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Dame Alison Mariot Leslie, DCMG, 2012 (CMG 2005)

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

Recollections of Dame Mariot Leslie DCMG at Royal Overseas League, Edinburgh, 29 March 2017, recorded and transcribed by Alasdair MacDermott.

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AM: Mariot Leslie, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the BDOHP. I see you started at the Iran desk, Middle East Department when you entered the FCO.

ML: Absolutely. I had already worked for a couple of years for the British Government. I got into the FCO when I was still an undergraduate, then turned it down and came and worked in Scotland. I realised I'd made a terrible mistake and turned it up again, and eventually joined in 1977. In those days we had just one week of training, as they called it, a sort of familiarisation in which we sat around and had a glass of sherry with the Permanent Secretary and learnt a little bit about what a submission was and how to draft and so on. And then I was plunged right onto the Iran desk.

Iran desk, Middle East Department, FCO, 1977-78

It was a time when the Shah was still in power. The Iranian revolution hadn't properly started, but there was a great deal of trouble and contestation already inside Iran and I spent my first year watching what became the Revolution growing. The Shah left power a few months after I left the desk. It was an extraordinarily interesting time to be learning a trade in which everything we were doing was going wrong, and yet people were in denial about it going wrong.

I remember knowing very little about Iran myself. I had to look hard on a map when I was told I was going to go on the Iran desk: it was somewhere between the Mediterranean and India. I had to find it and learn about it. Being conscious of how ignorant I was, I was probably over-zealous in thinking I had to go and meet as many people as I possibly could who knew about the country I was supposed to be dealing with - which I think was a rather unusual thing for people to do in their first jobs in those days. So I built up quite a collection of people in London who had lived in Iran or were married to Iranians, or who had studied there. I became more and more convinced, as the year went on, that the protests against the Shah were very serious and that Iran was on a knife-edge; that it was going to end up with the Shah going.

But that of course was not at all the corporate view of the Foreign Office. There were other people around though, in Whitehall, in the Diplomatic Service, who thought the same. There was a very good youngish woman in the FCO Research Analysts who knew Iran well, spoke Persian, thought Iran was going to have a revolution. There was a young chap in the Assessments Staff in the Cabinet Office dealing with intelligence work, also a diplomat - Nick Browne, who ended up as an Ambassador in the FCO. He was pretty sure that this was the real thing. But back in Tehran our extremely distinguished, very fine Ambassador, Sir Anthony Parsons, who was extraordinarily good at being close to the Shah and the top levels of Iranian society, was convinced it was all going to bubble down again. Indeed "bubbling down" was the image he used. I remember in the summer of 1978 his coming to see the department when he was on home leave, and coming, very decently, into what was then known as the third room, which I shared with someone else doing Iran and someone doing Iraq. I recall him swinging back on a chair and putting his feet up on the desk and saying "Well, young lady is there anything you want to ask me before I go back to Tehran?" And very impertinently, I said to him that what really intrigued me was how he was going to get on in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He laughed cheerfully and explained that they were like a pan of milk: they bubbled up and frothed and then the heat went off and the milk all collapsed again; and that was what was going to happen with the Persians. And it was going to be all right. Well, as we know, it wasn't. My respect for Anthony Parsons was enormous. It grew greatly when after the revolution (although by that stage I was no longer there) he spoke at a very large meeting of the FCO, said "mea culpa", and went through the mistakes that none of us should make.

For me it was a process from which I suppose I learnt some lessons which I overlearnt because they never left me. I learnt never to believe that great men must get things right - never to believe that the corporate wisdom about what's going to happen has to be right, just because the Ministry of Defence, the Cabinet Office and Number Ten and the senior members of the FCO and the Embassy think it's going to be right. I learnt not to be deferential, but to follow my own judgement. But I also learnt, I think, some bigger lessons that are of more general application: which is that really bad things can happen. Just because it seems as though they couldn't, just because you can't imagine a state which seems worse than the status quo, it doesn't mean that they won't happen. It doesn't mean that you mightn't end up with a Brexit vote; doesn't mean that you mightn't end up with a run on the banks, or the 2008 financial problem. All of these things are possible. You can have a

President Trump elected in the United States. There is nothing that is too big to fail. And that is the lesson which I think has probably informed the way I have approached everything else I have done in my career. I've always thought conventional wisdom needs to be stress-tested pretty hard because the fact that people you respect and admire think something different from what you think might happen, doesn't mean you're wrong.

AM: And after that very interesting start, you went on to Singapore?

Third/Second Secretary, British High Commission, Singapore, 1978-81

ML: I went on to Singapore after that, an interesting posting. I had very much hoped to become a linguist. I had a linguistic background and I had done well in the FCO language test. But in those days as a young woman, and worse still a young woman who intended to get married, I had my name crossed off all the hard language training lists. They then had to scrub around to find a place where they didn't need to invest too much in me, and English-speaking Singapore was what they came up with. So I set off very newly married, minus my husband who was still working elsewhere, at the age of 24, to Singapore.

And it was an absolutely fascinating time to be there. A context that is very well documented but people forget about, above all if they don't have experience of it. The Cold War was raging - the Cold War in Asia being as potent as the Cold War in Europe. The Chinese Cultural revolution was only just over. Deng Xiaoping and his Peking Spring, as we called it then, had really just started the year or so before I arrived. The Vietnamese War had, of course, only just finished in 1975, and I went to Singapore in 1978. There was a sense of precariousness in South East Asia - of Singapore doing well but being very vulnerable, and Singapore being noticeably different in its approach to world affairs from the countries around us. It was a time also - hard to remember this now - with great divisions between what we called the North and the South, the developed and the developing countries; and those divisions also acting as a proxy for the Cold War, with communist countries like the Soviet Union and China taking the side of the developing countries in their contestation with the West. There were a lot of difficult debates internationally about commodity trading: whether the developed countries were doing better out of the raw materials being produced in the developing world than the producers were. And the Non-Aligned Movement was becoming prominent but also becoming a bit of a proxy for the Soviet Union and China. And Singapore was in the midst of this, run by a sort of graduate group from Cambridge University and the LSE, running a capitalist state alongside a sort of national socialist model,

with higher levels of welfare and per capita income than elsewhere in the region but alongside a very authoritarian state. So it was an absolutely fascinating laboratory to find oneself pitched into.

A month after I had arrived there Vietnam invaded Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge who had been killing their own population were ousted. Roughly a month after I arrived there also Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, came to visit Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, in a move that sent shock waves around the other non-Chinese-majority states in South East Asia, who were still tussling with Communist insurgencies in the hills in Malaysia and Indonesia that were being directed from Beijing. So it was time when there was a high level of regional politics that people in London were extremely interested in. But also a time when (the FCO being rather better staffed than it is these days) people were interested in the texture of the country you were living in, its social set-up, its economic set-up, its politics, what made it tick. Perhaps I should also mention, in the wider context, the withdrawal of British military presence East of Suez, more or less complete when I arrived in Singapore. There were still some little bits of the RAF packing up. But it had been very recently that Britain had had a big military presence in Singapore which had then gone, and that had left its flavour in the country.

So I arrived with a very wide portfolio. The Chancery junior did absolutely everything! I was covering external politics, all the geo-political stuff I've been talking about. I was covering internal politics. I was covering the rather small technical assistance programme that the UK had. I dealt - as we had further down-sizing of the High Commission - with the press. I learnt all the tools of the trade of diplomacy. How you build a network of contacts, get to know people who will be influential later, make them know you and trust you in a way that brings information and influence later on when you need it. How to use entertaining as a tool: so inviting people to your house, inviting them out to lunch, giving parties. How to talk to the press, on and off the record, and what to do when they sometimes don't recognise the distinction. I did all of those things in a country which was itself developing extremely rapidly, but in a country whose elite was still extraordinarily young. So that someone like me, aged 24, was dealing with people in their early 30s who were already senior in the civil service, because they had come from nowhere in a country which had only become fully independent 12 years earlier.

It was a time when, in particular, we were dealing with boat people flooding out of Vietnam. Although the Vietnamese were in many ways saviours in Cambodia, they were expelling their own Chinese ethnic minorities who were taking to the sea in very rickety boats. Many of them were increasingly being caught by pirates, having what little they had by way of material possessions taken from them and then scuttled and drowned. Others were eaten by sharks. Some of them simply didn't make it through the storms. They were pitching up on the coastlines of Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore. Western shipping would sometimes come across these rickety boats on the high seas, rescue the people - because the captains had a legal obligation to rescue people in danger at sea - and then were left with the problem of what they did with 50 Vietnamese of all ages, some very frail and in very poor health, others infants and tiny children. Singapore had a very tough immigration policy at the time, so it wouldn't allow shipping owners to land their cargo of individuals into the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (who had a camp in Singapore) unless there was a guarantee from another country to take them off Singapore's hands, or repatriate them. So we became heavily involved in the High Commission in the effort of developed countries to re-house and take these refugees from Vietnam. Britain had always had a very tough immigration policy. Countries like Australia, Canada, the US, were very much more generous in taking in Vietnamese immigrants, or refugees as they were.

During my time there the Callaghan Government ended, Thatcher came to power in London, and the policy became very much more difficult, in that every single refugee application had to be approved in person by the Home Office, at a time when communications were nothing like as instantaneous as they are now. Previously I had been doing a roaring trade in taking for family re-unification cases of people who already had family in Britain, but otherwise persuading Canadian and Australian diplomats (whom I knew well) to take into their immigration programmes all the others who had been landed by British shipping captains or ships with UK flags. (They weren't always the same thing.) Suddenly I was unable to do any trades any more. The result of having to send teleletters (as they were called, or telegrams) with a lot of what we now call bio-data on individuals off to the Home Office, then wait for five days while they decided what to do, meant that we ended up having to take many more Vietnamese refugees to Britain than in the days when we had more flexibility at Post.

But I do remember - and it's the sort of thing that leaves an impression on people early on - I remember one day being rung up at home, as I often was, late one Friday night with the weekend coming up, by the Head of the UN Refugee Office, saying "We have a British-

flagged ship. They've picked up some Vietnamese boat people. There is a woman who is in labour who is likely to die unless she gets to a doctor. The Singapore immigration people are not letting her ashore for medical attention unless you give a guarantee that the UK will take her." I thought about it hard. I knew I had absolutely firm instructions on no account to do any such thing - that it would be a disciplinary offence if I did. I knew that if I rang up the more senior and experienced Head of Chancery, who was my boss, and dropped it in his lap, it would be merely shuffling on a moral dilemma to someone else. I decided to open up the office, get a diplomatic note out of the safe, stick a stamp on it, initial it, drive down in my little un-air-conditioned Mini car to the UNHCR Office and hand it over. And so that woman got medical attention and her life was saved. I don't know where she ended up, but she didn't die that night. And I've often thought about that. I did afterwards - on the Monday because of course there was no point in trying to get hold of the Home Office before the Monday - send off the telegram. We got the approval retrospectively, which we might not have. Nothing happened to me. I "fessed-up" to my Head of Chancery. I've often thought if I would do that if the stakes were very much higher; and I've often thought that actually I would have. So that too has been a reminder to me much later on when I was managing much more junior staff. As a Head of Mission, or Director or Head of Department, I would often have that difficult conversation with people, in which I would say "If you find yourself at the point where you think you have a massive dilemma and you don't know what to do, actually, don't bottle it up. Come and talk, because there's probably a way out of it. You need cover, and you need to have the sense that you are working in an organisation that will give you the cover for those difficult decisions, or take them off your shoulders, and do it themselves. Don't bottle it up any more". What I am really saying is that, as with most of us, I think, first postings in the Diplomatic Service are points at which you grow professionally, and in all sorts of other ways.

