

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Terence (Joseph) CLARK

(Born 19 June 1934; son of Joseph Clark and Mary Clark; married 1960 to Lieselotte Rosa Marie Müller.)

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This is an interview with Sir Terence Clark on Friday 8 November 2002 and the interviewer is Charles Cullimore, also a former member of the Diplomatic Service.

CC Terence, I wonder if I could ask you to start off with the usual question that gets asked on these occasions, which is, 'what was it that made you decide to apply for the Foreign Service, as it then was, in the first place?'

TC I never really contemplated any other kind of career. For family reasons I had to take charge of my own destiny at a relatively early age. I think I was probably about 14 or 15 when I realised that I had to make my own way in life. I had already developed a rather precocious talent, I suppose, for foreign languages since I had a natural ear. So when I looked around at the opportunities for using that talent it seemed to me that in Britain at that time it was either teaching or working in some government capacity abroad. I was so keen in fact to get into a working environment, so that I could use this talent, that already at the age of 16 I sat and passed the clerical examination for the Foreign Service. I matriculated, stayed on at school of course, further developed my language skills and took the executive grade examination for the Foreign Service while still at school. I left school, started my National Service where I went straight into the Joint Services School for Linguists, studied Russian - and it included a year at the School of Slavonic Studies at Cambridge - and by the end of my National Service I graduated as an interpreter in English - Russian and Russian - English and became a Pilot Officer in the RAF. At that stage I was torn between going back to university to pursue my Russian studies, and I had the opportunity to do so, or taking up the opening I already had in the Foreign Service as a B5 executive officer. Again, largely because of family reasons, I decided on the latter option and I joined the Foreign Service as it then was in August 1955. To my surprise, and it remained a source of astonishment for a long period afterwards, I had fondly imagined that with my linguistic qualifications I was a certainty for a posting to Moscow but.....

CC A reasonable assumption.

TC A reasonable assumption. In fact the introduction to the Foreign Service was, to say the least, haphazard. There was no induction programme. I was left to a large extent to my own

devices. I was occasionally told to go and attend a department to see how a department worked. I was given time to find my way around the Office which was of course quite a challenge, when you had no experience of the building, which was antiquated and complicated, but for a month or 6 weeks I really didn't do very much at all. Then one day I was summoned to Personnel Department and I was interviewed with a view to my doing a further hard language. That was a strange interview in which I was offered initially the possibility of doing either Burmese or Finnish, which took me aback, when I thought rapidly of the prospects, going up and down the road to Mandalay or sitting out the freezing winters in Finland, with really nowhere else to go where one could use those languages. So I said off the top of my head "couldn't I do something that is a little more widely spoken, like Arabic", because I knew already that there were something like 20 missions at least in the Middle East and therefore the chances of a variety of posts, if not advancement, were rather greater in that area. To my surprise the reaction was of overwhelming welcome. I was embraced as if I was a long lost brother, because the intake before mine had been more or least press-ganged into going to the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies (MECAS) in the Lebanon with disastrous results. I think of the 6 or 8 students who went three-quarters of them rebelled and most of them in fact did not pursue a career in the Arab world. So that was not a very happy experience and what they were actually looking for at that time, it wasn't indicated at the outset, was volunteers. So as a volunteer I was very welcome. Almost immediately afterwards I was sent off to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) to start an introductory course in Arabic. Up to that stage I had been in the Diplomatic Service for 2 or 3 months, and I had not even seen a draft paper. I had absolutely no training whatsoever for the Diplomatic Service. At SOAS we were a cross section of A stream and B stream members of the Foreign Service plus a few army or airforce or navy officers and we went through a process of sorting out the sheep from the goats: those who might make a go of Arabic and those who clearly never would. The filtration process was quite thorough and I think quite effective. After a full term's study we had a little examination and those who passed went on to MECAS, travelling in enormous style, first class on the Simplon Orient express from London to Venice and then by a cruise liner from Venice to Beirut. It was fantastic. MECAS remains for me a source of great pleasure, not only because it gave me the potential for Arabic but also because it was the kind of university atmosphere which I had missed; and for something like 15 months we went through an intensive programme of study

of the language, history, politics and geography of the Arab world, accompanied by a fairly rudimentary grounding in the law of the Persian Gulf, because most of the graduates from MECAS eventually went to the Gulf, where at that time Britain retained jurisdiction over various classes of people, and in addition to our other functions we also acted as registrars in court. I'll come back to that perhaps a little later. MECAS also remains very firmly in my mind for quite different reasons and that is that I almost lost my life there. It was in a way a kind of experience which brought home to me, in my naivety at that time, the dangers of our profession. This was of course in 1956 at the time of Suez when the young diplomats on the Arabic course were full of gloom and foreboding about the events which were about to unfold. We knew from our close contacts with the Embassy in Beirut that the overwhelming advice coming from the diplomats in the Middle East was that it would be a mistake of huge proportions for Britain to attack Egypt. Nevertheless, the attack went ahead and as a consequence and, of course a very small minor side-show, of that attack, Arab terrorists, almost certainly Palestinian, launched an attack on MECAS on one dark and stormy night. I was sitting alone in my bedsit at the school, thunder and lightning crashed around, when suddenly there was a rather louder bang and all the lights went out. A fellow student in a nearby room who had been in the Palestine police force came into my room, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me out. He said there had been a bomb, and as a Palestine policeman he knew what bombs were like. So we got out of the building, all in darkness and torrential rain and I always remember our night-watchman screaming his head off using the Arabic word 'sharmouta' which means prostitute; and that is how I learnt the word prostitute in Arabic. Up to that point I suppose I must have been a bit dazed and it was only when I got outside I realised that there was blood running down my neck. The Chief Instructor at the school, James, later Sir James Craig, came across from his house and took control; I had been cut by glass. A lucky escape. I had been sitting in a high-backed armchair with my back to the window. A bomb had been put on the floor below my room in the wall which, fortunately, absorbed much of the blast, but the window had been blown in, the ceiling had come down and when I visited my room the following day I was amazed to find the silhouette of my chair outlined in slivers of glass on the door on the other side of the room, like knife throwers' knives at the circus. If I hadn't been in that chair it would have been a different story. So MECAS was a source of great pleasure but also, as I said, a salutary reminder of the dangers to which we, as diplomats, are exposed from time to time.

CC Were there any other casualties at that time?

TC No, I was the sole casualty. After graduating from MECAS, as I said, most of the young diplomats went almost automatically to the Gulf. The Gulf in the late 1950s was as if still under the control of the British Raj, although the Raj had come to an end in 1947 in the sub-continent itself. By one of those strange quirks, for which we British are so famous, the system for administering the Gulf had lingered on. So I was appointed to the British Political Residency in Bahrain, not an embassy, as a Third Secretary. The Residency had oversight of all our missions, which were not called embassies or consulates-general but Political Agencies, from Kuwait to Bahrain to Qatar to the then Trucial States and another anomaly, Muscat and Oman, as the country was then called, which was rather more independent than the other states, where we had a Consulate-General. So from the Political Residency we had oversight of all these posts down the Gulf. The Residency was not the only vestige of the Raj, my introduction to society in Bahrain was, well, it took me completely aback. I had simply not registered that life had not moved on there as it had elsewhere in the world. I had already got used to diplomatic life in Lebanon where I was closely connected with the Embassy. Yet Bahrain was claustrophobic. It was de rigeur to wear formal dress in the evening, and not just a dinner jacket but a special form of dress called Gulf rig. There was also Red Sea rig and other similar forms of dress in other parts of the world, but Gulf rig was something special to the Gulf. It was worn most evenings. When we got home from the office and were going out in the evening that was what you wore. It was white trousers, a black cummerbund and a short sleeved open necked white shirt, quite comfortable and suitable for the conditions in the Gulf. It was required that newcomers called on the leading members of the community to leave cards, and it was only after we had gone through that procedure that we would be recognised as present. I remember also within my first week of being there being taken by one of the outgoing Secretaries, a junior Third Secretary, who told me, 'Look old boy, you had better get yourself properly kitted out.' I mentioned Gulf rig, but there was also the other thing that I didn't possess, a white sharkskin dinner jacket for the winter. I had to have mess wellingtons, because of mosquitoes, and these were hand made in the souk, in the bazaar, and ...

CC Was there malaria?

TC There was malaria, and we had to take prophylactics. So there was this extraordinary atmosphere which was perhaps crystallised in the programme for the first of January. The Ruler came to call on the Political Resident.

CC Not the other way round?

TC Not the other way round. To convey his personal greetings to Her Majesty The Queen. The Ruler came along in a black Rolls Royce, accompanied by a mounted guard of lancers, straight out of the Raj, and he was received by the Political Resident in full uniform. But it was very much, it seemed to me, master and pupil. Again difficult for a newcomer to gauge the relationship but interesting at that time. The formal relationship was of course that Britain through treaties signed with the Rulers of the territories down the Gulf was responsible for the foreign affairs and defence of those states, but not the internal affairs. But it seemed to me that from time to time that line was crossed and indeed the Rulers tended to seek our advice on the whole range of activities.

