

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

DAIN, David (born 30 October 1940)

CMG (1991), KCVO (1997)

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

Entered Diplomatic Service, 1963	pp 2-3
3rd, later 2nd Secretary, Tehran and Kabul, 1964	pp 3-6
On economics course, 1968	pp 6-7
Seconded to Cabinet Office (Assessments Staff, JIC), 1969	pp 7-8
First Secretary, Bonn, 1972	pp 8-11
FCO, 1975	-
Head of Chancery, Athens, 1978	pp 11-13
Counsellor and Deputy High Commissioner, Nicosia, 1981	pp 13-14
Head of Western European Dept, FCO, 1985	-
High Commissioner, Cyprus, 1990	pp 13-15, 27-29 and 31-32
Assistant Under-Secretary of State, then Director, South Asian and Southeast Asian Departments, FCO, 1994	pp 34-35
High Commissioner to Pakistan, 1997	pp 15-27, 29-31
Retired 2000	
General reflections	pp 12-13, 32-34 and 35-38

Sir David Dain KCVO CMG

This is Virginia Crowe talking to Sir David Dain in his house in Cornwall on 29 September 2003.

Reasons for joining the Diplomatic Service in 1963

VC: “What made you think of joining the Diplomatic Service?”

Sir David: “Like so many people I suppose I just fell into it. You get half-way through an Oxford career and you wonder what you’re going to do at the end of it. You go along and you talk to various people, and they say why not try the Civil Service examination. So you do, and when you succeed you think well that was such a hurdle I had better stick with it. So that’s how it happened.

It was more than that really. I think what I particularly wanted to do when I started my career was not to make lots of money. The Civil Service was therefore a pretty good option! Apart from that I wanted to spend time getting into other peoples’ cultures, getting to understand them, going abroad, learning languages, and serving, although it sounds a bit pompous, serving the country really, and that all came together in suggesting the Foreign Service to me. I was lucky enough to get through the examination, which was quite as tough in those days as it is today. One got there and stayed.

VC: “And did the Service meet your expectations?”

Sir David: “Mostly, I think mostly it did. It was very good to me in all sorts of ways. Without right at the start planning out a career, it took me by stages and gave me very much the kind of stimulus I wanted. It started off with a splendid introduction sending me to learn a fascinating language. I volunteered to learn Arabic but was asked to learn Persian. That was a piece of good fortune in itself, because that is a wonderful culture to embark on, and study, which I did for the first year, getting into the whole history and culture of Iran.

Afterwards, my career developed different aspects, but that was the central point of it. Funnily enough, it ended up on the same note, in my last posting.”

VC: “You completed the circle.”

Sir David: “A great circle. Of course, it wasn’t back to Iran. Iran was rather closed off because of political developments in the meanwhile. It was not a central point for British interests, of course, by that stage because of all the revolutions that had happened there, but the Office put me as close as they could to my original Office roots by sending me to Pakistan.”

Posting to Tehran in 1964 as language student

VC: “When you went to Persia, it was a key interest for Britain, wasn’t it? What do you think was the most important thing that happened to you there or that you were working on there?”

Sir David: “Well Persia wasn’t really my first post, it was a language student post. Although I was very conscious of what was going on and spent some time working in Chancery, my job was really to perfect my Persian and then I was due to go on to Kabul. Certainly Iran was a very central part of our interests and became one of our most important posts in the 1970s, a decade later. My first Ambassador, Denis Wright, was a highly distinguished, brilliant figure. He stayed many years in Iran. Though I was only six months with him there, it was obvious to me he had great leadership, great love for the place.

Later on, ten years later in the 1970s, it became a place of enormous value to us commercially. And politically, as long as the Shah was there, we had great influence, a big part to play as we had over the centuries, through the Gulf, through the history of our Indian possessions.

Afghanistan was of course a completely different place in those days. It was really rather marginal. How things change.”

VC: “Absolutely. Let me take you back to Denis Wright. I mean, he is a great figure in the Service, and it has been a tradition of the Service that people learn from their Ambassadors. Was that the case for you?”

Early training in diplomatic methods in Afghanistan

Sir David: “Yes, though again, six months with him, and most of the time in Isfahan outside Tehran learning the language, didn’t give me much chance to learn. I think my learning the hard basis of the job, drafting the political analysis, all of that, came a little bit later, on my posting to Bonn - a big Embassy, again with very distinguished people like Sir Nicholas Henderson who was Ambassador, and Christopher Audland who was Head of Chancery and who was a great practitioner of diplomacy and a great technician in things like drafting. That taught me something which stayed with me always after that.”

VC: “And you didn’t lack those skills, or feel the lack of those skills, in Kabul?”

Sir David: “Yes, I did feel that. I was learning other things though. In Kabul I had again a very good tutor as Head of Chancery, Sir Mark Russell, who taught me a great deal. But these were early days and it was much more a matter of using the skills I’d learnt, particularly the language, getting round the country, trying to form an understanding of what Central Asia meant.

Friendship with Paul Bremer

Funnily enough, to mention another name, which is topically worth mentioning, my closest colleague and friend in Kabul in those days was a certain Paul Bremer who has found himself in an exposed position in Iraq now. He and I knew each other so well in those days and have kept, at rather remote range, in touch. I have to say that from what I learnt of him there, it is difficult to find a better man for the job right now.”

VC: “Paul Bremer is now in Iraq. What’s his title now?”

Sir David: “Do you know, I can’t remember what the Americans call him. He’s virtually the Governor. Is he ‘the Civil Administrator’? I’m not sure.”

VC: “And then he was what? First Secretary, Third Secretary?”

Sir David: “He was Third Secretary. I was Third, later Second Secretary, Oriental Secretary it was called, in Kabul. He now has become the senior American Administrator in Iraq in overall political command.”

VC: “So he was a mainline US Foreign Service officer?”

Sir David: “Yes he was, on his first post, as I was. He went on to become Ambassador in the Netherlands and I think Head of Anti-Terrorism policy in Washington. He had a career fostered very much by Henry Kissinger. He became a protégé of Kissinger then left to do work and research in think-tanks. But just the man to bring back to the US Foreign Service.”

VC: “And when you were in Kabul, David, what were you dealing with mainly. Is there anything that stands out as important to you and the country?”

Sir David: “Yes. It’s worth talking a little about Kabul because Kabul was going through that forty year period of relative stability under King Zaher Shah. This was the period before the Communist revolutions began. His father had been assassinated in 1933 and he took over in difficult circumstances while a very young man. By balancing the very complex politics of Afghanistan, which we probably haven’t got time to go into (the ethnic differences, the external influences which affect that country), he managed by holding the balance to keep a stability which has since been lost, for all sorts of reasons, but maintained a good way of life in Afghanistan until 1973. He did this by bringing in Tajiks (he was from the Pashtu royal family of Afghanistan) and others into the government, giving everybody, all those varied ethnic groups of the country, a chance to be counted and have a say in the political system.”

VC: “Well, it is very interesting now to reflect on that. You left when?”

Sir David: “I left Afghanistan in 1968, strangely having met my future wife there. She was a traveller. I was stationary in Kabul but you tended to meet a lot of different people there. I left in 1968, five years before everything really broke down.”

Return to London, economics training and secondment to the Cabinet Office

VC: “And came back to London. To the Cabinet Office?”

Sir David: “To a very interesting economics course which went on for five or seven months in those days. Economics and Sociology was the new look of the Foreign Office. You actually taught people economics. The Service has changed a lot in my time but this was the beginning of the real change towards, what you might call modernisation I suppose. It’s getting instilled into young diplomats not just that technique with politics but the basis of economics and sociology, the structure of societies which we need to know about.”

VC: “Where did you do this?”

Sir David: “In Regents Park. It’s a place called Cambridge Gate. It was the thing to do. Many of the contacts I met on those courses have gone high in the Service, the Home Civil Service, it wasn’t just for Foreign Office candidates. A man called Richard Wilson who became Secretary to the Cabinet was there at the same time. I shan’t remember all of those, but I’ve kept in touch with various people, some of whom have gone almost to the top or right to the top. Peter Middleton was another one. Peter Middleton was actually in charge of the course. He became Permanent Secretary in the Treasury.

