DOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Sir John KILLICK

Biographical Details with (on right) relevant pages in the interview:

Served with HM Forces, 1939-46	
Foreign Office, 1946	pp 2-3
Control Commission, then High Commission for Germany, 1948	pp 3
Private Secretary to Parliamentary Under-Secretary, 1951	pp 3-5
British Embassy, Addis Ababa, 1954	pp 5-6
Canadian National Defence College, 1957	pp 6-7
Western Department, FO, 1958	pp 8-10
Imperial Defence College, 1962	pp 6-7
Counsellor and Head of Chancery, Washington, 1963	pp 12-17
Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1968	pp 18-22
Ambassador to USSR, 1971	pp 22-28
Deputy Under-Secretary of State and Permanent Representative on Council of Western European Union, 1973	pp 28-30
Ambassador and UK Permanent Representative, NATO, 1975	pp 30-35
Retired 1979.	

The interview also includes comments on the Cuban Missile Crisis (pp 7-8), Britain's role in the European Community/Union (pp 11-12), the collapse of the USSR (pp 26-7) and developments in NATO after 1979 (pp 35-8).

Sir John Killick

Interview with Sir John Killick on 14 February, 2002, by John Hutson.

JH: "Sir John, tell me, did your war service give you a taste for foreign parts? Did it perhaps influence your choice of career?"

Sir John: "No, I think my taste for foreign parts was developed before the war when I was at university in Germany, but certainly, subsequent military service played a great part. In fact, I think you would have to say that it was during my military service, that I read the information about the Eden reforms, and the fact that the Foreign Office was willing to take people who had been at university before the war but whose university studies had been interrupted by the war. That wouldn't have been possible before the war, before the Eden reforms, and the most I could have hoped for (I hadn't made up my mind) was perhaps a modest career in the Consular Service. The Eden reforms opened the whole Service up to everybody, and I was lucky to get in."

JH: "I know exactly about the Eden reforms, I don't know about the luck. When you joined the Office, was there any induction or training?"

Sir John: "When I think back, I'm appalled, to be honest, about the virtual total lack of any training or introduction. We used to get lectures by Harold Nicolson on the theory of diplomacy and the virtues of pragmatism, but you were expected to learn on the job. I started in the Japan and Pacific Department, of all unlikely places as my expertise was in Germany, and it was clear to me that all I was expected to do, was to learn the ropes, so to speak. One did comparatively menial tasks, like unlocking telegram boxes, putting telegrams in tubes, and serving up papers as they came in to one's superiors. And you were supposed to learn, I think, by force of example. I don't criticise this; it worked very

well. But in those days you had tremendous respect for your elders and betters and you learned from them. That's the way one did it."

JH: "Perhaps I can ask then, to go on, although you came from that department dealing with the Far East, you did in fact go abroad again in the Service, to Germany I believe."

Sir John: "I did indeed. I had, of course, experience in Germany, first as a prisoner-of-war, which is not very amusing, and then after the war in the Control Commission, and the High Commission, which was very educative for me. We had in those days, a thing called a post preference form, which I filled in while I was in the Japan and Pacific Department, and my preference was for Vienna. I thought Austria would be fun, and I spoke German. And so, what happened, I got Berlin. I didn't regret it as such, but I would have liked to go to Vienna very much in that post-war period."

JH: "But when you went to the Control Commission and the High Commission, that was as a member of the Foreign Service?"

Sir John: "I went to Berlin in '48 to the High Commission as a member of the Foreign Service, indeed, and it was a fascinating period because I arrived just as the Russians were marching out of the Control Commission, and we then had the blockade. An exciting period, and it stuck very much in my mind, that whole period, because I feel a bit like Dean Acheson, whose book was entitled 'Present at the Creation'. I was there only in a very modest capacity, but my goodness, we were dealing with big people in those days, real statesmen, who were moulding the future of the world we were going to live in. I felt very privileged to be even a small part of it."

JH: "Perhaps we shall come back to Germany. You were then brought back home, I believe, and became a Private Secretary to a Parliamentary Under-Secretary. A Parliamentary Under-Secretary is usually thought of as a fairly junior person, at least in

the ministerial stakes. Was that a good place for a relatively junior officer to learn more of the ropes maybe?"

Sir John: "Absolutely, because one got much broader contacts with other parts of Whitehall, with the House of Commons, and with the Party in power. When I first became Private Secretary to a man called Ernest Davies, it is true we did not loom very large on the ministerial scene, but he was involved with the Labour Party, and I had dealings with people like Denis Healey, who in those days was not even a Member of Parliament. He was the international secretary of the Labour Party.

I also had the great good fortune to accompany Ernest Davies to a conference in Paris called the Palais Rose, where deputy foreign ministers of the four powers had got together to agree with Gromyko, who was then Deputy Foreign Minister, an agenda for a proper conference of foreign ministers. It was an eye-opener meeting the Russians for the first time, although I knew a good deal about them, but also in the sense of reinforcing what I already knew of the difficulties of negotiating with them. One of the things I had done in the Japan and Pacific Department was prepare a memorandum on Soviet behaviour over Korea, and one saw the same thing, the stonewalling. It was unbelievable. We had seventy-two meetings, for which I had to write all the records, about an agenda, without even getting down to the substance. And we ended up disagreeing. I eventually reduced my records to formulae. They were the same things coming out, perhaps in a different order, over and over again, from old stone-bottomed Gromyko."

JH: "Yes, the Russians had some very good interpreters, but I must say they didn't have to learn more than a limited vocabulary.

Moving on, although we can always come back, I notice that subsequently, or shortly after, in the space of five years, you had two stints in different defence colleges. The first one, I think, was in the Imperial Defence College, as it was then called."

Sir John: "The first one was at the Canadian National Defence College in 1958, and that was after I had done a spell as Head of Chancery, as it was then called (I believe they've abolished the title now), in Addis Ababa. And thereby hangs a story. My second ministerial boss was Anthony Nutting, the late Anthony Nutting, who thought he'd done me a great favour by arranging for me to be posted, when I left him, to Lisbon. Indeed it would have been a marvellous post, but I was keen to get to Africa, because I had met and married a South African girl in Berlin. She was in the South African military mission, and I had never seen South Africa, although I'd been in West Africa during the war. So, rather to everybody's surprise, I said could I please go to Addis Ababa. It was one of the only two Foreign Office posts, when you think back, in Africa in that day, because all the rest of Africa, apart from Monrovia, was colonial. There was, of course, the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Colonial Office, which looked after the colonies and South Africa. So I did that stint. I never regretted asking for Addis Ababa instead of Lisbon. It was sui generis – not really black African and not North African either, having its own brand of Christianity. To read Evelyn Waugh was still useful! It was the era of our decolonisation – in my time the Sudan and then Ghana. It was pretty clear that the Emperor was less than happy at the prospect of being surrounded by independent black states. The Amhara didn't regard themselves as black and the Emperor tried to model himself in many ways on the British monarchy. But of course we could only tell him that independence for Kenya etc was on the agenda. The turning point was Suez. The Ethiopians were delighted at the prospect that their old enemies, the Egyptians, were going to get clobbered, and correspondingly disappointed when the operation was called off. It was then that the Emperor decided to throw in his lot with the non-aligned movement.

The real bone of contention was Somaliland. Following the restoration of Haile Selassie during the war, we had retained the administration of the Ogaden – the desert area of Ethiopia bordering on Somaliland, where the nomad Somali tribes had to water and graze their herds. Of course it then had to be returned to Ethiopian sovereignty, and relations between the Somalis and the Ethiopians were constantly prickly. We were the pig in the middle. But I much enjoyed bouncing around this area in a Landrover with our consul in

Harar, Gerry Pink, and liaising with the Somaliland authorities, who seemed to have difficulty in appreciating that we were dealing with a sovereign government to whom we could not issue orders – as they did on colonial lines. We sometimes felt that the sign in Hargeisa's main street - 'Camels have right of way' – was all too true. Once when the governor went on leave, the usual telegram went to London saying the Native Secretary had assumed charge. His name was Carrel, and this was the signature on the telegram. My Ambassador, who had a lively sense of humour, himself sent a telegram to London saying he assumed the signature should read 'Camel'.