CC And act on it, usually?

TC And act on it. One of the highlights of my fairly short stay at the Residency (I had already served, of course, a year and a half roughly at MECAS, then a spell of leave, then another year and a half at the Residency) was in 1957, when the then Sultan of Muscat and Oman called on Britain to help him fight an internal rebellion. There again it was a prime example of our intervention in the internal affairs of a friendly state. I, as the young Arabist member of staff, was drafted in to write the Arabic leaflets which were then dropped by RAF aircraft over villages in the Jebel Akhdar region of Oman warning the people that they should leave their homes at once. Again, terribly exciting, you have to remember that this was in the days of manual cypher exchanges, by telegraph, every man jack of us in the Residency was working on a shift basis around the clock trying to cope with the vast amount of telegrams to and from posts and the Foreign Office, all laboriously written down by hand. So it was a very exciting period and I was sad when, in summer 1958, I was told at 48 hours' notice that I

was not coming back to Bahrain after leave, but I would be going to another hot-spot. I was posted to Amman, Jordan...

CC I must just ask you before you go on to that, to what extent during that time in Bahrain, and you talked about calling on the leading members of the British community, how much social contact did you have with leading Arabs and local people?

TC Again as the Orientalist on the staff I generally accompanied the Political Resident on his calls on the leading members of the Arab community acting as interpreter. So in a way I was in my junior rank privileged to meet a lot of the members of the community. But I and another fellow graduate from MECAS who had been appointed to the Political Agency in Bahrain at the same time, and we shared a house together, were also required to do something which was regarded as rather new, somewhat daring, which was to cultivate the young Bahrainis. Indeed the year before I arrived there had been, for the first time ever, demonstrations against the British and the then Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, was stoned driving from the airport into town. And there was political agitation, some of the agitators being exiled to prison on one of Bahrain's islands. So our task was to try to get to know some of the young, well educated, Bahraini people to influence them and try to find out what was going on. So that was something of an innovation. So my colleague and I set about that and indeed we began to form quite a circle of Bahraini friends.

CC So you had a sort of special dispensation, so to speak, to do that, but from what you say am I right in thinking it wasn't the norm for there to be a lot of social contact?

TC Not exactly, no, because Bahrain was essentially a merchant community and many of the merchants had longstanding relations, particularly with India, and a lot of them spoke English well, so that it would be quite normal to invite members from the merchant community to functions. One didn't see so many members of the ruling family who were rather more exclusive. So when I got back to London for leave I was told that, because of the crisis which was looming in Jordan, I'm talking of the summer of 1958, there had been a revolution in Iraq when the Iraqi Royal family had been brutally butchered and the situation in Jordan was tense. King Hussain asked for support and the British government sent in a military

force to bolster his regime. I was sent, in fact I arrived with some of the troops, to act as an information officer liaising between the Embassy, British forces and the Arab press. So again it was enormously exciting for a few months but of course the situation calmed down again, the British forces withdrew and life settled down to a more customary level in what was a very small town in a very small country with few resources, with very close relations with Britain. The British Ambassador and the King met frequently: they lived about 100 yards apart in the same compound. It was amazing. So whenever we went to the Ambassador's residence we drove in through the Royal compound. They had a very close relationship. But after I had been there Well, I got married first of all in Amman. My future wife came out from Germany to meet me there and to marry there, because we felt we had to be on neutral territory, as it were, as her parents couldn't speak English and mine couldn't speak German. But after that I began to find life less and less interesting. Again I never had any formal training of any kind. In fact to go back just for a second to Bahrain, I had been in the Diplomatic Service by then 18 months. As I mentioned I think, I had never been introduced to a sheet of draft paper and there I was suddenly in chancery in Bahrain expected to carry out the duties of a Third Secretary in chancery. I didn't even know how a chancery functioned. I didn't know how to use a registry. I certainly couldn't do cypher work. I knew nothing. And I received absolutely no training whatsoever. I was told to get on with it. Equally in Jordan I wasn't given a job description. I had to make up my duties as I went along. I always remember one day the Counsellor called me in and he said, 'Look, you have got all these contacts with the Arabs but we don't see any fruit of it.' So I said, 'Well, what is it you want me to do.' He said, 'Well, write some records of people you have been talking to and supply us with information.' So I said, 'Right, I will do that.' That was the first time I had been asked to do anything specific. So from then on I did exactly that. Right up to 1960 I suppose, I had been in the service for 5 years, I had never had an interview on my annual report. I don't think I was aware there was an annual report, and certainly I had never been told how I was doing, or whether I should be doing more or less or anything. No guidance whatsoever. By the end of nearly 2 years in Jordan I was becoming more and more disillusioned about what I was there for. Eventually I submitted a memorandum to the Head of Chancery suggesting that my post should be abolished. I was then told that a new post was being created in Morocco for which I had the qualifications, if I was interested. I said yes. I think you were asking earlier why I had a sequence of Arab postings...

CC Well it seemed unusual for the Office to actually manage to do that...

TC And indeed it was unusual, most of my contemporaries had one post after MECAS in the Arab world and then back to London. So I fetched up in the new post at the Consulate General in Casablanca. Morocco at that time had two posts, the Embassy in Rabat and ... three posts actually, or three and a half really, because we had a Consulate-General in Tangiers, a Consulate-General in Casablanca, an Embassy in Rabat and we had a Vice-Consulate in Fez, but Casablanca was the economic and political hub of Morocco. Rabat was the administrative capital. I was tasked to cultivate what had been identified as a growing opposition to the monarchy in Morocco. It was thought this was likely to destabilise the monarchy and we had nobody monitoring that sector of activity.

CC A very difficult assignment.

TC Particularly for someone still with remarkably little training. It was widely assumed that because I spoke Arabic I could plunge into Moroccan society and speak Arabic but as I very quickly found out it was a different language and it was extremely hard work trying to get on to terms with the kind of Arabic which the people I was supposed to cultivate spoke. My targets were the media of course and the trade unions. It was not really a happy experience. The Consulate-General had been run on very traditional lines for obvious reasons. It was a Consulate-General largely engaged in commercial work and consular affairs. There hadn't been a political officer there. So I had to carve out my own niche and it wasn't entirely welcome to my immediate superior officer, the Consul, who got the impression that I was breathing down his neck. He was a locally engaged officer of enormous experience. He had been there, man and boy, for something like 30 years and thought, with some justification, that he was better placed to do what I was supposed to be doing as an upstart of 25.

CC But he had not been asked to do it.

TC No. So it was not exactly a happy relationship and I again asked if I could be moved on because I didn't feel I could work in this kind of environment. Things were taken out of my

hands by fate. I fell off a horse, broke my leg and had to be medivaced home. So that brought my stay in Casablanca to an end and it brought me into the Office, albeit on crutches...

CC For the first time ...

TC For the first time. And I was put in the Third Room of what was then called Eastern Department. We've always had a problem of what to call the Departments dealing with the Arab world and we have gone through a series of changes over the years but at that time Eastern Department dealt with all the countries East of Suez, including not only the Arab world but also including Iran. We had Arab/Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, CENTO, the Central Treaty Organisation at that time, and Iran. And for the first time I began to get an education as to what diplomacy was all about. I had a very happy two years in Eastern Department with wonderful colleagues who were patient and actually taught me some of the tools of the trade.

CC Which desk were you ...

TC I had Syria and Lebanon and Arab general, which means a sort of dogs body to anything that had a wider Arab connotation. I used to double for colleagues, when they were off sick, on Jordan or Israel, so I got a fairly wide experience of parts of the Arab world. I had wonderful tutors. Life of course in the office in those days was, by contemporary standards, still rather primitive. Communications were primitive. We used to use those strange suction machines that wafted telegrams through tubes around the Office. I was in a draughty room on the top floor of the Downing Street side of the Office, looking down on No. 10. A messenger used to come round with a bucket of coal for the fire, and we used to turn up on Saturday mornings, dressed down for the occasion, in sports jackets and some people used to wear black jackets and pepper and salt trousers, but it was an education. It lasted only two years when I was asked whether I was prepared to go to Dubai. Dubai in the summer of 1965 was seething. I was warned that I would probably not to be able to take my wife and, then, one son with me initially because the situation was tense. I was told that I would be sent initially as Commercial Officer, number three in the Political Agency, for a short spell, but

would take over as Assistant Political Agent thereafter. So I said, 'Yes, of course.' Off I went leaving my wife and son to go to her parents in Germany. I don't think I could have had a more dramatic entry into a post than to Dubai at that time. Dubai was then the principal state of the seven Trucial States. We had a Political Agency there under the direction of the Residency in Bahrain and we also had a Political Office in Abu Dhabi. We had oversight of the British officers who ran the Trucial Oman Scouts. We looked after the defence and external affairs of the Trucial States. At the time of my posting one of the Rulers, the Ruler of Sharjah, was trying to change that situation and to assert his independence. He had improperly, that is to say in contravention to the treaties, entered into a dialogue with the Arab League and we thought that this was the thin end of a wedge. We couldn't allow it and it would have to be stopped. There was a great deal of discussion, intrigue, the exact details of which I wouldn't want to go into. The upshot of all that was that the ruling family of Sharjah decided that it was not in Sharjah's and in their interests for the Ruler to continue to rule and that his actions were endangering the status quo!

