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**Charles Graham Crawford CMG interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Tuesday,
2 December 2008 at his home in Oxfordshire**

Education and decision to join the Diplomatic Service in 1979

MM Could I ask you to say a bit about your parents, where you were educated and how you came to join the Diplomatic Service?

CC My parents were teachers. My father was in the generation who fought modestly in the War and had never been to university; he couldn't afford the fees to become an articled clerk for a solicitor, so he became a teacher instead. He rose to become the headmaster of a primary school. I was brought up in a council house and went to St Alban's School, a direct grant school; got an Exhibition to Oxford; did a law degree at Oxford, then the Bar exams. Then I did a postgraduate degree at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston at Tufts University, and joined the Foreign Office after that.

MM What decided you to join?

CC I got interested in it for the most primitive reasons – namely the first girl I ever held hands with, her father had been in the Foreign Office. She talked about it, and I rather assumed it was impossible for people like me to get in. But all you had to do was take the exam. So I took the exam at the end of my last year at Oxford. I didn't get in as a fast streamer. They let me in as an executive streamer. I thought that wasn't good enough and I turned it down, and went off and did the Bar exams and this other degree in America. Then I tried again, older and wiser, and this time did get in as a fast streamer. I joined a bit later than some others in my year group. I was at college with Tony Blair. It was quite a political time at Oxford. He was a year above me at St John's. Benazir Bhutto and Dave Aaronovitch and other famous names were there. Quite a few Conservative MPs in the House of Commons these days were at Oxford at that time.

MM So it was a good glimpse into the establishment, if you like?

CC At the time it was a good glimpse into a lot of people with long hair who seemed a bit ridiculous. Some went on to be Prime Ministers, MPs and businessmen and everything else. It didn't feel like the establishment at the time. It took a while for the Swinging Sixties to get to Oxford. In late 1973 there was a huge sit-in at the Schools Building; it was a revolutionary occasion of its sort, and it galvanised the whole university. But eventually after another sit-in the following term some people were sent down. It was the Tony Blair year, the Oxford second year above mine, who were leading all this. When they all got into their third year they decided to focus on their degrees and the whole thing fizzled out.

MM So they became serious?

CC Became more serious. [laughter]

MM Anyway you did decide to join the Foreign Office and joined in 1979. What did you begin with?

South East Asia Department of the FCO 1979-80

CC I remember we had a few days of courses and briefings, and went round the building, and met Mr Peter Blaker who was a Junior Minister. He told us what a wonderful elite we were. By that point I was in my left-wing phase and I didn't like that much. During the introductory days I was told that I was going to be on the Afghanistan desk, and I thought "OK. I'd better find out where Afghanistan is." Then they told me the next day – No, we'll change you; you're on the Indonesia desk. I don't know what would have happened if I'd stayed on the Afghanistan desk, because a few weeks later the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and that desk suddenly got busy. Whereas the first thing I did in the Foreign Office was go on the Indonesia desk in the South-East Asia Department. Murray Simon was the head of it, with Donald Murray above him. Hugh Cortazzi, who went on to be Ambassador in Japan, above him. The low-level gossip had it that Donald Murray and Hugh Cortazzi disliked each other, but they disliked Murray Simon even more. This was said to explain why Murray Simon was ultra-cautious about putting up papers, or even letting stuff go out from the department without him checking it. When you went in to his room his desk was

like a fortress of files and submissions, all blocked as he pored over them, waiting to go somewhere.

One interesting point about the FCO then was that there were more obviously disabled people seen in higher positions than you see today. People injured in the War who had gone on to make a career in diplomacy. They just got on with it, without a single diversity target in sight.

The first thing I had to do – the very first thing I had to do, once I had found out where my pencils were and that sort of thing - was the guest lists for the State Visit of the President of Indonesia who was coming in November, just a few weeks after I'd joined the Office. For some reason they'd planned it so that the desk officer was changed just as the visit was coming up fast, so I spent the first two or three weeks in the Foreign Office doing guest lists. This was before the Office had word processors; before they had anything. I had to come up with something like two hundred names for the City banquet, a hundred names for the Palace banquet, twenty-odd names for the Prime Minister's lunch, mainly with no duplications. They got very cross if any of the decorations and addresses and so on were inaccurate. But you weren't to phone up their offices to check. So quite how we did all of this goodness only knows, but we did it and got it off in time and that was the Visit.

MM Did you take any part in it?

CC As a bureaucratic low-life I got in on the Lord Mayor's lunch. Indonesia was a big country which wasn't doing very much. Our relations "were cordial, but lacked substance". And so it was difficult to find people – the best part of three hundred people - who were (a) interested in Indonesia, and (b) available on the days concerned. So it was easy for me to stick myself in.

MM On the other hand there must have been a fair amount of trade?

CC Well there was, but looking back on the days before emails, fax machines, data-bases, the lot, it was just difficult getting the names. You had to identify them; you had to write to them; you had to track them all down; you had to get the phone

numbers. It was incredibly cumbersome. I spent over two weeks preparing this list and getting it typed and re-typed up in the right form. The Palace had to approve all lists at the same time, and the trouble was the lead times for these lists were all different for different purposes. It was all tedious. Well, that's what I did for my first few weeks - the Indonesia State Visit. Then I answered all the protest letters about the Indonesian State Visit, and after that there was nothing much to do.

MM So that was a good introduction?

CC It was a good introduction to quite a lot of process. I had to go along to the State Visit Planning Committee and I imagine it's pretty much the same now. You meet Silver Stick in Waiting and all these extraordinary officials who lurk in the background of high state protocol and yet are all businesslike and sensible. Without today's technology it all worked quite well. It's not clear it works any better now.

MM In 1981 you went to Belgrade?

CC I did Indonesia for a few months then, and if you look on my website www.charlescrawford.biz – I'll mention the website now and again – there is the story about the protest letter which came in about the Indonesian State Visit. Basically, Amnesty International were agitated about political prisoners in Indonesia, and so they wrote round to everybody they could think of – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Prime Minister, Sir Keith Joseph, anyone in the Cabinet they'd heard about, and all these letters wended their way to me on the Foreign Office desk for draft replies after the visit. Normally, the Amnesty letters would say - We are very upset about our political prisoner Mr So and So who's in prison unjustly. But one letter came from a couple in Bury St Edmunds, and the man writing it had forgotten to put the name of the prisoner in the letter. The question was, how do we reply to this letter? Should we write back and say you haven't mentioned the prisoner's name, but in any case we don't intervene with individual cases? That seemed a bit pathetic. We came up with a form of words along the usual policy line which didn't actually mention the prisoner, and sent this general reply to him.

Anyway then his wife noticed – she of all the people, the only person of all these Amnesty correspondents who'd written in – she read in the newspapers the guest list for the State Banquet. She saw the PUS's name from the Foreign Office on the State Banquet list and she wrote another letter to him where she did mention the prisoner's name. So then I had to draft the reply to that letter, but we thought it only right to serve up with the draft the previous letter we'd sent to that household. This came back from the PUS's office saying – “The PUS is unhappy with the line being used and especially dissatisfied with Mr Crawford's letter of such-and-such to this couple which in his opinion completely failed to answer the question”. It was like an ant being hit by a thunderbolt. Anyhow, I somehow survived. After all that bureaucratic commotion died down, I helped on the Malaysian desk for a while replacing Donald MacLaren, The MacLaren of MacLaren. He was the youthful desk officer famous then for having a big row with the Lord Mayor of London over a briefing exercise. He was a feisty character. He ended up as ambassador in Georgia after serving at some point in Moscow, when the Soviets thought it hilarious to telephone him saying “Hullo, the Ivanov of Ivanov speaking”.

Serbo-Croat language training 1980-81

Then I went off and started learning Serbian, going to meet Zorica Radosavljevic – a Serbian lady living in Hammersmith, where London Serbs were in those days - for two or three hours lessons a day. She tried to hammer some Serbian into me. A hopeless task – I didn't try very hard. I passed my driving test on the fourth attempt and went to Belgrade in February 1981. As I walked through the front door of the Embassy the first person I saw there was the young lady who became my wife. Rather touching.

MM Is she a Serb?

CC Almost – she's Yorkshire. She was in the Foreign Office. Also Judith Brown was there. She was the woman I was replacing, and she went on to marry another diplomat, John McGregor. They were the first diplomatic couple to have a his 'n' her ambassadorship - she being in Slovakia, Bratislava and he in Vienna.

Posting to British Embassy Belgrade 1981-84

MM So you went to Belgrade. What was your main job there?

CC I was Second Secretary Information/Political, the press and political officer - the young chap who was meant to get out and about and talk to people, and get under the skin of the country. Insofar as it was possible in that Communist situation, that's what I did.

MM Exercise your Serbian?

CC I started learning Serbian properly because the Ambassador was Sir Edwin Bolland, who will be old now. He came from a working-class mining family in Yorkshire. He claimed he remembered his father and brother coming home and being washed by his mother in a tub in front of the fire. On his first posting he was in Moscow during the Stalin show trials. He was a great Sovietologist, and had dreams of being Ambassador in Moscow, but ended up in Belgrade instead. Tito had died the year before, and they'd had a problem getting the previous Ambassador to leave post when they wanted someone a bit more lively to deal with the Tito funeral scenario. Tito's funeral was probably the biggest gathering of world leaders ever seen at that point in world history. Interesting when you see Tito's tomb in Belgrade now – all weeds and neglected.

Edwin Bolland would sniff the Yugoslav communist newspapers in the morning and say – “just smell – not like *Pravda*”. Every morning he had a morning Embassy meeting – you had to say what was in your bit of the newspaper. Someone did foreign affairs; someone did commercial. My job was internal, so the first few days I was hopeless and could just about read one or two headlines. Fear of that morning meeting galvanised me into learning Serbian. After two or three months I was rattling through the main pages pretty well, and after a bit longer I reached the point where I couldn't tell the difference between Cyrillic and Latin script and was reading the whole lot in about ten minutes: communist Serbian media had a stylised vocabulary. Yugoslavia had a federal Communist system, but we read the Belgrade Serbian communist press, not for example the Zagreb Croatian communist press. I ended up

being Olympic attaché at the Sarajevo Olympic Games in 1984; I stayed in the Olympic Village. That's when Torvill and Dean won their gold medal, which I watched sitting behind Princess Anne. Nothing much happened in Yugoslavia in those days. It was busy rotting but the smell of its rotting hadn't really wafted in the general direction of Western Europe, plus it seemed inconceivable that it would break up in a violent way, because these things just didn't happen.

MM They'd been stable for a very long time.

CC Stability is a complex idea. It was stable in the sense that a big wooden house with hordes of termites eating away the basement is very stable until one microsecond before it collapses. That's what Yugoslavia was like. It was a stable house in theory, but not in practice - the owners of the house weren't applying the ant killer. All these different rivalries and gangsterisms were creeping up the agenda with Tito out of the way. He should have retired earlier and helped bring in a new system. He was 87, 88, 89? when he died, so it was all too much about him. That was that period. It was boring, because most of the time nothing happened. We weren't allowed to have local girlfriends because of the so-called security risk. We had the odd trip and there was spectacular scenery, but there is a limit to how much grilled meat you can eat, and of course every restaurant had the same menu.