I enjoyed it all immensely, and it confirmed the interest in Africa which I had first developed in West Africa during the war. And my wife and I managed to take three months leave and drive in our Vauxhall Velox from Addis Ababa to Cape Town and back. That is a story in itself. I wouldn't dream of undertaking the trip today, but one must remember that in those days, once one had crossed the Kenya border it was red on the map all the way.

Then at the end of that I was posted to the Canadian National Defence College. I don't know why particularly. The Personnel Department moved in a mysterious way. I suspect the idea was to put me on ice for a year while finding another job.

The second experience was in 1962/63, when I did the Imperial Defence College in London, and that was really pure chance. What had happened was in 1962 they had wanted to post me to Moscow, and I gather that the Russians refused me a visa. They were having a visa war at the time. The other thing was that Derek Hoyer Millar, who was then Permanent Under-Secretary, said I couldn't be spared because I had become the great Berlin expert in the Western Department at that time. So that was fortuitous."

JH: "Is there anything in particular that you would like to record about the defence colleges, either of them?"

Sir John: "Not particularly. They were immensely valuable in contributing to one's background knowledge and in terms of the personal contacts one made across the board of course with the Services, which stood me in good stead later on. The Services didn't always get on with the Foreign Office frightfully well. They thought we were a lot of long-haired wets, and one was able to dispel that impression and to gain valuable experience. I might add though, that I always had the feeling that for those of us who came in at the end of the war, out of the Services, had something rather special to offer. I don't make disparaging comparisons with people who joined the Office before the war, but we were doers, we were organisers. I'm not suggesting the others weren't, but somehow we were more direct in our methods, and I think that was a good thing, a healthy thing, within the Office."

JH: "Certainly in contact with the military side and I'm sure generally, yes. I can see that. The Cuban crisis, I think, may have happened in your time, in one of those periods of study."

Sir John: "Exactly. It did. It happened when I was at the Imperial Defence College."

JH: "Did it excite you?"

Sir John: "Very much so, very much so. I suppose all of us felt that we were virtually on the brink of nuclear war. The Imperial Defence College, in those days, was all old Commonwealth, American and British. The rest of the Commonwealth didn't enter into it. Nor did the other Europeans. So we weren't involved in any controversy about it at all. We simply observed from outside, and we all ended up full of admiration of the way Kennedy handled it. In the light of history, I'm not sure that that impression was justified, but he certainly gave that impression at the time, and we admired him greatly.

There is one little titbit about the Cuban missile crisis worth mentioning. Years later, I had the opportunity of asking Dean Rusk, personally, whether he thought that when Gromyko gave Kennedy an assurance in the White House that there were no nuclear

missiles in Cuba capable of reaching the United States, whether Gromyko knew that he was telling a lie. I mean, we all knew that that wasn't true. The Americans knew it from their air photographs. Dean Rusk said, 'Oh yes, he knew all right. We could tell from the expression on the interpreter's face.' So, the Russians were liars. It was brave of President Reagan for saying so rather bluntly later on, but it was true."

JH: "Yes, well, if you're good at stonewalling, you can easily become a good stony-faced liar. You said that you had been in Western Department from l958-62. Was there anything else from that time that particularly needs recording?"

Sir John: "Oh, it was a very interesting period. A lot of my time was taken up with Berlin. I arrived in the Department just in time for Mr Khrushchev's first Berlin crisis, and it involved a lot of work. I got particularly involved in the contingency planning of what things we might do, including military things, in the event that the Russians interfered with the airlift and blockaded Berlin totally in those days.

The other thing that one was involved with was, first of all, Harold Macmillan's first attempt, first interest, in joining the European Community. I also well recall his going off to Moscow, that celebrated visit of I think 1961, with his fur hat, which confirmed my impression that I've always held, that Western politicians tend to make the mistake of assuming that the Soviet leadership were really people just like them, and if only they could get opposite them across the table they could fix everything. I remember Harold Macmillan saying, at the end of our briefing of him (I'm not sure to this day whether he was half joking or not), he said, 'Ah, poor old Mr Khrushchev, I suppose he has to think of the electors of Kiev just as I have to think of the voters of Bromley. Of course, nothing could have been further from the truth. I still don't know whether Macmillan was joking. I certainly had confirmed my impression that British politicians, of both parties, have always felt it necessary, as it were, to reinvent the wheel and have not wanted to accept the professional advice of the experts of what the Russians were really like. They were always under the illusion that they could somehow fix things themselves if only they could talk, man to man, across the table."

JH: "It's a common human failing, and particularly perhaps among politicians who have made their way by hard work and contacts, particularly contacts."

Sir John: "And in the Western way of things, personal contact does count. In the Soviet way of things it counted rather differently.

You asked about other things. The other thing that sticks in my memory that I was totally involved in was de Gaulle's state visit, which took place in, I think, 1961. When he was invited and accepted, Edward Tomkins, who was head of the Western Department, said, 'I want you to organise this.' I said 'Only on condition that you take me off all other work.' So I had a six-month period or more, doing nothing but organising this visit, which was fascinating.

I looked up the precedents, and found that before the war, the chap who had my job, who was called Ivo Mallet, had convened a meeting of everybody concerned with the State Visit. I think it was President Lebrun who was invited then. They included the Lord Chancellor's secretary, the Speaker's secretary, the military, everybody who could conceivably be concerned. Ivo Mallet had said to them, 'Well now, here is this visit. Get on organising it.' I tried the same thing, and they said, in effect, 'Bugger you, you get on organising it.' And so I was lumbered. And it really was like running a three-ring circus. It was incredible. But it went extremely well, I think. The Queen did special things for de Gaulle, like inviting him to review her Household troops. The massed bands of the Guards paraded for de Gaulle on Horse Guards, playing regimental marches including the Sambre et Meuse, all that kind of thing, and he was very impressed. I was told afterwards by a member of the French Embassy that when he got home he said, 'Les Anglais ont bien fait', which, coming from him, was high praise.

There were one or two awkwardnesses. Someone rang me up (he'd better remain nameless) to say could I please ensure he was put on the list to receive French decorations. This was someone outside the Foreign Office. This was normal practice,

and he thought the Legion d'Honneur would be worth having. His plans went rather awry when he was given the Etoile Noire de Benin. Very few people got the Legion d'Honneur, actually. He rang me up to complain bitterly. Anyway, I didn't get anything at all, not even a signed photograph, except my memories of a really epoch-making visit.

I recollect also, the speech de Gaulle made to both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall. One couldn't get the text out of him, out of the French Embassy, until the weekend before his visit, because he had Khrushchev and Bulganin in Paris, and he was focussing solely on them. He only bent his mind to the speech after they'd gone. The French Embassy came round, they'd got it by telegram, and I think it was the day before he was due to address both Houses of Parliament together. They would have been expecting a translation on their seats, of course, even if they hadn't used it. So I sat down and dictated, off the cuff, a translation, which was not easy because de Gaulle spoke rather a special sort of French, and to get the flavour of de Gaulle was difficult. But, anyway, there it was.

I was sitting there when he entered Westminster Hall, carrying the text of his speech in one hand, his pebble glasses in the other (he had very bad sight in those days), and I checked the speech against delivery. To my amazement and admiration, he delivered it, changed about three words, without even once looking at his text. It was a very revealing speech, because it paid full acknowledgement to Britain's role in the world, but it was clearly implicit that he didn't think we belonged in Europe. In the light of what happened later, his veto and so on, it wasn't a surprise to me at all".