I would say that Dubai was the most enjoyable and most interesting of all the postings that I had except Iraq. It was unusual, it was in a way something, I suppose, akin to a District Officer's role in the Colonial Service. I was still a young man. I should mention that on a personal level I had sat the entry examination for Branch A of the Service. I had passed the first two stages but I had failed the final interview. But I was subsequently invited to 'board', that is to say to come before a board convened in the Foreign Office from time to time to select suitable people for bridging. While I was in Dubai that happened and I bridged; and I was appointed First Secretary, Grade 5 and Assistant Political Agent. So ...

CC It's remarkable what fascinating jobs you had anyway before that, even though you hadn't bridged. It doesn't seem to have made the slightest difference to those early appointments.

TC So there I was as Assistant Political Agent with an enormous range of work. I was head of the political reporting section. I used to deal on a weekly basis with the so-called Desert Intelligence Officers, members of the Trucial Oman Scouts, who sat in the remotest corners of the Trucial States and knew everything that went on locally, or at least thought they did. I

also oversaw some very strange aspects of diplomatic life. We controlled the issue of liquor permits to entitled people, which brought with it all kinds of problems. We also oversaw the issue of import licences for arms by local people. So these were most unusual functions for a Diplomatic Service officer. Also whenever the Political Agent was absent, and in my time for a variety of reasons I was often in charge for quite long periods, I had the function of contacting the six rulers of the northern Trucial States, less Abu Dhabi, sometimes on a daily basis. I could go to see them almost whenever I wanted; it sometimes meant getting a helicopter from the Trucial Oman Scouts, to shoot up to Ras al Khaimah perhaps to rap their knuckles if they were up to something we didn't approve of. There was one occasion when I was tipped off that the Ruler of Ras al Khaimah was about to issue a series of stamps bearing the Queen's effigy and no-one but Britain could issue stamps bearing the Queen's effigy, certainly not a country such as Ras al Khaimah. So I had to summon a helicopter, fly up to Ras al Khaimah and visit the Ruler in his fort. It had no air conditioning; it was in summer and stinking hot, and there we sat cross-legged on the floor in this room in a mud brick fort and I was telling him that the stamps which he was going to issue the following day could not issue.

CC How did he take that?

TC He wasn't very pleased clearly because a good deal of money was hanging on this. His poor state much depended on such things as the issue of stamps. But he saw the argument and the issue was cancelled. It was one of the few successes I can claim in my diplomatic career!

CC Most diplomatic successes are about things that didn't happen.

TC So this whole period of my life was fascinating, full of unusual duties. For example, sitting down under a palm tree negotiating between two warring sides to stop shooting. In 1967 when we closed down a military base in Aden the forces were relocated to Sharjah, and we had to establish a camp for them there. This meant literally walking over the ground with the Ruler of Sharjah and putting down white markers to mark the perimeter of the future British camp. In the night one section of the white markers had been removed by the Ruler

of the neighbouring state of Ajman, who fetched up in our office the next morning complaining that we had encroached on his territory. There then followed a long and difficult discussion involving the two Rulers, the elders of both states, trying to decide exactly where the border was between those two countries. Another time the Ministry of Overseas Development as it then was wanted to donate a generator to supply electricity to two neighbouring townships, but they belonged to different states and my duty was to find a location where to put this generator. I went over and sat down with both sides; yes, they all wanted electricity but they both wanted the generator on their soil. So we had to reach a compromise using the wisdom of Solomon, and split this thing somehow down the middle.

CC Did you put it half way across the border or ...

TC Well, exactly. The problem then was to find where the border was and again we went through this long rigmarole of elders saying, no, no, in my grandfather's time that palm tree was this side of the border, and so on. In the end we found a compromise and the generator was installed. So all these extraordinary things happened in these nearly three and a half years.

One of the other extraordinary moments in my career happened as I was coming to the end of my tour in Dubai. As the main Arabist on the staff it was normal for me to interpret for visiting Ministers and we had a visit from the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Lord Goronwy Roberts, who came out on a goodwill visit to the Gulf to assure the Rulers of the Labour government's intentions to continue the relationships as of old. And I duly interpreted that to the Ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Rashid ...

CC I was just thinking that was about the time when the Dennis Healey reforms were coming into effect, recalling troops from East of Suez.

TC That's right. So I had to interpret Goronwy Roberts' assurances. Within a matter, I think it was of weeks if my memory serves me correctly, Goronwy Roberts came back again. The Labour government had decided to withdraw from East of Suez. And I had to interpret the decision that we were going to withdraw our military presence and would not be able to give

the kind of defence of the Gulf that we had in the past. There would be other things that we were going to do but not the same kind of relationship as before, and that indeed we were planning to change our relationship with the Gulf states. This was a bombshell. I remember the night before we were going to see Shaikh Rashid, the Ruler of Dubai, how we agonised with the Minister, how we were going to put this across. I was feeling extremely nervous because with Goronwy Roberts were a number of senior members of the service, Arabists, who were going to listen to my every word and they laid it absolutely on the line that I should say so much and no further. What I had been instructed to say sounded in Arabic as if it was an incomplete sentence and, I can't go into the details now, but it was very difficult to do it in Arabic. The next morning when we had the audience with Shaikh Rashid, we were all sitting round in a circle and Goronwy Roberts started. I was doing the interpretation a few sentences at a time and when we came to the key sentence I felt myself saying what I had to say in Arabic and opening my mouth as if to go on. I was conscious of all these eyes concentrating on me, saying for God's sake don't say another word. It was a very tense moment. But we got through it.

CC And you didn't go on?

TC So we announced our departure from the Gulf in 1971 and the end of that very special relationship. So that whole way of life for the diplomats came to an end. I might just mention one other aspect of life in the Gulf. I said that we were also registrars of the court, carrying out the requirements of Persian Gulf law as it applied to the non-Muslim foreigners, and once again we all had, as young diplomats, this basic training while at MECAS. But actually going into a court, to preside over a court, with lawyers present was a daunting experience. Even though it was in some places a backwoods, very simple courts and court procedures, it was still a question of a relatively young person and relatively inexperienced, administering a barely sufficiently understood civil code – we did not handle criminal cases – with the minimum of experience and knowledge. So attending court I also found unusual, certainly not repeated later on, and exciting.

CC How much of your time did that take up?

TC Actually not a lot, because the cases themselves weren't all that frequent, very often they could be sorted out before coming to court. In fact I only did it in Bahrain I think two or three times, but that was exceptional because in Bahrain we had two missions, we had a lot more people available, we also had a professional judge ...

CC But were you doing it in Dubai during your time?

TC Yes, in Dubai.

CC At the same time as you might have been acting as the Political Agent...

TC Yes, so that was another unusual aspect.

CC And when we announced this decision to withdraw from the Gulf partially. Was there any effect on our various treaties? Was it then necessary to rescind them because, as you said, we had treaty arrangements, not like a colony?

TC Yes, but that was after I left. Then one day the Political Agent called me in and said, 'I've got news for you, they want you to go to Belgrade.' I was completely taken aback, it was not what I had expected at all.

CC The first time out of the Arab world.

TC The first time out of the Arab world. I had asked repeatedly, we used to fill in a thing called a post preference form annually, saying where you would like to go and why, and I always used to put down that someday I would like to get to the Soviet Union to use my declining Russian. The Office felt that Belgrade was not all that far away and they spoke a language which was roughly like Russian. So I was sent off to Belgrade to be First Secretary (Information). A strange world Belgrade, this was in 1969 to 1971, with the beginnings of opposition to the dead hand of Communism. Our information effort was large for a relatively small post. It must have had a staff of 10 or so, a lot of it putting out information to the media. Much of the pleasurable part of the job was travelling throughout Yugoslavia,

because every constituent part of Yugoslavia, which was divided up into Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and so on, every centre had its own media. So I was constantly on the move, talking to editors, TV, radio ...

CC And there were no travel restrictions, unlike the Soviet Union, on diplomats?

TC Well, I was followed from time to time and I suppose they took note of the people I saw as they did in any Communist state, but it was relatively simple. So for 3 years I got to know Yugoslavia probably better than most people in the service. I simply had that opportunity. I found Serbo-Croat very easy after Russian and I could speak it fluently. That was to serve me in very good stead later on. While I was there, coming to the end of my three year tour, I was summoned by my Ambassador to be told of a posting and he said they wanted me to go as Head of Chancery, and I thought he said, Moscow, which seemed to me a sort of logical move from Belgrade to Moscow, having Russian and the background and I said, 'Moscow!', and he said, 'No, no, not Moscow, Muscat!', which was a complete surprise. So I duly buckled to and went off to be Head of Chancery in Muscat. This was in the beginning of 1972. By that time the special relationship which Britain had enjoyed with the Gulf states had just come to an end so we were really feeling our way in a new era. The former post in Muscat had been a Consulate-General under the supervision of the Political Resident in Bahrain. Under the new arrangements it was a completely independent post and the first British Ambassador had been appointed to Muscat. He naturally wanted to establish a proper Embassy and I was to go as the first Head of Chancery.

