever felt

that he would become a career civil servant in the sense that he was a man who had certain ideas and he was always going to push them forward, and I've been fascinated to see recently that some of the interviews with him about his time in the Trump administration, which are absolutely fascinating, have been very frank.

MG: He got sacked, didn't he, or did he resign, under Trump?

AC: I think it was probably both, in all his jobs he's probably been a mixture of resigning and being sacked. As I say, he can always move on and write another book or do some research or whatever he does. Condi Rice was very different. Condoleezza Rice had been a senior person at, was it Berkeley? One of the Californian Universities anyway. She'd also been, in her earlier years, a concert pianist, and in her young years she had been a professional-standard ice skater, so a very talented woman, originally from the South, who had impressed people by her sheer intellect and also incredible industry. She was the National Security Advisor, which is a huge job in the United States, next to the president, in the first George W Bush administration and obviously the Ambassador used to see her quite a lot and occasionally I would be around and see her too so I got to know her a bit. Then in the second Bush administration she became Secretary of State, the equivalent of our Foreign Secretary but a more powerful position, and, typical of Condi Rice, before she started that job, which she knew she was going to have when Bush had been re-elected, she read every single treaty that the United States was signed up to. She was that sort of person, she wanted to know exactly where the United States was in its commitments. I remember I was lucky enough to be among a relatively small number of people, I think the Ambassador may have been out of town, probably only about fifteen, sixteen people, when you are sworn in as Secretary of State then it's traditional to have a little party in the State Department, so I was among this small group, and she gave a little speech saying she was wondering how the first occupant of that job, Thomas Jefferson, would have felt about having someone of her background occupy this position, whom he would have insisted was only worth two thirds of a person. Because famously Jefferson was a slave holder and he was part of the settlement between the North and the South which led to the formation of the United States, whereby the South could count slaves in terms of their population, because you would get voting weight according to your

population, but they only counted as two thirds of a person, and they of course had no rights at all and counted only as property. It was just in order to prevent the southern states being out-voted by the Northern states - of course he was part of the South. So Thomas Jefferson, who was this great figure of the enlightenment, she, very calmly, I mean she never got angry with anyone, very calmly pointed out that he would have been rather surprised to see a black woman taking this job.

MG: Indeed, it's very stirring to think that it happened. I find I never understand the system in America, because they don't seem to have a kind of civil service like we do, where the known advisers like Sir Robin Butler or the Cabinet Office or this or that have people who've been coming up through the civil service ranks, they seem to fly people in, like John Bolton in a way, who may be clever, indeed is clever, but everything seems to be done on a political basis.

AC: This is where the UK and the US diverged at US independence. It wasn't in any way inevitable in the days of the late 18th century, the UK it was all sinecures and so on, second sons of whatever who got the jobs, and then it all changed in the 19th century in Britain, largely because of the needs of India, because you actually needed really competent people to go out, a full civil service governing the whole of India, and the people who went then had to pass examinations, had to speak the language, had to understand the religions and all this was tested before you were allowed to go out and that led, in turn, to, in the 1850s, the civil service becoming meritocratic and that carried on. That didn't happen in the US, in the US it still is the case, as it was in the beginning, that whoever wins the elections it's to the victor the spoils, and you appoint people to senior jobs. There are 25,000 people a President has to appoint, they never get round to appointing anything like all of them, and the same is true at local levels where you win a local election and you appoint the librarian, the fire chief, the police chief and all this sort of stuff. So it's a completely different system and that's the way they work. I mean, there is a civil service, but it only goes to a certain level and the top levels are basically political appointees although some of them may be people who are also civil servants who happen to have caught the eye, and there have been some very wonderful people who have managed that and sometimes even gone between Democrat and Republican

administrations. But you are basically right, that's the way it is and Condi Rice was one of those, came from a background of academia if you like, and then was brought in to that job. David Manning had a fantastic, if you ever get the chance to talk to him about it, relationship with Condi Rice and they were very close. I just remember one occasion in his residence, we had a small dinner, just he and I and two former senators talking about stuff, and then the door opened and Condi Rice popped her head round and of course the senators were astonished, what is one of the most powerful people of government doing here? The fact was that she was doing a bit of piano practice because obviously it was somewhere she could drop in without being bothered and she had a little chamber orchestra which she used to play with and they used to do that. Famously, although David would not want to talk about this, when Condi Rice's fiftieth birthday came up, he very quietly, no one knew about this, had arranged with her staff to have a party at the residence, she knew nothing about it. It was a Saturday night and she was coming down in the car with her aunt thinking that she was driving down to Georgetown to have a dinner, when the car called in at the Embassy, I asked her about this so I know how she felt about it, and she thought, well, perhaps I've left something behind here and they are just picking something up, I don't know, and she was greeted by all these people on the staircase, including the President of the United States and his wife, all former Secretaries of State, great musicians, her family, all sorts of people who'd been sworn to secrecy. And she was taken up to the top and one of the New York couturiers donated a gown, one of the famous ones, for her to go to the party. So an amazing occasion, and it was kept entirely quiet, no one heard about this, and I remember being asked a few weeks later by someone from another Embassy, was there a party for Condi Rice at your Embassy, so I said, there may have been, and it didn't get out there at all, everyone was sworn to secrecy. Eventually, this was a couple of years later at least, somebody in Parliament kicked up a fuss about it and questions were asked about how much it had cost and answers were given that there wasn't basically any cost, everything was paid for in the normal way and I think the cost was \$3000 or \$4000 for a party, which is what the Ambassador would spend on a large evening entertainment.

MG: But the good will!

AC: But to have that level of people there - pretty amazing! That was David's relationship with Condi Rice, and he saw a lot of the Presidents as well and it was quite a fascinating time, but also it wasn't straight forward, dealing with the backwash of Iraq and Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay and things like that, they weren't always straight forward.

MG: Now the Queen came to see you, why did she come to see you?

AC: In my very first week, sitting in my office as the Minister Deputy Head of Mission, I had a visit from a delegation from Virginia, from the Commonwealth of Virginia as it likes to call itself, and they came and said to me, back in 1957 we had a celebration of the 350th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, which was the first permanent settlement of the British in what became the United States, and so we had the anniversary, and the Queen came along, and we're now planning the 400th anniversary in 2007 and we've got all sorts of events and they explained all these various events that were going to go on celebrating the beginning of democracy and the development of Virginia and then also looking at some of the more difficult things, the eventual importation of slaves and how race relations had moved on in recent years and so on, and then at the end of this they said there's one thing we'd like to ask you, we'd like the Queen to come for the 400th celebration! So I said, well, I'll talk to the Ambassador about it and we'll talk to London and I've no idea whether she'll be able to come or not. This was well in advance, because we are talking about a conversation in 2004 now, that they were talking to me about this, so they were looking well in advance. Anyway, sure enough, I mean it took the following year, and David had talked to people and the Palace and whatever, and it was decided that the Queen would come, and the visit to Jamestown and Virginia was part of that. They actually arrived in Virginia and did that part of it first, and then they also had a leg in Washington and then in between the weekend was wonderfully timed so that the Queen could go and watch the Kentucky Derby. It so happened that the then American Ambassador was a horse-breeder and she went and stayed on his farm over the weekend, so it all fitted together quite nicely. It was a tremendous impact visit, obviously the visit to Jamestown was the historical bit and was very grand, and she made some careful speeches, very well-crafted speeches about how

things had changed in the previous 50 years since she'd been there before, quite something. Of course, in 1957 there had been total segregation, that had been a big change, obviously. The Ambassador went around with the Queen in Jamestown and other places, and I went around with the Duke of Edinburgh and, when we were in Jamestown going around all the sites, he got a bit bored and went off on his own and I actually lost him, because I was supposed to go in a helicopter with him to Norfolk, Virginia, which is a US Naval Base where there was a US ship which he'd actually sailed on briefly during the Second World War. I'd been to see this before in the recce. Anyway, the long and short of it is that he kind of escaped my clutches and went off without me, so this was never forgotten in the Embassy, of course, that I was the person who lost the Duke of Edinburgh, and he was left going around Virginia on his own - perfectly happy on his own, of course, he didn't need me at all. And so that was that. But the Washington leg perhaps made a particularly big impact not least because right at the beginning, and it was a beautiful day, there was the ceremony on the White House lawn - you may have seen these things, so podia were there and people were there and my wife and I were there as well and the President gave a little opening speech, standing there next to the Queen and, as happened with George Bush, he misspoke, there was a 'Bushism', and he talked about the Queen's visit in 1789 and the Queen gave him this sort of sideways look, and he sort of looked back and smiled. When we had the return dinner at the end of the visit, five days later there was a dinner in the Embassy, in the residence, the President came along, and this was obviously a much smaller occasion, because the Embassy's not huge so there were about 100 people there, and he started out by saying that when the Queen gave him this sidelong look it just reminded him of how his mother always looked at him, it was really good, no rancour at all, it was really nicely done. And we set off the historic bit. I went off with the Duke of Edinburgh to NASA - there's a huge group of NASA scientists nearby Washington, we went there, and they talked about the science, the earth science, and also the Queen came along as well and they talked to people on the space station, which was pretty memorable.

MG: I didn't know that, that must have been really very moving.

AC: Yes, it was incredible. That was an idea I had, that it would be good to have a counterpoint to the historic stuff of the founding of 400 years before with some of the modern science and the future orientation of the space station, so that was lovely. The visit was great for the news media because Laura Bush, who was quite a wag, always worth listening to, she'd been on TV being interviewed by people interested in the protocol and the dinner and everything that was going on and she said, 'well, I told George that this was going to be white tie and he doesn't like these things but I said, you're gonna wear white tie!' And one lovely touch, they invited the winning jockey of the Kentucky Derby which had happened the previous weekend to come to the party and of course the news media followed him round as he went to get his dinner jacket and all the rest of it. It was a fun occasion, but it also showed what impact you can have with these visits. We had the Foreign Secretary, who was then Margaret Beckett, and I went along with her to some meetings as well, so you always have a Minister in attendance and it's an opportunity.

MG: I'd forgotten that she was Foreign Secretary. How did she strike you? She seems to me to be a woman of great common sense, is she a woman of some intellect as well?

AC: Well I think so. I'd met her a fair bit previously. She used to go around with her husband, Leo, who was a bit older than her and had had some heart problems, and the bottom line was that she wouldn't go abroad without him in case he had another heart attack, she didn't want that to happen when she was not with him. She was one of these people who liked late-night sessions, so I remember one of the occasions she came to Washington - when you came to Washington it was normal to arrive in the late afternoon or evening, and then you'd try and sleep off the jetlag - for her, she arrived late, and she was holding court at midnight with her exhausted staff and I went along, with Leo there, and she liked drinking Calvados and would talk about all things under the sun, she was really good company in that respect, and it may have been something to do with the Foreign Office or it may have been something entirely different. But she had one particular passion and I remember before she stepped down as Foreign Secretary she came to Washington and gave a speech on nuclear disarmament and she, from her wing of the Labour Party, from the left of the Labour Party, this was something from her time

as a young person onwards was very important, and while she accepted the Labour Party policy, which had been the case since the 1960s, from Gaitskell's time, not supporting unilateral disarmament, famously Gaitskell saying 'you can't go naked into the conference chamber', she wanted to have a path, a way this could be achieved, and she gave a very emotional speech about it actually, really emotional, her eyes were more than damp by the end of it and this was, for her, obviously the right note on which to end her particular time as Foreign Secretary.

MG: Yes, she's overlooked a bit as Foreign Secretary, because, after Robin Cook, it was Jack Straw for a while wasn't it?

AC: Jack Straw was the one I knew most probably during my time - we'll talk about - but I met him quite a lot, and Jack Straw was another person who was a fascinating companion, I mean he really would talk about anything under the sun. When he talked about anything to do with the government or politics, he'd probably talk more about the Home Office than the Foreign Office, even after he'd been in it for a long time, he was very much fixed on his time in the Home Office and what he'd done there. But he'd talk about everything and he was very proud of his son who'd got into student politics at that time and yes, he was a fascinating character. But you are right that his name is remembered better as a Foreign Secretary than Margaret Beckett's. She wasn't there for a very long time, but she was our first female Foreign Secretary.

MG: So, apart from that, what other highlights do you have when you think back to your time in Washington?

AC: I think a lot of the highlights I have are that it enabled me to see so much of the United States and get some understanding of the United States, so I mentioned my job included oversight of all the consuls around the country, so of course I had to travel to go and see them, which was tremendous. I did actually, both before I was visiting the US and then during then, manage to cover all 50 states, so we did have a holiday in Hawaii and a holiday in Alaska to make sure we went to all of them. Just seeing the diversity of the US was amazing, and some of the things you experience. I remember going, I loved going, to the so-called 'flyover' states, the states in the middle of the country which people tend not to visit.

MG: Well I want to know about those, because I've got a kind of fascination for those because I want to go to them, but I imagine that they are so extremely conservative with a small 'c' and weird, like on Schitt's Creek, I don't know if you've ever seen Schitt's Creek ...