JH: "That was the gist of his words then."

Sir John: "He accepted Britain's status, but we belonged, as indeed we had said, in three concentric circles, the EC, the Commonwealth, and America. Europe was only one of three things".

JH: “I think we have been somewhat uncomfortable in the European Community, then Union, ever since. He was right to the extent that we are a bit different. We were never ruled by Napoleon, and it makes a lot of difference.”

Sir John: “You’re absolutely right.”

JH: “Everything is different here. I mustn’t make a speech, but I could go on.”

Sir John: “Well, I only want to say on that. We finally joined when I was serving in Moscow. I’ve often wondered why Pompidou allowed us to come in, and I came to the conclusion that it could only have been because he needed us as a counter-balance to the Germans. If one can jump forward to today, France always has seen Europe as a German horse with a French rider. The German horse has now got to be a bloody big horse since unification, and the French can’t ride it any more, and I don’t think they know quite which way to go. They are not able to dominate the Germans in the way they used to, but they are very reluctant to enlist our help in doing so. It’ll be interesting to see how this develops over the years ahead. Personally, I have great confidence in Germany. Having helped build it up, I think it’s quite remarkable that they’ve stayed so democratic. Long may it remain so.”

JH: “If we would look harder at Germany we would see what federation really means, and how it is related to de-centralisation.”

Sir John: “This is one of the problems. And another, as I’m sure you found, is language. The word ‘federal’ or ‘federation’ means something absolutely different in Germany, and I speak as one who was there when we were making them adopt a Constitution which was federal in character, precisely because we didn’t want too much power at the centre. And they still have it. So they see federalism as being something rather different from what we see it as. We’ve admitted the bogey-man. Napoleon still rides, I think, only it’s the Germans who worry us as much as the French. Sorry, that’s a side issue.”

JH: "No. I'm glad we got on to that because it is so interesting, and current, and will be for a long time.

We have perhaps arrived at your posting to Washington, as Head of Chancery?"

Sir John: "Yes, I think we have. What happened was, as I explained earlier, I was sent fortuitously to the Imperial Defence College, for a year, as it were, and towards the end of that course, I was given my Washington posting, for which I was overjoyed. The news reached me in Lagos, I think. We were on tour with the IDC, and the Office informed me there. I was very chuffed at the idea of going to Washington as Head of Chancery. I don't think any job quite matches it in the Service. One was a kind of Chief of Staff to the Ambassador, and running, or trying to keep a very disparate Embassy on the same lines, more or less. We had attachés for oil, for civil aviation, for transport. We had an enormous military staff. We had a totally separate, as it were, Treasury delegation, and so it went. All these people had to be somehow kept in line. One didn't do it by discipline but by persuasion and talking to them and so on. It was absolutely fascinating.

I arrived with Kennedy still in the White House, and I'm one of the people who could remember exactly where he was when we heard the news that Kennedy had been shot. I and my wife had been downtown shopping. We were driving back uptown. At a red light we stopped next to a taxi which had its radio on, and there was the announcement. At first we didn't assume he was dead. They simply said the President had been shot. However, when we go home we heard he was dead. And, of course, all hell broke loose in the sense that funeral arrangements had to be made at very short notice. We were involved because a massive delegation was going to come, led by Prince Philip, from Britain, and including Harold Wilson. And at that particular moment, the Minister in the Embassy, the No.2, happened to be away, so Harold Wilson fell to me, which was fascinating. One of his major mistakes was to try to pat my cats on the head.

He brought a morning coat, and I sent him off with my top hat (he hadn't got one) explaining that the programme was extremely vague still, and as far as I could judge from seeing it, there was no provision whatever for comfort stations, and if he wanted to use my hat, he should feel free. I got the hat back later in pristine condition, so he must have been able to contain himself all day. It was a very long ceremony and they had to walk all the way up to Arlington, to the burial, from the cathedral downtown. In the light of history, I suppose, the funeral as such was not an epic event, although, as usual, people tried to make it into a working funeral and have conversations and so on.

I mentioned Harold Wilson because, obviously, the major thing of the whole of my time in Washington was Vietnam. It was started by Jack Kennedy, whatever anybody else says. He started building up the American military involvement. After the assassination, Lyndon Johnson, who was a very nasty man in many ways, but with whom I have great sympathy, took on the presidency on the slogan 'Let us contin-ya'. And he did contin-ya with still in Cabinet, Bob McNamara, Robert Kennedy, the whole Kennedy team, who appeared to support him, although Robert Kennedy didn't really. But McNamara was the man who was responsible for further escalation of the American commitment in Vietnam because he somehow believed in computer studies, and he convinced himself, week by week, month by month, that the Americans were winning, and all they had to do was a little bit more. McNamara today is trying to pretend he was against it all the time. The only man I knew in the Administration who honestly opposed Vietnam was George Ball. He did it internally. He didn't make a great public fuss, he didn't resign. And I found also, very realistic were the assessments people in the CIA. But the White House and everybody just thought they were winning."

JH: "But wasn't it in Johnson's time that there was some sort of naval . . . the Tonkin Gulf, which was a trigger for a further escalation?"

Sir John: "Absolutely, in the heat of the moment, as it were, he got out of the Congress, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which gave him, more or less, carte blanche to do whatever he wanted."

JH: “Couldn’t he have chosen not to do that, not to go on?”

Sir John: “He could have done, but you see he was still being advised by people who thought they were winning, including the military on the ground. It was a sad business. I found it an extraordinary situation to be in, because we had a government at that time who were, if not supporting the Americans 100%, were at least very sympathetic. I’ve found it interesting over the years, to observe the Labour Party’s relationships with American presidents. We’re seeing it at the moment, of course, again. But although they wanted to criticise the Americans privately they were opposed to any commitment in Vietnam, much to the displeasure of Dean Rusk, who wanted us to put out more flags. And here again, history is repeating itself in a way. The Americans wanted to run things, but they wanted to give the appearance that they were in a coalition. And they did persuade some others to go. They had Koreans, they had Turks, they had Australians, and so on, on the ground in Vietnam. We refused, but at the same time wanted to influence American policy.

And thereby hangs a tale of what was the role of Harold Wilson in general? He was always extremely pleasant to me personally, and I don’t mean to appear critical of him, but I wondered honestly how far he was a victim of his own illusions. He really seemed to believe that he had great influence with Lyndon Johnson. This led to the extraordinary situation when Kosygin was in this country (I forget which year it was) and he went down for talks with Harold Wilson at Chequers, with Chester Cooper, the American, in a hidey-hole upstairs, in direct touch with Washington, getting instructions and passing them on downstairs. And there was a foul-up. Harold Wilson was given, by Chester Cooper, a formula to give to Kosygin, which excited Kosygin’s immediate interest because it was different from some formula which had been used before. And it turned out to be the wrong one. Kosygin had already left; he was about to board his train going to Scotland when he was pursued by a private secretary from Chequers with the degrading admission that he’d been given the wrong formula. My belief is that from that

time on, the Russians had very little interest in Harold Wilson, despite his links with Washington.

I hesitate to tell this story, but it's true. Harold Wilson was always wanting to talk to the President, much as the way Clem Attlee did over Korea, wanting to come over, and he sent a message once, proposing a visit. The usual reply was sent saying looking forward to seeing you next week. I was telephoned from the White House by Walt Rostow to say, 'John, you better know what the President's reaction really was. He said we got enough pollution around here already without Harold coming over with his fly open and his pecker hanging out, peeing all over me.' I hesitate to quote that, but it is such a vivid picture of Lyndon Johnson in reality. Yet he was a great president in many ways. He did things Kennedy could never have done, like bringing in the Great Society. I think you were there at that time, were you not?"