MM Still does.

CC Still does.

MM So you came back to the FCO in 1984.

CC Other people who were there by the way were Terry Clark, who went on to be Ambassador in the Gulf; Gavin Hewitt who went on to be Ambassador in Finland, Brussels and Croatia. He was in Croatia when Tudjman was still there during the Bosnian war. Now at the Scottish Whisky Association? He was my immediate boss. Mark Allen was there as well and he went on to distinguished things. Last sighted, again retired, at BP.

Return to FCO, 1984-85

MM So you came back to the FCO in 1984 as Desk Officer for Air Services?

CC I didn't know anything at all about air services. It turned out that when planes fly between two different countries there's a treaty governing that relationship. And with flights in all directions there is a great network of bilateral treaties. It is different now within the EU, but in those days ... The big one was Transatlantic services and I ended up talking about the five freedoms and between gateway double disapprovals and single sectors: all this jargon to do with when a scheduled flight does fly. I did that for a year.

The main problem was the privatisation of British Airways. Freddie Laker was suing British Airways over an anti-trust claim in the States, plus there was a criminal investigation and various other things. Freddie Laker had cranked up a huge legal head of steam, because he said he'd been put out of business with his cheap airline because of British Airways, so this was messing up the privatisation of British Airways. Because people didn't know whether there could be a punitive triple damages liability they couldn't really tell what the company was worth, with a billion dollar or whatever lawsuit hanging over its head. It was complicated. So this eventually led to Thatcher and Reagan having a private word about it and it was solved in a rather mysterious way. It was at that level of interest. When I joined the Office the Conservatives were already in. They won the election in 1979. I didn't serve under that Callaghan government at all. I served mainly under three Prime Ministers – Mrs Thatcher, John Major, and then Tony Blair. Gordon Brown got in the last few minutes of my career.

MM I don't think we need to dwell on air services. You did a spell as an FCO speechwriter.

Speechwriter in Planning Department of the FCO 1985-87

CC A basic thing about the Foreign Office then, and to some extent it still is, is your first big job, unless you have a crisis, is your second job in London after your

first posting. You've been on a posting and worked out what an Embassy is. You've learned how to do the basic drafting. You come back and then they put you through your paces on a job in London as a first secretary, and you have more authority in the system. And the second job is when they let you loose on the private secretary jobs or the big policy jobs, or something where you're going to have a lot more weight. They asked me if I wanted to do this speechwriting job, so I said – sure, why not. I'd never written a speech in my life. So I did that for two years.

MM So whom did you write speeches for?

CC Sir Geoffrey Howe and all the other Foreign Office Ministers, but occasionally I'd contribute words for the Queen, or for Mrs Thatcher.

MM In what Department did you serve?

CC I was in Planning Staff. Alyson Bailes as Deputy and the famous Pauline Neville-Jones as Head ran the Planning Staff in those days. I was there with them.

MM How did you find working for them?

CC They were both mighty impressive. Alyson Bailes was the cleverest person who's ever lived, and so she was in fact too clever for the system, mainly because what she could do was look at a piece – a speech on something - and word process it instantaneously and say that paragraph should go there and that should go there ... And then it would be fifty times better, and it would take her about two seconds, just by glancing. She had an ability to look at a page and remember the whole page and word process in a split second, which was good. But it was bad as well, because she could produce stunning work far faster than any of the rest of us could cope with. After she was Ambassador in Finland I think she ended up leaving the Service early. Don't know why. It's not just cleverness, you've got to be able to work with things.

Pauline was different. She was much more normal in a clever way or clever in a normal way. She was good at having intelligent and unwelcome fights with the other big policy heads in the Foreign Office. She said - if you're going to be Head of the

Planners there is no point in not taking on the big guns - the big guns in those days being Disarmament, East-West, those sorts of things. Her successor was David Gore-Booth, who took a less combative line. She would weigh in on all these policy issues and annoy some other heads of departments, but she was right to do so. She privately was friendly with Geoffrey Howe and his family, so she was well-connected within the Ministry, and she was a much more grown up person than I was. Fair to work with and straightforward.

MM She was older.

CC She still is older than me. So by then I was 31-ish. So she would have been 40-something.

MM So she was Head of Department.

CC Yes, Head of Planners. Alison was the Deputy. Another person who was there when I left was Mariot Leslie. Looking at Foreign Office women, Mariot Leslie is the one I've always thought might be the first woman PUS. She ended up leaving the Foreign Office for a while for family reasons. She's back now and is Director of Security I think. She's in with a chance. She wrote the famous paper about Germany and Reunification in 1987. By then we had Gorbachev going on. Our main effort was Gorbachev and his *perestroika* and there was Europe – sandwiched between cowboy Reagan and plucky Mr Gorbachev and moral equivalence and neutron bombs. She had served in Bonn, I think. She wrote a short paper, four or five pages, saying – Mark my words, Germany could unify far faster than we think, Germany could be unified abruptly. Everyone including me laughed heartily, saying it was stupid. Because the one thing the Russians wouldn't do was give up Germany. She said - Well there you are. It was put on the shelf. Of course, three years later it's what actually happened. Germany did reunify abruptly. Her paper was pulled off the shelf and the FCO said - Of course we saw this coming all along. Hers was a profound insight.

The paper I wrote there that I'm most proud of is the Foreign Office Guide to Speech Writing, which is still used as the key text twenty-something years later. We edited it

when I was in Warsaw and put it on the Foreign Office Intranet. It's recognisably drawn from my original text. A lot of the text in those days was about the mechanical process of getting a speech through the system, which of course has changed a lot. So that has all been edited out, but the substance and value of writing a speech and the examples are still fresh.

British Embassy Cape Town/Pretoria 1987-91

MM Your next move was to Cape Town.

CC While the East-West drama was going on South Africa exploded as an issue. Steve Biko had been killed in the late 1970s and they had had a period when the anti-apartheid struggle had declined, then picked up. Mrs Thatcher's stand and the sit-in outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square was a UK political drama. So the feeling was that with *perestroika* going on we needed a heavier diplomatic effort in South Africa. There was a famous mission. Mrs Thatcher was taking heat on the matter, so she sent Geoffrey Howe down to South Africa to 'do something'. It was in summer 1985? The townships were ablaze being led by the UDF, the ANC in a not very full disguise. There were a lot of necklacings and burnings. They sent Geoffrey Howe down there to meet black leaders and to give a sense of engagement and come back and report. It was a very high profile visit – one of the highest profile ones he did. In the Foreign Office all these grand diplomats were fighting like cats and dogs to get on the 'plane. But he went there at very short notice, when the Embassy were all on holiday and stuck up in Pretoria, and few if any of the key black activists would see him. The whole thing was a mess, in policy terms, substantive terms, a mess.

So then it was decided to clean out the Embassy, which was a bit unfair, given the problems they had fixing it all up which weren't entirely the Embassy's fault. Robert Renwick was sent down there as Ambassador, a tough egg. And they sent down a couple of feisty first secretaries to be with him, namely myself and John Sawers. John Sawers is now our Ambassador at the UN – he's done better than me. Renwick hand-picked him as he'd worked in the EU Division with him. Renwick hadn't heard of me. I remember him turning up one day in Planning Staff and he stuck his nose round the door and said – "Congratulations. You're coming to South Africa" and

disappeared again. The three of us were I suppose the backbone of the new Embassy, arriving in the space of a few weeks almost; maybe two or three months. But a whole lot more were replaced.

MM That's on the political side, presumably?

CC Well, that was the side that mattered. It was a huge international political story. Renwick was the best diplomat ever, probably, in modern times, and he set about in a very systematic way fixing this problem. And as if by magic, it helped that the Cold War was ending and P W Botha had a heart attack, which Renwick couldn't quite have planned for, but four years later apartheid had ended. Mandela was out, visiting Number 10 with Mrs Thatcher and thanking her for being such a great friend of the South African blacks, which in 200 weeks after that Howe visit fiasco was pretty damn good going. So I was part of that process. I wouldn't say I was part of the Renwick plan because he just got on with it. He worked so fast and was so secretive, and he wasn't really interested in what anyone else did. In the mornings when something dramatic had happened I would say – Do you want me to do a telegram? He would say – It's gone. He had a secretary who would come in, take his telegram, send it off. So of a thousand or so telegrams the Embassy sent in my four years in South Africa, I drafted about five. As a manager he was, I suppose, absolute zero. This bothered other people in the Embassy who thought the Ambassador should be aware that at least they existed. It didn't bother me much, because I appreciated the fact he was getting results, and management by getting results is quite effective.

MM So what in fact was he doing?

CC Well – he had luck and all these things are partly luck, but it's also about being the right person there to exploit the luck. The Americans under Reagan at this time had broken off relations with the communist MPLA in Angola. Our man in Angola during much of this period was Patrick Fairweather. His daughter is married to the Diplomatic Editor of *The Times*. We met them in Moscow subsequently. Anyway Patrick Fairweather was in Angola but with no US Ambassador, so when the Americans wanted to know about Angola, they were getting British material and passing messages to Angola through the Brits. And Renwick was a mate of Chester

Crocker, who he said he had played tennis with in Washington. Crocker was then the big American diplomat for Africa, and Renwick was a mate of Patrick Fairweather, so Renwick was able to be at the heart of the operational policy chain leading to Namibia's independence. The South Africans were seeing the way the wind was going and wanted to get rid of Namibia. Too much pressure. Too many people being killed. Just the desert anyway; who cares? So there was a big move to get Namibia independent. The general plan was Angola would normalise; Namibia would become independent, then some sort of mechanism would emerge for dealing with apartheid. And Namibia became independent. If the Americans had had an embassy in Angola, it might have been rather different for Renwick's role. Anyway, they didn't, so that gave him a unique ability to scheme on a massive global level.

I saw little of it. It wasn't really my job – the foreign policy side. I was doing Internal. We had to move from Cape Town to Pretoria and back for the parliamentary season every six months, like moving from London to Rome. The packers coming – the whole bit. So a few of us would go down to Cape Town. A separate political team stayed in Johannesburg – the black struggle was centred in Johannesburg. We had a Consul General in Cape Town and a Political Officer who did the political struggle in Cape Town, and I dealt with, as it were, the national white politics including Conservatives plus the bits of the black politics no-one else was that interested in – the Black Consciousness movement; the Pan-Africanists and Inkatha – the people who were not like the ANC. So I did the black and white so-called extremists and white moderates.

MM Did you witness any sort of change among the ruling elite?

