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Hon Sir David Alwyn Gore-Booth (b. 15.05.43)

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British Diplomatic Oral History Project
Interview with Sir David Gore-Booth, KCMG, KCVO
on Thursday 4th. March 1999
conducted by Malcolm McBain

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M.M. Well, Sir David, you had what can only be described as a privileged childhood and upbringing, education and so on, at Eton and Christchurch College, Oxford. You entered the Foreign Office in 1964 through the examination, I take it, and went almost straight away to MECAS, the Middle East Centre for Arabic Studies, to learn Arabic?

G.B. Yes.

M.M. And how long did that take?

G.B. That took a year and a half, eighteen months. There were two phases to it; an ordinary phase, I forget what the word was, short course, I think it was called, and then a second phase which turned it into a long course for those who were judged capable of going to a higher standard; I was amongst those judged so capable and so I did the full 18 months.

M.M. And did that make you proficient in both spoken and written Arabic?

G.B. Well, I am married to an interpreter and her proficiency in foreign languages is a great deal better than mine. I suppose at the peak of my proficiency which was in the late '60's I could near as dammit interpret but Arabic is a very difficult language, the number of words in the language is enormous and I would never claim to have felt totally comfortable with it; but I did get what is called the advanced exam and I did use it quite extensively over many years.

M.M. So it was an ideal introduction to a posting to Baghdad in 1966. What sort of situation did you find yourself in there, Third Secretary in Chancery doing the drafting and so on? What was the situation then?

G.B. Well, as it were there were two situations, one was my own personal situation as a new entrant because learning Arabic was not a job in the conventional sense. I was paid to do it but it wasn't a job, so I knew nothing about Foreign Office procedures when I arrived at the

British Embassy in Baghdad. My predecessor hadn't left and was just about to get married, which he did, and I remember asking him in the Church, I think, what 'bring-up' meant, a Foreign Office form of words and he has never forgotten that either. So there was that side of it. I was very new, very innocent in the ways of the Foreign Office and the ways of diplomacy. Then there was how was Iraq and that is rather interesting in the light of subsequent history. It was a curious time because there were two brothers who became Presidents successively, the Aref brothers as they were called, Abdul Salam and Abdul Rahman and there was a civilian Prime Minister called Dr. Abdul Rahman Bazzaz the only time, I think I am right in saying, that there has been a civilian Prime Minister in Iraq since the revolution in 1958. So in a curious way the period '66-'67 was rather a good one for Iraq. There was a greater degree of freedom. My then wife and I made a lot of friends. One didn't feel tremendously boxed in although one had to get permission to travel outside Baghdad. This all came to an end with the June war of 1967 when Iraq accepted the Egyptian line that the British and Americans had conspired with Israel,' the big lie 'as it was called, and we were expelled and that was quite exciting too. But I have fond memories of Baghdad in the mid to late '60's which is rather ironic in the light of subsequent events.

M.M. Were the Iraqis friendly?

G.B. Yes, very.

M.M. So it was a bit of a tragedy really for the British that we had to leave.

G.B. Well, it was not the last time either. We left in '67 in some disarray and the Swedes took over as the protecting power and then we went back in, I think, 1970 and were then kicked out again in '71 as a result of the withdrawal from the Gulf and the deal with the Shah of Iran and, of course, because of recent events we are once again no longer represented in Baghdad; so it has been a fairly helter skelter relationship since the revolution in 1958.

M.M. Sad story. But from there you went on to Lusaka after a very short stay in Baghdad and a completely different situation there. This was presumably at a time when Dr. Kenneth Kaunda was running affairs. Did you come across him?

G.B. Oh, yes indeed. Of course, what happened in the summer of 1967 was that a whole lot of the Arabists Club, of which I was a new member, were spare, on the loose, because not only had relations with Iraq been broken but of course relations with Egypt and numerous other Arab countries and so there was a whole bunch of us looking for new assignments. I was selected for Lusaka which was completely different, a Commonwealth country in Africa

and only relatively recently independent - 1964 - and with the Southern Rhodesia problem on its doorstep and as a political job it was quite interesting. KK, Kenneth Kaunda, was very much the man in charge with his humanism as he called it, his third way, and his ever present white handkerchief which he frequently waved and frequently used to dab at the tears which seemed to come relatively readily. It wasn't a very happy time for me; I didn't feel enormously comfortable there. There was a lot of post colonial evidence around - the streets were still called King George this and Queen Elizabeth that and there were British Colonial Service servants still floating around in white shorts and socks. Also my first marriage came apart there too. So it is not a posting which I look back on with great affection.

M.M. Anyhow that led to a return to London and the FCO in 1969 when presumably you were in some department.

G.B. Well there is a bit of a story behind that. Because my marriage fell apart and because my father was actually head of the Foreign Office at the same time it was felt that I should be withdrawn. So I was taken out of Lusaka after only 18 months or so and reassigned to the Foreign Office conveniently, as the powers that be thought, to the Zambia desk. The only thing was that when I got there I found that there were two other people on the desk as well! So there turned out to be three people working on Zambia which even in the immediate post colonial phase was too many. So when the call came suggesting that I might go to Libya I was immensely relieved.

M.M. When you went to Libya presumably we were well into the period of difficulty and complication with Colonel Qadafi.

G.B. Well, not actually. I arrived there in July '69. King Idris was still on the throne. Libya was rather a sleepy hollow. Very Italian in its feel. Vines were still being grown on the hills at the back and there were Italian restaurants and so on. But within six or eight weeks the whole situation had changed with the coup of the 1st September 1969 which brought Colonel Qadafi into our frame for the first time.

M.M. Who was your Ambassador then?

G.B. Well, actually I arrived during an inter-regnum. The previous Ambassador had been Sir Roderick Sarell but he had left and we were expecting Donald Maitland, later Sir Donald Maitland but his arrival was delayed by the coup so he didn't get in until mid-September or thereabouts. So for the first couple of months I had no Ambassador at all. Peter Wakefield was in charge based in Benghazi because we had posts both in Tripoli and Benghazi. Then

Donald Maitland arrived but was quite quickly taken away because of the election of 1970. Edward Heath asked him to come back and be his press spokesman. So Donald left after a very short tenure and was succeeded by Peter Tripp.

M.M. What was your function there?

G.B. Essentially much the same as my function in my two previous posts which was a sort of dogs body but it became much more important because of the coup and the Libyan demand that we remove the RAF base at El Adem, the largest RAF presence anywhere in the world outside Britain at the time. I got directly involved, partly in an interpreting capacity, partly in an advisory capacity, in the negotiations leading to the closure of the British bases on the 28th February 1970.

M.M. Had we got rid of all the bases in Tripoli itself at that time?

G.B. We had a British Military Mission (BMM) and we had a British Naval Mission (BNM) both based in Tripoli advising the Libyan armed forces. There was not a British base as such in Tripoli. The big base was the RAF base at El Adem.