JH: "Yes, I think we may have met in Washington, fleetingly, because I was in San Francisco as Commercial Consul, then Consul for four years."

Sir John: "It's interesting, these little sidelines. After Kennedy died, you know what the outside world's reaction was. I know I myself was very taken with Kennedy from after his first inauguration speech. And then in Washington, after the assassination, we would go to parties, and blue-rinse ladies in high heels would say, 'I'm glad that immoral man is dead.' It shook us. He had a very mixed reputation, domestically."

JH: "But he does seem to have managed to keep his policies separate from his irregular life."

Sir John: "He does somehow, quite extraordinary. Although one still speculates about the links, indirect though they were, with the mafia. He had this girlfriend, Judith Campbell, who was Sam Giancaria's girl, and also summoned to the White House. The story is that he really only won the election by a very narrow margin, thanks to gerrymandering in Cook County, wherever, in Illinois, organised by the mafia. I think he

was pretty close to Frank Sinatra who was a mafia man. I can't help wondering whether the assassination wasn't a mafia job, through a cut-out of course, because Bobby Kennedy started pursuing them after the election when they thought they had helped to bring Jack Kennedy to power. Bobby Kennedy was conducting this campaign of rooting out the mafia. He was Attorney-General. And I can't help wondering whether this was the pay-off, as it were, for Bobby Kennedy. He afterwards got knocked off himself. Very hard. I wonder about the assassination of Jack Ruby, who Lee Harvey Oswald really was. The Warren Commission report didn't provide all the answers, I don't think. It may remain one of history's unsolved mysteries."

JH: "It didn't stop speculation, that's right.

You must have met, possibly all two or three foreign secretaries during Harold Wilson's time. Michael Stewart was rather clever about dealing with student opinion in this country, about Vietnam."

Sir John: "That's right. Michael Stewart I admired considerably. He was devoted to whisky, but he never showed any signs of being drunk, and he behaved, I felt, very well indeed. He put a foot wrong here and there. He made a speech in Washington once, in which he said he thought the Americans should have decent respect for the opinions of mankind. Lyndon Johnson took agin him for that. A perfectly reasonable thing to say in reality, but of course, he was preceded by George Brown, over whom a veil should be drawn, but can't be. He rivalled Harold Wilson in his belief that Lyndon Johnson loved him. He was a great chap for one-upmanship. I remember I had to meet him once at Washington airport. He'd come from New York, having sent a telegram saying, 'Ya-boo to you, Lyndon Johnson has asked me to lunch', and I had to break the news to him that it was lunch for 300 people. He was seated at the table with somebody, miles away from Lyndon Johnson, and he wasn't best pleased. My God, we had a rough time with him."

JH: "I think in one sense one is perhaps being slightly hard on him because, unlike Michael Stewart, as we've just said, he couldn't actually take drink at all. I gather

that one drink was enough to set him off, and therefore he should have been teetotal, and then he might have been brilliant all the time."

Sir John: "Absolutely. I always said of George Brown that he was a brilliant weapon. He would have been a wonderful Foreign Secretary if you could have loaded him with the right ammunition and fired him off in the right direction at the right time. His trouble was, he would get loaded, literally, and fire himself off in the wrong direction at the wrong time."

JH: "But it took unusually little to load him. He might accept one drink, and that would be too much."

Sir John: "There are so many stories about George Brown. One I particularly like is one where he is at a meeting, I think in Paris, with Couve de Murville, at some meal, and after the meal they were sat down in the corner together and Alun Chalfont, who was a junior minister at the time, was at the other side of the room. He suddenly heard George Brown shouting across the room, 'Alun, come and help with the interpreting, this bloody frog doesn't speak English.' So Alun trotted over and did his interpreting, and at the end of it, Couve de Murville got up and said, icily, in English, 'That was a most interesting conversation. Thank you very much.' And George Brown said, 'Oh! the bugger, he speaks English all the time.' But he didn't make friends. Therefore he didn't influence people. I have deep sympathy for Murray MacLehose, who was George's private secretary at the time. A great man.

Well, one could go on for ever about Washington. It was a fascinating period. I would only like to end up by saying it was a difficult post in the sense that the whole society was so open; information was sloshing around the place, and the problem was to reduce it to manageable proportions to report to London. London didn't need it all. You had to make somehow a judgement of what it did. Of course, to me the contrast was incredible when I got to Moscow. You had a totally enclosed society, when even what's on at the Bolshoi in two weeks' time seemed to be a State secret."

JH: “Moscow was in fact your next post abroad?”

Sir John: “Abroad, yes it was. I had a spell in London as Assistant Under-Secretary, which was an odd sort of period, because I had a great rag-bag of subjects. I was supposed to look after EFTA which, at the time, was our refuge from refusal to join the EEC. That was difficult because our partners in EFTA suspected, quite rightly, that at the end of the day we would ditch them and join the European Community, which we had tried to do, after all.”

JH: “Indeed. I wonder whether it’s just to say we ditched them. They got rather good terms. They were able, in effect, to get the benefits with us paying the cost of the agricultural policy. When they used to criticise me, I used to tell them that they were jolly lucky, we had done very well by them. We had taken on this burden and they didn’t have to.”

Sir John: “That’s right. I hasten to say that when I said what I did, I was describing what I took their position to be at the time. I didn’t say I agreed with it. But they were very suspicious at that time. I also was supposed to understudy Stewart Crawford, who was the Deputy Under-Secretary in charge of intelligence, but I didn’t do much in that field other than support, very strongly, the recommendations that we should expel a large number of KGB men from the UK. I’ll come to that again later.

The most interesting thing I had to do at that time was to lead our British delegation to an ongoing conference in Washington on setting up INTELSAT, which was an experience I won’t forget in a hurry. It was difficult. It was highly technical in lots of ways and it was under the British Post Office, who were a law unto themselves and believed implicitly in the Commonwealth, and reckoned they and the Australians and South Africans and a few others could fix the whole business with the Americans. I had a background in representing the Foreign Office on the European Committee on Telecommunication Satellites, CETS, which had a very different outlook. I said to the Americans quite

frankly at the beginning, 'I am going to have to do a difficult balancing act. We want an efficient organisation same as you do, but we are going to have to pay a certain political price in terms of a degree of control by others.'

It was, at the end of the day, a great American disappointment, one of many, in which they could not understand why other people could not see that their method of doing things was the right answer and the best thing for them. They learned the hard way. We ended up with a system, which, as far as I know, still works. But it had to involve an assembly, which was notionally democratic, participation of all the governments concerned, and so on. And, of course, it was in the context of this negotiation that it was brought home to me how strongly the French felt about the maintenance of the French language. And that is a continuing problem, because the language of technology is English, and they see it taking over more and more. They, on the other hand, have been willing to spend considerable amounts of money, tax-payers' money, on the establishment of satellites which will carry French language broadcasts, particularly to Africa. At the end of the day, I'm sure French will still be a very important language, but they won't win."

JH: "La francophonie exists, but as you say, it won't win worldwide. But I wonder if that's why so many would-be immigrants come to France but don't want to stay there. They only see France as a staging-post to England. And I wonder if the fact that American English is now the world language, or the nearest thing, isn't one of the reasons for our asylum seekers and immigrants problem."

Sir John: "That's a point that hadn't occurred to me. I'm sure you're right. It's not easy for an immigrant to learn good French any more than it is for immigrants to Germany for that matter, Turks and so on, to learn German. The Turks make a better fist of it, I think, but very few Africans or Eastern Europeans speak what the French would regard as good French, and they tend to despise people who don't. It's a very good point you have there."

JH: “It’s a red herring I’m afraid, but it’s something that occurs to one.

What about the personalities you had to deal with, if indeed they influenced policy in a way that should be recorded because it’s interesting, during your time in the Office before you went to Moscow?”

