

(Frank) Stephen MILES (b. 7.1.1920)

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Interview with Stephen Miles 11 November 1996

Interviewer Malcolm McBain

MMcB: Can we start Stephen by my asking you to describe briefly what it was that decided you to join the Diplomatic Service?

SM: Briefly my background is a degree in History at St Andrew's University, four and a half years in the Fleet Air Arm in the War, some further study at Harvard on a Commonwealth Fellowship, a degree called an MPA, Master of Public Administration, but I managed to concentrate mainly on international relations and as a result of which I decided that, rather than go into to the Home Civil Service, I would prefer to go into the Diplomatic Service.

So I sat the examination, entered what was then called the Commonwealth Relations Office in 1948, later becoming the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Throughout the interview I hope to refer to the FCO rather than the Foreign Office as it is so often referred to, because I regard our foreign policy as having three strands: one, the link with Europe, secondly the link with America and, thirdly, just as important, our position in the Commonwealth.

So I went on and retired in 1980. Covering, as one looks back on it, the interesting period of the change from Empire to Commonwealth almost complete in my time, starting with, the year before I joined the Service, India and Pakistan and Ceylon becoming independent, and going right through to 1980, when I retired, when Rhodesia became independent. I had a preference from the start to serve in new Commonwealth countries. Originally in our office we were just sent somewhere without anyone asking where we wanted to go, but fairly soon we were allowed a preference and there was never any difficulty in finding myself being posted to a new Commonwealth country because not quite so many people wanted to serve in the so-called 'hardship' posts. For me it meant that I served then in four countries in Africa: Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. In the Indian sub-continent I served in East and West Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and just for variety I also had postings in New Zealand and the USA.

I think, looking back, I can't prove this, but I think I am probably the member of the Diplomatic Service who served in the most Commonwealth countries. Of my ten posts I

served in nine were Commonwealth countries, and all , incidentally, spoke English which meant that I being lazy with languages, had no problem with learning other languages.

MMcB: Thank you for that introduction. Could we perhaps deal, not chronologically, but starting with Ghana, which is the first of the four African countries you mentioned? Can you tell us something about how our relations with Ghana developed from early independence until your retirement?

SM: Yes, the thing that appeals to me is the thought of following through a particular theme, rather than everything chronologically. The theme I am going to start with is 'The Wind of Change in Africa'.

After service in New Zealand and Pakistan, which I will come to later, I served in Ghana from 1959-1962 as a First Secretary. In 1960 Harold Macmillan being Prime Minister came out with Sir David Hunt from London to visit Ghana. We found the Macmillans a delightful couple. I remember my High Commissioner at the time, Sir Arthur Snelling, and his wife saying that they were most relaxed and they often had some difficulty in getting them on to their next engagement because they were sitting around a lot of the time reading the Illustrated London News.

Now Macmillan, without giving us any warning, went on to South Africa and made his remarkable 'Wind of Change' speech in the South African parliament, which said in very stern terms that African countries were going to become independent whether South Africa liked it or not and that this change would eventually affect South Africa. Nkrumah, who was President of Ghana was a very personable individual but gradually, as time went past, he became something of a dictator, even something of a megalomaniac. He was very anxious to portray himself as the leader of the freedom struggle in Africa. Ghana of course had become independent in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Sierra Leone and Tanganyika in 1961, Uganda, Zanzibar, Kenya in 1962, Malawi and Zambia 1964, Gambia in 1965 followed by Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Nkrumah, having been the first in the field, then used Accra as the centre for conferences of freedom fighters - if you approve of them they are called freedom fighters; if you don't approve of them they are called terrorists, or the neutral word is guerrillas. So he summoned them to Accra from time to time, the freedom fighters, the leaders of the freedom fighter movements. It was at

one of these conferences, that I was allowed to attend as an observer, that I met Joshua Nkomo and other people that I ran into later throughout Africa. My next posting in this particular field was Dar-es-Salaam then Lusaka in Zambia. I found that I was following round these freedom fighters from post to post, and getting to know more of them as I went along.

Nkrumah gradually became a dictator and became very unpopular and was overthrown in 1966. By this time I was head of the West Africa Department of the Commonwealth Office, London.

Nkrumah had broken off relations with us over Rhodesia so we had no High Commissioner there. I was then sent out in 1966 to restore diplomatic relations that the new regime were very keen to have. I personally received a very warm welcome, with people in the street waving or even cheering as I drove by with the Union Jack flying. It seemed they were glad to see the British back! One of the interesting and disturbing things I discovered when I got there was that the whole apparatus of the terrorist movement was now opened up in Ghana for all to see and we, the Ambassadors, were taken out to see freedom fighter camps, in fact terrorist camps, where students from other African countries, including the Cameroons and some of the French territories, came from countries which Nkrumah felt were not radical enough in their policies, These students had been invited to take up scholarships in Ghana and then found that they were being drafted into terrorist camps to train to overthrow their own governments. We were shown the arms they were using, and the bomb making equipment. Of course these young chaps were not at all happy. They were delighted when Nkrumah was overthrown. They were able to return to their own countries.

MMcB: Were they being kept in detention, in effect?

SM: In effect, yes. It was not very easy for them to get out anyway.

MMcB: But you were given free access?

SM: The military cum police government that had taken over wanted to demonstrate to the world that this sort of thing was going on under Nkrumah's rule. I then went on next to a posting in Uganda for eight months, '62-63, as a First Secretary. That was interesting because I was there at independence and saw the British flag being lowered in a very dignified manner. Sir David Hunt was now my High Commissioner and I remember him saying that this could be a success story: a Jewel of Africa. And so it seemed at the time. But at that time I suppose Idi Amin was probably just a private in the army. Thank goodness we did not know what was ahead of us.

MMcB: Could you just spell out why Uganda was regarded as the Jewel in the Crown in 1961?

SM: I think, largely economic reasons. It was a prosperous country agriculturally, with a certain amount of industry, the university there, Makerere. The atmosphere seemed good, but underneath was this awful African tribalism that one comes across in so many countries in Africa.

After that I was moved on to Tanzania, in 1963-65, on promotion as Deputy High Commissioner, but when I got there the High Commissioner I was to serve under had actually been posted back to London, and I found myself, rather alarmingly, stepping up two ranks all at once, and becoming acting High Commissioner for over a year, 63-64.

Here is where the interesting freedom fighter trail continues because Tanzania had now become the centre of the freedom fighter movement. President Nyerere was a very different sort of person from Nkrumah but felt it was his duty to provide for the exiles from the remaining colonies and South Africa by allowing them to set up their headquarters in Dar-es-Salaam.

There I met Joshua Nkomo again. Robert Mugabe was just appearing on the scene. There was a very fine Mozambiquan called Dr Mondlane who had taken his doctorate in America and was leading the freedom struggle in Mozambique. There was also Ntsu Mokeshle who later became Prime Minister of Lesotho but at that moment was an exile from Lesotho. Perhaps most interesting of all: in 1964 the South African freedom fighters, if I may use the word, started coming out of South Africa because they were going to be locked up if they stayed there. Principal among them was Oliver Tambo, the President of the African National Congress, and Jo Slovo, the Communist leader, and somehow or other (I don't know whether my reputation was getting around) they seemed to end up in my office on their way to Britain, where they remained in exile for many years. I must confess I liked them all. There were very few I didn't feel I could do business with and even Jo Slovo, for all his Communist leanings, was actually a very enjoyable and humorous chap. Indeed history has proved that he was not so bad after all because he was one of those who, when he joined Mandela's government in South Africa, did help towards a reconciliation between black and white.