M.M. We used to have a RAF base at Castel Benito and army barracks in Tripoli itself.

G.B. Yes, that's right.

M.M. Did you have any particular impression of Colonel Qaddafi in his early stages?

G.B. Yes, he came from nowhere. That was the point about the coup - that it was mounted by junior officers who had really not registered before. It came from the army rather than something called the PSF - Public Security Force - with which we had had most dealings. Although Colonel Qaddafi had done a training course in the UK we knew very little about him or about the whole of the Revolutionary Command Council or RCC - 12 strong. One of the great misjudgements, I think, of our time. We thought that he was unlikely to survive for very long because he was totally innocent of the ways of government. Very much a child of the Nasser age, the Egyptian revolution, worshipped Nasser but in 1999 he is still there! We said six months and thirty years later he is still in charge! Though he has lost most of his colleagues. I met him several times because we were negotiating this withdrawal of the RAF. We negotiated directly with him and there were many nocturnal sessions in a barracks in Tripoli with sub-machine guns on the table on the Libyan side, pencils and pens on our side! Staring eyes, the sense of mission and definitely, what would be seen in retrospect, I think, as

a rather retrograde view of the world.

M.M. Right, from there back to the Foreign Office again and shortly after that off to Brussels.

G.B. Not so shortly. I did a full three years '71-'74 and I was successively the desk officer for Jordan and then for the Arab/Israel conflict and of course that period took in the October 1973 war and was extremely busy as a result.

M.M. So in other words you were inducted into the business of the Foreign Office at a fairly active sort of level.

G.B. Indeed. I was promoted First Secretary somewhere along the way there and I worked for, I think, one of the most outstanding diplomats of our time - Sir Anthony Parsons - later our Ambassador in Tehran and Permanent Representative in New York and it was a real joy.

M.M. He would certainly have been hands on.

G.B. Yes, very clear in his thought processes and his decision making.

M.M. Yes, I am sorry I got a bit ahead of things by misplacing your posting to UKREP Brussels which was a fairly early exposure to EC affairs.

G.B. Well, indeed so. We had only been members of the European Community for just over a year when I arrived in Brussels so it was early days; and then we had the renegotiation. The Heath government had fallen, Wilson had come back in and had pledged to renegotiate the terms of accession agreed to by Edward Heath and I came back to London from Brussels to take part in a thing called the Referendum Information Unit set up to give the British public information about the European Community in preparation for the Referendum of 1975 on the renegotiated terms. Of course the Referendum was 66% to 33% successful in keeping us within the EEC but that was quite an interesting spell.

M.M. It has been said, at least I have heard it said that it was somehow or other improper for civil servants to be involved in that information about the EU. Do you have any views on that?

G.B. Well, it was very difficult. The way the circle was squared was to tell us that we were not to express a view, whether a political view or a yes or no view but simply to give the facts. It was the first referendum ever held in this country so that was sensitive in itself and

then the politics of it were also very sensitive. I think it worked in the sense that we did seem to be able to maintain the line that we were only providing factual information about the European Community and about the terms that had been renegotiated. I sometimes think back and one of my most persistent questioners, we had telephone boxes and people just rang in, and among the people who rang in quite often was Jack Straw, who has subsequently become Home Secretary in the New Labour Government, and who is now regarded as being pro-European but at the time he certainly was sceptical.

M.M. But you simply gave information about the Community and the terms of our membership and the terms on which we were going to renegotiate.

G.B. On which we had renegotiated.

M.M. Had negotiated because it was then a question of putting a referendum to the public.

G.B. That's right.

M.M. And there was largely party political support for that.

G.B. There was which is going to be different, I think, this time round when we have a referendum on the Euro. Then broadly the political class in Britain was solidly in favour of the Yes rather than the No vote. That may not be the case next time.

M.M. That's true. Well, we must wait and see. I recall that in my time in the Foreign Office in the mid 1970's that we were doing quite a lot of active information about the state of the British economy and some people thought that that was verging on the improper but it seemed right at the time. I must say, the national interest was quite clear in that case.

G.B. It is much less clear this time.

M.M. With the Euro.

G.B. Yes.

M.M. An interesting interlude anyway.

G.B. Yes, and the other interesting thing about that was that I was in Brussels for the first UK Presidency of the EU in 1977 as it was the first time we had ever done it. I was actually

called the Presidency co-ordinator. That was an absolutely fascinating time and by that time the Ambassador had been my old Ambassador in Libya, Sir Donald Maitland.

M.M. To be followed shortly after that by a spell as Assistant in Financial Relations Department in the FCO. So can you tell me what the function of the Financial Relations Department was?

G.B. Yes, good question! It had essentially liaison with the Treasury - spice was added to that at that particular juncture by the fact that it was the absolute heyday of something called the North/South dialogue and FRD had responsibility in the Foreign Office and indeed in Whitehall for the North/South dialogue and how Britain was going to play that. And, of course, in the middle of my time there was a general election. Mrs. Thatcher came in and essentially changed our attitude rather radically. I was dealing with instructions to our delegations to the IMF, to the OECD. Factoring in political and geographical aspects to what otherwise were simply Treasury drafted instructions. It was also the time when these economic summits were set up, now known as the G7 or G8 if Russia is included. The department was responsible for that too, that was quite an interesting aspect - the early days of the summits between the major industrialised countries. A functional department. You can regard it as a post box department. I think it was slightly more than that and it gave me a very useful insight into matters international and economic and so on.

M.M. It is a bit hard to see how the Foreign Office itself could have views on, strong views anyway, on economics when you have an entirely separate independent department being mainly responsible for economic matters i.e. the Treasury. Were you able to argue with them on any points?

G.B. Oh yes, mainly on what would be the impact of Treasury instructions or lines on political relationships between Britain and the country concerned. We are talking about rescue packages, that sort of thing. Secondly the Foreign Office does boast a number of people with quite a good knowledge of economics and particularly international economics. The Treasury has a very very small capacity dealing with international economics. Rather a curious thought, it may have changed, but in those days there was huge emphasis on domestic financial and economic matters and much less on international ones. So, I think, the Foreign Office was able to inject policy thinking as well as political analyses. I don't think we ever felt at the time that we were poor relations in this area. My boss was the Deputy Under Secretary subsequently Permanent Representative in Brussels and then a banker and he was certainly no slouch in economics.

M.M. That's interesting. So from there you went on to be Counsellor in Jeddah in 1980. Back into Saudi, an Arabic speaking country, terribly important. Even important before the change of government in 1979 because of its role as a purchaser of various products that we were good at - military for instance. What did your job there entail?