CC Who was the first ambassador?

TC Sir Donald Hawley. So in the period that I was there, again very short, only two years, it was a period of establishing a proper functioning Embassy. Not only had our political relationship changed but there had also been a significant change of regime. The former Sultan had been ousted by his son in 1970 in July and the young Sultan was also finding his way. He depended quite heavily on Britain for support so it was a particularly interesting period with a new Sultan, a new Embassy, each establishing a new relationship. Under the previous Sultan, the country was then called Muscat and Oman, and had lived virtually in the

Middle Ages. So, again, this whole antiquated country was undergoing profound changes.

I, arriving in Muscat, came in on a twin-engined small aircraft which hopped over the mountains and landed rather suddenly on a concrete runway, which had been a military runway, got into a Land Rover and drove on the only section of tarmac road in the country to the Embassy. When I left two years later, I left the Embassy in a small car driving on a four-lane highway to an international airport. And all this in the space of two years. So it was an extremely exciting and quite demanding period of great evolution. Oman is a lovely country, the people are charming and have a very close relationship with us, so it was also an extremely enjoyable country to serve in at that period. It came to an end rather suddenly, I was there for barely two years and I think through the intervention of Patrick Wright, who had taken over as the new Head of Middle East Department, with whom I had served at MECAS as one of his students. Patrick Wright wanted me to join him as his assistant in the Department. This was the first opportunity that I had had in a career, which was already of 15 years, of serving in the Office at a level which brought me into contact with the people who really made things tick. It was a particularly exciting period because of the oil price hike and the fallout which we as a Department dealing with the major oil producers helped to manage. It was a time again when we were working flat out, actually sleeping in the office because of difficulties of working in the Foreign Office at that time when we had no power, no electricity. It was quite extraordinary in those times to be reduced to working under literally one electric light bulb in our girls' room, where the typists sat, because that was where the coffee was. I think I found this period extremely important for my subsequent career because it really brought me into contact with the higher echelons of the Office, the Ministers, because when I was in charge of the Department it was normal to deal direct with the senior Under-Secretaries and the Ministers themselves. The Office was in those days still run very much on a hierarchical basis and, for example, desk officers hardly ever came into contact with Ministers or Deputy Under-Secretaries, it was all funnelled upwards through the Head of Department. That changed later on to the good. So it was a very formative period.

CC Does that mean you had much contact back then, with for example the Foreign Secretary ...

TC Yes, for two reasons, not only because at times I was in charge of the Department but

also I continued using my interpreting skills and I usually interpreted for the Foreign Secretary whenever we had any visitors from my part of the Middle East ...

CC Was this Alec Douglas-Home? ...

TC Callaghan, who was a lovely man to work with. I remember when he came in as Foreign Secretary. One of his first visitors was the Ruler of Qatar and I went down to interpret and also to take a note. I arrived 5 minutes beforehand in the outer office and was summoned in; and Callaghan turned to me and said, 'Tell me, where is Quayter?' But he was a superb performer and everybody loved him. I also used to interpret for the Queen whenever her visitors came over which was at times quite daunting because my Department had of course drafted the brief for the Queen and so we knew, or I knew, what she should say and what she should not say, subjects to be avoided. I remember I was interpreting on one occasion when a visitor from one of the Gulf states was calling on her and we had listed in items not to be raised the position of women, because in the Gulf states they held a very back seat in society and were generally not referred to in conversation ...

CC You nearly said polite conversation ...

TC To my surprise, and these are always very difficult moments when you are interpreting because panic seizes you, and you tend to dry up. The Queen referred to his family and particularly whether he had any daughters. And before I knew it we were off on the subject of the education of women. But it all went absolutely beautifully and the visiting Ruler was entirely at ease and happy to discuss the whole thing; and we had got it completely wrong! I will mention one other moment of horror in that period. I had been drafted over to No. 10 to interpret for the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, when the then Crown Prince Fahad, who later became King of Saudi Arabia, was visiting and the form was that at dinner the guests would sit around with the Prime Minister, his principal guest on his right, and there would be two interpreters who sat behind, not having eaten I might add, and I sat behind Harold Wilson and there was an Arab interpreter sitting behind Prince Fahad. The idea was that during dinner we would each talk to our respective masters interpreting what was being said and then after dinner there were to be formal speeches. As we sat down at the table the Arab

interpreter whispered to me, 'Would you like to see Prince Fahad's speech?' And I thought, terrific, this gives me a chance to work it all out. So he passed me this thing over and during lulls in dinner I went through the speech and had my interpretation ready. Then I felt very confident when Prince Fahad got up to speak. To my horror, having heard what Harold Wilson said, he crunched up the speech in his hand and spoke extempore. Well it seemed to me like forever but I suppose it was a matter of seconds, my mind went completely blank and I had to turn to the Arab interpreter and ask what he said, until I could get going again. So this enjoyable and instructive period in Middle East Department came abruptly to an end in the middle of 1976 when I was asked whether I would like to go to Bonn on promotion to counsellor as Counsellor (Press and Information). I was not at first wildly enthusiastic. I was very happy to go to Germany, because having a German wife speaking German was an opportunity, but I was not very keen on doing information work again. However when we looked at all the aspects of it we decided it was worth going for and off we went. Bonn at that time was of course one of the great powerhouses of the Diplomatic Service. It was a very large mission, an ambassador, two ministers, seven counsellors, rafts of first secretaries, second secretaries, third secretaries, covering not simply our bilateral relationship but our relations with the European Union and more specifically our special position in Berlin. It was a great joy in fact to work under an Ambassador who was himself a tremendous showman, and I mean that in the best possible sense. He knew how to project and I learned from him enormously about the importance of public relations. I often used to travel with him to speak to the media, giving interviews to television, radio, or press all over the many media centres in Germany.

CC This was Sir Oliver Wright?

TC Yes. He was a great master of reducing often very complex subjects, particularly in the European Union sphere, to terms which the average person could very easily understand. He could do it, moreover, in both languages equally well. What at first seemed to me a not very encouraging prospect in fact turned out to be equally useful and educative for when I eventually took over my own mission. I suppose a high point in nearly 4 years in Bonn was the State Visit of the Queen in 1978. These things do not come round very often in a diplomat's career and Germany being the size it is and importance it is, with world-wide

relationships, meant a State Visit on a very large scale. My task was to liaise with the Queen's own Press Officer and the Press Office of the Federal German Government and directly with the journalists. This meant being involved right from the beginning in the planning stages of the visit, right through to the execution, and accompanying the Queen and her entourage on the visit. It was certainly a marvellous opportunity to see how a State Visit can contribute to the bilateral relationship. In terms of media coverage, in terms of public displays of affection for and certainly admiration for the Royal family and Britain, there can't be a better way of achieving that. The period in Bonn was also fascinating because we were going through an extremely difficult phase of our relationship with the European Union, when Britain was on the defensive over a whole range of issues and we as the Embassy, and I in my public relations function, spent an enormous amount of time defending British positions, explaining British positions and trying, I must say not all that successfully, to persuade the Germans of the validity of our points of view. But it was certainly a very interesting professional period for seeing how, for examining how the European Union impinged on the bilateral relationship.

CC You got the, was it, Order of Merit of the Federal Republic. That's an unusual thing to happen. Can you explain how that came about?

TC As a result of the Queen's visit all those who had been directly involved in the planning and execution of the visit received awards from Her Majesty. In fact we were summoned on board the Britannia in Bremerhaven. I was awarded the CVO because I was a Counsellor and that level of the Victorian Order went to people of that rank. The German government awarded the German Order of Merit to the British team organising the State Visit. So from the Ambassador downwards we were given the various medals of the German Order of Merit, and in my case it was the Commander's Cross. So that's the reason for that. As we were coming to the end of our stay in Germany, I could say that having a German wife was an enormous advantage, because it opened up many doors in German society which would have been more difficult, not impossible obviously, for someone without a command of the language, and certainly dealing with the media, we circulated really an enormous amount, it was really a great boon to have Liese there. In the old days of course having a German wife would almost have guaranteed an officer never going to that country. That was one of the