Then I moved on some years later to Zambia, 1974-78, where I was High Commissioner. Here again the freedom struggle had now moved to Zambia. So there Oliver Tambo turned up occasionally and when we met again he gave me a great bear hug. Joshua Nkomo and Mugabe were there and the Rhodesia struggle was the problem that faced me most of all in Zambia. At this point I go on now to the Rhodesian problem.

MMcB: Are you coming back to dealing with the actual situations, the political situations inside those countries like Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania?

SM: I will, except for Uganda. I have finished what I wanted to say about Uganda, but what I am going to do now is finish off the Wind of Change in Africa, decolonisation, particularly Rhodesia, which was the last and most difficult of all.

I landed up in Zambia. Really at rather a fortunate time because relations had not been good over Rhodesia but a report that reached me was that the Foreign Minister was reported to have told a colleague that he felt the time had now come to normalise relations with Britain, so I received a very friendly welcome from President Kaunda and his Foreign Minister, Vernon Mwangi.

Now to turn to Rhodesia which was my main activity in Lusaka for four years. I won't go back into the history of Rhodesia but about 1972 when the guerrilla war was hotting up (and the guerrilla war went on for seven years, 1972-79), an extraordinary thing happened very soon after I got there. I received a report in November 1974 that Nkomo and Mugabe who had been imprisoned in Rhodesia for ten years had now been released and were in Lusaka. At first I did not believe this but it proved to be true. It seems that Ian Smith, perhaps influenced to some extent by the South Africans, who I might add were, over the whole Rhodesian issue not unhelpful, in fact I'd even say helpful. It was not because they supported the idea of a black government in Rhodesia, but the South Africans were being entirely pragmatic. They took the view that if Rhodesia did not solve its problems there was going to be a continuing turbulence within central Africa which would be harmful to South Africa, and that if Ian Smith had decided that sometime there would be a truly multi-racial government, not apartheid, in Rhodesia, let him get on with it and the sooner the better. South Africa's position was different. They had the policy of apartheid and that was that.

The discussions about Rhodesia began, unknown to us, between the Nationalists, Nkomo, Mugabe, Ian Smith and his government and what became known as the front line presidents. The front line

states around Rhodesia were Zambia , Tanzania, Mozambique and Botswana, and occasionally the Angolan President, or Foreign Minister, turned up at these meetings. My first involvement began in December '74-January '75, when Jim Callaghan who was now the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, came out to Zambia, to South Africa, and the other front line states to review the situation and see what could be done to bring a solution in Rhodesia.

Let me say right away that I had the greatest admiration for Callaghan and David Owen, who succeeded him, in the effort that they both put into this problem, which involved very tiring journeys around Africa, where they dealt in discussions with the nitty gritty of these very complicated problems, with the presidents of these countries and with the nationalists. Very many of these discussions when they were in Lusaka took place in the Residence, as we call it, that's my house. This was a fascinating, if difficult, period.

MMcB: Could you just explain what the problems were; why there was difficulty in dealing with the problem?

SM: I think it starts with Ian Smith's government. Rhodesia, of course, was a self-governing colony but they had never achieved independence. They seized independence in 1965 but we could never accept that. What we wanted to see was the same thing as had happened in every other country, a black majority government, which could have white people in it and did in a number of cases, but it could not be as in South Africa, a completely white government. Ian Smith, I think probably quite sincerely, felt that he had to maintain standards, and that African governments would not provide high standards. That was the crux of the problem. In these next years what we were trying to move towards was a situation where the Smith government would accept that there had to be elections and that out of that there would come a new government of Zimbabwe. Once we, the British government, were satisfied that this was going to be a democratic government we would give independence.

So in these next five years there was a bewildering flow of VIPs: ministers and senior officials travelling round central and southern Africa trying to get this point across and come to some agreement between Smith's government and Nkomo and Mugabe.

The next significant event was in August 1975 when President Kaunda and the other presidents, in conjunction with South Africa and Smith, summoned a conference on the Victoria Falls bridge

between Zambia and Rhodesia. This bridge, of course, was the boundary between Zambia and Zimbabwe, as it later became. So it took place in a railway carriage and it could be said it was in no-man's land. I won't go into the details of all these conferences because all they amounted to was that we still were striving for this agreement which never came for such a long time. At this conference were President Kaunda, President Vorster, Nkomo but not Mugabe, who by that time had his headquarters in Mozambique, but also Bishop Muzorewa, of whom more later.

Kaunda to give him credit was a genuine conciliator. He invited President Vorster to come over into Zambia. I was there, not at the conference, but as a general observer and I remember President Vorster walking round our hotel with Kaunda in Livingstone. It was all extremely friendly. But it did not produce a solution and at this point in September, the four Front Line presidents, who had taken this problem on as their problem to solve, felt they had done all they could and, in effect, withdrew, and they said, "Now it is over to you, Britain, to solve this problem for we have not managed to do so".

MMcB: Had there been a British representative actually at that conference?

SM: No. I suppose I could have been, but I did not ask to go and no British representative was invited and we did not want to push our way in. This was still Africans trying to settle this problem.

So they said, "Over to Britain". In December 1975 Joshua Nkomo went back to Salisbury to have talks and stayed there until March 1976, trying to find a solution but they could not arrive at an answer. He actually came to Lusaka, he was living just around the corner from me. We saw quite a lot of each other. The interesting thing was that Nkomo came back to Lusaka and just carried on the war. It was a very strange situation when you think about it. The next big development in which I was involved was in September 1976 when the Americans were beginning to get involved in the problem and offering help. Kissinger was Secretary of State in Washington. He came out on a visit to southern and central Africa, toured all the capitals, including Lusaka. He arrived in his own plane, with his bullet-proof Cadillac which came off the plane, in which he was driven around. Accompanying him was a Counsellor from our Embassy in Washington, Richard Samuel. Kissinger went back and forth between these various countries and we began to get a little worried because he seemed to be promising things to various parties, particularly the Rhodesian government, which we could not agree with. He had this technique, I believe which he used in the

Middle East, of reporting that such and such a government is agreeable to this but going a bit further than they had actually agreed to and then bringing this back to another government which he was dealing with. So we, Richard Samuel and myself, were told by London that we should go in and see Kissinger and tell him that he was getting a bit ahead of things and that we could not accept all that he was proposing.

Kissinger had been extremely pleasant and agreeable on our first visit, and I had found a common ground with him because we had both studied under the same Professor of Government at Harvard whom we both greatly admired. On the second visit he exploded when we, particularly Richard Samuel poor chap, had to put our problem to him, and he told Richard Samuel that really he needn't come back with him on the same plane. We reported this back to London. We then went back to see Kissinger the next day, and by this time he had calmed down and really was quite pleasant again. It was all over. It was a very interesting experience.

MMcB: Richard Samuel had this extraordinary mission to accompany Kissinger, from Washington? That sounds fairly extraordinary. Have you got anything further to say about that?

SM: Yes, he was really sent to keep an eye on Kissinger and make sure he did not go too far, and that is exactly what happened. Richard wrote to me later from Washington to say "Dr Kissinger was kind enough to stress later, more than once in fact, that his broadside was directed at HMG and certainly not at us, and I know that he and his staff also personally enjoyed their contacts with you."

MMcB: So then, as I understand it, the next big event was the formation of the Patriotic Front. Could you tell us, please Stephen, what the Patriotic Front consisted of?