CC Well, P W Botha had a heart attack, which was a change for him. Without that it would have been difficult. The interesting question is what would have happened if he'd kept going, because F W De Klerk came in, and F W De Klerk was a Dopper, a form of Afrikaner - I wouldn't say fundamentalist – but strict formalistic sub-set of the Afrikaner reform church. I can't remember what it's precisely called. The point about Doppers is, whatever it is they believe they believe in 100%, but they're capable of shifting their beliefs completely. So having believed in apartheid, F W De Klerk seems to have had a personal decision that he had to believe in some

sort of pluralism, and he was a different kettle of fish. P W Botha was hawkish and tough, and so once P W was out of the way and with Gorbachev behaving positively it was possible to legalise the ANC and the PAC and these other groups and start a process. A big part of the Afrikaner intellectual argument was – We have to protect the West from Communism - and Communism was ending in effect once the Berlin Wall came down, and there was a feeling everyone had to change including them. They felt that, but then the question was - what sort of bargain do you have? Did De Klerk drive a hard bargain, or was he too naïve about the way the ANC would be? Would a P W figure have ended apartheid under different circumstances? A key thing about our policy - it wasn't clear what it really was. Did we want pluralism in South Africa? Did we want one man, one vote? Did we want democracy? Did we want Nelson Mandela to be President? Did we want the end of apartheid? All these things were very different. You could put under those sub headings very different baskets of outcome. I think what Robin Renwick wanted was to get the issue out of Trafalgar Square. He was saying the British interest in this was that apartheid ends - that we end up with some sort of African-trending outcome which will be sub-optimal - but end of problem as far as we in the UK are concerned. Move on to the next problem. That will happen sooner or later. Let's make the best of it.

MM Did Rhodesia, Zimbabwe ...

CC Renwick had negotiated Lancaster House. That was his rise to fame, through that process. So he was familiar with the psychology of the whole thing, even though he would probably admit he was one of the people who didn't see Mugabe taking over. The plan was that Mugabe as an Africanist wouldn't take over. Mandela was quite different in South Africa – he had more money behind him.

MM Had he?

CC He had the whole world supporting the ANC, and the ANC had the South African Communist Party at the heart of it. They had the Soviets and all the European leftists behind them, and not behind any of the other African movements.

MM But the Americans weren't?

MM But it didn't matter. There was only one show in town as far as the opposition was concerned. There wasn't anybody nearly credible the Americans could seriously support. Buthelezi was fine if you wanted a Zulu; that was as far as it went. He wasn't capable of mounting a national challenge. We lived a nice life as a sort of white South African. A big house and servants - a servant anyway - someone to cut the grass, and I didn't see many dramatic, difficult moments. The whole point about apartheid was it worked well in keeping things hidden. Some other Embassy people were in the townships a lot more than me during much more violent episodes. There were a lot of historic things swirling around me, but often I didn't see them; I didn't feel them.

The new team arrived within two or three months of each other and left within two or three months of each other – Renwick went to Washington as Ambassador. Robin Renwick did a farewell lunch when I left and I think it's the first time in South African history that you had a member of every political faction from across the political spectrum. You had a Conservative Party white, the hardcore Afrikaners, a fairly hardcore Afrikaner National Party white, a Liberal Democrat white, the Communist Party, the ANC, the PAC, AZAPO, Inkatha – the whole lot were there. It was an impressive metaphor for what the Embassy had done in four years; not just what I had done, but what the Embassy had done by being efficient. A lot of other countries – the Swedes for example – had made a big point of being the ANC's best friends. It meant that they were always in there with them, but they were useless because what the ANC really wanted was to know what the other side were thinking. Unless you talked to the Afrikaners you weren't really much use to the ANC other than giving them money. So it was a brilliant piece of political work by the Embassy.

MM When you had this rainbow of opinion there, did they get on well?

CC Oh yes, sure.

MM So it was a great success then?

CC I introduced them to each other. I knew Carel Boshoff, – one of the top Afrikaner Conservatives. The Afrikaner Conservatives often spoke African languages, whereas white liberals up in the English-speaking areas – none of them spoke. South Africa was a complex, religious place. There were some Muslims, but mainly it was a Christian space. You would go into the townships, tin shacks and mud and nothing, and out of nowhere these big African ladies would come with their kids dressed-up in immaculate Sunday outfits. Astonishing technical achievement to get these outfits so clean and ironed and smart and beautiful. So there was this sense of – reconciliation, faith, I don't know what to call it – which meant that there was something there to work with. Of course they had plenty of religion in Bosnia too but there it drove people apart.

The biggest gathering in the African continent every year was where one or two million black South Africans would go off to the north of the country for this outdoor festival – very conservative; very against fighting apartheid; very fatalistic. So when people came together, if anything it was a – especially for whites – it was a psychological relief. I suppose that the Embassy was a glorified counselling service. When Mandela came out of prison it happened I was stuck up in Transkei at a PAC rally – they'd been talking about him coming out for ages – so I missed the show in Cape Town. John Sawers was the first British diplomat Mandela met, the day after he came out of prison. John's speech he gave recently is on our UN Embassy website – he talks about it

MM It was an amazing development, and one hopes that it succeeds.

CC It's a question of timescale. It depends what you want. That's what I said before – did we want democracy? Did we want the ANC to win? Did we want Mandela to win? Did we want one man one vote, or whatever it was? They were very different things. I remember – again it's on the website – there was a famous occasion when Renwick was in London just after Mandela got out of prison. The Embassy was in Pretoria, so our Deputy Head of Mission, Jim Poston, decided to go and see Mandela. He was dancing round the Embassy saying – I'm going to see Nelson Mandela today. And he went off to Johannesburg to see Mandela. So we sat

there sulking – Lucky chap, with us stuck here. I was in the Embassy and almost nobody else – it was a sleepy Pretoria afternoon. Then the guard at the gate said – Mandela’s at the front door of the Embassy. I said – Blimey. They came in and said – We sent a message saying we were coming to the Embassy instead of meeting him in Johannesburg. Is that okay? Of course they hadn’t sent a message. It was a lie. I think they’d been in Pretoria and hoped to catch Jim before he left. We had no mobile phones in those days. Frantic messages were sent to try and track down Jim Poston, while I sat down with Mandela for an hour on my own, chatting. And we talked about the quasi-war going on in Natal over the transition. He suddenly said to me – What do you people want? Do you want Buthelezi to be President? So I said – if he wins a free and fair election of all South Africans – black, white – why not? And then a long pause, and one of his people said – Good answer. It was a good answer. I didn’t agree with the paradigm that the only result was the coronation of Nelson Mandela and the ANC sweeping the board.

MM How did Mandela take that?

CC He came from a more Africanist tradition, not as Communist as some of the others, so he took it well. Eventually they left and Jim Poston not only missed him but got a speeding ticket on the way back from Johannesburg. A very satisfactory day. I had a huge row on this with someone in Warsaw years later. I can even tell you who it was, because no-one will ever read the transcript. It was David King, the former Government Chief Scientist. It turned out he was from South Africa. We were sitting there in Warsaw having a lunch talking about science policy and global warming and he said – I’m really pleased to be here in Poland, because I come from South Africa. Poland like South Africa had a peaceful transition to democracy. I said Poland wasn’t that peaceful because quite a few people were killed, but South Africa’s wasn’t peaceful at all. He said – What do you mean it wasn’t peaceful? I said – Thirty thousand people were killed. Hacked to pieces and burned alive. He said – That’s just ridiculous. I said – It may be inconvenient, and it may be that you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs, but it strikes me as a bit thick to call South Africa a peaceful transition. It just wasn’t peaceful. If 30,000 Poles had been killed we’d have heard about it. Poland had Father Popieluszko and one or two others, and that’s about it. Anyway we had this absurd row, with the Poles watching

like that Hitchcock film called Strangers on a Train where all the heads are turning to and fro at the tennis match. Eventually we declared the end of hostilities and changed the subject. I went back to the Embassy and got on to London and said – How many people died in the transition away from apartheid? And the answer was - over that period – seven or eight years period – what you could define the transition as – 30 to 40, 000 known deaths – those sort of numbers. There was basically a civil war going on in different parts of South Africa among the blacks. But the so-called peaceful transition took place because few if any whites were massacred. Anything else was sort of weird unimportant African stuff. And so your question; was it successful? Well, how do you measure success? I met a woman once whose twin sister had been necklaced by the ANC. She was a PAC supporter. The world let loose revolutionary terror in the townships and the World Council of Churches and these people did nothing about it. In fact if anything they encouraged it and Winnie Mandela with her matchbox – it was disgusting. There were crucifixions going on in the townships just a mile or two away from the Embassy in Pretoria. (Tape change)

CC ... So the question is, how do you measure success? We brought to power a government, an ANC Party, whose subsequent incompetence has led to the more or less winding down of the best electricity system in Africa because of lack of investment. But above all – according to the Harvard study which came out the other day – 300,000 people have died over the AIDS problem who maybe needn't have died. Now this is a tremendous disaster, and it's sort of tucked away on page 3 somewhere, so hideously embarrassing it is that the ANC government has led to this result. It goes beyond any measure. In the last ten years we've had a Labour government, a lot of whom invested hugely, personally, in the anti-apartheid struggle. Tony Blair, Robin Cook – this was one of the big moments of their life and there was a big moral campaign, and for them the ANC are for all practical purposes above criticism. And we've sat there watching 300,000 people die because of mistaken policies which we all knew were a farce. I saw in the paper the other day the government are giving £50 million to South Africa who's now got a new health minister, to deal with this AIDS problem. It's the mother of all shutting the stable door after the horses have bolted and died. I'm pleased to say if you type in *South Africa peaceful transition* into Google, my website dumping on the peaceful transition comes up on the front page at number 3. So the truth is out there somewhere.

What's the point of diplomacy? When I was at the Fletcher School there was a fellow called Jim Manzi, and it turns out there are two Jim Manzis. So if you look them up on Google, don't get them muddled up. This Jim Manzi went off and became the Head of the Lotus 123 Corporation, and became the highest paid executive in America or something for a few years. They were bought out by IBM. He made gazillions. I remember Jim at college. He was sardonic, he loved making money. Did his degree in Classics – unusual in America. He'd take student loans and invest them, and played poker with them, always letting money trickle through his fingers. And he said – The three rules in life are be honest with yourself, be honest with other people and don't be stupid or boring. I think being honest with ourselves about what's going on is a big part of the point in South Africa. There's no point in saying it was a peaceful transition. It wasn't. There's no point in pretending it's somehow okay for 300,000 Africans to be liberated and then to be effectively killed by their own government. It's monstrous. The silence about it ...

MM It is. It is. Thank you very much for that. That's a very good insight into your time.

CC Should we care? - is the question. It's South Africa's problem, not ours. It's not for us to define the outcome. If we had tried to fix the outcome, so that, say, there had been a different sort of coalition and so the ANC hadn't got so many seats; Buthelezi for example had had a bigger role; you might have had a different health minister team; you might have had a different President. You might have had Mandela with a different less ANC configuration, and we would have been reviled at the time for helping to thwart the ANC; for thwarting one man, one vote. Yet 300,000 Africans might be alive. So on my website I talk a lot about cause and effect. How do you measure success? There's all this government rubbish talked now about targets and objectives and strategies and road maps and just junk – without a vision over what timescale you measure these things it's madness, drivel and nonsense.

MM Well I suppose the outcome in South Africa was satisfactory from our point of view because it got us off the hook. We were being criticised for maintaining our commercial links etc.

CC Absolutely. There was a moral quality to it.

MM We were criticised by everybody.

