

BDOHP INTERVIEW

Sir Reginald Alfred Hibbert: career outline. (With, on right, relevant page numbers in Interview number one, to the career stage.)

Born 21 February 1922

Army 1942-5

Entered FO 1946 pp 2-3

3rd Secretary, Bucharest 1947 pp 3-4

FO South East Asia Department 1949 pp 2, 4

(Married Ann Alun Pugh 1949)

2nd Secretary, Vienna 1952 pp 4-5

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Ist Secretary (Commercial), Brussels 1962 (Counsellor 1964) pp 8-10

Chargé d'Affaires, Ulan Bator, Mongolia 1964 pp 10-12

University of Leeds (Sabbatical) 1966 p 13

Counsellor, Political Adviser's Office, Singapore 1967 pp 13-17

(Chairman of JIC, Far East) and Political Adviser to CINC Far East, Singapore 1970

Minister, Bonn 1972 (Chaired JIC, Germany) pp 17-22

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British Diplomatic Oral History Project.

Interview with Sir Reginald Hibbert

on 15 July 1997 by John Hutson.

J.H. You dealt with very important matters at the top of the Diplomatic Service, but before we get there may I ask you about your rather special war service with the SOE in Albania and then in Italy with the Hussars; did that influence your choice of profession at all?

R.H. Well, yes. Certainly in this sense, that when I went into the Army I had really intended to go to the Bar; when I came out of the Army in 1945 I had already become interested in what was going on in the Balkans and Eastern Europe - and also the task of reading for the Bar was going to be rather slow and I was not sure that I wanted to go in for that at that stage - so I submitted myself for the Diplomatic Service examination and was accepted and, of course, once one is accepted for that sort of thing it decides your fate.

J.H. It does indeed decide your fate, as you say. Your almost immediate fate was to go abroad, if not to the Balkans then close by in Bucharest and your subsequent early postings were Vienna, Guatemala, Ankara and Brussels which seem to offer variety if not any particular plan. What do you have to say about your entry into the Service and these first postings?

R.H. I think I should begin by saying that one of my most extraordinary experiences in the Service was in fact at the very beginning, before any of the postings you have mentioned, because when I was accepted for the Service I was telephoned one day from Personnel Department and told to present myself in Paris to the British Delegation at the conference of, I think it was, 31 nations, drawing up the post war peace treaties; so before I had ever been in the Foreign Office I found myself in a room in the George V in Paris and sitting daily at the sessions of the conference trying to draw up the peace treaties as one of the Secretaries of the British Delegation; and from there I came back to London for a few days, a couple of weeks or so, and was then sent off with Mr. Bevin's delegation in the *Aquitania* to New York and there I sat in the background of meetings of the four Foreign Ministers, again as a secretary of the British Delegation, watching the sunsets over New York from the towers of the Waldorf Astoria and seeing how the world's affairs were conducted. Indeed, on one occasion during that stay in New York there was trouble over Trieste and it looked as though the conference was breaking up.

They couldn't find Mr. Bevin's Russian interpreter - Mr. James Byrnes, the U.S Secretary of State, had called a special lunch of the Foreign Ministers to try to iron things out. They whipped round the British Delegation trying to find someone who knew some Russian - I had read Russian at Oxford during 1945/6 - and I was sent in with Mr. Bevin to have lunch with Mr. Molotov and Mr. Byrnes and M. Couve de Murville for France together with their interpreters, the American being Chip Bohler and the Russian being Pavlov, who often interpreted for Stalin. I sat there seeing how the Foreign Ministers really got on together in intimate surroundings. In fact, things were moved forward at that meeting and the conference resumed and I once more reverted to the role of Secretary to the Delegation; but that was an extraordinary experience to be starting off with, seeing life at the very top. They then came back to London and I stayed on in New York to help vet the text of the Treaties in the various languages and then came back to London on the *Queen Mary* after a stay of about 2 months in New York. Then I was taken off to Moscow with Mr. Bevin's delegation for the Council of Foreign Ministers there. That was extraordinary because we got into a train at Dunkerque, the French delegation joined us, we trundled across Europe and as we went across Europe the destruction was greater and greater. It was very bad in Berlin, it was worse in Warsaw; when we got to Minsk we could see some wooden buildings being rebuilt and when we got to Smolensk there was nothing left at all; and suddenly we came across Moscow -Moscow an intact city or virtually an intact city because the Germans hadn't attacked it. Of course, that was in the immediate post war years and there one saw Molotov in action, Vyshinsky in action, Mr.Guser in action and that was quite an eye-opening vision of the way the post-war world was forming. Indeed, on one occasion, at the Opera, I even had a glimpse of Stalin. So, for a young man at that time, it really was quite an extraordinary start to a career. Then I came back to London and was sitting in on the sessions of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers to try to draw up an Austrian peace treaty - Gladwyn Jebb was the principal British negotiator - and then that ended and I was posted off to Bucharest.

In Bucharest what was happening was the communist revolution - when I started off in Bucharest I suppose I must have had something like 100 or so friends and acquaintances among young people in Romanian society; by the time I left two years later they had all disappeared, not all necessarily in prison but because their families had been attacked, damaged, fallen apart. King Michael was exiled and the Communist Government took over. So there I saw a Communist revolution. I did one of the last more or less free tours of Romania that anyone in our Service did for many years because at that time one was still

able to move about; but they closed in on us during my two years there and by the time I left Romania was a Peoples Democracy - a communist governed state.

Then I came back to London. I was supposed to go to Singapore to join the staff of the Commissioner General for South East Asia, but I had had a severe bout of hepatitis in Romania and the Treasury Doctors decreed that I should stay in London. So I was posted to South East Asia Department in the FCO, and in South East Asia Department I was dealing with a part of the world I had never seen, never been to. It was an introduction to a new part of the world. And then after that I was posted to Austria and by then I had a young family. Perhaps I should have said that by the end of my time in Romania one of the extraordinary things was that I wanted to marry my wife and I had to get Personnel Department to act as intermediary for me as communication between Bucharest and London was not at all easy - at that time one could only telephone occasionally - so I had a marriage kindly arranged for me by Personnel Department which is an unusual experience!

J.H. Was Vienna, your next posting, still an occupied City? Because the Austrian peace treaty hadn't yet happened, had it?

R.H. That's quite right. Austria at that time was under quadripartite occupation; Vienna was also under quadripartite occupation. My job in the Embassy was to do with Austrian internal politics and not actually with quadripartite politics, Sir Harold Caccia was High Commissioner/Ambassador and one of the tasks I was given was to take the place of the Ambassador's Representatives in the British Zone - that is to say Carinthia and Styria - when those officials were absent on leave or sick or anything like that; so I was in fact absent from Vienna for about six months in the year, taking the place of these officials down in the British Zone. There the task was to keep in touch with the local authorities and the police authorities, to travel around and I had a really fascinating time getting to know the countryside of Austria as well as the towns. Vienna, of course, was slowly waking up. The Opera had restarted in the Theater an der Wien not in the Opera House; I remember the concerts in the Musikverein and one had a fascinating time getting to know Austria as a whole - getting to know the life in Vienna. Of course, there were restrictions in the sense that we were surrounded by the Soviet Zone but relations with the Russians were not too bad and we had no major troubles.

J.H. Stalin was dead?

R.H. Stalin died while I was there - Stalin died in 1953 and I remember the Soviet ceremonies to mark his death with great torches burning around the Soviet War Memorial - very thin crowds as far as the Austrians were concerned, but massive crowds as far as the Soviet Army was concerned.

J.H. We need to move on - what about your following posts?

R.H. From Vienna I came back to London and worked in Northern Department for three years. Northern Department was the Department dealing with the Soviet Union and my particular portfolio was Soviet Foreign policy; so I began to learn rather more about what the Soviet Union was doing in Eastern Europe and the world. We had the Bulganin - Khrushchev visit to London during that time, which entailed a great deal of work, of course. I learned in London how very gruelling life in the Foreign Office can be with the mass of paper and the constant demand for briefings, for answers to Parliamentary questions, for the writing of papers. They were really three rather hard years, because in Northern Department at that time we were not only working all the week but often on Saturdays and sometimes even Sundays and certainly late at night; the Foreign Office in those days was a place where one was expected to be a very dedicated person. Things eased up curiously when they shut down the telephone system on Saturday morning because the effect of that was that the top people could no longer come in to ask questions and it was therefore possible, sometimes, to get rid of a lot of paper quietly on a Saturday and lead a slightly quieter life. It was extraordinary how the technical process of cutting off the telephones changed the shape of one's work.

J.H. And then you went abroad again?

R.H. Then we went to Guatemala - where the major problem was the relations with the government of Guatemala over British Honduras - Belize; that was the major dominating factor in our lives. Guatemala is a very beautiful country - the country of eternal spring. There were a number of British and American 'finqueros' there, owners of coffee plantations and cattle ranches, and the diplomatic bag came from London only about once a fortnight or once every three weeks; so one was able to get away and see a lot of the country. It was a sad country in a way, because at that time the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer, and one of the really sad aspects of the

countryside was the role played by alcohol in the Indian villages; one could arrive in an Indian village at the weekend and find everyone dead drunk on white spirit celebrating something or other and one was sorry to see the people languishing in that way. I think that what we saw there to some extent explains the revolutionary difficulties that have racked Guatemala in the last two decades. However, we managed to keep our end up as regards British Honduras. We also had the experience there of what earthquakes really mean - there was one period when we had something like 120 shocks in 24 hours; there again, one was sorry for the ordinary people who had no defence against this and had to go and camp in the streets and in the countryside to escape from the tremors; but on the whole it was a very fine experience and we thoroughly enjoyed our time in Guatemala. Although we had these frictions with the Guatemalan Government, they weren't always very real; there was a sort of play acting about the friction and one could cope with that. Of course, one was a maid of all works; I was Head of Chancery, Head of the Commercial Department and Consul so that one had a great variety of work and got to know how the Foreign Service worked over a whole range of activities; and sometimes I was Chargé d'Affaires - we had a Minister in charge and when he went away I was in charge - we were a very small post.

J.H. It may have become smaller since although the problem of Belize has perhaps not quite gone away - gone away from us, perhaps I should say.

R.H. We broke off relations for a time, but they have been renewed now. We had some very faithful friends there upon whom the life of the British community and the work of the British Embassy heavily depended. I won't name any names but I know one or two amongst the Guatemalan population who were very faithful friends indeed of Britain and with whom we have kept in touch to this day.

J.H. That's good to hear. Perhaps this is a point to ask you about the importance or otherwise and the role played by the British Community and by our Diplomatic Missions in connection or non connection with British Communities. Rather a large question.

R.H. Well in every country I have been in we have - when I say we I mean members of the Embassy staff - we have always tried to maintain a close relationship with the British Community. The position with the British Community is, of course, a little difficult at times - in cases where there is friction between Britain and the country

where you are posted you really can't expect the British Community to stand in the front line; they after all have to live their lives there and they have to put up with the difficulties and friction for much longer than any member of the Foreign Service has to. But on the whole it is extremely valuable for an Embassy to have firm roots in the British Community and through the British Community with the local people. Because through the British Community you can get to know some of the native inhabitants of the country apart from your official contacts. My personal view has been that it has always been very important to maintain a good relationship with the British Community even allowing for the fact that the British Community interests are not identical with those of the Embassy; this is where the Embassy has to show a good deal of patience and sympathy with the problems facing the local British Community. If you have a good relationship it can be a marvellous sounding board for the Embassy and it can also be a marvellous source of getting the feeling of what is going on in the country where you are posted.

J.H. What about your return to the European field, because Guatemala was a bit of a one off, if one goes by Continents, in your career?