SM: That happened in October 1976. Nkomo and Mugabe had operated separate parties up till then and Nkomo's was called ZAPU (Zimbabwean African People's Union) and Mugabe's was ZANU (Zimbabwean African National Union). Nkomo burst in one morning at breakfast on a Sunday to my house and said that he and Mugabe had now formed an alliance to be known as the Patriotic Front and would I quickly tell London what was happening. So I duly sent a telegram to London to this effect, and from then onward they did operate as an alliance, a very uneasy alliance but that was it. This then led on to a conference in Geneva that same month. This again did not produce the answer. The Rhodesian government were there and Nkomo and Mugabe.

I remember Mugabe arguing with me in the office to be allowed to send up to 20 of his party to the conference. We said "Sorry, that is too much; we can give you twelve or something like that." But it was all quite amicably done. Well, again, this conference did not produce the answers. But Nkomo made a rather significant suggestion to one of our delegation which was passed back to me. This was to the effect that as the African parties seemed to be getting nowhere among themselves, he thought it might be a good idea if the British government could come up with a compromise plan, and say to all the parties "If this is what we think is a fair solution, are you prepared to accept it?" This was taken seriously by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was certainly taken seriously by me, because from then onwards I kept plugging certain suggestions into London. This was the genesis of the ultimate solution.

The next move for me was in January 1977 when Ivor Richard came out with some officials from the FCO. Ivor Richard at that time was British Ambassador to the United Nations. He again did the rounds of the African capitals including Lusaka. The last meeting we had with President Kaunda was an absolute disaster and really rather amusing when one looks back on it. We found Kaunda in a furious mood, just like Kissinger. It was not entirely clear what the problem was at first. But what seemed to have happened was that somebody, and it turned out to be Tiny Rowland of Lonrho, had told him about the oil which was coming up the Beira pipeline into Rhodesia, and thereby we, the British, colluding in this, were breaking sanctions. It wasn't quite as simple as that but certainly there was no way that we could persuade Kaunda that we were acting properly, and Ivor Richard went home with a completely failed mission as far as Zambia was concerned. It was not his fault at all. He tried very hard.

MMcB: Just before we leave that, the busting of sanctions via oil imports, wasn't that alleged to be through South Africa, on tankers that way rather than through the pipeline up from Beira?

SM: It was mainly from South Africa, yes, but there was oil coming up on the pipeline at that time. I think one has to admit.

MMcB: Was that from British sources?

SM: That is a messy question with a difficult answer, but I suspect that some of it was, yes.

MMcB: So Richard's mission was not successful, what next?

SM: Jim Callaghan became Prime Minister which meant he was no longer Foreign Secretary and Anthony Crossland had a short time as Secretary of State and then, of course, sadly died. This was the point where David Owen came on to the scene. He was appointed Secretary of State at a very young age.

By this time, I might mention, we were working even more closely with the Americans, and I had struck a very close relationship with an admirable American Ambassador called Stephen Low, very thoughtful and determined to help in any way that he could and we started to share all our information. One interesting piece of information for me was that Stephen Low received a report from his Embassy in London that David Owen, who was very anxious to get a grip on the Rhodesian problem, was having some difficulty within his Cabinet. There were some, I think, who took the view that the Rhodesian mess had gone on for so long, and they were getting nowhere saying, "Let them stew in their own juice". To me this was very bad news, and I assumed that it was very bad news for David Owen, so I redoubled my efforts by pushing even more and more with thoughts and ideas, urging that we should not give up on the problem. Indeed, we should keep at it.

MMcB: Well, the problem had been going on for twelve years by then. Obviously a lot of people must have thought that it was not proving to be soluble? What sort of ideas were you able to put forward at that stage to encourage London to persevere in the face of twelve years of failure?

SM: We were really following through the suggestion that originally came from Nkomo. David Owen put our ideas into the White Paper called "Rhodesian: Proposals for a Settlement". The next move was that Owen himself came out to southern and central Africa and did the rounds of the front line states and Rhodesia and South Africa. I know some officials found him difficult at the beginning, I think that is generally admitted, because he rather took the view in the FCO that there were a lot of bureaucrats who were getting in the way and wanted to stop him doing some of the things he wanted to do - to put it rather bluntly. In fact, eventually, relations did settle down and he began to appreciate that they were only trying to help him. I, fortunately, had no such problem. For one thing I did not see so much of him. He came out to stay with me twice in Lusaka, and I had the rewarding experience of finding that we were looking at the problem from

exactly the same point of view. When he arrived in Lusaka one of the first things he said was to admit to problems among his colleagues over Rhodesia, and said that when he had been arguing for a certain course of action, and some had been opposing it, a telegram had then arrived from our man in Lusaka urging the same line. So we hit it off rather well. I liked him. I must admit I had a great admiration for him. He wrote a nice letter saying that if our plan succeeded, it should be known as the Miles-Owen plan.

So we had our meetings with the front line Presidents once again. This time it was Kaunda, Nyerere and Samora Machel from Mozambique, a Marxist, and, I think, the Foreign Minister of Botswana and, I think, the Angolan president might have turned up. It started off really very well, and David Owen said to Kaunda "Well, you and I are Christians and we look at this from the same point of view", and Kaunda nodded, and the initial meeting went very well.

MMcB: May I put in a question there? What possibility was there of difficulty between ourselves and the Front Line States, if we were all trying to impose majority rule on the people of Rhodesia? It seems to me that this can only have been a meeting of like minds and there should not have been any problems there at all. Now no doubt there were, but what were they?

SM: We were on the same side. There is no doubt about it. The only criticism that was made of us was that we were not always getting on with it as fast as we should. Our job was to get rid of Ian Smith.

MMcB: They wanted us to use force on Smith, did they not?

SM: I think they had got over that by this time. Yes, that was, additionally, a problem but not during my time. They realised it had to come by negotiation.

Diversion for a moment. The visit of a Secretary of State, in my day, was a major operation. Way back in 1964 after the mutiny in the Tanzanian army, which I'll come to later, Duncan Sandys came out to Dar-Es-Salaam. He brought with him three officials: an Under Secretary, an Air Vice-Marshal and a Secretary and that was the delegation. In 1977 when Callaghan, or David Owen came, there were forty. Life had become much more complicated by this time. One was conscious that the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was continuing in Lusaka. David Owen was dealing with telegrams about European affairs and other parts of the world and

the staff around him were continuing their work, which they would have done in the FCO. I was hoping for a chat with Owen about certain matters affecting the office, and I thought I would do it at breakfast but his chaps were coming all the time with telegrams to be dealt with. I told Owen, knowing he was a churchman, that there was a church service on the Sunday at the Cathedral. He just said, "Let's go to church", so that was the only time I had a chat with him privately on this visit. But this huge entourage of forty should have gone back to their hosts, they were all staying with members of the High Commission who were putting them up; but they were still working when lunch time came and we found ourselves making sandwiches for forty people. The cook practically went on strike for it was quite a major household operation.

To return to the meeting of the Front Line Presidents, Samora Machel of Mozambique, whom we all at that time distrusted as a Marxist, did show that he had something constructive to say and it was he who said that, "In finding a solution to the Rhodesian problem we have to put a neutral force into Rhodesia". It was not quite clear what he meant, but that turned out to be part of the ultimate solution.

MMcB: He did not suggest what sort of neutral force?

SM: No, but he was helpful. He was helpful later in the final solution.