AC: Well of course, but like everywhere else, there's great diversity, you'll find different people but they do tend to vote Republican on the whole, but it's not by any means 100%. I mean, I like Kansas which is right in the middle, I really thought it was a fantastically interesting place, but the thing is you think of Kansas and the old cowboy films and meat packing is still big, but 70% of the people who work there are actually Hispanics. You think of the Hispanics being in New York or California, but they are also very much in the mid-West, so the demographics have changed a lot. Also, I suppose, wherever you go, religion is different. You have to be careful about talking about religion in the US because people have very strong views, or some people do. But I had this wonderful moment when I was invited to speak to a university audience in one of the mid-Western universities, and I was introduced, first of all there was the Rector there saying, 'to introduce Mr Charlton who is from the British Embassy in Washington I have our friend a fellow student here Blessed Moreover' - that was his name! He was Ghanaian or something, but it took me a little while to recover from that. He was a very nice chap, I have to say.

MG: It would, it would! But a lot of them haven't got any idea about the rest of the world, have they?

AC: Well, it's true that a lot of Americans don't have passports, and this brings me to an important point, actually, and one of the things I think everybody, as a British diplomat, has to grapple with in the US, and it's important to understand I think also the history of US foreign policy: the US has always moved between isolationism and internationalism, and the two have always existed, but the degree to which one or the other is in charge is dependent on the President at the time as well as on what is going on in the world. And of course it was crucial to UK foreign policy to get the Americans involved in World War 1 which, although they only arrived right at the end, was crucial in the final victory. Obviously crucial for Churchill in the Second World War to find a way to enable

Roosevelt to get involved in the war, having been elected on a platform that this would never happen. And I think similarly, when it came to Bosnia, during my time, it was crucial for Douglas Hurd, the then Foreign Secretary, to get the Americans involved in that. And so as a British diplomat you are very aware of this attachment to isolationism, that a lot of people don't have much understanding of the outside world or any interest in it. On the other hand, you are very aware that the US are a crucial international player and so you will always be trying to play to that international side of their thinking and so that's the way it is. But you have to accept that, for people who live in this expanse of a country which has no neighbours on the East or West, and only Canada and Mexico North and South, and you are kind of protected by the sea from a lot of the influences and you look on your TV and see that some terrible things are happening in the rest of the world, you don't really want to have anything to do with it - you can see the temptation of that to happen, and so it's important to understand it. I felt, getting around the US and I did go around doing stuff, seeing the consulates and talking to people and you see companies and whatever, that it was an important chance to understand where people were coming from on this, and it's not weird, once you understand their situation and the way it's grown up.

MG: No, I'm not being critical of it, I mean there are aspects of it which really appeal, like the fact that the Post Office will stay the Post Office year in, year out, on Main Street, whereas ours turns into a coffee bar or something like that. But travelling around, it's a bit disconcerting when you are sitting next to someone on a plane and they say, 'oh where are you from?' and you say 'Cambridge', and they say, 'oh is that in France?', and the whole of Europe has got sort of muddled together.

AC: Yes, absolutely. Well if you say Cambridge, they'd probably think Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Harvard is. And that's why they have this rather quaint thing, we think it's quaint anyway, until you've lived there a while, saying, 'yeah, I went to Paris, France, once', and you think, well where else is Paris? But of course there are other Parises in the United States.

MG: I don't mind that so much, but I have found that, and I find that kind of paradox, which you've just explained, the great internationalism, the great power-broker of the

world involved in everything almost everywhere, combined with a tremendous sort of 'little America' attitude, difficult to get your head round.

AC: It's also, if you think back to the origins of the idea of British-European colonisation of what is now the United States, there were those who went to Jamestown, who were basically what you'd call adventurers from the Joint Stock Company, they were looking for gold originally and so on, that's one kind of colonisation, and then there were the people who went on the Mayflower, to Massachusetts in 1620, who were religious - we would call almost fanatics, actually, who believed in creating, these are words from the English puritan movement, 'a city on a hill', and those terms are still used by American Presidents today, 'a city on a hill', the idea of creating a society that they would look up to and everyone else would look up to which was ethical, religious, different from the corruption of Europe. So very much the idea of being different and having higher standards, or standards they would try to live up to, but understanding they would almost certainly fail most of the time. And that thought is still around in the 'story' of the creation of the United States, with a lot of people, and the people who were attacking the Capitol building back in January, a lot of them were talking that kind of language about the need for, it's our country, and these people need to live up to our ideals and so on.

MG: But again, another paradox - how can they have Donald Trump as the 'saviour', the exponent of the city on the hill, when you couldn't get a more dishonest, corrupt person etc.? That's the thing I just can't get my head round.

AC: It is very hard and of course I'm always very fascinated by the interviews with people asking that question, and the people I've asked myself, and they will say, yes, OK, he does a few of these things, but actually the key thing is he stands for our values, so that's the way they see it. And these people aren't stupid, it's the way they see it and it's kind of also a reaction against the establishment of the United States. One of the curious things is about the way the United States was created, it was at a time when the monarch, the King or Queen, of England was becoming less and less powerful, and they didn't want to have a monarch, and of course how would you develop a hereditary monarchy, but what they did is end up having a President who had king-like powers, whereas our Prime Minister has to go and be bashed up by Parliament every week, and has to have a

parliamentary majority, the President doesn't need a parliamentary majority, and never goes and talks to the congress except once a year when he gives his State of the Union Address to which there are no questions. So one of these paradoxes, where it attempted to do one thing and you've ended up with a system which actually enables power to go into one person. Of course, this person has to be elected, and it's not like a monarchy which goes on forever, it has to be elected every four years, but it's a kind of elected king.

MG: Yes it is, and also the election doesn't go on the popular vote as such, it goes on this electoral college business which is extraordinary. They can also decide who has a vote and who doesn't in different states so it strikes me that Charles Dickens wasn't too far out when he hated it!

AC: Well Charles Dickens hated it in particular. Charles Dickens was the equivalent of a mega-twitter star nowadays, he was hugely famous, and when the latest chapters of one of his books arrived in New York by ship, this was a sensation. When he went out there and gave readings, he was received, in fact he got so many invitations by the President on his second visit he turned them down, he kept being invited to an individual meeting with the President in the White House, and he was far more important than the President anyway, in those days. But he disliked the US in particular because they always breached his copyright. All his books were bootlegged!

MG: I understand his motives, but it is very interesting. So from there, in 2008, tell me how you ended up in Brazil. What happened? They spoke to you, who spoke to you?

Ambassador to Brazil, 2008–13

AC: OK well we had by this point the situation where you applied for jobs so I wanted to, and that's what it was thought in London, go and be Ambassador somewhere, which is what I'd rather expected to do before, anyway, and so I was looking at senior Ambassador jobs and of course my first, and second, thought was: Germany. I did apply for that, three times actually, and each time came second. This is something I know, particularly from my time as HR director, but I knew before, is that it's always a roll of the dice because you never know who else is going to be applying, and you never know

what's going to be important to the Foreign Secretary, maybe, maybe even the Prime Minister sometimes, of the day. It so happened on these three occasions, perhaps the first time I applied was the time I had the best chance, actually, in many ways, as it turned out, but when I applied for it this time it just so happens that there was someone else who was always going to get the job, and that happened again when I was coming to the end of my time in Brazil when I tried again. So I never made my 'dream job', but that's the story of being in the diplomatic service, you never know how it's going to turn out: you may end up in the job you wanted to do, but you may well not, and that's the way it is. So, having not achieved that then looking at other possibilities Brasilia was coming up. It happened at the time that there was a big push from the government which of course by this time was back with a Conservative government, no sorry it was Gordon Brown at that time, there was a big push to try and make more of our relationships with countries like Brazil and India and so on, not just the traditional ones which were the big countries. And so the job had been upgraded and there seemed to be a lot of interest in it. So I applied for it - I was also interested in the idea of doing something different, if I'd gone back to Germany obviously I wouldn't have done, and the big thing looking back as well, this also opened up South America to me as a place to get to know, and to this day I am grateful for that, because otherwise I never would have done so. So that's how I ended up applying for Brasilia and they appointed me. Also I was quite interested in going to a place where I didn't speak the language, because this had never happened before, I was an Arabist when I went to Jordan, I'd spoken German forever, and obviously in the United States I could soon speak American, although I should say about the United States, an important point, that you should always keep your British accent, because people think you are more intelligent than you really are! They love it! The number of times I and other people were talking to people, particularly when you are out of Washington, and they'd say, 'oh do talk more, we love hearing your accent.' What happened was I went back to London and I had a teacher, a Brazilian woman, who taught me Brazilian Portuguese.

MG: Because Portuguese is not even Spanish, is it? Portuguese always strikes me as being a bit more difficult.

AC: It's Portuguese, but also it's Brazilian Portuguese, which, although the language, the written language, has a few differences, but very few, more differences say than between American English and English, but obviously if you can read one you can read the other, it's almost exactly the same, spoken it's quite different, and so you need to learn to speak and to understand Brazilian Portuguese as it sounds quite different from European Portuguese, so that was the challenge. I found because I spoke French and I knew some Spanish and Italian, I'd done Latin at school, that it didn't take that long before you could pick up a newspaper and at least puzzle out what the stories were about, but to understand what people were saying to me, even when you were having full-time tuition, took quite a long time. So I did that with her and also then spent a month in Brazil living with a family, being taught, but also living with a family as a way of trying to get myself really up to speed, because I wanted to be at the point when I arrived that I could stand up and give a speech without having to read it in Portuguese, that was my aim. With a languages background I suppose I had the ambition as well, the interest in doing that.

MG: And you achieved it?

AC: And I achieved it, yes, so that was another factor with the Portuguese. I had those few months in London between the two jobs and then off I went to Brasilia.

MG: So what did you find?

AC: First of all, and I knew this before because I'd had a little recce visit, one of the factors about being Ambassador to Brazil is that you are living in Brasilia. Now Brasilia, as you will know, is a capital which was only built in 1960, built in five years, famously, as part of an election promise by the guy who was elected president, and is in the middle of the country and a long way away from anywhere traditional, any of the cities. All the cities, any of the grand cities, it's not as true as it used to be but still, all the grand cities really are still on the coast, on that very long Atlantic coast that Brazil has, so the first capital was Salvador, the second capital was Rio, and the real capital of Brazil, even to this day, is Sao Paulo, which is by far the biggest city, it's the centre of business, of finance and now I'd say the centre of culture as well, and if you are governor or mayor of Sao Paulo, you are a pretty important person. So you live in Brasilia and you are a long way away and Brasilia has a lovely climate, it's great for people with small families, for

example, and is gentle, and quiet, but actually a bit boring, to be honest, that's the other factor. As Ambassador you've got to realise that you are going to have to spend a lot of time in a plane.

MG: Is it very, very huge, then?

AC: Brazil is enormous. Brazil is the size of the United States if you take away Alaska. To fly from the furthest point East to the furthest point West, or the furthest point South to the furthest point North, is well over five hours.

MG: Has it got railways?

AC: A very good question. It ought to have railways. The British did introduce railways, but the railways do not work well nowadays. It's been a disaster. Since about the 1950s or 1960s the railways have just atrophied, and even though they spent a huge amount of money, they don't really work. So it's really silly, it's made for railways, because they don't have really high mountains or deserts, obviously there are some things you have to negotiate, and some of the old English railways were wonderful that they built, but, no, you have to fly everywhere. When I arrived it was actually all changing because what had happened since time immemorial is that when there was a long public holiday period, for a few days, and then people take a few more days, people would travel back to their home area, so they were living in Sao Paulo for work, and they'd travel back and they'd be in a bus for two days, that was what it was. These long-distance buses were really well known and went everywhere. And it was just changing when I arrived to budget airlines making it possible for people and I just recall in those early times, now you wouldn't see it, you could tell that people were coming on a plane for the first time, wondering, what do I do and this sort of thing! So it is a huge country, and that's a big thing to understand that it is a huge country and communications are not good, really only by air. It takes so long to go by road and many of the roads are not good, you don't want to be going on them, and the number of deaths on Brazilian roads every year average about 60,000. If you add the number of deaths on the road and the number of homicides in Brazil, you are well into 110, 120,000 a year.

MG: That's something we don't hear about.

AC: An awful lot of that going on, I'm afraid.

MG: But why is that, is it drug cartels, the homicides, or are they just aggressive people or what?

AC: No, they're not, they are entirely the opposite, they are very gentle people on the whole; a lot of it is to do with black on black and drugs, it's basically in the cities, in the so-called favelas very often, it's part, sadly, of Brazilian life, unfortunately. Well, what did I find? It was interesting to get to grips with the Embassy but I also obviously was in charge of our consulates, so I had to go down a lot to Sao Paulo and Rio and also other places like Recife and Porto Alegre and whatever. Also, it's a federal country, based on the United States, so there are power centres in the states of Brazil, if you include the central area of Brasilia there are 27 states, so you did need to go and talk to the governors of the larger states as well, so I had to travel around a fair bit. And actually that was good, because staying in Brasilia all the time as Ambassador, frankly I don't think there was enough to do, and I felt sorry for those Ambassadors who you would meet in Brasilia who were from countries who didn't give them a travel budget, so I think some of them got a bit bored.