I learnt to be distrustful of the press, but actually that you can also use the press the way you want. I remember a journalist coming out from Time magazine - the American news magazine - so he had flown in from the States. He had been commissioned to write a piece about Singapore which was going to be one of the main features in that week's Time and he was doing the round of the Embassies and High Commissions who knew Singapore well, to talk to the press officers, to pick up material for his piece. I gave him about an hour of my time. I talked to him at length and he took copious notes. I knew he was going to see the Australians and the US Embassy and others as well so I didn't think much of it. Then a

couple of days later Time magazine came out. It was the front page story - pictures of Lee Kuan Yew and of Singapore. I turned to the article to see if anything of what I had said had survived - and the entire article was more or less verbatim what I had said to him. He had just been amazingly lazy and he'd written up the short-hand (which was what everybody had in those days) version of what I had said. There was virtually nothing else there. So one learnt little lessons like that. I also learnt a lot from the journalists in the Press Club in Singapore, many of whom had been in Saigon at its fall and had pitched up in Singapore afterward. So there were a lot of very hardened war correspondents there who used Singapore as a comfortable base for moving round in what was still a very troubled region - a lot of violence in Indonesia still. So I think I learnt in Singapore lessons which were a very good starting point for where I went next.

AM: Which was?

Second/First Secretary, British Embassy, Bonn, 1982-86

ML: Yes, I went to Germany in 1982. Once more there was a context that was absolutely familiar then but has disappeared now. Younger diplomats don't remember it because they didn't go through it. The Cold War at its height, Germany still divided, the four former occupying powers still held elements of Germany's sovereignty: the United Kingdom, France, the United States and the Soviet Union. Brezhnev died shortly before I went to Germany, but Gorbachev had not yet become the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Eastern Europe was still in the Warsaw Pact behind the Iron Curtain. Berlin still divided; East Germany off limits for people like me who were in the Embassy in Bonn because of the danger of communist subversion and blackmail. A context in which you had to report absolutely every contact - even if you shared a lift with them - with a communist diplomat. And a time nonetheless when it seemed, at least to me, palpable - it was in the air in Germany - that the tectonic plates were shifting. Very shortly after I arrived in Germany Helmut Schmidt lost power, Helmut Kohl came in, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the Liberal Party, the FDP, shifted allegiance. There was a new sense of generational change inside Germany.

I started again as a junior member of what was a very much bigger Chancery in one of our biggest and most important Embassies. At the time our European Embassies had a prestige and kudos and influence in London that disappeared in the 1990s for a variety of reasons we can talk about later if you wish. But at that time Bonn, along with Paris and Moscow, and

Washington self-evidently, was one of the most important Embassies in the stable of British Embassies abroad. And it was full of awesomely self-confident high flyers and I found myself in one of the most junior positions in the Chancery. Again, timing always seemed to be everything. The week I arrived and was having my hand-over the Argentines planted a flag in the Falkland Islands and I ended up being the desk officer for the Falklands War for the first several months. I think I had my first Sunday off - I worked all weekend, and all week, of course, for the first two or three months - my first Sunday off when the Argentines capitulated. It was a very, very busy time running round in and out of the Bundestag; into the Auswaertiges Amt several times a day; and dealing with the British military.

Rheindahlen, the British military headquarters there, was obviously not implicated in the Falklands conflict, but having to make available personnel and material that otherwise they would have been holding in Germany. We were also taking in a huge amount of analysis and assessment of the implications for elsewhere. It was a time when, as we always were in Bonn, we were very conscious that the world was watching what the UK was up to - in other words not only our European partners.

The Germans were among the first to be very reluctant to follow us in imposing sanctions - EU sanctions, it was not the EU then, EEC sanctions - on Argentina. They were the very first to want to lift them. Keeping the Germans on side was extraordinarily difficult. They had persuaded themselves that Europeans were no longer belligerent and were very disturbed to see that, just across the water in London, people were willing to send a gun-boat at what seemed to them very little provocation. There was also a strangely disturbing undercurrent of German relations with Argentina that went back, I think, to the War and the many people who had gone there in the de-nazification process at the end of the War. That had quite a large influence in some bits of the political scene back in Bonn, so one was always looking out for that. And there was a lot of hostility to the British position among ordinary Germans, although the German Government did come through and did actually help Britain in its effort.

So there was that aspect of it, but we were also very conscious that the Russians were watching. But one learnt things about the Russians that I have found at other times as well. There was a moment when the Russian Ambassador in Berlin sidled up to our Ambassador there and sort of more or less gave him a wink, tapped on the side of the nose and said, "Well done, we big countries mustn't let the little ones get away with anything". So it was a sort of complicity among the great powers, that contradicted, if you like, the Cold War assertiveness that the Russians were showing towards the western powers at the time.

Anyway, by the time the Falklands War was over I had earned my spurs on that as far as the Bonn Embassy was concerned; and as it became more and more apparent that the government of Margaret Thatcher was heading for a showdown with the rest of the European Union over, particularly, the Budget, Britain's budget contribution, the Bonn Embassy decided it needed to have a First Secretary who did nothing other than European Community work in its Economic Section. So they created a new job and put me into it, and I found myself having to build up a much more detailed set of connections in the Finance Ministry and the Economics Ministry than Britain had had previously. And build up a constituency of people who would at least listen, although they were very hostile, to Britain's case on its relationship with Europe and how it saw the European Communities. I found myself having to do things I had not done before and that I found very difficult at first, including a lot of public speaking, a lot of television appearances, a lot of podium discussions (which were a big German thing). And I found myself going round the country talking to absolutely everybody, trades unionists, meetings of the Young CSU (Franz Joseph Strauss's people in Bavaria), meetings of Young Socialists from the German Socialist party, meetings of Chambers of Commerce and so on. Having to speak in German with a hostile audience, in a language I had only learnt from scratch six months previously, and recognising that I might be on television that night. So again it was an enormously steep learning curve, a thing I felt extremely diffident about when I started. Once you've done that with the sort of audiences I had to face ... actually I've never been afraid of public speaking ever again in my life ... but I think it was a very good thing to have got in well before the age of thirty.

I remember once turning up in Dortmund on a bitterly cold day with three feet of snow. I had to talk to an audience of trades unionists that had been put together by the Dortmund Young Socialist party, the left wing of the SPD. My French colleague who'd been talking to them before - this was a Saturday, I can't think why German trades unionists spent their Saturdays in lecture theatres but they did - my French colleague came out ashen white, saying "They're mad, they're mad, don't go in there". I went in and found this audience more or less rioting, and extraordinarily hostile because Margaret Thatcher was a hated figure in Germany. So I reckoned I had to turn the tables on them. I said "Well, look, I'll tear up my notes," which I did rather ostentatiously to the sound of ripping paper, "and I'll ask you a few questions," which wasn't what they expected. And so I teased away at questions about their attitudes to Europe in which I set up a dialectic in which it became very obvious that they were deeply racist towards some of the Southern European members of the European Community. They

were rather against someone from one of the Mediterranean States becoming President of this new Federal Europe that they envisaged: that was not what they had in mind at all. And by the time we'd finished jousting with that I was able to insert some of the British messages which worked very much better for them than if I had just pitched into them. But I do remember coming out of that afterwards and seeing my host who was a rather militant Young Socialist whose car had got stuck in the snow in the car park. So in a friendly way I said I'd give him a shove and help him push his car, and he batted me away saying very crossly that he wouldn't accept help from a diplomat who supported Margaret Thatcher and her anti-European statements. So it became clear that one became tarred with the notion of one's Government: the notion of political neutrality just didn't exist in Germany at the time.

Anyway, it was a very interesting time. By virtue of all this (what we now call) public diplomacy I was probably rather closer to the grass roots in Germany than anybody else in the Embassy. I always made a point of speaking only German to Germans, so I had a lot of German friends who didn't usually meet diplomats. I was also dealing a lot with the so-called technical Ministries, not with the German Foreign Ministry, so again I was speaking to people who told things the way they saw it and didn't mince their words. And my husband, who had come to Germany with me, was teaching in Bonn University in the English Faculty, so had a lot of young students including some post-graduate students. And he was running a drama club so had a lot of students from the wider student body doing drama with him. We used to have student parties at home quite often, so I was seeing Germany and hearing voices, particularly from a younger generation, who didn't use the polite post-War discourse of the former Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, or of the generation of people who'd reached power at the tops of German Ministries, or in the Bundestag or German industry. I was hearing a very different approach to what it meant to be German, towards what was then the German Democratic Republic, a quite different view about the re-unification of Germany. I was rather closer to some of the more disturbing trends, from a British point of view, such as the rise of the Greens, Petra Kelly; and the protests about the stationing of American Pershing missiles in Germany; different attitudes towards East and West, peace, NATO, the European Communities. For me a lot of that was crystallized when I went to Berlin for the first time and walked around. It was West Berlin, we couldn't go to East Berlin. I walked to Checkpoint Charlie, went up to the Wall, looked over into East Berlin, reflected on what people were saying, and spent a long time sitting in Berlin over a cup of coffee, thinking about it all. And thinking that it was unsustainable, grotesque, more than that, almost

Kafkaesque in its absurdity, and it's not going to last. And I left Germany convinced that reunification was very, very, much closer than most people thought, including the elite in West Germany itself; and that there were signs of it in the way Ostpolitik was being cultivated by Hans Dietrich Genscher, but also by a lot of other people round him who had never lost that desire for reunification despite the language of the West German elite. So that marked me again as being a bit of a dissident, doing things slightly differently from people around me.

But, of course, most of our day job was helping the Treasury and Number Ten and the Foreign Office negotiate with the Germans, who were a key player, over the Thatcher Government's wish to "have our money back", as she put it. What became the British budget rebate was negotiated at the Fontainebleau European Summit, when I was there [in Bonn]. It involved mastering a colossal number of sometimes slightly specious but nonetheless very technical arguments, about how the Budget worked, how contributions worked, how British taxation worked, how VAT worked right across the EU, and then converting those very mercantilist British arguments into a much more political argument that would have purchase with Germans. And making it clear also that you couldn't have a situation that was stable in which [one of the few net contributors was] a UK which was not by any means among the richest members of the EU - on the contrary, in those days it had a per capita income that was really quite low compared with the EU average. (We changed that in the course of the 80s and 90s, but in the early 80s the UK's per capita income was very low; productivity was low; we were just coming out of what had been a very difficult economic period the 1970s, in which we had had to bring in the IMF to rescue our finances.) I was having to bring home to them that it wasn't sustainable to have EU spending patterns, including the Common Agricultural Policy, that skewed a huge amount of money to voters elsewhere in Europe, but very little of it to the UK, which had joined the EU late and didn't have the sort of patterns of farming or of industry or of settlement that would allow it to benefit [adequately] from the EU Structural Funds. These had been set up since the UK's accession to the European Communities but were not actually evening things up at a time when agriculture was still 70% of the EU budget. And to make it clear that that fundamental unfairness wasn't a question of the UK assuming that the EU was a savings bank into which you put money in and got the same amount out. It wasn't a question of "juste retour" as the French used to say, but that it was a fundamental unsatisfactory aspect of the EU. When you then accumulated some other unsatisfactory political aspects of the EU from the British point

of view - a type of law based on Roman law, which was more intrusive and less based on intuitive case law; unfamiliarity with the degree of regulation, because the UK had hitherto been a much less regulated country than France or Germany ... I had to keep making the case of how all these objective political differences between the UK and the EU made it unsustainable if the UK was also, while not one of the richest countries, by far its largest net contributor, alongside Germany. So I was having to convert often unusable arguments from London into arguments and concepts that would make an impact on a German audience, and conversely having to translate language that Germans regarded as self-evident into something that wouldn't be explosive when it hit the desks in Number Ten.