very enlightened changes that came about. Coming towards the end of my stay in Bonn the Ambassador summoned me one day to say that the Office wanted to move me to Belgrade as the No. 2 Political Counsellor. It was sold to me, because I was not very keen on going, by describing the very important events that were happening in Yugoslavia at that time. Tito was coming towards the end of his life and everyone was concerned about what would happen in the Balkans. There had been many forecasts about the break-up of Yugoslavia into its component ethnic parts and the consequences this would have for the stability of that part of Eastern Europe. I was told that as one of the few people of the right level with fluent Serbo-Croat and a wide experience of the country that I could help the then Ambassador who had no former experience of the country and was not a speaker of the language. So very reluctantly, because when we had been there ten years earlier life, living conditions had been pretty grim and my wife had not been very happy; she was more or less compelled to learn Serbo-Croat because without it life was very difficult; and with small children we were not terribly happy on a personal level. So we went off reluctantly and I have to say none of my worst fears were borne out. We found that the friendships that we had formed ten years earlier paid off handsomely. The people I had known as young journalists were now editors, chief editors, politicians, mayors and really from day one I was able to function on the telephone straight away with old friends. This period was tense, Tito was a long time dying, it must have been a good year after we had arrived that he eventually died. It was a period when we were closely examining the entrails of Yugoslavia trying to forecast what would happen. My personal feeling, based on constant travelling and interviewing people and so on, was that nothing would happen, that the mechanism which Tito had laid down for his succession, cumbersome and awkward as it was, would, in the special circumstances of Yugoslavia, work. And indeed so it did for almost a decade. That there would be trouble eventually was not difficult to forecast. Indeed before leaving Yugoslavia one of my last tasks was to undertake a close examination of the situation in Kosovo. I had made part of my special interest in the Mission the position of Islam in Yugoslavia, because of my earlier life and so on, so I often used to go down to Sarajevo to talk to the religious school there, with the Imams and so on, and to Kosovo to try to get a feel for the situation there. Kosovo at that time was going through one of its periodic periods of tension and I remember writing a report at the end of it all saying that this was a powderkeg which only needed a spark. Of course the spark was a long time in coming but all the ingredients were there for an explosion. I

think the only thing that stopped it at that time was the situation in Albania. People told me in Kosovo that if Albania had been more attractive than it was, it was still under Enver Hoja, a ghastly regime, conditions were worse than in Kosovo, if it had been a different situation there it would have exploded there and then and they would have gone to join Albania. It did not happen but at least as a diplomatic observer in Yugoslavia at that time it was intensely interesting.

This may be a good time to mention my Libyan episode. In the winter of 1981 I received a telegram from the FCO asking whether I was prepared to stand in as Chargé d'Affaires for the Ambassador in Tripoli while he went on leave for a couple of months. The Libyans had declared his deputy persona non grata in revenge for our expulsion of a Libyan diplomat. Belgrade in winter was not an attractive place and the prospect of a sojourn in a sunny Mediterranean country seemed rather appealing. So my wife and I set off in late January in a snowstorm for what proved to be an extraordinary adventure.

The first shock was the weather. Our plane was hit by lightning as we came in to land. We were all rather shaken and joined in a round of applause for the Yugoslav pilot who skilfully brought us safely down. Instead of the warmth we had expected it was bitterly cold and wet: it turned out to be the coldest winter in Libya for 40 years, with snow falling on the outskirts of Tripoli. After a few days of handover from the Ambassador I was sitting late in my office on my first day in charge reading myself in, when the telephone rang. As my secretary had gone I answered and was treated to a tirade from a British woman, who wanted to know what I was going to do about an assault on her. She had been shopping and was bending over to put some groceries in her car boot when a Libyan had walked up behind her and had bitten her in the posterior! Restraining my laughter at the scene with difficulty I invited her round to see the Consul next day. Over the next few days I tried to make contact with the Libyan People's Bureau of Foreign Affairs to introduce myself but found the process bewildering. The ministry was not run on standard lines at all but consisted of a ramshackle building with long corridors off which there were rooms full of people in casual clothes sitting around drinking tea and smoking. It was impossible to tell the officials from the tea-makers. But that was democracy Libyan style.

It was not long before I was involved in an unpleasant aspect of this democracy. The Head of Chancery was due to leave on transfer. We had already had some indications that a Libyan army officer had an eye on the house. As soon as the Head of Chancery left and before the Administration Officer could secure it, a band of uniformed women moved in and occupied the house. When the AO arrived he found them inside the house throwing all the furniture into the garden. For the rest of my stay I was trying to reverse this outrage with protests at every level of the bureaucracy right up to the Prime Minister. Every time I was promised action within 24 hours but nothing happened, showing how the bureaucracy was impotent in face of the local People's Committee, who had done the deed. I even tried a back channel with a senior figure in Libyan Intelligence who invited me to meet him at a new stadium. It was a Kafkaesque situation. I arrived and was told to go up to the equivalent of the royal box in the otherwise deserted stadium, where sitting all alone was the man I was to meet. The two of us sat there and had a very amicable conversation in which he promised the house would be returned in 24 hours, but nothing came of it.

Libya is full of spectacular archaeological sites. One weekend after another heavy storm I took a walk along a beach near Sabratha and played ducks and drakes with pebbles. I bent to pick up what seemed a nice flat stone. It seemed embedded in the sand, so I loosened it with my finger, pulled and out popped a complete marble head on a plinth! I was flabbergasted. I had never experienced anything like it before or since.

In the middle of my stay came the news that a Pakistani aircraft had been hijacked and was on its way to Libya with a Canadian among the passengers. As we represented Canada, I was told to set in motion the arrangements for dealing with hijackings. After much excitement the problem was suddenly resolved by the plane landing in Damascus. We then heard that the Canadian, on whom I had already expended a great deal of effort, was an escaped convict travelling on a false passport!

Several times often late in the evening the telephone would ring and a voice would announce: "Protocol!" President Qadhafi or his Deputy Jalloud was receiving some foreign delegation and Heads of Mission were required to attend. On one such occasion, I was already due at the Italian Ambassador's for a farewell dinner. I could not reach him as his telephone was out

of order. I could not reach any member of my staff to convey a message as the rain had affected all the telephone lines. My driver had not arrived. I could not drive as I had slipped on a wet tennis court and had a cracked bone in my wrist, which was in plaster. In the end I went to the Italian's dinner where I found several of my colleagues, who had become so used to such last minute importunities that they no longer worried about them. My eventful time came all too rapidly to an end and I went back to the reality of Belgrade.

I ran my usual span of three years or so in Belgrade and towards the end I was told that I would be going back to London. They couldn't say where. There was a possibility of a sabbatical, and the possibility was at Chatham House; and I offered as a subject a thesis on Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic terrorism as a future phenomenon. Unfortunately things did not work out that way and literally from the Friday to the Monday I was told that the sabbatical was off. I was needed to go to the British Mission to the OSCE, the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe, which had embarked on holding in Madrid a conference to follow up the Helsinki Conference to establish the parameters for security and co-operation in Europe. This was sold to me because of my Belgrade experience: Yugoslavia was one of the key non-aligned players in this whole game. So very reluctantly I left London for Madrid with a very open-ended commitment, because no-one knew how long this conference would last. Again it was not an experience I enjoyed. It was my first real coming together with multilateral diplomacy. I had had some experience in the NATO forum while I was still in Middle East Department, we used to attend a special group on the Middle East, but this was the first time of really working in a multilateral environment. It was an extremely frustrating experience. We had frequently caucuses first of the European Union members, then the NATO caucus, that was before you came in sight of the enemy, and so much time was taken up arguing with our friends on the line we would pursue that you were exhausted before you actually came in contact with the enemy ...

CC Before the real battle ...

TC The conference in fact dragged on for nine months. Not all the time was spent in Madrid but most of it. We had to come back periodically for consultations and it was only towards the end that the real excitement, and for me the mainly interesting part of this whole episode,

happened. When we were in the final stages of drafting the new agreement, the successor of Helsinki agreement, we came up against a very surprising twist of diplomacy, where for the first time in my diplomatic career I actually had scope to use my Russian. We found, after months of arguing about the wording of individual paragraphs - sometimes we would literally argue for weeks over words, single words, which for us were terribly important and indicated progress from Helsinki where the Russians were doing their darnedest to frustrate us - we eventually hammered out an English version of the final agreement. In the last weeks we sat down with the other side with the Russians' translation of the draft agreement in front of us for the first time. I was I think one of the few people on our side who could actually read the text and to my horror found that many of those points over which we had argued endlessly had been clawed back by the Russians in their translations. These texts had equal validity, so for, I can't remember, 24 or 48 hours, I was trying to hold the fort over what these words meant, drawing on Russian which I hadn't used for 20 odd years, until one of our marvellous experts, Tony Bishop, came in from the Foreign Office to take control. But it was an extraordinary turn of events that no-one could have forecast and it was almost by accident really that I just happened to be there at that time.

CC That's extraordinary, but how was the delegation made up, because you weren't, it wasn't just a British delegation.

TC No, it wasn't. Not at all.

CC But you in the whole delegation on the Western side, so to speak, were the only Russian speaker, and you were having to explain to your own side that there was a problem with not just one word but several whole sentences ...

TC Key words which had been significantly changed and ...

CC How did that get resolved then?

TC In the end we got our way ...

CC Presumably you had to adjourn ...

TC We had to adjourn, as I said we had a real expert brought in ...

CC A language expert?

TC Yes. Bishop his name was. He was the PM's interpreter.