G.B. Well, what had essentially happened was, in the Arab world, that the escalation in the price of oil in 1973 and then again in 1979 following the Iranian revolution had given the Arab oil producers unexpected wealth and none more so than Saudi Arabia. I arrived as Commercial Counsellor just at the time when the Saudis were extremely flush and it was my job to help to promote British exports which did increase at that time, not because of my presence there but simply because they were extremely rich. It is a place that people require advice on dealing with because it is mysterious and difficult. It was before the big arms deal - the Al Yamamah arms deal - which actually took place in the mid-80's. Our exports, in my time, to Saudi Arabia crossed the one billion pound mark and made Saudi Arabia one of our most important markets. So that was interesting and it brought me into direct contact with British business at a senior level which is something I have always treasured really.

M.M. The Service was always being told that we ought to have businessmen as Ambassadors. Somehow or other this was going to solve all our problems. Would you like to talk about that aspect of affairs in relation to Saudi Arabia.

G.B. Yes, my own view is that there isn't a single decent businessman in Britain who would be prepared to take on an Ambassadorship for the money that an Ambassador gets paid and for the life style that he is obliged to lead. People may think its glittering and glamorous; it isn't actually, it is extremely humdrum and at times punishing. I have always thought this pretty bogus. What I do think is that Ambassadors should be interested in business and open to businessmen and be prepared to go into bat for British business at any given moment. That is something I carried forward from this particular job in Jeddah to the two Heads of Mission jobs I had later, including, of course, the one in Saudi Arabia again; having been Commercial Counsellor was a tremendous asset when I got back there 10 years later as Ambassador.

M.M. But even supposing you could find a decent British businessman prepared to do the job for the money what could he bring to it that could not be brought to it by a career diplomat?

G.B. Well, there has been an argument about this over the years with some businessmen saying that the Foreign Office is useless because it doesn't know about business and the Foreign Office saying that businessmen don't know anything about diplomacy and never the twain met. I don't think that diplomats are meant to sell widgets - that isn't their function - or

to know about the intricate details of how widgets are made and what they measure. What diplomats are meant to do is generally create, promote, foster the environment in which British exports are likely to be successfully achieved and specifically to press, pursue, and promote individual contracts when these are at stake. A lot of diplomacy is not about that; it's about representing Britain in a much wider sense, a lot of which incidentally is extremely dull. It is about protecting British citizens. It's about, in poor countries, promoting development assistance. I don't myself think that businessmen are likely to find it a very comfortable environment in which to operate. I think that they are much happier jetting in and out and running their companies than they would be running missions abroad and representing the UK in the round.

M.M. I would have thought myself that the main value that a businessman would set on an Embassy's Commercial Counsellor would be knowing who to talk to. If you go to an obscure place like Saudi Arabia and you want to sell them something or other then you need to be given an introduction to the right person not otherwise identifiable by your ordinary businessman.

G.B. I agree with that. The other thing of course is that a diplomat can't essentially get caught up in a conflict of interests whereas a businessman would find it very difficult in any major market, (why would he want to be in a minor market?) to avoid either actual conflicts of interest or suggested or rumoured or claimed conflicts of interest. I am against it. I don't think that it's a realistic notion.

M.M. It seems very naive. Still it keeps coming up. So Jeddah was mainly a business post, deeply commercial at a time when the Saudis were awash with money and we were desperate to sell them whatever we could and that included arms.

G.B. It did, although the arms element, in my time, was very small. It became much, much, much larger between my departure as Commercial Counsellor and my return as Ambassador.

M.M. Did we not have military advisers and defence staff generally to look after arms sales in Saudi?

G.B. We had Attaches in the conventional sense and part of their remit was to promote British equipment. We had a military mission to the National Guard which is the internal security force in Saudi Arabia and British Aerospace had sold Lightning aircraft to Saudi Arabia but all of this took on a completely different context or aspect when the Al Yamamah deal was signed in the mid 1980's, the largest ever arms contract for anybody out of this

country with a figure of 20 billion pounds or something like that. We had a relationship with the Saudi armed forces going back in the mists of time. In the immediate post war period we had advisers in Saudi Arabia but the Americans had essentially replaced us as the principal military advisers to the Saudi government with the exception of the British Military Mission to the National Guard but as I said by the time I got back the second time we were selling major quantities of Tornado aircraft.

M.M. How about competition with our allies?

G.B. It is almost a contradiction in terms, isn't it? But it happens, of course, extensively. The Americans were our biggest allies in Saudi Arabia, and still are, but also our largest competitors whether for civilian equipment or military. The Saudis were quite clever in portioning out contracts so as to keep both the Americans and the British and to some extent the French happy.

M.M. Were the French important?

GB. Not the first time round. They were more important the second time round and they were quite keen to establish a rather larger foothold than they had. We actually jointly, the British and the French, tried to sell the Airbus to the Saudis in the early nineties but in fact they went Boeing and McDonnell Douglas so the Americans won that; but there is a case of a bit of Anglo/French co-operation. It wasn't successful but it was quite interesting - so we are not always fighting the French.

M.M. So after that you had another overseas posting as Head of Chancery to the U.K. Mission in New York.

GB. Yes, fascinating.

M.M. What were the issues at stake there?

GB. Well, the whole range really but there were some staple issues, the Middle East ranks very high so that's why it's not a bad post for an Arabist. I got there in '83, the Falklands conflict was in '82, so the aftermath of the Falklands was an issue particularly in the General Assembly. In the Security Council, well, we had the Korean airliner, we had Nicaragua.

M.M. The Korean airliner; that was when ...

GB. The Soviets shot down a Korean airliner in '83. We had Nicaragua which was an ongoing issue particularly for the Americans. The Middle East came back endlessly, the Cyprus dispute came back frequently. Those were the main issues plus two other things; one was the 40th anniversary of the UN itself in 1985 and the question of who should succeed Javier Peres de Cuellar as Secretary General which turned out to be Javier Peres de Cuellar! But it was an interesting time because it was just the beginning of a period when the Russians or Soviets as we must call them at that time were prepared to co-operate on certain issues rather than distinguish themselves from the West; the decision to reappoint Javier Peres de Cuellar was one of the first and the most pivotal of the decisions that the five Permanent Members took together. It may be seen as a precursor of the decisions that were taken in the late eighties and early nineties though that rather tailed off subsequently.

M.M. So this posting might have been seen as a precursor to another later post in New York.

G.B. Which was very much what I wanted. I made no secret about it. I was quite disappointed when it didn't work out that way.

M.M. Yes, of course, one is very much exposed to the public in that position.

G.B. Well, I enjoy that.

M.M. Where you do have to get out and speak and do a lot on television and all those things.

G.B. I enjoy public speaking. Not all diplomats do but I do. I did quite a bit of it at that time even as a Counsellor and in various UN committees and meetings of one kind and another and that was one of the reasons why I was keen to go back there but it didn't work out that way.

M.M. Such is life. Who was the UK rep. at that time?

G.B. Sir John Thomson.

M.M. So back to the FCO again - Head of Policy Planning Staff. Could you tell me something about the Policy Planning Staff.