R.H. Well, when we came back from there I was posted to Turkey. In Turkey my portfolio in the Embassy was CENTO and its activities, so I was not directly involved in the study of Turkish politics. I was engaged in the process of negotiation, discussion, contact within CENTO whose headquarters were in Ankara - that is to say with Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the US - Iraq was no longer a member at that time. The British Ambassador was our representative on the Council of CENTO, of which there were regular meetings, and there was ongoing work in the Aid sector, in the Military planning sector and in the general maintenance of the organisation.

J.H. We must not spend too long on it but I can't help asking what happened to CENTO - one can hardly find it in works of reference these days?

R.H. It faded away in the end. It was one of the Cold War organisations which finally ceased to have a real purpose in the world. But I don't think that means it wasn't necessary at the time.

J.H. Yes, I accept that and after Ankara you went to Brussels, I believe.

R.H. After Ankara I was posted to Brussels, and in Brussels I was the First Secretary

Commercial in the Embassy and there acquired my knowledge of Commercial work. Of course, Belgium was virtually the first country that British business men came to when they came out of England. So, in Brussels, one saw Commercial work in a very intensive form. We had a very big Commercial Department and it was headed by a Commercial Counsellor; my job was really to organise the work of the office under the Commercial Counsellor and it was a job where I learnt more about organisation than anything else; because I found that when doing Commercial work organisation and careful preparation of materials and information for wider dissemination is really the key to the job. It is not that members of the Service themselves are commercial people, good at buying and selling, but what they have is access to people in the Country, knowledge of how to get to doors which are open, how to get through doors which are shut, how to introduce people, how to sift information so that it is readily available in the right form for the businessmen who need it. This is to a very large extent, in my view, an organisational job and takes a certain amount of organisational skill so as to deploy a force of Market Officers; Market Officers have the detailed knowledge and one has to help them to deploy it to the best advantage.

J.H. I have never heard a better summary of our bread and butter Commercial work and I have done a fair bit of it myself so I ought to know something about it. Thank you for that. Anything else about Brussels before we move on?

R.H. Yes, during our time in Brussels - the beginning of the 1960's - we had the anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the anniversary of the liberation of Belgium after the Second World War both occurring in 1964; at that time one had an extraordinary insight into the impact of those wars on the people of North Eastern Europe and the relationship that sprang up between them and the British Army. As you know there are memorials to the dead in those wars - all over the Western part of Belgium - and the number of ceremonies that occurred in that year to commemorate first, last and major battles, incidents in the two Wars, was really quite extraordinary; the staff in the Embassy was fully stretched going to these places to take part in these celebrations. In fact the Ambassador found himself completely over-run with invitations and so did the Ambassador's deputy. I remember on one occasion I was asked to go to a ceremony near Mons; I was told it would be a little ceremony and nobody much would be there, but I would have to make a speech. I went there and found myself in the Square at Mons with a Battalion of the Belgium Army drawn up, a Battalion of the French Army, a large contingent

of Veterans, Prefects from the neighbouring Departments of Northern France and Belgium, high officials of all sorts; I was expected to address this huge crowd in my best French and it was really quite a testing experience as I had not expected anything of this sort; but, of course, one rises to the occasion if one can and one is encouraged and buoyed up by the enormous response of the people.

J. H. Attending these ceremonies would lie outside any bureaucratic definition of diplomatic work and when one thinks of the amount of sentiment still favourable to Britain in Belgium now it would have been a huge mistake not to over stretch oneself and go to all these.

R.H. It is perfectly true that when one is abroad a large part of the work is simply being present, attending, going to things happening in the country where one is posted; I think, in my experience, all members of the Service have taken a full part in that sort of thing and, of course, it fills one's weekends, one's evenings and one's life; but in Belgium it was particularly important because of the extremely close ties between the Belgian people and ourselves. I think a great deal of our work in a country like Belgium does consist of what I suppose should come under the heading of public relations.

J.H. And this is valuable.

R.H. And this was my first taste of that sort of public relations on a really big scale; of course, one had seen something of it in Austria and in Guatemala but nothing comparable to the scale one encountered in Belgium.

J.H. Which must have been a complete contrast to where you moved to next, namely to Mongolia - Ulan Bator - where I believe you were asked to establish a Post which had not previously existed. Could I ask you why we were opening a Post there?

R.H. Yes, I think the reason was fairly straightforward. The Mongolian Peoples Republic had been admitted to the United Nations two or three years earlier after the Russians had finally agreed to open the floodgates for new members to the United Nations; here was Mongolia, a member of the U.N., virtually unknown to the Western world and they themselves began to agitate among possible friendly governments asking that diplomatic representatives be sent there. Now at that time the United States was inhibited from having a relationship with Mongolia because they were in close

relationship with Chiang Kai Shek and Chiang Kai Shek regarded Mongolia as part of China; it would therefore have been difficult for the United States to be represented in Mongolia and still keep their relationship with Chiang Kai Shek on an even keel. I think the scene emerged that, as the Western countries wanted to know what was going on there and as relations between the Soviet Union and China were becoming an interesting subject in world affairs (and of course, Mongolia lies along the Soviet/Chinese frontier in Central Asia), it was decided as an experiment that a Mission would go there to see what was happening. We had already had the British representative in Peking accredited as Ambassador to Ulan Bator, but he could visit only once a year or twice a year and then very briefly; so the decision was taken to try to set up a Mission there and I was sent there to be Chargé d'Affaires. The posting was put to me in an unobtrusive way - that is to say it was intimated to me that if I accepted a posting to Ulan Bator I would be promoted to Counsellor but if I didn't accept that it would be difficult to predict when promotion to Counsellor would be coming; so, of course, off I went. I went off to Mongolia accompanied by one man, my assistant, and we went out via Peking. We arrived by train. We were met by the Head of Protocol and lodged in the local hotel, the only hotel in Ulan Bator which had been built by the Chinese and furnished by the Czechs; and we began to live the life of Ulan Bator. What I found there was that one had to be something of a Boy Scout; I suppose something near 80% of one's time was taken up with self-administration - that is to say simply keeping the Mission going. Food was very difficult at first; in fact, supplies of all sorts were very difficult. We had to depend on the hotel restaurant initially and the shortage of food was sometimes quite extraordinary; there were days when there was nothing but fried eggs to eat. We laid on a supply line from Hong Kong via Peking and once one got that going - there was a delay of two to three months in things arriving - but once it was going we were able to keep a supply flowing in and I laid on another supply line from Copenhagen, Ostermann and Petersen, which came across Siberia, for costly and concentrated goods - especially drink. First of all I shared a little two room suite with this man who came with me. When my wife came out about three months later, she and I moved into a three room suite which really became the residence of the British Mission; and the assistant moved into a little two room suite of his own next door. Then later on we swapped him for a married couple and so we became four Brits in Mongolia and the Russians took the three rooms opposite us in the corridor so as to keep an eye on us; and so we got going. And the Queen's Messengers came once every three weeks. The difficulty was, especially for my wife, that we had had to leave our children at home in school including our youngest,

a seven year old, which was rather hard and communication with them was extremely slow because it took about six weeks to have a return of letters - there was no telephone communication. I could sometimes telephone Peking if I waited until the people who listen were on duty, and very, very rarely I could get through to Moscow. We were really rather cut off but it was a very interesting experience. Mongolia is about the size of Western Europe with a population at that time about that of Birmingham, so you had vast areas of virtual emptiness with just the odd wandering herds tended by a Mongol family. We were able to travel, although with care; we always had to be accompanied, and not just for reasons of security because there was nothing to hide, but really because it is a country where you can get lost; in winter certainly, if your car breaks down, you have had it. So we got around and they were helpful to us and I think I was in a lucky position; the Mongols were delighted to see us; we were the only capitalists - I suppose I can say the only Western Mission in Ulan Bator - members of a Diplomatic Corps which was otherwise communist from top to bottom, through and through. The Mongols were pleased to see us there because it showed that they were becoming properly independent; the Russians were pleased to see us there because it showed that what the Chinese said about Russian domination of Mongolia wasn't quite true; the Chinese were pleased to see us there because it meant that there was somebody there besides the Russians or as the Chinese Ambassador used to indicate, somebody civilized to talk to! It was a quite unique experience because we were in fact admitted to the all-communist Diplomatic Corps there on a footing of complete equality simply because we were the only exceptional ones; you couldn't set up a special regime for a single Mission, and we were allowed to tag on to the rest of the Diplomatic Corps, took part in all the major ceremonies of State as part of the Diplomatic Corps, and sat at the high table at all their Banquets. Curiously, given their system of protocol, the top people would sit in the middle of one side of the top table everybody else, members of the Government and the Diplomatic Corps, would be placed according to their protocol seniority around the table, so that in fact, although the most junior member, I would always end up across the table opposite and only three or four feet from Tsendenbal and other leading members of the Government and their important visitors from the Soviet Union. I have written about my time in Mongolia here and there; it was an experience not to be forgotten; I think I can say that after two years we had exhausted the pleasures that were possible for a member of the Diplomatic Corps there. The only other thing I would add is that it is an extraordinary fact that I think I was the first resident representative of a Western government to reside in the capital of the Mongols since the 13th century, when two

friars had been sent by St. Louis of France and Pope Innocent IV to investigate what had been happening in the Mongol lands after the Mongols had swept up to the doors of Hungary and had begun to look as if they were going to invade Europe; but, of course, the invasion faded away and these monks resided for a short while in Karakorum, the capital of the Mongols, and from that date until the time I took up residence there I think I am right in saying that there was no resident representative of a Western government in the Mongolian capital. And when a Frenchman came to take up his post there at the end of my two years I tried to persuade him to write a letter to President de Gaulle saying that he, the successor of the envoy of St. Louis, was writing this report to him, the successor of St. Louis. I don't think he had the courage to do it.

J.H. I think de Gaulle might have liked that.

R.H. I think he would.

J.H. Well, thank you for that picture which is indicative of the variety that can occur and indeed the hardships, although you rather made light of them, in the Diplomatic Service. After that a complete change was almost inevitable. Am I right in thinking that you then moved straight, without a London posting, to Singapore?

R.H. No, I was brought back to London and given a sabbatical year at Leeds University. I went to Leeds University because in the Chinese studies department there the Professor was Owen Lattimore whom I think people will know of; he was one of the few people in the Western world who had a real knowledge of Mongolia. I went to Leeds University and did some writing there and contributed in whatever way I could to knowledge about Mongolia and then was posted to Singapore. But in a way the experience at Leeds was not altogether satisfactory because Mongolia was so unknown that nobody seemed to know what I could usefully do; however it was useful to me. And then I went to Singapore.

J.H. Singapore must have been extraordinary itself in as much you were in the Office of the Political Adviser to the Commander in Chief South East Asia and then you became the Political Adviser in charge of that Office so it wasn't the conventional Diplomatic Mission; what was its job?