CC And was he interpreting for the whole Western delegation, the whole team?

TC Yes, of course the Americans brought in their man as well but he was the key man. And he ensured that it was a fair translation.

CC And he confirmed that you were right. And then what happened.

TC In the end there was a new Russian text which was a fairer translation of ...

CC So do you think this was a try-on?

TC Absolutely.

CC But they didn't then try to insist ...

TC Oh yes, they argued endlessly that they were custodians of their language, and this is what it meant, but Bishop was sufficiently expert in their language to convince them otherwise.

CC Yes, so it was a try-on, they weren't trying to go back and say no, we mean what we are saying, they were trying to kid you that the translation meant the same as ours.

TC So there I was, once again without a job and all the Office could tell me was that I would be coming back to London to head a department but they couldn't say which. There was a

possibility of Middle East Department which of course I was enormously attracted to but in the event I was given Information Department. I ought to say that many people misunderstand the function of Information Department. They confuse it with our News Department which is the organ of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which handles the media directly. Information Department was one of the largest departments in the Office and it encompassed a wide range of activities: it dealt with the relationship with the external services of the BBC; it covered the production of information for all our posts world-wide across the whole gamut of foreign affairs; it also dealt with the prestige aspects of international trade fairs and exhibitions. I was with the Department for only 2 years and much of that time was taken up with battling with the Treasury for funds for the BBC external services. It was very difficult to get across to a bureaucracy that was largely interested in money the concept of the importance of winning friends and influence abroad. This aspect of the Department's work brought me quite frequently into contact with Ministers including the Foreign Secretary, because the BBC is a very sensitive area and we had to walk this tightrope whereby we could not appear to be managing the BBC, while it was quite clear that we were funding it and externally people found it very difficult to believe that we were not responsible for what the BBC said. So we had to be constantly bending over backwards to show that we were just funding it and establishing the languages in which they broadcast; we had no role in the editorial content. It was an interesting experience. The BBC had administrators who were fantastic at fighting their corner. They could be extremely irritating at times because time and time again we would be defending a budget which we thought cut them to the bone only to find that when they were cut to the bone there was actually another inch of fat which they'd concealed. This caused at times quite a lot of ill-feeling. However it was an interesting aspect of the work.

CC Had BBC World Television come on the scene then or was that later?

TC We were beginning then, looking at this as a possibility, but only in the early planning stages. The other interesting aspect of this period in the Office for me was taking part in the Permanent Under-Secretary's daily meetings, where one really felt in touch with the day to day concerns of the Office, the Departments and the Assistant Under-Secretaries and Deputy Under-Secretaries. My presence was required there because I was expected to find out and

establish what the priorities were for informing posts abroad about the subjects which needed putting across. So that was an interesting period in the Department. Of course when you are Head of a Department you don't have an ambassador to inform you of your next posting. I was at one of the PUS's morning meetings one day when the Chief Clerk said to me: 'Could we take a walk in the park.' I said, 'Of course,' so we set off for a walk chatting generally. The Chief Clerk was then an old buddy from Bonn, John Whitehead, and he said: 'I don't know what you think about this but we would very much like you to go to Baghdad'. Now Baghdad at that time was deep into the Iraq-Iran war and on a personal security level it was difficult. He said: 'Go away and think about it but I can tell you the Office are very keen that you should go.' So in the usual way when the bait of your first Embassy is dangled before you and it is a part of the world which I knew and it was likely to be a fairly high profile job I really didn't take long to make up my mind that this was it. Although everybody I talked to, inside and outside the Office at that time, commiserated with me I have to say it was the most enjoyable period of my career after Dubai. It was a difficult posting obviously on a purely personal level. My predecessor, Sir John Moberly, had told me that his Mission had been literally under siege. The living conditions were very difficult. Contact with the natives was almost prohibited. The Iraq government was very difficult to deal with because our policy was very restrictive towards Iraq at that time. Previously, I spoke of the drama of arriving in Dubai. The drama of arriving in Iraq was very similar. First of all we chose to drive to Baghdad, taking a few weeks holiday on the way. As we approached Baghdad the news on the car radio was becoming increasingly alarming with the Iranians bombing Baghdad airport and I decided to put my foot down on the gas and get there as quickly as possible. It was an horrendous drive getting into Iraq because Basra as the port, Iraq's port, had been virtually closed by the Iranians. Everything going in and out of Iraq, huge tankers, juggernauts carrying every kind of commodity moved like a continuous stream of ants on the one road that led into Iraq from Turkey.

CC In both directions ...

TC In both directions. Most of the road surface had gone. It was pouring with rain and it was a nightmare. Anyway we got there. We reached Baghdad eventually and on our very first night, at about 2:30 in the morning, we literally fell out of bed. A missile had landed

quite close. We thought, 'welcome to Baghdad', which is known as Dar es Salaam, the city of peace. And it was an experience which was to punctuate the next three years. We worked out that we experienced something like 69 missiles on Iraq, most of them falling on Baghdad, during our period. One or two of them came uncomfortably close to both the Embassy and the Residence. So it was almost a wartime experience. There were various extremely unusual and unpleasant aspects of life there. We were living of course in a police state. In many respects my experience of Eastern Europe was very useful in Iraq because you could see there all the elements of an East European society: that is to say there was the police and security apparatus; there were the organised trade unions; there were the women's organisations; the youth organisations; all these elements which we were accustomed to dealing with in Eastern Europe. In a funny way of course we felt terribly secure, because there was a policeman on the gate of my house, police all around the Embassy, you never felt in any kind of personal danger ...

CC Except for missiles from Iran ...

TC Except missiles from Iran, of course, but on a purely personal level, no burglars; or even then this police presence impinged because the secret police used to visit our homes periodically. We knew that because of items that would go missing. I'd brought back from leave a book of cartoons in the western press depicting Saddam Hussein and I found it had disappeared from my library, never to be seen again. One of my staff had an extensive library of video tapes and they used to be borrowed and replaced quite regularly. So we knew they were visiting us. So there were all these trappings of the police state. This was brought home to me at a very early stage when I was invited to present my credentials. At that stage Saddam Hussein, as the President, was still receiving new ambassadors. Later on, a couple of years after my arrival, he stopped doing that. Some Heads of Mission never actually saw him at all. Getting in to the presidential palace was uncomfortable because there were guards everywhere. I was in my official car and although they clearly expected me, they knew who I was, I was still made to feel as though I was a hostile element who might possibly threaten the security of their president. Once I had got over the pure formality of handing over my credentials, which I did in Arabic, because I felt I needed to establish straight away that this was a medium in which we could speak if they wished, and I had

presented my senior staff, I was then taken off for what was normally a purely courtesy call on the President. The interpreter was dispensed with because I had made it clear that I would speak in Arabic. The only other person present in the room was the Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, who sat on a chair at the back of the room and played no role in the subsequent interview, except when the President used a colloquial Arabic word which was unfamiliar to me. It was actually a key word. I realised that this might be the only opportunity I would have of speaking to him directly and so after the pleasantries I said to him, 'Mr President, I hope you don't mind but I would like to ask you a direct question about our relationship.' He hesitated for a moment and said, 'Well, this is not usual because this is normally a formal occasion, a courtesy call, but as you've asked the question I will answer it.' And for the next 15 or 20 minutes he treated me to an Iraqi view of relations between Iraq and Britain going back to the period when we had the mandate in Iraq after the first World War; and the general tenor was, we were old friends who had gone astray regrettably, and the fault for that divergence was ours, and if we were more accommodating we could reforge that friendship. After a long interview, it must have been about 45 minutes, it was quite exceptional, we came to a kind of agreement that clearly what was needed after much misunderstanding was an increase in dialogue. For an incoming Ambassador to get that from the Head of State was, to put it mildly, extremely useful because it gave me a basis for then knocking on doors saying that your President said we need dialogue. I also discovered, when I started doing that, the conversation must have been taped. I presume the bouquet of flowers on the table might have concealed a microphone in it, because I was aware that all my interlocutors knew what had happened. As soon as I mentioned the need for dialogue, they said yes, of course, that's what the President said. If one had been in a different country it would have meant getting off on the right foot. Unfortunately of course the things that the Iraqis wanted from us I, and certainly HMG, were not prepared to deliver. And so it meant I was constantly circling around these difficult points in our relationship. They were principally involved with support for Iraq in its war against Iran. For a long time we had been of course content for the two sides to slug it out as two nasty regimes. The catch phrase then was: a plague on both your houses. We were content to stand back and let them exhaust each other. Later on in 1987 – two years into my mission - it became apparent that the Iranians might win and this presented for Britain and the West generally an increasing threat to the stability of the region. It did not however lead us to change our policy fundamentally. We still maintained a strict embargo on

arms supplies, although subsequently we were accused of supplying Iraq with armaments, the policy was absolutely crystal clear, we would supply nothing that would prolong or exacerbate the conflict with Iran.

CC And you were not aware of any breaches of that, any serious breaches of that?