G.B. Yes, it wasn't a job that I had expressed an interest in or thought much about but in the event I enjoyed it and was grateful to have had the opportunity. It essentially has two complementary parts. One is to spend a good deal of time out of the Foreign Office

interacting with Policy Institutes whether in Britain or in other countries and secondly using that as a basis on which to try and jerk policies in different directions within the Foreign Office if one thought that the policy was either atrophied or going in the wrong direction. So it turned out to be, I only did it for two years, but it was extremely rewarding. It gave this unusual opportunity which most people in the Foreign Office go in at whatever hour in the morning and leave at whatever hour at night and never know anything else other than those columns and frescos and friezes; but as a planner you go out go out and about perhaps as no other Foreign Office officials have the chance to do. I relished that.

M.M. With the object, of course, of producing papers for Ministers to think about.

G.B. Yes.

M.M. 'What if' sort of questions.

G.B. That's right. Whether related to the function of the Foreign Office or to the direction of policy. I had a lady on my team from BP who had some very interesting ideas on how the Foreign Office needed to update itself particularly in the IT area. This was quite early days before the IT revolution. So there were some interesting aspect to that job.

M.M. Anything that is worth recalling at this stage, do you think?

G.B. Well, we did a lot on Germany and I always say I got it right except that I got the timing wrong. I was asked if I thought Germany would ever be reunited and I said yes and then I was asked how long it was going to take and then I said well twenty or twenty-five years - it actually took three! But at least very few, and we tend to forget this, very few people in the West thought there was any possibility of reuniting Germany in anything like the foreseeable future. So that was one interesting area.

M.M. Could they foresee the collapse of the Soviet system?

G.B. Well, inherent in the judgement that the Germanys would reunite was that but I have to say I don't think and certainly the Sovietologists did not predict it in anything like the way it actually happened. I don't think that we in the Planners got that right and one of the troubles of being a planner is that you aren't a Sovietologist otherwise you would be in the Sovietologist bit and it is quite difficult to challenge the expertise and that is actually what one is doing all the time. You were challenging people who knew better than you and you didn't always win. The success was probably rather limited but worth trying.

M.M. Well, it must have been very challenging indeed, I imagine. You went from that to be Assistant Under Secretary of State in charge of Middle East Affairs - so that was a reversion to type really, wasn't it? Your earlier training and language and all the rest of it. What comprised the Middle East from an Under Secretary's point of view?

G.B. Geographically from Morocco to the borders of Pakistan. The Middle East remains about the most volatile of regions. It is a region which Britain has huge interests in, whether historical or financial, and actually if you look at the crises which arose in my time, I had this job for four years, it proves the point. I had hardly been in the job for five minutes before the Rushdie affair blew up and the newly restored relations with Iran were broken again so that was one crucial element. Iran and Iraq had only just finished fighting each other for a year - 1988. Then of course the whole business of Iraq blew up in 1990 we were all aware that the Gulf crisis would be very important and the recapture of Kuwait, the liberation of Kuwait and its aftermath which included a major focus back on the Arab/Israel issue which was a major preoccupation of the Assistant Under Secretary particularly one who had been directly involved as a desk officer with that issue some years previously. I got heavily involved in the Arab/Israel issue. Restoration of relations with Iran in 1990, restoration of relations with Syria, both of which I was heavily involved in and generally in keeping our relationships with as many Middle Eastern countries as possible in good order. One of the things about being an Arabist is that there are over 20 countries where they speak it, so it is not like learning Burmese or even Japanese and having only one place to go. You have lots of places to go and then, of course, you have Israel which is a crucial part of the Middle Eastern puzzle and I accompanied Ministers on innumerable trips to the region - starting with Geoffrey Howe and then Douglas Hurd and junior ministers also - William Waldegrave and Douglas Hogg.

M.M. So you really got to know the political establishment. Did you not pay, I remember seeing somewhere, a secret visit to Syria?

G.B. Yes, it was taken from my valedictory dispatch I should think; that's when I say life isn't just champagne and cherries, amongst other things incognito visits to Syria. Relations with Syria had, I think, been broken off in 1986 following something called the Hindawi case when a young lady was said to have been persuaded to take a bomb on an El Al aircraft. When the Gulf crisis broke it was clearly in our interest to try and resume our relations with Syria which was a very vital member of the coalition, as it was called, against Iraq so I was asked to see if we could establish a centric basis for resuming relations with Syria against the background of a terrorist past. It required some quite delicate negotiations involving as it

happens an incognito visit to New York as well as an incognito visit to Syria and then some recommendations which Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary at the time, accepted and we resumed in November 1990; but that was quite an interesting episode.

M.M. It is a good example of an official playing a pretty key role in policy making -isn't it? Politicians couldn't do it themselves.

G.B. No. There was an added wrinkle to this too as Mrs. Thatcher who was still Prime Minister was very hostile to the notion of resuming with Syria and she had to be persuaded and that took quite a bit of doing.

M.M. Did you take part in that?

G.B. I took part in it in a written sense and eventually argued the toss with her directly but she accepted Douglas Hurd's recommendation.

M.M. Do you think that her attitude was, to some extent, coloured by the existence of a powerful Israeli lobby in Finchley?

G.B. Yes. I am in no doubt about that. I think that her instincts were all with Israel except possibly with some of the Royal families of the Middle East though she fell out of love with King Hussain during the Gulf crisis. Although she had the reputation of being pro-Israeli and as I said I think that's where her instincts lie but she actually produced the best dictum for the Middle East that I know of which is that the Israelis cannot deny to the Palestinians what they have claimed for themselves and actually as a solution to the Arab/Israel conflict that's a pretty perfect analysis.

M.M. At what stage did you get involved in the Scott report?

G.B. Well

M.M. That must have been while you were Assistant Under Secretary.

G.B. Very much so. I mean the question of arms sales to Iraq goes back to the conflict between Iraq and Iran which started in 1980 and went on for eight years. In 1984 when Geoffrey Howe was Foreign Secretary he adopted some guidelines on sales to both countries essentially saying that we wouldn't sell arms to either of them that might encourage everyone to prolong the conflict. In late 1988 when there had been a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq

Ministers got together to consider updating these guidelines, essentially to take account of the fact that Iran and Iraq were no longer fighting each other. So to have guidelines which referred to a conflict which no longer existed was pretty stupid and they did agree that there should be an updating which fractionally lightened the burden which British exporters had in proving the case for export licence permission - fractionally. But no sooner had Ministers agreed that than we got into the Rushdie difficulty which meant that relations with Iran collapsed and therefore the chances of any arms being sold to Iran pretty well vanished. It wasn't long, although that implied that the Iraqis might be more favourably treated, it wasn't long before we got into similar difficulties with Iraq.

M.M. But not over Rushdie.