VC: “So you think the training was pretty good then?”

Sir David: “It could have been done in a more compressed way, but the effect was very good, yes.”

VC: “Because you talked earlier on about learning your craft, your later craft in Bonn. It sounds, to me, slightly haphazard to have been on a course with the essence of diplomacy taught a bit later on in your career.”

Sir David: “You were meant to pick diplomacy up. You absorbed it, you didn’t get taught it. These days you get taught it, but I didn’t set foot in the Foreign Office for a year after I joined the Service. They instructed me to go and learn Persian at London University. I didn’t need or want to go particularly into the Office. Immediately I finished my course I was on my way to Tehran and Kabul. I got my first real taste of the Office itself five years after I joined the Service. That’s different you know. These days you’re inducted into a course immediately. It’s not necessarily much better but it’s very different and that’s just one of the ways in which I think the Service has changed a lot in the last 40 years.”

VC: “That’s very interesting. What did you do when you went to the Office? Was it hands on economics when you finished your course?”

Sir David: “No. I did analysis of Middle Eastern economics and politics after the course. I went to the Cabinet Office and worked in the Assessments Staff. The JIC (Joint Intelligence Committee) is back in the news. The JIC was a pretty smoothly functioning organisation. It still is, very effective. It is fascinating to see the inside of the intelligence field, the raw intelligence, the analysis of it, the assessment of it which is, of course, what the Assessment Staff Joint Intelligence Committee were intended for, and did do, I think, very effectively. A man called John Thomson, another very distinguished member of the Service who went on to be UK Representative in New York to the United Nations, was in charge of the Assessments Staff in those days.”

VC: “Well that was an interesting introduction to all sorts of areas that many young diplomats don’t get to see, I imagine, the assessments and the intelligence reports. Enjoyable?”

Sir David: “Tremendously. It gave you contacts, again around Whitehall. I seem to have been very lucky in this respect. People from the Ministry of Defence, people

from the Intelligence Services, Americans take part in the assessments, Australians and New Zealanders with whom we, in those days, shared quite a lot of this intelligence work and assessment. All of these were different aspects of diplomacy. It's a different kind of diplomacy. It's nothing to do with bilateral relationships. It's all to do with background to policy."

VC: "Is there anything that stands out as particularly interesting or important that you were dealing with at that time that you can talk about?"

Sir David: "Well, the main issue at stake then was what was happening in Egypt, between Egypt and Israel and the Soviet Russian influence in that region, the supplies of surface to air missiles and the effect on the balance of power in the Middle East. It was many years ago. I can't recall lots of details except that what we were able to do through our various sources, means of gathering information, was to form a pretty accurate day to day picture of the state of the balance of military power, what was going on, in the Middle East - an area which is still important to us which, I think, probably one can say was relatively even more important to us in those days as a nation. And also, other things happened. It was a period of change and crisis in all sorts of ways. The Libyan revolution took place."

Posting to Bonn, Germany in 1972

VC: "So, David, on to Bonn and a whole new aspect of things. What do you remember as important and interesting to you at that time?"

Sir David: "Well, Bonn, yes that was completely different, and perhaps it's worth at this moment, saying in slightly more general terms what really formed the broad political background to my career, because joining the Service in 1963, leaving it in 2000, spanned the period of the worst of the Cold War. In Bonn I went to deal directly with the effects of the Cold War. German policy had been at the centre of British policy for heaven knows how long, and it still was, and in the 1960s and early '70s we were still heavily engaged. It was probably the most important part of our foreign policy. I can't think, as we speak, of anything more important than getting it right as between the West and the Soviet Union, and of course Germany was still

divided. Bonn and Berlin were the pivotal places where East met West. The Berlin blockade, getting the Berlin Agreement right, beginning to develop the relationship which West Germany had with East European countries, the 'Ostpolitik' in other words. And this was what I was very fortunate to be dealing with.

There were various sections in that huge Embassy, but the section dealing with the Bonn Group, Ostpolitik, was certainly one of the most important. I had to learn German very fast. I was given six weeks to do that then had to take notes at meetings in German having not had a word of the language before that. It's amazing, when the devil drives, what you're able to achieve, with the help of your friends and your fellow diplomats. This was multilateral diplomacy again with British, French, Americans, the 'three allies' in other words, sitting together working out the future of Germany with all those powers they'd retained at the end of the War, and bringing our new friends, the West Germans, into the discussion, doing things with their agreement most of the time, if they weren't doing things which would upset our policy directly, and then handling this very delicate situation with the Russians and with the East Germans.

This was real central diplomacy, which I was handling at First Secretary level. I always called them the 'work horses', this is the boiler room of the Foreign Office and embassies really, the First Secretary level. That's where the interface between the top echelons and the learning groups down below occurs. Somehow or other you reach a transition at First Secretary level where you're going to have to take lots of responsibility, and I felt it and it happened, and fortunately I had a lot of excellent guidance and some excellent colleagues at my level. Although these were incredibly testing, in some ways exhausting, times, looking back one realises just how important they were in one's own development.

Changing relationships following the collapse of Soviet power

That East-West relationship was at the cusp in those days. We got it right in the end as 1990 showed. That's why my mind leapt to 1990 a few minutes ago, because that's when it all changed: Germany was reunited, Soviet power collapsed, and this of course is exactly what we'd been working and waiting for although not knowing

when it would happen, keeping the question ready for solution. Don't force it, keep the German question open, keep Berlin safe. Eventually, the Russian empire had to go, and it did go, and that changed the whole face of the world. It certainly changed our diplomacy, and from 1990 onwards we were therefore in a totally different scene. My only central European-like post was Bonn. I served in Europe again, but this was the middle of Europe; there you felt the direct effects of the East-West confrontation, but also at the fringes of course. My first and last posts also felt the effects of this Soviet interference and domination, or attempts to, on their borders in Iran and Afghanistan. The effects of Soviet expansionism, their doctrinaire policies, the Brezhnev policies in Afghanistan were in a way just as important as those in the central part of Europe."

VC: "It's a very interesting connection. You were there when very dramatic things happened. You had the Munich Games, the massacre, you had the resignation of Brandt and the Guillaume affair. Did that touch what you were doing?"

Dramatic events in Germany from 1972-75 and threats to personal security

Sir David: "The Olympic Games massacre was a horrific experience. The internal politics impinged a bit on what I was doing, but of course the Brandt affair did much more because ostpolitik was very much guided by the SPD and by Brandt and his colleagues. It didn't actually change very much when he went. By that stage Germany was on a course which I think it was always going to follow. It was the right course and every government after that pursued it."

VC: "I was struck, looking over your career, at the number of countries you were in where terrorism actually was a factor. The Bader-Meinhof in Germany to start with, but in the other countries. I don't know whether you have any reflections on that and, if you don't . . ."

Sir David: "I do. I might have started by saying that if there is a single thread through my career, it is what I sometimes call 'divided countries' when I give talks about what I've done in the Diplomatic Service. If there's a single element in all that, in almost all the countries I've been to, it is that I've been to countries which have

been divided or had some intense national problem closely connected with the division of the country. When talking about, for example, Cyprus, it is obvious, but Afghanistan too, and Pakistan, Iran, Germany obviously, these are all places with really quite critical national problems of one kind or another, but mostly to do with the extent of their national borders. When you get that, you get tension, you get division, you get terrorism because you get groups who think they can change things by those means. And so, yes, everywhere I've been there's been an exposure to that. As you become more senior in the Service you feel it directly because you count yourself an object of threat, and for no fewer than seven years of my career, those I spent in our mission in Cyprus and later in Pakistan, I had military protection, sometimes 'close protection', by British military police in order to make sure that we were safe in that work. I have to say it's not that pleasant always to have to be accompanied by an armed man when you're outside the precincts of the Embassy. On the other hand, serving in places like that does give you new insights. It has certain advantages in that many people are very interested indeed in hearing about one's experiences in those sort of places, by definition places that people tend not to go to."