MG: The great thing we associate with Brazil now is climate change and the Amazon rain forest - was that anything you were concerned with when you were there?

AC: Very much so. It so happened that as an issue to talk about, I'd given quite a lot of speeches when I was in Germany as Deputy Head of Mission I'd go around talking about that, and among the Germans at that time there was a lot of concern about acid rain in particular and the destruction of the forests, forests are something primeval in the German mind, don't know why, and in the United States I was certainly talking about that, which was more difficult sometimes. Tony Blair was particularly active in this and of course with George Bush it wasn't necessarily straightforward, but we did find ways of working together with the US administration but we also worked together with a lot of other groups, we worked with CNN, CNN really became very forward leaning on climate change issues, and we used to go out and talk to other people, including the faith groups, actually, it was important to try and bring them over to it, and we found we had common ground on 'it's all about protecting God's creation', even if they didn't accept the

scientific rationale, and a lot of them believed the world was created in 6000 BC or whatever. When it came to Brazil, Brazil was obviously, as you rightly suggest, a central country in this whole issue, both because of the Amazon rain forest, also because of something I mention on the more positive side, the way Brazil organised itself, and at that time President Lula, who was a strong, charismatic, international figure was interested in the issue in terms of what role Brazil could play in the international negotiations on this, so we were very involved in it, even we had some of our people involved in helping to create some TV programmes, without the British Embassy's name ever being on them of course, as a back drop to it. There were a lot of people who were against this whole thing, a lot of people who were more interested in intensive farming and there was a kind of a big clash always between the farming lobby and the environmental lobby in Brazil, which was very difficult to diffuse, so we were involved in that a lot, it was a fundamental part of our mission, if you like, in Brazil, to talk about climate change, and we had succeeding Secretaries of State for DEFRA who came through. I remember there was one Secretary of State for DEFRA called Ed Miliband who came through, and we took him on a sort of whistle-stop tour, starting in Sao Paulo, went to see a sugar cane mill so he could understand a very important point about that: you remember in 1973 when we had the oil shock, and people were thinking, what does this mean for the future of our cars? Well the Brazilians took the view that the future was actually creating ethanol as fuel, and from the 1970s all Brazilian cars made in Brazil could take either regular petrol or ethanol, and the filling stations all had ethanol pumps and petrol pumps, and the petrol pumps also had 25% ethanol. So this obviously in terms of fossil fuel use was very advanced. They are now working on the so-called second generation, which doesn't use sugar cane anymore, but uses basically animal fats, used cooking oil, all those sorts of things, which are now being developed as a kind of completely carbon-free way of driving your cars. So Ed Miliband came, we showed him that, we took him to Brasilia to meet the environmental groups, and interestingly the environmental groups are very strong in Brazil, but if you talk to the Greenpeace and others in Brazil, they have very different views than they do in Europe, so their view on ethanol, for example, was quite different, they were very positive about it, whereas the ones in Europe aren't.

MG: I'm going to have to stop you there, for this reason, that I'm worried that I booked it for two hours and I'm worried that it's suddenly going to black out! And there's such a lot more that I want to ask you, because I want to ask you, when you talk about farming, what that is, because you are not thinking of the kind of subsistence farming like in parts of Europe or Africa, you are talking about huge beef herds and presumably also soya and also palm oil and that kind of thing, and so I want to talk about that; you've got a lot of visits to talk about, so I'm not going to get through it in three minutes

Alan Charlton 4: Friday 16 April 2021

. It's 16 April and Alan Charlton is sharing his recollections of his life in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the fourth instalment.

MG: We went a funny way round with Brazil because basically we were talking generally about what it was like and the access to different parts of this enormous country, and then we seemed to get on to climate change, and I think you'd got to Ed Miliband. So I'll start formally and we'll go from there, but that means we still have to go on to the Falkland Islands and strengthening relations with emerging powers, and then royal visits. So we've got to the point where you are the Ambassador of Brazil, and it seemed at that stage to be involved with climate change and sustainability matters, that's not the case anymore, I think, but it was then. So what happened with the UK? We were starting to show an interest in that as well, weren't we?

AC: Yes, it had become part of our agenda somewhat before, but certainly a number of things coincided as I was going to Brazil. First of all it was, as you suggest, becoming a bigger issue, both climate change and sustainability, which was a rather new thing in the UK although not in other parts of the world, and at the same time there was an agenda which the government and particularly William Hague when he was Foreign Secretary got into, of developing relations with the big, emerging economies, so Brazil, India, South Africa, Turkey and so on, and these things coincided because Brazil was one of these big, emerging countries, and at the same time was an absolutely key player on

climate change and sustainability agendas, both because the country itself has a large amount of the Amazon rain forest, which is crucial in any climate change discussion, and secondly because there are a lot of, and have been for generations, environmentalists in Brazil and they were beginning to have at that time some impact on the political process. So we had at that time Lula was the President of Brazil who is a charismatic individual and had pretensions, certainly, to becoming a player on the global stage, and I think he realised that, although he'd not grown up in any way with this kind of agenda, he was much more the kind of people's person about jobs, industry, and that sort of thing - that was his bit -, he came to realise that this was an important agenda internationally and so saw the advantage for Brazil of working together with other countries like the UK towards climate agreements. So this was a big part of the job at the Embassy for that reason, and I can't remember now if I discussed the visit of the Prince of Wales

MG: No.

AC: Well perhaps I'll mention it at this point because, before I went out to Brazil, I was told that the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, who hadn't been married that very long by that point, only a year or so, wanted to make a visit to Brazil. Now you should know that Prince Charles is a well-known character in Brazil, he's visited many times, and I'm sure you'll be aware that he is very much focused on the environmental agenda and has been for a very long time, as indeed his father was. And so this was going to be quite an important visit, both in terms of how the UK would interact with Brazil on these issues, which were sensitive then in Brazil, because there were those who were very much in the farming lobby who saw this as potentially stopping them doing what they wanted to do, so it was politically tense in Brazil, so there was a chance of moving that agenda forward, and the other part of it of course was the UK agenda: here was the Prince of Wales coming out with his new wife who was still at that point I think slightly nervous of how she was being received by the British public, which I think has moved on in the last ten years, but now we are talking about 2009, so when they came out there was a lot of interest in the British press in getting the photographs of them together, we had to stage some iconic photographs of them in Rio de Janeiro, in the botanical gardens, and so on, and so there was a dual thing. I can mention a lot of things about this

visit, but it had three parts basically, one part was in Brasilia, for him to see the President, and do a few other things, another part was in Rio de Janeiro which was more the beginning and that obviously would appeal particularly to the media, Rio is very photogenic of course in parts, and would enable him also to talk about his environmental agenda, talk to environmentalists and a number of other groups of people, and the other part of it was going up to the Amazon rain forest, which he was very keen to do. And, somewhat to my surprise, when the advance party came out, which is normal on these visits, they come to discuss with the Ambassador how to do the visit, I assumed that they would stay at a hotel, maybe three hotels, maybe one in Brasilia, one in Rio, and one up in Manaus, which is the only city in the Amazon rain forest area, but they decided first of all, no, they would stay in one place, in Brasilia, and they would fly off to the other places, and if they had an overnight it would only be an overnight, say, in Manaus, and then they went to look at the hotels in Brasilia and clearly the people, the private secretary, knows the boss, and said, 'it's all far too modern, full of granite and so on and I think he'd prefer to stay at the residence'. I said, well the residence is also modern, and has got lots of granite, and he said, yes, but at least it's smaller and cosier, and I think that would suit them better than this vast place that was the five-star hotel in Brasilia. So I then said to them, and I think I mentioned this when I was talking about the Queen's visit to Berlin earlier, 'would you like me to move out', my wife wasn't actually with me at that time, she used to come out and visit from time to time, but she didn't stay full time in Brasilia, 'then the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall can have a house of their own and they can bring their staff in and so on, and I can easily go and stay somewhere else nearby for a while', but they said 'no, no, no, they wouldn't want that', so we had this rather bizarre thing of having to divide the house up and I'm afraid in my mind, and this is rather a sideways step, it reminded me of the old Steptoe and Son episode, I don't know if you ever saw it, where they get so upset with each other that they decide to divide the house in half and have a sort of string going through the house at various places. So I had visions of this sort of thing happening - it didn't turn out quite like that, but basically I kept out of their way. So they stayed at the residence and went off for trips in between. It was a remarkable visit, the interest was very big, but one of the key things for the Prince of Wales was seeing the President, President Lula, and it wasn't at

all sure that this was going to happen, and one of the difficulties of working with Brazilians, charming people though they are, is that they just don't make decisions, and leave them until the last minute. So although this visit was being planned months in advance, I still didn't know for sure until the last few days, and the people in London were getting increasingly anxious whether the President was actually going to see the Prince of Wales and I'd worked with his staff and we'd worked out when it would make sense for this call to happen, but there was in the back of my mind whether this man who had risen from abject poverty and was very much a left-winger, whether he'd feel it was the sort of thing he'd like to do to meet someone of a royal family, and how they would get on and so on. So we were very much on tenterhooks. With only about a day or two to go we finally got the message that yes, the President would see the Prince in the early evening, so what happened was that they arrived in the afternoon in Brasilia, and then the first thing was a garden party at my residence, and the residence and the Embassy are together, but the residence is sort of walled off a bit, but it has a nice tropical garden so we'd agreed with the Prince's staff that we'd build a marquee, or at least one with no sides, so that people could get some shelter from the sun, and we'd bring people in and they'd have a chance to go and talk to people, and also arrange a sort of ceremonial entrance. It was very typical of the way in which these things are organised, they like to do lots of things at once, so you have different parties of people he'd meet during this call, and then he'd go off and meet the President. Well, this all happened, but slightly chaotically as things are in Brazil, and we had a bagpiper who lived in Sao Paulo who came and played the bagpipes as they ceremoniously came in to the assembled masses, and they did their bit going around. And then I got a message from the Presidential palace saying, could we hang on a bit because the President wasn't ready, so I said, well let us know when we can go. As it happened, not his own fault, the Prince's plane was rather late, and so it didn't worry me too much, the idea that we'd have a bit more time in the residence garden, because we'd already started rather late, and I should mention we'd had a meeting before that in the Senate which was absolutely chaotic; it was supposed to be a group of half a dozen people, and there were about 600 there in the end, the usual thing, it was total chaos, including people we didn't really want to be there, but anyhow. So the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall got on with meeting various people

in the garden, and I was waiting for this message that we'd be able to go, and hoping it would come. Eventually it did, and we went off about an hour late, which isn't very late in Brazilian terms, to the Presidential palace, and got there. We only found out later that the reason why it had been delayed was that there had been a power cut and they had no lighting, and it would be getting dark by the time we got there, or getting a bit murky, and no air conditioning, they didn't want to receive the Prince of Wales in the Presidential palace in this rather humiliating circumstance. It was the case that the Presidential palace, which was one of the original buildings from Brasilia, built in the early 1960s, was due for a major refurb, which it had not very long after that, and the life-support systems were beginning to fail. So no one admitted this at the time, I only found out afterwards that this was the reason we'd been delayed. So we got there for this meeting and actually the Prince of Wales I think was slightly nervous about it, because he'd probably been made aware that there'd been a somewhat difficult preparation to this visit, and it was supposed to be just a very short meeting to say hello and welcome and what are you doing here, nice to see you and that sort of thing, and it went on for a very long time, because the Prince gave an impassioned presentation, you know, waving his arms around, on how important it was now to save the world from climate change, and how important Brazil's role was, because of the Amazon rain forest and also because of their political weight in the international discussions. And you could see that President Lula, who was a very savvy individual, and he'd spent his life talking to people, he knows people very well of all kinds, and you could see in his face that this was not quite what he'd been expecting, and I was rather worried at one point that he might feel he was just being lectured at, but then it rather turned out that, when he asked a few questions, he was actually quite interested in why this Prince of the Realm was so impassioned about an issue of that sort, and wasn't just a sort of grand person standing on ceremony. So it went on for over an hour, the meeting, far longer than it should have done, so that was mission accomplished for that, although, in the usual way, and I think this is a good example, the life of a British Ambassador is never straightforward, nothing ever goes according to plan, you always live on your nerves wondering what's going to happen, quite often things turn out well, though, as they did on this occasion. As for the rest of the visit, the Rio part we had lots of different groups of people came together, there was a lot of

talking to people interested in the climate change and sustainability agenda, but also in other things like young people, he met young people working, he went into a favela and saw a kind of boxing club, a really fantastic thing that had been made for young men, getting them off the streets, and also teaching them various things like IT skills, so the Rio thing was good. And then we went up to the rain forest which, logistically, is a bit of a trial. I mean there are two things that I asked the governor of the state of Amazonas which is enormous - about half of Europe - the two things I asked him for earlier on, I said, 'first of all, could you put on a do at the wonderful Teatro Amazonas in Manaus' - this is this opera house that was built, I don't know if you've ever seen the film Fitzcarraldo with Claudia Cardinale, well this is an amazing film, set about 1900, about somebody who wanted to take advantage of the rubber boom in Brazil. Manaus then was the richest city in the world because this was the only place you could get rubber from in large quantities in the world at that time, and the demand for rubber, particularly from the United States and Europe, was huge because of auto tyres, and people made amazing fortunes. And this chap Fitzcarraldo in the film, played by the mad Klaus Kinski, it starts out with a scene of him rowing with his wife, Claudia Cardinale, over the Amazon to the Teatro Amazonas and going in to see Caruso singing in an opera, with everyone dressed in their amazing finery, I mean they'd built this thing like Milan, all the stuff had come from Europe, the marble and everything else, and I'd been inside this place and I thought this would be a fantastic place for the Prince to enjoy some Brazilian music, because they're very good at it, so the Governor fixed this, although it was out of the opera season. And the other thing I asked him to do was to get all the governors of the states in the region to come to a meeting and most of them did, in the end, so that was very helpful of the governor to help me out on that. I remember very well in particular the scene going to this theatre, you can look at it online, it's very ornate, they have a season every year and Margot Fonteyn used to go there every year and dance, for example, there's a pair of her shoes there, because her father was Brazilian, and the interest was enormous, they arranged a programme, half of it was English music, and half of it was Brazilian, and we arrived in the square just in front of the theatre, it was dark by then, in the car, and got out with the Prince, and these great arc lights were there, which were obviously there so that all the people around could see the Prince and we couldn't see anything with

these lights, but they were giving a running commentary, it was astonishing, over a huge public address system, in Portuguese, I didn't translate it for the Prince because it obviously wouldn't have been right, but it was quite amusing, and I was listening to this and it was, 'and here comes Prince Charles, he doesn't look bad for a man of sixty does he?' It was rather like that, very folksy. It was a great occasion and a lot of fun and he also had a chance to go out onto the Amazon river, to go and see some projects that we'd lined up, and also go down one of the tributaries of the Amazon which I'd spied out a few months before, which during the rainy season is about ten miles wide, and this is just a tributary of the Amazon...