We were now getting closer to the Americans, and David Owen and Cyrus Vance, the American Secretary of State, set up an Anglo-American consultative group. I had already got the discussions going between myself and Stephen Low. Let me give an example of the tricky decisions one has to take. I could not have asked for a more interesting and challenging assignment than a posting to Lusaka. There was always something that was difficult to make a judgement on.

A message came from the FCO that, in the talks in Salisbury, the Rhodesians had expressed anger at the way in which Zambia was supporting the guerrillas by allowing training on their soil. They said we should tell President Kaunda that, if they did not stop, the Rhodesians might attack Zambia. I was uncomfortable about this, and in retrospect I think I should have done nothing but I did tell the Zambians. There was an immediate explosion, of course, with Kaunda giving a press conference, denouncing the Rhodesians for this terrible threat. That is an example of the sort of tricky situation I was continually involved in. In fact, a year or so later the Rhodesian forces did attack the guerrillas in their camps in Zambia.

Owen then paid a second visit in August 1977 to Lusaka, this time with a high-level American delegation, led by Andrew Young who was the American Ambassador to the United Nations. It is interesting that his delegation was half black. These talks again went reasonably well, with the Patriotic Front and the front line presidents. The Patriotic Front, Mugabe and Nkomo met again in my house, with David Owen and Andrew Young. The Press by this time were extremely interested in all these activities and up to about twenty press men, mostly British, were around my garden, my wife feeding them with cool drinks. We all came out into the garden. There was a great rush across the rose bed much to my wife's annoyance and my daughter was knocked down. But we still had not got the ultimate solution.

Owen then went on to Salisbury and Stephen Low, as one of the American delegation, accompanied him. He told me afterwards that this meeting with Ian Smith went extremely badly. Ian Smith was probably the most difficult person to negotiate with, anyway, but also Owen was by this time very tired. One could see how these tours by Foreign Secretaries had taken it out of them as they went round.

MMcB: Why did it go badly?

SM: Because Owen was tired. One must forgive Ian Smith, I think, for provoking him. We were still some way from a solution.

MMcB: Were they arguing about this threat to take action against the Zambians if they persisted in funding guerrilla attacks on Rhodesia? That must have been a sore point.

SM: Yes, I honestly cannot remember that now.

MMcB: So eventually definite proposals were made for a settlement by Dr Owen and a White Paper produced. Can you tell us what those proposals were in essence?

SM: Yes, they were published in September 1977 and were headed "Rhodesia, Proposals for a Settlement". They had been cleared with the Americans although they were essentially British proposals. They started off with a great mistake in the first proposal: "The surrender of power by the illegal regime and a return to legality". We had not foreseen that the word

"surrender" would look to Ian Smith as if this was a military surrender and we had to argue this one out. I think it was eventually accepted that we should have used other words. Apart from that these were the proposals which were eventually accepted as the solution to the problem except in one respect. This was that in leading up to the elections there should be a United Nations presence including a United Nations force during the transition period. This did not happen. Lord Soames eventually went out as Resident Commissioner to take over the government from Bishop Muzorewa who was now Prime Minister. Power was handed back to the British who were then to go through the normal process of colonial settlement: an election which would produce a government and then a Prime Minister. But what we did do in the end - and by this time I was no longer dealing with the problem as I was now in Bangladesh - was not to have a United Nations force because I believe it was thought, "Well, why let the Communists come in?" The force was in fact 1500 Commonwealth troops and a number of British policemen. Otherwise this was the ultimate solution: the elections, the establishment of a transitional administration, handing over to a government, a new constitution and so on. But that did not bring peace for another two years.

An interesting point in all this is that there was no mention of a handing in of arms. I looked again at the White Paper the other day and that was not in it. When you think of Northern Ireland ... but in Zimbabwe there was not any cease-fire. The guerrillas were going on fighting their war with the Rhodesian Army but here we were negotiating, and so we went on. The arms, of course, were not handed in until just before the election in 1980.

MMcB: Whose arms are we talking about here? Both sides?

SM: We are talking about the guerrillas, well both, if you like. In fact the Rhodesian army never did hand in its arms. At least, that is my recollection. They were still an army. They were confined to barracks, of course, but ultimately the guerrillas agreed to give up their arms, which was quite something - but not then.

There was another little incident about this time, again with Tiny Rowland being involved. President Kaunda summoned me and Stephen Low in to tell us that Tiny Rowland had been making an attempt of his own. He had been seeing Mr Smith and he had seen the Patriotic Front and had encouraged them to have another meeting in Lusaka, and I believe Ian Smith actually came over. But Kaunda said at that time there still was not any real agreement and Tiny Rowland had been exaggerating the situation. So still no ultimate solution. Then the Security Council decided to send

yet another representative to central Africa and sort the problems out. This time it was Field Marshal Lord Carver, who again proved a delightful guest, but he couldn't bring them all together and so the problem remained.

MMcB: Presumably the thought behind sending him as a representative was that he would be able to instil some kind of feelings of confidence in the white Rhodesians?

SM: There might have been a point there but to their credit the African states and the Patriotic Front were very happy to talk with a senior military person like that. But there just was not the basis for agreement yet.

In December 1977, Ian Smith then started to talk to Bishop Muzorewa to see whether they could form a multi-racial government. I knew Bishop Muzorewa very well. He was in Lusaka a lot of the time along with Sithole, though not of the same party. They were the more moderate wing of the Nationalists. I liked Muzorewa as a man but I did not really think he had the strength of character to find a solution to this problem. His party was known as the United National African Congress, UNAC, but at this point I left for Bangladesh, feeling that there would be a solution though there was still a lot of uncertainty. But I think, for the sake of completeness, I must try and run roughly through the moves toward the ultimate solution. In April 1979 elections of a sort were held in Rhodesia. Muzorewa became Prime Minister, but it was a hopeless situation because here was a black leader leading a government which was fighting the guerrillas and this was neither accepted among the guerrillas nor in the central African states. The war was continuing in Rhodesia against the Patriotic Front guerrillas. It just did not work.

In August 1979 we were going to have a Queen's visit to Zambia, which incidentally went extremely well, and a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. At this point there had been a change of British Government with Mrs Thatcher and Lord Carrington, who were at the Heads of Government meeting. By this time I believe that both sides - the guerrillas in Zimbabwe and the Rhodesian Government - felt the war was tearing the country apart and had to be stopped somehow. This was the final turning point. Lord Carrington had stayed with us earlier on in Lusaka before he was in power. I had the greatest admiration for him - a real conciliator. If anybody could bring people together it was he, and he did. He decided the time had come in the autumn of '79, to summon a Lancaster House Conference. These were very difficult negotiations. Carrington, for instance, stuck to his guns that in any free Zimbabwean government there should be

white Members of Parliament and some white ministers. This was eventually accepted and on 11 December 1979 the Rhodesian Members of Parliament voted to return to British rule. On the 12 December Lord Soames arrived in Salisbury and there is no doubt also that the Front Line Presidents put strong pressure on the Patriotic Front to go for a settlement.

It was interesting that Mugabe, I remember in a television interview some time after the settlement, said that one person he had telephoned to see whether he should accept the settlement was, in fact, Samora Machel in Mozambique. Machel had said "Yes, it is the best deal you will get". Now this was actually the Owen plan except for the fact that there was no UN presence.