R.H. When I first went there my principal job was to be chairman of the Joint Intelligence

Committee Far East which was the intelligence organ of the Commander in Chief Far East and his Army, Navy and Air Force colleagues; that was a full time job because the Far East is quite a big place - the Far East and South East Asia. The war of resistance to Indonesia had just finished in Malaysia at that time and the armed forces in the Far East were settling down to a more peacetime routine than they had previously enjoyed. The work on the intelligence side was to keep the military briefed about what was happening all through the Far East and to find out for oneself about what was happening all through the Far East. What I learned there, I think to my great benefit, was that the military are very exigent in their planning, timings, briefings, and information material. I think that it was there that I learned to provide 10 minutes worth of information in 10 minutes or 5 minutes worth in 5 minutes and to do things on time and to be clear and succinct. I was also able to travel very widely; I visited all the South East Asian countries, Far Eastern countries, Australia and New Zealand (because, of course, we had close working relationships with the Australians and New Zealanders), up to Japan and Hawaii, where the American Pacific fleet has its Headquarters. As a result I acquired an extremely wide knowledge of the Far East and South East Asia. I suppose some of my Diplomatic colleagues thought I was getting in their way now and then - interfering in their provinces; but that is part of the characteristics of that sort of job. At the time there was the Vietnam War, and I used to go up to Vietnam and liaise with the Americans up there - Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, all the countries involved in and affected by the American/Vietnam War. Working with the Armed forces was an extremely valuable experience because the British armed forces based at Singapore at that time were quite powerful and there was a substantial Fleet and Air Force and, of course, the British Army. One got to know the senior officers of the armed forces. When I first went there it was General Carver, later Field Marshal Lord Carver, who was the Commander-in-Chief; and after him it was Admiral Hill-Norton, later Admiral of the Fleet Lord Hill-Norton, who became Chief of the Defence Staff after Field Marshal Carver; and the third Commander-in-Chief under whom I served was Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burnett. So, in fact, I had experience of working with very senior officers of all three armed services; and my wife and I gained a very wide acquaintance with officers of all those services in Singapore and throughout the Far East, Hong Kong and so on. This was a very valuable experience and one that we look back on with very great pleasure and one that is a bit unusual for a Foreign Service Officer.

J.H. I think that is true but you must have had contact with the Army and Air Force in

Germany. But we will come to that. In the meantime could I ask: weren't we very close to withdrawal from the Far East, in fact, from everywhere east of Suez, and when did that begin to impinge on the work of this Office - presumably when you were actually the Political Adviser?

R.H. It became our major preoccupation because Mr. Healey and George Thomson - later Lord Thomson - came out to announce the beginning of the run-down and to call on the Commander-in-Chief and his staff to plan the run-down. In fact, managing the run-down became our major preoccupation. My move to become Political Adviser was part of the run-down in the sense that the office itself was reduced in size and I was switched across to become the Political Adviser as the whole apparatus slimmed; but, of course, as Political Adviser I was even more closely in contact with the senior officers than I had been as Chairman of the JIC; the run-down was completed by 1971, I think I am right in saying, so my last two years there were nearly all run-down.

J.H. There was one slight upset or at least a complication with the withdrawal which happened, of course, at the other end of the Gulf when Iraq was very annoyed both with the Shah and ourselves and broke off relations; was there anything similar further East - any loss of influence and so on which was serious for us?

R.H. No, there were serious misgivings about our withdrawal - you cannot expect people to accept a thing like withdrawal with equanimity as though it is an everyday thing. The Australians and New Zealanders at first had many misgivings and, of course, Malaysia and Singapore had too; but as the process went on it became possible to work out arrangements which gave everybody some degree of reassurance. One of the difficulties at the time was that the Vietnam war was going on and people just did not understand for a large part of the time what was going to be the outcome of the Vietnamese war. There was a tendency for people to accept the domino theory; that is to say that if the Americans did not win in Vietnam the countries of S.E. Asia would fall like dominoes to communist domination. In fact we have seen that that was not the case - that the domino theory was not a valid one and S.E. Asia has survived extremely well without us. But the transition from a large powerful military force in Singapore to none was a delicate one and had to be very carefully managed. I think it should be remembered that the plans for withdrawal were not at all welcome in the armed forces in the Far East. I remember that when Mr. Healey came out and addressed the assembled Staff Officers in Singapore and

spoke for the first time about the major plan for withdrawal he was facing a hostile if polite and disciplined audience; but what was remarkable was that by the end of the morning the audience was not noticeably hostile and had begun to understand what was being put to it; I think that this is a remarkable tribute to Mr. Healey's political and diplomatic skills. Perhaps also I should make a comment about the Commanders-in-Chief. I think, if I can make such a comment, that Field Marshal Carver was a man of great intellectual power who could always see well over the horizon and as a result was sometimes regarded as rather aloof by some of his subordinates; in fact he was a very capable and inspiring leader but, as I say, seeing over the horizon he didn't perhaps always see what was under his feet, but nevertheless he was a great leader there. Admiral Hill-Norton was in many ways the opposite - Admiral Hill-Norton saw as far as the horizon I would say, but probably not beyond it; but I would say that Admiral Hill-Norton would be a great man to be with in a tight corner and I had a great admiration for his skills, as a personality, and as a leader of men - though I must add that I was sometimes grateful that I was not a member of the Royal Navy and had my own independent Service to back me and give me support. The third Commander-in-Chief, Sir Brian Burnett, was a very kind man, a very gentle man and I think he was admirably suited for the final phase of the rundown when the task throughout S.E. Asia was that of reassurance and instilling of confidence in spite of the whittling away of our presence there. But on the whole I found work with the military very worthwhile and interesting. The military tended to be a bit impatient with what they called diplomatic hesitation and diplomatic niceties, but on the whole it worked out very satisfactorily and we managed to get through without too much 'sock it to them' on the military side or too much hesitation and 'don't do anything' on the diplomatic side. So I think we managed to strike a reasonable balance on most occasions. But it was extremely interesting visiting all those countries in the Far East, seeing their problems and seeing the problems of our own Diplomatic Missions there, who were all working in difficult circumstances and naturally tended to have a rather narrower view than I was able to take as one who travelled around and saw a bit of everything. In that I was very lucky.

J.H. Quite, if you were in Djakarta and your building was burned down, you would take a rather different view of things perhaps.

R.H. I would quite agree, but on the other hand the overall view was one that had to be put together.

J.H. Did the change of Government before the withdrawal was complete make a difference?

R.H. No, there was none that was really noticeable. The withdrawal continued. We had the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Singapore at that time; Mr. Heath came out, Sir Alec Douglas Home - later Lord Home - and some very senior important people, and that too was a way of seeing how the world is governed at the top; but the run down went on independently of that sort of event which in fact served as part of the political transition - that is to say from a military presence to a more purely political presence and interest in the region.

J.H. Thank you. Now we should return to Europe; especially as I believe your next posting was Bonn. This was just about the time of our entry to the European Community which must have been a major occupation or preoccupation perhaps in all your remaining posts. Perhaps you will say if that was the case. Did you go straight to Bonn after leave or was there a time in the F.O.?

R.H. No, I went straight to Bonn at the end of my time in Singapore - unfortunately I was not able to stay in Singapore until the very last - I left a few weeks before the final withdrawal so as a result I was not able to see the final sail-past of the Far East Fleet or the final fly-past of the Far East Air Force, which I was rather sorry to miss. I came back, had a short leave in England and was posted to Bonn as No. 2 in the Embassy - as the Minister - at the beginning of 1972. And in Bonn, having been Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee Far East, I became Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee Germany, which was at that time one of the functions of the Minister at the Embassy. So again I saw a great deal of the Armed Forces in Germany; I used to go up regularly to Rheindahlen for meetings with the Commanders-in-Chief and meetings with the JIC I used to go to Berlin quite regularly too, performing the same sort of functions. Apart from that I simply acted as No.2 in the Mission. In fact, when I first went there the major issue was the Eastern Treaties and the agreement on Berlin. They were just being concluded and one of my first duties was to be Chargé d'Affaires after the departure of Sir Roger Jackling, who was the Ambassador when I arrived, until the arrival of Sir Nicholas Henderson who was the new Ambassador. I found myself taking part in the negotiation of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin and the various diplomatic complements of Bonn's policy of relaxing tension by negotiating the Eastern treaties.

J.H. Could you briefly describe the Eastern treaties for those who don't know.

R.H. The Eastern treaties were the agreements that the Government in Bonn was making with the Soviet Union and its satellites, which were related to the east-west compromises which finally took their form in the Helsinki Agreement. They weren't treaties, except for the Helsinki Agreement, which the British Government was directly concerned in. They were treaties which Bonn was making with the Soviet Union and its partners which were the accompaniment to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin. It was the quadripartite agreement on Berlin that we were chiefly involved in. So I found myself engaged on that for a little while, which was a dramatic reintroduction to European Affairs and more particularly to Eastern European affairs. Apart from that my job was that of No.2 in the Mission, that is to say taking on the duties that the Ambassador couldn't take on. The Ambassador in a place like Bonn is a much sought after person and can't possibly accept all the duties and functions which he is invited to take part in, so the two Ministers - there is a Minister Economic as well - have to take on a great number of public activities to relieve the pressure on the Ambassador. My job was to keep an eye on the political work of the Embassy and the reporting to London from Bonn and in general to have a finger on the pulse of life in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Berlin. So that was what occupied me for the next four years. I think that in that time I managed to visit practically every part of the Federal Republic. As I said, I used to go often to Berlin and also to East Berlin to keep in touch with our people there. And I watched the steady development of the Federal Republic from the regime of Willy Brandt to the regime of Helmut Schmidt.

J.H. Brandt was Chancellor for most of your time?

R.H. No, he was there when I went there and then Helmut Schmidt became Chancellor in about the middle of my posting.

J.H. Brandt, I suppose there has been a great deal written about him but he was an interesting character; I saw him in action as Mayor of Berlin when he was, I think, superb. But there were more mixed feelings about him, certainly in his later days as Chancellor.

R.H. Willy Brandt was a man who brought a great deal of inspiration to politics and I think that it is the inspiration that he gave to the policies of the Federal Republic which made possible the settlement with the East - settlement is not quite the right word because

it was a compromise, a balance, but it was Willy Brandt who made it possible by the inspiration he gave - the acceptance of a degree of détente in and around Berlin and a degree of détente which eventually made possible the Helsinki agreements. Now the man who gives inspiration is not always the best possible detailed administrator. I suppose Helmut Schmidt had a firmer hand on the day to day business of government than Willy Brandt himself had; but in matters of political leadership one can't be too fussy; one has to be grateful for the genius and ability of the people who are in power at any given time, and I think Germany was very lucky to have both of them.

J.H. Indeed, I think Brandt had a second triumphant career after he left office. Although we can't go into that too much, he retained inspiration in his dealing with North/South international affairs thereafter.

R.H. Then, of course, there is a third man who was busy in Germany at that time whose name is often forgotten and that was Herr Wehner. Herr Wehner played an extraordinarily important part in bringing the Social Democratic Party of Germany away from its stronger left-wing leanings.

J.H. Marxist.

R.H. Marxist leanings, yes - and bringing it to the more moderate policies which it then followed on the basis of what was called the Godesberg Memorandum; but I think Herr Wehner's role in providing the Party background - the Party political support to the Chancellor should not be forgotten.

J.H. Yes, I'm sure. Although I don't know too much about Herbert Wehner but that just illustrates your point. What impression did visitors from the British government make at that time because, given the importance of Germany, you must have had quite a lot to do with them; particularly perhaps in our first years of membership of the EEC - we actually joined on the 1st January 1973.

R.H. Yes. We started at that time with a Conservative Government and then later we had the Wilson Government with Mr Callaghan as Foreign Secretary. So we saw something of all of them at different times. I think that then as now one of our fundamental difficulties in Germany has been that the opinion formers in Britain have never fully understood the predicament of Germany, any more than they have in many ways understood the

predicament of France. To my mind it is this that marks Britain off from some of its Continental neighbours. One has to understand how shattered Germany was, how long the process of recovery has been in spite of the brilliant exterior, in spite of the economic miracle, in spite of the prosperity which Germany has acquired and the extent to which turning Germany into a fully fledged democratic member of the European Community of Nations, how delicate that has been. I think that Herr Brandt's work with the Eastern Treaties and our work with the Berlin settlement all contributed to that, but I was always surprised by the suspicion that one encountered here in Britain amongst leading British politicians, amongst writers and informed journalists, about the motivation of the German Government, the motivation of the French Government for that matter and the rather over-heavy commitment I would say to the idea that one was going to have to fight diplomatically against the Soviet Union for ever. My own belief was, and has always been, that one day the Soviet Union would collapse because of its own internal forces, but I didn't expect that to take place in my life-time; but nevertheless, I think that I have always believed that it was possible to establish a degree of détente; that is to say that amount of détente which would ensure that there was no explosion into war - without believing of course that it could ever become real peace. I think that our work at that time was very largely directed, especially by the Germans themselves, towards establishing just that little band of détente at a certain level which would defuse the dangers of the Cold War without giving away essential points to the other side. This was what our work was really all about. As I say, I don't think this was always fully understood by people here in England. They were very suspicious of détente, they thought that détente was perhaps a form of surrender. I don't think it was. I think in fact that in the end all these things have contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and its collapse.