Head of Chancery Athens 1978-81

VC: "For the time being, after Bonn you went to Greece, and you went there in 1978. That was just the time of the earthquake. Did that touch you?"

Sir David: "Hardly. I mean it touched me personally. I was in Thessaloniki when, in 1978, I think it was May, there was a very big earthquake. Although it was a big earthquake, fortunately it was fairly short-lived and not that many were killed or injured. Quite a lot of buildings fell down, but it was the first and only time I've been in such a serious natural disaster. But I was at that point again a language student. I was learning a language for the third time, and I give the Service huge credit for making it possible. Learning modern Greek, or rather converting my classical Greek to modern Greek, was one of the great experiences. It stayed with me, probably the reason that I've had three postings to Greek-speaking places, two to Cyprus and one to Athens. It was seriously rewarding, just the sort of thing that I originally joined the Service for."

VC: “And of course being in Greece you were in the centre of great tensions, tensions with Turkey which actually served you rather well, the experience of that I imagine, for later postings.”

Sir David: My career then began to develop into two main strands, give or take the Bonn East-West experience. I had my Persian, my Central Asian experience, and then this Greek-Turkish rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean. Every career that is going to be remotely successfully has to have strands like that through it. What I didn't ever find was that I terribly wanted to be in that tight-knit inner circle of European specialists, and this is, I think, a change that happened in my time in the Service.

When I joined, there was much more tendency to post people around the world and not concentrate so much on what you might call the inner area. You can see why and how it happened, it was totally logical. As our interests in Europe became more and more concentrated and our relationship with Europe, through the European Community and European Union, became so complex, you simply had to form a core of people who could go, return again and again to that subject and pick up the strands and deal with those complex issues effectively. I didn't terribly want to be part of that and didn't become part of it, and that's not surprising either. I think it's an admirable thing but I just point it out that this is, I think, one of the developments I noticed in the Service as I went through.

I tended to remain available for what you might call the slightly wider area. I still wanted to go to places that were difficult to handle, where diplomacy was important, where our interests were important, but I didn't awfully want to concentrate on the central theme of the European Union and its development. I got posted to Athens. Greece was just joining the European Community at that point. Funnily enough, when I went to Cyprus the second time as High Commissioner, I arrived on the very day that President Vassilou put in the application for Cyprus to join the European Union. So I constantly came in touch with this fascinating, important development, but never got into the root thinking within it. I never got into the detailed negotiation within Europe. I was perfectly content with that.

The two strands that I have mentioned were well balanced I thought. What one might call the Eastern Mediterranean edge of NATO was important because relations between Greece and Turkey were very fraught. They've improved a great deal. We tend to forget now the intense hostility that happened for quite a long time with Greece taken out of NATO by Karamanlis, getting back into NATO, getting a stronger relationship with its allies and indeed with Turkey. That was all quite important, and I think the development of that has helped towards the gradual solution of the Cyprus problem. Let's remember how fraught a place Cyprus was in those days, with the Turkish invasion of 1974. It happened actually while I was in Bonn, but the consequences of it were still, and still are, with us. But the immediate political and human consequences which I saw when I went to Cyprus for the first time in 1981 as the No.2 in the High Commission and then as High Commissioner, were very important and very close to our interest, because of our history in Cyprus. Of all the countries interested in a solution we played the lead part. With the help of the Americans we have driven things gradually towards what everyone knows has to be the solution in Cyprus.

But the point I was really making was that I never fell into this rather tight and important group of people dealing with the European Union, but had enough knowledge of it from my postings in Bonn and Athens I think to be able to cope with the consequences of being in a partnership with so many other important countries in Europe, France, Germany, Italy. And this all came back and was apparent when I was High Commissioner in places well outside that area, in Pakistan for example. In Pakistan a great deal of consultation went on between those European powers in dealing with the crises, for example over Kashmir and Afghanistan, when I was there.

VC: "What was the name of the head of the Cyprus Government who made the application?"

Sir David: "President Vassiliou, George Vassiliou, who was a good friend of mine. He had nothing to do with politics when I first knew him when I was No.2 in the High Commission. He was then in business, he became very wealthy. But he gave it up for politics and managed to get himself elected. Here again, you see, there's the East-West influence coming in with the Communist Party in Cyprus. The Communist

Party, AKEL, decided for its own reasons, and they are rather too complex for me to go into here, to support Vassiliou, which got him rather unexpectedly elected President of Cyprus, because they were a party which could, although not control, pretty well count on the votes of their membership. It wasn't a rabid Marxist type Communist party, many of them were churchgoers and perfectly normal middle-class Cypriots, but they did vote as a block and they made this man president. Actually, I think it was a stroke of, in a way, brilliance to choose him because his act in taking Cyprus towards Europe, and it was very much his personal initiative to do it, I would, today, say is more likely to lead to a solution of the Cyprus problem, when it eventually happens, than probably any other act of policy of the Cyprus Government. The Greek Cypriot, let's call it that, Government because that's in effect what it is, ie the Cyprus Government, with all its mistakes over the years of trying to get a settlement, since their application for Europe, has had a better chance of getting a decent agreement with the Turkish Cypriots to unify the island."

Importance of the Commonwealth

VC: "Let me take you back to what you were saying about the relationship between the, if you like, the fringes of Europe and Europe. It made me think you must be in a very good position to be able to comment on the usefulness of the Commonwealth vis-à-vis the usefulness of the European Union. You were in Cyprus when CHOGM happened in 1993, and that would have given you a particular perspective. I don't know whether you'd like to comment on the general point of the Commonwealth on its usefulness in your time and in your experience."

Sir David: "Yes. I don't want to sound in the slightest bit dismissive, I mean there is a tendency to say 'Well the Commonwealth doesn't have much power, it's nothing like as effective as NATO or the European Union.' I'm a huge supporter of the Commonwealth, but I think one has to be realistic and understand that it doesn't actually find it very easy to achieve things and doesn't drive world events easily. It tends to be rather reactive. It's quite remarkable that it has held together as it has in my view, and it produces a highly civilised effect, both politically and culturally and every other way, on its membership. And it is a big feather in its cap that it goes on attracting new members, some of whom have only got really rather a tenuous

connection with British rule in the past. I'm a great supporter of it, but I think one has to be realistic in understanding it's not an organisation which is ever going to be able to exert influence as decisively as it sometimes might hope.

Reaction to the military coup in Pakistan in 1998

For example, when there was a military coup in Pakistan while I was there, against a corrupt civilian government, which I personally believe had misgoverned and was misgoverning in all sorts of ways, the Commonwealth decided it was going to react by cold-shouldering that new government. It didn't have any effect, of course, as sanctions by the Commonwealth did not affect Pakistani policy or the determination of the military government to do what it set out to do. And, for instance, I would say that, although it wasn't widely understood (it was understood in some quarters but not widely understood) that right from the start, right from day one, the intention of that new military government, under President Musharraf (Musharraf personally did not want to take over, if it could have been avoided, as president and as direct military ruler) his intention from the start was to clean things up and to return things when possible to some form of democratic rule. One could question how democratic Pakistan could ever be, and certainly from day one under Musharraf it was a better place politically and economically, and in all sorts of other ways, than it had been under the previous government. The Commonwealth reacted in a rather knee-jerk response way by cold-shouldering that government, and I have to say that it was probably rather a good thing it didn't succeed in achieving anything as a result of that policy.

The Commonwealth wasn't the only international body which took that view. Of course, it's not easy always to see, to understand what a people really want. Most Pakistanis were delighted with the change. They found it rather surprising that outsiders, who appeared to know not very much about the internal workings of Pakistan, were critical of what they thought was a rather good move by the military in this respect."

VC: “What did the EU colleagues, by contrast, do? On the spot, they would have understood perhaps better, would they have sent back different messages to their governments?”