TC No, and subsequently the whole Scott inquiry, and what the minister, Alan Clark had said, all these things were a complete revelation to me at the time. So it made for a very difficult relationship, constantly skirting around, while trying to find small areas where improvements could be made. One of the extraordinary features of this tense relationship was the fact that Britain, which had set up the medical schools in Iraq, had continued to set the examinations for the medical schools, sent out its examiners periodically and had maintained on a professional level an uninterrupted relationship which was of extraordinary breadth and depth. It was borne into me palpably when the outgoing President of the Royal College asked me if I could arrange for a farewell dinner for him in Baghdad, asking as many Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons as possible. I sent out invitations to all these chaps with the FRCS expecting a minimal response because relations between Iraqis and foreigners were curtailed. To my surprise the response was overwhelming. We had booked a restaurant in one of the hotels for a relatively small number of people, something like 20, and we got about four or five times that number. Fortunately it was a room that could be opened up and expanded. People came from all over the country and I found myself sitting at a table next to the Surgeon-General of the Iraqi army, a person whom normally I would never come near. So it was a tribute really to the strength of that friendship between the medical establishments.

CC But presumably that now has been stopped ...

TC I would imagine so. It wouldn't be allowed under sanctions.

CC How much access, after this extraordinary initial meeting with Saddam Hussein, did you have thereafter? Did you see much of him?

TC No, I saw him in fact only once after that and that was a dramatic meeting, which finished dramatically. David Mellor, who was then Minister of State at the Foreign Office came on a visit. It was extremely difficult to get Ministers to come to Iraq for fairly obvious reasons. It was a very dangerous place. Anyway, David Mellor came out and part of his brief was to argue for the release of our long-term British prisoners. Because of the arrest and sentence to life imprisonment of an Iraqi assassin who had gunned down in broad daylight in Belgravia a former Iraqi politician, the Iraqis from time to time would seize on a British subject on some trumped up charge and sentence him to life imprisonment in the expectation that he could be swapped. But, of course, as had been made clear to the Iraqis over and over again, that was not British policy and we would not do it. So when David Mellor came, we had two long-term prisoners in jail. One of them had been there for 8 years. David Mellor first saw Tariq Aziz, as the Foreign Minister, but it was then arranged that he would meet the President, exceptionally. We had a very interesting meeting. David Mellor of course had never met Saddam Hussein before, so there was the usual sizing each other up, as it were. David Mellor is a very impressive performer on his feet. He was a lawyer and could argue a case extremely well. He came to Iraq bathed in glory, having taken a very robust stance while on a visit to Israel. He had been critical of some Israeli action there, and supported the Arab side; and that really opened up the conversation and brought it onto a quite amicable level. After going through a number of subjects David Mellor raised the plight of our prisoners. At the end Saddam Hussein suddenly said you can take one of them with you.

CC Did he say which one?

TC Yes, and the next morning the prisoner was released and delivered to the Embassy, which was quite a coup. The whole business of these prisoners was something that made my whole mission extremely difficult and came up in every context. Whenever we had a high level visitor or whenever there was an opportunity either the visitor or I myself had to raise this subject and it was always difficult.

CC I just wanted to ask you; even then it was a high level, high profile post, did you have much dealing back home with Number 10, and particularly with the Prime Minister?

TC Well, I suppose one of the compensations of the job in purely career terms was that I was fairly confident that the telegrams from Baghdad were going regularly to Number 10 so it was nice to know that what you were reporting was being read at the highest level and I never had any complaints.

CC I suppose the other obvious question is to what extent did anyone, you or the Embassy, foresee towards the end what then subsequently happened, whether there was a possibility of that ...

TC I think I had better describe, really, how my mission fell into two distinct parts. There was the war, I have described some of its horrors, and then in 1988, when both sides really had exhausted each other, they finally came to an agreement to cease fire. It's hard to describe now the dramatic change in life in Baghdad. It all happened quickly, it seemed to be almost overnight. Previously the atmosphere had been oppressive, people looked miserable: they were miserable. There were constant funeral processions down to Kerbela for the Shia to be buried there. It was an unhappy place. When the war came to an end suddenly all those repressed emotions welled up and it seemed literally overnight shops opened, boutiques suddenly appeared, where there were none previously goods were on sale, people looked cheerful and within a very short time there had been a dramatic turn-around. It was about this time that I had completed three years and there were murmurings that perhaps I ought to make a move but I argued that I had been here for three years during wartime, I forecast a boom time, and I would like to stay here and be part of it. So I was allowed to stay. And it was boom time. You have to remember that much of the country had been destroyed; contact with the outside world was difficult and restricted; and all of a sudden there was an opportunity to reconstruct, redevelop, build, not only in the purely physical sense but also contacts and so on. I suppose a small triumph at that time was when we held a Heads of Mission conference, a regional one in the Gulf and the Minister of State, William Waldegrave, came to preside over it. I argued that there were enormous opportunities in Iraq for us to exploit. I described Iraq as a potential bonanza, probably the biggest market for the UK in the region because of this need to reconstruct. In summing up that meeting Waldegrave described Iraq as "the big prize". None of us, least of all me, knew the economic

difficulties under which Iraq was then labouring. Of course we knew that there were economic difficulties but I don't think we appreciated the full extent of them. The Iraqi regime was struggling not only to finance the consequences of the war, the regime was also trying to bolster its position internally for the future. It had to be seen to be passing the money around to overcome the feelings of hardship, penury and disgruntlement of the population. At that time when Iraq needed money most, the oil prices had collapsed and the Iraqis laid the blame for that largely at the door of some of its Gulf Arab brothers whom they accused of exceeding their OPEC quotas, over-production, depressing the price of oil. That emerged later, certainly after I had left Baghdad. So while I was there, for a year and a half or so after the end of the war, we were going through this boom time and I confidently forecast for my successor that he would be there at a time when there was scope for enormous business with the UK and reformation of the relationship with Iraq. The only small cloud on the horizon at that time was the arrest of a journalist of Iranian origin but working for the Observer. He had behaved foolishly, engaging in activities which the Iraqis were onto immediately. It was foolish even to contemplate getting away with what he was doing, gathering samples of soil near a place where there had been a mighty explosion, to prove they were developing weapons of a certain kind there, and that sort of thing, taking photographs where he shouldn't and so on. Now my confident prediction then was that after a period he would be released.

CC Who was that?

TC Bazoft. I expected confidently that after a trial he would be given a term of imprisonment and that after an interval he would be released. So, as I said, that was the only cloud I could see at that time, otherwise it looked like good times ahead.

CC And you didn't suspect that Saddam Hussein planned the kind of agenda that resulted in ...

TC Well, I did suspect it, but not in the short term. My forecast when I left was that he entertained regional ambitions and I think I said something to the effect that he might try to establish a position of control in the next five years.

CC In the region?

TC In the region. I didn't know and I don't think anybody else knew that within eight months he would have invaded Kuwait. My feeling and indeed the reason I gave why he would not undertake any adventures within that five year timescale was because the Iraqi armed forces had been debilitated by eight years of war. I really didn't think that he was in the position militarily or economically to expand Iraq's activities.

CC Right. Was there any evidence of opposition, to what you already said, it was a pretty oppressive regime, a police state, at that time at all?

TC One of the things that I tried to put across to visitors, to media, and of course to the Office was that the image held outside Iraq of Saddam was not correct as regards his relationship with the people of Iraq and I mean the masses. I travelled widely in Iraq, much more than others had been able, or perhaps inclined, I don't know, there were greater restrictions before than when I was there and I managed ...

CC Really, even though the country was at war, you were able to travel quite widely?

TC Yes, I could travel virtually everywhere in Iraq. It was necessary to have a travel permit to go outside Baghdad, but I would apply on a regular two-week basis to go to a far point which left me free more or less to choose my route. Anyway I found that way I was able to traverse the country and I used to get out and talk to ordinary people all over the place. Very often they didn't know who I was. I have to say that I was even able to convince some people that I was an Iraqi. I must just tell a small story. I was driving with my Kurdish driver up in Kurdistan trying to get to Halabja, the scene of that dreadful poisonous bomb attack ...

CC When did that happen?

TC That happened in March 1988.

CC It had already happened?

TC Oh, it had happened in March 1988 I think it was and I was there about a year later. At that time no diplomats were allowed anywhere near there and it was very difficult to get an accurate picture of what had happened. We have been criticised subsequently: we should have known and we should have protested. We didn't because we were supporting Saddam's Iraq against Iran, that's how the argument runs. But it was at the time impossible to sort out all the conflicting stories that were coming out: that the Iraqis had used poisonous weapons was not in question but there was also the question of the Iranians having used them as well. Cyanide shells.

CC At that spot?

TC Yes.

CC And in that place?

TC In that place. So there was a very confused picture.

CC So it wasn't entirely clear that it was the regime that had done it at all?