It was during that time that a group of five members of the then European Community, the Benelux countries, France and Germany, met in a place called Schengen in the Netherlands, and set up new arrangements for dealing with the borders between their countries. I waited, I think this was 1985, and waited for our Post in the Hague to report on this, because diplomatic etiquette required that you didn't report [first] on something that happened in someone else's country. They showed no signs of having any interest in this at all, so I sent a longish report back to London on what Schengen was, what it meant and how politically significant it was from the point of view of the Germans and the French, and to the others as well, as the starting point to a more political Europe in which integration was becoming much closer. I pointed to what this meant for different ways of dealing with not only freedom of movement but attitudes towards citizenship, and invited London to ponder this and take it seriously. It disappeared into a void; but one day I feel I would like to go back to the National Archives and find that letter and see what it actually said, because here we are sitting in 2017 with Schengen and free movement of peoples being one of the issues. And a lot of what we are doing now, today, on the day on which our Article 50 Brexit letter is hitting desks in Brussels, feels to me very, very similar to what I was doing in 1985 and 1986.

AM: On to Planning Staff?

Planning Staff, FCO, 1986-87

ML: On to Planning Staff. A lot of fun. The FCO had a Planning Staff which was, in effect, an FCO in-house strategy unit, a think tank; a place where people thought about the things that otherwise would fall between the cracks of the organisation; a place where people kept in touch with the academic world; kept in touch with strategy units and planning staffs elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States in particular, but also elsewhere in the world; a

place where relatively young people were free to think relatively freely, and had direct access to Ministers, which hasn't always been the case [since].

When I was there it was run first of all by Pauline Neville-Jones and then by David Gore-Booth. It was a bright, sparky place, and I did a whole range of different things, different Planning Papers of all sorts. There was also another strand to our work (now not done in that way any more). There was always one person in the Planning Staff who was detailed off to help the Political Director in the FCO (the most senior policy official) with his work on East/West relations, some of the more sensitive aspects of negotiations with the French, the Germans and the Americans, to keep the major powers in Europe together in the big strategic issues of the day. That was my job, so I found myself going round with the Political Director in a series of very sensitive talks in Brussels, in Bonn, in Paris, in Washington, particularly on the stationing of INF missiles in Europe, and on East/West relations at a time when they were contested. As I said earlier, Germany was heading in a slightly different direction.

I not only did that with the Political Director but Ministers would meet from time to time and I would act as the secretariat for those Ministerial meetings, so it was a very interesting grandstand view of high politics in the West at the time. Gorbachev had become by that stage the leader of the Soviet Union; Reagan was the US President. They met in Reykjavik, in I suppose 1986 or something like that, and started the process of arms negotiations that led to the big START talks, and other negotiations like that. That was causing a lot of fluttering of doves in European capitals because they were suddenly afraid that this rather unpredictable President Reagan would negotiate away European security over their heads through deals with Gorbachev. Some of what I was doing with the Political Director was aiming to keep tabs on that, remind Americans of European interests, and make sure we didn't have any unwelcome surprises. There was a very important NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in June of 1987, at which a small meeting took place (for which again I was the secretariat) at which the deal was actually done in which the Germans - Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Foreign Minister as he then was - accepted the basis for the INF deal that the Americans concluded with the Russians a couple of months later in 1987. That was a very interesting meeting to have prepped and then sat through. So Planning Staff was a chance for me to be in at some major issues.

Towards the very end of my time in Planning Staff our Ambassador in Bonn, Julian Bullard, became concerned - in this rather febrile East/West relationship - that Gorbachev, who was

proving to be a very dynamic Soviet leader and a surprising one, with Glasnost and Perestroika under way, changing some of our assumptions about the Soviet Union - Julian Bullard became concerned that Gorbachev might play the German card, as he put it. In other words offer Germany, the two Germanies, reunification in return for neutrality, so that West Germany would leave NATO and become a neutral country, rather like Austria, but become reunified. This, of course, would change all our calculations about East/West relations, NATO, about the European Union, about relations with the United States. It would mean naturally enough the four powers leaving the Federal Republic. The status of Berlin would have to be changed. There would be all sorts of issues to do with the final frontiers in Europe - the borders in Europe after the end of the Second World War would have to be resolved. So it was a very big issue. Because I kept banging on about what I knew about Germany in the Planning Staff, including in little minutes I used to send to Geoffrey Howe's Private Office, David Gore-Booth said "You keep talking about Germany, you say it's going to reunify, write a paper [in answer to Julian Bullard's question]." So I sat down at my kitchen table across one weekend and wrote and wrote and wrote. What I concluded was that Gorbachev would not play the German card. I had a first half of the paper, part A, which explained why this thesis was wrong: that he would not do it, that was not how it would work, and that the Soviet Union had far too many material reasons why they would not want to have a reunited Germany, and would want to resist that. But I wrote a second half of the paper that I was not invited to write. But I wrote it anyway: why communism was a spent force; that it would fail fairly soon in Eastern Europe, and that at that point there would be a massive change in the configuration of politics in Europe. The two Germanies would reunite, that was what they would want to do; we would have to deal with the post-war borders; and it would have massive implications for the EU, NATO, East/West relations, security, defence and so on. As I wrote this paper my nerves slightly failed me when it came to timing. I thought it [reunification] would probably happen by the late 90s, because I thought the INF Pershing stationing would go ahead, and that that would produce a passivism in Germany that would be part of the situation. I didn't think it would be quite as soon as it was, but I certainly thought it would be very soon. I said in the paper something a bit longer, but my guess was mid 90s, so I was out by a few years, I have to say.

This paper was taken up by the Planning Staff and by a sort of sleight of hand by-passed the usual committee of Deputy Under-Secretaries who should have vetted it before it went to the Foreign Secretary. It went straight to the Foreign Secretary who liked it and commissioned

more work, so Deputy Under-Secretaries weren't allowed to stop it. It went out for consultation all over the place. (I still know, but I won't say, who rubbished it and who gave it a fair wind: my respect for those who gave it a fair wind is very high!) It went to Number Ten and was laid in front of Margaret Thatcher and her principal foreign policy advisor. I then went on maternity leave, and the paper quietly disappeared into the long grass. A couple of years later - because this was, of course, 1987 - in 1989, when a furious Margaret Thatcher asked why nobody had warned her about German re-unification, they dug out the paper again, and said "oh, but we did". But by then, of course, it was all too late. That paper will one day - it hasn't yet - reach the National Archives.

AM: Do you want to go on to Paris, at this stage? [Secondment to the Quai d'Orsay].

Secondment to Quai d'Orsay, Paris, 1990-93

ML: Yes, I had a wonderful time in Paris. I wasn't going to talk about it here at any length because I did do a paper about it which also hasn't reached the National Archives, but I'm assuming it will one day. I wrote at great length when I came back about my experiences and my conclusions. I will just say it was great fun and a huge privilege. I was the first really substantive exchange of diplomats we had had with the French. They'd had a youngish chap who'd spent six months there after he'd been at ENA but this was a rather surprising initiative between Margaret Thatcher and President Mitterrand to exchange diplomats. So, they started off with me, substantively, and we had in the Foreign Office a First Secretary from the French Foreign Ministry, who I think went on to the Algeria desk. I'm not sure what the Algerians thought of that but that was what he wanted to do. I arrived in Paris with two very young children in tow, a few weeks' old baby and a two year old, and found although the Quai d'Orsay had known all about my arrival and were well prepared for it, they hadn't really made any arrangement for me at all, and hadn't worked out what job I was going to do. I went on my first morning to see the Director for Europe who was nominally in charge of me, and made it clear that I couldn't wait to be shown to my desk and was raring to go. Since they didn't have a desk or a job, he did a wonderful (I learnt a lot from the French) act of delegation: he took me down the corridor to the Deputy Director and handed me over; and there I was with the Deputy Director who then wandered down the corridor - a terribly nice chap - to find some billet for me. They put me eventually, very early on, onto the British desk, because the Quai d'Orsay had no idea of what to do with me, and the British desk was vacant at the time. So I found myself - from a British point of view where we were much

more cautious about security - I found myself in the extraordinary position of being in charge of all their archive material on the UK, including their Leading Personality notes on British Ministers, their analysis of their last conversations with the British Prime Minister, their analysis of British politics and so on. This was the time very close to the end of Margaret Thatcher's premiership when her leadership became contested. Indeed she was on the steps of the British Embassy in Paris (something I had nothing to do with) when she realised she had the skids under her. So I was in the extraordinary position of being the person on the British desk at the Quai d'Orsay who had to write the note for the French Council of Ministers - the French Cabinet therefore - on the implications of the Conservative Party leadership contest. I wrote a little paragraph about why John Major was going to win it, and got hauled in to my boss, the head of department, who said "We thought you knew about this stuff and were quite clever but of course this unknown Major isn't going to win. Our Ambassador in London says that's nonsense, so would you like to revise your note?" So I said "All right, you tell me what you want me to write and I'll write it. Fine by me, I don't mind". And I went back to my desk and was bashing out something else saying it was going to be I don't know who, when the Ambassador from London rang through and said "Guess what, John Major has just walked it". So after that they took me a bit more seriously at the Quai d'Orsay.