MG: That's just unimaginable.

AC: The size of everything is enormous, but again we tried to get things together, various projects and how people could have their livelihoods in the Amazon rainforest without cutting down the forest with sustainable products and tourism and fish farming and these sorts of things, so all that was fine, and it was quite a visit, and the Duchess of Cornwall did a few things on her own, and a few things together with him. She didn't do the more 'hard-work' things in the Amazon because they were pretty sweaty and required a lot of physical effort, but she did do things on her own, charities both in Brasilia and Rio and also in Manaus, so it was quite an occasion, and certainly pushed our agenda, which is what the Royal Family are really great at doing, they pushed the agenda we have on greater partnership on climate change and sustainability. The plan had been that we would try to push them towards having a very advanced position at the next big climate meeting which was at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen, which was meant to produce the big agreement - it didn't happen until years later in Paris - but everyone saw this as the big moment, and Gordon Brown went to Copenhagen as Prime Minister and stayed there over a week, personally trying to negotiate this, and it didn't work out. But Lula had made a turn around and decided he was going to be very positive, because everyone knew at the end of the day that Brazil would be one of the three or four parties at the top table, there would be China, India, United States, Brazil and perhaps the European Union, they would be the people who'd decide basically what was going to happen, and he turned round from a position of very little interest to saying, yes, I'm very positive on this. I

think it was a great disappointment to him, because we'd been egging him on, of course, that in the end it didn't work, mostly because both India and the US weren't really ready for it and the Chinese were lukewarm, so it didn't happen. That was our big effort on that. I'd mentioned before that we had Ed Miliband and other people who came, we had lots of visits from other people involved in the agenda.

MG: I wanted to ask you, if President Lula came from a favela or similar and was socialist, left of centre, how did he get on with Ed Miliband? Presumably you weren't quite so concerned.

AC: No, and the Brazilians are very protocolaire in the sense that people meet their equals, so there was no way that Ed Miliband was going to be seeing, as a mere Secretary of State for Environmental Affairs, the President. For them, it was a stretch for the Prince of Wales to do it, so for Lula, the only people he should be meeting really would be the Prime Minister or the Queen. So we didn't even try for that because it would never happen, they were always very clear on that, and it was the same for every country, Americans were exactly the same, a Secretary of State going to America would not usually get to see the President, not at that time, anyway. The government meetings were not a problem, but they were only one part of it, because the whole agenda was so much wider than just government, as I say. We went out into cowboy country, literally, to see how the farmers operated, and heard their point of view, we went on this amazing thing we'd arranged with twenty different native tribes to come together on a river in the middle of nowhere, and it took ages to get there, and Ed Miliband was given a presentation by representatives of these twenty tribes, all in their own languages, all translated into Portuguese and then into English, and all were basically talking about the iniquities of the white man, by which they meant the Brazilians, and referring back to various treaties that the British had signed with the Indians in the pre-revolutionary times in North America, that had been quite advanced on saving their areas and so on. It was an amazing experience for everybody, for Ed Miliband, also for us, seeing all these people and knowing that this kind of way of life, where the chiefs actually didn't speak Portuguese, would probably only be lasting another half generation, already their kids had gone to university, and spoke Portuguese and English, and already they were using

the internet, so you could see that happening. They were obviously very much part of the environmental agenda, and indeed some of these people have turned up in groups outside Parliaments around the world to plead their case to stop the building of dams and this sort of thing which ruins their fishing farther downstream. So that was pretty astonishing. But the Ed Miliband thing was quite tense in the sense that he had come to Brazil having heard from European environmentalists how iniquitous the Brazilian idea of using bio fuels to fuel cars was, and the interesting thing was that a lot of the international NGOs which had a Brazilian arm and a European arm and an American arm, the Brazilian arm had a very different point of view, so if you are talking about Oxfam, or any of these, they had a very different view to the Europeans, because of course they had lived it. And the Brazilians had, since the 1970s when we had our oil shock in Britain, responded to the oil shock by developing the first-generation bio fuels, and of course they've got lots of land and lots of sugar cane, so they used sugar cane to make the bio fuels. And from that time up to today, at every petrol station in Brazil, you'll see two different pumps, one is bio fuels and the other is standard petrol, but that has 25% standard bio fuels in it. Now the argument from the Europeans was that you shouldn't be using food, sugar cane, for making fuel, and there was a risk that the land was not being used for its right purpose. There was this kind of theory that sugar cane was being grown in the Amazon. Well you don't grow sugar cane in the Amazon, it doesn't grow there for a start, it doesn't make any sense at all, it was all grown basically in places like Sao Paulo state. Anyway, things were moving by then, and are now, in that they are using second generation bio fuels, which is using things like old cooking oil and all sorts of stuff, but not necessarily plant products. They are far in advance of us in terms of this sustainability agenda, and I think it was a bit of a shock for him to realise that we were basically thirty years behind where Brazil was in terms of thinking about sustainability in that sense. It was a very interesting visit. This was of course before he became leader of the Labour party, but you could already see that this was a guy who was on a mission and moving very fast, and it was an exhausting visit because we travelled thousands of miles into the interior of Sao Paulo to see the sugar cane plant and factory, over to the middle of the country to visit the Indians and the cowboys, Brasilia to have meetings with government ministers, but mostly with the NGOs, and of course Sao Paulo which is the

power base for business, so it was quite something. But again it played very much to one of our main issues in the Embassy, so it was very good that he came along.

MG: You've made me realise what hard work these visits are. I don't know whether it was particularly hard because of the size of Brazil, the climate and the diversity, but it sounds like a really difficult enterprise. We were talking about the lengths of visits; how long did Prince Charles stay?

AC: He was there five days.

MG: So that would have been gruelling wouldn't it?

AC: Yes, it was five days and obviously not everything goes right and there are a few dodgy moments. We had one particular one which he handled beautifully actually, when we were up in the Amazon. We were in the state of Parà, which is one of the states of the Amazon region, a huge state, pretty lawless, and we'd worked quite hard to ensure that the governor, a woman, wouldn't turn up, because she was quite a controversial character to say the least. Of course she turned up anyway, and she wanted a picture of Prince Charles dancing with her by the side of this river with the local people around and so he very graciously went in for this. Once these things happen you just have to go with the flow, even though you know this is entirely a publicity stunt for a failed politician to get her face in the papers.

MG: At the end of all that you must feel like a wrung-out flannel. And then you have to just keep carrying on?

AC: Yes, it's only partly me, of course, you're right in Brazil it's more difficult because of the size of the country, so we had people planning these visits and going out to all these places. I had one of my members of staff put in charge of the whole visit, and then she had a number of people she went round with to try and organise the various programmes and to do what they wanted, and as I mentioned, they like to group things, so when they were in Rio in the botanical gardens, they met several different groups of people there in different places of the garden, so they were catering for the artistic groups, some sort of ancient Brits who were around, for environmentalists, for young people, and they very much wanted, even though it was well out of carnival season, some

samba dancers and so on, they had to have that for the photos, a kind of echo of the famous, and you can still find this now on the internet, time when Prince Charles was a young man and came to Brazil and was confronted by a sort of half-naked young woman who wanted to dance with him, and she, now in her sixties, is still dining out on it. Her name is Pina and she came to the fore on TV again, about this experience many, many years before. So it is a lot of hard work, but the thing is that it does help you advance your agenda, there's no question, it gets you access and gives you the chance to explain what the UK is trying to do in various areas, so obviously you welcome them, and it was just a time when Brazil was the flavour of the times, everyone wanted to come to Brazil. It's quite the opposite right now, for reasons that are probably fairly clear, but at that time everyone wanted to come, we were fighting people off. Both Gordon Brown and David Cameron, as Prime Minister came, for example, as well as lots of others in between. I should just mention, actually, talking about Gordon Brown, Gordon Brown came around the same time as the Prince of Wales, so it was quite difficult, we were dealing with these visits just a few weeks apart from each other, and he was coming because he was the chair of the G20 at that point, and it's hard to recall it now, but this was the first part of 2009 and the world was very worried about the backwash of the big financial collapse, and as the chair of the G20 and a person who'd obviously been Chancellor of the Exchequer for many years, very strong contacts around the world on these issues, he saw himself as playing a leading role in trying to get the world to work together to stave off this crisis and recover from it. He did a lot of very good work. So he was coming to Brazil, he was only briefly there, only a day, and so he and Sarah Brown came, and they stayed at the residence briefly, but the main thing was to meet Lula because Lula was obviously a big player and would be, and Brazil is part of the G20. And it was an extraordinary thing because it was only three a side, this meeting, so I was there as was the Brazilian Ambassador to the UK, he had come over, Lula and his Finance Minister and Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling who was Chancellor at that time. For Gordon Brown, this was his great mission, and you could see he was desperate to get his case across, so the meeting started and he gave this long, quite fast talk about the state of the world and so on, and then after this torrent rather subsided Lula looked at him and said (and he knew Gordon Brown quite well because Gordon Brown had been quite helpful to

him years before, before he became President, they'd known each other a long time), in Portuguese, he didn't speak any English at all, 'well Gordon, that's all very interesting, I can't pretend I understand everything you are telling me, although I'm sure my Finance Minister will be able to comment on some of the detail, what I do know is that the G20 summit is about to come up, and it needs to have a plan, it needs to show the world it's got a plan to save the world from this disaster', and I thought to myself, wow, that's really cutting to the chase, very impressive actually, very impressive indeed.

MG: Gordon Brown did have a plan, didn't he? And he was assisted or even suggested into that by President Lula, then?

AC: Well, I think what Lula was saying to him was that the details would have to be discussed by the technicians, but he was up for the idea of the G20 having a plan, and the big meeting was about to happen, I think, the next month, or April, I think, and was happening in London, Britain being in the chair, and it was, actually, when you look at the whole history of the G20, by far the most significant meeting the G20 has ever had, people really looked to the G20 as, in theory, the twenty leading economic countries, although it is not quite like that, because some are there because they would not be left out, but it did actually work out, so that was quite important. I didn't see a lot of Gordon Brown and Sarah, but actually they were quite nice in the residence, and then they were going off to Chile because there was some international socialist meeting going on there, I can't remember what it was exactly. But they had an awful lot of people with them, Peter Mandelson ...

MG: The Prince of Darkness! What's he like?

AC: Well I'd met him quite a few times before in the past, when I was dealing with Germany and the US, and he was always a man with ideas, he was very interesting. I remember being stuck in the car in a traffic jam somewhere with him, because we also went down to Sao Paulo, and he had a particular interest in Brazil at that time because I think he had a Brazilian boyfriend, but he was also interested in Brazil like everyone else because it was one of these big, emerging countries, so yes, he always had lots of interesting ideas, Peter Mandelson. So we were given quite a lot of big visits and then, as I mentioned, later on, when the Conservatives came in, David Cameron came, after the

Olympics, with various Olympic medal winners like Anthony Joshua, and the woman boxer who is still around fighting professionally now...

MG: I can't remember her name.

AC: Very charismatic people, and all sorts of other ministers came, Vince Cable and all sorts of other people, and had a big pow-wow with Lula, actually it wasn't Lula by that time, it was Lula's successor.

MG: Who was that?