CC We were in a bad position, and to be honest only when Renwick went to South Africa did we have a policy of actively working to end apartheid. Renwick was a bit like General Rupert Smith years later in Bosnia, who said – We have to change course, and he created the conditions in which that was inevitable. Renwick invented township diplomacy. Our people went round – we got a slush fund from the ODA as it was in those days – we’d go round – I wouldn’t say bribing people – but we’d go round into the townships and start helping build capacity. Build a little church hall or give money for people to set up a knitting collective. It wasn’t enough to say we want the South African blacks to become democratic – we set out helping them achieve that. I remember going to Zambia to meet Thabo Mbeki who was then in exile. I took with me a list of all the projects we were helping. He went down the list nodding, saying for about 80%, were things he knew about – they were ANC projects. We were doing it because we wanted to be seen by the ANC to be changing course. It was a cynical use of taxpayers’ money, but it worked in the terms the policy was defined, namely to end that particular form of racist authoritarianism. As I say, my feeling is at the back of it we could have aimed for a higher moral quality of outcome. But even then could you aim for a higher moral quality of outcome than the Afrikaners themselves were prepared to negotiate? If they sold the shop, they sold it. Partly our problem; mainly theirs. And wholly their shop. On we go.

MM You then came back to the FCO?

Return to the FCO, Soviet then Eastern Department 1991-93

CC John Sawers got a job running the Presidency Unit which became a stepping stone for him to become a Private Secretary to Douglas Hurd. Whereas I got the job, which was less good but a good strong step forward for me and quite a big profile job, of being Deputy in the Soviet Department under Rod Lyne. I went back in June 1991. Our first little one had just been born. I wasn’t really up with Gorbachev and Yeltsin,

and the great dramas which had been churning away in that part of the world. I'd been stuck in South Africa – deep in that. So I was there in London about six weeks. Rod Lyne goes on holiday in August and I said to him – Knowing my luck there'll be a coup when you're away. Then I am phoned up at four on a Monday morning saying there's been some sort of coup in Moscow. We had that dramatic week when there was an attempted coup by hardcore Communists against Gorbachev, which rose and crashed spectacularly. By the time the EU got round to meeting on the Thursday, it was over. On the Monday afternoon Douglas Hurd called a meeting and I was there, to represent the policy, and I knew nothing about it. I was completely hopeless. There were one or two other grand diplomats there as well who unlike me had at least served in Moscow, but they didn't know anything about it either. So we sat there watching CNN for about an hour or so, and Douglas Hurd said that he wanted to talk to the German Foreign Minister on the telephone, and that was the end of the meeting.

Anyway, then the stupid coup failed and Rod Lyne came back from leave, and Yeltsin in a series of blows proclaimed the Russian ministries to take over. And that was the end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev resigned as whatever he was of the Soviet Union on Christmas Day 1991. John Major rushed over to Moscow straight after all this drama first started and helped negotiate with Yeltsin the independence of the Baltic States. I negotiated with the Treasury for the return of the Baltic gold. This was a big deal, because the Treasury were trying to claim they'd given it to the Soviets back in the 1960s. It was a tumultuous time. Round the corridor Yugoslavia was starting to break up. That was, with all due respect to them, a sideshow compared to the end of the Soviet Union. Renwick couldn't care less about the FCO system. Just ignored it as far as he possibly could, saying it was full of useless people. Rod Lyne worked with the system. Rod would dictate these great policy submissions which would include telegrams and instructions for every possible post you could think about. A great wad of papers. He would then get it walked round to all the key Departments giving them ten minutes to clear it, and then say – fine, Ministers have ticked it off, now we would have a policy. Whereas Renwick always had a policy, his policy (laughter). I did the economic policy side of the collapse of the USSR. There was the famously useless model farm, supposedly starving Russians. I would go to Whitehall meetings on the economic side. Rod masterminded the diplomatic, political. Doing a lot of it personally – it was a phenomenal piece of work.

The break up of the Soviet Union; the principles thereof – terribly complex technical issues of debt, nuclear weapons, borders, sovereignty, new embassies. Rachel Aron now HM Ambassador to Brussels, spouse of Michael Aron – another diplomatic couple – Rachel was brought in as the desk officer to open new embassies. We built up a new office in St Petersburg. We started opening all these embassies all of a sudden, in a way we hadn't had to do before. There was a great scrambling around.

MM At the same time you were gouging the gold out of the Treasury?

CC The Baltic States had been independent before the Second World War – I forget the exact history of it now. Their gold had been deposited in London £30-£40 millions worth at prices then. Gold's gold. The Soviets annexed them but we'd never recognised the annexation, so we kept the Balts' gold in a bank account of the Baltic States. We recognised the annexation *de facto* not *de jure*. Anyway, in the 1960s, even though we hadn't recognised *de jure*, Harold Wilson's Government came to some weird deal with the Russians whereby they were given assets to the value of the gold - basically a disgraceful piece of work. Some trade thing. The Baltic States then emerged again and said – Where's our gold? And the Treasury were making a half-hearted attempt to say – Well sorry, we gave it to the Soviets. I said there's no way you're going to get away with that. I sent along a robust minute. The Titanic of the Treasury was hit by the iceberg I hurled at them and gave in, because the sums of money were smallish and it was a fair cop. So I got the Baltic gold back for the Baltic States. They were opening their embassies in London. Diplomatic relations. Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh – there was all sorts of things going on all in that former Soviet space.

Meanwhile the Yugoslav fire was starting to burn. There was a busy little flame down in that corner of Europe, but the thick black smoke hadn't spread as far as it later spread. A big point to understand about this is the following. We had two problems when the Soviet Union broke up. We didn't understand communism. And we didn't understand capitalism. We had never really had to think about our society - what made western society tick? I was writing papers in Planning Staff in 1987, which wasn't very long before this happened, about communism. I was writing

speeches for Geoffrey Howe as Gorbachev was coming in. I wrote a speech for him which he gave in Hungary, and getting these speeches cleared was almost impossible because the other bits of the Foreign Office didn't like you using Mrs Thatcher rhetoric against communism. You could not write an anti-Communist speech, for fear of it being seen as being provocative. It's hard to imagine it now. I've got some of these papers upstairs. They hated it when we said – Russia is an evil empire. They didn't like it at all. So I wrote a speech for Geoffrey Howe, basically saying to the Hungarians – You should give up all this stupid communism and have a much more pluralist, efficient system. He gave this speech much as I wrote it, because somehow the FCO mice didn't get at it to cut out the good bits, and in Hungary he was given a standing ovation. I was quite ideological about this. Basically I joined the Foreign Office as a paid up lefty after being in America, where I found American society a bit too weird compared to Hemel Hempstead. But then after being in Yugoslavia, and seeing communism at first hand I became a rabid anti-collectivist.

MM Reality had set in.

CC I was always a libertarian in a strange way. And so I was pushing market solutions in Whitehall. When other people were saying we need to give the Russians help, I said if you give the Russians help, if you give them food aid, you will destroy the latent markets that are already there. We had these big arguments about do you give them spare EU butter or not. I was more or less right. As I said, we didn't really understand capitalism, why societies work. We were starting from not exactly a blank piece of paper, because they had clever ideas themselves. But we didn't really have an underlying philosophy about it. Basically the paradigm was that if you privatise things that will be fine, and that was partly fine, because it did get things out of state hands. But without the rule of law to underpin all this – this was the big mistake we made – a philosophical mistake of huge proportions – privatising things without the rule of law doesn't get you as far as you need to get. It creates oligarchs and that sort of thing. We didn't put enough money into the rule of law in Communist countries. And partly because DFID – well not DFID, the ODA – said - Lawyers are rich. Why do you want to give lawyers money? Well the answer is that if you went back to England in 1700, you decided to give judges a load of money to keep them honest, because they were being bribed and duffed-up and threatened, so you had to keep

them separate. It was a wise investment, and you had to do the same in the Soviet Union. You had to give judges a million dollar a year salary and all the protection they could possibly have to get law established, and we didn't do it.

When I went to Bosnia a judge was paid 200 Deutschmarks a month, and a truckload of smuggled cigarettes would be worth a quarter of a million, so it's pretty obvious who's going to win that battle. With that truckload and a few more you don't buy a judge, you buy the legal system. The same thing happened on a bigger scale in the Soviet Union. So there were philosophical mistakes. Yet it was a tumultuous time. You couldn't do everything and the Russians had their own views. It was their country, not ours. People say now this was a failure of shock therapy. The trouble was there wasn't enough shock, and there wasn't enough therapy. If anything, we should have been more radical in some of the things we'd done in terms of upsetting the old order and breaking up the old monopolies. We certainly should have been more radical in pressing for Lenin to be taken out of Red Square. It was a moral blunder not to press for that.

MM Could we have got away with that?

CC You could only get away with it only if you decided it was important. I think there was a feeling of – Oh well – Leftism in that form is over, so why bother pushing it? If you get on my website again you'll see reference to my telegram about a tale of two vampires. The Nazi vampire was killed at the end of the Second World War. The Communist vampire wasn't killed. It lies there in Red Square but no-one's driven a stake through its heart, and it just keeps coming back. Leftism in the Foreign Office and western thinking generally, it's a profound thing. The idea that you should drive a stake through the heart of communism ... people would say – Well why? Why are you being so divisive? It's all over. They didn't realise you had to kill it off. And Mrs Thatcher would have been much better on this, because by then John Major had come in. He wasn't one of nature's stake-drivers. He probably would have agreed with it, but he wasn't somebody who was going to push it.

MM Well I suppose you could say what's it got to do with us?

CC What it's got to do with us is that we have to kill vampires. Otherwise they return through the back door. As indeed they've done. So there were decisions made which were not dramatic enough. There were issues about the Katyn massacre in Poland which Yeltsin pushed – but we didn't really take them up thematically. Because there was always a feeling – Well we don't want to do this, in case it provokes the opposition to Yeltsin. It was odd. We pulled our punches, but the argument against doing what I wanted was that you can only do so much and we were all working flat out. I still think there wasn't a big enough ideological component. A lot of western governments didn't want to gloat, be seen to be gloating, and maybe there's somewhere between gloating and being much more determined. When the Second World War ended we organised all these conferences at Wilton Park on de-Nazification. We didn't do de-Communistification, or whatever the word would be. Because we didn't think we needed to.

MM Where would it have got us?

CC It might have got us to a lot of good places if you brought a lot of these people across and taught them about the rule of law. Don't forget in Russia they've got no living memory of anything other than communism. In Eastern Europe it's different. What you said makes my very point. It wouldn't have got us anywhere, why bother, it's too big and it's too complicated. My point is, this is one of the greatest intellectual convulsions in modern history and we tried to do it on the cheap. The Know How Fund was what, fifty million, a hundred million over eight years – peanuts. We gave quite a lot of money writing off debts which I suppose was theoretically real money, but in terms of the money we invested in transforming those societies, given the scale of what was needed and the scale of where they'd come from, it was just absurd. Just not up to the job. We saw this after Milosevic was killed in Serbia. We tried to do it on the cheap. Stupid. It was a bad investment.