It was a very different career path from the FCO one. The FCO tended to be rather centrally directed, meritocratic. You did what you were told and you went to where the need was, where most work was, and shifted around accordingly as priorities changed. In the French system it was very much more dependent on who you knew, and which boss, which Director, Director-General, or Head of Department wanted you because he'd known you in some previous Post. You used your network, particularly those who'd been to ENA, the National Administration School. They used their network of [ENA] contacts to prospect future postings so that they were well placed for them when the time came. Of course arriving from a completely different planet and being parachuted into the Quai d'Orsay, I was treated as an honorary *énarque* but had none of these contacts, so I had to work my way up. I was able to measure my progress in the Quai d'Orsay really by the geography I sat in. I started with no desk at all, having to borrow paper clips and squat on the edge of tables when anybody was off sick; and by the time I left I had an office of my own, halfway down the corridor, with a view onto the garden rather than the street, between two key Directors. So I had clearly sort of found a way to do it, but it wasn't very self-evident. Since I didn't have all these

university and posting and political connections, I had to use all the sneaky diplomatic skills I'd already built up. I bought a coffee machine, because the coffee dispenser down the corridor into which you put, was it euros then? no, you put a few francs in, and got a dribble of disgusting coffee ... So I would turn this coffee machine on temptingly at about half past nine when colleagues had come in, gone through their telegrams and were beginning to think what they were going to do by way of work that day. The smell would waft down the corridor; people would gather and know they would get a cup if they came and had a chat. I would turn it on again at the sort of low point, about half past five in the afternoon. So I picked up a colossal amount of gossip that way. I took to doing what was very counter-cultural in the Quai, where information didn't circulate at all freely, particularly not horizontally. If I had something that involved somebody in another Department, another Directorate, on the pretext of not speaking very good French (which actually wasn't true) I would say, "Do you mind if I come and see you rather than doing this on the phone?". So I would then go down and see them. When you see somebody and start talking to them about the issue you are both dealing with, they would then say to you "Oh well, actually, I've got a note about that in my drawer" (because they never really filed anything) and they would open their drawer and produce the vital thing that you wanted that they had forgotten that they knew about. So I built up a horizontal network that way. I had a degree in French so my French was actually good; I did nothing but speak French and write in French all the time I was there.

I think I earned my spurs from the French point of view by being in a small French CSCE (as it then was, now OSCE) delegation, in a conference that was having an almighty row over the future architecture of Europe. Germany by now had re-unified, the Iron Curtain had fallen, but it wasn't at all clear what was going to happen next. The Soviet Union was still intact. There a big tussle going on between France and the United States in the CSCE about the future architecture of Europe and what was going to stay inside the CSCE (as it then was) with an American seat at the table, and what might disappear off into a Europe the Americans weren't represented in. There I was in the French delegation, speaking French, masquerading as French (which I did all the time: I became totally French while I worked for them). The American delegation found to their chagrin that the French delegation could produce drafting amendments in English as fast as they could, and this was unprecedented. We went through a very silly, actually, negotiation, in which both sides were being extraordinarily intransigent, and eventually the Secretary of State in the State Department had to ring up Paris and Oslo

(where the meeting was being held) in the middle of the night, and remonstrate and ask people to be more sensible. But as far as France was concerned I had been utterly French in my bloody-mindedness. We came home to Paris to a heroes' welcome because the head of the French delegation had won far more than Paris would have been willing to settle for. So after that I was regarded as a Good Thing, and I was allowed to go for pretty much any job I wanted.

I was co-opted into a plan of President Mitterrand's to deal with the future architecture of Europe by setting up a European Confederation. This in Mitterrand's mind, I think, would have prevented newly democratic countries in Central and Eastern Europe from joining the European Communities. Instead they would have belonged in a looser organisation so that the more centralised federal Europe would not have been watered down by the arrival of the Eastern Europeans. He had persuaded Vaclav Havel in Prague rather unsuspectingly to co-chair with him a big meeting about this idea of Confederation. Havel discovered belatedly that he had been sold a pup and that this was very unpopular with his fellow Central Europeans. The Germans were very rude about the idea, which they torpedoed before it really got going. But I helped the Elysée and the *cabinet* (the Private Office of the Elysée) and the French Foreign Ministry to set up the so-called Assizes of the Confederation in Prague. I had a wonderful time - along with the other people who were doing the setting up - corralling what the French regarded as European opinion makers, including people like Melina Mercouri and George Soros and goodness knows who else. So we had a wonderful meeting in Prague which was a success from the French point of view.

After that I was once again without a job. We were now in I suppose the summer of 1991, and they decided that it would be a good thing if I were to go into the Soviet department and become the desk officer for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. I had no objection to that at all; it was very interesting. But I once again went along to see my Director and said, "Look, I'm very happy to do this but in my view the Soviet Union is about to collapse and you're about to be dealing with three independent states at an absolutely critical juncture in European politics. Are you sure you want a foreigner doing that, or is the job one you would really rather have Frenchman in, somebody who both can represent France outwards but also can develop all the experience you are going to be using later on? You have very good Russian speakers; are you sure you want me to do this?" Again he looked at me and said, "We thought you were quite sensible but you seem to have lost the plot here. There is no way the Soviet Union is going to collapse. Complete nonsense! Go and do it!" So I said I would sleep

on it and give it a couple of days, and if you still want me to do it I'll do it. And I did. Needless to say, about a month into it the Soviet Union had collapsed and I was the desk officer for three independent countries. And I found myself - this was wonderful and why I found I had an office in a prime location in the middle of a corridor - I found myself drafting France's first Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with newly independent Ukraine. President Kravchuk of Ukraine had been persuaded with not much pushing that it would be a brilliant idea if they had a French-style executive Presidency rather than a German-style, non-executive, purely representational Presidency, and wanted a lot of French help with the way he devised and constructed his new state.

So I went to Kiev with the French Director-General, and conducted negotiations back in Paris with Ukrainian negotiators. It was an emotional time with the collapse of the Soviet Union. I remember one of the Ukrainians from their Foreign Ministry who came to Paris. We had had a very good day of talks. We fleshed out a number of clauses of the Treaty. He'd gone off cheerfully that evening, but came in the next morning looking absolutely ashen-faced as if he had been sick. I asked if he was ill, and he said, "No, no, no, you don't understand. I came to diplomacy a bit late. I was in the Ukrainian, Kievian, Institute of Foreign Languages before. French was my special subject, and I've spent all my life reading French literature. I only became a diplomat a couple of years ago, when Ukraine starting flexing its muscles and moving towards greater autonomy. I couldn't resist it: I spent all night wandering around Paris, in the streets, thinking, "This is where Madame Bovary thought this ... and Victor Hugo did that ... and I didn't have any sleep.". And you suddenly realised what an enormous personal and emotive thing the end of communism and the end of the Iron Curtain was for people right across Eastern Europe.

So I did that and arranged the first state visit for President Kravchuk to Paris.

AM: And then it's Environment, Science and Energy?

Head of Environment, Science and Energy Department, FCO, 1993-84

ML: Well after that, yes, that's right, we were going to settle my family back in Scotland. We'd agreed to that; and I had told the FCO with deep regret that I was going to be leaving them, but needed a year back in Britain to settle myself before I upped sticks and moved back to Scotland. What they could have done is to say "OK, you're a loser (to quote President Trump). We'll find you a little desk job and then goodbye." But actually they were

extraordinarily supportive. They said, “We really want you to go to the Cabinet Office and head one of the European sections (an Exterior Department dealing with the EU) but could you allow two years?” I said no and they said if I could only do one year they would promote me anyway. There had just been an enormous Environment Conference in Rio, the Rio Earth Summit. There was a huge amount of follow-up. The Head of [the Environment] Department was leaving. The FCO said that if I could take over for just one year “we won’t tell anybody in Whitehall and you go in there and do all the follow-up until it’s fixed and then we can replace you”. I’ve enjoyed all my FCO jobs, but this was terrific. It was making policy on an international scale that hadn’t been made before, because it was the start of all the environmental conventions. It was the start-up of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, setting up its architecture and its procedures, rules, going to New York and negotiating that in committee for several weeks. It was negotiating the Climate Change Convention: a lot of trips to places like Nairobi, where the UN Environment Programme is; Delhi, because Indian attitudes to [the Climate Change Convention] it was absolutely critical to the follow-up to Rio. Negotiating the World Bank’s Environment Facility - a big meeting in Beijing to do that.

I had in the meantime got some very good staff in my Department. It was an exciting moment so I was able to attract very good staff. Some of them were negotiating other bits of new environmental treaties, or the follow-up to mature treaties. I’d also got people dealing with science - new projects like the Large Hadron Collider, the European Taurus and so on. I had a seat ex-officio on some of the Science Research Councils. The FCO was running a network of scientific advisors worldwide, so I used to enjoy attending things like the Particle Physics Research Council. Then there was a lot of oil and energy policy as well. The oil price was pretty stable at the time, but the underlying tensions of pipeline politics were always visible in Middle Eastern politics. It was also the time when the British Government was taking the decision to set up the THORP re-processing plant, reprocessing plutonium at Sellafield, so I sat on a rather secret committee to do with that.

So it was an intensely busy year. Our children were very small: the eldest one was not quite five, the youngest was two. I was the youngest Head of Department in the FCO, and I was spending an awful lot of time on aeroplanes. I was negotiating hard outwards with foreigners but also inwards with the Department of the Environment and DFID [then the Overseas Development Administration], both of which were the other stakeholders on most of the environment or development legislation, as well as with the Administrations in Scotland and

Wales and Northern Ireland who were to implement some of the UK's undertakings on sustainable development. So there was a great deal of domestic politics, Whitehall management and "Whitehall warrior" stuff that stood me in good stead later on when I became Director-General in the FCO. I also saw a great deal of the Treasury, which was very suspicious of DFID and the Department of the Environment. So I was trying to keep everybody onside from a sort of central position, quite often brokering agreements between those three Departments that otherwise would have broken down. Then we had the civil nuclear folk in what was then the Department of Trade and Industry, who were also very suspicious of everybody else, and at loggerheads with the Department of the Environment over the THORP reprocessing stuff. As I said, I was the youngest FCO Head of Department: I was often catapulted up two levels above me in Whitehall, negotiating with Deputy Secretaries elsewhere whose Departmental interests were important to them, and who regarded me as probably the only honest broker who had an interest in all of them succeeding and none of them winning at the expense of the other. So it was great fun, I greatly enjoyed it and I was sorry to leave it in way.

AM: But you went back to Scotland?

Scottish Office Industry Department, 1993–95

ML: I went back to Scotland. This is an interview about the FCO so I won't talk about it at great length, but what I would just say is that I went back to what was then the Scottish Office, the Scottish Office Enterprise Department. I was in charge of the branch that dealt with so-called Enterprise Networks - Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the economic development network of local Enterprise Companies. I learnt a lot of the grey arts of civil service management there, because the budgets were enormous. The FCO had a tiny budget - still has a tiny budget in British public expenditure terms, even smaller now than it was then. The budget I had in my branch alone was equivalent of half of the FCO worldwide budget. I had about £500 million; the FCO had about a billion pounds in those days. I was signing almost every week - because one signed cheques in those days before electronic payments - cheques for grant-in-aid of £50 million, £33 million, here and there ... This was a time when you could run an Embassy like, say, Stockholm on about £1.5 million a year. These were enormous sums in FCO terms. The other thing was that the Scottish Office then, because it was a single Department, was the equivalent of what a large number of Whitehall Departments were doing [for England and Wales]. It was allowed to sit in on the

Treasury Budgetary negotiations each year - on the negotiations over financial Estimates with the other Whitehall spending Departments - if they were spending departments which had an equivalent to the Scottish Office. And because my branch had a very large budget, even by Scottish Office terms, I was very heavily involved in public expenditure Estimates and in the negotiations between spending Departments in Whitehall. I learnt a colossal amount that stood me in very good stead later on in the FCO on the Board, dealing with Treasury and the rest of Whitehall in what is often a form of vicious guerrilla warfare when budgets are being carved up. In those days it was being done once a year; we are now on a three year cycle.