A journalist friend and I were listening to a talk given by Owen some time after the settlement in London. The journalist said that "You, Dr Owen solved the problem because it was your proposals that were ultimately accepted. Carrington did a splendid job but he carried on from where you left off". (An interesting example, incidentally, of the bi-partisanship of British foreign policy which has nearly always been the case). Owen replied very modestly and said that he had not felt that the time had come to summon a Lancaster House Conference, and undoubtedly the timing of the summoning of the conference was just right.

When I retired from the Diplomatic Service and went to see Lord Carrington when he was now Foreign Secretary, in January of 1980, and the Rhodesian problem was still with us, I found Carrington quite gloomy because he was not certain at all that the guerrillas in Zimbabwe would give up their arms and come into the camps. But they did, and this was very much touch and go I believe.

The elections were held in March 1980. Mugabe obtained 57 of the 80 black seats. A rather significant, but not very widely publicised event happened at this point. The day before the election results were declared, Alec Smith the son of Ian Smith (Alec had been working very hard at reconciliations with Africans and tried to influence his father) and some African friends decided that what must happen was that Ian Smith, still at daggers drawn with Mugabe, should meet Mugabe, and this was arranged. This, miraculously, went well and the two decided to bury the hatchet. It possibly may have had an effect - one should not make perhaps too much of this - in preventing an army coup by General Walls. There had been rumours of this. But with Smith and Mugabe coming out together, both being statesmanlike, any possibility of that was avoided. I remember President Kaunda, who was really a great conciliator, completely non-racial, multi-racial

in his attitude, said in a speech some years before that, when Zimbabwe achieved its independence under majority rule, there would still be a place for Ian Smith. I did not really believe that at the time, but in fact that is what happened. When I met Alec Smith in London, some years afterwards, I said, "Had it been a success" and he said, "Yes". He said, "If you consider the fact that my father is still in Parliament, and he and Mugabe are slanging each other vigorously, you could call it something of a success".

I also remember an opinion expressed on Africans by a man called Derek Bryceson, who was a Minister in Tanzania and who had stayed behind after independence. He used to be a white farmer. He joined Nyerere's government, became Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Health in Tanzania. He said the good thing about Africans is that they do not bear a grudge. He himself had to stand for re-election at one point against African candidates, and he won. In Rhodesia two white Ministers did go into the government. I met one or two of the new Zimbabwean Ministers a year or two later, one of them was one of these two white Ministers, and he put a very positive view on the situation at that time, and said, "Thank God for Mugabe", his actual words. That was it. Obviously there are problems and it is sad that a head of government who stays in power for too long often gets corrupted by power.

MMcB: Can we now continued with Namibia, Stephen?

SM: This was the other main problem which we had to deal with in Lusaka, namely South West Africa. This was really a United Nations matter but obviously they were going to get their independence sometime. Sam Nujoma was the President of the South West Africa People's Organisation, and he was fighting his guerrilla war from Angola.

Sam was a delightful person and I am very glad in the end that he became president of Namibia because the reports are that, although he is not a man of great education, he is a pragmatic and sensible sort of chap. I enjoyed getting to know him and it was good to see again an example of a successful outcome. Perhaps not perfect, but Namibia, I think, today is a reasonably contented and sound multi-racial country.

MMcB: You also had some comments to make about Mozambique and Angola?

SM: Mozambique: In the 1960s in Dar-es-Salaam I got to know very well the leader at the time of the FRELIMO organisation which was fighting a guerrilla war in Mozambique to push out the Portuguese. This was a Dr Mondlane who had a doctorate from an American university, most civilised and pro-Western. Sadly he was killed by a parcel bomb shortly after I left and I think things went very badly from then onwards and he was replaced by Samora Machel, the Marxist leader.

In Portugal, of course, there was a revolution in 1974. Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 but it was chaotic. The South Africans and the Rhodesians encouraged the opposition to the Marxists, and RENAMO the right wing organisation came into being. I think only today after some terrible fighting are they recovering and becoming a reasonably well-governed country, but they have probably a long way to go. That all went wrong with the sad assassination of Dr Mondlane.

MMcB: He was opposed by Dr Savimbi wasn't he?

SM: No, Savimbi was in Angola. Angola had an even worse, or just as bad, problem. A Communist government took over there. Opposing them was a Dr Savimbi, who spent much of his time in Lusaka, another gentleman I greatly admired with a doctorate from a Swiss university and pro-Western. We all hoped that he would come to the top. I did arrange for him to see a Minister in the FCO, but something went badly wrong because when he went back to Angola to continue the fight, possibly because of his years in the bush he really went round the bend. He is still there but he did not win the election and he refused to accept the result. By this time the Communist government was becoming more reasonable and middle of the road; but the Angolan problem is still unresolved, so again this was another instance where there was not a happy outcome.

MMcB: I understand you had contacts with these freedom fighters in several of the places that you were posted to. Would you like to comment about that?

SM: My view on this was that these people were going to be in power fairly soon, and that rather than treating them as enemy it was a good idea, perhaps, to try to make friends with them and listen to their point of view. This actually was welcomed, as far as I could judge, by my superiors in London, who never tried to stop me, and I think they were grateful to be told what these people were thinking.

There is only one example where a former British Ambassador to Portugal, who came out to Dar-es-Salaam, to look into the Mozambique problem, was a little surprised when he met over tea members of the FRELIMO organisation who were trying to overthrow the government of Portugal, in Mozambique.

MMcB: That was something that you organised?

SM: Yes, I took it upon myself to do this. That was the only comment that was made. Otherwise it seemed to be welcomed. I felt all along that these were people that one could do business with and, by and large, many of those who got into power made a pretty good job of it.

MMcB: Turning back now to your time in Ghana. Could you say what your dates were there and what you were doing?

SM: Yes, that was 1959-62. I was the First Secretary, in charge of political affairs, and I was taken off all work for six months to help plan the Queen's visit, which took place in 1961. I must say I had a great admiration for the Buckingham Palace team who came out, and were very efficient in the organisation of all the close detail. But there was a problem because in 1961 Nkrumah was becoming very unpopular. He was staying within his house and not going round the streets very much because he did not want people to demonstrate against him. Now came the most ghastly problem that I ever had to face. I kept in touch with both government and opposition MPs in Ghana. The opposition were a civilised group of barristers, London trained, the United Party. Three of them came to see me at home. I had checked with my Deputy High Commissioner that it was alright to see them. I took along one of my office colleagues and they came straight to the point that they wanted arms to get rid of Nkrumah. Of course, we tried to dissuade them. Years later I was told by one of them that we had dissuaded two of them, but one had not been dissuaded. This led to a terrible problem within the office. My High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Snelling, for whom I had high regard, took the view that we should inform Nkrumah. I took the opposite view that these were our friends, who thought so well of the British system, and that to betray them would be a terrible thing to do. What happened was that two recommendations then went to London, to Duncan Sandys the then Secretary of State. One was not to tell Nkrumah and the other was to do so. This went up to Alec Douglas-Hume, who was then Prime Minister. He decided that

Nkrumah should not be told and that was a tremendous relief for me. That was the worst problem ever.

The Queen's visit went ahead.

MMcB: Before we leave this question of the arms. Do you think that the approach by these opposition MPs asking you for arms was formal, or was it an informal conversation?

SM: Oh, informal, and I asked one of them after, when I met him years later, when he became Foreign Minister, "Why did you do it? Didn't you realise you were putting your lives in our hands?" and he said "We were so desperate. Nkrumah was so unpopular and so oppressive that we just felt we had to do this".