J.H. Thank you. So I gather that the mechanism of the EEC as such which has been dominating a lot of things certainly since we joined didn't impinge too much on your work in Bonn at that time. It was, of course, the first years.

R.H. Certainly not on my work on the political side. It did impinge, I think, a great deal on the work which was being done on the economic side, by the Economic Minister and all the people who worked with him. But I must say that I myself was not ever very deeply involved in talk about the EEC. My job on the political side, and certainly as Chairman of JIC Germany was more analysing the political confrontation with the Soviet Union and managing the analysis in the Embassy of Germany's political evolution and what is generally called the German question. That was really what I was

largely engaged on and it was others who were engaged on the complex work as regards our joining the EEC.

J.H. Yes, I have sort of excuses for asking the question again; one is that it was almost simultaneous with our actually entering the Community that we had the first oil price shock, which ended the years of easy growth when more money solved every European Community problem; which was terribly unfortunate, I think. And also, from beginning of the Labour government in 1974, there was the desire to renegotiate the Treaties, for political reasons I suppose; but there again that would impinge more on the work of your Economic colleague.

R.H. Yes, I have quite a good memory of the oil shortage because Germany had non-driving days when one had to go everywhere by bicycle or on foot but that's just an anecdotal side of things. I think at that time there was always that uneasy feeling that Britain was not really impressing its neighbours as one would have wished as a diplomatic representative to have impressed them. That to some extent passed me by as I was engaged on a different aspect of work where Britain was in fact a leader - as a member of NATO, as the country that provided the armed forces, the principal forces in the north German plain alongside the German army. Obviously one was operating in a field where Britain's prestige was high. But there was an uneasy feeling about our relationship with the European Community and the way in which dealings within the Community were going. I think that one saw it when some leaders of the Government came over and there were some uneasy occasions that occurred both when Mr. Heath was Prime Minister and when Mr. Wilson was Prime Minister. Certainly the ride in Europe at that time was bumpy.

There is one other thing about an Embassy like the Embassy in Bonn; it is a huge organisation. I think it is true to say that if you added up the staff of the British Embassy at Bonn, the British Consulates General in Germany and the British diplomatic staff in Berlin we were at battalion strength - really a huge operation. So there was a big administrative load and a big personnel and welfare load to be carried there. And then, of course, there was a constant public relations task, making speeches all over the place and helping the Ambassador by taking on speaking commitments that he couldn't undertake, the whole operation being conducted in German. So one's time was cut out keeping up with all these things; first of all keeping this huge organisation on the rails and keeping up with the administration that was necessary because of the spread and depth of our commitments in Germany; keeping up with the armed forces and being familiar with them;

going to visit cities in Germany and taking part in meetings of Chambers of Commerce, dinners, lunches, all sorts of things; making speeches; and, of course, reading, making sure one knew something about Germany; and also dealing with a constant stream of high level visitors to Bonn. This was really a full time occupation - weekends and nights as well - I am saying that not as a complaint but simply as an explanation of the variety and richness of the experience one had there.

J.H. I think it is useful for perhaps academic historians to be reminded of the background, just as it is useful for them to be reminded what life is really like in No. 10 where it is not like academe. Thank you for that. Perhaps it's time we went to 1975 and '76 - you went back then as Assistant Under Secretary of State in the FCO; may I ask what your responsibilities were?

R.H. When I went back to London Mr. Callaghan was still Foreign Secretary and I became the Assistant Under Secretary for European Affairs and did that for a year or so and then moved up to become the Deputy Under Secretary and what's called the Political Director in the Foreign Office. Political Director is a European title adopted from our European neighbours meaning the man who sat in the Political Committee of the 'Nine' preparing work and business for the meetings of the nine Foreign Ministers and generally working towards co-operative endeavours in foreign policy.

J.H. Were you the first holder of this office?

R.H. No, no, there were two or three before me - Sir Oliver Wright was at one stage and I succeeded Sir Alan Campbell in that position. The task of Political Director was an evolving one then. The Political Committee of the 'Nine' was a committee meeting outside the provisions of the Treaty of Rome.

J.H. I am not sure that it is a separate one now.

R.H. It still is to some extent; political consultation is not completely under the Treaty of Rome; the two things are co-ordinated. The Political Committee of the 'Nine' met once a month and we had the complicated so-called COREU (correspondence Européenne) system of communication by which we were constantly in touch with one another. In my time as Political Director I visited virtually every capital city in Europe for bilateral talks of some sort, mostly about the ongoing work aimed at détente, related that is to say, to the Helsinki operation and the Mutual and Balanced

Force Reduction negotiations. I was in pretty constant touch with my German and French colleagues but also the Italian, Dutch and all the others; and as I said, we met once a month for a couple of days and there was quite a strong network of supporting committees. The whole thing became more and more elaborate as time went on. As Political Director one was able to have a finger in almost every pie in the sense that there was hardly any international matter of importance that didn't at some stage come up for discussion amongst the 'Nine' and in the Political Committee of the 'Nine'. Our function as the Political Directors was to prepare the meetings of the Foreign Ministers and to deal with and pursue the decisions reached by the Foreign Ministers. This was quite an ongoing commitment; I think that it evolved even while I was doing it. In addition to the consultations with the 'Nine' you had most important consultations with the Americans, because the most important ally for the 'Nine' was the United States. So consultation with the United States was also a major commitment. And we still had our quadripartite responsibilities for Berlin, and there again I found myself as Political Director having a certain continuing role in that after I left Germany. So there was quite a range of subjects one dealt with. In European affairs I would say that the subjects I was most involved in or most concerned with were the pressure points in Europe - that is to say what was happening around the North Cape, Murmansk and so on and at sea around Norway, what was happening around Berlin and Germany, what was happening in Yugoslavia and the Balkans and what was happening in the Eastern Mediterranean including Cyprus. Those were the subjects that most frequently occurred for quite understandable reasons, and when I say I was Deputy Under Secretary for Europe those were the European subjects that I personally was most engaged in. In addition we had things like the Gibraltar question, which also was a pressure point of a different sort - not an East-West pressure point. Otherwise the day to day conduct of European Affairs would be in the hands of the Assistant Under Secretary who would be dealing with the regular work of the Embassies. But as Political Director my attention had to be focussed very largely on what was being discussed amongst the 'Nine'. By then Dr. David Owen had become Foreign Secretary, so I found myself often at David Owen's elbow at that time. A major problem was the follow up to the Helsinki Final Act and so the question of détente came up again in that context; and there again I would argue that the major problem facing the 'Nine' was how to manage the narrow band of détente which seemed so necessary for the preservation of the equilibrium in Europe - that is to say sufficient détente to avoid dangerous flare-ups but not so much détente that we lost ground. This was really what it was all about and I think again that the

German view on this was not fully understood. In Britain people tended to think that Germany was perhaps a soft option - too inclined to give things away to the Soviet Union. I think that that is very unfair. The Germans stood their ground remarkably well and we were able to do so with them; but the quadripartite process and the work of the 'Nine' was a process of grinding out this band of détente and ensuring that it was maintained in a stable form. One of the big things we had at that time was the follow-up meeting on the Helsinki Final Act at Vienna. That involved a great deal of work. The interesting thing then was that we were sometimes a bit torn between the Americans and our European partners, for various reasons. Partly because of their own superior strength - the Americans were less inclined to calculate Soviet sensitivities than some of our European partners were. This sometimes pulled us in opposite directions: should we go along with the Americans and be tough, or should we go along with the Europeans and be conciliatory? There was a constant balance required there, and I think there was a lot of unfair comment about it written by various so-called experts and commentators. In fact, the Germans stood their ground quite well and the Americans went along perfectly well with the consensus, and we did too, but there were little tensions here and there.

J.H. Yes. Could I put questions in the guise of comment - first of all you make it sound as if we already had the 'Nine' running a joint Foreign Policy - you were dealing with world affairs as a member of the Political Committee of the 'Nine' not with internal European Union affairs - and secondly, wasn't there opposition in Britain from both sides - you had people who were against the so called twin track decision on nuclear weapons - the Harmel Report - and the people more to the Right perhaps who didn't appreciate the difficulties of the German position.

R.H. Yes, I think that perhaps as far as work amongst the 'Nine' was concerned the first important point to make is that it was extraordinarily time-consuming. When you have discussions between representatives of nine Governments round the table it takes quite a long time, because everybody likes to have their say; and quite frankly not all of them have a say that is worth very much and sometimes those that have least to say speak longest. These are just normal human difficulties, but I would say that amongst that 'Nine' we did at that time, and have since, made some extraordinarily good progress. It is perfectly true that each Government liked to maintain its independence and to be seen to be maintaining its independence. We always said that that was a characteristic of

the French, but in fact I think that it was a characteristic of everybody including ourselves. And when something was decided every Government liked to pretend that it was their initiative, that it was winning, and that it was dominant. Quite often this was not true, that is to say it was an initiative that had been carefully worked out and ground out as the result of hours and hours of discussion and work and negotiation. I think we made reasonably good progress, and the progress we made at the C.S.C.E. follow-up meeting in Vienna is really the proof of that, because in the end the West stood firm there and the Russians didn't get away with what they were trying to get away with. In fact the existence of the Helsinki Final Act and the C.S.C.E. process played a very big part in the downfall of the Soviet Union, not least because the Helsinki Final Act was published throughout the Soviet bloc. It was really the first time that people in the Eastern countries had seen any definition of the sort of rights which ought to be enjoyed and I think that this had a powerful effect on them. Now it is an effect which is extremely difficult to measure, but it was partly the cause of the agitation which began to occur, which began to well up, and which finally resulted in the fall of Communism in the satellite countries, and the gradual evolution of a better way. Economic troubles also led them in the same direction. I personally am not a believer in the theory that the Soviet Union was brought down by the pressure of the armaments race; it played a part but I don't think that it played a decisive part. I think that the decisive part was the rottenness of the system and the way in which détente coupled with containment, that is to say the two-track policy, maintained the pressure on the Soviet Union and the Satellite countries over many years until the system burst and collapsed. I think this should be the right interpretation of what happened at that time. Now, of course, there were ups and downs in the negotiations and there were times when we were impatient with the Germans and the Germans with us, or we were impatient with the French and the French with us, or everybody was impatient with everybody else; but in fact by this long and extremely time-consuming process, and I may say very irritating process at times, sitting for hours talking about these things, one reached a measure of reasonable agreement which enabled us to hold the front against the Soviet Union, both in terms of military strength and in terms of keeping tension down, which finally broke the iron curtain.

J.H. Could I ask, before we end this session, what does this make you think? What view do you take about the prospects for the European Union's present endeavors towards a joint Foreign and Defence policy? It seems to me that once the Americans took the lead in Bosnia the defence half of it has worked rather well so far, but the joint foreign

policy, a rather hasty recognition of these little countries and particularly Bosnia which is possibly not a viable State at all, was less successful. What do you think about our chances of a joint foreign and defence policy gradually evolving and working in the way you have described earlier?