So that was extremely interesting. My branch was also a bit of the Scottish Office that disbursed a lot of the [EU] Structural Funds, so I saw a great deal of how that was run. And because we dealt with economic policy in the macro-economic sense I was also quite closely involved in writing some of the Financial Services bits of Michael Heseltine's White Papers on Competitiveness. This was because the Scottish financial services sector was a big sector [in Scotland] that was trying out innovative things that the Treasury would allow it to do as the scale was relatively small, but didn't allow to happen at the London end. So some of the innovative schemes that were going on in Scotland made their way into the White Paper, together with the supporting intellectual arguments from the economists. So, again, I found myself totally unexpectedly dealing with some central themes, even while I appeared to be on the periphery of things.

Perhaps one other thing, because I learnt something important there. As head of a branch, I had staff in the Scottish Office. I had to at one stage merge my branch with another branch. It was in effect a sort of benevolent take over. The Scottish Office was having to make economies. Nobody lost their jobs. It was done in an extremely humane way. The head of the other branch was retiring, so he simply wasn't replaced. Nobody was ousted: there were various other people in the branches who were leaving for other reasons, so nobody got eased out. We phased it over time. We were in a building in which the branch that was joining ours was immediately above us, one floor up in the building with exactly the same views from the windows. They had only to come down stairs: it was the difference of being on the fifth not the sixth floor, as far as I could see from an FCO perspective. We were used to having to get on planes at very short notice, say goodbye to wife and children who would see you next a fortnight later; or go to some Post you hadn't heard of before and start a new life. It seemed to me like very, very, small beer. So it simply hadn't occurred to me how disruptive this would feel to people who had lived in the same city all their lives, who had

been to school and university in the same city all their lives, who had perhaps been in the same job for five years, rather than the three or four that was the norm in the FCO, and who were simply not used to disruptive change. I was very transparent about what was happening, and I was cheerful about it, and consultative about it. But probably not sympathetic enough about realising, until it became very clear to me, just how upset individuals would be. I learnt a very big lesson that way that was useful when I was managing locally engaged staff later, because our locally engaged staff in Embassies are in very much the same position. Some of them are living in their home city; they've been in the same jobs for probably twelve, fifteen, twenty years. And when you confront them with change, ask them to drop one little thing they are doing and take on something else instead, it feels like a big deal to them. Whereas for me to be told, "You're not doing the Falklands war anymore, you're doing the European Communities", as I was in Germany, was the sort of thing where you just smiled and agreed, said "lead me to it." But to be told you are no longer going to be doing the Outer Isles, you are going to be dealing with Inverness, seemed a very big deal to somebody who had been dealing with the Outer Isles.

AM: And you then went back in Policy Planning Staff?

Head of Policy Planning Staff, FCO, 1996-98

ML: I don't really want to dwell on this because it wasn't a happy time for the FCO, or particularly for me. It was a difficult time. I was in the Policy Planning Staff from the beginning of 1996 until the spring of 1998, which straddled the time when John Major's Conservative Government was having a very difficult time over Europe. Under contest from within the Party, he was dealing with his so-called "bastards"; and then in 1997, as we know, Tony Blair was elected and became Prime Minister. There was a massive change after what had been 18 years of Conservative government. That ought to have been, I suppose, a very good time for the Policy Planning Staff to be dealing with the transition. The transition was exactly what we dealt with. At the tail end of John Major's government foreign policy more or less stopped because at the heart of it was the division inside the Conservative Party over Europe, in which the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, was inevitably implicated one way or another. Politics was taking over once the electoral cycle got under way. So it wasn't an easy moment for doing policy planning. We then spent a lot of time drawing up briefs for an incoming government. On this occasion it was a serious issue because it seemed very likely that there would be a change of government with a massive change of direction. Policy

Planning Staff drew up meticulous briefs: rather short for an incoming Conservative Government because they wouldn't have needed to know a lot, and a very much more voluminous set in which we were foreseeing what might be the policies and questions for a Labour government.

Robin Cook became Foreign Secretary. It was a time when, I think, the incoming Labour Ministers were suspicious of civil servants. They had spent a long time in opposition. They'd done a lot of thinking of their own. They had used a lot of focus groups, prepared for power with very clear ideas of what they wanted to do, and they were suspicious of Sir Humphrey and his mandarins coming along and saying "no, no, it's not like that". And I think Robin Cook, in particular, was suspicious. He was wary of the Foreign Office, never entirely bonded with it, always thought that the mandarins might have ulterior motives in what they said. Which was mis-placed. As you know, none of us ever knew what our colleagues' politics was because we never revealed it. But whatever anybody's politics was, I think everybody in Whitehall (and certainly in the FCO) was quite keen to have a change, simply because after such a long time and the stasis that had come from a Conservative Party that had, in effect, run out of power, run out of mandate, any Government with a convincing majority in the House of Commons and a new broom with which to sweep clean, was welcome and had a Civil Service that was keen to help it succeed. So, as I say, his scepticism was misplaced; but it was a time in which as Foreign Secretary he was not much interested in policy planning papers and was suspicious of his most senior staff, so it was quite difficult for the Policy Planning Staff to find a rationale.

What do I remember from that time? Again, perhaps, one little thing that I can't resist. I spent quite a lot of time, therefore, going round the academics, going round the think-tanks, talking, gathering stuff. I remember once going to what was called the John Mackintosh Society, a sort of centre-left group (which were all the rage at the time) in memory of the Labour MP John Mackintosh, who had died. (A very great figure.) I went to a little evening session that they were holding, talking about British foreign policy and relations with Europe. There was a young chap there who was then in the Number 10 Research Department called David Miliband, about whom we heard more later. They started talking about the plans for a Scottish Parliament, something I must say I've always been thoroughly in favour of. I remember during that evening saying to David Miliband, "You do understand, don't you, that when there is a Scottish Parliament the fundamental divergences in interest in European policy between Scotland and England will come into plain sight, whereas they are hidden at

the moment, with a Scottish Secretary who is a member of the Cabinet, bound by collective Cabinet responsibility. If he's lost some argument over fisheries or agricultural funds or whatever else it happens to be, he's not going to go home to Scotland and tell everybody. Those differences will become very plain, with a Scottish parliament holding to account a Scottish government, and they are so fundamental that I think they will have a destabilising impact on the Union, the United Kingdom". I remember David Miliband goggling at me - at this totally mind-boggling talk that he hadn't heard before - and him saying gamely "It's no use arguing about that. The point is, the pressures from the Scottish Convention for a Scottish Parliament were irresistible. The Union would be destabilised if we didn't bring legislation". He was probably right on this. But I've often thought about that conversation in the last few weeks.

AM: You escaped then to Rome?

Minister and Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy, Rome, 1998-2001

ML: I escaped to Rome. Not much to say about it. I was Deputy Head of Mission. I loved Italy - wonderful place. I learnt Italian, I spoke Italian. I built up lots of contacts. I was lucky to have two Ambassadors in succession who very reasonably and properly regarded it as their duty to spend quite a lot of their time in Milan and in the north of Italy (the economic powerhouse) not least for economic and trade reasons. They more or less abandoned the Mezzogiorno to me. I used to travel down particularly to our Consulates in the Mezzogiorno, and travel around there.

I did a huge range of things as Deputy Head of Mission. The Kosovo conflict was on while I was there. Italy being part of the theatre of war from which RAF flights took part in the Kosovo campaign, the Rome Embassy was temporarily increased in size while that was going on. I dealt with internal politics. It was a time when Italy was very popular with the Blair Government, and a lot of Ministers came to Italy frequently to build up contacts with the Italian Socialist Party that was in government at the time. The Blair family spent every summer in Italy, but other Ministers were constantly coming through. It was a chance to learn how to be a Chargé d'Affaires, and to be an understudy for becoming a Head of Post myself, in a much bigger Post than obviously I was going to go on to when I first became an Ambassador. It was also a time when there was an absurd burden of administrative work put on Deputy Heads of Mission by the FCO. It has slimmed down since - very necessary to do so. I must have spent nearly half of my time actually sitting behind a desk, never speaking

Italian, dealing with returns, statistics, and issuing bossy minutes to the rest of the Embassy about diversity-policy-this or work/life-balance-that ... or enquiring whether they were getting their exercise. Or how recently did they do their fire drill in their section?.. budget accounting: did you spend 15% of your time on FCO Objective 3? or was it Objective 7?.. and please could you tell me why? And it took up a colossal amount of time.

One other thing about Rome: I was in Rome on 9/11 when the two aeroplanes flew into the Twin Towers, and just by chance the Ambassador was on leave that day so I found myself in charge of the Embassy. People talk about it being wholly out of a blue sky and unforeseen. And it was; nobody knew that plot was going to happen. But the phenomenon wasn't unforeseen. We knew that there were al-Qaeda cells in Italy, and we knew they had been taking an interest in the British Embassy and the US Embassy and Italian targets. Al-Qaeda was a threat; absolutely no question about that. I remember being called along the corridor by my press officer saying, "Come and look at the television. Something terrible is happening in the US". And there were the newsreels going round and round the loop of the planes flying into the Twin Towers. I took one look at it and thought the only people I know with those capabilities are al-Qaeda. We know they're in Italy; this looks massive. (The first news was coming in about attacks on the Pentagon.) London would be going into meltdown trying to work out what was happening. There would be a big Consular side of this in the US as well as all the other stuff world-wide. It is likely to take them [the FCO] half a day before they get around to sending any instructions to overseas Posts about what we ought to do. In the meantime they won't really know what to say - mealy mouthed sort of stuff that hedges bets and so on. So I'd better just take an executive decision. So I didn't wait for anything. I closed the Embassy to the public, closed our consular queues (we had huge consular queues - not of Italians, they didn't need visas, but of third country nationals, any of whom could have been a proxy for terrorists) and I called a meeting of my Post Security Committee. When people asked afterwards in some of the European Embassies "how did you know to do that?", I said we all knew al-Qaeda was like that, and that something like that could happen. And of course the FCO instructions to do all the things I had done came in that evening, by which time it would have been much too late if anybody had tried anything against us [in Rome].

AM: Then, on to Norway? First ambassadorship?