AC: Well her name was Rousseff, and her father had been a Bulgarian immigrant, I think, her first name was Dilma, everyone's known by their first name or by a nickname in Brazil, and she was always called Dilma. Lula's name, that was a nickname, Lula means 'little squid', and everyone called him Lula, though it wasn't his real name, although he did later adopt it legally as part of his name, like most Brazilians he has several names, and she was very different. Whereas Lula was this incredibly charismatic and expansive man of the people, had very little education but really understood people and had a very sharp intelligence, Dilma was a kind of intellectual, former freedom fighter / terrorist if you like but very much of the intellectual side: middle class family and quite a cold person, actually, and she'd been groomed by Lula because Lula had found her fantastic as his Chief of Staff for her brain and abilities, and then she became President but personal relations were not her forte to say the least. It wasn't very easy. When David Cameron came we were warned before and she always wanted us to know this, that there wouldn't be any sort of grand presents, protocol very often means there is a grand exchange of presents on big visits, so that was great, we didn't need to look out for some first edition of a book or whatever it was for her. But I did say to David Cameron's people in Number 10 that the one thing that Dilma actually cared about was her little grandson, she had a two-year-old grandson, so if he brought a little teddy bear that he could just give to her when he met her then that would probably melt the ice, and so it did, she sort of hugged it, so that was quite nice. The meeting was quite tough, but that was Dilma for you, but it was good to have David Cameron. Then we had Nick Clegg come several times, and also lots of other people, and one thing we did, I'll mention now we are onto it, succeed in was in getting quite a lot of cooperation on the

scientific and university side. It so happened that when Dilma became President after Lula, she suddenly had this idea and mentioned it to one of her ministers, who happened to be someone I knew very well, that she wanted Brazilian students to have the opportunity to go off to the world's best universities and spend a year and come back and enrich the country, and she got this idea I think from something that Hilary Clinton had told her once upon a time, and so in the normal way she said, 'right I want 10,000 Brazilians going overseas, spending a year in the best universities in the world, fix it!' And it so happened that we had a huge visit just coming up a few weeks later with Nick Clegg leading seven or eight different ministers, and university vice-chancellors were coming too, and Universities UK, for example, and so when we got there, one part of it was to have a meeting in the residence to lay out how we could help with this thing. And so we were in right at the beginning, and said we'd take 10,000 of these 100,000 students over the next five years, that was it, our universities would find a way. This was a gift from God because these people were going to be paid for, they were going to have their fees paid and their travel paid by the Brazilian government, so what's not to like about it for a British university, and Brazilian students have a very high reputation, both in terms of their abilities, and the way they manage to integrate, which is sometimes more difficult for the Chinese and others. So this was a fantastic thing, and it's probably the best achievement we had during my time. Unfortunately, towards the end of my time, it went a bit sour, because I got a call one day from the Minister of Education saying: Dilma has found out that some students on these courses (because they were able to choose which universities they went to) are choosing to go to Portuguese universities, simply because it's easier for them, and they don't have to pass a language exam and that sort of thing. And that wasn't the idea at all, nothing wrong with Portuguese universities, but she had the idea that suddenly 20% of them were going off to Portugal, whereas she had thought that they were going off to the United States or Britain or France or whatever. He said: she's decided to stop this, which means we have, I can't remember the exact figure, but something like 2700 students we now need to place, can you help? So I went into this and very sadly it didn't work and it was taken up in parliament, because at that point Theresa May was Home Secretary and she'd got this thing about immigration figures including students. And although I talked to people until I was blue in the face, senior

people in the Home Office and elsewhere, saying: look, no one in Britain is going to be saying that she's letting us down on immigration because an extra two and a half thousand Brazilian students are being let in for a year, they are going to go back - they have to go back to get their degree, they're not going to be hanging around; oh no, no, it will boost the figures, it can't possibly happen; and Number 10 were not prepared to stand up to it at that point, it was too difficult standing up against Theresa May, because she'd got this *idée fixe*, so it didn't happen. It was the one time I think in my whole Foreign Office career when I felt so frustrated, I just wondered, I didn't do anything off the rails, I thought about briefing some MPs and so on. As it happened the news got round and there were various committee discussions in parliament saying how ridiculous this was, but it didn't go anywhere, it wasn't a big story. But the universities thing was an exciting time and another example of how you could use these visits. While we are talking about visits, I mentioned Vince Cable and I'll just mention him briefly. Vince Cable obviously was someone who probably never would have expected to become a senior government minister, but because of the coalition government he became a senior minister, and he did come and visit us when he was the Business Secretary. Business Secretaries at that time would always go to Brazil because that's what we were about, and we were trying to get them to be more forthcoming on some things as well. But it so happened, and I didn't realise this, that he also had a personal element to his visit, which we helped out on. He had his second wife with him, but his first wife, who had died some years ago, was actually Goan, a Portuguese-speaking part of India, and it so happened that she had studied in a university in Rio and had been writing a thesis and I think she'd finished this, or nearly finished this, anyway we arranged for Vince Cable and his now wife to go and visit this university to present the thesis of his former wife formally to the rector of the university. And a member of my staff said: look, find some nice way to present it, a box with some ribbon on it and this sort of thing, but it was rather a nice occasion, it was all done quietly and it was an old university, not a sort of great big building, but an old, little university in the middle of Rio, it was quite a touching occasion, actually.

MG: I thought you were going to tell me that he had an interest, because he's got a great interest in dancing, hasn't he? And ballroom dancing, so I thought you were going to tell me that he also wanted Samba dancers!

AC: Well, you're right, and I wondered about that because I used to be, although by that time I'd already lost it, a ballroom dancer myself.

MG: You picked that up in Germany, didn't you?

AC: Yes, but we didn't end up having time for that, but actually that does remind me, and we'll go onto this now, because it's someone I have a lot of affinity to, we had a visit by Ken Clarke, who came along. Now Ken Clarke ...

MG: He's a Nottinghamshire MP, isn't he, that's why you like him!

AC: He went to the same school, we had the same kind of background and I met him a number of times.

MG: And I used to see him in Sainsbury's with a trolley full of red wine, down by the canal!

AC: Well, he's a great character and, as I say, we went to the same school, although obviously he's a lot older than I am, but I had met him a few times and he knew that we came from the same kind of background, near Nottingham, we'd been to the same school and supported the same football club, Nottingham Forest, and the same County Cricket Club, and he was always full of interesting facts. One thing he said was: do you know, I've always lived near a test cricket ground; when I started out as a lawyer I worked in Edgbaston in Birmingham, and of course my home in Nottingham is in West Bridgford, (which is actually in his constituency, which is another walk from a ground) and in London he lived somewhere near the Oval, I think. You mentioned interests, now Ken Clarke, whom I'd met before and I knew about these interests, had two particular interests which could be met in Brazil, one was jazz, so we did get him to a jazz club in Rio, another was bird watching and I don't know if you know but he has been a bird watcher all his life, and he's not the only one, there are a number of people who we got out to places where they could see some exotic birds, but he didn't have a lot of time, so

we only sat, which he'd done before some years before, we sat on the terrace of the residence and saw the birds coming along there, and you do get a lot, you get the odd egret and maybe a toucan and certainly lots of lapwings and things like that, and he just sat there for two hours one evening, and he had this book where he was writing it all longhand and he said: I've got dozens of these books from over the years that I've collected. But he was there because at this point he wasn't a government minister but he had been appointed as the Trade Envoy to Brazil and other places by the man he called 'the boss', David Cameron, so he had a reason to go there, I think it was also India as well, he went out to, so that's the reason why we got him. But poor Ken Clarke, it was quite tricky in that, when he arrived at the residence, his luggage had got lost, he wasn't the only one who did this. He had gone via Charles de Gaulle, Heathrow to Paris and then got a direct flight from Paris, there are direct flights from Britain, but there are more from France. And somehow his luggage hadn't made the translation, so he arrived in his normal shambolic state in his jacket and shirt or whatever, and the famous Hush Puppies, and of course he was going off to meetings while he was there and wanted to be reasonably smart, but unfortunately his luggage just didn't turn up that day, or indeed the next, I think it took two days, so I think we did go out and get him a shirt or two, but as for the rest, I mean nobody minded really but it was a bit awkward that he didn't have anything!

MG: Doesn't add to your confidence, does it, if you are trying to put a point of view across.

AC: No but I don't think anyone will remember Ken Clarke necessarily for what he wore, but he was always a man with an interesting idea, and always a great minister, actually, he always did the job in a very good way. It was fun having him there, I have to say. And all sorts of people visited, we even had the Northern Irish First and Deputy First Ministers come along and, together with the Irish Ambassador we did a number of things, this was after they'd started the Joint Executive in Ireland, and so getting these people together, and I'd met them before but, yes, everyone seemed to be coming to Brazil, so it was good to have these people, as you say, hard work but being Ambassador now would be a bit sad because you wouldn't be getting these people going around at all.

MG: No, that's true. Because it was at that time that they were part of the BRICS, weren't they? You kept hearing about these places, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, India, I don't know what the other one was.

AC: It was Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, and this acronym had been made up by some commentator, it wasn't something they made up, but they did have these yearly meetings, and they created a lot of the stir because people were thinking: oh the world is changing, this is what's going to be running the world in the future. And the Brazilians were quite keen on it, they liked being together in this grand thing but, when you think about it, in terms of agenda, it was quite difficult getting Russia and South Africa - what have they got in common? Whereas Brazil and South Africa you can kind of see, everyone's interested in China, so it was an artificial thing, I think the actual substance of it was much less than the appearance, but yes, you're right, at the time that was quite a big deal, and as an Embassy we were meant to be reporting back to London on it as to how Brazilians saw it and what they wanted to get out of it and so on, so that was true. But it's interesting, the organisation still exists, but people don't have as much interest in it now as they used to. Clearly China is so big now that everybody... and particularly for India of course, they've never had a straightforward relationship with China.

MG: Having changes of President makes such a difference. So in India it's made such a difference, hasn't it, and of course in Brazil with Jair Bolsonaro it's made a difference, but I need to ask you, because President Lula is on everyone's lips at the moment, he's trying to make a comeback! Do you think he will?

AC: Well, it's a very good question and I remember being part of an online debate about six months ago where people were talking about Brazilian politics. What was likely to happen, and I did ask the assembled experts: well what about Lula, can he make a comeback? And everyone said no, no that's not going to happen, but who knows? He just seems to me, and I'm not an expert any more, but from first principles, you've got a president now who is extremely controversial, but on the other side there is no well-known figure, and being well-known is very important in Brazilian politics, to come up against him, so who knows? It's not impossible. It's true that Lula's party, the Worker's

Party, is not what it was, but he might be able to pull together wider coalitions of people. The reason Lula's been off the stage a long while is that he was convicted and jailed for corruption, and in the usual Brazilian way, over time, there's just been a judgement to annul the conviction, this is over the last day or two, so this means that he would be able to be eligible to stand again because one of the punishments he had received was loss of his political rights for some incredible length of time. So it's not impossible that he'll be, in fact I'm sure he will be in some way part of the electoral process.

MG: What about the lady, Rousseff, that you were talking about? She was a different party, presumably, to Lula? Or the same party as Bolsonaro?

AC: No, she was the same party as Lula, the Worker's Party, and she was very much his successor. He decided not to stand again, because he'd had two terms and he thought, although there's no legal bar, well actually there is a legal bar in Brazil now, he couldn't stand again because he'd been elected twice, and he decided not to try and get the constitution changed so he could stand for a third term. If he'd decided to do that it probably would have passed. Because there's no great magic in these things, obviously in Britain Prime Ministers can go on for as many terms as their party and the electorate allow, and the time limitation relatively new in the United States, it's only existed since the beginning of the Second World War that you can't have more than two terms, but he decided not to and so passed the baton over to Dilma. In one way it was quite clever because the great economic success of Brazil was about to go downhill anyway, and so he didn't have to face that, but his idea had certainly been that Dilma would be around for a term or so and then he'd come back, but then meanwhile he got embroiled in the problem of corruption, and so then couldn't stand again. So she was the same party, but she ended up getting impeached for involvement in the cover-up of corruption so she had a very difficult time.

MG: There's not any mention of her name, now you've mentioned it today I've recalled it, but it's not in the papers now, so she's really rather off the scene now?

AC: Oh yes, well she was impeached and so had to step down from the presidency short of her term, she didn't finish her term, and her Vice-President took up the rest of the

term, Vice-President Temer, up to the election which then elected Bolsonaro, by a big margin, as it happened. So she's off the scene.

MG: You haven't touched on the Falkland Islands. I can't see that it's very near the Falkland Islands. It's nearer than the UK but how did you get involved with them?