So, the question of the Queen's visit: Duncan Sandys came out to see whether this ought to go ahead because of this danger. He drove round the town with Nkrumah and nothing happened. But, of course, none of those who might have demonstrated against him knew this was going to happen so one could not be sure that they would not demonstrate during the Queen's visit proper.

The visit went ahead. Nkrumah loved the Queen, despite being so anti-colonial. It was a great success. In January 1966 Nkrumah was overthrown in a police-cum-army coup. I was Head of the West Africa Department and was sent out to Ghana as Acting High Commissioner to restore relations, which had been broken off by Nkrumah over Rhodesia. In Accra I met an old trade union friend. When we discussed the Queen's visit he said some of them had considered whether to make a demonstration, or even worse, against Nkrumah but they had decided that it would be absolutely wrong to do anything that might harm or embarrass the Queen whom they greatly loved, and they did not do anything.

Tanzania was fascinating because this was when I was, in Uganda, promoted to Deputy High Commissioner in Dar-es-Salaam, one stage up, and then found that the High Commissioner was not there. He had been given another job in London. I was acting High Commissioner, jumping up two ranks rather alarmingly, and I was in charge for over a year.

President Nyerere was the head of state I most admired. I utterly disagreed with his African Socialism which was very unrealistic and which helped to ruin the country economically. As a

man he was a delightful person to talk with, and you could have a real discussion. You could argue a point and just forget that he was the President of his country.

Things all went well until January 1964 when the Zanzibar revolution occurred. Zanzibar had just become independent under a Muslim government headed by the Sultan. The African parties were unhappy about this and they organised a coup in a very simple way by simply bribing the corporal who kept the arms belonging to the police, and took over the government. The Sultan was exiled and landed up in Dar-es-Salaam. Nyerere was very good. Kenyatta, in Kenya, did not want the Sultan on his soil but Nyerere, very fairly, accepted him for a few days, and we sent him on to Britain, where I think he still lives in Southsea.

Nyerere explained this revolution to me by the fact that the Africans had still not entirely got over the slave trade and they saw the Arabs as the enemy who had sold them into slavery. That was the origin, in his view, of the Zanzibar revolution.

MMcB: The attacks against the Arabs?

SM: Yes, indeed, they suffered severely. There were many killed in Zanzibar.

But a little later, Nyerere had sent over some 40 armed police who were able to do very little. They could not really stop the killings. Nyerere did say to me that he was thinking of withdrawing them because they were useless. I said, "Are you sure you ought to do that because it is one thing that can influence the situation?" He kept them there and a little while later Karume, the African leader and president, decided to join up with Tanzania. Nyerere said that he thought that the main reason was that Karume felt a bit safer within the boundaries of Tanzania.

MMcB: Before we leave the subject of that revolution, is it correct that Mr Nyerere disappeared from public view for quite a key part of the time when the revolution was in effect.

SM: Ah, that was a week later during the mutiny of the Tanzanian army which is the next step. Because independence had come so quickly to Tanzania, before people had expected it, bodies like the army were still run by the British. The Brigadier in charge, Brigadier Douglas, and the senior officers were British. Evidently the revolution in Zanzibar gave some indication of what could be done with a small group who seized the arms. In the middle of the night of 19/20 January

1964 Brigadier Douglas rang me to say that there had been a mutiny at the barracks. I immediately tried to see Nyerere but I could not get into State House. It was guarded by mutinous soldiers. I then went to try and see the Foreign Minister, Oscar Kambona. Outside the Foreign Ministry my American opposite number and myself, Bob Hennemeyer, were arrested by the mutineers and had to sit around on the pavement for an hour, along with the Minister for Home Affairs, Job Lusinde. After that we were released. I reported this back to London and things were going pretty badly. People were getting killed on the streets. In this situation the British representative's main priority must be the safety of British citizens and there were still several hundreds of British in the country: businessmen, farmers, administrators and so on, who had stayed on after independence. By this time Brigadier Douglas and the officers had reached my house and were sheltering there.

Then Kambona arrived at my house accompanied by some of the mutineers. My wife, Joy, was determined that the mutineers should not enter the house so she walked out to meet them rather than let them into the house. Kambona was looking for me. We wondered at this point if Kambona had seized power. When I went to see Kambona an hour or so later I asked him if it was a coup. But he assured me it was not. He and Lusinde both told me that the problem was Africanisation of the top ranks in the army and also pay. They wanted more pay.

I then saw Nyerere who had been hiding in his beach house. I knew that there was a group of British ships out exercising in the Indian Ocean, among them the aircraft carrier the Centaur, which had helicopters and a Marine battalion on board. I let Nyerere know this. I added "I think the mutineers having tasted power, might well decide to overthrow you next". So there was just the hint that if he wanted help these British forces were out at sea.

Well, he decided for a day or so to try to negotiate, just as if it was a Trade Unionist dispute. Then he came to the conclusion this would not work. He asked me very quietly if it would be possible to have British forces to put down a mutiny. I said I was sure it would be but I would have to consult Duncan Sandys, who was, incidentally, marvellous. He was on the teleprinter all the time, asking for information and giving advice. He was a great man of action. This was just his forte. Of course, I had to get this in writing that was quite clear. Nyerere said this would be arranged and I received a letter marked 'Top Secret'.

(Reads) "Mr Stephen Miles, Acting British High Commissioner, Your Excellency"

"I am directed by the President of the Republic of Tanganyika to approach the British government with a request for military assistance in order to enable us to maintain law and order in the country.

Yours sincerely

R N Kawawa
Vice-President"

That is the one official paper, I think, I stole from the office because it was no longer top secret (by the time the British troops landed!

Brigadier Douglas in my house said "I must get on board that ship, that aircraft carrier". I had never thought of this. He knew how the attack should be made. The Second Secretary, Christopher Macrae, who later became High Commissioner in Nigeria, smuggled Brigadier Douglas and one of the other officers on board. We had sent a message to the aircraft carrier by the clandestine American radio. A launch came out. Under the eyes of the patrolling police the two officers were taken out. Douglas discovered that they were planning an attack on the shore and he said, "You must fly the helicopters straight into the barracks", which is exactly what happened at first light the next morning. There was absolute pandemonium. One or two Tanzanian soldiers were killed but the commandos were fine. Then it was all over.

I had been asked to try to get Nyerere to get on the radio quickly to announce that he had asked for these troops. But he had disappeared. For several hours he was not around. But eventually he did come on the radio.

This problem was happening in Kenya and Uganda as well. The word was getting around from Dar-es-Salaam that mutiny was quite easy, and British troops also went out there.

Nyerere was generous. He wrote a very fine letter of thanks and he did allow Duncan Sandys to quote it in the House of Commons. He was generous although it had been a great humiliation for him. I had feared there would be chaos in the country and British people would be killed and it would become another Belgian Congo, which had just recently achieved independence and produced a most horrible law and order situation.

MMcB: And after that you went to the West African Department of the Commonwealth Office?

SM: Yes, in early 1965. Now I thought this was going to be quite a quiet couple of years. In fact I had only been there a few weeks when there was a coup in Ghana and I remember getting up in the morning and rushing in to the office. Nkrumah was out.

Then came a several coups in Nigeria; then a coup in Sierra Leone. The only country that escaped at that time was The Gambia. That was again an extremely hectic two years.