Ambassador, British Embassy, Norway, 2002-06

ML: Went off to Norway. Lovely place. I learnt Norwegian before I went, the FCO being very good about its language learning. The FCO language school then sadly had been disbanded. Instead of doing it in London, I was allowed - which was very nice for me - to make my own arrangements to do it in Edinburgh, so I was able to live at home and learn Norwegian with a tutor from Edinburgh University. I then went out and did some immersion training which nobody had done in Norway before, so again I had to set up my own arrangements. My predecessor, naturally enough, didn't want the incoming Ambassador under his feet in Oslo while he was still there. It's not a good look to have your successor hovering around while you are still in charge. So I said I'd go to the north of Norway. We consulted our Honorary Consul about whether there might be somebody, somewhere, who could take me in, and he very spiritedly said "Come and stay with us". So I spent three weeks staying with the Honorary Consul and his wife in Tromsø. He was the owner of the most northerly brewery in the world, and I had a very nice teacher from Tromsø University. I used to put my knapsack on my back with all my grammar books and dictionaries in it and trot down the hill every day to the brewery, and have a Norwegian lesson in the brewery. I would spend a bit of the rest of the morning in the canteen chatting with the workers and the secretarial staff and having a sandwich; then set off into Tromsø and go to cafes and shops and museums; and come home and talk to his wife and him. All that meant that by the time I arrived in Oslo I not only spoke fluent Norwegian, I had met some very ordinary grass-roots Norwegians. I'd met people who didn't come from the capital, in a country that's one of the longest countries in Europe with a lot of regional diversity. I'd learnt to deal with dialects, because Norwegian has a lot of regional dialects. And I had learnt about the scepticism that some parts of Norway feel about their capital and their political class. All of that was extraordinarily useful in establishing my credibility in Oslo once I arrived. I was able to give an interview to the Norwegian newspaper, Aftenposten, when I got there, in Norwegian, talking about Norway. I remember an officious press secretary in the Embassy trying to give me briefing notes about stuff I actually knew all about - what our position on NATO was, what our position on the UN was and what we thought about the Middle East Peace Process and the Oslo Accords. I said "Trust me, that's not what they will want to talk about." We did an interview that was all about Norwegian beer and forests, scenery and shipping and things like that, and it worked well because I became very well known as the Ambassador who'd learnt Norwegian in a brewery. After that I was well accepted by Norwegian Ministers who

felt they could speak to me in a private way as well as a public way. It wasn't difficult being in Norway. It is a cooperative, well organised, effective country. So I chose to focus my own effort on the things that were difficult not the things that were easy. I didn't want to do the things that were easy: my first secretaries and second secretaries could do that. I focussed mostly on oil and gas. We were negotiating a gas pipeline with Norway at the time. We were having a very bitter fishing dispute between Scottish salmon fish farmers and Norwegian salmon fish farmers. And then there were things that were to do with what became the Iraq war, and the operations in Afghanistan. So I spent most of my time doing that sort of thing.

I inherited a very difficult budgetary situation. The budget had basically collapsed and local staff were unhappy, so I spent a lot of time just putting that back in place during my first year. I was then ready to deal with the rest after that. There's not a lot to say about it actually other than that it was a lot easier than I thought. I didn't need to learn how to be an Ambassador in substantive terms, I'd done more difficult work than that when I had been Chargé in Rome. I didn't need to learn about the policy issues other than that every country has some different policy issues from the one you had been in before. How to acquire the knowledge and the contacts wasn't a mystery to me. I think that what was new on becoming an Ambassador for the first time was the extent to which, particularly in a country like Norway which was relatively small, you are a public figure recognised wherever you go. People will come up to you out of the blue and shove a microphone under your nose. You can't go out on a Saturday and have a cup of coffee without people knowing that it's you there. What you are doing is being observed. I also, during the Iraq war, had to have police protection because Norway had offered asylum to some people who had been terrorists and who potentially would not have liked what we were doing in Iraq. So that was difficult and constraining.

But it was a happy time. Not a lot to be said, I don't think ... other than that I had the privilege of Norway reaching its centenary as an independent country. I accompanied King Harald and all the rest of the members of the Royal family when they made a Special Visit to Britain. Like our Queen, he is a grandson, she a granddaughter, of Edward VII, so they are cousins once removed or second cousins. So it involved also the privilege of not only knowing the Norwegian Royal family pretty well but seeing our own Royal family at close quarters in family circumstances rather than State circumstances.

AM: The next two bits then rolled into one when you were Director Strategic Threats and Director-General Defence and Intelligence? Which do you think were the key issues there?

Director, Strategic Threats, FCO, 2006-08

ML: I went back [to London] from Oslo in 2006. Global terrorism was becoming an enormous issue for not only the British Government but other Governments too. I think the British Government was a bit slow to recognise that the UK, like the US, were very much greater targets than other European countries at the time because of some aspects of our foreign policy and our role in Iraq and Afghanistan. The UK saw it as a global threat, and was very conscious of Islamist tentacles spreading out from Indonesia, the Philippines, right through to the US; and didn't really appreciate, I think, at the time that the UK was under a much higher threat than most other countries for some good reasons. I mean not "good" but substantiated reasons why it might be so.

Anyway, [the Strategic Threats Directorate] was a Directorate that had previously had a lot to do with defence, with arms control, non-proliferation, the British military nuclear programme and so on; but it had become more and more skewed towards counter-terrorism. I had a title that I inherited from my immediate predecessor, that of the Foreign Secretary's Special Envoy for Counter-terrorism. I had to do a colossal amount of travel to dangerous places - because you didn't go to them if it wasn't a place where terrorism and its potential was very high. You went to the priority countries not non-priority countries. So I did a lot of travel, including under close protection, and travelling around within the country under armed escort, and negotiating with some real plug-uglies.

I also became in that job, as in the Director-General job, involved in what became a rather difficult dialectic inside the British Government at the time over where the line lay between civil liberties on the one hand and counter terrorism legislation on the other. To what extent should you hold people for police questioning? For how long? How far do you go in constraining civil liberties in order to find out what people are up to? There were divided views among the Cabinet. There were divided views about how to cope with the question of radicalisation inside Britain among British Muslim communities. John Reid, who was then Home Secretary, set up an Ad-Hoc Group on Terrorism as it was labelled, which used to meet pretty regularly at Cabinet level. It was a rather revolutionary idea that this group should be composed jointly of Cabinet Ministers and their most senior civil servant for the issue, which in many cases was their Permanent Secretary. Our Permanent Secretary asked

me to accompany Margaret Beckett, the Foreign Secretary at the time, to this group, although I was only a Director (not even a Director-General) at that stage. Margaret Beckett was handling a very big portfolio and found that meetings were quite often at a time she couldn't manage. So I would represent the Foreign Secretary as well as the FCO in a meeting where a lot of the other principals around the table were Cabinet Ministers; and where the issues were genuinely difficult both intellectually and in policy terms, but also quite political and politically divisive. There were different views about the competing claims of, as it might be, white working class communities and Muslim majority communities. Or about whose constituencies were where. Or about the extent to which you did or didn't involve the Opposition in your emerging thinking about what was a national security threat, and the extent to which this could or could not be aired with the press. So it was extraordinarily interesting.

It also coincided with a time when, quite separately in a different part of what was also my portfolio, Tony Blair's Government were deciding whether or not to renew the Trident nuclear submarines. I found myself again accompanying Margaret Beckett to very restricted meetings of a small group of Cabinet Ministers deciding on that, including being at the one in the Prime Minister's office in the Commons at which the decision was taken to go ahead.

I am not going to say more about that other than that it was an interesting insight into politics. I was seeing things that for the most part were only being seen by Private Secretaries and Permanent Secretaries.

Director General, Defence and Intelligence FCO, 2008-10

I won't say more about that. I then went on to be promoted, doing the same stuff again at a more senior level, and doing more as well. It meant I was sitting on the FCO Board of Management. I also had responsibility for a large chunk of territory. The FCO had been cut and cut. By that stage there were only three Directors-General dealing with foreign policy work. There was also one dealing with administration, personnel and so on, and a Finance Director-General. Of the three dealing with policy there was me doing the defence and security side of things; the D-G Political as we called it, dealing mostly with the UN, with the conflict in Afghanistan, with the big European political issues; and then there was the D-G Economic, the person for the rest of the world and "global issues", dealing with trade, economics, third world, development, plus a whole range of regional issues. The three of us divided the world [geographically] between us, in a sort of post- Napoleonic war way -

dividing up the Christmas pudding. I had all of the Americas, the Caribbean, the Overseas Territories. I was, absurd though it seems, the line manager of our Ambassador in Washington. I held the budget of all our Embassies in the Americas. I chaired the cross-government committee on the Falkland Islands, kept a watching brief to see that it remained safe. I dealt with the Caribbean independent states, but also the Overseas Territories - so we were always having to make sure the MOD didn't withdraw its frigates in the hurricane season. So I was dealing with all of that, plus the personnel and budgets and Ambassadors which went with Embassy management and discipline. Those [latter] subjects, though, were mostly delegated to my good Directors.

I was the point of interface between the FCO and the MOD and the Service Chiefs, at a time when both Iraq and Afghanistan were campaigns that were not going well for us. I didn't deal directly with either the Iraq or Afghanistan campaigns: that was the DG Political. But dealing with the military and their relationship with the FCO was mine, so I was going regularly to Chiefs of Staff meetings, and talking to them about evolving military doctrine and so on.

I was dealing with counter-proliferation at a time when it was undervalued as an issue. It is very important and it was dear to my heart. [Nuclear] proliferation and particularly the growing programmes in India, Pakistan, caused considerable concern; as did what was happening in North Korea, Syria, the Middle East; and the potential for [further] proliferation. So I did a great deal of work on that, most of it self-initiated. It was not something that was receiving a lot of other attention, and a lot of it of course was very sensitive. There was a very good idea that came from MOD and the nuclear military scientists at Aldermaston, which I carried through. I managed through some shuttle diplomacy [i.e. visits to their capitals] to persuade a very reluctant US, France, Russia and China to hold the first meeting of policy directors in charge of nuclear military policy from the foreign ministries of all five nuclear countries [in other words my opposite numbers from these countries]. It was the first time they'd got together to talk about confidence-building measures. I hosted it, I chaired it; we met in London. It now meets regularly. All these countries, particularly France and the US who were very sceptical, now regard it as a good measure. I don't know if it will survive the Trump presidency but certainly it was a going concern. So I did a lot of work on that.

I was also the most senior formal point of contact between the FCO and the intelligence agencies. That's been a long standing function of this job. One of the FCO Directors-General (they used to be called Deputy Under Secretary) has had that role because, in the British system, the Foreign Secretary is in charge of the UK's overseas intelligence agencies, SIS and GCHQ. They have direct access to the Foreign Secretary, not via the FCO. But whenever they have something that is unusually sensitive, potentially politically difficult, or raises difficult legal issues, he receives parallel policy advice - not intervening advice but parallel advice - from the most senior official in the FCO charged with intelligence policy, the Director-General Defence and Intelligence.

So at a time when the world was unusually dangerous - terrorism was very much at the top of the agenda - I was also dealing with intelligence policy and the agencies, and sitting on the Joint Intelligence Committee, the JIC. It was a difficult time for the agencies because, around the time I took over the job in 2007, it was beginning to become apparent that what the Americans were doing in their zeal to counter terrorism breached the UK's view of international law - some of the American practices like extraordinary rendition, water boarding and so on. This is well documented. I am not going to talk about secrets but this is well-documented stuff. It was a colossal, legal, operational, cultural, and moral dilemma for our agencies, which they were finding it hard to find their way through at a time when staying close to the Americans was a top priority for Tony Blair, and at a time when keeping the UK safe from terrorism would be a priority for the whole of his government. So I was heavily involved in working through with the agencies and with the Foreign Secretary what would be legal, decent and sustainable, in a world in which you could no longer make assumptions of secrecy. Because everything tended to come out sooner or later. We didn't know about Wikileaks then, but it seemed to me - probably more to me than it seemed to the agencies because of other work I was doing - it seemed very likely that anything that happened could leak even if it was in the most compartmentalised and secret of the secret categories. Therefore one had to be ready to account for things one had never had to account for before and everything one did had to be audited with that in mind. So, a difficult time though very interesting. I perhaps ought to say, as this is all on the record, that I have a huge respect for our agencies, and the very serious-minded and professional way in which they took on board the need to remain honest, legal and decent.