Sir David: “Yes, we understood very well. We had frequent meetings and there was consensus, unanimity of view. After all, we were hearing the same thing from all over Pakistan and not just propaganda-makers within the government of Pakistan, but from people from low down, in the bazaars, one’s own staff (we had many Pakistani staff in our High Commission), even waiters, servants, people at all levels of society. With the exception of course of those who were directly related to the previous government who were in a very small minority, most tended to think this was rather a good move. It was bloodless and things, as I said a few minutes ago, began to look up almost immediately, although it takes time to turn things round. Pakistan’s a pretty big ship to turn round, 130-140 million people (no-one knows quite how many and they’re increasing at a very rapid rate every year). But yes, we in the European Union knew very well, we reported it, but of course it’s not always easy. One can understand why policy-makers, not directly there feeling the sense of it, might regard with some scepticism this kind of view. I think that a coup like that, in which a democratically elected prime minister, however poor a prime minister, had been overthrown was open to criticism.

Importance of not allowing domestic politics to influence foreign policy

But, on the other hand, again I’d make a cautious general statement and say that where foreign policy is concerned it is important for governments to try to avoid allowing domestic politics to intrude upon judgements of foreign governments or of how to develop one’s foreign policy. If you allow domestic party politics to get too much involved, you can end up with the wrong sorts of decision. In various countries around the world, I think a clearer view should have been taken. The real nature of the new Pakistani administration perhaps had a veil drawn over it by other internal considerations. That was a pity. It is quite interesting to see now, with a few years hindsight, how things have changed. Hindsight wasn’t necessary for this as a matter of fact because I think a lot of us did know that Musharraf had the right intentions and made it clear from the start, privately and publicly, that he was not going to tolerate

the kind of terrorist extremism that we'd been seeing in Pakistan, and he was going to use the forces at his disposal to try to contain that.

Difficulty of governing states like Pakistan

Well, we've seen a lot of that recently. Since the campaign in Afghanistan, I think we've seen a lot of new developments, which are encouraging in Pakistan. I think we've seen a lot of movement against terrorism, terrorists have been arrested, held, not released. I think some of the dangerous aspects of Pakistani society are being tackled. I'm thinking in particular of the religious schools, madrasses, many of which are within Pakistan, are being controlled. These madrasses are responsible for producing young men who go off with the extremist kind of Islam in their minds. We know that they went off and fought with the Taliban, many of them were the Taliban in Afghanistan in those days when the Taliban were protecting Osama bin Laden, giving him shelter, allowing him to move within the country safely, make his dreadful plans, create his training camps. These madrasses were the source of the human material for the Taliban which kept the Taliban in power and gave them such cutting edge in the Afghanistan civil war.

And Musharraf is now quite clearly an ally of the West in trying to contain that and is very bravely leading, or trying to lead, Pakistan in the right direction. With the army behind him you might say that's not a particularly difficult thing to do, though in the past it hasn't been done. And it's really not just that. He's trying to tackle a lot more aspects of Pakistani society which need tackling. I've heard him use the phrase 'feudal society'. He's the first to admit that he doesn't have total control over large parts of Pakistan. The Tribal Areas are no-go areas for the Pakistan government. It's extraordinary to think. Actually they were in British times as well. In Musharraf's interviews, and I heard one quite recently given by him on the BBC, he was prepared to admit that he did not know whether Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan or not, or maybe in Afghanistan. He thought he was alive but couldn't be sure, because it wasn't possible to go and insist on the Pakistan Government's writ running in these particularly sensitive border areas.

I mentioned Feudalism. This is another area affecting a lot of Pakistan. The government, the authorities, are denied access not just to private houses but whole areas by militant groups, by tribal leaders, by people who really exercise completely feudal control over their populations, quite large tribal populations, not just Sind and Baluchistan which is that whole area south of Afghanistan's southern border with Pakistan, a huge empty province where it's very difficult indeed to exercise government control. Also in the Pashtun tribal areas up round Quetta and the North West Frontier (as Britain used to call it, and it's still called the North West Frontier Province) where I travelled but found that even with government protection (and they are very happy to provide it) there were still areas where I was told you simply can't go there because we can't protect you, we can't even protect our own people in those areas.

General Musharraf as ruler of Pakistan

So it's an incredibly difficult country to govern, and I would hate even to try. This is being attempted by a man who, from my own personal knowledge of him, has no ambition to be a sort of eternal autocratic ruler. He had plenty of power as Chief of the Army Staff when the trouble really occurred and he had to intervene. I won't go into the details of that, but he was put in a position, in my view, where he simply had no alternative but to take over or face his own possible exile and danger to people in the aircraft which was denied landing on that day, rather foolishly, by the previous government.

Musharraf is a man who doesn't have family roots in one of the various provinces of Pakistan. He is not a Punjabi, he's not a Sindi, he's not a Baluchi, he doesn't come from the North West Frontier Province and is therefore not a Pashtu. He's what's called an Urdu-speaker. In other words, he doesn't speak as his native tongue any of the traditional Pakistani provincial languages. He speaks the common language of the country. The reason he does that is because he is a Mohajir, a 'migrant'. This is a sobriquet given to those who, like him, don't have these deep ethnic roots in the country. His family, I think I'm right in saying, brought him to the new Pakistan as an infant. They had come from India of course, which itself has a vast Muslim population. They had migrated into Pakistan from India. Those who did that, and

there are lots of them in Pakistan, are known by this collective term, Mohajirs or 'Urdu-speakers'. These are not outcasts but they are regarded as different by Pakistanis whose roots go back centuries in the Pakistani soil.

It's quite remarkable, leading on from that, to consider how a man in that position could reach such an exalted post as Chief of the Army, presiding, therefore, over some of these ancient aristocratic families whose members had been generals. These are the ruling élite in Pakistan, over the years since independence, but before that over long periods of time when their families have, originally I suppose by right of local conquest, owned tracts of land, had their retainers and exercised huge control, some of them with powers of life and death in their local areas, though of course they wouldn't always admit that. They certainly had rights of summary punishment within their tightly-controlled, sometimes fortified villages. There are some who are regarded with such awe by their retainers, they kiss their feet and don't stand in their presence. In some areas women simply have no part in society at all, they don't leave their fortified houses. If a census is conducted, the women can't be counted. The only way you can get anywhere near a figure is to ask the male head of the household to give you the number of women in his household and so on. Musharraf, I think, was totally aware of the defects of this kind of practice. You can't change it overnight, he's the first to admit it, but I think he is gradually trying to do that. He would be the last to want his own family or immediate circle to be subject to that kind of discrimination."

Diplomatic life in Pakistan

VC: "Well, that's a remarkable picture of Pakistan. It sounds like a country that is actually quite difficult to live in. I wonder if you'd care to say something about how you lived in Pakistan. You talked about the protection, but there is an image, isn't there, of people living high on the hog of diplomatic life. I don't think that the general public perhaps know about some of the difficulties of the Service. Do you want to comment on that?"

Sir David: "First, about living in Pakistan itself, it's of course not very difficult if you've got a nice diplomatic compound and you're well-protected and you've got your electricity and water supply and everything provided. That's indeed what we've

got, and Islamabad is hardly part of Pakistan in some senses. It's a little bit remote because it doesn't contain any of those rather difficult features I've been describing. It's a nicely well-ordered artificial capital created in the 1960s and 1970s for the Diplomatic Corps and for the main political entity going to govern the country. So that's different.

What's interesting in Pakistan is to get out into the countryside, and I tried to do that. I visited all the provinces, large parts of which I don't think any of my predecessors had ever visited, particularly Baluchistan, travelled in the mountains and got to learn quite a lot about what drives the place. I don't want to give the impression that Pakistan is all just a feudal society. It's not. There are numbers of highly cultivated people. There are universities, there are very good schools, people who have got tremendous talent. The governmental system is actually quite sophisticated if it were to operate properly within the parameters it was supposed to. The trouble is, when you've got the drag of a huge, uneducated population and these very primitive parts of the country, it's very difficult for that government to operate in a modern civilised way. Pakistan isn't alone in this. Of course, I don't know much about India, but I'll bet there are large parts of India which are comparable.