Sir John: “You mean British personalities?”

JH: “With whomever you dealt. I realise you are not the first person who has said to me the AUSS job tends to have a rag-bag of different things to look after, and it may be that you don’t want to draw further on that period, you think there are more important things further on.”

Sir John: “I certainly have views on the organisation of the Office at that time, which I discussed with Denis Greenhill. He had been my predecessor in Washington and become the PUS (because George Brown liked him very much). I felt the Office was not well organised because I had had my State Department experience. The State Department, I felt, was more hierarchical in its structure: you had an Assistant Secretary of State clearly in charge of a geographical area. Under him, two Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State and then the various Directors of the individual countries, but the focal point was the Assistant-Secretary who answered directly to the Secretary of State, which meant that the threads were pulled together properly.

In the British scheme of things, they were devoted to the principle that the Counsellor, the Head of Department, is the focal point, and you find it difficult to know where you fit in as an AUS, even for that matter, as a DUS, because the Heads of Department were competent people who knew much more about the area they dealt with and tend to row their own boat. I had a certain impact, I think, on Denis Greenhill, because at that time we also amalgamated with the Commonwealth Relations Office, so we ended up with sixty-something departments. Absolutely unwieldy if you considered the Head of each Department is the focal point. I believe they’ve now changed the structure totally, but

it's been a long time coming. But you are right, at that time the Assistant Under-Secretary was a bit of a spare wheel in a way and had to be prepared to stand in here and there, but had no very clear mandate."

JH: "Probably had a lot to do with other government departments for all these different things."

Sir John: "Absolutely. I spent a lot of time sitting on Whitehall committees. I remember in my time, I supervised, amongst other things, the Science and Technology Department, at a time when the environment was suddenly blooming, and it obviously had international aspects. I remember putting a paper to the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee saying this, and we'd better be aware of it, and Denis Greenhill said, 'All right, I suppose we can let John go off figure-skating.' But it wasn't figure-skating, it was for real. And I ended up sitting on a Committee chaired by Solly Zuckerman, the Chief Government Scientist, which had environmental questions, domestic, on its agenda who found there were no less than seventy-two different bodies looking after the rivers of Britain. That sort of thing.

And the international thing, because the Americans were very keen on this. They had Pat Moynihan, now a senator in New York, in the White House, as the sort of egg-head in residence, and the Americans wanted to make this a big issue. The challenges of modern society was a great thing. They introduced a committee in NATO to look at the challenges of modern society. McGeorge Bundy wanted to set up an organisation in Vienna, which would include the Russians in looking at these problems. And the Foreign Office had to play a role, which we came to do. I was very fortunate during that period in the Science and Technology Department. I had a wonderful back-up, people who really worked on these things and understood them.

In two ways, it was an interesting illustration of the extent to which diplomacy had expanded; having to deal with INTELSAT on one hand, having to deal with the human

environment on the other. All these kinds of things were not areas one thought of as being natural fields for diplomacy, but were very real."

JH: "Yes, I can see that. I'm glad I asked. That's important.

Should we move on to Moscow? It was, as we've said, the Brezhnev era, and until you get to Afghanistan, it's hard to think of particular crises during the years 1971-1973, but perhaps there were some that I have not known about, or forgotten."

Sir John: "Shortly before I left for Moscow, Denis Greenhill suggested that I should talk to the Opposition, so I got Denis Healey to lunch. He said the Party weren't at that time particularly interested in the Soviet Union but were focussing on China, which he hoped shortly to visit. He didn't think Harold Wilson had any plans for a visit to Moscow. But I had no sooner arrived (and hadn't even presented my credentials) than Harold Wilson announced his imminent arrival. We of course left him largely to do the rounds on his own, as he would have wished, but he afterwards gave me a pretty sketchy account of what had passed. It didn't amount to much, but he seemed to think there was a basis for co-ordinated economic planning between our two countries. I might say that I do not for one moment believe, as some in MI5 seemed to believe, that Wilson was a conscious Soviet agent or spy. But Moscow certainly regarded him as a potential 'agent of influence', if not as a 'useful idiot'.

Another event shortly after my arrival was the death of Khrushchev. It took the Soviet authorities about 48 hours to decide how to announce it – and eventually about four laconic lines appeared on the front page of 'Pravda' informing the Soviet people of the death of 'the well known pensioner'. This for a man who had ruled the Soviet Union for ten years! Meanwhile we were receiving messages from Harold Macmillan and others conveying condolences to Nina Sergeevna (the news had reached the West pretty well straight away) and we had to say in reply that we couldn't deliver them because the event had not yet occurred officially in the Soviet Union!

The funeral (which several members of my staff attended) was a sad and pathetic affair. He was buried in the Novodevichy cemetery – admittedly with many other distinguished Russians – but not in the Kremlin Wall, as was really his due.

There was a Middle East war, which I can mention, but could I first say something about our bilateral relations. I mentioned I'd understudied Stewart Crawford on intelligence questions and was particularly involved with the recommendation to expel the Russians. With hindsight, and even at the time, it was pretty clear to me that I was not being posted to Moscow because of my tremendous Soviet expertise, or knowledge of Russian, but simply to hold the fort there during what promised to be a difficult period following the expulsion of 105 Russian KGB men.

I suppose one could say that, as a diplomat, I was renowned for being somewhat robust. I don't think I was ever rude to anybody, but I believed in calling a spade a spade, and it was felt, I think, that if I were in Moscow during this difficult period, I could weather the storm. So off I went with the assurance from the Soviet Department that I would be given at least two weeks' notice when they were going to throw the Russians out. I'd only just presented my credentials in Russia when, on a Friday at midday, came a flash telegram saying they were summoning the Soviet Embassy that very afternoon to tell them that 105 were being expelled. Well, of course, that caused a certain crisis at my end because a lot of people had planned travel for that weekend, including the Service attachés, with their long lenses stuffed up their trousers, and one had to call all that off because they'd have been terribly vulnerable. So we battened down the hatches. To cut a long story short (I won't go into the details), we went through a quite hairy period, but there was nothing dreadful from the Soviet side, and in fact their retaliation was puny. They couldn't find 105 people to throw out for one thing.

In the discussions in London about this business before I went, we mustn't forget that Alec Douglas-Home had tried to resolve it quietly. He raised it orally with Gromyko a year before. Gromyko said, 'Write me a letter,' which he did. Gromyko never replied and we had no alternative but to take this public action, which made a lot of Russians

very cross, of course the KGB. A lot of Russians were rather pleased that we'd given the KGB their comeuppance, because I think the Foreign Ministry, you see, objected strongly to the amount of space the KGB were taking up in their embassies abroad. As a rough rule of thumb, one could say that the greater the extent of détente, the greater the extent of intelligence activity. The two things seemed to go in parallel in the Western world. Anyway, there it was.

I had felt though, that in the discussions, one of the major worries people had was loss of trade, of course. I argued, really not on the basis of any knowledge, but on simple commonsense, that trade and financial arrangements were not something you could turn on and off like a tap, and I did not believe that in the longer run they would suffer. And that proved to be the case, because although there was a lot of noise and thunder from the Soviet side (the expulsion happened in September, I think it was), we had a trade delegation the following March, the London Chamber of Commerce, and business went on as usual. It is true that British business was not doing terribly well at the time, but a lot of that was attributable to bad handling by management in Britain. Some people did very well. Courtauld used to come without any embassy assistance. They would do £12 million worth of business, and come and tip their hats and have lunch, and go. They were marvellous. There were other people who weren't so clever. One shouldn't name them.