R.H. I think you can make considerable progress towards joint foreign policy. It is much more difficult to make progress towards a unified defence policy. First of all, only countries which have a real defence capability are capable of having a real defence policy. As the European Union expands the number of countries which are really capable of contributing to a defence policy, to an actual defence structure, diminishes in proportion. What you find is that you remain with the core countries which have always been the core countries of NATO, the core countries of the WEU - the Western European Union. My own feeling is that the correct way for European defence to evolve is by the development of the WEU in harmony with NATO. I think that is probably, broadly speaking, what the Government aims at. I think that the idea that you can go beyond that to a European defence organisation, integrated with the European Union, is probably pie in the sky, certainly at the moment.

J.H. Some major members of the European Union seem to want to go that way.

R.H. That is so, but I think there we come to this point - do we really understand what France and Germany have been after and are after. I think first of all (and here come on to France which we haven't spoken about but we can do that later) French policy on these matters is very largely conditioned by the French fear of Germany, by the fact that France has suffered enormously in the present century and at the end of the last century at the hands of Germany and the French aim is to keep Germany tame - that is to say, contained within a European system. They would like that system to be European because it is only by being European that it can be largely guided by France. Now that is the secret of French policy. I think in defence terms it doesn't make a lot of sense, but nevertheless in political terms in France it does make a lot of sense. Slowly one has got to find a compromise here. As regards Germany, the point is that Germany is still feeling its way to being Germany; it has only been reintegrated for a relatively short while; the Eastern side is not yet fully or properly integrated. Germany has yet to face up fully to the new situation facing it: that is to say where it has a direct frontier for which it is itself responsible with these countries in the East, though with fragments of the old Soviet bloc between it and the new Russia. Germany has been anxious above all to

ensure that it gets on well with its European neighbours, which means primarily with France; and so you get a tendency for Germany and France - above all France - to aim at a degree of defence integration which we are bound to consider unrealistic and which I think probably is unrealistic. We for our part have perhaps been too much obsessed with the idea that the NATO boat would be rocked if we did anything that would be in any way independent of the United States. I personally think that that is overdone. But, of course, experience of the relationship with the United States is the dominant experience at the top of the British establishment ever since the War, so I think that it is understandable if we tend to veer too much in that direction. Nevertheless, I think if we understood rather more clearly what France is after, and what Germany is after, we would find it easier to develop policies which would give them some accommodation and make it possible to lead to a more integrated European defence without leading to a unified European defence independent of the United States. I am quite sure that our defence is going to have to be integrated with that of the United States, that is through NATO; and the question then is which are the countries of Europe which can contribute to a proper defence policy. Obviously they are not very different from those we have known for the last twenty or thirty years. And how is that to be organised. The obvious organ for that would be the WEU or something like it, working in harmony with NATO and the European Union but not in fact a part of the European Union itself.

J.H. If I could revert to the Bosnia example of the joint work; our military side really only worked there once the Americans decided to put some of their troops in, didn't it?

R.H. Yes, but I think that that was largely fortuitous. The real trouble in Bosnia is that we all started off with a wrong appreciation of what the situation was in the old Yugoslavia, in the collapse of Yugoslavia. The European countries failed to appreciate that Serbian nationalism had to suffer a direct check if the situation in the Balkans was to be satisfactorily re-established, and we failed to do that. The Americans perceived that more of a direct check was necessary but were themselves not particularly keen to deliver it because they are so afraid of people being brought home in bodybags. When the Americans did come in, this gave the Western powers the muscle to deliver a check to the Serbs, but it still wasn't a sharp enough one. In fact, I would argue that the war in Bosnia finished a couple of days too early, just as the war in Iraq did.

J.H. I recall you wrote to *The Times*, some time ago now in the early stages of the war (between Moslems and Serbs largely as it was then), saying that a controlled relaxation of the arms embargo - which was hitting the Moslems much harder than the Serbs - would give the Serbs a check at that time. And I thought, what a good idea, but how would you get several nations running a joint policy to implement something so complex, when one dominant country could have perhaps done such a thing. Doesn't a common policy have to be a lowest common denominator?

R.H. To some extent, but not necessarily completely so. It can be a little bit further up the scale. The point is that our own national appreciation of the situation was not correct, and the French and German appreciation was not correct, and the American appreciation was not correct either, though it may have been in some respects a little more correct than ours. But as I say, in the American case the follow-up to their own appreciation was for part of the time missing. The trouble with dealing with the former Yugoslavia has been, as I say, mistakes from the very beginning, and I personally think that the whole idea of Western intervention was wrong. I don't think that our soldiers should have been there and I don't really think that they should be there to-day. What we should have done is to say "here are these people, the Serbs, invading Bosnia: let the Bosnians defend themselves, let the Croats defend themselves". It's true that the difficulty might then have arisen that you have to arrive at the point when you have to say "now we must defend the Serbs against the Bosnians or against the Croats" but this is the nature of Balkan politics and Balkan wars.

J.H. Were we right to jump on Herr Kohl's bandwagon and all recognize these places - Slovenia one understands, it has a border with Austria, but the others? Should we have rushed to recognize them as independent States?

R.H. Well I think a lot of fuss is made about this. I personally don't think it made any difference, not any real difference. Recognition was going to come sometime. The Serbs were not going to accept it at any time if they could possibly help it. Recognition at that time, including recognition of Bosnia, could be compared with our offering a guarantee to Poland before the Second World War, and it was ineffective.

**British Diplomatic Oral History Programme Interview (part 2) with Sir Reginald
Hibbert Recorded by John Hutson on 3rd June 1998**

JH. Sir Reginald, we covered a lot of ground in part 1, but we did not quite top out

your Diplomatic Service career. Your final posting was as Ambassador at Paris. What were your preoccupations there? What was different or special and important about Paris, about Giscard d'Estaing, about Monsieur Mitterand?

RH. I think I had better say something first about the nature of my posting to Paris. I have always considered myself extremely lucky to have been sent there. I can't go into all the details; but just a year or two previously I was nearly posted to Spain and then I was nearly posted to Greece and then I was told that I shouldn't expect to be posted to Moscow because they wanted to send somebody else there and then, to my surprise, I finished up being posted to Paris. When you have failed to go to places like Athens, Madrid and Moscow, you don't normally expect to go to Paris. At any rate I did! I was posted there at the tail end of Mr Callaghan's, now Lord Callaghan, Labour government with David Owen as Foreign Secretary, but very soon after I arrived in Paris there was a General Election and Mrs. Thatcher came to power.

Now I spent three years in Paris. I would comment that I think three years is one year too few for an Ambassadorial posting; but, of course, these postings take place because of pressures of different sorts in different directions - people's health, the career structure of the Service and so on. During those three years in Paris, half the time was with President Giscard d'Estaing and half the time was with President Mitterand and in that sense I managed to live through the *alternance* which was then being introduced for the first time in Paris. I can make one comment about the difference between the two regimes and that is that with President Giscard one always had a very clear but sometimes a somewhat chilly reply to questions which arose, and when I went to the Elysée I would get an answer to questions quite clear, crystal clear, but, as I said, a little chilly. When I went to the Quai d'Orsay I would get exactly the same answer. With President Mitterand it was not quite the same. It was more friendly, but it was also more opaque. One got an answer but it wasn't quite so crystal clear and sometimes I would go to the Elysée and get an answer and then I would go to Quai d'Orsay and get a slightly different answer. So in a sense it was more friendly, but it is very difficult to say which was the system which it was easier to deal with. It was just a difference of two different styles. Now while I was in Paris we had a series of points of friction with France, largely arising from British restiveness about its place in the Community. As everybody knows, Mrs. Thatcher wanted our money back and there were all sorts of little disputes which arose about turkey meat, about sheep meat, about fishing, about the Community budget, about the

agriculture policy and so on. I think it was Sir Charles Petrie who once commented that the troubles between France and Britain tend to be S.W.1 troubles, that is to say troubles between British organs of government which are all concentrated in S. W.1 and the French organs of government and not really between the two peoples. And I must say that that was very much my experience in France. During work hours one would tend to be occupied all too frequently with trying to elucidate, trying to smooth out the various points of friction, trying to explain them to London or trying to explain London's attitude to the French. Then, after working hours or when one was on tour in France, all the doors were open and there were really no difficulties at all; and certainly outside Paris the whole of France was open to us and there was a tremendous wave of sympathy and friendship with Britain. So I think that it is quite wrong for people to think that somehow France is a difficult or in any way unfriendly country; it simply isn't true. But we do have these points of friction which are constantly arising, and to this day are arising, between S.W.1., between the organs of the British government and the organs of the French government, and anybody who is posted to Paris is bound to feel that friction to feel that awkwardness.

Now the next point I would make is that as Ambassador in Paris one is the head of a very large organisation. I can't remember the exact figures, but I think that the UK- based, the British-based, staff in Paris numbered something around 80 and the total staff numbered around 160-170, the balance being made up by locally engaged staff. Now that is a very big staff to manage and I think it would be true to say that on all the political issues that we were dealing with, all the major communications with London, the writing of despatches, the writing of telegrams, the writing of papers of different sorts, there were really only about ten of those people who made the major input, the major contribution to what we were doing. All the rest were in various way supporting the efforts of that small group and acting as contributors to the general formation of an Embassy outlook; but it means that one had a very big administrative tail to look after; and, as a result, an Ambassador tends to find himself being engaged on all sorts of issues which are not entirely central to what the Embassy should be doing. This is a problem we might deal with later in talking about the organisation of the Service.

Now, I think, too there is one other point. An Ambassador in a country like France is very much a public relations figure these days. A very great deal of what I found myself doing was talking to people, talking to the Press, going around the country making

speeches, (of course always having to make one's speeches in French), going to Trade Fairs, going to open Exhibitions and that sort of thing and generally keeping in touch with rather a wide circle of people, but spending a great deal of time away from the Embassy. One is, of course, programmed in a post like that from morning to night and one is living a very public life. During the whole of my period there we were dealing with a difficult security problem, because of the possible threat from the IRA. We had one or two rather disagreeable events, disagreeable circumstances at the time of the hunger strike by Bobby Sands and various efforts by the IRA and their sympathisers in France to demonstrate against us. There were one or two untoward incidents, unpleasant ones, but we managed to deal with them. And during the whole of my time there I was always accompanied by two members of the French Service pour la Protection des Hautes Personalités en France. This, of course, has a slightly inhibiting effect on one's movements. On the one hand one gets very used to it and one in the end becomes very friendly with all the different detectives one gets to know. I could tell various stories about that, but I don't think this is quite the place for that.

Another comment I would make is that, with France, our cultural relations are of very high importance. I think that it is sometimes thought that politically France and Britain are not quite on the same net, but I would say that culturally we tend to be closer together and the French respect for British culture and the British respect for French culture is very high. During one of my years there I would say that the two most important events that occurred in Anglo/French relations were the Gainsborough Exhibition at the Grand Palais and the production of Peter Grimes at the Paris Opera. Those both made a huge impression in France and I would say a much better and a much more useful impression than many of the rather more ephemeral events which were seizing the headlines at that time in these little frictions and quarrels we had with France on political matters. In saying that I am not saying that the political matters weren't important. They were of very great importance to us. But I do feel that very often the reaction on both sides to these small events was altogether too impatient, altogether too intolerant and showed a lack of understanding of what each of the countries was aiming at. People tend to say that this is the fault of the tabloids, because the tabloids rush to criticism altogether too freely. I don't think that it is entirely that. I think it is that in spite of the closeness of France to Britain both geographically and in the terms of personal communication, there is a failure in Britain to have a complete understanding of what makes France tick, how France works; and the same is true the other way round.

This is something that in the long term needs to be overcome; and it can only be overcome by spreading the knowledge of French in England and the knowledge of English in France, on both of which fronts progress has been made; although I think it is true to say that Britain now tends, surprisingly, surprisingly because of what's been recorded in past history, to be lagging a little behind France in learning about the language and culture of the other.