It's wrong of people to think of Pakistan as a modern state which can adjust its policies easily. When you've got a huge population, many of them radicalised in the past, and you've got extreme Muslim leadership, some of them who are not going to co-operate with a modern government for all sorts of reasons of their own, it's really very difficult indeed to produce a coherent policy, economic or political. And therefore I think one has to give a lot of understanding to someone who is prepared to try to do it without showing all the obvious signs of corruption which have managed to capture his predecessors.

More generally speaking, I'm not one ever to say that the Diplomatic Service produces great hardships, that life in the Diplomatic Service is one of those more difficult ways of life. It's different. It's very interesting. It's challenging in some ways, but actually, I started by saying that I think the Service is very good to its members in all sorts of ways. It delivers potential. These days it delivers tremendous help with family problems and questions. We've got it right, or much more right now

in the way we handle children's education, visits to parents, travel. It's much more understanding, it's much more generous in all those ways, and that's important when you're in a difficult place (and I have to say that I think Pakistan is one of the most difficult places probably on earth). Given the number of people we have in our mission there, the physical threat, the very strange cultural climate which is very alien to us, I think it really is a seriously difficult post, particularly for young people, and we had an awful lot there dealing with immigration questions. I think that is difficult. It's not difficult for those of us who lived through years of adapting to that kind of society. I personally didn't find it at all difficult to be there or to travel. It was difficult to manage the people who were not used to that kind of thing and to keep their morale up. You needed an awful lot of help, particularly from the London end to try to do that. I don't know to what extent one succeeded in that. I think the more difficult aspect is not one's own life, but that of others one's trying to help through an earlier stage in their careers."

British influence in Pakistan compared with the influence of the United States

VC: "May I ask you about the comparative influence of the British in Pakistan still, especially perhaps vis-à-vis the Americans."

Sir David: "Again, I had a lot of luck, but then you need a lot of luck in this career. Both in Pakistan and in Cyprus, the places where I was Head of Mission, certainly in Cyprus we were the lead mission. In Pakistan I can't say that we were more than equal with the Americans, but we were certainly looked to. Because of our historical connections we had a lot of influence there, and that's how it should be. For example, I was there for the 50th anniversary of Independence in 1997, and there were lots of celebrations and things like that. I was one of the most junior heads of mission (I got there in May). Within a month I was beginning to attend things and I was given pride of place. There was no real need for that. Of course you could say it was logical, but on the other hand had they not had a pretty high regard for us British, they wouldn't have done it.

Similarly in Cyprus, we really were regarded as the people to talk to. Cyprus was a different case because we had those important interests there including Sovereign

Bases, and we won't go into that. But we have retained, I think very cleverly, and I give credit to my predecessors in the Service, my contemporaries, and indeed people who succeeded me, for maintaining this. There is no doubt in my mind that we rank right among the best in diplomatic services in the world. The best evidence is that others are prepared to admit to that. There was an Athenian admiral who commanded the Greek fleet against the Persians, whenever it was, 400-odd BC, and they wanted to know who was the most popular, best commander from all the city-states. They knew very well that if they gave everyone one vote they would each vote for themselves, so they gave everyone two votes and they voted for themselves with the first one and they voted for this chap with the second. I think actually, if you did that in diplomatic services around the world, the British might get all of those second votes, because I really do think there is a lot of admiration for it, and I think it has been highly successful. I just hope we can keep it up. I'm sure we can. It means just operating a little bit over our weight. Despite the fact that our relative world power has declined, we have still kept up in the top league. That makes one rather proud to have been in a Service that's achieved that."

Visit to Pakistan by HM The Queen

VC: "The Queen's visit to Pakistan. Was that a way of fostering British influence? Would you care to talk about that?"

Sir David: "Yes, I'd love to talk about that, because I regard it as one of the high spots, if not the highest spot in my whole career. I think I'd probably put it that way. It's difficult to describe the enormous benefit to our diplomacy of a State Visit. I arrived roughly six months before the Queen was due to come, and the effects of the imminent visit were already apparent. My reception generally, the degree of access that I had at every level, the co-operation we had from the Pakistanis to make sure it was a great success was enormous. You mentioned the high-life of diplomacy, there's not much diplomatic high-life in Pakistan and Islamabad, but if there is any, and if there was any to do with a State Visit, it was more than justified, more than worthwhile because the effect of that visit in giving us influence and access and confidence among people at the top, not just in the government but all the parties, was really quite exceptional, quite extraordinary. To see them turn out and be together,

these leaders at daggers drawn, people who had probably not been on speaking terms for years, in each other's presence because they could not afford not to be seen with the Queen and each other was quite splendid. That's not just a quirk, not just an observation, the fact they were there means that Britain meant a lot to them and gave us the chance to influence whatever it might be we wanted – our commercial interests to be promoted, our banking interests. We had a huge range of interests in Pakistan. There it was. The Queen's visit did actually do a great deal to promote that, I've not the slightest doubt at all."

VC: "A huge amount of work for you, was it?"

Sir David: "A huge amount, yes. It must have taken, I suppose, about maybe 50 or 60% of my time in the first few months I was there, and if that doesn't seem a high proportion, there were an awful lot of other things to do. I did have a large group of staff working full time on it, coming to me with all their problems. We got them resolved, and dare I say it, although parts of that visit to the sub-continent were less than wholly successful, it was not in Pakistan that that happened. The Pakistan leg was 100%. There wasn't a single thing that went wrong, certainly not one that was noticeable. Those six days were memorable, and I owe an awful lot to my close (British) colleagues in Islamabad for achieving it. I think it was an extraordinary thing. But again, we had quite a lot of luck, not least with the weather."

VC: "The United States President did visit Pakistan, didn't he, in March 2000?"

Indo-Pakistan relations

Sir David: "Yes he did. It was a quite different sort of visit. It was a very short visit, if I remember rightly designed to balance one he was making to India, and the idea was to try to reduce the tension which had then grown up very much between those two countries. It was a purely political act to show interest in the area and to try to get those two, now nuclear, powers to exercise a degree of restraint and responsibility in handling their bilateral relationship, which risked causing a major conflagration."

I think it's a truism that confrontation between India and Pakistan, which has shown itself in recent years, for example over the Kargil incident and more recently after the attack on the Delhi parliament, by confrontation between the two armies when one million men were said to be facing each other across the borders north of Lahore up into Kashmir, produces dire danger, a relationship perhaps more likely to cause a nuclear exchange than any other serious problem in the world at the moment. Things can change, there are other hot spots, but in the long run, I have for long taken the view that this is probably the most dangerous area and needs most attention to try to control it.

It is very difficult indeed to reach any kind of solution between those two countries, particularly over Kashmir which is one of the most intractable problems, much more difficult, for example, than the Cyprus problem and one which deserves a lot of study. It is difficult to see one's way through the Kashmir question. But my main point is that these two countries are at risk, if only by error or mistake or misjudgement, of coming into conflict which could lead to a nuclear exchange. There's more risk there than anywhere else, and that was why the American President made his brief appearance in Pakistan. It's not possible to compare it with the State Visit which was all to do with the 50th anniversary and our past in the place and so on. Important though that Visit was, it's terribly important that America, which of course wields far more power and influence in diplomatic or political terms than we possibly can these days in India and Pakistan, it is terribly important that America stays engaged, despite all those other things that are going on around the world. We mustn't take our eye off the India/Pakistan question. If we can possibly nudge the Kashmir issue towards some kind of arrangement we should. You won't necessarily get a solution. It's a very complex matter to talk about. It's to do with terrorism, it's to do with history – one has to understand what happened in 1947 to really understand why the Kashmir issue is so difficult. But it's vital that America, and Europe and all the powers who have influence, and the United Nations, keep a close watch on that bilateral relationship.