TC Oh no. It was clear that the main damage had been done by the Iraqis dropping gas bombs on the Kurdish population but there was also evidence that the Iranians were firing into that area, where the Iraqi forces were, cyanide filled shells. I was travelling up in Kurdistan to see whether I could actually talk to somebody, as I say more than a year later with my driver. We were taking it in turns at the wheel and we got to a military checkpoint. I was at the wheel. A soldier came up to me and said in Arabic, 'where are you going?' I said in Arabic: 'We are going to the next village,' which was the last one before Halabja, and he said 'why, have you got family there?'

CC But you were in a flag car.

TC We weren't flying a flag. We were in a Range Rover but he didn't look at the diplomatic number plates. He was half asleep, I suppose, but anyway he somehow thought that I was one of them. I said we were going to visit the village and he said OK and waved us through. We got to the next checkpoint where there was a smart army officer who said: 'No, come with me,' and I was incarcerated for a few hours while they checked me out. And on another occasion I appeared on a television programme. I was interviewed. My wife was walking the next day in the street and someone came up to her and said: 'that man we usually see walking your dogs, he was on television the other evening and the stupid interviewer thought that he was an Iraqi because of the way he spoke and the language he used. So there were some indications that I was getting on well with the language. So I often used to travel around and talk to people and I got the impression that they didn't know who I was.

CC And you also got the impression that they were quite happy with the regime?

TC Exactly, that was the point. I am talking about the masses, I lay emphasis on that, because they were people who, under the previous regime, under the monarchy, lived in primitive conditions: no water, electricity, education, health facilities and so on. And the one thing this regime did do was to provide those things. There was a political motive obviously but this was something that the people could tangibly appreciate. So it wasn't a hostile population to the regime. Of course there were many others who had suffered directly under the regime, people taken away in the night, a body thrown on the doorstep the next day with a bullet in it, and then being charged for the bullet, and that sort of thing which would easily alienate large swathes of the population but they were more often than not in the upper brackets, the thinking people. So I thought it was wrong at that time to think that this was a repressive regime over an alienated population. It wasn't quite like that. At the other extreme there were some people with whom I developed a good understanding who in a corner on a dark night would say to me: 'Alright, we hate this man, but he is our saviour. He is the only man who can save us from Iran.' And they believed it.

CC They really believed that.

TC And that is the irony of Iraq. It needs, in my view, a strong man. There is all this talk

now that is coming out about a pluralist society, a democracy, a multi-party state and all the rest of it. It is my conviction that to hold together a country with all its disparate elements like Iraq you need strong central control. And at that time, certainly during the war, even intellectuals grudgingly accepted that he was the man to do it.

CC The war was seen as aggression by Iran against Iraq presumably, I mean it was seen in Iraq as a ...

TC Oh yes. And it was part of Khomeini's expansionism.

CC So, that was nearly five years and then after that you went directly to Oman or ...

TC Literally directly. My mission finished in December, just before Christmas in 1989, so almost five years, and we came home for leave, went back to Baghdad about the middle of January, packed up, climbed into the car and took the road to Muscat. Once again ...

CC This is now early 1990, right ...

TC I don't know whether the Office was just wanting to be nice after a fairly arduous posting but I saw the Head of Personnel who said: 'What would you like to do next, would you like to come back or finish your service in a region?' I said I'd prefer the latter and he said: 'There are various but a limited number of possibilities', and he mentioned Islamabad, Ankara and Muscat. I said: 'I would be happy with any of those in that order'; and I got Muscat. Going to Muscat was like going home. I had been there 20 years before. Again, as with the Belgrade experience, all the young men that I had known in the then administration under construction were now Ministers. I had met the Sultan before. I knew all the people around him well. Indeed his right-hand man I had known in Dubai, where he was in exile. We used to have beers together on the beach and that sort of thing. I knew him extremely well and really from the first day it was like pulling on a well used glove, a very smooth and happy transition. Of course that was not to last for very long because we had hardly settled in for six months when the Gulf war began and it was a busy time of course. We had elements of the British forces used in the liberation of Kuwait based initially but later more in transit

through Oman where we had access to various military facilities. It was also a busy time because Oman has a very individualistic foreign policy, which aims really to be friendly with all sides. It believes in a policy based on dialogue, not taking sides and confrontation. At times it was difficult for us to persuade the Omanis to take a robust stance against Iraq.

CC But that is a very Arab characteristic isn't it?

TC Well, some of the other states were much more supportive. But the Omanis would have preferred not to have been directly implicated. But these small incidents apart, it was a very happy period. Oman is one of the favourite countries for visiting of the Royal family and of the government. I think in the four and a half years we were there we met all the leading members of the Royal family, sometimes two or three times. Prime Ministers, Foreign Secretaries, Defence Secretaries regularly came out and as British Ambassador you had the inside track. I saw the Sultan more than any other Ambassador, always á deux, a very close and comprehensive relationship.

CC So the close and special relationship was very much still alive and well while you were there.

TC So it was with enormous regret that I left, not only Muscat but the Service. Looking back over something like 37 years I'd seen of course enormous changes in the way the Service was run, some of them for the good, some of them I was less happy with. Good things stick out, like employment of wives, I mentioned postings to the country of origin of foreign wives: they were very sensible. The 'navel contemplation', to put it in parentheses, the introspection was at times I thought going increasingly over the top. Time spent as Head of Mission on analysing your staff, on performance, prospects, all of course necessary; and when I think back, I think I mentioned, I wasn't aware for years of ever being reported on at all!

CC So you think the pendulum has swung too far?

TC Too far the other way. The declining role of the Ambassador in the way he ran his own

mission. I had to argue against the appointment to my staff in Muscat of a female Arabist Third secretary on the grounds that I couldn't afford to carry a passenger. A female, no matter how good an Arabist she was in that slot would not have been able to operate. But I was told in no uncertain terms that it was not for me to decide and if I wanted to make a case it had to be one that could be justified to the union. I had to sit down and make a case which could be put to the union why a female could not operate in that position.

CC Even though there were many people in the office who would have known that.

TC Yes, but that kind of judgement has been taken away from the Ambassador.

CC Was the case accepted then?

TC Yes it was. That whole area of introspection I think has gone too far. Although communications have changed out of all recognition over the years from, I mentioned, hand decyphering to electronic keyboards, individual ones, such are the burdens on the officer, the individual officers, that there was never the degree of feedback that all of us in the field wanted. So often you asked: 'Is this what you want?' And you would get back from the desk officer a two-liner saying: 'Yes, that seems to fit the bill.' You never got a commentary on what you were doing. It was simply because we don't have enough people to allow that kind of luxury. I always felt, and I am sure many people felt the same, that we suffered through never having Ministers with the time to spend cultivating the regions, because again Ministers are constituency MPs with full-time jobs and subject to a three-line whip which could throw all plans to visit into chaos overnight. One envied some of the other countries who had roving ambassadors and roving ministers with time to cultivate the local people; and that kind of cultivation is so important.

CC But at least your Shaikhs and leaders, and I suppose to some extent it is still the case, from the Gulf region coming to London seemed to get serious hospitality and to be met, and to be able to meet the Prime Minister and, on some occasions, the Queen, or did you feel towards the end there wasn't enough of that either?

TC Well, I felt that too had declined because of a rather somewhat arrogant attitude. If a Minister of State from the Foreign Office came out to visit it was generally expected that he would see the head of state and in the old days when there were Rulers around the Gulf that was perfectly acceptable. Times have moved on and these heads of state are now many of them super-players on the financial field, open to the entreaties of countless heads of state, very busy gentlemen themselves and yet we would still try to wheel in a minister of state to see the head of state. Conversely if the Foreign Secretary of that country came, he might not get in to even the Foreign Secretary. He might meet the Minister responsible for the area. And some of them felt it. And sometimes they wouldn't come if they felt they were not being treated properly and of course the whole business of meeting at airports ...

CC We are not very good at that.

TC Well, how many hours are there in a day? Perhaps one last word. I have three children, all born in the Arab world, all exposed from their earliest childhood to foreign influences: not one of them thought of joining the Diplomatic Service. That is partly I suppose because of personal inclinations, the way they have developed as individuals, but possibly also a reflection on our way of life. Certainly in my time scale, 37 years, much of it has been spent in what you might call an artificial atmosphere. Certainly when we reached the level of ambassador you are the personal representative of Her Majesty The Queen, representative of the government, you are a very big fish in whichever pool you are in. It's a rather lonely existence because there are very few people on the same level. There are your diplomatic colleagues of course but they are foreigners so they have got their own interests to look after. There are, if you are fortunate enough, heads of major British companies, the education establishments and that sort of thing but there is always a slight sort of reservation between them and you simply because of who you are and the fact that for 24 hours a day you are on representational duty. It is very difficult to relax completely because people are always conscious of knowing who you are and you knowing that you have got to be careful. There are things you cannot say. All the flummery that goes with diplomatic life, the constant entertaining, being entertained, being parted from your children during the formative periods of their life. All of that, for some would be attractive, an attraction, for others it is very discouraging. I think for any young person coming in it would be a good thing to talk to

somebody who has seen it all to talk about it frankly because most people when they start have no idea of what is involved in living in foreign countries.

CC Well, I think that is a very good point at which to end your tour de force.