So that was a very large bit of my work, but I was also just doing the day job in the FCO, because once again I was in charge of the response to terrorism, kidnapping, and international

crises. I had several Directorates and a lot of Departments working for me, including the people working on what is known as the PREVENT strand of counter-terrorism, countering the radicalisation - the ideology and the narrative - that encourages people to become involved in terrorism. I was particularly keen that we get that on a much better footing than we had. When I took over as Director we did have a team that was called Engaging with the Islamic World, but it was very scatter-gun. It was celebrating the very real successes and joys and culture of Islam, but it wasn't actually well directed towards doing it in a way that would discourage people from going in for violent terrorism. It seemed to me the need was too urgent: people were being killed. One couldn't afford to go on using what were very small resources in that way. And it was a difficult task. It needed to be much more directed towards the target [of preventing terrorism]. It was also directed, it seemed to me, in a way that was dangerous for the FCO: too much towards domestic policy inside the UK, not enough towards the very big target which was radicalisation of populations elsewhere, and towards influencing governments and voices of moderation elsewhere in the world. Not enough towards the foreign problem, while leaving someone else in Whitehall, not the FCO, to deal with the domestic problem. I was clear the FCO needed to be part of the solution to the domestic problem, not least because radicalisation of the sort that was affecting us domestically in the UK came from messages that were being generated outside the UK. But I didn't think the FCO ought to be running a domestic programme. This was both because I am tidy-minded but also because it was a reputational risk for the FCO at a time when these counter-radicalisation programmes inside the UK were not going well and were very politically contentious with the Opposition - including incidentally with some people who are now close to the present Conservative Government. So I spent a lot of time in "Whitehall warrior" mode, trying to restructure what was happening across the rest of Whitehall. I won some battles, I lost some battles. At any rate the outcome was that the Home Office became the Whitehall lead-Department for counter-terrorism and other aspects of dealing with the terrorist threat, and along with the Department for Local Government took on counter-terrorism inside the UK. We were able to disengage a bit. We used our expertise - because actually the FCO still probably had better contacts with British Muslim communities than the home departments - but handed on some of our contacts and our expertise and knowledge and focussed more on what was happening abroad.

So that was one side of the work that involved some quite delicate public diplomacy and a lot of very interesting meetings with British Muslims, which I greatly enjoyed. Then there was

the harder end of it, which was encouraging other countries in their own counter-terrorist activities without, in turn, encouraging them to plunge into some of the things that we abhorred when we saw them happening - the torture, the extra-judicial measures, infringements of civil liberty and so on. That was a delicate issue.

We managed to get a lot more money for the FCO to do that with. Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister in 2007, and a lot more money [for counter-terrorism] was due to appear in the next Public Expenditure Round. I was told to get what I could for terrorism because that was going to be the only thing for which the FCO got more money in the new regime. I was given a very impressionistic brief by my Permanent Secretary. I wasn't told how much, I wasn't told how, I wasn't given any tactics; but I used my previous Scottish Office skills. I thought it would be really handy if we had about ten million quid. We could really make a colossal difference with that, and ten million pounds was big money for the FCO. So I bid for £95 million ... and I got £90 million. So we spent a lot of time working out what to do with it. I managed to structure it by putting quite a lot into programme budgets that had a label of preventing or countering terrorism, but were underpinned with a lot of narrative about good governance. This baffled people, but they approved it. To cut a long story short, a bit later on when fashions had changed and the FCO was under much greater budget pressure in other directions, we were able to convert some of this governance money, in a sort of Whitehall money-laundering process, so that it then became used for other governance-related things - things that were then Government priorities but which were not caught up in the hard end of counter-terrorism response. I had foreseen all of that, including the potential future changing of direction for the money, right at the time when I was going through those budget negotiations when I first got the money. I think too many FCO people haven't actually had experience of working with big budgets in Whitehall and how to fight the FCO corner in those types of fights. That was a parenthesis, though.

The people I spent most of my time on were the FCO team dealing with terrorist incidents abroad - kidnappings, hijackings, bombings. We had a really good team, they were extraordinarily dedicated, in the FCO Counter Terrorist Department; and they worked hand in glove with the Consular people who were also extraordinarily good, and then with the Metropolitan Police, the agencies, the armed forces. It now seems to be a fashion for Prime Ministers and Defence Ministers to chair what are called COBR meetings - emergency meetings in the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms. In our day Ministers hardly ever chaired them. These were meetings chaired by senior officials. The danger of having a Minister

chairing these meetings is that people start playing to the gallery and they bring in all sorts of other departmental interests since they've got the Minister's attention. Whereas if you've got a rather sober group of counter-terrorist officials, used to dealing with each other all the time, I think you can piece through in a much more measured way what the risks are: what the risks to life are for our Special Forces if we send them in on a mission to rescue people who have been kidnapped; what's the likelihood of the operation succeeding; what's the likelihood of the people being kidnapped actually being killed while the raid is going on; what is the opportunity-cost to our armed forces if we send the Special Forces to do that, if they are needed for something else. Remember we'd got two of our biggest military operations on at the same time as I was doing this - Afghanistan and Iraq - and both were short of resources and going badly. It's much easier to piece through the difficult questions of what we do and what we don't tell the families and what we tell the press, and what the intelligence does and doesn't say. It's much easier to put the intelligence agencies under a little bit of pressure about their degree of confidence about their interpretation of what they are seeing. It's much easier to have a very frank conversation in a Secret secure video conference with Posts if a Minister isn't there. So I used to chair these COBRs. We had an outstandingly good Director by the time I became Director-General in charge of all of this as well (Simon Manley, who is now our Ambassador in Madrid). He and I between us chaired more COBRs than anybody else in Whitehall, and we were doing it all the time, I'm afraid. I think there was an 18 month run in which my counter-terrorism team had only eleven days when they weren't dealing with an active case.

We dealt with a kidnapping in Iraq: a youngish, computer technical expert was kidnapped along with his four private security firm bodyguards. It was the longest running kidnapping case. He eventually did get out; his four body guards were killed. Devastating for all of their families who were very suspicious about what was going on and, in their grief, found it hard to deal with officials. We dealt with a man in Mali who had his throat slit by jihadists. We dealt with the Lashkar-e-Taiba attacks on the Taj Hotel and other places in Mumbai. That was a nasty four day incident that lasted from a Wednesday until a Saturday. I was always afraid that it would occur to the terrorists just to set fire to the hotel. We still had British people in hiding in the hotel. That's what I would have done if I'd been them: it would have been a conflagration that would have finished everybody off. Thank goodness they didn't do that, as luck would have it. Incidentally it showed how very good Britain had become at counter-terrorism by then. The attacks took place on a Wednesday, sort of middle of the day

in British time. By seven o'clock that night we had already held our first cross-Whitehall counter-terrorist meeting (which I chaired) and had already got written permission from the Home Secretary for a Home Office police negotiating team to go to India if we could persuade the Indians to have them. We had already got our FCO emergency response consular team booked on a plane and on their way out there. Our High Commissioner in India, Dicky Stagg, was already on his way down to Mumbai. The Consul there, who had just moved buildings from one that was much more at risk, had set up a coordination cell inside the British Council building in a safer location. The High Commission in Delhi had had the very clever idea of doing an agreement with Indian mobile phone roaming companies in advance of all of this - not knowing it would happen. So any Briton who had a British mobile phone contract on arrival in India got one of these messages that say "This is Vodafone, welcome to India," but it also said "If you are in trouble, this is the number for the British consular services in India at the British High Commission." So a lot of people in Mumbai were using their mobile phones to send text messages to the High Commission telling them what was going on - before it hit CNN even. It was a very professional response. By pure coincidence, I was due to be in Delhi on Saturday, ready for counter-terrorism talks on Monday, immediately after it. I thought they wouldn't have time to see me, but they did. I was also due in Islamabad the day after. I was able to have some very intense talks with Indians and Pakistanis about what this meant both in our bilateral relations with each of them but also in their relations with each other.

So it was a busy time. What more is there to say about this ... other than that it was a time when I used what I had learnt from my time in the Scottish Office about how people react to stress. I had people under acute stress all the time pretty much, and they were wonderfully robust, but you had to keep looking out for the things that would just tip them over. I gave them a constant reminder that they were dealing with horrendous things, and that if they ever felt a moral or a personal dilemma or were queasy about it they should come and talk early; that nobody would be cross with them, and we would see that they got a fair hearing; and if it were all too much we would find ways of taking it away from them and make sure they were all right and that they would go on to something better. They wouldn't be punished for it. I think that was an absolutely crucial message at a time when individuals were under a lot of strain. And I have the impression just at the moment that, with Whitehall under colossal strain dealing with some of the very difficult political issues they are dealing with at the

moment [i.e. Brexit], that message isn't getting through loud and clear to some individuals who are doing things they don't feel comfortable about.

AM: And then NATO?

UK Permanent Representative to NATO, Joint UK Delegation to NATO, Brussels, 2010-14

ML: NATO. Very recent and very close. I was there from 2010 to 2014. I left only three years ago really, so an awful lot of what I was doing there that really can't be in the public domain. (Indeed this was even more the case in the previous job.) What I would say is that it was a very good club and the North Atlantic Council has terrific collegiality. It oughtn't to work because it works by consensus with no voting, so nothing is agreed until every single person round the table agrees or at least doesn't block it. But the Council had a sort of sense of complicity that meant that the business got done far faster and far smoother than one might imagine. A lot of work took place outside the Council or between Ambassadors, or between the delegations who were pre-negotiating things, spotting who was uncomfortable about what, what accommodation you could make. Almost every Ambassador without exception was not only their country's Ambassador vis-à-vis the rest of NATO but also NATO's Ambassador vis-à-vis their own capital. They would be giving advice back to the capital on how to cut and trim a little bit in order to move things on.

I worked very closely, obviously, with the US for self-evident reasons in NATO. But actually the accident of alphabet means the UK sits next to the US. We were always looking at each other's homework, so to speak. I worked very closely with France, which had recently rejoined the integrated military structures of NATO and was slightly finding its way as to how to make the situation work for it. France still had some suspicions [about NATO] that weren't well founded; but also it was a time when the UK's defence relationships with France were very close - closer than they ever had been - because of the so-called Lancaster House Agreement. This had a nuclear and a non-nuclear component that I had been involved in in my previous job. I worked closely with Germany because Germany is very big and important.

But I was also careful to work with countries that were becoming increasingly worried about the rise of an assertive Russia. There was still, even when I left in 2014, denial about how serious things were becoming with Russia, even after they grabbed Crimea at the beginning

of 2014. There was a lot of denial because it was inconvenient. Going right back to what we said at the start of the interview, I had learnt from my Iran experience that just because something is bad, it doesn't mean it can't happen; and just because it's inconvenient that doesn't mean it can't happen. I remember an argument - this is a parody but only a very slight parody - I remember when I was dealing with Iran and its impending revolution back in the 1970s there was a sort of argument in the Ministry of Defence and in the FCO that "there can't be a revolution in Iran because we have £600 million worth of defence contracts there". By which they meant, it would be so awful if it did happen, that it can't. Well, of course, it can be that awful and it can. So I was giving increasing attention through 2013 to the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, countries that felt they weren't being taken seriously by the bigger Northern members of NATO.