Quite often I am asked, 'OK, the Kashmir problem, one of the world's most difficult, one of the world's most important. What is the solution, what is the shape of a

solution?' and I have to say it is one of the most difficult problems to see one's way through.

I have talked a bit about Cyprus, and will come back to that in a minute, but I think one of the things that has to be said about the Kashmir problem is that it is not going to be resolved on the basis of the whole of that old Princely State, Jammu and Kashmir, going either to India as a whole part, or to Pakistan. For one thing, it is virtually impossible to think of that, because parts of that old Princely State are now part of China, and is China going to release those tracts? I suppose China probably has something like a fifth, a little bit less than a fifth maybe, of what was Jammu and Kashmir.

And Jammu and Kashmir means different things to different people. People talk about Kashmir when they quite often mean just the Vale of Kashmir, that beautiful part of Kashmir where the houseboats and the lakes are which, at the moment, is under Indian control. Other people talking about Kashmir mean the whole of that large Princely State which in 1947 couldn't really decide which way to go, at least the Maharajah said he couldn't decide which way to go which was in some ways the start of the whole conflict. Some people mean the whole state, and that is quite a remarkable piece of geography in a way because it's not a unity, it's a whole collection of valleys, very mountainous area, some of which is virtually impenetrable, included in which is the second highest mountain in the world. It's hard to legislate for such a mixed patchwork of valleys and mountains and decide which should go to which country.

As it happens, large parts of the northern areas of Jammu and Kashmir went to Pakistan anyway because the troops holding those valleys decided they were going to declare for Pakistan in 1947, so again, to some extent, the solution has probably written itself. And yet there is clearly an intractable kernel to this problem, and that is essentially the Vale of Kashmir. When arguments are made about what should happen to the area, it's really the Vale of Kashmir which is being talked about, and that's where most of the population are, that's where something like 95% of the population is Muslim. It's the area of the whole original princely state, the one area which can be economically viable because of the potential for tourism mostly, but

also no doubt a certain amount of agriculture. It's an easy, biddable, lovely area which, not surprisingly, people have always wanted in their hands. It was regarded by the Moguls as one of the finest jewels in their great empire in India, in Central Asia. So it is that that people really talk about, and I find it terribly difficult indeed to predict how any solution would work which would deal fairly with that central part, that Vale of Kashmir. People talk about partition. It is hard to see that working, but maybe in the end the only line of thought perhaps is some form of autonomy, but it has to be something that India and Pakistan can agree together. And in all that we mustn't forget that the people of Kashmir themselves must be given some say, it must in the end be with the consent of the population.

I think to go further into details is perhaps not profitable at this moment, but better just, as I've just said, to bring out the true perplexity and difficulty of this international issue.

The problem of division between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots

I mentioned it in connection with Cyprus, though there are very few direct parallels, but since I have, in a sense, lived and served in both, travelled extensively in both, I think it is just worth saying that, by comparison, the Cyprus problem these days seems one almost ripe for solution. Indeed, perhaps we already have the solution. I did earlier, in this recording, say that the European incentive, that the European catalyst, had moved the Cyprus problem forward towards a solution. I still believe that to be true, because I think there is enormous incentive now for Turkey to lend its efforts to persuade the Turkish-Cypriot leadership that they should be accommodating now towards some kind of settlement. It does look rather as if the Turkish-Cypriot population has come to the view that it is in their interest to reach a solution, join the European Union along with all the other Cypriots and benefit from it both politically and economically. It does look as if Turkey may fear that if there isn't a solution before accession to the European Union, a Cyprus government vote without any input from the Turkish-Cypriots could be harmful to Turkey, and that must surely be a big incentive for Turkey to take some action.

It is noticeable that the population of Northern Cyprus, Turkish-Cypriots largely, have been expressing their views rather forcefully on the streets towards Mr Denktash who was always sceptical, for the quite powerful reasons one must recognise (after all he has lived with this problem over many decades and has suffered, as all other Cypriot people have, because of it). So it's not surprising that he wants to have an absolutely clear belief and realisation that the thing is going to be solved, that there won't be further conflict and his people won't suffer as a result. But somehow he finds it difficult to adopt that turn of mind. I think, gradually, my perception is that he will, or his successor will, and that we will have a Cyprus solution within the next few years, if not indeed in the immediate future and that it will be very much bound up with their accession to Europe.

That said, one shouldn't under-estimate the difficulties of Cyprus. Only those can understand who've been there and looked across the buffer zone and seen the minefields which still exist, and talked to people on both sides, feel the real hatred and distrust (one mustn't put it too weakly). There is great fear, hatred and distrust on both sides. There are Cypriots, particularly outside Cyprus, who will say they want nothing more than to be re-unified, to be able to see their neighbours and brethren again (people from the other community who lived in the same street, fellow Cypriots). They will say that when they're outside Cyprus. But in Cyprus it is very difficult to get people to take that kind of attitude. I've often said that they are, towards each other, the least magnanimous of all people I've come across. I used to say that until I went to talk to Pakistanis and to Indians about Kashmir. Of these problems, one could be solved rapidly, the other will take longer, perhaps indeed a very long time. But both are important issues which I have been privileged to deal with in my service."

Nuclear tests by Pakistan

VC: "Of course the one has got this terribly dangerous nuclear potential. When you were there, there were nuclear tests, weren't there. What did you do when the tests went off? Were you personally involved in some kind of protest?"

Sir David: “Yes, indeed. We have to remember that it was the Indians who tested first. Then there was a huge amount of debate, and indeed tension, in Pakistan for some weeks over the question of whether Pakistan should reciprocate by doing their own test. There was no doubt that both India and Pakistan had a potential, indeed a capability, to explode these weapons. The fact that India did it was very disruptive in the region indeed. It is not totally clear why India did it, except I suppose to establish its position as a world force, to underline that position. The effect was to make it almost unavoidable for the Pakistan government to do the same thing, to set off an explosion. OK, we tried very hard to dissuade them. There were moments when I thought we might succeed in that because a lot of incentives were offered to the Pakistanis, and they could have gained the political high ground internationally.”

VC: “Can you be more specific about how you tried to persuade them?”

Sir David: “On instructions to go and talk to the government. Indeed I talked to the government right at the top, to Nawaz Sharif the Prime Minister, and to his brother who had great influence on him, Shahbaz Sharif. I recall one talk with Shahbaz Sharif, lasting well over an hour, in which we went through all the arguments. He certainly is very bright and I’m sure he understood them all, and I’m sure fed them in. But it is extremely difficult when you have a population of well over 130 odd million people, almost to a man and boy (because after all women’s views don’t come to a great deal of notice), demonstrating, shouting, howling for some kind of response from Pakistan. This reaction was not just on the streets but also from politicians. It was deeply felt throughout Pakistan that not to respond would seem to be crumbling in the face of Indian . . . the word ‘aggression’ is wrong because it wasn’t aggression, it was India’s attempt (I think it was perceived in Pakistan) to establish itself as a stronger, more forceful state, with a stronger, more nationalist forceful government which could only then browbeat Pakistan politically, or try to. The populist argument went that the only way to show them that we won’t crumble in the face of this is to let off our own weapons, and that will show them that if they do try to recapture part of Kashmir, the part which is in Pakistan, or under Pakistan control, if they did try that there would be a nuclear response available, because that is essentially why Pakistan has its capability. It’s a deterrent to make it completely unthinkable, they hope, that

the Indians would ever try by conventional means, by their superior conventional force, to recapture part of Kashmir.

Of course, the Indians have other fish to fry. There is the Indian/Chinese relationship, which is part of their calculation over possessing nuclear weapons.