G.B. Not over Rushdie but over a chap called Bazoft. He was an 'Observer' journalist who came across Iraqi weapons of mass destruction facilities and was subsequently executed by Saddam. That put a block on any realistic prospect of selling arms to Iraq. Then, of course, we got into the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and there were suggestions that British arms had got into the hands of the Iraqis and were being used to fight our boys - never actually proven, in fact - but this became a Parliamentary issue and the question of whether the guidelines had been changed and if so, whether Parliament had been told, became a political football between the Conservative government and the Labour opposition. The Conservative government had changed its Prime Minister; John Major had succeeded Margaret Thatcher, and John Major agreed in response to Parliamentary pressure to set up an inquiry. It was decided on advice to ask Sir Richard Scott to head up this inquiry and that the inquiry should be in public. Two decisions, I think, that turned out to be unwise. Anyhow, that was where it began - it didn't actually take off - this was by now the end of '91 beginning of '92 I should say and it may even have been the end of '92 beginning of '93. The Scott inquiry didn't get under way until the beginning of '93 and I was summoned back from Riyadh by which time I was Ambassador in Saudi Arabia to appear - first of all to answer some questions on paper and then to appear in front of the inquiry. This was in September '93 and it took Scott two more years to produce his report and it some further time before I was given the all clear. My authorities decided that I had not been guilty of any particular infraction. It was an extremely lengthy process, it essentially covered the whole of my time in Saudi Arabia and I believe it to have been, as I said in my valedictory dispatch, a travesty in its origins, procedure and output and I stand by that.

M.M. What did the Saudis make of it?

G.B. I don't think they were interested to be honest. They regarded it as another bizarre

function of the British way of life which they find difficult to understand.

M.M. Like the Press.

G.B. Yes, very much so, very much so.

M.M. Going back to this business of the guidelines; was there some question of William Waldegrave deciding that we could defend the fact that Parliament had not been told about some change in the guidelines.

G.B. Yes, he did. It became very difficult to take a photograph of what was happening because of developments in Iran and Iraq to which I have referred. So it is very difficult at any point (to identify) such a change as there was, which in any case was only marginal. But Ministers always reply to questions that these guidelines were kept constantly under review or some formula like that. I personally didn't think that we had misled and Waldegrave didn't think we had misled. What people and perhaps Scott himself failed to appreciate is that, in a Whitehall situation which this was, the Foreign Office is one department and there are several other departments and on the whole, to its credit, the Foreign Office was opposed to arms sales to Iran and Iraq whereas the DTI for industrial reasons and the Ministry of Defence for defence equipment reasons were keen to sell so we were always in a two to one situation against. And at times of particular crisis i.e. when Rushdie was - the fatwa was issued and relations were broken off - we were able to win the day although we were one against two but as those events faded then the arguments on the other side resumed their importance and weight; this happened on a number of points. Even so, we didn't actually sell any arms to speak of to Iran despite suggestions to the contrary. Dual use things, radios, Range Rovers that kind of thing. William Waldegrave said himself on one of my submissions that it takes a screwdriver to make a nuclear bomb - do you stop exporting screwdrivers? I think that it is a comment he may have regretted later when it became available.

M.M. But nevertheless a valid point.

G.B. Yes, it is a valid point.

M.M. I thought this all started with a Company called Matrix Churchill and some unfortunate chap being taken to Court. There were three Directors of Matrix Churchill who were being prosecuted for a breach which was the result of an activity by the Foreign Office or was it by the Customs and Excise?

G.B. It was essentially by Customs and Excise but there was another element in all this which involved Alan Clark who was then Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence with responsibility for Defence Sales. He essentially told British businessmen not to take any notice of the guidelines and just to get on with exporting. He then denied that he had said that and then, in fact, during the trial of these people which you mentioned he then admitted that he had told them what he had been accused of telling them and the trial collapsed as a result. Matrix Churchill, the interesting thing about Matrix Churchill is that it was owned by Iraq and that had made me extremely suspicious from the word go and that is why I had recommended against any sales to do with Matrix Churchill but Alan Clark felt differently.

M.M. And so they were exporting lathes.

G.B. Yes. The British machine tool industry was telling us or telling the DTI that it was at death's door and unless contracts like this were allowed through there would be no British machine tool industry and that was a very powerful argument in its way. So there were a lot of factors in play here.

M.M. Then, of course, there was this agony over the public interest immunity certificates wasn't there. Were we involved in those - the Foreign Office?

G.B. Yes, a Foreign Office Minister had to sign and did - I think it was Tristan Garel Jones as it happened. He happened to be available, he wasn't the Minister dealing with the Middle East but he happened to be available at the time. That gets into legal niceties in which I am out of my depth but it is to do with class actions and public interest; I think there was a legitimate case that the public interest was best served by not pursuing these matters but it went the other way.

M.M. But was it not that aspect of things that led to the establishment of the Scott inquiry?

G.B. No, no. The Scott inquiry was established directly as a result of pressure in Parliament on the question of the guidelines. The public interest immunity question arose separately.

M.M. It raises a lot of questions, doesn't it, about the position of an official doing his duty.

G.B. Yes, it does.

M.M. What is your view about that?

G.B. Well, I have expressed a view about this. There are two parts. One is that Ministers are decreasingly willing to take responsibility for the actions of their officials and are increasingly willing to say 'it wasn't my fault; it was the officials fault' and secondly and connectedly, as media intrusion into government increases and is unlikely to be reversed, individual civil servants are themselves the focus of media attention and unless Ministers are prepared to defend them those officials, it seems to me, are going to have to start defending themselves which is, of course, completely contrary to the ethos of yesteryear. I have now been involved in a number of cases where I felt that my personal involvement was incorrectly portrayed and those of my colleagues and staff. So I do feel very strongly about this issue. I don't know what the solution is, because I don't think you can turn back the clock and the invasion of the media and I doubt whether Ministers are likely to suddenly rediscover the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility because Government is a very complicated thing - some departments are very large and one can see why Ministers may be reluctant to take responsibility for what some junior official may have done in Liverpool or Dundee or Whitehall. But it is a very complex issue and a very sensitive one. It is one of the reasons why, I think, recruitment into the senior civil service may suffer unless some way is found, and it is mostly senior civil servants who are likely to be identified, unless they can find some way of defending their corners.

M.M. Yes, I was going to ask you how you thought people could be found to work for civil service conditions and rates of pay and so on and work the hours they are expected to work when everything they do is likely to be raked over by the public and the press and by Parliament even and then written up at length by Judges.

G.B. Yes, and there seems to be this habit of turning to Judges and I don't think that they are necessarily the right people to do this sort of thing. It is very interesting that Robin Cook who took the Conservative government apart on Scott, - we tend to forget that the Tories won a vote on Scott by 320 - 319 one vote - Cook took them apart on Scott but when it came to his own little arms problem - Sierra Leone - he had the enquiry conducted in private - the Legg enquiry was conducted in private whereas Scott was conducted in public and this is a Government which is supposed to be in favour of more government accountability.

M.M. A lesson had been learned, perhaps? One hopes. It is a fascinating little exercise, the whole thing, but it must have been pretty wearing for you. What were your personal impressions of it?