Obviously, all my time there was over-shadowed by Afghanistan, ISAF, and the difficulties there. I really don't want to talk about that. I was very heavily involved in what was the NATO Libya campaign, because it was a campaign wanted, essentially, by the British and French President and Prime Minister, against the extreme reluctance of everybody else, including the Americans until they came in. I had to persuade a reluctant North Atlantic Council that they were going to do this. Which we did. I don't want to say much more about that, other than that NATO did its stuff, but there was a failure after that on the part of other international institutions. NATO stepped back and said, "We've done the military bit, we've done exactly what we said, no more and no less. We're not going to be involved in the politics: that's now for the UN, the EU, bilateral programmes, aid agencies and so on." I think that's the point at which things went very badly wrong.

And I enjoyed also a lot of travel with other members of the North Atlantic Council to places as far apart as Doha, Kosovo, Afghanistan (where we went several times). We did a lot of things together on the "school bus" that was the NATO military plane that took us to all these places.

AM: I know you didn't want to talk about being a woman in the FCO but I should ask you as they would ask me to ask you.

ML: Well, what can I say? It's worth remembering, because it seems staggering these days, that in the year 1975 [the year I finished university] - the year that the Equal Pay Act got onto the Statute Book, all the assumptions through school and university had been that discrimination against women not only happened but was legitimate and normal - so it wasn't

normal for somebody like me to enter the FCO. There were women in the FCO, but there was a marriage ban until 1973. There were remarkable and distinguished and very effective women in the upper reaches of the FCO, but very few [of them]. And there had been other, again extremely good, woman diplomats who had to leave because they got married; they had to make a choice that their male colleagues hadn't made. So when I joined in 1977 the FCO had relatively little experience of having woman diplomats, little experience of having senior women diplomats, and virtually no experience of having married women diplomats. And they still had an assumption - wrong - that most of the new legislation about equal opportunities didn't apply to them because they dealt with Abroad, and Abroad was self-evidently different. And they assumed that the security circumstances of a Diplomatic Service where everybody was security-vetted were so self-evidently different that foreign postings didn't need to have the same criteria as those that applied to domestic jobs. That was very deeply entrenched.

I have to say I was treated with nothing other than with warmth, respect, supportiveness by virtually everybody I met in the FCO throughout the entire span of my career, including right at the start. But I did drop a bombshell on the FCO towards the end of our first year, when we had to do interviews about what our first overseas job was going to be. I'd done very well in the language aptitude test. I was clearly a candidate for one of the hardest languages. I was very keen to do a hard language. I had been asking and asking senior personnel people for a meeting with them because I knew I had just agreed to become married. We intended to continue my diplomatic career. My husband was going to come with me. We intended to make it work, but I wanted to tell the personnel people this in the context of my next posting. They never made themselves available; they kept cancelling appointments. So the first chance I got to tell anybody in the administration this was when I went for my language interview. My name was down against various hard languages; and when I said, "Well, I need to tell you I'm about to get married", the chap who was doing the interview picked up his pen and scrawled my name off every list. He said in the most delightful way, "Of course, I don't mind what you do and this wouldn't be up to me, but I am afraid the Personnel Operations "grid" [the committee of postings officers who met regularly with a "grid" showing vacancies and available staff] and the Postings Boards won't agree to invest tens of thousands of pounds in somebody whose future in the Service is clearly not going to be a very long one". And he then said, equally charmingly, "But actually, I am seeing my colleague from the Ministry of Agriculture this afternoon. Would you like me to arrange a

transfer?" So this was not a huge vote of confidence. But I was made of slightly sterner stuff and said, "No, I intend to stick at this; we're both going to stick at it and we'll see how it goes. My husband will come abroad; we will make it work". So we did.

They eventually sent us off to Singapore. My husband joined me a year or so later. Of course it wasn't only the UK that wasn't used to having women diplomats, and worse still, married women diplomats. The Singaporeans were very concerned about immigration, having to acknowledge as Singapore citizens people who were born in Singapore. On arrival in Singapore I had to sign, as every foreign diplomat in Singapore did, an affidavit saying my husband would not become pregnant while he was abroad with me. Which I had no difficulty doing at all, as there was no chance of him becoming pregnant.

We had a long time in which the Inland Revenue (as it then was) didn't know how to deal with us. The FCO overseas allowances were predicated on the diplomat being a man, and they assumed that the diplomat would receive a married man's tax allowance if he was married and paying income tax. But in those days when I got married - in 1978 - a wife's income was her husband's for tax purposes. Married women were not allowed to fill in their own income tax forms, and my income was his. However the Inland Revenue had no means of dealing with a woman diplomat whose husband wasn't employed abroad, and whose residence status abroad was ambiguous as far as they were concerned. He was not resident in the UK, whereas British public servants in my position were treated as ordinarily resident and taxable in the UK. So for five years we corresponded to and fro between the Inland Revenue and ourselves, unable to sort out our tax or file my tax returns or his tax returns, and unable to know how much tax we owed. The FCO was extraordinarily helpful, and the Administration weighed in the Treasury to try and get it sorted out. Interestingly, the people who weren't helpful were the Diplomatic Service Association, the staff association for the FCO (not yet a trade union) to whom I put this conundrum. They said "I'm sorry but this is not a priority for our members", so they kind of brushed me aside. The FCO administration was much more enlightened. We eventually got it sorted, but it meant that for a long time we were not getting any married tax allowances because I wasn't entitled to them; women didn't get them. We couldn't file my tax, and our married overseas allowance in Singapore, which the FCO was sportingly paying, was calculated on the [false] presumption that we were also getting married allowances from the Inland Revenue.

When I sometimes hear people saying that the FCO was a bastion of Old Think and very conservative, it really wasn't, compared with what was happening in Britain at the time. It was really Britain that was Old Think; and the social changes that have brought equality for women were coming in gradually but for those of us who were on the cusp of the change they were quite slow. The FCO still had until, oh goodness, when would it have been, late 1980s, still had a ban on women diplomats being pregnant and giving birth overseas. I went to Singapore and from Singapore to Bonn. We had been married for nine years before I was posted home to the UK and could start a family. I could, I suppose, have done what one other woman had done - the only other woman who'd ever been married to somebody outside the Service and was thinking of having a family. She became pregnant on a posting and had her posting interrupted and was in everybody's black books for not playing the game in a mobile Diplomatic Service. I didn't do that, so we timed our two children so that we had them during my four years' home posting - perfectly timed at two year intervals around FCO jobs. When I tell younger diplomats this now, they can't believe it. It was how it was. I didn't make a nuisance of myself, and we found solutions to all our problems. My husband found work in the university in Singapore. He also became a writer. He had a weekly column in the Straits Times. He had a radio show. When we went to Germany he wrote books and taught at the university. So we made it work. Every time we had a problem, I came to the FCO with the solution, and they always said yes. I always found the FCO extraordinarily supportive of what I did. I never found any of my line managers or bosses, with one exception whom I won't name, anything other than supportive, ambitious for me and keen to give me whatever work there was exactly on the same basis as a man - and indeed rather more when they discovered I could do it. So I never had any sense of being at odds with the FCO.

I had sometimes had difficulty, not difficulty, a *hesitation* with foreign diplomats or foreign officials whose countries were less open to the notion of professional women than the UK was. Germany was rather like that actually. It never lasted very long. Once they realised that I did speak with the authority of the British Embassy or the British Government and that I did deliver what I said I would, that usually evaporated; and I never saw any need to be strident about it. I just allowed life to speak for itself, as I regarded myself as being on the winning side. So unlike some women more recently in the FCO, I never felt any particular wish or need to champion women's issues in the FCO. I think my own philosophy was that demonstrably being a good diplomat would persuade more people surreptitiously than would

have been persuaded by my stridently coming out with feminist arguments. That was my rationale at any rate.

We did have two children. I didn't take any extra time off: maternity leave was three months, which I took, and went back to work again. I moved with very small children to Paris. My youngest was 12 weeks old when I moved there, and as ill luck would have it my husband's parents were ill at the time, so I moved on my own with a nanny. He came and went a bit, and joined us substantively a few months later. It wasn't easy; these things aren't easy; but then life isn't easy. I've always been conscious later on, as I became more of a manager and less of a junior employee, that life is very difficult for both sexes these days. As women became more emancipated, life became harder for the men as well. I saw men juggling with wives with careers, or perhaps themselves being widowers, or divorced, bringing up children on their own, coping with elderly relatives, juggling with long distance careers, or with half the family on one country and the rest elsewhere. That's the point at which I became, if anything, slightly more assertive on these issues of equality, because it seemed important that men got equality too. I had to intervene for instance for one of my Directors who was being denied a place in the FCO crèche for his youngest child despite being married to a woman outside the FCO with a very senior career of her own. She was not going to give up her career to look after their youngest child, and if he couldn't get a place at the crèche their child-care arrangements were going to collapse. There was absolutely no reason why he shouldn't have had a place in the crèche on the same basis as women. I found myself weighing in quite often for men who were getting a raw deal, as much as reminding people that women needed to have their chance.

I spent a lot of time mentoring when I was older, both young women and young men. What I quite often said to the women was, "I think you ought to go and talk to some of your male colleagues and see how they cope with these things, because you might feel less of a victim if you saw that it wasn't actually because you were a woman that you were going through these problems. It is one of the dilemmas of life that you are juggling house, money, career, family, children, marriage, health, exercise, sleep, and all the other things you are doing." So all of that was my reflection on those issues.

There came a point at which my husband really did want to move back to Scotland. I had always said we would if that was how he felt. We moved the family back to Scotland. I left the FCO. By that stage I was already in FCO terms a Head of Department, a Counsellor, too

senior to be recruited elsewhere. The FCO was very helpful to me then as well. They allowed me to have a sort of acting promotion, so I was able to transfer into the Scottish Office at a level below the one I had already reached at the FCO. The move was for keeps: I had left the FCO, I had left the Diplomatic Service, I had resigned. I joined the Scottish Office. Then two years later I decided I wanted to go back into the FCO. They had kept in touch with me; and they found ways of inventing a Final Selection Board that I had to sit again, and be re-recruited from scratch by the Civil Service Commission procedures. They took me back, and they used the experience that I had got in the meantime on budget and other things and put that to good use themselves. I have no complaints about the FCO as an employer of women. On the contrary, I think sometimes people are very unfair in suggesting that they are at war with women, and are slow to recognise and promote women. They were always at least as ambitious for me as I was for myself, always keen to give me demanding jobs, and thought I'd be good at them. They were keen to have me on the Board, keen to send me to a big Post after that. So I never had some of the difficult conversations that some other people seem to have had. But on the other hand I did always come to them with the solution to any difficulty.

AM: Good, Mariot Leslie, thank you very much indeed.