Of course, there is another point I would make. As Ambassador in France one is doing three separate things. One is the curator of a museum which is the Palace in which the Ambassador lives in France, a very fine building, and the French attach great importance to our maintaining it and keeping it. Indeed when I first went there the Foreign Minister, in one of my first interviews with him, alluded to reports that had appeared in the press that people in Britain were beginning to say that the Embassy in France was too luxurious and too expensive and he said that he hoped I was making it clear to people back in Whitehall that the French government really did attach great importance to our maintaining our position in the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré near the Elysée where we had been installed for so long.

As I say there were three functions. One was to be the curator of a museum, another was to be the manager of a 5 star Hotel because of the constant flood of visitors from London coming to stay and do their work in France; and it was after that that one was, so to speak, Ambassador. On the question of visitors during our time there, we had pretty well every member of the Cabinet, some many times over, to stay and deal with their French opposite numbers. We had members of the Royal family, we had Her Majesty the Queen herself who came to stay in the Embassy on one occasion which was a great honour and pleasure for us. We were constantly engaged in this business of helping visitors to Paris, helping to open doors for them, helping to arrange programmes for them, helping to brief them, helping to see that they were able to do their business with dispatch in Paris. I think that this is a natural development of Ambassadors' work these days because, of course, with modern communications, both transport communications and electronic telegraphic communications, it is possible for much more direct business to be done between capitals. In those circumstances an Ambassador and his staff are facilitators in many ways, rather than on many occasions direct agents. This also is a matter we might discuss separately in relation to the conduct and structure of the Service, but it was certainly something of which I was very conscious in France.

I think that during my time in France I managed to visit pretty well every corner of the country and the more I stayed, the more I admired the conduct of modern France and the

way in which modern France has been developed and ruled. It is quite extraordinary how they have recovered from the disaster of the Second World War and how their methods of centralised government have served them well.

Nowadays in a post like Paris, one is very conscious of the progress of the calendar of the EU because the major issues which arise between countries like France and Britain tend to be discussed and dealt with very much within the framework of the EU, either the EU itself, if they are more economic problems, or in Political Co-operation if they fall outside the terms of the Treaty of Rome. So, as a result, one is constantly helping those who take part in the actual negotiation of EU problems or political problems to keep in close touch with their French opposite numbers. There are the summits which occur from time to time when heads of government meet and, of course, the Foreign Ministers meet very often. So, to a great extent, one is sitting at the elbow of the principals and helping them, trying to make clear to them what the motivation of France is, what the forces are that drive the French government in a particular direction, in order to try to make it more possible for the British government to reach reasonable adjustments with its neighbour. I think there is one point that arises here. One is often seeing the comment why do we need a big Embassy like Paris these days when there is so much covered in the Press. I think my answer to that is that it is not true that so much is covered in the Press or on the radio. I was always struck by the paucity of coverage in the British Press, on British radio and television, about events and attitudes in France and, I think it is true to say that the amount of information which the British government requires about a country like France in order to formulate its policies and reach reasonable attitudes in relation to France, is much, much greater than anybody could glean from the Press and radio at anytime. For this reason, I think, an Embassy is needed to have its tentacles into many aspects of French life and to draw the threads together and try to make a coherent picture of the direction in which France is going. I think that on the whole the British Press and radio coverage on the events in a country like France is much poorer these days than it was several decades ago. One of the things which is very striking is that when you have broadcasts to France or television programmes in France, French television programmes, there is much more difficulty in finding Englishmen who can explain to a French audience in French what the British government is doing than the BBC or ITV have in finding Frenchmen who can speak reasonable enough English to explain to an English audience what is happening in France. So I do think that on that side we have a bit of a gap which needs to be made up.

JH. I agree; but if I may just interject there, we have some excuse. The French have decided that English is going to be the world utility language for a while and they have therefore overcome their reluctance to learning it, which used to be very clear. We do not have a natural easy approachable language to learn which will serve us all around the world. So we have a bigger problem than the French in deciding what language to learn if we are going to learn a foreign language.

RH. I am not sure that I would completely sympathise with that. It's perfectly true that the French are facing up very well to their task of knowing enough English to cope in the world as a whole, especially in the United States. I think the position when I was at school and university was that French was the No.1 foreign language which people needed to learn. I would argue very much that that is still the case, because French is still very widely used in the world, more so than other foreign languages that one can think of, for the conduct of public business; and I think that it is a great pity that French is no longer held up as the No.1 foreign language in British schools. I think too that what's needed is that people should be encouraged to learn French as an oral language, that is to say as a language one can use in business and not so much as a literary language, though literature is important for those who take France seriously. But what is needed is people able to communicate and above all to communicate on the telephone. I used to see in France that the real test of whether somebody could be really competent at using French was whether they could speak French capably on the telephone, and it is a great pity that this test isn't more rigidly applied and more steadily used.

JH I agree with that. Could I ask you perhaps, are there one or two examples of important issues where the different administrative cultures that you have pointed to in Whitehall and in Paris were making difficulty? Unless there are other more important examples to give of your work in Paris?

RH. Yes, I think the point would be this - in France, if you have an issue, shall we say such as sheep meat or turkeys, which was one of the little issues which I remember caused quite a flurry during my time there at one stage, the French policy is decided very centrally and usually at a fairly high level and normally speaking with a certain amount of

input from the Elysée which is, of course, the controlling power. It is very difficult to get into the French system or to know at what level to get into the French system in order to be influential, in order to try to have some effect on the way in which their policy is being formed. In Britain, of course, the process of policy formation tends to be a matter of more public debate, chiefly because of the need for Ministers to answer the whole time in Parliament. This leads to the constant interplay between Ministers and the Press so that on the British side there is a greater fluidity - on the French side a greater firmness and rigidity, and this is sometimes a little difficult to explain. I can put it this way perhaps. I used to find, for example, that I would receive instructions on some agricultural problem that was coming up in the Council of Agricultural Ministers and I would receive instructions to make very strong representations to the French on some subject. I would make them. The French would appear to be totally impervious to what I was saying. You would then have a Minister come over and sit in the Council and I would expect that Minister to speak equally powerfully to the French. To my surprise he wouldn't do so and in the end some sort of compromise would be reached which really could have been reached a week or two before. I think this is because on the British side it was absolutely necessary in the point of view of public relations for the department in London to be seen to be fighting hard for the British interests and if there are to be concessions, compromise and agreement it has to be the Minister who is seen to be solving the apparently insoluble. On the French side they had made up their mind what they were going to do and weren't going to be deflected at all easily anyway. I am not sure that our techniques for dealing with it were entirely adequate. I think that it is equally arguable that the French were unnecessarily 'obstacularising' progress in these matters from time to time. But this is an example of the sort of politico-cultural difficulties that one had to deal with and overcome if possible, and not always successfully.

There is a further comment I would like to make about Franco/German relations and about Defence relationships. I think that the British side always tended to over-emphasise the importance of NATO and the importance of not rocking the NATO boat, to the extent of saying that if we were to work too closely with France and Germany we would be in danger of alienating the Americans and encouraging them to withdraw more quickly from Europe. I lived in Paris in the Residence of the British Ambassador with the American Ambassador as my neighbour in the house next door. I am bound to comment that I was always impressed by the closeness, regularity and intensity of

Franco/American relations. They were in very close touch with each other, certainly in quite as close touch with each other as we were with the French. I think that it was always a fallacy to suppose that somehow the Americans didn't fully understand what was going on in France and didn't fully appreciate the difficulties in relationships within Europe or didn't wish to see the countries of Europe working more closely together. I think that we could have been altogether more vigorous, more bold on this question of closer relationships with France and above all on this question of Defence relationships. When the question arose of the stationing of medium range missiles in Germany, you remember that there was this problem, Schmidt had said that would be acceptable but German opinion was making a lot of difficulty about it. There was an occasion I remember when a meeting was held in one of the big basement halls under the National Assembly to discuss this question, and there were four or five Germans, I forget their names now, on the stage, being required to answer for what was going on in Germany. The hall was full of members of the National Assembly, journalists and officials of different sorts. I was astonished at the roughness of the questions that were put to the Germans on that occasion by the French; a roughness that never would have been repeated in London. I thought that this was a very interesting experience, because everybody always thinks of the French and the Germans as being so close together and Britain being a bit left out. In fact, of course, this was illustrating the nature of the Franco/German relationship, that is to say they work together for the convenience of both, but the French certainly have deep misgivings underneath, resulting from their historical experience of Germany. At that time I felt, and I feel even today, Britain could have taken more initiatives and, in fact, was the only country that could have taken initiatives to bring the European Defence side more closely together (I am talking about Defence in the conventional sense rather than the nuclear sense here) and could have done it in ways which would not have necessarily alienated the Americans. I think that it is a great pity that we have never been able to do that and as a result, to some extent, have been left a bit behind in European organisation. It has to be remembered that in the very beginning, the first post-war years, the aim in uniting Europe was driven by Defence considerations and it was only when Defence imperatives were found not to be productive in terms of European unification, and NATO was formed, that European unification took the economic road and the economic road has never quite suited us. I think that it is a great pity that we never again became leaders in drawing together European Defence. Now this is a very complicated question. I am perfectly aware that what I am saying is somewhat superficial, but nevertheless this is a subject which ought

one day to be much more carefully examined, much more carefully speculated about, that is to say, whether we couldn't have done better for ourselves in the European cause if we had shown more boldness on the Defence side and so left ourselves less exposed, as we are, on the economic side.

JH. Yes, that is a very interesting thought; although one's first reaction is: well, the French, I believe, still have not quite rejoined the military structure of NATO. We, I know from personal experience, have made attempts to get them to do so. Without going back to the very beginning, when it was a French Assembly which voted down a too ambitious European army concept. So we have tried, perhaps not very imaginatively, but perhaps this is just an illustration of the different French and British approaches to the problem.

RH. Yes, I think that the imperatives which cause France to distance itself a little from NATO have to be very clearly understood. France has been recreating itself ever since the war and an extremely important part of this process of recreation is the demonstration, in the first case by President de Gaulle but also by his successors, that France is an independent agent, able to take the lead. We may find it difficult to sympathise with that, but politically it is of the greatest importance in France, because French patriotism, French nationalism, is the political cement in a country that is otherwise, or has been otherwise, rather deeply divided, deeply divided ever since the days of the French revolution. It is nationalism that has provided the cement in modern times which keeps France together. One of the striking things in my time was that the Communist Party voted at one stage for another nuclear submarine, which is a difficult thing to understand except that the Communist Party could not afford to be left behind in terms of supporting French national endeavour. So I think that one has to understand this French difficulty in accepting the leadership of NATO. But there would be ways around it and I think that we, the British, have not in the past explored them enough or done enough to try to find a way of accommodating France. You see the French and the Germans adopting not very meaningful measures of common Defence co-operation. They look good but they are not terribly effective in practical terms. France needs these, and Germany concedes them to France in order to keep France as a good partner; and it is a great pity that we haven't at times done similar things. We could have done that sort of thing, I am quite sure, if only we had not been so nervous the whole time that anything we did might cause the Americans to withdraw from Europe. I am sure it wouldn't have done, but there you are, that's the way it's

been in the past.

JH. Yes, indeed. Well, perhaps we should leave your Paris posting there, though items from it may well come up if we discuss some more substantial but less particular things. You have mentioned the different sort of motivations of the EU as an economic on one side and foreign policy/defence on the other, the latter being in the very beginning, which didn't quite work, and so people went onto the economic side and the Treaty of Rome and so on. This does rather raise the question of how effective multilateral diplomacy is - the EU has been a bumpy ride not just for us, although the British press suggests just for us, ever since it was formed. I have heard a former German central banker say that the EU proceeded only by crisis. If it wasn't in crisis it wouldn't be making any progress. What can we do about this? Or do we just have to live with it and work through the UN on some things rather than through the EU.