There are moments when you invest a bit more money because they're historical moments. There was opportunity to put thousands of people through courses, as opposed to tens or scores or hundreds of people through courses. It's just a good investment and we didn't have a leader who had a strategic vision in that sort of way. Plus there was other money around – it's not our job – why should we bother – dah,

dah, dah. There's always a reason for not doing anything, and slowly the moments pass. Years later you see Putinism there. One wonders if one had invested a bit more in pluralism, would we have quite ended up where we are now? Some say of course you would, because that's all there is in Russia. Other people would say no – it would have made a difference. Personally, I would like to have seen us make a bigger effort.

Russian language training

MM We are still talking about Russia.

CC That was that period. So then I went off and started learning Russian. I'd got basically a big jump again, to go to Moscow as Counsellor to replace David Manning, who did well subsequently. Rod Lyne went to No 10. I had a big row with the language centre because they forced me to learn Russian from scratch and I said – Look. You've only given me five months or so before I go to Russia. I've got Serbian so I can do Russian much faster. So I wasted four or five weeks arguing with the language centre about having special personal tuition, and the Russian language ladies who thought Russian was far superior to what they called Church Slavonic Serbian were furious. Then they were amazed that with my Church Slavonic I could make intelligent guesses far more than they thought. I tiptoed my way towards the exam on intermediate level Russian, which I duly passed.

Appointment as Counsellor to British Embassy Moscow 1993-96

I went to Moscow, under Brian Fall, who was then the Ambassador, as the Political Counsellor. Francis Richards was my boss. He was later Head of GCHQ and Governor-General in Gibraltar. Not long after we got there we had the shoot out at the White House and the attempted Communist coup against Yeltsin, which was quite a dramatic moment. The Embassy did a wonderful job that evening.

MM What did they do?

CC We got it right, whereas the BBC got it wrong. These demonstrations started against Yeltsin. There was some sort of demonstrators' camp outside the White

House Parliament Building. Then a Communist vanguard invaded and seized control of parliament led by someone called Ruskoi – a former fighter pilot. The pro-Yeltsin forces caved in. The supposedly dreaded pro-Yeltsin OMON special forces ran away or were pushed aside. We were having an Embassy picnic up in the *dacha* on the outskirts of Moscow. We had a telephone call – Something’s going on. I went to the Embassy and ended up spending the night in the Embassy building down by the river. The boss and the young boys stayed at home, much to her annoyance with all the gunfire going on near the flat. It said on the BBC at the height of this gun battle – this is an uprising by the people of Russia against President Yeltsin. It was simply not true. Simply, totally not true. The Yeltsin troops soon got the upper hand – a lot of the troops had been away picking potatoes and came back. An absurd Russian farce, all of this. Enough Yeltsin troops had got to the Ostankino radio tower to defend it. The attackers were repulsed. There was a serious gun battle there. Pro-Yeltsin forces then went to the White House where the so-called anti-Yeltsin pro-democracy forces were holed up, and there was a theatrical, surreal shoot out at the White House, with lots of loud noises and things set on fire up on the roof but really it wasn’t damaged. There were tanks firing blanks to make a big noise. If they’d really attacked the building it would have been blown to smithereens.

Eventually these people inside surrendered and the whole thing ended, and Yeltsin had elections, and Zhirinovskiy did quite well – my meeting with him is on my website - and blah, blah, blah, on it all dragged for three years. I was there from the early middle to early end of Yeltsin, from 1993 to 1996 watching capitalism taken to Russia for the first time since the Revolution. It was wonderful. We had a State Visit. So I was a big part of organising that.

MM A State Visit by The Queen?

CC Which, given the history of the Tsars and her relatives, was a big event. We organised this thing for months, but when she landed I did not set eyes on the Queen until there was a gala event at the Bolshoi, and she and President Yeltsin came out on the balcony. It was a touching moment.

MM How was she received?

CC She was received well because the Russians thought this was great. John Sawers by then was with Douglas Hurd as his Private Secretary, so he came out. We sat there in the first black tie event in the Kremlin since the Russian Revolution, and I said to John Sawers – I bet that if in South Africa I'd said to you that in a couple of hundred weeks Communism would have ended in Russia and we would be sitting in the Kremlin listening to Engelbert Humperdinck's greatest hits played by the Russian military band, you wouldn't have believed me?

How was she received? She was received well. Except there was one farce, partly our fault, I mean the Embassy. We decided to organise a walkabout for The Queen to meet the people of Russia, and so she would go to Red Square with President Yeltsin for the walkabout. So they got to Red Square for the walkabout. The security forces had cleared the square of people. It was deserted. The Queen apparently said - Oh. They walked round the Square and met one or two people separately. St Petersburg was a bit more relaxed, but the Russians even then were incredible – the security apparatus was difficult to deal with. You couldn't get hold of the people in charge of it to talk about the way we wanted the programme to run.

My time in Moscow ended in a dramatic way in mid-1996. I was well in with the MFA. They liked me there and we were doing good work together. In Bosnia we had the contact group period. Yugoslavia had blown up and we were working closely with the Russians on this, doing our best to maintain some sort of equilibrium. It was the high water mark of Western-Russian co-operation. The MFA people were in one of those Stalin skyscraper buildings in Moscow, and I said to them – Look folks – here's the deal. I'm leaving. You provide the highest possible floor in the MFA building with a great view somewhere; 38th floor or something. You find somewhere where we can have a party, you provide the guests and I provide the whisky.

We were working away on this project happily when suddenly we got this strangled phone call on a Monday morning. Andrew Wood was by then the Ambassador. They said the Ambassador should come immediately to the MFA; so I went with him. There was a young Desk Officer who normally would have accompanied him. She'd just got back from seeing her fiancé in France and was miserable and didn't feel like

going. So I went. They said - We are expelling nine British diplomats. They have to leave within two weeks. We had this amazing conversation where they listed the names of the nine diplomats being expelled, including this girl. We went back to the Embassy and sent a flash telegram to London, and a drama ensued. It was a global news story. The first time since the end of the Cold War that anything like this had happened.

MM Why were they doing it?

CC They said they'd caught us red-handed.

MM Doing?

CC Spying on them. So John Major sent a message to President Yeltsin cranked up in the FCO on that Bank Holiday Monday, remonstrating about this. So by about the Wednesday, Primakov, who was by then the Foreign Minister, called in the Ambassador to talk about this letter. Andrew Wood – I always tell him off about this – he wouldn't let me go with him. I said – I have my training needs – how can I learn to deal with this sort of crisis without training? He said – forget your training. There are moments when Ambassadors deal with things privately. Off he went, and Primakov said – Mr Ambassador, you're putting me in a difficult position with this letter. If I show it to the President, I'll have to show him various other documents, and he will be annoyed that Mr Major is wasting his time with this. What do you want me to do? Andrew Wood said – I'll just get back to you on that one.

The long and short of it was that we then threw out some Russians, and the Russians fudged a little bit on ours who were asked to leave. Some of them were leaving anyway. It all fizzled out a few months later. But I of course was leaving anyway, so a lot of people thought I had been kicked out. It was a big Embassy, so there were always new people coming, and always people leaving, always people on leave. Journalists never found out the names of the people expelled. It was a wonderful piece of work by the Embassy to keep the names private. I'm technically impressed, looking back on it. Anyway I left, and that was the end of Moscow.

MM Rather a sad way to go really.

CC No it was good. I wasn't under a cloud, because the Russians hadn't accused me of being involved in whatever they thought someone else was involved in. At the time it was an exciting story.

MM What did they think you were spying on?

CC Well they claimed we were running agents. Perish the thought. (laughter).

MM So do we want to leave Moscow there?

CC It was a busy time. I had worked hard. I remember one period when I'd been out twenty nights out of twenty one and was exhausted, with delegations coming in; the anniversary of the end of their Second World War; Clinton came across. A huge effort was made to work with the Russians. Yeltsin, for all his faults, and the turbulence and chaos going on, was a good partner. Everyone sniggers at him now but Yeltsin brought Russia freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of travel, freedom to set up a business, freedom of speech; every freedom that we still think counts for anything, he gave Russia. Amazing burst of enthusiasm. When we went there, there was nothing in the city, hardly any food. By the time we left there was a big fat "yellow pages". We wanted a firework display for Guy Fawkes Night so we looked in the "yellow pages" and some young guy turned up with a load of free samples and a video of his fireworks display and we hired him. Brilliant. After all that Marxist rubbish of scientific socialism, we saw scientific capitalism in operation. It was really remarkable.

MM Did you get the impression there was very much corruption?

CC There was lots of corruption, but it wasn't because of capitalism. It was because there were Russians who knew nothing else but petty corruption and who now could operate on a much bigger scale. It depends what you call corruption. If you're the owner of timber factory No33 which is four time zones away from Russia in the middle of Siberia somewhere, and some Japanese fellow turns up and says –

Look we want to buy twenty lorry loads of wood. The first lorry load is \$5000. With that you sort of do a deal with the head of the local police to allow more lorry loads to be shipped out. You've got a forest the size of France or something. You find a whole lot of people with AK47s to protect the thing. Within a few months you're dealing in millions, and then you're up to your tens of millions, and then you're up to your billions and you're an oligarch.

I cannot tell your loyal readers clearly enough – there was nothing there! The first person to sell paperclips in Russia was going to make a load of money. There was raw materials wealth, and a sort of money there, but there weren't any products; nothing. Nothing. It was far worse than communist Yugoslavia. A British fellow I know went over there. He started with some money. Last sighted he was running a two or three hundred million dollar property/PR firm. There was no PR. There were no supermarkets. There were no promotions in supermarkets. No motor shows because there were no cars. So the first person to do all that was going to do fine. Interesting difference between Russia and Poland, Poland being much smaller. Rolls Royce started selling Rolls Royces and Bentleys in Moscow fairly easily. In Poland when I was there, I did a big promotion for the new Rolls Royce cars at the Residence. A select number of wealthy Poles turned up. They had the money. Buying the car wasn't the problem, it was that no one wanted to be attacked in public for being the first to own one. Everyone wanted to be second. In Russia, everyone wanted to be first. The psychology of it, the brashness, was very different.

Posting as HM Ambassador to Sarajevo 1996-98

MM Your next move was as an Ambassador to Sarajevo?

CC Kim Darroch, the friend whom I'd met back in the Aviation Department, had become Head of the Balkan Department dealing with the collapse of Yugoslavia. He said to me – Do you want to go to Sarajevo as Ambassador? It would be a great boost to your career. It's a happening place. It's had Dayton. You can make a name for yourself. Completely crazy situation. Massive profile. So after two seconds of hesitation I said – Sure. Because I was looking for the next job and trying to bid for a job in Argentina, but you couldn't guarantee it, and this came up and it was back to

Yugoslavia. The trouble was that Helen and the two boys stayed in Zagreb for the first year because it wasn't safe for the small boys to be in Sarajevo, so the FCO said, in case they needed medical attention. I went down to Sarajevo. We had a tiny Embassy and it was probably the best year in my career in the terms of frantic excitement. A small Embassy – four or five Brits – plus a larger group of locals. They'd had an Embassy in Sarajevo before I got there, but I was the first more senior person to go and run it.