G.B. Well, it was quite a distraction from being Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. That's the first point. Secondly, to spend two days on the stand is not a comfortable experience particularly

and - this is the third point - that it was terribly adversarial, there was Scott and his assistant Presiley Baxendale acting essentially as counsel for the prosecution, judge and jury. The Press present in the room and able to titter at one end of the spectrum or record at the other and the defendants as it were, those of us in the dock were only able to speak, this is the officials anyway, were only able to speak to Scott or Baxendale whereas the Press were able to write whatever they wanted. And a fourth point, following on from that, there were recreations of this enquiry on the radio, on screen and in the theatre and it seemed absolutely grotesque to me that I and others should be characterised and I think grossly traduced by people purporting to be us. I remember in Riyadh being rung up by my Maltese colleague - 'Sir, you are on the radio' 'No, I am not I am sitting at my desk' 'No. I am listening to you on the radio' It was the BBC reconstruction or a radio reconstruction of the Scott inquiry - purporting to be me and this seems to me to be quite beyond the pale and it plays into the point, that I made earlier, about public servants having to defend themselves against this kind of thing.

M.M. When you were being questioned by Sir Richard Scott and Presiley Baxendale did you have any papers to support your answers or were they armed with the documentation and you without it?

G.B. I was with it. We were given - as I said earlier there were two phases to this. They submitted a kind of written question which I had to come back from Riyadh to fill in because it was very detailed and I had to consult papers and so on. So I had, we had, and they had the written evidence we had submitted and whatever background we had thought necessary but their documentation was very legalistic if I can put it that way. When officials are submitting whether in typescript or in manuscript they don't actually expect what they say to become public and they don't actually check it to make sure that it is legally sound because they are not lawyers. Again I go back to William Waldegrave's thing about the screwdriver - if he had known that this was going to become public I dare say he wouldn't have written it down or he might have put it on a 'Post-it'. This is what worries me again, if everything that civil servants offer by way of advice is going to become public then either that advice will not be given at all or would be 'on the one hand or the other' so that every time you gave advice there was an opposite piece of advice you could fall back on or they will write it on 'post-its', stick it on top and take it off again when action has been decided. I think that this is appalling and that it will greatly distort the process of government or paralyse it.

M.M. Indeed. I noticed that the Prime Minister's, and this is going ahead a bit, Press secretary, Alistair Campbell, was sounding off about these plummy old Etonians daring to represent Britain. Who is Alistair Campbell? Is he a civil servant?

G.B. No, he is a political appointment. He has no business saying that. Even if he knows whether they have plummy voices or not, what disqualifies an Etonian from being a civil servant any more than what does or doesn't disqualify somebody who went to a Comprehensive? It is absolutely meaningless in my view but it falls into this easy caricature or stereotyping of civil servants or indeed anybody for that matter. A plummy voiced old Etonian applies, if you subscribe to that view, to an awful lot of people in an awful lot of walks of life.

M.M. It is practically racial discrimination!

G.B. Well, indeed so. Stereotyping diplomacy is very easy to do. We suffer from it enormously and we haven't found any very effective response. There was a case the other day, about travel advice, in the light of recent sad events in the Yemen and Uganda, where a spokesman for the Travel Agents Association or something says - the Foreign Office travel people are bow-tied ex-Oxford types - if anything could be further from the truth I can't imagine but that is the stereotype she wanted to portray because she feels that strikes a chord particularly in the tabloids and perhaps more generally across British public opinion.

M.M. Anti-Foreign Office propaganda.

G.B. Absolutely and widely believed.

M.M. Yes, unfortunately. It's incredible really. Oh well - thank you. I wondered what the position of Campbell was. I recall that Bernard Ingham was similarly outspoken in Margaret Thatcher days although perhaps from a slightly different angle.

G.B. Yes.

M.M. But he was a Civil Servant.

G.B. Yes, he was a Civil Servant and probably not a believer, at least in the early phases. He was a good Press person but I don't think that he was a Thatcherite. I think he became one.

M.M. He started off as a Labour supporter.

G.B. Whereas Campbell is a Blairite: there is no doubt about that.

M.M. Well, it's very sad. Anyhow, after all that, have you actually got anything to say about your time in Saudi?

G.B. Well, it was in the recent aftermath of the Gulf crisis and there were several scares while I was there which brought British military reinforcements to Saudi Arabia. There was in any case a British military presence when I arrived in the shape of aircraft resulting from the Gulf crisis as well as this huge Al Yamamah contract so that the military aspect of things was indeed very prominent in my day to day dealings. Our exports were still doing well particularly at the beginning of the time I was there and the British community was about 30,000 souls which is quite a high figure for a desert community really and it was substantial job. One of our bigger posts and certainly one of our most important these days. A lot of travel within the country - a big country. And then I came a cropper over the Surtees case which I don't know if you know about.

M.M. No, do tell me about the Surtees case. I don't know about that.

G.B. Well -

M.M. He was a British Aerospace man - wasn't he?

G.B. Yes, Mr. Surtees wrote to me in the summer of '94 saying that he had been insulted by a member of the staff of the Consulate in Jeddah who had asked him to pay for a service that he had requested and done so, so he thought, in an impolite manner and he went on to ask why it was that we employed people of Asian origin -

M.M. Not Oxford educated!

G.B. Asian origin in our Consulate and perhaps we should be employing nice British housewives. I didn't like the tone of his letter at all but I responded to it as politely as I could by saying that charging policy was well established and that employment policy was well established and that it was not possible in Saudi Arabia to employ wives on the counter because under Saudi practice and custom women can't appear in public with men. My letter didn't reach him so he wrote another one saying that unless he got a response very quickly he was going to take the matter further and I by then had discovered that he worked for British Aerospace and British Aerospace was a subcontractor to HMG on the afore-mentioned Al Yamamah contract so in effect Mr. Surtees was actually working for the same employer. I thought that his boss ought to be aware of the attitude of one of his employees so I bunged off a note to the British Aerospace Chief Executive and with copies of the correspondence and