The biggest problem we faced was the Biafran War. Biafra, eastern Nigeria, tried to break away, under General Ojukwu, and the problem was that we were arming the central Nigerian government which, of course, had every right to put down this rebellion. There was a great deal of anxiety in Britain and in Parliament because the Biafran public relations machine was very efficient and here was a persecuted section of the Nigerian population being put down. Should we continue with arms to the central government? In fact we did continue to the end. After I had left the Department there was a debate in the House of Commons and the policy was very nearly defeated.

During this time I had a lot to do with my Minister of State, George Thomas, who later became Speaker of the House of Commons. I seem to have been very lucky with the Ministers I served under and he was absolutely charming and was prepared to listen and discuss and was a very decent and warm individual.

MMcB: What were the main reasons why we decided that we should continue to arm the central, federal, government?

SM: The legalistic, constitutional reason that a central government was entitled to put down a rebellion, to stop the break up of Nigeria. There are good constitutional reasons. The moral reasoning was a bit more difficult.

Just to dash quickly to another part of the world: Pakistan, Calcutta and Bangladesh, in all of which I served.

I served in East Pakistan, as it then was, 1954-55. The Bengalis have always given us trouble. They did in British days, and this was no exception because the Bengalis had strongly resisted the imposition of Urdu on East Pakistan by the Pakistan government. The Muslim League which was in charge in Dacca was then overthrown in the first election, and a left-wing group took over, the AWAMI league. One of the leaders of that group was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who I, again following the principle that it was a good thing to get to know the people who might later get into power, got to know and his friends very well. They were real rabble rousers but very attractive chaps, most Bengalis are. There were more riots at the time of the election.

In the Indian sub-continent, what happens when the government breaks down is for the government to be dismissed, a governor to be put in and it becomes governor's rule. They then govern without a parliament. In this case General Iskander Mirza was put in as governor but he was called off to become Prime Minister of Pakistan and, believe it or not, the chap who had to take over at this point, according to the constitution, was the Chief Justice, who happened to be British, Sir Thomas Ellis, a kindly, delightful man, who would scarcely scare a mouse, but very fair, very sensible. He found himself in full control of East Pakistan as in colonial days. Isn't it rather extraordinary that a British, ex-ICS man, ex-judicial man, should seven years after independence be running the eastern half of Pakistan, but nobody seemed to think it was at all odd!

Then I moved to West Pakistan, '55-56. The biggest problem we faced there was in 1956, I was serving in Lahore, when the Suez trouble blew up. We were faced with an unruly mob (because Pakistan was, of course, a Muslim country) surrounding and wanting to attack the High Commission, so we had to have police protection. This was the first and only time when I never tried to defend my government's policy. I was not prepared to lie for my country. It would not have gone down well because we had our Pakistani friends and they would not have believed me. I was the First Secretary, actually. The Deputy High Commissioner was Martin Moynihan. We had excellent protection from the Pakistan police who kept out the mob. I was rather touched when the Superintendent of police in charge of the operation happened to be a gentleman called Fazal Mahmud, who was the best seam bowler in the world. Occasionally we were honoured by being allowed to play with him against the Gymkhana Club, I being a cricketer. This was a special honour to find ourselves protected by this delightful Police Superintendent.

Another feature I remember was the BBC External Services which, unlike the Voice of America which of course is also government controlled, refused to push the line of the British government.

They published all the critical things that were being said around the world. This greatly angered the government at home, but did prove the impartiality of the BBC External Services, which has always, to my mind, been accepted as truth. We had to listen very carefully to the BBC overseas services because it was quite possible for the President or Prime Minister, or Foreign Minister of the country to pick up something on the BBC service which he did not agree with.

MMcB: You had finished your point about the BBC? Now we are moving on to Calcutta.

SM: Calcutta 1970-74. I was in America in 1970 serving as a Consul General and suddenly I was offered Calcutta on promotion. I was not immediately wildly enthusiastic. It is one of the most dreadful cities in the world but obviously one had to go. The reason for my appointment, I discovered, was that they were looking for somebody who had been through troublous times, and the mutiny in Tanzania was considered to be such. The north east of India was suffering a very severe terrorism attack by the Naxalite Communists. They were complete anarchists and they were just out to kill members of the establishment. For instance, in one year forty-five police were killed, mostly knifed in the back, in West Bengal. West Bengal then was turned over to Governor's rule. One of my jobs was to keep in close touch with the administration - a charming ex-ICS Governor trained under the British, the charming Chief Secretary also old ICS, the Police Commissioner proud to be the last Indian policeman trained at Scotland Yard, and the General who had fought through the North African campaign and was proud to have been part of a Gurkha British Regiment. They were all splendid chaps who were all very easy to do business with. There were some hundreds of British citizens, businessmen and tea planters.

The new government really took on the Naxalites and by very tough measures, tougher probably than we had ever used to put down our rebellions in India, they did get on top of the problem after a couple of years. There were difficult situations. There was, for instance, no British person was killed, but there was a British priest in Calcutta working in the city who was told he was going to be killed by the Naxalites. He did not want to leave. I thought perhaps he should leave. But one of my British business friends, who had lived in India for years, said we must not be seen to be giving in. So I did not tell him to go and to my relief he was not killed. Those were the sort of situations that were very difficult.

For my own protection I was given a bullet-proof car. Because a rumour got around to the Police Commissioner that they were thinking of kidnapping a diplomat and I was the most likely one he

thought, I had two Gurkha guards on my house with their kukris, who had retired from the army, and a police van with armed police followed me everywhere. Also a Sub-Inspector Banerjee, plain clothes, carried around a little briefcase, in which he had a gun, and he followed me around everywhere, including on the golf course and we became very good friends.

A nice part of the job was visiting the tea planters in Darjeeling and Assam. We had a tricky time at the end of 1971. India went to war with Pakistan over Bangladesh. The war was going on from Calcutta only a few miles from Bangladesh. I remember the question came up, "Can our children come out at Christmas time? Is it safe". Not just my children, but the children of the British community. The message was passed back, send them on a British Airways flight. The local authorities were very good. They stopped the war for a few hours so that our children could disembark from the plane. The military flights were going on into Bangladesh with Indian soldiers. Then they resumed the war.

I am now sometimes asked what was our favourite post. There is great astonishment when I say "Well, Calcutta was perhaps the most interesting of them all". I think it was because of the Bengalis who had given us the most trouble in times of British rule, and had killed a lot of our administrators, were in fact those with whom we had so much in common. I remember for instance, sitting through a performance of Hamlet, which had been brought out by the British Council, and around me were local people beginning to recite the verses from Hamlet. Somehow it was their culture, their liveliness, their great sense of humour which appealed to us. We kept many friends there: the General and the Police Commissioner have both been over to stay with us in England.

Bangladesh, 1978-9: my last post when I was High Commissioner. In '71 I mentioned Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who became the first president of Bangladesh. I went to see him when I was still in Calcutta, he was just taking over. A delightful chap, a delightful rogue, but he was really a chaotic administrator. Everything went downhill and he got assassinated, sadly. When I went back there in 1978, as High Commissioner, there was General Ziaur Rahman in charge. He had taken over in a coup but he was not a dictator in any way. He gave extremely good government, very easy to talk to. We had our second biggest aid programme in the world there. We were making some progress. The difficult problem was immigration to the UK. We had a large team of immigration officers who tried to decide whether families and children of Bangladeshis who, years back, had emigrated to England should join their menfolk. It is terribly difficult to decide who are

not bogus. My officers thought that about 40 percent of the applications were bogus. I sat through some of these interviews. A typical case would be a fairly young wife with two very small children and two big boys who she said were her sons. They were obviously her brothers or her cousins. This was a difficult problem that my immigration officers had to decide. I think they were always fair. They said, "Probably some we've let through who shouldn't have been, but if we are in doubt we give the benefit of the doubt".