We did a lot of work in implementing the Dayton Agreement and bringing Bosnia back on its feet. During the two years I was there I lived in four places including the house we finally turned into a Residence. One was a floor in a maisonette somewhere on a hillside, and then we moved down into town, which was like an old mansion-type flat but in a shattered block, and then we had a house. The family had turned up so we moved down to a bigger detached house near the airport. By then we found a four up four down, old house in the centre of old Sarajevo up on the hill, which was being renovated. It took an awful long time to finish this job for stupid FCO reasons. Once it was renovated, I moved into it with only six weeks of my posting left. Sarajevo had really changed for the better in 1997 when the Pope came, because they cleaned up the airport and made a big effort to lift the international facilities. It became clear that you could get to Ljubljana or to Vienna as easily as you could get from a hard posting in Africa to the nearest place with good medical facilities. They had no reason not to let the family come down, so they did. Helen and the boys came down in the second year, so we had some family life. They opened the International School in Sarajevo. There were five kids in the school when it started, and we had two of them.

MM Did you open up this post?

CC Yes and no. It was open in the sense that there were two Heads of Mission before me during the war. The Embassy was an old dentist's house/waiting room/surgery – painted in Communist excrement brown up a little side street, just off the main drag in Sarajevo. It was relatively safe from snipers because you couldn't see it from the surrounding hillsides. With peace the Foreign Office technical team started to operate normally for the first time, and so slowly but surely they brought in

equipment; the filing cabinets and so on. When I got there we had to scrounge or borrow. We were living in impoverished conditions. I built the Embassy up to what you might call a modern Embassy. Not because I was cleverer than the people who'd been there before, but because there was peace and you could do it.

MM Did you develop relationships with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

CC Up to a point. Except of course the official one wasn't really recognised by the Serbs. In Bosnia after Dayton they didn't shoot at each other but war continued by other means. Whenever we think about the UK we all recognise the Queen as a national symbol. We recognise Manchester United. We recognise Nelson's Column. We recognise Stratford upon Avon. It doesn't stop. Charles Dickens. There are symbols which, for better or worse, bind us together. Whereas in Bosnia everything was contested, at least by the political leaders. They wrangled over everything – the symbolism of the colour of the money. There was nothing in Bosnia that the three different communities agreed on. There wasn't a common writer; there wasn't a common colour; there wasn't a common book; there wasn't a common football team. One day the three members of the newly elected Presidency sat down to have a meeting round a round table, about six feet across. They spent three hours arguing about the seating arrangements. Should they sit in an isosceles triangle formation, an equilateral triangle or a scalene triangle? Eventually they just sat down and started talking, but this was the sort of madness we had to endure.

MM What were our main interests there?

CC We had no interests at all in terms of commerce. We were there to build up Bosnia and stop the war. Bring peace to that part of the world. It was only an hour or so away from Rome in flying time. Tens of thousands of people being killed in Europe was too much. I was one of the first on the case who'd worked in the former Yugoslavia, so I was able to explain it in a vivid way, which got many of my telegrams a high profile. They were read by the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and valued by Americans and Europeans at the highest level. I wasn't ever going to reach the top, but through that work I made a big jump.

MM Were the Americans there?

CC They had a huge Embassy. Dayton was their baby, so they had to implement it. Dayton had happened when I was in Moscow in November 1995. I got to Sarajevo to start work in June 1996. Bosnia had had six months worth of peace, but it had taken a while for the NATO forces to settle in, and then they had the business of the Serb exodus from Sarajevo, houses being burnt in the Spring. The airport was still surrounded by sandbags and barbed wire. I would fly up to Zagreb for the weekend to see the family on a military flight when I could scrounge a ticket. My typical day was to get up at about ten to seven, go to the Embassy to have a shower because there wasn't any water in the flat. Have a primitive shower; emerge from that; get dressed. The kind Bosnian cleaner would bring me honey, bread, fresh orange juice and coffee and I would sit there after whirring round until about midnight and go home again. So I was working from eight to midnight, twelve days out of fourteen.

MM Sounds like quite a grind?

CC We did remarkable things. We had to improvise. Amra Salkic, Emira, Munevera, several Senads, Jadranka and the rest - the terrific Bosnians who worked in the Embassy were given loads of responsibility. My driver Azam was the best driver in history, he became part of the car – he had the knack of overtaking at high speed on blind mountain corners at night in thick fog which I'll never forget [laughter].

I remember in 1997 we did a massive Valentine's Party. We decided to invite all the glitterati of Sarajevo – the newsreaders; the basketball players; models; hairdressers. The fashionable *monde* of Sarajevo turned up. We had 250 of these folk, plus assorted generals and 50 soldiers in uniform and everyone else, with one WC and no water supply. Helen and the boys came down from Zagreb. The boys were four and six - they slept in the bedroom with a huge pile of NATO assault rifles piled up in the corner. A great party. For many of the Bosnians it was the first such chance to relax in many years.

Becky Fuller ran the Embassy; about my age. I said to her – Every woman has to have a rose for Valentine's Day. She said – Where the hell am I going to get 150

roses in Sarajevo in February? I said – What’s that got to do with me? Just go and get them. So she got them. Magnificent. I did my first lunch party when I moved into the second flat - a farewell for the Turkish Ambassador. My Bosnian housekeeper, Visnja, looked after the flat for me. Some furniture there was painted black. I said – Listen Visnja, I want a black dining table - we didn’t have one – we’ll have to have one made - which will seat eight people. Roughly this size. Make it nice. Get on with it. We turned up for lunch and a black dining table had appeared from nowhere. We lifted up the napkins and they were slightly sticking to the table because the paint wasn’t dry! It was that sort of place. Unbelievable improvisation. We had more senior visits in this period than the whole of Africa, run by our tiny Embassy in chaotic conditions. And everything worked like clockwork.

We all had Bosnian nicknames. I was Boss, *Zdaga*, the Bosnian word for boss *gazda* written sort of backwards. We used the Africanist PAC motto: high discipline, high morale. We hardly missed a single trick in that time, and had a wonderful reputation in London. The Foreign Office sent out people to help us for a week or so here and there. Judy Legg turned up. She’d been at the Embassy in Moscow, I’d been her boss there. I said – Here is the situation. You’ve got no computer, no desk. You’ve got no office. You’ve got no transport. You’ve got nothing. Okay? This is what you have to do. Do this, this, this, this and this. How you do it, I haven’t the faintest idea. Just get on with it. She went off and did it. And that’s why some people look back on it as the best year of their career, because there wasn’t bureaucracy. You had to rely on your own resourcefulness.

Becky and I counted the money one night; once a month you had to balance the Embassy account. There was a lot of money in the Embassy, with people doing massive aid projects, paid in cash. We had bundles of Deutschmarks which came from somewhere - and the aid teams would come in covered in mud from some deepest part of Bosnia, grab a hundred thousand, half a million Deutschmarks in cash and disappear again. We had to balance the books. I said to Becky one night – this is ten o’clock at night - We’re now going to do the Embassy account. Where is the money? So she got out the money. The money was in three places. Namely, a little tin box which had twenty thousand Deutschmarks in it, a brown envelope full of another forty thousand Deutschmarks which had spilled all over the registry cupboard

where the papers were kept, and in her handbag where she had another twenty thousand just in case. So we sat there counting 70,000 DM by hand. We had no adding machine. We didn't have proper books to enter the things. It was all done on scraps of paper. We couldn't quite balance the account. It was fifty Deutschmarks out or something – not too bad in the chaos. The next morning I sent off a telegram to London to say that according to the rules I was meant to certify the account to be in good order, but I hereby certify the account is not in good order. We don't have anywhere to store the money. We don't have a safe. We don't have this. We don't have that. It's a farce. They then apparently thought I was trying to hide something, so pondered whether to send out the police to investigate us. Unbelievable. Anyway we got through all this madness and gradually built it up and we tackled war crimes and we ...

MM The war crimes thing, can you explain?

CC Arresting war crimes indictees. Not waving at them as we drove past them. Karadzic initially was sitting up in Pale and there was a famous occasion when he waved to NATO forces as they drove past. So I sent a telegram back to Kim Darroch in London. I said, if we're going to have a war crimes Hague Tribunal we have to do it seriously. If we're not going to do it seriously, shut it down. If we are going to do it seriously you have to arrest these people. They're a bunch of gangsters, running around, pouring poison into everything we're doing. I think London and the Americans were already coming to this conclusion as well. Richard Holbrooke's book; there's a bit about it in there. We had to start arresting them. So the question arose, do you arrest the biggest ones first or do you or the easiest ones first? So in a steady as she goes way, they decided to arrest the easier ones first, just to practise the technique. The SAS went in and tried to arrest the first one. He pulled out a gun and they shot him. So that didn't end up so happily. At least for him. The result was that more senior ones soon disappeared into hiding, and of course Mladic is still out there. Anyway, I played my part in that.

We also did a lot to bring Bosnians together. Like what I'd done in South Africa - physically bring them together. People who hadn't spoken to each other for years and been enemies in the war - in the same room. We took a visitor up to Pale, the Serb

area above the city, in a Bosniac police car with a Bosniac police escort. That was the first time that had happened. Even a year before it would have been unimaginable - no-one would have dared do that. We deliberately pushed the envelope. It's one country; the war's over; stop messing around; co-operate. It was morally inspiring.

Fellowship at Harvard 1998-99

After all that I went to Harvard to cool down for a year. As far as I know the Foreign Office still has an annual fellowship to Harvard. So I did that for a year and by then the Kosovo bombing was brewing up. I missed that episode, although I did lots of talks at Harvard and elsewhere on Balkan problems, Kosovo and so on. But my main effort was studying the internet and how that can be applied to government, as back in 1998 it was all just getting going. When I went back to London a few months later, I was the only one who understood anything at all about the internet at a senior level in the Foreign Office.

MM That was 1999?

Deputy Political Director at the FCO 1999-2000

CC Mid-1999 I went back. I was given a big promotion because they had bombed Kosovo that Spring, and Robin Cook told the Foreign Office he wanted me in a Deputy Director's job to deal with the Balkans. So I got a big promotion.

MM How did Robin Cook know about you?

CC He had met me in Sarajevo on a visit in 1997 soon after Labour came to power. The Balkans and the 'ethical foreign policy', arresting suspected war criminals - it was his main effort. He spent more time on this than anything else. Labour came to power in 1997 with their tough on crime, international crime, tough on the causes of international crime agenda. So he knew me from Sarajevo. He never said much, but I guess he liked me.

MM What did you think of him?

CC Well I'll tell you what I thought of him. I thought of him what P G Wodehouse said - It's never difficult to tell the difference between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine. He was on the Scotsman-with-a-grievance end of that spectrum. We sat in the car after he landed on his first visit to Sarajevo. He later came on a second visit to give a speech to the Republika Srpska Assembly: not exactly a brave thing to do, but a striking thing to do. Separate story. On his first visit he had a difficult meeting with Izetbegovic. This was just after we shot the first suspected war criminal, Mr Drljaca. Even though the SAS had gone in, and killed a Serbian war crimes suspect in a gun battle, the Bosniacs thought this was a typical British pro-Serb move. This is a measure of the political madness we had to deal with.