AC: Well it so happened at the time I was in Brazil that there was quite a problem over the Falklands because the then president of Argentina, who is now the vice-president, Cristina Kirchner, had taken a very aggressive line against the Falklands. This has come and gone over the years with Argentina, but she was very aggressive, was demanding that the Falklands were handed over, and trying to get other countries in the region to blockade the Falklands, basically. Every time there was a regional meeting, there are a number of regional bodies in South America, where the heads of government meet together, every time there's one of these the Argentines will only have one agenda item, which would be to get some ringing statement about cutting off the Falkland islands and how outrageous this was, and it was beginning to have some effect on the Falklands, the people were starting to get a bit worried about the links. For example, we mentioned before, I think, that the way you fly to the Falklands is via the far south of Chile, you fly from Punta Arenas, there's a flight every Saturday that goes to Mount Pleasant, the main airport now on the Falklands, and then comes back, and that is a very important life-line and there was a worry that somehow the Argentines might persuade the Chileans to stop that; and there was this ban on Falklands flagged vessels visiting any port in South America, which would also be quite difficult. Now the Brazilians, there's always been an antipathy between Brazil and Argentina, there's never been any love lost, but there was a great effort going on at that time to work together and they had been working together in this organisation called Mercosur which is a part of South America trade organisation, and actually Lula and Dilma got on quite well with Cristina Kirchner, they were both, although it's more difficult in Argentina, big, left-wing political figures. So we felt quite a lot under pressure and wanted to make sure that the Falklands weren't going to suffer from all of this, and this was one of the reasons why there was the idea of having a referendum back in 2013 in the Falklands, on the future of the Falklands, and famously in that referendum, it was 98% in favour of continuing with the present arrangement and

being an overseas territory of the UK. Apparently the two people who didn't vote for that, who've never been located, actually it was thought they wanted out-right independence, rather than being part of Argentina. I have to say, when I visited the Falklands, and I did go and spend a week there to talk to various people about their interests, and this was not a generational thing, it was the younger people who in some ways were even more that way, a great distrust of Argentina, and particularly among those who had been children at the time of the invasion, who had gone through a lot of trauma, being cooped up for six weeks, without their parents very often, by the Argentine army. Some of the older people were a bit more statesmanlike, and just wanted to find a way of getting on with the Argentines, but quite a few of the younger people were pretty, you know, and we had to quieten them down. I remember I went on to one of the other islands to see some sheep farming and some shearing, and there was a young man there and we were having a drink together, and he had this T-shirt which basically had on it a toilet roll in Argentine colours, this was his statement on Argentina, so there was that side of it. And we were very interested in practical things, so every time there was one of these statements internationally, which no one took a blind bit of interest in, apart from people in the British Embassy, I have to say, I'd go and talk to the Foreign Ministry and say, what's this about? And one of these things turned up just before Christmas one year, and it said that, as I've hinted before, Falklands flagged vessels would not be allowed to visit any port in South America, so I rang up the Foreign Ministry and said: well what's all this about, I didn't think you were in for all this sort of thing, this is a blockade, and they said, we'll get back to you. And it so happened that they got back to me in the evening and by that time I was in Rio, we had a party going on, it was just before Christmas, the 23rd, it may even have been 24th, for some visiting Royal Navy people, and we were actually on board one of the ships that the Brazilians had bought from us which had actually participated in the Falklands offensive, they had quite a few of them, they bought second-hand ships, there's a very strong link, there always has been, between the Brazilian navy and the Royal Navy, indeed Britain founded the Brazilian navy famously; so I had a call from the Deputy Foreign Minister who'd got up and said he'd been told about my representations and he'd been told by his experts that nothing had changed. I said: what do you mean nothing has changed? This is a really alarming development.

And he said: I don't really know the details (he probably did), but I suggest you come in and see the people in the Foreign Ministry, so actually I went in on Boxing Day, which isn't a holiday in Brazil, and they explained to me, this is very Brazilian, and said: have you read the statement? And I said: well I've seen it, yes. And they said: well if you read the statement it says that all Falklands flagged vessels will be prohibited from entering ports of member countries, South American countries, subject to national and international law, and, he said, we inserted that because we have no national law to implement this, and we believe it's against international law, so it won't happen in Brazil.

MG: That's very clever, isn't it, very neat?

AC: Very Brazilian. So they'd given the Argentines what they wanted, this big headline, but it had no impact practically in the most important country of the region, so those are the sorts of things that as an Embassy you need to find out, that's what you're paid for! We worked a lot on things. There was this idea, which came to fruition, but it's suspended at the moment, to start an air link between Sao Paulo and the Falklands, and the idea was this would facilitate US and Canadian tourists who would come down, come to Sao Paulo and then go on and fly to the Falklands, because it was far too difficult to come all the way round Chile, and the only tourists you tend to get in the Falklands are people coming off cruise ships, and the Argentines were banning cruise ships visiting Argentina from going to the Falklands - that was also reversed later. We talked about that and we talked about medical things, never publicised, but whenever there was a serious medical emergency, obviously they have facilities in the Falklands, but it's a small population, they can't do major heart surgery or anything like that, they'd be quietly flown over to Sao Paulo without any publicity. The Argentines would have been furious if they'd known! So all these things we were trying to protect, and also supplies. The Falklands need foodstuffs, has to import them. It grows a certain amount in greenhouses, but it's limited. So if you go into a supermarket in the Falklands and there hasn't been a delivery the most expensive thing you can probably buy is a lettuce or something like that, so I went to see companies and Brazilian companies were quite prepared to do this, but on the sly. The problem was the size - they had the idea that

they'd be sending a container ship, and I said: well probably they need about a quarter of a container, there are only 3000 people there!

MG: I'm surprised that it's a tourist place, I know you can see albatrosses, so I can understand that bird watchers might want to go, but it always looks terribly bleak to me, with no trees.

AC: It is quite bleak, but there are a number of things which interest people. First of all, people like to visit out-of-the-way places now, that's the case, so going there is one thing, there's also battlefield tours, there's a lot of debris around from planes that were shot down and that sort of thing, and war memorials around and people to explain it; there is the wildlife, particularly the penguins, there are penguins everywhere, so there are penguin tours, and for some people there's fishing, as well, so there are a few things like that. It's limited, but being what they are, there's loads and loads of islands, given that it's such a small population, if you get a certain amount of tourism that's an important boost. It's not the most important thing in the economy, the most important thing in the economy is fishing licenses for krill and stuff, so people go and get that, it's by far the most important, and tourism is one of the subsidiary things but none the less it matters a bit. So we fought the good fight for the Falkland Islanders and even, again, caused a lot of trouble with the Argentines because we did have a major visit by the largest ship in the Royal Navy, which was not a war ship as such but carried vehicles and whatever, so actually they ended up selling it to the Brazilians, and they used this to do some sort of amphibious exercises, and the Argentines were absolutely furious about this: it's all planning to invade Argentina and so on, they claimed, so the Brazilians learned from that and were quite difficult with us for a while after that, it's true. We had some stickier times; after that they didn't let us have any naval ships visiting Brazil for a number of years, simply until the heat had died down, and they kept telling us, this is not for ever, it's on a case by case basis, but, as so often, you get caught as an Ambassador between the fury of people back home and the fury of people in the country you're at, and trying to find a way forward that makes kind of sense. And so I was trying to persuade people in Britain that there was nothing we could do about this, because we keep saying how outrageous it is and so on, and there's a lot of embarrassment in Brazil, but one day the

heat will die down and it will start up again, and that's what happened actually, eventually, after I left. But those are the things you are meant to deal with. So the Falklands was always a touchy subject in Brazil because of Argentina. However, I always kept in my mind two things. The then Chief of Staff of the Brazilian Army, it so happened that as a very young man in his first job he'd been charged to look after the pilot of a British war plane which had made an emergency landing in Brazil, and this was at the time of the Falklands. And it was a very sensitive thing, because obviously the Argentines were up in arms about it, and they didn't know what to do about it, so they gave the crew a good time for a while and then eventually let the plane quietly disappear. There was that in my mind, and also in my mind was a cartoon - the Brazilians are brilliant at cartoons, all their newspapers have great cartoons - and there's a picture in my mind of this historical cartoon at the time of the Falklands crisis, with two Brazilians standing on the beach with palm trees, and you can just see their backs and they're looking out to sea, and in the distance there are these ships steaming by, which of course at the time you take to be the British Navy on its way to the Falklands, and you can see them going like this gesturing "that way!" You know, this traditional enmity with Argentina.

MG: Well, it's a very eventful time that you were there, how did it come to an end and what sort of fuss did they make and what kind of farewells did you have?

AC: Your time comes to an end - you have four years, and I ended up having quite a lot longer..

MG: It looked to me as if you had at least five...

AC: I did end up having nearer five, because it so happened that my successor, who they were very keen to have in Brazil, needed time to get out of his previous job, and then, although he spoke Portuguese, he really wanted to become acquainted with Brazilian Portuguese, because his wife was Portuguese, actually, so I ended up staying on longer so that there wasn't a serious gap between Ambassadors, which was fine by me because by that point, although it was not where I had started out, I had decided that I was going to retire from the Service anyway after this, so if I stayed on for a few extra months it didn't really matter too much. So there are always dinners and whatever, and people go by and

that's what happens; the going away bit, for me, is always something which I've tried to manage with as little fuss as possible, and it's more important when you arrive that people take notice of you than when you are leaving, so I try to avoid too much of that.

MG: Well you couldn't drive home, could you? You didn't attempt to do that?

AC: Not this time, no, there was no way of doing that, so it was a flight back home. And I left feeling, well, it takes its toll working in Brazil, so I'd probably done my bit and it was time to move on, but I did feel that it was a pity I hadn't quite managed to get round everywhere I wanted to go to in Brazil, I'd done pretty well, there were still places that were on my list that I never managed to see, which was a pity.

MG: Have you been back since?

AC: I've been back two or three times, but only briefly, mostly when I was working on behalf of a university, and also I set up this organisation called the Conversa. 'Conversa' in Brazilian Portuguese means 'conversation' or sort of 'debate', which is quite easy to understand in British terms. It's a UK-Brazil thing for people to meet and talk quite openly, under Chatham House rules, about matters affecting the two countries, and we've held a couple of these in Brazil that I've been to, one in Rio and one in Sao Paulo, and we've had three in the UK, and the last one was virtual, and we're hoping there'll be a real one in Oxford in September, but it may end up being at least partly virtual as well, we'll see.

MG: I understand that. So normally now, because we've come to the end of your career, I would ask you about your views on it and how the life's changed and what you think is better about the service now and what you think is worse, but I'd like to go back to your job that we didn't actually touch on before, because it ties in, which is when you were in charge of HR. Can you tell me about that, and go on from there?

Director, Personnel, then HR Director, FCO, 2002–04

AC: Yes, this was 2001-2004, and I'd never really given much thought to going into what we call 'the Administration' which is HR and other things, but it so happened that the outgoing Permanent Under-Secretary and the incoming Permanent Under-Secretary

were very keen on me doing this, I wasn't quite sure why, and I ended up going along with it, thinking it would be an interesting challenge. Now there are two types of person you can have as HR director, really, in an organisation like the FCO, either someone who is a professional person on HR, which is what you'd want to have if you had someone leading the finance function, for example, and probably estates function, or you could have someone who was a fairly senior diplomat who would run a function which had lots of experts, and that's obviously what I was, because I was not an HR expert, I didn't have any professional qualification in it. So it was strange being the Administration, that's the first thing I'd say, because you weren't involved in foreign policy, and that was odd, not being involved in foreign policy you do feel a withdrawal symptom, it is odd. It is also bureaucratic, you are involved in endless processes and meetings. On the other hand, you have some really interesting things, you had, at that time the HR function was very big (it's very different now) because we did more things, we also included things like training and counselling, welfare, career advice and all sorts of stuff, it was a huge function, and we had about 350 people, it was ridiculous, there are about 35 now, it was very big. Part of the job was actually to begin this modernisation process and we did have a major restructuring exercise which I got someone to manage, which had two main outcomes, well three really. One was to drop some of the things that we were still doing, like giving career advice and stuff which is probably something we felt we shouldn't be involved in, but it did two things, it set up a contact centre, so that if people needed something from HR they had people they could talk to on the phone, or by email around the world, and these people would be able to solve their problems, whereas previously they'd have to find the right person in the right department of HR to talk to, and the idea was that if the people on the front line couldn't answer it then they'd get an answer from some expert or whatever it was. And I remember one thing when we decided on this, the man I was working with who has since become an Ambassador himself, and he said: some of the staff are saying that they ought to call themselves 'Alan's angels', and I said: no we won't! And it didn't stick, which was good. So that was one part of it, and it was an interesting process, but I think the main thing that will probably be of interest to talk about, or two things really, one was being part of the Administration and, as HR director at that time, I was part of the management board, and I talked to a number of people