But to go back to Pakistan's attitude, you could sense the popular demand, you couldn't fail to sense that it was extremely powerful, and I think it's to some credit to that government that they didn't immediately respond by setting off their own nuclear explosion. I think they delayed longer than was necessary from the purely scientific point of view, so I think there was at least a debate going on. They did consider the possibility, could they get away with it, could they avoid responding in that way. Maybe they didn't think too hard or too deeply about that, but at least they gave the idea a chance and would have no doubt, financially and economically done quite well out of it as well, because the Americans, and indeed the Europeans, would have given Pakistan a great deal of credit for avoiding that response. However, there it was. It took place. They, for whatever reason, decided it was necessary to go ahead and do it. There were no protests. All the protests were in favour. There were huge demonstrations in favour, models of rockets appeared made of cardboard in city centres, pictures on television of the mountain shaking as the explosion went off, in deepest Baluchistan, a long way from anywhere much populated. For a long time afterwards they prided themselves on having this great achievement. And we all know the consequences. It's been increased tension over Kashmir, or at least when there is tension over Kashmir, the worries and fears that it causes are that much greater."

VC: "It's interesting that you found a sort of tangential way to try to influence policy through the brother of the Prime Minister. Is that common? Is that an aspect of the kind of diplomatic entertaining activities? It's part of the role of a diplomat, isn't it, to cultivate people in the wider community?"

Sir David: "Yes, it is, though in this case it was not in any sense a surreptitious or back-door approach. He actually asked to talk to me. I had instructions to talk to him. He was a minister at the time. He was a cabinet minister and known to be in

government with his brother, and they consulted the whole time. I think it was really because he was a very real point of access who was going to report precisely what I said to him that he was offered as a channel of communication. There were, of course, cases where one would use more informal diplomacy of that kind, perhaps through a brother or some other contact who did not hold office, but in this case it wasn't one of those."

Diplomacy in Cyprus

VC: "And would one do that in Cyprus too, or was this a rather Indian sub-continent . . .?"

Sir David: "To return to Cyprus, I had a particularly helpful relationship with the President when I was posted there as High Commissioner, because, as I mentioned earlier, I knew him personally and had direct access. I was able to 'phone him up personally and go round and talk to him. And, indeed, he would sometimes 'phone me up personally, on a Saturday when he was not in the office, and say, 'How about coming round for some coffee? Let's talk about where we go.' And on all sorts of things, totally off the record, no note taken, no-one else present in the room (and one assumes not being overheard). George Vassiliou was like that because he wasn't deeply imbued in official practice in government; he had come to it, as I mentioned, late from business to be a politician. He enjoyed this kind of informal approach, and in Cyprus (it's a small place after all) you do get to know people at the very top very easily.

I like to think I had some direct influence with him. It did show at one point. It wasn't just my influence, but he had a very good relationship direct with Margaret Thatcher, the then British Prime Minister. They had known each other for some time and he admired most of the principles of Margaret Thatcher in those days. Therefore, during the time of the first Gulf War, he made sure that Cyprus was as helpful as Cyprus could be in the circumstances, given the very exposed position Cyprus held in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was very helpful.

I don't claim any personal credit for this, but I think the whole sum of things added up to a very good relationship in those days. In fact, one of the best, because Cyprus has been ambivalent towards the West from time to time, particularly towards Britain. It's been fashionable sometimes to blame Britain for not doing more to help get a solution, indeed for perhaps even wanting to avoid one so that the sovereign bases would remain intact. I think we have now totally overcome that view. It certainly existed still in some quarters when I was first in Cyprus in the early 1980s. I think it's gone completely. I think we've demonstrated that we are ready, have been extremely keen, to help get a solution, and indeed I understand now, although of course I'm not privy any longer to the details of policy, I believe ready to even perhaps withdraw from some of the area which is British sovereign base territory in order to help facilitate a solution if necessary, if it came to that."

Changes in Diplomatic Service life

VC: "It's clear, though you are modest about your own personal role in cultivating prime ministers, it is clear that personal qualities played a large part in the success of diplomats. I wonder if you'd care to talk about aspects of the Service as you have known it and as it is now, how it changed in your time."

Sir David: "I'd really like to say just a little about it. I think it has come out of what I have said already that I am a great admirer of the collective entity which is our British Diplomatic Service. I admire the way it has evolved, taken on new roles, adapted, put more emphasis on the things that need to be emphasised. I sure there is less fixation now with the pure politics of international diplomacy and a lot more emphasis, over the decades, on all the other things like commercial work, trade promotion, economic analysis, human rights, management within the Service itself, consular work, looking at humanitarian things, the whole spectrum of aid. I could go on. After all, every Embassy and High Commission, it is often forgotten, represents not just the Foreign Office abroad but the whole range of British government activities, all of Whitehall, and not just that, but Britain generally, the Queen and all the countries that make up the British Isles, what it stands for. And that's terribly important, and I think it's done very well."

Actually, I think also, and I mentioned briefly, that I thought the Service had adapted itself to look after its staff a lot better now than it used to, to make it better for families while serving overseas, particularly. All of those things. There are, however, I think just a few things which I think could have been rather avoided, or done better. I think there's a danger of losing that commitment and desire to serve as being the core of our motivation. What I'm really getting at is this. I think there's too much tendency to look for the unnecessary incentive, particularly when steering our more senior people towards performing their duties. I would almost go so far as to say that it is rather ludicrous, and certainly unnecessary, to offer a few hundred pounds extra bonus to someone for doing their job 'better' in the Diplomatic Service. Everyone's heard of the 'objectives' exercise and things of that kind. Well, it's fine to write down your objectives (although you shouldn't really need to, you ought to know what your objectives are), and it's certainly right to agree with your managers and with the office as a whole what it is you are supposed to be doing. At the same time I don't believe that our predecessors in the 1950s and 1960s had no idea what they were doing and had not talked about it with their superiors and with their colleagues and everybody else. I'm sure they knew exactly where they were going. If it's necessary to write that down, that's fine, I have no objection to that, but to actually then go on and say that you only get this extra £2-300 or £4-500 if you have met these objectives, whatever they are, that strikes me as being a totally unnecessary way of proceeding. I mean, people, if they want to be in the Diplomatic Service, will want to achieve their objectives anyway, and certainly, in the great scheme of things, an extra £200 isn't going to affect that. So, I think we've unnecessarily been pushed, or been drawn into going down a road which is fine for selling razor-blades, but is not actually very fine for practising diplomacy, and it could, and should have been avoided. I'm not sure it's done a lot of harm, it's just it could do harm if people came away with the attitude that it's only worth doing something if you get a spoonful of sugar at the end of it. You are actually in the business in order to serve the public and create a better good for the nation, or for some other nation, or whatever it might be. Indeed, it's a kind of vocation, an incentive different from the pure financial incentive which is understandable in business, but which does not really apply in most of the Civil Service, and certainly, in my view, not in the Diplomatic Service."

Appointment as a Director in the Foreign Office from 1994-97

VC: “Interesting. It begs the question about how much people need extra money in London. It’s one of the things that people have said, I think, that the benefits are most felt in London where the costs of being a diplomat are more evident. You might like to comment a bit on the difference between your service abroad and your service at home in the FCO. You were a Director of the South Asian and South-East Asian Departments, weren’t you? We haven’t talked about that, about policy being made at the centre.”

Sir David: “Well, this is something I also wanted to come on to. The way in which I believe the Service has evolved very beneficially, to itself, and probably to everybody, is the way it’s devolved its financial control, and with that, it’s imaginative thinking and planning, to sections within the Office, away from the centre. I think that is an advantage. It’s happened all over Whitehall. I once wrote a ‘scrutiny’ actually which proposed this kind of thing. I wrote it in response to a request from the Administration in the late 1980s. Since then, it has happened, and not precisely on the lines which I recommended, though it was on a very similar basis. And it’s all to the good, because it means that you make planning and responsibility and policy connect up with the financial resources that back it up. It also means that individual Directors are given the incentive and means to work out what they want to do and then put it into operation. There used to be a much more centralised structure.