There was a row about corruption on the eve of Cook's visit. The Sarajevo newspapers hinted that I would be expelled for spreading false information. So we had this problematic meeting with Izetbegovic. Robin Cook then was flying off to Zagreb to see President Tudjman, another difficult customer. I briefed him on what to say to President Tudjman, which in rather vivid terms went well beyond what the Foreign Office brief said – and maybe a million miles beyond what our Ambassador in Zagreb my old boss Gavin Hewitt wanted him to say. He went in and used my language and had the most terrific row with Tudjman. He was delighted by this.

MM A diplomatic success!

CC Having left, I look at Ministers down the years. I wrote in an affectionate way an article for **Total Politics** about Ministers I have known. The person I gave the highest marks to was Michael Portillo: he was much the best in terms of courtesy, ability to get on with people, ability to master the brief, and so on. Robin Cook was spikily brilliant. He got in the car with me in Bosnia, and this was just after all his early difficulties with the Foreign Office, his divorce – a lot going on in his life- and he sat there and read the FCO brief in a cross sort of way, and said – What do I say to these people? I was reading the brief out of the corner of my eye. It wasn't that good. I said - Well actually I think there's probably four really good points you can make. Then I gave them to him. One, two, three, four.

In the meeting with Izetbegovic, with about ten minutes to go, he had dealt with two of these in a good way. I thought - Not bad. Normally you wouldn't expect Ministers to remember any points in much detail from such a short briefing in the car, but to remember two was definitely good. Then he said to Izetbegovic - there's just two more points I want to make - and he gave the other two. And I thought - How the hell did he do that without notes? Sheer ability to master the point. He's really got it. But not an easy chap to work with.

That reminds me. When I was Second Secretary on my first posting my first Ambassador Eddy Bolland in Belgrade had once asked what I thought about a long despatch he'd written about the Congress of Yugoslav Socialist self-Managers. I hesitated, because it was pretty bad. He said - you think it's pedestrian, don't you. I said - Yes, I do. He then said something I never forgot. He said - all the other people in this Embassy are yes-men - you're the only one who says what you really think. Never lose that.

Anyway Robin Cook liked me, maybe because I always said what I thought. That's maybe why I got this big promotion through Robin Cook and I came back as Deputy Political Director, a big job close to the top. Thanks to my work in Moscow and Sarajevo I went from First Secretary to that level in effect in only five years. A meteoric rise. [laughter] I replaced Peter Ricketts, now PUS. I was the Balkan superstar in the Foreign Office. I had one or two other interesting parts in the new portfolio - Devolved Administrations, Cyprus, - which I gave away, because I wanted to focus on the Balkans. My main effort was to help democratic forces remove Mr Milosevic. I was the first person working on the issue with any seniority since the whole stupid thing had started who previously had worked in Yugoslavia. I was able to speak the language. All these Balkan people who came through, they knew they were dealing with someone who knew the subject.

And eighteen months later Mr Milosevic was gone. As a Director I was in on the FCO top brass morning meetings the PUS John Kerr chaired. We'd talk around the table about what was happening in our various patches. He turned to me in mid-2000 and I said - Milosevic has just called an election and I think we're going to get him

this time. They all laughed – Oh, the famous Balkan expert! Are you stupid? I said – Well, we’ll see. And we got him. And at the morning meeting two days after he fell I reminded them – I just want to recall that I said we were going to get him, and you all tittered. They looked sort of shifty. [laughter]. They didn’t understand the subject, and I did.

We’d run a philosophically clever campaign which I more or less worked out on the ‘plane on the way back from Harvard. We got the Americans to sign up to it. It wasn’t mainly me of course, because it was a big team effort. We even had the Russians working with us to a certain degree. I knew Vladimir Chizhov, who’s now Russia’s Ambassador to the EU. He had been in Sarajevo with the High Rep’s office and before he’d been the Head of the British Section in the MFA when I was in Moscow. Wonderful Russian diplomat. I had personal relationships which I was able to play with, not so much in Washington, but with the Russians and some others. I spoke the language. Once I went along to an EU Political Directors meeting in Helsinki and told them what was happening in the Balkans. All the young diplomats from other countries hovering in the background came up to me afterwards and said – Thank God there’s somebody here who actually understands it for a change.

Most of the people dealing with it - why should they understand it? They hadn’t lived there, they didn’t speak the language. They were familiar with it in very big picture terms. But it’s how you combine the big picture with the details that makes a successful policy. As result of all that I volunteered to go to Belgrade after Milosevic fell in late 2000. Just after he fell I flew out to Belgrade to see Mr Kostunica who had beaten him. My first visit there since 1985. I just wanted to go back, I guess. So I went back as Ambassador.

Appointment as HM Ambassador, Belgrade 2001-3

MM Must have been rather satisfying?

CC It was strange. I had a good time there. It was another business of re-building an Embassy. The Embassy had been shut because we’d bombed Serbia, and they churlishly broke off diplomatic relations. Chargé David Landsman – now

Ambassador in Greece - actually re-opened the Embassy before I arrived. The thing I'm most proud about in Belgrade, apart from the diplomatic work we did, was renovating the Residence. The house was a funny 1960s building on two floors. Primitive really, with some quite nice 60s touches. We modernised it for the first time since it had been built. When we got there everything was a disgusting communist dark brown, the floors – everything - the outside. All the awful sofas no-one in the FCO wanted had crawled there to die. We painted everything in bright Mediterranean colours. It transformed the house and the whole atmosphere of what we were doing there. People's spirits were lifted when they walked through the front door. It was amazing what you can do with a coat of paint.

MM Did you get many Serbian guests?

CC Yes. Before we went, everyone said – We led the bombing and they will hate you. The first thing I did when I went to Serbia was to go down Kragujevac, a drab industrial town place in central Serbia. The point about Kragujevac is that in the First World War Scottish nurses went out there to help deal with the typhoid epidemic in Serbia. A lot of them died in the epidemic. So every year there is a memorial service for the Scottish nurses, and I was invited down to that. And we the West had just bombed Kragujevac, a year or so before. Yet we couldn't have had a warmer welcome. Maybe it's Balkan fatalism. Sometimes I wish there had been a bit more hatred. It seemed so sad somehow. They were so philosophical about it.

I had no problems at all. Everyone came to the Residence. I had good contacts across the spectrum. I knew the subject. People like it and respect you, even if they don't like the policy, if they know that you're on top of the issues. We were dealing with it in an open-minded, transparent way. What people see was what they got. Not people saying one thing and doing another. They knew that whatever I said in public would be what I was doing in private, most of the time, for most purposes, which was good enough for them, so I had no problem there at all. My main problem was with London.

MM Really? The Foreign Office?

CC I don't think they understood the need to follow through with Belgrade. We'd waited ten years for Milosevic to fall, and he had fallen. That was the moment then in which you had to try and push to get a deal eg on Kosovo, cutting a deal with the new local democratic circumstances there. But people had got so used to the idea that the Serbs were bad, and Albanians were good. There was a mini uprising in the Presevo Valley right next to Kosovo; the Albanians having a go at the Serbs. It took months and months for NATO to understand the Serbs in that battle were the good guys. NATO and the international community in Kosovo had to lean on these people and take their weapons away, to stop them going over and taking pot shots at Serb policemen. Their training camps were within 200 metres of NATO bases. It was a mess. Anyway we in Belgrade did good work down there in stopping all that. A classic piece of peace-building, done with the Serbian government.

On the other hand, we could only do so much while Karadzic and Mladic were still running around. Kostunica was a thoughtful character who couldn't bring himself to strive to get these people to surrender. Those who said the Serbs still had not got the message were right, they hadn't. Djindjic, the Prime Minister, was assassinated when I was there. My telegrams in Bosnia were quite famous. They had jokes, summing up the problem; in Bosnia you started off with one ethnic omelette and ended up with three hard-boiled eggs. This sort of stuff. It brought out the logic of it all to people. One of the best telegrams I sent was immediately after the assassination of Djindjic. I'd got up at 5 o'clock in the morning and hammered it out. I received a private message from the PUS Michael Jay which said – your telegrams are legendary, but this one was outstanding even by that high standard. I recently got the telegram under the Freedom of Information Act. It's good. Looking at it now, I would do it slightly differently. At the time it captured something important.

We built things up. We had a huge turn over of staff, because normally in an Embassy there's the normal cycle of people coming and people going. The staffing aspects of these new Embassies are difficult. You've lost the postings rhythm. When you open an Embassy from scratch, you have to start training people in the language who've never been there before. So in the first year in Belgrade we had something like thirty temporary staff coming out for odd weeks or a month here and there. Almost every week we were having a farewell or a new arrivals do for someone. I

wouldn't say I opened two grand Embassies, but I built up from next to nothing two Embassies; I left both of them in excellent shape, far better shape than they'd been in before. People working hard and being efficient, and generally getting on with it.

MM Were there any specific British government interests there?

CC Not really. Our only interest was that they would stop fighting and think about joining Europe.

MM Did we want them to join?

CC Yes, I suppose so. Anything to stop them fighting. By then we were well down the road of Romania and Bulgaria joining, so you can't have a black hole in Europe full of bickering Slavs. A hole surrounded by nothing into which smugglers and gangsters would pour, so that was the policy and made sense.

MM How about the Russians?

CC The Russians were quite pleased when some countries did join the EU because they could buy key EU industrial/energy assets more easily. They weren't keen on more countries joining NATO. Serbia hasn't joined NATO or the EU and Montenegro hasn't either. Croatia is different: the Russians don't care about Croatia because they are Catholics, but they're keen that Orthodox countries keep out of NATO, just to make a point. It's a question of Russia somehow staying as a both a political but more important psychological force in that part of the world.

While all this had happened we'd moved away from Yeltsinism into Putinism. When I was in Russia westernisation, if you like to call it that, was a good thing. Then Primakov came in as Foreign Minister, towards the end of my time in Moscow: westernisation then became less clearly a good thing. Then Putinism came in, when westernisation is mainly a problematic thing. So you've seen these three phases, and the latter one is intensifying. So the background of what we were doing in the Balkans changed. Our engagement with the Russians dwindled because they were objecting to everything we did. Russian diplomats were real Yugoslav experts. I

enjoyed their company. They were good fun; smart; sensible; cynical and oddly objective. They saw the frustration of it. They understood Yugoslavia, the Serbs, the Bosniacs, the Croats, the Slovenians, and all the deeper relationships there which exist regardless of whether or not you call them countries or not. So I enjoyed dealing with the Russians.

HM Ambassador, Warsaw 2003-07

CC It's almost got me to Poland. Anyway I went to Poland in 2003 on another promotion and spent four years there. My first main effort was the State Visit of President Kwasniewski to London just six months after I'd joined the Embassy. Interesting how my career saw these State Visit milestones: started with Indonesia, Moscow in the middle, then Poland near the end. It had been set up well before I'd go there, timed to coincide with Poland joining the EU in May 2004. Poland all the other countries joined on 1 May and the State Visit was a day or two later. So there was a lot of work to do with that. But the centre left government in Poland was crumbling. Prime Minister Miller had a helicopter crash and wasn't well after that. Michael Pakenham was there as Ambassador before me, and Ric Todd replaced me. Ric Todd inherited a strong Polish centre right government. Michael Pakenham inherited a strong centre left government. I had four years of messy governments of different shapes and sizes. In four years I had about six Foreign Ministers. And ten Finance Ministers, if not more. Several Prime Ministers. Two Presidents. A state of little other than waiting for the next turmoil. By then the New Labour project wasn't as healthy as it once had been, and people were talking about Blair leaving. So there was a *fin de régime* feeling in both capitals, waiting for something to happen. In those circumstances you can only do so much as Ambassador. Things chunter away at the official level and you get excited about individual EU Directives, but there was no strategic partnership possible.