about this before around Whitehall, because you usually talk to people around Whitehall, and they said that there's always this thing as to whether HR should be on a big stool or a small stool, and so it was a kind of condition of my going there that I wouldn't be on a small stool and that I would be involved in the major discussions, even so, it was a bit of a struggle sometimes to get noticed. But being a part of those discussions was new and interesting. And secondly was the appointments system. Now we had an appointments system and it's still much the same, it's been modernised a bit, whereby every job is advertised by this point, very unlike when I first came into the service, and the various grades were taken care of overseas by different people in HR, who would oversee the process. The process ought to be as far as possible not involving HR now, was the thought we had, it should be between people who are going to be the line managers of the people who are applying, and they should hold the interviews and so on, but there's a certain amount that HR had to do to make sure that requirements were being met and so on. It so happened that the tradition was, which I kept on, that the Director of HR did two things. First of all I was the secretary to the so-called number one board which was chaired by the Permanent Under-Secretary, and the number one board appointed the top Ambassadorial and home posts, there are very few home posts at that level, only the directors general, so three or four people, but overseas there around 20 odd, 25 I suppose, Ambassador jobs which were there, so it was for me to go to the meeting with the Permanent Under-Secretary and one or two other people who would be the board, to decide who was going to be the new High Commissioner in India, who was going to be the Ambassador in Moscow, Washington and so on. Of course, it didn't just happen like that, there was a lot of preparation stuff going on and also I used to talk to the candidates, so people would come and see me and say, do I have a chance of becoming Ambassador to the EU or what would I need to do and this sort of thing in the longer term, so it did a bit of career stuff like that, but trying to tone that down. So being involved in that was very interesting, and of course sometimes you got unexpected results out of the board, and sometimes there were changes of mind, so it required quite a lot of work, quite a lot of finesse and a close relationship with the Permanent Under-Secretary, particularly over the most sensitive appointments so, for example, the most sensitive appointment has always been, in my experience, the Ambassador to Washington. The formalities are that

once the number one board has decided who should get the job, then that name has to be agreed by the Foreign Secretary, and then by the Prime Minister. Now mostly the Prime Minister of the day doesn't really mind too much who's going to be Ambassador in China or whatever, but they tend to mind who's going to be Ambassador in Washington, and so it does pay to, I remember getting the, having been through this once, Permanent Under-Secretary and saying, look you do need to go and talk to the Prime Minister about whether he's got any particular ideas, because there's no point in us going up the hill and then actually finding out that the Prime Minister already had somebody in mind or somebody he didn't want to do it, or whatever, so that was quite a tricky one, really, and having been in Washington myself, I had some understanding of how these things were done from that point of view. The other job I had was chairing the so-called number two board. The number two board appointed people at the level below that who were the less senior Ambassadors and also the number twos at very senior ambassadorial posts, and that was also an interesting experience. So it was quite a business, and I'm glad I did it. I do feel that there was an opportunity cost, I could have been doing something interesting in foreign policy, but there's no doubt that, when I bump into people nowadays from the old times at the Foreign Office, people most remember that I was HR Director, because it was a kind of feeling that he's the person who knows where the bodies are buried.

MG: I don't fully understand how promotion was obtained, because you said that when you started out, and for a lot of your career, you were told: you're going here, and you had the choice, yes I'll go or no I won't. But you're now saying that the post of US Ambassador isn't advertised, as it were, you can't have a number of hopefuls applying?

AC: It is advertised, yes.

MG: It is, but you said that the Permanent Under-Secretary has someone in mind...

AC: Well, put it this way, the Permanent Under-Secretary will always have a view, but he would certainly want to ask the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary before you get into the business of appointing someone to a post like Washington, to make sure you don't appoint someone they are going to turn down. Maybe they won't have anybody in mind, but you do check, but you'd only do that in those cases. The situation is that

people are in different grades in the Foreign Office, to get promoted to those grades that's something different, the promotion systems have changed over time, promotion systems either happen through an assessment centre - you go to an assessment centre and you either succeed or fail, and if you succeed that will mean you are eligible to apply for jobs in the higher grade. If you fail then the idea is that you'll get various developmental messages from it and then you'll do better next time. So that's one kind of promotion, but from some grades people get promoted on the basis of the annual appraisals they've received, and this has gone to and fro a little bit, I mean now we've gone to a more mixed system, whereas we were very much in the business of doing it almost entirely by assessment centre in my time, but now it's more of a mixture, because assessment centres are very, very expensive, and I think they probably are a better indicator on the whole of whether someone's ready for promotion, but I don't necessarily think they're that much better, as long as, and I think this is the argument people would deploy, annual appraisals are properly done, and getting people to do good appraisals of other people was always a challenge in the Foreign Office, they saw this, particularly senior people, basically as a tedious chore, and perhaps embarrassing, rather than a core activity. And that has certainly changed, the mind set of people, the language that people use on these things nowadays is much different, so probably it's perfectly justifiable to put more weight on assessments to determine promotion. But promotion doesn't give you a job, you still have to apply for jobs, it just means you can do it at a higher grade.

MG: I see. And where does this fit in with what we've been hearing about in the last year or so where the argument's been put forward that we should pluck people out of business and other areas to be Ambassadors, rather like they seem to do in America. There was some dreadful talk of Nigel Farage being our Ambassador to Washington, I mean where does that fit in with HR and this assessment and so on?

AC: There are couple of sides to this, I mean first of all the letter of the law is that the Foreign Secretary can appoint whoever he likes, so that, constitutionally, he or she can do. The reality is that that's not going to happen, because they've all agreed it should be based on a proper system. But sometimes, and this is not new, this has happened in the past as well, sometimes the field is opened out to people beyond the Foreign Office, in

fact most jobs now are advertised Whitehall-wide, so you do get people who will apply from another government department, perhaps they see a job in India that they think they'll be good at, and they apply and say: I have this experience, knowledge, qualification, skills or whatever, so that happens regularly, and sometimes, and this thing has come and gone four or five times in my lifetime, where people say: yes, we must have people from business to go and do the commercial jobs. On the whole it's been a bit of a flop, we have found some people have shown interest in this, but when it's come to the point of being appointed, they've said: crumbs is that all you're paying me? Being paid a civil service salary compared to what a business person's been used to is not easy. And second, the people we have appointed there's been a mixture of results, to be honest, and so for that reason we've had more these Business Ambassadors if you like, who are not part of the system, who go sort of roving around, and it might be people like Ken Clarke, it might be a businessman, so they kind of help, but they are not part of the staff, this is something that they do out of the goodness of their hearts and they are probably given a travel budget by the Prime Minister or Business Department, whatever. So those people exist, but it's always around, and I think I and most people in the Foreign Office have always been very concerned in case the government of the day, whatever colour it was, decided to go for appointing people who had not gone through a proper process and then we'd end up being, we wouldn't be like the United States, because the United States has always had this system, to the victor the spoils and President Biden obviously now has to reward all the people who [supported him], so half their Ambassadorships will be given to people who provided money for the Democrat party, that's the way it always has been, we would never go to that system, that would never work in Britain, but there is obviously a risk that the government of the day could decide: well, look, I want, say, Nigel Farage as my Ambassador to Washington (that was never going to happen of course), for example, and the letter of the law is that they can actually do it. I don't think it would withstand public scrutiny.

MG: Well, there is, I recall, the signal incident of James Callaghan, who promoted his son-in-law, the 'cleverest man in Britain' *soi-disant*.

AC: He did, yes. Well there's an example and that does happen, occasionally.

MG: He didn't do very well, really, and he lost his wife as a result.

AC: That's right, yes, he didn't stay all that long, what was his name, Jay, wasn't it?

MG: Peter Jay.

AC: He didn't stay all that long, but that's always a possibility. It's certainly happened with Ambassadors in Washington before, that the Prime Minister has spoken up and it's someone that they've known within the civil service who has ended up doing it, but that was an egregious example of, he was an economist, wasn't he, Peter Jay, appointing a clever man.

MG: And he ended up as economics editor for the BBC, and ended up rather a sad character really, I'm not sure if he's still with us. I wondered whether, as we speak in April 2021, and we have all this business being discussed about sleaze, whether that would have a bearing on it as well, in employing people who hadn't come up through the FCO. Because someone said: oh well it's good to have business people who know about business, but then they don't understand about the civil service, and the need to be impartial.

AC: And what's interesting is, and this already applies to special advisers who you get in all government departments and in Number 10, when they are appointed they have to abide by the civil service code, so yes, they are special advisers and they haven't gone through some kind of system and they've been appointed by the government, by ministers, but they have to obey the same rules on probity and so on and, on the whole, I think they do. But also these people don't tend to stay very long, you know for one reason or another they find it a bit frustrating working within a civil service system and find something else to go along to. But I have to say that, when I was HR Director, this was one concern in the back of my mind, that one of these things would arise, and I felt very fortunate, and this is going back to someone you've spoken to, that there was an obvious candidate who happened to be working at Number 10 at that time, from the Foreign Office, in David Manning, he was the obvious person, to go off and be, obviously this was in the days of Tony Blair, the Ambassador in Washington, if he wanted to do it, and I knew him a bit and understood he did, and I think probably the

Permanent Under-Secretary did check with the Prime Minister and that was fine with him, so this was never an issue. The one thing for me was being up-front with people because, with the service as a whole, I said to them: look (I was talking to my senior staff in HR about it, I remember this) look, we all know that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary want David Manning to be the Ambassador; actually, if we have a board, he is the best candidate anyway, I can't see anyone who's going to come around who could possibly be a better candidate; we need to be honest with the service, saying to them: this is an exceptional circumstance, it happens very infrequently, but there's no point in our having a competition and pretending that we're going through a system, when this is the man who is going to be it. And actually that was fairly well received, I did put that out to everyone, so everyone could see, and there's no one who said to me that David Manning wouldn't have been appointed anyway, but they recognized that at least I was being transparent, that the system was not operating in this case, and what else can you do? It would have been much trickier if the Prime Minister had come up saying, well, I've got this fancy new adviser in Number 10, who's come from business, he'd be the perfect guy, that would have been much trickier and there would have been trouble with parliament.

MG: Yes, what would you say if he'd suggested Lex Greensill?

AC: Well, there is another side to this in that parliament was also very focused on Ambassadorial appointments, and there was a suggestion then, and I know there has been since, that the House of Commons ought to have the right, as the Senate has in the United States, which is to interview all prospective Ambassadors before they are formally cleared to go off to their posts. Now it's rare for the Senate to blackball anybody, but it is potentially a possibility, and I know there were those in the House who said: if the government is going to start appointing people from outside the system, then that strengthens the case for us to have the right to interview all prospective Ambassadors in the future. So this is a debate which has kept simmering and has never come to the boil, but I think if you started having a situation where it was being proposed that people like that were being appointed, it would come back big time very quickly, and be hard to resist.

MG: Yes, that's encouraging. So having been on the foreign policy side and worked your way up, and been an Ambassador, and also been on the administrative side, for a short while, what are your views on how it's changed, is it for the better or for the worse?

AC: It has changed enormously, but there's one thing I would say straightaway which is that when I started in 1978 it was just after, it had been the previous year, the issue of the so-called CPRS, the Central Policy Review Staff, Berrill Report, that was the name of the chap who headed it, this was a report on foreign representation, and it took a long time to write, and this was the time of the then Labour government, the Wilson and Callaghan government, and they had this thinktank called the CPRS which looked into loads of different things, and this was the backdrop to my starting, it came out with the idea, do we need Embassies anymore? And they boiled it down, it wasn't as simple as that, but it became known as replacing the Foreign Office with a fax machine, so the idea was that governments overseas could get in touch directly through this amazingly modern thing called a fax machine in the 1970s, and you don't need any Embassies, and to this day you can read online in Hansard all the various different debates that happened in parliament about all of this and it came to nothing, but the idea was certainly out there and it was questioned not for the first time whether we need all this paraphernalia of a special Foreign Office, which not every country in the world has, and its special outlets called Embassies. It's interesting now that here we are now in 2021 and again there's been a great shake of the kaleidoscope caused by Brexit, and I think interestingly now everyone sees there's a very strong case for having a strong Foreign Office, because the UK needs to build new style relationships around the world, both formally in trade and cooperation agreements, but also in the way we cooperate more widely, diplomatically and politically, so it's interesting to see that you've gone from that sort of 1970s discussion about abolishing the Foreign Office, to another great discussion of how the Foreign Office should evolve in this new era, but it's a much more positive agenda now, I think, than it was in the 1970s. I think, I mean the Foreign Office has its problems of bureaucracy like all civil service departments, and I think that's got a lot worse, I think there is a lot more bureaucracy and decisions are not made quite as freely and easily as they used to be, but it's also benefitted a lot over time by its own reputation being enhanced. I think the Foreign Office does have quite a high reputation, whether it's deserved or not you can

argue, but certainly when I talk to people from other government departments or countries, they tend to say: yes, the Foreign Office, a kind of Rolls Royce machine and this that and the other, and some of it may be based on past reputation rather than present, but whatever it's still there and people are very keen to work there, people are always asking me, how can I join the Foreign Office? So it's still regarded as a place to be, with exciting work to do, so those are the forty years in between, from a time when you are wondering whether it should exist to now people seeing its need being stronger than ever. Looking at the people we have now, there's no doubt that over the last few years, since Brexit, but also before, we have managed to attract in some very good mid-career people from academia, from business, from thinktanks, it's a much more mixed group. When I joined, the vast majority of people basically came direct from university, I was one of the older ones who wasn't doing that and even I'd only been a few years out. Now you get people of all sorts of ages who come through, and the numbers who come straight from university I would think, to the so-called fast stream, are probably a minority, a small minority I should think, some, but relatively few. So I think we do have people coming in with a bit more experience, obviously a lot more varied, a lot more women now, in fact probably in recruitment more women are recruited now than men, definitely, and obviously that takes time to translate into the higher echelons, but already you see nearly all our top Ambassadorships are now women, and in the directors general there are two or three of them. We haven't had a female Permanent Under-Secretary yet, but that will happen eventually, probably the next time round, so you can see that there's been a kind of feminisation of the service over the years, and obviously a lot more people from different backgrounds both ethnically and from other countries, so I think it is a different kind of organisation. But in many ways the ethos has stayed much the same, this reliance on teamwork is very important, the Foreign Office exists on teamwork, sharing information, and of course trying to prioritise which we're not very good at, but we keep on trying, so I think it's developed, if I think back forty years ago and I was told then what it would be like now I'd be quite happy that it's got to this situation.