Sadly then, after I had left, in the typical Bengali fashion, Ziaur Rahman was assassinated by a jealous general. I won't go into the later history but they are still not terribly stable. Of course, they are among the poorest countries in the world. We tried to help them with aid, but they have had these enormous problems of floods every year due to the cutting down of the trees in the Himalayas and rivers get out of control, and this enormous rise in population all the time. It is a very difficult situation.

MMcB: Now to conclude, Stephen, I think it would be very useful for you to record some of your impressions of the Commonwealth. In particular the way Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia were prepared for independence by the British. And perhaps you could say how you feel how they dealt with the problems.

SM: I will skip over America where I had an interesting time as a Consul General in St Louis, Missouri, pushing trade, and my first post New Zealand, very delightful, friendly atmosphere, and quite different from all the other posts.

The Commonwealth: I started off as a student, as most students do, with the feeling that it must have been rather unpleasant to be ruled by another race, and therefore imperialism and colonialism were very undesirable things. I recently looked at a paper I had written on the Indian Civil Service when I was at Harvard and I notice that I had come to the conclusion that it was a 'noble failure'. Those were my words. I don't think it was because I have changed my mind but because what I have seen is really rather different. I think in all these Commonwealth countries, though one might have expected resentment against the former colonialists, there is an easy, relaxed attitude and an extremely friendly one. If there is a chip on the shoulder in Africa and Africans, I think it goes back more to the days of slavery, to the Arabs mostly, certainly in East Africa, who had sold the Africans into slavery and this has left something of a mark still a certain inferiority complex. But with the people of the new Commonwealth countries, we all found ourselves getting on extremely

well. I think that there was a feeling of common traditions and culture, and a common language. I think we should not underestimate the great gift we have given to the world, from the days of the American colonies onwards, because the language of America is English. Because the Americans speak foreign languages even worse than the British, English has become the international language. It is sad for the French but that is the way it has worked out.

I remember I recently listened to a talk by David Howell, an MP, who had chaired the committee investigating the value of the Commonwealth. He said that it was very refreshing to attend a Commonwealth Conference and not having interpreters. So there is this common legacy, a sense of camaraderie and actually an appreciation of the British. Which I had not, I think, expected to find when I started my career. I think it is partly due to the fact that, early on, after the War, the Attlee government came to a very firm decision that these colonies were going to become independent, starting with India. The process was planned and the dates fixed for freedom. In all cases it worked out, except India. Obviously, it was a terrible problem with partition and the Muslim problem but it was planned, and if one compares it with the other colonial powers, well, the French managed very well in the rest of their colonies but they did not succeed very happily in Guinea or in Algeria. The Dutch East Indies it was never planned, as far as I recall, that they should become independent on a particular day and that was a general mess. The Belgian Congo was absolutely a disaster. So was the Portuguese empire, Mozambique and Angola, where up to the end Portugal regarded them, not as colonies, but as part of metropolitan Portugal.

I don't know about the success story, but it could have been much more disastrous. Something we enjoy now, this feeling of being part of the Commonwealth. A lovely little story: when I was in Lusaka the government decided to have a statue to all the freedom fighters who had died during the colonial struggles. They, therefore, produced a statue, and all the diplomats came out for the opening of the statue. A cabinet minister rang me to see if I could suggest an inscription for the monument - of all people! I could only think of Lawrence Binyon but clearly they wanted something more radical than that. So we all attended the opening of the statue, which was a very fine statue of an African breaking his chains. At the end of it the sculptor was asked to stand and up stood a Mr Butler, who was British!

I think I was lucky in a way, there were plenty of difficult posts, but that is what I wanted. We wanted a good challenge. None of them we disliked. Most had a good deal of difficulty about them. But at the end of it whereas so many posts can end in disaster, as countries go down hill and

there seems little hope, I feel that virtually all the countries I served in saw some glimmer of a solution at the end. Things had not gone quite as badly as we had feared. I was fortunate for my last thirteen years, in four posts, I was in charge of my post, so I enjoyed the responsibility. I had no language problems. Everybody spoke English and I was fortunate to deal with, what I would describe as, decent heads of government and foreign ministers. For instance Nyerere, as I have said, was a delightful person to talk with. Kaunda was a little more difficult in that he did not tend to discuss things very much. He made statements. I think his ministers and officials found it very difficult to stand up to him. But he was very friendly and I do admire him for his very strong non-racial, multi-racial approach, and he did a tremendous amount to bring about a solution in Rhodesia.

General Ziaur Rahman, I have also mentioned, as a delightful person, easy to talk to. General Ankrah who led the coup in Ghana was very pleasant and jovial. The same was true of foreign ministers that I happened to have to deal with. I also appreciated the great value of a good team around me. I will say I think that our service was very good in that way in that they collaborated and gave you the support you required. This was particularly difficult in some of these posts I served in, like Tanzania, where Peter Carter became my deputy. He got the British officers to the airport, even though it was very dangerous, and got them out of the country, and gave me marvellous support. Likewise in Zambia where a sensitive attitude towards the African problems was very important, my Deputy High Commissioner, John McQuiggan, and my First Secretary Political, Jeremy Varcoe, had this sort of understanding and we really did operate as a team. So by and large, I enjoyed myself very much and felt it was very worthwhile.

A final word about the diplomatic wives. In my day (I retired in 1980) very few wives took jobs. They did not look for jobs. What they considered, and certainly my wife did, was that she and her husband were a team and all the representational side of the job was very important. My wife was free to take Mrs Callaghan or Mrs Owen around Lusaka, and as she herself was not doing a job so she was free to do that. Then there was the entertainment side, the representational side. In the sort of posts I served in there was a continuing flow of Ministers and MPs and so on, in times of crisis. Forty MPs came in a few months to Calcutta during the Bangladesh war, when they wanted to see the 10 million refugees who had come over from Bangladesh. So this was very enjoyable but hard work. Of course, my wife was always there to look after that side of things. Lower down the same sort of situation applied, in the lower ranks.

My wife, in her first post (she was a hydrographic officer in the Admiralty) was offered a lectureship in the University of Dacca, and turned it down. She felt that her duty was alongside me. Now, I think today things have changed a bit.

Our three daughters were all born on different continents. Although not enthusiastic about boarding school, their school holidays to nearly every corner of the world have given them a wide appreciation of the world about them. They have now settled in New Zealand, Canada and the USA (where Ann is now a director of the World Bank having been appointed, we like to tease her, because her passport says "born in Pakistan").

Postscript

Rereading the interview six years after recording it, I realise I have said almost nothing about Communism. I did describe the defeat of the Naxalite Communists in N E India (pp 16-17). But what about Africa? Certainly Communist infiltration did at one time seem a serious threat, e.g. the supply of arms to governments and guerrilla movements, training in the Soviet Union and China, the manipulation of aid, etc. But in the end Communist ideologies never really caught on in Africa. A greater source of instability has been tribalism, corruption and the lust for power.

Possibly the greatest tragedy has been the ghastly personal change in Mugabe, who started so well. Some may see this as a carefully calculated plot to seize total and unbridled power. I, however, incline to the view that mental illness, of which there have been reports, was the more likely explanation. In Africa one man (e.g. Idi Amin, Mobutu), can destroy a country.

(Signed) F S Miles

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