RH During my career, that is to say since 1946, the most striking change in international diplomacy has been the rapid, the very rapid, and extensive growth of multilateral diplomacy, that is to say conference diplomacy. There is hardly anything now that is not dealt with in some way by an international conference, an international congress, an international organisation. This doesn't relate simply to political or major economic things but to almost any human activity in the world: health, education, labour relations; there is always an international organisation which deals with it. Now international negotiation between many partners is a very complex and difficult thing. It requires hours and hours of application, sitting around a table discussing, of letting everybody have their say whether they have anything to say or not, and it requires tremendous patience, generates a very great amount of paper, a considerable amount of translation and in fact is extremely difficult to bring together in a completely coherent and concentrated form. And this is what we are doing in almost every aspect of diplomacy now. When I first joined the Service bi-lateral diplomacy, that is to say our relations with individual countries were largely paramount, though not wholly. Since those days it is the conference diplomacy, the multilateral diplomacy, that has become paramount, and the really active diplomacy is now carried out by those engaged in multilateral diplomacy. In a thing like the UN, the EU and in NATO one is confronted by exactly the same problem, of time-consuming sessions, around a table, trying to reach some sort of consensus between varying numbers of countries. The smaller the number of the countries the easier it is to reach consensus and, of course, the easiest consensus is

between two, but if we can't just have two, then three, four, five and so on. Of course, the bigger the organisation the more difficult it is and the most difficult of all is the UN, being the biggest number, 180 or something now. NATO is quite big and the EU is getting steadily bigger. I don't think that the difficulties of reaching agreement in the EU are any greater than reaching agreement in other organisations except that the EU now embraces such a wide extent of national interests that there is an enormous amount going on in the EU at any one time and therefore much more time, much more paper and translations and so on.

JH. Money issues and things directly effecting the lives of people, affecting national interests.

RH. Absolutely. But this takes us back just for one moment to the French desire to distance themselves from NATO, the difficulties of having them as whole members of NATO. There is a paradox that I would mention here and that is: if ever the French fully rejoin NATO, it will mean that NATO has really lost its significance and can therefore be joined at no cost whatever to one's national interests. So I think that one should bear that in mind. As NATO extends itself Eastwards it is ceasing to have the same significance as it had previously, that is to say a Defence organisation completely dominated by the United States, which is what the French found particularly difficult, because this inhibited French sovereignty and French freedom of action in Europe. So this is an example where the multiplication of the number of people in an organisation slowly dilutes it until it becomes possible for almost anybody to join without difficulty. This is the problem of multilateral diplomacy. And, of course, the Foreign Service has had to adapt itself to this. I think it is true to say that all or most of the ambitious young men in the Foreign Service now aim to take part in multilateral diplomacy. This has a side effect which in some ways is regrettable. In the old days people went to countries abroad and got to know them in some detail; and I would argue that it is only by getting to know some foreign countries in considerable detail that one begins to understand how the world works and how foreign relations work. Nowadays you are tending to get a quite able group of diplomats growing up in our Service and in the Services of other countries who haven't really made any detailed acquaintance with the coal face, so to speak, in individual distant countries or even individual neighbouring countries, who have become used to constant committee work and who perhaps don't fully understand the deeper currents which affect the movement of foreign relations. I would argue very much that this is the case in the Balkans now. The position is that for 50 years the Western countries

attached little importance to the Balkans because the Balkans were firmly under Soviet domination, and there was not much you could do there. Let us be frank about this; postings to Embassies in the Balkans tended to be regarded as retirement postings. People went there and became Ambassadors and then left the Service. No satisfactory body of knowledge of those countries was built up and left in the Service. I think, to some extent this explains the incompetence that the Western powers have shown in their dealings with the falling apart of Yugoslavia and the Balkans problems of today. It is very difficult to see a remedy for this, but I certainly think that it is something people ought to bear in mind. And this would lead me to a comment on Foreign Office careers and Foreign Office staffing. I think it is true to say that pretty well over half of the First Secretaries in the Service these days are employed in London, because with modern communications there is much more control from London. You have more Ministers in the Foreign Office than there used to be. Ministers travel about more, do more of the work at first hand. The Service has to attach more importance to staffing the Ministers' private offices than perhaps they used to do, because there are more of them and the result of this is that instead of producing powerful personalities of the pro-consular sort at the top who can speak with authority about what they see happening in the world, you are tending, if anything, to develop a Service of people whom I would even describe as courtiers, that is people who serve Ministers, who largely serve at home, who get used to regarding the world as something that exists on paper rather than in the flesh. In so far as they meet it in the flesh, they meet it in multilateral committees and conferences. They have to be knowledgeable about domestic politics and they don't acquire the same deep acquaintance with what we might generally call 'abroad', with foreign countries, as they used to. And this is related to other things. When I first joined the Service, as a junior in Embassies abroad, one was able to travel quite widely in foreign countries and get to know them really well and in quite informal ways in their remote parts. Slowly, over the years, the amount of money available has been cut away for that sort of thing by the Treasury. The amount of money available for overseas allowances has steadily been reduced and I think the modern young diplomat in an Embassy overseas has very, very much less possibility of learning about the country he is in than we used to have when I was younger. I well remember in Bonn, at one of the morning meetings I was chairing with diplomatic staff, upbraiding junior members of the staff for not being completely informed about what was in the daily Press or what was in the weekly journals in Germany and appearing to be slightly behind in their reading. One of the junior secretaries had the courage to say to me 'Minister, you don't have to get your own

breakfast'. Of course, this was absolutely true - these young men were having to look after the family, having to do all sorts of things, simply because they no longer had the support which I had from my earliest years in the Service and which enabled me to get out and about, reading, travelling around the country, getting to know people, getting to know the country in depth from morning until night. I think this is a great loss to our Service. I quite understand why it has happened, but nevertheless one should be conscious of the fact that it has happened. And, as I say, people spend their time at home and this leads me in turn to this question of 'high flyers'. The Service has prided itself on its selection of 'high flyers', which means young men rising thirty or in their early thirties, who are picked out as being people who are going to be destined for the highest positions. It is an understandable process, but I am not sure that it always has satisfactory results. It results in the Service becoming rather slavish acceptors of the Biblical principle that 'to him who hath shall be given'. These people are picked out and given more favourable jobs and they go to into private offices and they rise to the top. They become people at the top of the Service, I would say in the rough wartime phase, 'without getting their knees brown' and without having worked, again to use a poor sort of cliché, without having worked at the 'coal face' in difficult countries, above all in developing countries which are very important. And I personally would like to see a modification of this system so that, instead of saying that somebody at the age of thirty was definitely a 'high flyer', one would merely say that at the age of thirty he should be considered for early promotion to the next grade and that one should then look again at the age of thirty five or forty and see if he is still worthy of early promotion to the next grade. In other words the whole process should be a more gradual one and less a case of dividing sheep from goats. I think that one of the troubles about the 'high flyer' business is that a man is chosen because he has an unblemished record. But an unblemished record is not always a sign of the greatest ability, and I think that this where a more gradual approach would be better. That is to say you should judge at the age of thirty whether a man is fit for early promotion to the next grade and you should then look again at the age of thirty five/forty and see if he is fit for promotion to the next grade beyond that and so on. In other words, not pick out one man as a 'high flyer' for good, but have a more graduated approach to this whole question of finding out who are the good people.

JH. You don't think that the annual report does this job?

RH. I would argue that the mere fact that a man having been chosen as a 'high flyer'

means he's put in the most favoured posts, which tend to be the bigger posts, which tend to be the ones with grade one Ambassadors and with greater possibilities of shining. And so he shines more and more. I think, in fact, that the Service is breeding perfectly able people in more distant places who could sometimes be considered for the higher positions. I quite recognise that this is a contested view. When I was a Deputy Under Secretary and used to sit regularly in the Permanent Under Secretary's meeting of Deputy Under Secretaries I would look around the table sometimes and realise that all my colleagues had been Heads of Departments in the Office, Assistants in Departments in the Office, members of Private Offices of Ministers and so on, and I was the only one who had never been a Head of Department, never been an Assistant in a Department and had never been in a Private Office. So I was very lucky to be there at all.

JH. You were the one who had worked abroad and gained experience at various 'coal faces'.

RH. I had worked abroad more than at home; in fact, at one period I was abroad for 18 years at a stretch, which is quite unusual in the Service. And I know one argues from one's own experience. I would simply say that the thing should be evened out rather more, that those who spend so much time in high places at home should sometimes be sent out to see how things happen the hard way, and those who are in the more distant places should be brought home a little more often to get some experience. But I recognise that this is very difficult for Personnel Department to manage.

JH. You mentioned in our preliminary discussion that there was now a tension between globalisation and national systems of government. This is perhaps an extension of our talk about multilateral diplomacy, but it does go quite deeply. You have almost suggested that there will soon be a globalisation of 'high flyers' who will know each other better than they know anyone's country, maybe even better than they know their own.

RH. I think that may very well be true at times. When I was Political Director in the Office I certainly knew my fellow Political Directors in the Committee of the 'Nine', the Political Committee of the 'Nine', better than I knew many of my colleagues in the Office, because I saw them more often and had more frequent communication with them. I think that it is perfectly true that there is a conflict between national systems of government and globalisation. After all, everybody's national government tends to be elected on the basis of

domestic issues. Domestic issues are what are paramount at election time. But we all know now that many of those domestic issues are heavily influenced by international developments, international changes. Increasingly the way in which any single country is governed depends very extensively on what other countries are doing. This brings us back to the crucial importance of multilateral diplomacy. But of course multilateral diplomacy tends towards compromise; it is bound to. The whole meaning of diplomacy is to try to seek peaceful solutions, which means compromise solutions. In the Press and sometimes in Parliament one sees the Diplomatic Service being derided, because the Diplomatic Service seeks compromise, not for its own sake but simply because we have got to live with other countries. The alternative to compromise is sometimes conflict, and conflict on the whole tends to be more costly for everybody and more painful than compromise. I see what a Foreign Office is trying to do in the international field as often conflicting rather sharply with what the public at home is led to believe or thinks that the foreign policy of its country ought to be doing. One sees this contradiction quite often these days and this produces a major difficulty for those working in the diplomatic field. It means that the diplomat tends to be regarded as a sort of strange creature, a little bit alien from the public life of his country. But this is not true, because in fact the work he is doing has a direct bearing on the fundamentals of the peace and prosperity on which everybody in his own country ultimately depends. I would certainly put peace first before prosperity, and this leads to a comment on the extent to which commercial work has tended to be played up as being the prime work or the prime objective of the Foreign Service. I think that this can never really be true. The maintenance of peace in the world is always more important, because you certainly cannot have prosperity without peace. The maintenance of peace is not at all easy, as we are seeing in many parts of the world. I think what is called the political work of the Service, that is to say the work that is aimed at maintaining peace in all parts of the world, is still ultimately the paramount work of the Diplomatic Service. This is not to say that commercial work isn't important, but commercial work can never be, to my mind, the No. 1 concern of a Foreign Minister, the No. 1 concern of his principal advisers or the No. 1 concern of the Embassies which serve him.

JH. In the light of all you have just said, do you think that the very large Paris Embassy that you mentioned, which I imagine is still roughly the same size, ought to be smaller or are all the supporters you mentioned necessary to the effective functioning of the ten or a dozen people who make the major input?