And the Kaczynski twins came in. I had the job of explaining the Kaczynski twins phenomenon to London. By then Kim Darroch had risen to become the Prime Minister's European Adviser. Kim, if you recall, got me the job in Sarajevo. This was my first and only EU job, where my main effort was EU work and EU negotiating and getting the Poles on side for British positions in Europe, just as they

wanted us on side for their positions. So we had the Constitutional Treaty negotiation, then the Budget negotiation during our Presidency just after the excellent French and Dutch referenda on the treaty. And that coincided with the Kaczynskis being elected. The Embassy of each six-month EU Presidency in each country has to give a local lead. In my time in Poland where the EU Embassies took it in turns there were eight different Presidencies. Our one was by far the best in terms of the local organisation and impact. We had a selection of lunches where EU Ambassadors met in my Residence. Top Polish guests including Jaroslaw Kaczynski – later Prime Minister - and Donald Tusk (now Prime Minister) and President Kwasniewski himself. Beautifully done. I'm proud about it.

I had moved into the Residence in Warsaw thinking I'd be there for six weeks. They were keen to knock it down and build a new Embassy and Residence on the site, because the old Embassy building was being repossessed under the restitution laws and we were being asked to leave. The idea had been to use the Residence site to build the new Embassy, and that was all set to go until the terrorist bombing in Istanbul when Roger Short whom I'd known in Sarajevo was killed. So that meant that all these plans had to be reviewed and they decided not to build the new Embassy on the existing Residence site in Warsaw because it was too near the road. So we looked around and finally found another site down in the diplomatic area below the park. Central, but not quite so handy. They started to build an Embassy there. It's going to be ready in 2009. So annoying though it is for me, my successor inherited a brand new Embassy project and a government which has a good majority and is able to do things. I sat there for three or four years dealing with these unending messy situations. Patrick Davies was my deputy and did a great job pushing the project along. He was sent to Tehran as a reward [laughter].

I was pleased with the briefing we did explaining the Kaczynski phenomenon. It gave very specific gains for the UK as a direct result of my work. When they renegotiated the Constitutional Treaty which crashed because of the French/Dutch referenda, they came up with the new text in 2007 and called it the Lisbon Treaty. Tony Blair, in one of his last visits, came out to Warsaw and met Prime Minister Kaczynski and then President Kaczynski. That was the whole visit. Two people, identical twins – it was unusual. He had good meetings. When they all went to off to Brussels to try to

hammer out a deal on the new treaty in mid-2007, Tony Blair went armed with my emails to Kim, private ones, on how to negotiate with the Kaczynskis. I basically said that 'just be nice' is quite a good place to start, and he was the only one I gather who was friendly to them. Other European leaders thought Kaczynski was a reactionary wanting to drive a tough bargain and hardly would speak to him. And so Tony Blair and he were chatting and having tea and coffee, and the Germans ended up desperate for a deal, showering us with concessions we hadn't even asked for, begging us to get the Kaczynskis on side.

So this goes to show what twenty eight years of diplomacy do. You end up after twenty eight years of diplomacy personally knowing Heads of State and personally advising your Head of Government accurately how to deal with these people and to get the best result out of them. And how you use that knowledge to play others. It was a super piece of work. I had sent targeted advice saying accurately where they would dig their heels in and for far longer than anyone could imagine; look out for that. Kim told me afterwards that as the Brussels negotiations drama started to unfold the British Delegation said – Bloody Hell, Crawford was right after all. They hadn't believed me, because they hadn't wanted to believe me. It was not convenient, and everyone else had said the Poles will just make a big fuss then quickly fold. Wrong.

MM Of course it's detracting from their authority in a way.

CC Maybe. Plus I had had that drama of the leaked email as well during the 2005 Budget negotiations which was leaked all over the front page of the Sunday Times. There's a link to it on the website. That was exciting, for a few minutes. So I gave up the FCO at the end of my Polish posting. My career finished there.

Looking back on FCO career

MM Were you sad to give up?

CC Been there, done that. The charm had gone out of the work. The quality of FCO work went down a lot in recent years. The sense of what policy actually is has gone down a lot. The level of analysis had gone down. One of the aims of the EU is

to leech the life out of member states' foreign policy, and it does. You end up with sensible people spending too much time worrying about how to get an issue through an irrelevant EU working group, rather than working on the subject itself. Why bother to try hard to understand the subject if actually your main effort is haggling in EU working groups for a trivial consensus. It leads to a degradation of process. And there was no clear vision of what the FCO wanted from European posts. They were cutting things in a silly way. I sent angry emails about this, which didn't go down well.

MM Well it's a rather sad moment to end on, but I suppose it's realistic.

CC I could have bid for Moscow. I would have been a strong candidate. We'd had enough of the entertaining and so on. Twenty eight years is not bad in one job. So we had a big bang. I gave up the job, career, everything to try and live off my wits. A year later I'm still living off my wits and I'm still alive, and so are most of my wits. Now the financial crash has happened, it's quite uncertain. But if I go down then more or less everything else will at the same time, so I won't be the only one. On the whole I'm getting more to do than I expected.

MM Are you?

CC One of the New Labour big points was Diversity. We did a good thing in Warsaw. They asked us; in fact they told us we had to have the first ever, at least in modern times, and possibly ever, a deaf person posted as a First Secretary, and so this woman turned up with lip-speakers, lip-readers, all sorts of equipment. She'd learnt Polish before she joined the Foreign Office when she'd been a teacher, and then she suddenly went deaf. She had a bit of Polish and that's why they thought they'd send her to Poland. So she then learned Polish thoroughly as a deaf person, which is pretty remarkable. The feeling was - if anyone can make this work, Crawford and his team can make it work. And so we did.

It's interesting being a pioneer for a quite elaborate experiment, if you like, in diversity or even human rights. I had the impression that previously FCO people had found it difficult to deal with her because of her disability, and therefore they defined

the job so that she could do it well. So what we said was – Listen. No messing around. You're going to have to do the same jobs as everyone else, and we're going to rate you the same as everyone else. So we were tough in terms of how we marked her work. We made some allowances, but not as many as maybe she'd been used to. And she was great about it. She said that's exactly right. I don't want favours. She got better by leaps and bounds over the posting. She went on Polish TV speaking Polish and became a star, a British diplomat who's deaf and female and speaks Polish. It would not be easy to imagine this happening in other foreign services. She was there to do a hard foreign policy analysis job. I said to her – Look. I don't want to force you to be Little Miss Disability. But someone's got to be first and you are our pioneer and you can help hundreds of thousands of people in Poland by setting an example. Not as your main effort, but as part of your time in Poland. She said – Fine. She's done a lot of outstanding work on that side – working with the parliament on drafting legislation and so on. Impressive.

MM Well done.

CC That was a nice piece of work. The point of that story is that what I was good at in the Foreign Office was innovation. My appraisals said consistently that I had too many ideas and did not pay enough attention to management. I was the first person not to send my Annual Review on paper. In Sarajevo in 1998 there was a foot of snow. I said - if I sent it by paper you'll probably get it in May, so I am hereby sending it by telegram. Then everyone else started doing it. Just pushing things in terms of innovation and creativity and style was what I was good at. Sometimes I got it wrong. Not everyone liked it. Some people thought it was all too self-indulgent or something like that.

My final thought is PUS John Kerr. When I came back from Sarajevo he called me in and said – Now listen, Crawford, you've been doing all this fancy stuff playing on the wing down in the Balkans. We're going to bring you into mid-field now as Deputy Director. You'll have to play a totally different game. What I stupidly didn't say to him was – Listen – it depends how many goals you want [laughter]. But in any case I scored one of the biggest goals of modern British foreign policy by getting them Milosevic, a spectacular shot from mid-field which crashed in off the underside of the

crossbar. Almost no-one in the Foreign Office understood how we'd done it. And it was actually a model on how you deal with these Bad Leaders around the world, and of course nobody's ever bothered to ask me how we did it and how we can replicate it.

MM How did you do it?

CC Hah, that's a separate interview. Basically you had to have a message. Milosevic was saying to Serbs – I am the only one the world will talk to. They always come back to Serbia through me – Holbrooke and Neville-Jones and Douglas Hurd and the Russians, they all come to you through me. Serbian people, the world's against Serbs, but if you want to deal with the world, you have to deal with me. So I said – we have to get our message out. We are for Serbs and against Milosevic. We have to drive wedges into the regime, and so we started doing that.

We set up an offshore centre in Budapest. I got some money from the Treasury – Sir John Birch ran this thing. It wasn't enough to say we supported the opposition. We started giving the opposition courses in agricultural reform and water policy. All the boring stuff they needed in government. And this sent a signal a) that we'd invested in them as people which also raised their level of commitment, and b) that we were planning for a change in regime. Through this and all sorts of rather darker plans of different shapes and sizes, plus also Milosevic's own miscalculations, we stopped dealing with him completely. Robin Cook was good on this. Milosevic became isolated. Once he'd been indicted for war crimes, we had an excuse for no more talking to Milosevic. We held that line. He didn't talk to a single serious foreign leader in eighteen months, so Serbs were starting to say – hmm, maybe they really mean it this time. And so we started to get a sense of an inevitability of change. He then called an election thinking he would fix it by winning a big new popular mandate. This was a great success for us.

I met the Russians before the election. They said – Look he's going to lose, and then he's going fix it so he wins, obviously. But what the Russians didn't realise was that this was the first internet revolution – the first revolution where, in part thanks to us and the Americans, people were able to get the results out through laptops within

seconds of the first results being declared. So it was obvious within minutes, to more or less the whole of Serbia, that he had lost. I went to the FCO and sat on the internet late in the evening as the results started to come in. The first result came from some tiny village in a mountain somewhere – core Milosevic territory. He lost something like 10 votes to 32. A massive 90% swing against him. As these figures started to come out and he was losing everywhere, then his basic plan was to batten down the hatches and massage the figures and – like Mugabe – just stay on. But democracy supporters came out on the streets and he was forced out. Zimbabweans alas aren't prepared to invade parliament. Eventually you have to just do it.

We'd sent messages to his key military people and the intelligence people saying – Listen, when the moment comes, be on the right side of history. Messages which I'd written in London. A master-plan rolled out on all fronts simultaneously, sustained over eighteen months. In football terms, we'd worked the ball forward, put him under pressure, forced him to make a mistake, and finally the Serb strikers we'd trained slammed the ball in the back of the net. A nice piece of work, if I say so myself. I was there when Robin Cook had a press briefing later and said to the media – That campaign was the high point of my Foreign Office career.

And I ran it. And I got a 'B' in my appraisal, missing an 'A' for not being good enough at management [laughter]. So farewell then British diplomacy.

MM Well done. Thank you very much indeed.

Transcribed by Evie Jamieson

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