Directors are what used to be called Under-Secretaries. I don’t think it matters too much what you call people, but it’s certainly not a brilliant idea unnecessarily to replace one piece of jargon with another, and I’m not totally convinced that the Director-Generalship for Corporate Affairs is a very good title for a job. I don’t think it’s any better than its predecessor, and I really do think that it’s a mistake to try to model a Civil Service department on an industrial organisation, a private company. Why? It’s different. The motivation, the incentives are different, the objectives are very different. An objective of foreign policy is usually a process, it’s not achieving, say, the sale of a hundred more Ford motorcars. It’s much less tangible than that. Surely that must affect the way we write down our objectives and policies and the way we react. React is the word, because in diplomacy, in foreign affairs of all things,

o.k. you're taking the initiative in some cases, but you're also reacting, very quickly often, to processes which are beyond your control. You can't always say what circumstances you're going to find yourself in months, or even weeks in the future.

Directors are now these individuals who usually have areas of the world under their responsibility, and I think that's proved rather good. But it's also important to remember that on the management side you need slightly smaller units so that, particularly in London, where often life can be more difficult, especially financially, than overseas, you're looking after people within a small group. In the days when I joined the Diplomatic Service in the 1960s, it was common practice, for example, in London for departments to put their papers down, just for a quarter of an hour in the afternoon, and gather, perhaps in the largest, the Third Room as it was called in those days (where the desk officers worked), for some kind of cup of tea or biscuit together, at all levels, including head of department. They would all get together, compare notes, talk to each other, get to know each other and get to know the more senior people. It's gone largely, but it certainly had a place, and although one must make sure time is used to its best effect, I do think it's important not to lose touch between the senior and more junior people in departments. That is something that should be watched carefully. It's easier often to do it in Embassies and certainly small Missions overseas, but in London one has to watch the 'big machine' effect and make sure that people are brought into the family, as it was rather, of a department.

Life, as I was saying, in London could sometimes be rather daunting. The costs of working in London had nothing to do with the system of incentives, these extra few hundred pounds I was mentioning, for seeming to have done a better job on achieving your objectives. It's very difficult, as I was saying, to judge that kind of thing. Service in London is compensated for, partly by, I forget what it's called, but the amount of money you're given on top of your salary as a fixed proportion extra to compensate you for having to work in the metropolis. But that applies to all civil servants, home civil servants as well as Foreign Office employees. It is without question quite a big shock, and it's expensive and disruptive, to find yourself accommodation, to have to travel and work in London, coming back from overseas. There's a very good system, I think, of allowances, transfer grants and things of that kind that do make it easier for people to do that. This is something that I think the

Office now does very much better than it used to do in the past. A lot more help is given over buying first time houses and flats. The importance of that should not be lost sight of. It really is very important, especially if you want to attract a broad range of young recruits to the Service from all groups, all classes, all ethnics groups too which are now embraced within the Service a great deal more, and indeed should be. There should be no obstacle of any kind to broadening the Service, provided you always make sure you get the best people.”

VC: “Can I just explore an area with you that you mentioned. You talked about ethnic participation in the Foreign Office. Were you aware of ethnic influences, as it were, on policies in Cyprus and Kashmir, political constituency which people might see as important to the making of our policy. Was that an important ingredient?”

Sir David: “There are bound to be ethnic influences on the government.”

VC: “That’s what I mean, yes.”

Sir David: “There are bound to be, not within or on the Office itself, but of course the Office receives its policies from ministers. It is not easy for me to say how much the internal politics, pressure from groups within the UK, how much effect that had on our policy over Cyprus and Kashmir, it is difficult to say, but it certainly would have an effect. It must do, because you have groups of Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Kashmiris, Indians, Pakistanis, living in the United Kingdom. Those who have been resident long enough to have citizenship, have votes, and in the democratic process that is bound to influence what governments do and think. So, no difficulty about that. The difficulty for the High Commissioner or Head of Mission on the spot was to try to recognise where, as you might say, visiting MPs and ministers were coming from on these questions, and that was what you had to do, that was part of the skill. It’s more a matter of making sure you have the materials, the equipment, the knowledge, as it were. These are abstract, I’m not talking about physical equipment, I’m talking about the knowledge, the facts at your disposal, to be able to explain, particularly to ministers and visiting MPs, exactly why the problem exists, what the other side thinks,

because in these cases there is always a balanced argument if you're prepared to look for it."

VC: "Policy making at the centre? When you're a very senior Foreign Office official, as you were, how is policy made, can you give us a sort of basic rundown. It may be obvious, but it may not be to outsiders."

Sir David: "It's a two-way process. The officials who know about the problem produce ideas, they produce the information, the back-up knowledge, they write papers, often in response to ministerial requests for advice. That's not a simple process, it's a long process, a lot of consultation, not just within departments but around Whitehall, with each other, past papers. All of that is assimilated by, one hopes, a pretty intelligent mind, and put down in clear terms as options available, maybe possible courses, and then, when that is ready, a political decision is taken by whatever level it has to be taken, depending on the subject, depending on the degree of change you're looking for, if you're looking for change. Usually it would be taken by ministers obviously in important cases, perhaps in the Cabinet, by the Prime Minister. Once that decision is taken, then that's the policy. But the policy has to be implemented, and the way you implement the policy is to return the problem to the officials who know the ropes, or they work it out. Quite often they will have again to offer advice on how best to implement the policy. It's a two-way process, and it's extremely effective in my estimation, and must continue to be done in that way. It would be quite wrong, in most cases, for ministers to take important policy decisions without advice, without listening to the man on the spot overseas (I'm talking about foreign policy now), or within a department, or both. But it would also be quite wrong for any of those officials to go off and do things without knowing that they had the total agreement and understanding of their political masters."

VC: "So it's a good, creative political tension, or tension, if not political tension."

Sir David: "Generally speaking, this political 'tension' amounts to a rigorous process of analysis, of the possibilities, where our interests lie, collecting the information, putting it all together, and then getting a decision."

VC: “Thank you. A very clear exposition. Just a last word. A better Service that you left than the one you joined?”

Sir David: “I wouldn’t say it was necessarily better, I wouldn’t say it was worse either, just different, but different because it has managed to change. It has managed to change, I think, in a way which really looks after its members and encourages them. Well, the proof is in the eating, isn’t it? The fact is that even though, for economical or other reasons, there has from time to time been a fall-off in recruits to the Civil Service, recruiting for the Foreign Office, the Diplomatic Service, has never been a problem. I can speak with some knowledge, because part of my career was spent in examining candidates from university for the Diplomatic Service. One of the most enjoyable few months I spent was as Chairman of the team which did examine university graduates, or undergraduates about to graduate, for the Diplomatic Service. And there is never any reduction in quality, I’m quite sure of that. If anything, the quality constantly increases, and the numbers certainly have not fallen away. Word gets around. I mean people know that the Diplomatic Service is an excellent career.”

VC: “Did it meet your expectations? We talked about what you hoped for when you joined, and public service loomed very large in that. Do you feel that you’ve had a satisfactory (it’s obviously a very successful) career? Was it a satisfying career, David, did it meet your hopes and best wishes?”

Sir David: “If you were to ask me the question differently, would I do it again, I think the answer is ‘yes’. I can’t really think of a career I would have preferred. The only career I might, in theory, have preferred is if I’d been a gifted artist or sculptor, or writer or something of that kind, but few of us can spend all our lives doing precisely what we want to do and make money at the same time. But I think that if you’re not individually talented in that way, I couldn’t have found a better way of spending my time. Very satisfying. I might have, if I’d been designing my own postings sequence, I might have chosen one or two jobs slightly differently, but on the whole I think I was pretty fortunate. I think my family would probably agree with that too. Sometimes my children have looked slightly askance when they heard they were going to a rather tricky, slightly fraught, part of the world when we might have

been going to a rather more calm and sunny island somewhere in the Caribbean. But I wouldn't have chosen it that way myself. In the end I think they all realised that they have benefited enormously also from the chance to travel and see things they would never have seen, certainly until much later in their lives. So, yes, in short, I think it's been thorough satisfying and rewarding and I wouldn't have wanted it any different."