RH. You ask a difficult question! You must remember that I opened the resident post

in Mongolia and there we started with myself and one assistant and it was still possible to do some work. I have felt ever since then that the size of many of our posts is unnecessarily large; but the size is often, to a considerable extent, determined by the wishes of Departments other than the Foreign Office - the Department of Defence, the Treasury, the Ministry of Agriculture, you have a whole number of Departments, all of which wish to have their say in the analysis of what an important foreign country is doing and they wish to have members, representatives, on the staff in an Embassy such as the Paris Embassy. Now those people produce an awful lot of paper which they send back to their own Departments which does not, to my mind, always contribute very constructively or very fruitfully to the concentrated analysis of the policy of the foreign country in question which the Embassy has to produce or needs to produce. I would question whether all of that is really terribly useful; but nevertheless it is there and so you have a large Embassy dealing with it. I personally would have felt able to do quite a competent job in Paris if I had had a completely free hand with a smaller staff I quite recognise that this is a contentious issue. In fact, at one time when we were having an economy drive, in Mrs. Thatcher's time, I think that the Foreign Office aim was to produce a 10% cut in staffs overseas. I looked carefully at Paris and felt quite able to offer at least 15%; but it was sharply indicated to me that 10% had been asked for and 10% was what they wanted to get.

During my time, the status of the Foreign Service has certainly diminished and in many ways this is understandable because of the way in which the conduct of foreign affairs has changed with multilateral diplomacy and Ministers playing a much greater role and so on. Nevertheless, I think that the way in which the status of the Service has declined does a dis-service to the country as well as to our Service. The way in which the Service has tended to be presented in the Press as a sort of gilded collection of gypsies moving around the world, living high on taxpayers' money, is a very grave misrepresentation of what the Service does. I think that the Service itself is mistaken in drawing so much attention to the representational role. In the representational role the Service, to my mind, should simply say that it is an extension of government hospitality, which is what it is. Government hospitality concentrates on entertaining foreign visitors of importance and political figures when they come to the United Kingdom. Embassies overseas are really an extension of that activity and one shouldn't make more of it than that. As regards what is called the plushy living of members of the Foreign Service, as I have said earlier, the French attach great importance to our maintenance of our Embassy in Paris,

the Dutch the same way with our Embassy in the Netherlands and the same way with every country in the world, in Washington, Bonn and so on. And this is entirely reasonable. I think that the way in which the Service has been criticised as being not totally committed to the maintenance of Britain's position in the world is quite ridiculous and needs to be corrected by greater courage on the part of our political chiefs. The Ministers themselves when they are going around the world would hate to be described as agents of unnecessary compromise and the members of the Diplomatic Service are no more agents of unnecessary compromise than the Ministers are. I think that it is a great pity that the Service has been talked down in quite the way it has over the last few decades.

I would say something about the difference one senses in dealing with the United States as distinct with dealing with our other important partners. In Washington, I was always conscious that any question that was raised was always being looked at from an entirely global point of view. This, I think, is due to the fact that the United States has the potential to intervene in any part of the world and is the custodian of the Western deterrent. Anything that happened anywhere in the world tended to be looked at and tends to this day to be looked at in Washington in terms of the way it might react at some stage on the United States' possession of this enormous military power. This is quite different from the way other countries look at things and, I think, that this is why, from time to time, people in European countries have tended to describe United States policies as irresponsible. One thinks of things like the bombing of Libya and things of that sort. The Europeans had difficulty in reconciling themselves to what the United States was doing. But, in fact, if you looked at it from the Washington point of view, it was an entirely reasonable line of policy to adopt. I have always felt myself that Britain, France, Germany would adopt much the same sort of attitudes if we possessed the same sort of power. This is where the difference lies in having a relationship with the United States and having a relationship with other important but nevertheless secondary countries; France, Germany, Italy and so on. It is simply a difference of position of power which has a very direct influence on the way in which a country looks at the world outside.

JH Yes, I can quite see that. You said in part one of this interview something like:- experience of the relationship with the US is the dominant experience at the top of the British establishment ever since the war so it is understandable if we, the British, veer perhaps a little too much in that direction. Well, you've again, I think, made it clear in various contexts what you mean by that, but it is a very striking expression. Do you think that the British establishment, not just the Diplomatic Service, but the

British establishment is really dominated by the relationship with the United States?

RH. I think to a very considerable extent. And this leads me to make a comment on the question of intelligence assessment and the intelligence machinery. I have in fact written about this subject elsewhere. Maybe I can advertise my own writing on this; it appears in *Intelligence and National Security*, volume 5, No.1 of January 1990, published by Frank Cass, London. The article was based on a lecture I gave at Oxford on the relationship between intelligence and policy formation. We have been extremely closely linked, as everybody knows, with the United States ever since the War in this question of intelligence assessment and I would argue that our system of intelligence assessment is something which needs constant reappraisal. I am not sure that I have got it absolutely right. As anyone who reads my article would see, this is a very contested area. I would hold that while intelligence collection is extremely well organised the problem of assessment has never been completely satisfactorily solved. It may be that it can never be completely satisfactorily solved, but one ought to be constantly looking at it and adjusting the way it is done to the requirements of the present day. I think that what we need, in Britain, is some much more open discussion of intelligence material. Now in the United States you do have that through the separation of powers and through the fact that almost nothing is kept secret in the United States. You have various agencies there, very powerful agencies, doing a massive amount of assessment and sometimes disagreeing with one another and in the end working things out between them. One thing I would like to see is a closer link between the Whitehall intelligence assessment machinery and the foreign policy think tanks which have become such a feature of academic life in British Universities, in the International Affairs Departments of Universities. There is an extraordinary wealth of analysis and knowledge there and the link between the two is not completely satisfactorily organised because of the exigencies of the secrecy qualification at the Whitehall end. This is due to some extent to the fact that the Secret Agencies play prominent roles in the assessment process and, of course, you have got to have them in the assessment process merely to be sure that you have a proper comment on the material they are making available. On the other hand, it seems a pity that there should be this rather sharp division between that which is secret and that which is confidential or open. I think that this sometimes has the result that the assessments which are being made of situations - and again I would argue that this is very much the case in the Balkans or has been very much the case in the Balkans - that the assessments which are being made are not quite as accurate as they ought to be. But the situation and problem is a very complicated

one and, as I say, I have handled it elsewhere with the article I mentioned and it is far too complicated to deal with, at the moment, in this particular conversation.

JH. Am I remembering correctly that JIC stands for Joint Intelligence Committee?

RH. That's right.

JH. And you chaired the one in Singapore and subsequently the one in Germany including representatives of the Armed Forces, of course, so you speak with authority on this, having had some experience because presumably the JIC in London is roughly the same thing?

RH. More powerful.

JH. Of course, much more powerful. It's closer to the Cabinet Office.

RH. This is a very interesting issue - how do you make a correct assessment about what is happening in a foreign country or between a group of foreign countries elsewhere in the world. I don't think that there is any perfect answer to this and it's a subject on which a constant search needs to be made for a better way of doing things. But I think that the great lack at the moment is the lack of a proper link between the 'Think Tanks' which are themselves heavily engaged in this sort of process and the Whitehall machinery which, as I say, is very much inhibited by the secrecy qualification which has to be attached to many items.

JH. But, perhaps, not as much as formerly. So when you yourself were chairing JIC meetings in Singapore, Rheindahlen or Bonn can you confirm my impression that what they are is, in fact, assessment bodies, that they don't say here is a problem and this is the policy to deal with it - they don't recommend policies?

RH. They are assessment bodies and what they are trying to say ...

JH. They don't deal with a crisis as a kind of emergency.

RH. The planning side tries to say what you should do about it, but the intelligence side tries to produce a reliable and accurate picture of what is actually happening and what the forces are that have to be reckoned with. This is not an easy thing to do and I don't,

as I say, think there is any perfect answer to it. In many ways the genius of one person can sometimes produce the answer, but you can't possibly depend on just one person. Mr. Churchill, as Prime Minister, often used to make an assessment of his own which was dead correct. On the other hand, Mr. Churchill was not employed day by day on full intelligence assessment and you have got to find some means of bringing all the different threads together, of developing the talent and experience which can deal with those and which can produce intelligent answers on which the government can proceed to try and base a policy. This is a subject which I have found fascinating and, as I said, have written about and which I think is one of continuing importance and interest.

JH. Certainly. If I may for a final moment return to your final posting. One has often seen that foreign policy varies less between one government and its successor than domestic policy. Was there any significant change in French foreign policy as a result of President Mitterand taking over from Giscard d'Estaing?

RH. My answer, I think, to that would be 'no'. What you had, as I explained earlier, was a difference in style and, of course, style does eventually have some effect on the way in which relations are conducted. I would say that, on the whole, we got on more easily with the French government under Mitterand than under Giscard and this reminds me of a point that I had intended to make earlier, which is really a little side issue, but of some interest. I think to some extent we got on better under Mitterand simply because Mitterand always used an interpreter in speaking to his visitors. President Giscard d'Estaing was inclined to use his own English and when, for example, Monsieur Giscard d'Estaing met Mrs. Thatcher they spoke to each other directly in English. As a result sparks sometimes used to be generated, used to fly. With Monsieur Mitterand there was always the interpretation set between them and I think this had the effect of calming the atmosphere, rather like road calming procedures taken by our municipalities. It had the effect of slowing down the traffic so to speak and resulted often, to my mind, in a somewhat better understanding. One shouldn't exaggerate this; it is only marginally so. Nevertheless it can have an important effect because it makes it easier sometimes to arrive at some sort of agreement that keeps the temperature down. It comes back to this question of style as between different governments. I have served different governments as an official, and I can't say that I have ever noticed any real difference in policy between

them, only slight differences. But there are differences of style between different Ministers and those differences of style certainly have an effect. I would argue, for example, that the death of Anthony Crosland was a misfortune for the conduct of Britain's foreign relations because Anthony Crosland died at the point where he was beginning to get an extremely intelligent grip on the conduct of foreign policy in the Foreign Office. I was a witness of that at the time and his death, I thought, removed a man who was going to take a very sensible comprehensive grip on the conduct of British foreign policy. We then got a quite different man, Dr. David Owen, who also in his own way got a very strong grip on affairs. I think I got on with Dr. Owen better than many of my colleagues did. Dr. Owen was very quick on the uptake, had a very sharp mind and was a very able operator, but rather inclined not to carry the whole of the Foreign Office with him on all occasions which was perhaps a bit unfortunate at times.

JH. Having to strike out rather on his own.

RH. He was less patient with the slowness of some of my colleagues, shall I put it that way, than perhaps might have been desirable; but I quite understand his reactions. For example Dr. Owen couldn't stand people who disagreed with him starting what they were going to say with "With respect, Secretary of State"; and yet my colleagues went on using this expression quite unnecessarily. Dr. Owen was far more able to take a direct disagreement than many other Ministers I have known. But what he did not like was indirect disagreement. It is this sort of thing that makes for differences in the way in which people get on with Ministers and the way in which policies are eventually affected. But, by and large, I would say that the differences in policies between governments, both in Britain and abroad, are relatively slight. The differences in style are much more pronounced and have a certain importance and a bearing on the way in which foreign policy is conducted.

JH. Was Dr. Owen more patient with say the Foreign Minister of another country when he was dealing direct?

RH. Yes, I sat next to Dr. Owen on very many occasions in overseas negotiations and I had a great admiration for the way in which he conducted those negotiations. And I must say, with foreigners he was entirely realistic and quite understood when things were difficult and when things were easy. But I think he had little sympathy with or patience for, what shall we say, the more traditional aspects of Foreign Office procedure.

JH. Yes, I see. I suppose he showed great patience when he was dealing with the Balkans which he patiently did for quite some years and, of course, the Balkans are flaring up again now in the place you yourself knew before your Foreign Service career started, Albania and Kosovo. Kosovo seems to be a Serb heartland but populated by Albanians.

RH. Yes. I still write about that. I have an article about that in this week's 'World Today'.

JH. Have you?