the next thing that happened was that British Aerospace summoned him and said why did you do this and sign here. We think that it would be better for all of us if you signed here which, of course, was his resignation. So he resigned and then wrote to his MP and his MP wrote to the Foreign Office and the Foreign Office wrote back and said that it was a matter for British Aerospace and he wasn't happy with that so he went to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman reported and said that my conduct had been wholly deplorable and the Foreign Office then offered him £5000. I thought both of those things were a mistake and I didn't think that my conduct had been wholly deplorable and I didn't think that the Foreign Office should have paid him £5000. The Ombudsman reports are supposed to be anonymous because he covers a whole range of Whitehall departments mostly Customs and Excise and Child Support and things like that. He put out a Press release which was headed British Ambassador reprimanded by Ombudsman or something like that and of course it didn't take very long for the sharks to discover who the British Ambassador was, so my name came out. At that point I thought I had better defend myself and I did. I put out a statement and I gave an interview to 'The Times' which appeared on the front page - most extraordinary it must have been a dull day for news - but anyway there I was on the front page of 'The Times'. This aroused the interest of something called the Select Committee on Public Administration which summoned me on the 12th January. There then unfolded a bizarre chain of events because the Chairman of the committee who is Rhodri Morgan - who is the guy who has just been defeated in Wales - started by saying that he thought my whole attitude was rather Evelyn Waugh like and this was what most people thought of the Foreign Office. The reason he said this was when communicating with the British Aerospace chief executive I had said 'I think this man is one of yours' and Mr. Rhodri Morgan seemed to think that calling someone 'one of yours' was very Evelyn Waugh like! And then it got worse because there were two ladies on the committee who were incensed that I had referred in my communication to British Aerospace to company wives - this is a reference back to Mr. Surtees's suggestion that wives should be employed - and I had said that I didn't think British Aerospace were keen that company wives should be. I knew this because I had checked it around the back that they didn't actually want their wives to work even if they had been able to do so under Saudi custom, and these two ladies went ballistic over the reference to company wives so here was I, I wasn't being questioned about the merits of the case and whether Mr. Surtees had been right or wrong or whether I had been right or wrong, but only that I had used the term company wives and I must say I couldn't believe I was in the Mother of Parliaments.

M.M. Oh dear!

G.B. So it was pretty bizarre.

M.M. An extra-ordinary example of current political correctness.

G.B. And then there was a gentleman called Peter Bradley MP who asked if I had learnt my arrogance on my father's knee or at Eton, which really takes things to a new low I think.

M.M. There has got to be something deeply offensive about that.

G.B. Deeply actually. Happily 'The Daily Telegraph' wrote a nice piece, by a man called Uttley who said that it had sounded like the French Revolution! He was at Eton - off with his head.

M.M. It is breathtaking!

G.B. And all this, of course, about an event which took place four and a half years previously so Scott and Surtees have both been issues on which I have been interrogated years after the event.

M.M. Well, it is enough to make one pretty disenchanted with public service.

G.B. And that is a serious concern.

M.M. Yes, it is.

G.B. I believe in service. In my valedictory I said that when I joined the Foreign Service in about 1964 I was motivated by a sense of duty or sense of service which may sound old-fashioned but I think we lose it at our peril, to be honest. If there aren't people who are prepared to serve their nation then the nation will not be served or be served badly. Anyway that was Saudi Arabia.

M.M. From there you went to India. Coming home in a way, as you must have early memories of being there with your father.

G.B. Yes, Indians tended to say 'didn't you spend your childhood here or weren't you at school here' and the answer is 'no' I was 17,18,19 or even 20 perhaps when I visited my father out there. Which means, of course, my recall was total. We had the same house, it is the same office, even one of the Indian staff was the same, he had risen from lower something or other to Head Bearer.

M.M. Do they still call it 2 KG?

G.B. Well, everybody in the High Commission does but of course now it is called 2 Rajaji Marg that's the official name but my driver called it 2 KG; all the staff of the High Commission called it 2KG.

M.M. Well, the Indians themselves have certainly made a lot of progress since the 1960's in some ways; but how did it strike you?

G.B. It struck me in a kind of schizophrenic way really. In many ways it seemed hardly to have changed. My own personal circumstances would have reinforced that impression i.e. I was living in the same house, commuting the same distance to the High Commission and so on. On the other hand, things had clearly changed. Above all, I suppose, the size of Delhi had rocketed and with that the other way around the size of the population of the country had rocketed. When the Queen came we looked at her brief for her visit in 1961 when my father was High Commissioner and the brief said that the population of Delhi was one million whereas the population of Delhi now is 12 or 13 million and that gives you a ready estimate of what has happened in India; the population has exploded, with that the traffic. The traffic of all forms, lorries, buses, cars, rickshaws, bicycles, bullock carts and with that pollution has exploded. Delhi is now a very dirty city which is a shame.

M.M. Yes, it is. And so you looked up the Queen's visit for 1961 and was that used as a basis for 1997.

G.B. Well, in one way; she had been twice before. Once in '61 and then in '83 for a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and so we did look at the two previous visits as we tried to work out where we might suggest she go on this one. Obviously Delhi was given but outside Delhi we tried to take her to places She hadn't been at all or that She hadn't been in 1983 so that actually gave us Amritsar which was new, Cochin which was new and Madras which She had been to in 1961 but not in 1983 and we structured this to give her as varied an itinerary as possible. It was very much in my mind, it was the hope at the beginning that she would visit Amritsar because of what took place there - the Jalianwalabagh Massacre - and because of the importance of the Sikhs both within India and in this country. There are something like 400,000 Sikhs in Britain and I knew that it would be a gesture that they would enormously appreciate, which was how it turned out. It was quite difficult getting there for one reason or another, I don't mean physically but I meant politically, but she did go.

M.M. To visit the Golden Temple wasn't it?

G.B. And Jalianwalabash.

M.M. Oh, she went to Jalianwalabash!

G.B. Yes, she did.

M.M. What difficulties were the Indians raising over that?

G.B. In India it is so difficult to know what they really think because they don't always say. There are sensitivities. The Sikhs are still a sensitive issue in India as a minority. Secondly would she apologise for Jalianwalabash and I answered "No, because Monarchs don't apologise for what happened a long time ago if indeed an apology was indicated." So would her going there and not apologising be worse than her not going there and not apologising! My calculation was that the gesture would be seen as a real one, just going there. Then, of course, the question of security in the Punjab and so on. And then what happened was that Mr. I.K. Gujral became Prime Minister rather unexpectedly in April 1997. I noticed that one of the first things he did as Prime Minister was to go to Amritsar so when I saw him after that I said that it was in my mind to recommend that the Queen go to Amritsar and he said that is a splendid idea so I reported that back and I renewed my recommendation that she should do that. Then in the summer of '97 when I was out of India on holiday an 'Observer' journalist had an interview with Gujral in which Gujral apparently said that the Queen shouldn't go to Amritsar and that caused some fluttering; then he corrected himself as a result, I think, of some internal discussions in India and said, of course, the Queen was free to go wherever she wanted. So my people here at the Palace and Foreign Office and so on said that's fine we are happy that she should go but we would like the Indians to confirm formally that they are happy that she should go there, because we had had this hiccup. In fact I never got an Indian to say that she would be welcome in Amritsar. I got them to say there is no particular problem and we have organised a reconnaissance trip for you and I am sure the Chief Minister will welcome you and so on. In the end the Queen went essentially on my recommendation and it was brilliant and there were no security problems and it had the impact I had hoped for. She didn't apologise but the fact of her going to Jalianwalabash and she laid a wreath with the Duke was spectacular and meaningful. I am just pleased that it happened and then the Golden Temple was equally dramatic in its way. There was some controversy about whether she would go in in her bare feet which She doesn't do and didn't and whether the socks were of the right colour. She wore some rather ghastly coloured socks in Pakistan but in Amritsar she wore some white socks which were fine. But there were people determined to point fingers -

M.M. Try to wreck it - why?