But, in all events, this was a period of Brezhnev's Westpolitik, matching Ostpolitik, when he wanted to spread the wealth a bit, not literally but in terms of giving to people favourable contracts, and so on, on a broader basis than just with his traditional suppliers. Nobody more important, of course, than Germany, but also France where Giscard d'Estaing thought he was interlocuteur privilegié, and the Italians. They all broke the rules on credit terms in fighting for trade. This was a point of criticism we made from Moscow, that the European Community was not fulfilling one of its professed aims of having a common foreign trade policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, we were all fighting each other, a bicycle race.

At all events, it didn't work out too badly. I suffered in the sense that I had very little working relations with the Foreign Ministry at that time; they wanted to make a demonstration. But I cannot say in all honesty that we suffered materially. On the other hand, we made a tremendous impact on our allies, who in Moscow were wonderfully solid. They all came to call, flying their flag. Nobody was more interested than the Chinese Ambassador who wanted to know every detail what we had done to ruin the Russians. Loved it. And before long we were back in normal business. During the period when I wasn't doing a lot of business with the Foreign Ministry, I travelled. I got down to Central Asia, to the Ukraine and so on, and enjoyed it. And up to Leningrad, as I now have difficulty in calling it. So much for bilateral relations.

On the broader issues, as I say, this was the time of Brezhnev's Westpolitik, which was in a way a response to the Ostpolitik which had been pursued intermittently by the Germans. I felt that Western politicians, as I've said before, misunderstood him. It was very clear that his objectives in Westpolitik were quite limited. He wanted, as he put it, to draw a line under World War II, under the results of WWII, in other words to hang on to Eastern Europe, and maintain tacitly the Brezhnev doctrine while wanting a façade of good relations with the outside world, based on a real need for Western technology above all. A lot of the espionage that went on in Britain was to get technology, no question about it.

We were under an illusion that there was peace at the end of this process, which there wasn't. Maybe we were not going to be at war, but there was still this underlying antagonism between the Soviet system and the Western system, no two ways about it. However that may be, this process culminated, as we know, in two things; one was the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks in Vienna, and the other was the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. In my belief, the two things should have been one. We could have negotiated arms reductions, whatever, in return for whatever he wanted on the political front. But it worked out pretty well in the end, and to my astonishment, and to the astonishment of others, the CSCE turned out to be a considerable victory for the West.

We had been afraid, a lot of us, that this process would lead to further Soviet advances, politically, and Western set-backs. In fact the boot was on the other foot, and we insisted on what we call Basket 3, all the provisions in the field of public information, freedom of movement, and so on, which ran counter to the system as it operated, and which Brezhnev perhaps thought he could laugh off. But he found in Eastern Europe, and even in the Soviet Union, there was the establishment of human rights committees and things of that sort who became more outspoken as it went on, and, as we know, this whole process culminated in Gorbachev and the break up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Communist Party.

I wouldn't have believed it. My colleagues and I in Moscow at the time all felt convinced that it was an unstable system and one day it must collapse. But we never thought it would in our lifetime. I still find it hard to believe that it's gone, just like that, like a house of cards."

JH: "I have heard two different estimates of the importance of different factors in this unexpected collapse, one being that the key factor was the Russian economy, which was failing more and more, and when Reagan started the Star Wars idea the Russians realised right from the start that they would never be able to match this. They had done this with nuclear energy, they had done it with the hydrogen bomb, but they would never be able to match this, and so they couldn't work on the basis of mutual assured deterrence or détente against them and this was perhaps <u>the</u> factor that led to the collapse. On the other hand, I've heard it said that that was not so important, what was important was all these ideas from the CSCE which penetrated the Soviet Union itself as well as Eastern Europe for the first time."

Sir John: "Well, I would think both factors are important. I would disagree about the second one where you said the Russians felt they couldn't maintain this competition in the field of armaments. That is true of Gorbachev, it was not true of the military, and probably not true of a lot of people in the Party who felt the struggle must continue, and

we will win in the end. Because that is the hope that Brezhnev had held out as a result of CSCE. I am a tremendous admirer of Gorbachev in lots of ways, while being aware of all his limitations, because it was he who upped and said publicly, 'Our economy cannot stand this competition.' So, I think there was a great ground swell of opposition to the regime, resulting from the CSCE, but then the Reagan policy of arming the Russians to death, so to speak, or out-arming them, was the crucial fact that pushed them over the edge in the end."

JH: "Thank you. I think that is very well worth recording. Would you like to stay on Moscow for a bit?"

Sir John: "Yes, I would, because there was this major international crisis when I was there, of the Yom Kippur War. We were involved, not centrally perhaps, but because we were seeing it from the Soviet end, and it was clear to us that once the Egyptians had reached and crossed the Canal, using the equipment that Moscow had provided for them to do it, the Russians got bloody worried, and didn't want them to go a lot further, and started withdrawing. They withdrew all their military personnel and left the Egyptians to it. We saw a war in which, ultimately, the Israelis did so well that the road to Cairo was open to them, and they had a whole Egyptian army on the Eastern side of the Canal surrounded. That's when the Russians really panicked, because Kosygin said, 'Send for Henry Kissinger' so to speak. And Henry Kissinger came to Moscow and talked to Kosygin about ending this war. It worked in the end. Henry Kissinger left on the basis that there would be a Security Council resolution in the next couple of days. We and the Australians were both members of the Security Council at the time, so he summoned me and the Australian Ambassador to tell us this and tell us to report it. With hindsight, I think he failed to understand, because he went away and he didn't really put into effect what he'd agreed with the Russians. He thought that the Israelis were still doing pretty well. I tried to bring home to him later on in private talks how things looked to the Russians at that time. The road to Cairo was open, a whole Egyptian army, their client state, was going to be annihilated. Did he not realise that a cease-fire was essential from Moscow's point of view? He didn't seem to have grasped that somehow. He had his

blind spots, you know. In the end, he said, ‘Well, I suppose you could say that is the case.’”

JH: “Would you like to spell out why a ceasefire was also in Western interests, or in the United Nations interest, world interest?”

Sir John: “I suspect that in the European case we didn’t really want the Israelis to go to Cairo. It’s very interesting. I think the Russian position on the Middle East at that time was essentially ‘No peace, no war’. It suited them to have an indeterminate situation. I think that was, up to a point, the European situation. They didn’t want either side to win. They wanted a compromise solution, which is why the European Community kept coming up with high-falutin’ declarations about it. But, at the end of the day, it was the Americans who count with the Israelis. Who counts with the Egyptians these days is difficult to say. I think the Americans. Here we are in a situation now where there is only one super power, but that’s another story.”

JH: “Yes, thank you.”

Sir John: “I must tell you one funny story which Kissinger told me about that time. He had a final conversation with Gromyko in one of these rather ornate houses in Moscow with a painted ceiling with nymphs and whatnot all over it, and for a joke Henry Kissinger said to Gromyko, ‘I suppose we can talk safely here?’ and Gromyko looked up at the ceiling and said, ‘No, I think it is in her left nipple.’”

JH: “With that, should we perhaps leave Moscow now? Would you like to return to London, as this time as a Deputy Under-Secretary.”

Sir John: “I could have done with another year in Moscow. I got to be fascinated by the place. My Russian was beginning to improve, but I got a message from Denis Greenhill saying that Alec Home, who was then Foreign Secretary, wanted me back in London because the new Permanent Under-Secretary was to be Tom Brimelow, and Alec

felt he was a somewhat quiet personality, which he was, and he wanted a deputy to him who would do battle in Whitehall. So I was summoned home."

JH: "With respect, he didn't quite know Tom Brimelow."

Sir John: "He didn't, he didn't. He was not flamboyant at all though. He was very firm. He and I once had a terrible punch-up with Harold Wilson, but that's another story.