MG: One of the things that having more women brings in train is, if they are married, what their husband does, and I was struck by this, and I'd like your view on it, because there's been a lot of talk since the demise of the Duke of Edinburgh about how he gave

up his career to support his wife, and how unusual that was at the time, and I think it's probably still pretty unusual, and I wonder how you cope? I mean you mentioned that when you went to Brazil your wife didn't go full time, but historically it is what happened, wasn't it, the children came in your baggage?

AC: That's one thing that has changed a great deal, in that, back in the 1970s, there was still this idea that you go overseas, you have a house, and you and your wife entertain people. It can be quite important, you have an entertainment allowance, and obviously I did various things, but the idea that your wife, husband or whatever needs to be involved in that, that's gone away now, and quite rightly. Before, that was the job, you needed to be married, you needed to have a wife then, and she needed to have her own circle of people as well in the society there and perhaps some interests with charities or whatever, but that's all gone. So I think that's helped in terms of women. I know there are people like Karen Pierce, for example, in Washington, her husband, who's never really been much involved in her career in recent times, I don't think he spends a lot of time in Washington, and it's the same with a lot of people. I think that's the one thing, I should have mentioned this before, when I was HR Director I used to chair the final selection board for recruits into the fast stream. Now for the Foreign Office, FCDO as it is now, and other civil service departments, there's a standard system which has been more or less the same since the second World War, called CISBE whereby people apply and you go through two days of written tests, which I imagine now is online, and then for those that get through, and of course the vast majority of people don't, these people are then called together and go through a couple of days of interviews, committee exercises, that sort of thing, and then that's it for the Civil Service, and people are chosen. Now the Foreign Office has often thought about getting rid of this, but as far as I know has not done so yet, and it has a third one, a final selection board because we felt: OK, we've gone through this system, the same as the Civil Service and we've got people who we think have the right intellectual abilities and personal qualities to be good civil servants, but we need an extra thing in the Foreign Office to make sure we are getting people who will fit into our particular service, and I used to chair that board. And one of the things I always used to say, and obviously you do say it to everyone, is, and this was the same whether it was a man or a woman: well how do you think you'd get on when your first

posting is Pakistan, and you can't take your family because of the security situation? Because that sort of thing happens a lot, and can happen suddenly. And it is the reality, that you have to have that flexibility, and, yes, ideally you'd be travelling around everywhere with your family and it would all work out perfectly, but it may not work out because security doesn't allow, it may be particularly difficult because you have a child with special needs, and people will try hard to make sure you can go to a place where there is a school for that child, but that may restrict your ability to go to places that you're really interested in, so there are certain issues about families. The most difficult thing about a foreign service career is how the family is affected and what you have to do, and I used to say to people quite honestly, you make the best decision you can, and it may be sometimes the least worst option, but that is sometimes the price of being in the service. Obviously the relationships now with married couples are very different and I'm not saying it's not harder being a woman than a man, but I think it's much more similar than it used to be, put it that way, and certainly whereas when I was in the first part of my service, any senior woman was unmarried, or widowed, or something, nowadays that's not the case, and they find a way, and that's what you have to do: find a way.

MG: Are there things from your early days and the way it used to be that have gone that you regret, that you think shouldn't have gone?

AC: Um ... this probably sounds a typical complaint, not a complaint but an observation of someone who is of an older generation now actually, rather than just the Foreign Office, but I did find when I was in HR, and I think it's even worse now, the kind of language that people use, the sort of semi-scientific language people use about things, is rather off-putting, I think there was much more plain speaking in the olden days, to be frank, plain speaking, but also more elegant writing, I think, on the whole. The more elegant writing, that's another thing which obviously goes with the times, people used to be much more careful about the way they wrote in those days, and using their semi colons correctly and so on, and that's not the most important thing, as long as you can write briefly and to the point. But the use of jargon for things all the time which carries certain connotations, I think is a problem, and I'm rather glad I'm not in charge of HR these days, for example.

MG: Yes, all the acronyms that you have now.

AC: Oh the acronyms as well, you learn as a diplomat that you have to put up with a certain amount of these things and it doesn't really matter and you can still do your job anyway, and the trick is not to get annoyed by it and allow it to push you off your stroke, but that's just a minor gripe, I think. Certainly I get asked a lot by people, would you recommend a career in the foreign service? To which I say: well, all I can say is that I'm really glad that I had the opportunity and I really enjoyed it, and I think a lot of people would, but you have to be aware of the difficult parts, particularly to do with how you manage your family.

MG: So you think that, at the present, particularly since Brexit, there's been a kind of flourishing of importance of the Foreign Office, because we used to be told that we had too many Arabists, and it wasn't representative, and it kind of lost its cachet somehow for a bit, didn't it?

AC: Yes, the too many Arabists thing was I think always rather unfair in that it's simply a fact that there are a lot of Arab countries in the world, and you do need quite a few people to staff them who can speak Arabic. Now the suggestion was that with that went particular attitudes, which may be the case in some areas but not necessarily in so many, so I think that's probably not a very fair thing. But the thing about the Foreign Office and I think I've probably said this before, I've certainly said it to a lot of other people, is that you've got to be flexible, because things can change, so the big change in my time was obviously the end of the Cold War, and suddenly all these people who were Kremlinologists, I think I mentioned before in the beginning, the first training course that I went on was on Communism, all these things become irrelevant. Similarly, all the great knowledge I had about the status of Berlin during the Cold War, all that became irrelevant, and suddenly you need other things, so I mentioned Yugoslavia, which went from one desk to about fifty people dealing with it when it became a big issue. And similarly now, suddenly you are bringing lots of people who are involved in considering how we're going to join the Trans-Pacific Alliance, for example, how we're going to extend our relations with country X, Y, Z, all these kinds of things, which means, for me, whereas I did wonder when I first joined the Foreign Office, what kind of future will it

be? Britain was a declining power in terms of its influence at that time, there was a lot of talk about it in the seventies, about that, and will we ever deal with anything that matters, basically? And I felt very lucky that, for one reason or another, there were things that mattered: we still mattered when I was in Jordan in the Arab world at that time; we were one of the occupying powers, so-called, in Berlin, when I was there; we did take the lead in Yugoslavia, which was the big issue in the early 1990s, the last time probably ever that we'll be the lead country on the major, political, foreign policy issue of the day; and obviously we were involved for good or ill in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the relations between Blair and Clinton, Blair and Bush were very big things; and then we talked about Gordon Brown and those days of the 2008 crash; and of course I think the Olympics in 2012 was quite a crowning glory in many ways, Britain's reputation was very high from that. Actually, I should tell a little story about that if I've not already told it which is relevant now we've just lost the Duke of Edinburgh, but after the visit of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to the United States, I ended up having a personal meeting with them and they gave me an award, made me a member of the Royal Victorian Order, and just as they were going back on their plane I said to them: well it's wonderful news that we're now having the Olympics staged in 2012, and both the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh said: we won't be around for that! So they weren't expecting to last five years, and of course they managed rather better than that!

MG: Yes, did you meet the Duke of Edinburgh many, many times?

AC: In Jordan, the first time he came by, I didn't meet him, although I was involved in preparation of the programme, he came when he was president of the World Wildlife Fund, and he was re-introducing the ibex or something like that to the Jordanian desert. I suppose the major times I met him really were in Germany and the United States, in Germany when they came to open the Embassy in 2000, he did come through Germany quite a lot when I was in Bonn and Berlin to visit his sisters while they were still alive, but I didn't actually see him, but I did see him in Berlin when he came to open the Embassy, and more so when the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh came on the state visit to Washington. I spent quite a lot of time with him, for example the car ride when we went

out to the Scientific Institute of NASA outside Washington, he regaled me for about three quarters of an hour on the importance of science.

MG: I was going to say, were you ever on the receiving end of one of his grillings? We've had these church people on the radio who had their sermons taken to pieces over lunch and things like that.

AC: It wasn't so much a grilling and more him saying: people just don't understand X, Y and Z and this sort of thing. The one thing I really regret, I probably mentioned it, was I was meant to go with him by helicopter from Jamestown over to visit the ship he'd been serving on in the Gulf of Tokyo at the time of the surrender of the Japanese, and I'd been there for the recce and there was this long gangway and I was told by the staff: he can jump up that, no problem, and he was then not a young man but he was very fit, and I ended up missing the helicopter after losing him, so I didn't get to do that. But I don't know if I already told this story, but when the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh came to open the Embassy in Berlin, and we had a dinner - I think I did tell you this story didn't I - he did walk up to me and a German general and said to the German general: I think I know you, but names are a funny thing, the great thing about Alzheimer's is you get to know new people every day! And that was very much his style.

MG: Yes, I think you did mention that one, you didn't mention the other but if it's in there I obviously won't write it twice. What I needed to ask was, you mentioned the Permanent Under-Secretary when you were at HR, I ought to have his name down for the record.

AC: Well there were two, as I say, the outgoing one was John Kerr, now Lord Kerr...

MG: Is he the one who's taken Irish citizenship?

AC: I don't know, it's the sort of thing he would do! He's certainly very much involved in the whole Brexit business in the House of Lords. He was one of the really formidable people in the Foreign Office, he was Ambassador in Washington at one time, but I think he's probably best known for being Permanent Under-Secretary. But he was very much a Europeanist, and worked in his younger days for the Prime Minister, he was always the person who was there in summits, coming up with ideas. So, there was him and the one

after him was Michael Jay, I think he's still with us, as we speak, I know he's been ill, but he's also Lord Jay, now, who was our Ambassador in Paris, later on. They are important people, the Permanent Under-Secretaries, there's no question, they are people you end up being affected by and relating to.

MG: And when you say that there was a worry that would we, as a declining power, ever amount to anything, the thing that your recollections show, as you've enumerated, is how things change, how something that's really important becomes of no consequence, and something else comes on, and of course interestingly you started off in Jordan in your first overseas posting, and now it's in the news again. Do you know the people that are involved, the chap who claims he was under house arrest - is it a family squabble?

AC: Yes, and it seems to have been sorted right now. One of the interesting things in Jordan, it's an amazing thing, they're celebrating, or coming up to the 100th anniversary of the existence of the state, it wasn't independent then, it was a creation after the first World War by the British, basically, part of our mandate first of all, but basically, they have survived through great leadership. The present King, his father was King Hussein who was the King when I was there, and King Hussein was married a number of times, but his second wife was Toni Gardiner who was the daughter of the British Defence Attaché in the Embassy, she's still around although she has such a low profile you'd never know it, and always has had, she never had anything but, and they had a number of children, it was definitely a love-match, and Mohammad, the King now, was one of those, and so he is, if you like, half British by birth, and was educated in Britain and went to Sandhurst and so on, and one of the worries I remember when I was at the Embassy, was the Crown Prince then was King Hussein's brother, Hassan, who remained the Crown Prince for a very long time, until the King died, and the King had kind of decreed that Mohammad should be King, King Hussein had decided that, and so we thought if Hassan ends up dying, and it's Mohammad, would he be accepted, does he even speak Arabic very well, how much time has he spent here? But he's proved, like everyone else, he's by no means perfect, he's made mistakes, but one thing he does have is this ability to have good personal relations with people, which is what King Hussein was brilliant at. Very much a people person. Now the brother who was talking about being incarcerated

and about whom there were claims he made a coup, was the son of the marriage with Queen Noor. Queen Noor was an American basically, with Syrian heritage, Lisa Halaby, she was actually as American as pie in most ways, and she was the Queen when I was in Jordan, the fourth wife, because the first wife was a kind of intellectual Egyptian, there was one daughter from that, the second was Toni Gardiner and that ended in divorce because the King needed to marry an Arab, he was under a lot of political pressure. He married Alia, who tragically was killed in a plane crash, and so Lisa Halaby was the fourth wife, who was the wife really for a very long time, until the King died, and so, when I was in Jordan, the guy who was in the videos was just a toddler, he was born in the early 1980s. He does look uncannily like King Hussein I have to say, I think that's part of the attraction, that he has, because people still have this vision of who they want to be King, and it's basically King Hussein! So, here's a son who looks very much like him, and that counts for something.

MG: Yes, I understand that.

AC: Yes, it's funny how it goes on, but they seem to be finding a way of moving on. I think people often say, which country did you most enjoy and there's no answer to that because you go there and there's something in everything, but the one I feel most affection for, even if I wouldn't want to be going to live there, would be Jordan, it's a country I feel a lot of affection for.

MG: Well thank you very much indeed. It's been a very interesting set of recollections.