G.B. Ah! I have asked myself that question a lot. I think the real reason was twofold - one - I think in the end the Indians regretted having asked the Queen to come in the fiftieth year as an independent nation; it was their invitation, after all. The Queen doesn't visit places without being invited to do so but the Prime Minister who had issued the invitation, Narasimha Rao, had been beaten at the elections, 1996; the new government was essentially rather a weak one and quite a lot of Indians were having some difficulty working out what there was to celebrate after 50 years; and here is the Queen arriving to celebrate and well - we're not sure that is quite right, that is the first element. The second element is this - that all the monarchy watchers after the 1st May were on the warpath because the State visit took place 6 weeks or so after Princess Diana was killed and it was the Queen's first outing since then and there were a lot of people watching her every move, seeing how she behaved vis-à-vis would she touch beggars, would she touch lepers, would she do this, do that, how would she behave and in particular with the sort of people Princess Diana was good with and finally, I never thought the English language would be something I would regret but the fact that there was a four and a half hour time difference between Delhi and London and that the major journals in each country are written in English meant that the two media were competing with each other to make this a controversial visit and to a large extent, I regret to say, they succeeded in doing that. Then, of course, we had Mr. Cook's interventions on Kashmir which were not greatly appreciated.

M.M. Weren't the alleged statements by Robin Cook made in Pakistan? So you had no responsibility for that but there was a spin off.

G.B. Yes - I was saying about Kashmir - it really went back to the Labour Party Conference of 1996 when the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party issued a statement about Kashmir which included amongst other things the notion that Britain had an imperial responsibility to resolve the Kashmir issue. So when the Labour government came in in May '97 the Indian hackles were already aroused and then when Mr. Cook made whatever statements he made in Pakistan they really took off. That added to the element that was already determined to make controversy out of the Queen's visit, whether from the Indian end or the British end produced very negative media treatment of the visit which actually wasn't reflected in the visit on the ground. At a human, cultural and geographical levels it was a tremendous success.

M.M. One can imagine. I certainly remember the first visit - fantastic!

G.B. I can't say that it was as dramatic as that. I have seen pictures of the roofs in Delhi with people hanging off the corners but there were lots of people. Delhi, of course, these days, is for security reasons particularly closed down when there is a State Visit; but outside Delhi there were huge crowds, tremendously enthusiastic.

M.M. What is your general feeling about the attitude of the Indians to Britain?

G.B. It is a very complicated affair. I think that some Indians, if not grateful to the British, are anyway mindful of what the British did achieve in India and bequeathed to independent India; others resent the whole colonial period which, of course, was not the first colonial period that India had experienced; and some feel both sentiments, either at the same time or at different times; so its very difficult to get a central pointer for India. The English language, although I said it could have a negative impact in the sense that the Press can feed on each other, it is an extremely bonding influence; Shakespeare is a bonding influence; cricket is a bonding influence; the Indian community in Britain is a bonding influence; there are these bonding influences which make India extremely special and the Indo/British relationship unlike almost any other - but it is at all times a very sensitive and complex relationship.

M.M. Why is it important to us?

G.B. The main reason it's important is a combination of history. I am not one of those people who believe you can just delete history at midnight on the 14th August 1947. You can't delete 200 years or however many years you ascribe to it of history, particularly when it has left the traces I have mentioned. Well, I suppose nowadays the fact there are near on a billion people who call themselves Indians and who occupy a large expanse of the globe is in itself important and hopefully it will become a more prosperous nation and therefore one we can do more business with than we do - it's already in our top 25 markets or something like that. It is somewhere that British Companies have invested a great deal. Britain is still the largest single investor in a historical sense India has. Household names have major operations there - Cadburys, Beechams, Glaxo, ICI, BAT, BOC the list goes on - they have major operations there which go back into history, of course, which are expanding and on the whole very successful. So there is a lot going for Britain in India but India itself has a long way to go before frankly it can look after its own people in a way in which they really ought to become accustomed.

M.M. Yes, it is an absolutely fascinating place and I am sure very important. What about our relationship with the EU do you think that that is going to impinge on our relationship with

India in any serious way.

G.B. It was a question I was asked quite often. My German colleague was furious, as he put it, that India tends to look at the EU through London and he did his best to try and dilute that perspective in Germany's favour and the French are very active in India partly, I think, for anti Anglo Saxon reasons, I mean, they are still bruised by the fact that we got most of India and they didn't and they are very complex say about the Americans and any chance they get to tweak Anglo-Saxon tails they take. The Indians haven't understood the EU, they are very much more familiar with the kind of cold war world in which they were very close to the Soviets and the Americans were close to the Pakistanis and that was, in a way, a kind of stable equilibrium and the British were the British for historical reasons and nobody much else mattered. They haven't followed the evolution of the EU very closely or very well. They found it quite easy to deal with the EU through London and we, of course, were quite happy that they should do that and I suspect that to large extent that will continue to be the case. I was always being asked whether the Euro would make any difference and I said that I didn't think it would. I did say that Indians must get used to negotiating with the EU as a unit essentially on trade matters; essentially within the WTO - the World Trade Organisation - because that was the way trade negotiations were now going to be conducted, of course, they should lobby the individual member states but their focus should be on Geneva and the WTO - they are beginning to wise up to that. One of the good decisions they have taken recently is to join the WTO which was a very unpopular decision in India but I think a necessary one even an inevitable one. But they are still somewhat at sea, I think, that many of the fixed points in India's compass have altered and they are not really sure how to cope with the world as it now is. On the one hand they resent globalisation, particularly if it is called Americanisation, on the other they realise that India, if it is going to prosper, has got to become part of that process. Of course, the younger generation, like so many other younger generations, is in love with jeans and coke and all the usual things.

M.M Yes, an absolutely fascinating place and I am sure you must have enjoyed your time there.

G.B. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

M.M. I think that is probably all I wanted to ask you - unless you have anything to add?

G.B. I think the only thing we probably haven't covered is why I joined the damned thing!

M.M. You said the bit about service - I think that's clear - as it was with your father.

G.B. I never expected to go to India. I joined the Foreign Service when he was High Commissioner in India and one of the reasons I was sent off to learn Arabic, I am fairly sure, was in order to make sure that there was no prospect of our paths crossing. Then, of course, when he became Head of the Diplomatic Service it became quite difficult because he was top of the shop but Lusaka was quite a long way from London so that was OK. Then my career took this largely Arabist path and it wasn't until I was in Riyadh as Ambassador that the thought of India crossed my mind. I had never, never thought that our paths would cross in that way at the end of my career. My father and my mother, of course, he was long dead by then but my mother was absolutely thrilled.

M.M. Did she go out to visit you?

G.B. She came twice. And found it quite changed, I think.

M.M. The overwhelming population, quite unbelievable really.