When I got home, I found I wasn't to be Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary at all, and anyway the government changed. They had the election, and next January I think it was, I was working for Jim Callaghan, who I don't think liked me very much. He came to Moscow when he was Foreign Affairs spokesman for the Opposition. We told him not to come because he wanted to come in the summer, and we said everybody was going to be away, having their holidays. But he came anyway, and lo and behold, there was nobody in Moscow, so, for a meeting with the Russians he said, 'I'm willing to fly down to see Gromyko on the Black Sea.' The Russians said 'No,' so he and I staged a sort of conversation in front of the walls in his hotel to say how bad it would look if the Russians refused to talk to him properly, and eventually Suslov performed. It was an interesting, revealing thing because it became clear that Suslov, with the Party machine, was in charge of foreign policy, even when Gromyko was there, let alone when he was away. Foreign policy was not formed in the Foreign Ministry, it was formed in the Central Committee Secretariat.

Anyhow, that meeting took place all right and Jim Callaghan gave a press conference. I did everything I could to help him. A couple of months later, there was a Foreign Affairs debate and Julian Amery made the mistake of twitting him with the fact that he had not seen the Soviet Foreign Minister. Jim Callaghan, for some reason, took it into his head that I had put Amery up to this, and could he please see my report on his visit. Tom Brimelow said, 'No, you're not allowed to, it's the property of the previous government.' But he never believed that I hadn't done him dirt, which I hadn't. In fact, I looked up my own letter to Denis Greenhill afterwards and it said he had seen Suslov, good for him,

and he'd done some useful talking. The last thing I'd done was to criticise him in any way. And do you know, when he came back to power, he still demanded to see the file and was told he couldn't. So I didn't enjoy working for Jim in lots of ways I'm afraid. He was a bit of a faux bonhomme.

As Deputy Under-Secretary of State as well, I had much clearer areas of responsibility at that time, for East-West relations, of course, for Western Europe and, above all Transatlantic, because this encompassed Kissinger's Year of Europe, which was a very difficult period. He kept saying, 'Who do I telephone in Europe when I want a European point of view?' and there was no answer. We had a good deal of difficulty with him during this period, and misunderstandings with the Americans. I was given the special task of making sure that there were no more misunderstandings, which, up to a point, I was able to do.

During this period we had the invasion of Cyprus, which I suppose was the major thing. And here, of course, what I said earlier applied, because the head of the Southern European Department was the expert who ran the situation room and so on, and it wasn't at all clear to me what the AUS or the DUS for that matter were supposed to do. I remember Tom Brimelow saying all he could do, as accounting officer, was to write to the Treasury about the cost of it.

It was interesting to see Jim Callaghan handling it. He had a good deal of sympathy, let's face it, with the Turks who'd had a pretty raw deal. Nobody loved Makarios after all, but we couldn't afford to see this awful man, Nico Sampson taking over. That involved my staying in the office for ten days and not going home, not that there was much one could do except be around.

Towards the end of that period I started thinking that as my next job would be my last one, it had better be one I liked. I wondered if they wouldn't send me to Germany because that was my forte, but they said, 'No, we'd like you to go to NATO.' I said, 'Fine.' But I went on leave and when I came back I was told it was all off because

Harold Wilson had taken against Donald Maitland who was designated for the European Community, and they were going to send me instead, which was emphatically not up my street. I made a powerful thing of saying, 'Why shouldn't I have, as a last post, one in which I feel at home? And I think it's disgusting that they should do down Donald Maitland.' They were dead scared in the Office that somebody from the Board of Trade would get the job. Anyway, it all worked out in the end. Donald Maitland worked his passage with Harold, who came to form a high opinion of him, and he went to Brussels and did a wonderful job.

NATO was right up my street really, given my past experience of dealing with the military and getting on well with them, and having been concerned with East-West relations and all that. It was a period in NATO when there were no major East-West crises in political terms. We had a problem with Russian build-up in the nuclear rocket field, the SS20, which was in its way I suppose a crisis because we were involved in considering how we should respond. That all led to the deployment of Pershing 2 and Cruise missiles. We all know what that meant in this country.

I would say, broadly speaking, I was lucky in a way to be there while the Cold War was still going on and, to use the terms of George Bush, you knew who the good guys were and who the bad guys were. It was comparatively simple. Our problems were largely internal. We had bad Greek-Turkish relations, of course, all the time. We had a Cod War with Iceland in which I wasn't involved personally, thank God, and my Icelandic colleague said to me, 'If you and I can't talk to each other, who can?' So we went on in the best of terms. The Cod War was actually solved in a NATO context, but not by NATO, during a NATO ministerial meeting in Oslo."

JH: "Was that the agreement with Iceland which was so favourable to us that they subsequently denounced it?"

Sir John: “I don’t know what happened afterwards, funnily enough. It was Tony Crosland’s agreement and I thought it was very courageous of him given that he was the Member for Grimsby.”

JH: “I think there were two, and certainly the first one, which was after we brought in heavy tugs instead of frigates to barge the Icelanders off our fishing boats, that worked so much in our favour that we got an agreement . . .”

Sir John: “This was the second one.”

JH: “This was the second one that was less favourable anyway and presumably overtaken by the general 200 mile limit.”

Sir John: “Well it was, ultimately. The criticism we had of the Icelanders really was that they were in fact applying a 200-mile limit before it was legal. On the other hand, it was very interesting that Admiral of the Fleet Hill-Norton, who was then chairman of the committee, a British sailor, was pretty critical of what we were doing with our frigates. He was being thoroughly international with his attitude. I don’t think we had a lot of sympathy although, legally, right was on our side. At all events, it was settled during a NATO meeting in Oslo when Tony Crosland left the table and went off with the Norwegian Foreign Minister to meet the Icelander (whose name I can’t remember) and they sorted the problem out. As I said, I thought it was brave of Crosland because he was Member of Parliament for Grimsby, a fishing constituency.”

JH: “Crosland’s death is thought to have been a tragedy. It sounds as if you might agree. Did you have more dealings with him? He was a very interesting man.”

Sir John: “I had had dealings with him in my earlier incarnation because he dealt with the environment in those days. I was pretty impressed by him, but his death was bad news because (I hesitate to say this, but it’s true) it brought us David Owen. This only happened I think against Jim Callaghan’s better judgement. But the time factor

influenced him. We were due to assume the presidency of the European Community. Tony Crosland had done all the homework and David Owen had done all the homework as his understudy, and there seemed little alternative but to make him responsible. He was difficult, to put it mildly. The then Minister of Defence, Fred Mulley, said to me, 'The trouble with him is he's too big for his boots.' And this was one Labour minister about another. He didn't take kindly to official advice; he very much wanted to do his own thing. He was obstinate, opinionated and not very polite.

I'm told, I don't know as he never said it to me, that he tried to get me sacked in Brussels because I didn't do anything to reduce British defence spending. Well, the formula governing our defence spending was actually drafted by Fred Mulley at a Council meeting, so I was serving two masters. I confronted him with this, and said, 'I understand you're not satisfied with my performance.' He said, 'I think there's been some misunderstanding,' and ran away; he didn't like confrontations with people."

JH: "Our programme already has on record that the way to get a decision out of him was to have a blazing row, and that after that he was all right. So he obviously did confront quite a lot."

Sir John: "He must have done at home, I think with Reg Hibbert as much as anybody. I know he arrived at one NATO meeting with the fifth draft of the speech which Reg Hibbert had been working on and he still wanted to amend it in unsatisfactory ways. We had a final confrontation with him down at the British Embassy, where he was staying, at breakfast on the morning of the NATO meeting, at the end of which he said, 'All right, I won't make a bloody speech at all.' I said, 'But you have to make a speech because you are the President d'Honneur of the Council.' I said, 'Why don't you do what Tony Crosland did up in Oslo; tell them about Rhodesia or something.' He said, 'Never, I wouldn't dream of dragging Rhodesia into it.'

I must say I've come to respect him considerably, not personally but as a statesman, for what he has done since, and I reckoned it was a good idea to send him to Bosnia, because

he and Cy Vance (who died the other day, sadly) could play the hard-cop/soft-cop routine.

Another main problem was the maintenance of nuclear deterrence satisfactorily. People tend to think that all NATO does is plan nuclear war. Actually, all our time was taken up by maintaining a nuclear balance, not in numerical terms, but in terms of capabilities, so that mutual deterrence remained. Of course the SS20 confronted us with a problem. I think it was Egon Bahr in Germany who said, 'What is the point of introducing Pershing 2 if only to take them away?' Well, he didn't understand, did he? I mean, the whole point was to get both sides to take their weapons away.

We also had that period of the so-called neutron bomb, which was totally misrepresented in the Press. There I was a bit fed up, to be frank. It struck one as being a useful weapon; it was only an artillery shell, and it was to be used against mass armour. It would knock out the tank crews with a minimum of collateral damage. From that point of view, it seemed very sensible. We were on the point of agreeing a formula about it in the NATO council when word came through that the President (Jimmy Carter) had prayed all night and had decided not to deploy this thing. The interesting point about it is that this was a period when Donald Rumsfeld (or was it in fact Harold Brown?) and others were consulting in NATO about their own nuclear armament, and above all wanted to know whether Europe wanted this thing deployed, and the Cruise missile. And Europe said, 'Yes, please.'

Anyway, it's all ancient history now, but I look back with considerable satisfaction to the maintenance of this military balance, mutual deterrence. I look forward with apprehension to the attitude of the present Administration in America. I really don't know what they're aiming at."

JH: "Thank you. Perhaps I could ask you first of all to say anything more you would like to about your time in NATO, or subsequently, otherwise to reflect on the

changes in NATO's task, and possibly shape, since 1979, and perhaps particularly since 1989."

Sir John: "Well, that is more important. May I just say that during my time in NATO, the other major thing that three of us were deputed to do was to write a study of relations with the Soviet Union through the 1980s. This was then the mid 1970s. My Danish colleague and I, who had been colleagues in Moscow, plus Robert Ford who was the Canadian Ambassador in Moscow, put our heads together and produced this piece of paper. It was not epoch-making but we forecast more of the same, but not war and so on. I can't remember now exactly whether I mentioned Afghanistan, but certainly we said that the Soviet Union would be liable to engage in adventures of that type. We were told that Jimmy Carter had read this wonderful piece of work cover to cover, and then when the Soviets under Brezhnev did invade Afghanistan, he was quoted as saying, 'I never knew the Soviets were like that.' What is the good of offering advice; in one ear and out the other?

After I retired and my wife died, I came back to live in this country and became President of a thing called the British Atlantic Committee which was mainly concerned with enlightening people about what NATO is and does.

Come the collapse of the Soviet Union, I must say, and said, I still believe that NATO did an absolutely brilliant job in adjusting to the new situation where obviously the threat of massive Warsaw Pact invasion has virtually disappeared, and I'm astonished that people still talk about the defence of London in relation to this Air Force squadron, which was being disbanded at the time. I mean, who are we defending London against? But however that may be, obviously the nature of the challenge to the Western world had totally changed, and, as against an East-West confrontation, we have instability around Europe, which is every bit as much of a threat that needs countering. I say to people that it is every bit in our interest that we should do so. We are a trading nation; we need stability in Europe. It is no good saying we have nothing to do with Bosnia or whatever; we do at one remove. So I believe that NATO has done a wonderful job in adjusting its

strategy and its force structures and so on, to meet this new position, but has been let down, if you like, by the politicians who don't seem to be sure what they want to do. I remember Dick Vincent, Field Marshal, who was the CDS ten years ago now, saying loud and clear, 'If the government would only tell us what they want us to do, we will do it.' And they didn't. The great thing was to appear to be contributing, and I'm afraid we are still suffering from this syndrome. I was quite surprised to find we were fighting in East Timor to the last Gurkha. I didn't think that was really a very good piece of British foreign policy. So, as I say, NATO itself is well organised to deal with these new threats. It has the command structure, it has the communications, it has the intelligence through Americans inputs, of course, and, to be frank, there is no alternative to NATO, so long as Europe doesn't create its own capability, which it shows no sign of doing. This European Rapid Reaction Force is a paper tiger because it has no heavy airlift, it has no strategic intelligence facility, it has no smart weaponry, and so it goes."

JH: "Is it going to have a headquarters that can give orders to somebody?"

Sir John: "Well, it has, on paper."

JH: "If it does that could cause trouble, couldn't it?"

Sir John: "Yes, but, the problem is whether people will accept that command structure. They have accepted it. I mean they accepted in Bosnia and they accepted it in Kosovo to the best of my knowledge, I'm not really up to date with all the details. The other thing that is failing on the ground is that people are reducing expenditure on defence in Europe, and, as I always argued, these new tasks require more expenditure; it requires a more sophisticated weaponry, better organisation, rapid reaction, and all those things which we didn't need in the time of the Cold War. And this costs money, and governments are not facing that issue yet. You have the special case of Germany, which is very reluctant to get dragged into this sort of thing at all. But at the end of the day one should rightly be proud of the British armed forces and French. We are the only two people who could really contribute. But can you expect the French and British taxpayers to go on paying

for a big effort when the Dutch and the Danes and the Germans for that matter, and the Canadians, don't pay or are not paying as much? They are all reducing like mad. So I feel a bit gloomy about the future, but proud of the way NATO has adjusted itself."

JH: "Can you tell me (I believe it now has nineteen members or thereabouts), does it still operate by the unanimity rule?"

Sir John: "As far as I know. And this was one of my reasons for criticising, strongly, the enlargement of NATO. I did this in columns in the newspapers about four or five years ago, with the full support of Field Marshal Carver, Admiral Hill Norton, Sir Michael Howard, a whole lot of people who are much more distinguished than I am in the defence field. They all accepted my argument that the enlargement of NATO would dilute its decision-making capability. That hasn't happened yet, but the enlargement is not going in the right direction. The people who really want to join NATO are the Baltic States, and these are the most controversial of the lot. They are the most vulnerable to Russian incursion. They are the most difficult to help, if you like. But, if you're going to enlarge, they are the people for whose benefit you should be enlarging. As things are, we are risking diluting our decision-making capability. I'm told, for example, that the Hungarians wanted to join NATO for the protection it would give them, and were then shaken when they found they were expected to contribute something over Bosnia. They and the Americans are very insistent that new members must accept obligations as well as acquiring rights. So I don't know where the enlargement process is going. In theory, it's limitless virtually, up to the borders of the Soviet Union. People even talk of including Russia. I don't know. We shall see."

JH: "Yes, it's very difficult, especially about the future."

Sir John: "Yes, it is."

JH: “You mentioned this rather interesting post-retirement work that you were doing in the British Atlantic Committee, of which I see you were President, and subsequently Vice-President.”

Sir John: “I was President, and Vice-President of the international organisation, the umbrella organisation.”

JH: “I see. Is there anything more you would like to say about that or is it perhaps time for a break?”

Sir John: “All I would say on that, and then we will have a break I think, is that I am not at all sure that the British Atlantic committee and the other national committees have adapted or adjusted in the way that NATO itself has. They existed because originally it was agreed that publicity, public relations for NATO, had best be conducted in individual countries by voluntary organisations and not by governments, and that’s what happened. But now, you’re not propagating the same thesis about NATO at all. I’m not sure what the British Atlantic committee does.”

JH: “It’s not propagating a clear line?”

Sir John: “I don’t hear anything from them.”

JH: “It hasn’t got a line to propagate.”

Sir John: “Well, that’s the problem I think, and maybe these committees should be wound up where they exist. They existed even in France too, even though France was only a partial member of NATO.”

JH: “Thank you. Well, on that rather limited note we shall end this session, and I can only say that I am fascinated and very much obliged indeed.”