

**BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index**

**LYNE, Sir Roderic Michael John (Born 31 March 1948)**

CMG 1992, KBE 1999

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Early life and entry to FCO	pp 2-11
Commonwealth Co-ordination Department, FCO 1970	pp 11-12
Army School of Languages 1971	p 13
Moscow, 1972	pp 13-16
Dakar, 1974	pp 16-19
Eastern European and Soviet Department, FCO, 1976	pp 19-21
Rhodesia Department, FCO, 1979	pp 22-23
Assistant Private Secretary to Foreign Secretary, 1979 ( <i>mainly commenting on the Lancaster House conference on Rhodesia</i> )	pp 23-29
UK mission to UN, 1982 ( <i>mainly commenting on the Falklands islands crisis and Namibia</i> )	pp 29-36
Visiting Research Fellow, RIIA, 1986	pp 36-39
Counsellor and Head of Chancery, Moscow, 1987	pp 39-47
Head of Soviet, then Eastern, Department, 1990	pp 47-52
Secondment as Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, 1993 ( <i>Includes comments on: working in Downing Street, pp 63-71; Iraq, pp 72-4; Northern Ireland, pp 75-82; European Union, pp 71-72 and 82-92; Bosnia, pp 93-8; working with</i>	pp 63-113

*President Clinton, pp 98-101; Helmut Kohl, pp 101-104; French Presidents, pp 104-7; and overseas visits, pp 107-13)*

Seconded as Director for Policy Development, British Gas, 1996 Not covered

UK Permanent Representative to Office of the UN and pp 113-16

other international organisations, Geneva, 1997

Ambassador to Russia, 2000-04 pp 52-63 and 116-35

*(Includes comments on: first Blair-Putin meeting, pp 52-4; course of the Putin administration, pp 54-8; decline of UK-Russian relations in 2003-4, pp 58-61; Chechnya, pp 116-21; Russia and the West, pp 122-5; Russia as an energy supplier, pp 127-9; and the role of the UK embassy in encouraging change in Russia, pp 130-33).*

SIR RODERIC (MICHAEL JOHN) LYNE KBE, CMG

interviewed by Malcolm McBain on 6 June 2006

-----

**Educational background**

MM: This interview is about your career but could we start by your telling us something about your educational background before joining the Diplomatic Service?

RL: My education was dictated by my father's profession. My father was an Air Force officer throughout his career and he'd moved house every one or two years, even less sometimes, during my childhood. So I first went to school in 1953 in a very small village primary school in Lincolnshire in the village of Legbourne. The school only had two classes. It turned out to be exceptional; at least there was an exceptional teacher there, so I had an extremely good grounding. After that, I was sent to a prep school in the south of England because my father's profession left my parents with no real choice but to send us to boarding school, which I don't think they would have wanted to do otherwise. I arrived at Highfield school in Hampshire in the summer of 1955, just after my seventh birthday. I wasn't supposed to be there that young because the school had a minimum age of eight. When the headmaster discovered, just before I arrived, that I was a year too young, he summoned my brother and said that he was very worried that I wouldn't be able to look after myself. What would I do if somebody hit me? And my brother said, "He would hit him back," which was a pretty accurate summation, and that was the first entrance exam that I passed into a school. I spent six years at Highfield; it was at the time a very good, smallish boys' prep school (120 boys), fairly traditional, and it focused heavily on trying to get scholarships into respectable public schools.

I adored sport and I spent as much of my time as possible throughout my school career playing games and, for that reason, I enjoyed it. I was very average academically but I was towed along at Highfield in the slipstream of two extremely clever boys, both of whom got top scholarships to Eton, one of whom subsequently becoming a leading Classics professor at Oxford, which he still is, and the other of whom is currently Head of Research at a defence company, British Aerospace Systems, having been an academic mathematician. Because of this slipstream effect, I was dragged into doing calculus at the age of eleven, although I was no mathematician, and writing Greek verses at the age of eleven or twelve, and other things which, in many ways, I would have thought beyond me.

My father had intended that I should go to Marlborough; my brother had gone to Shrewsbury and my father had decided that we should go to separate public schools, which I think was a wise decision. He wanted to avoid any competition between us. I learned a bit about Marlborough and the one thing that stuck in my mind was, I was told, that they didn't have doors on the lavatories, and I was determined that I didn't want to spend five years of my life in a place that didn't have doors on the lavatories; it sounded very primitive. I never visited the school. One of the masters who taught me at Highfield, who went on to become a master at Eton, was convinced that Eton was the right school for me. He discovered that there was an obscure bursary at Eton called the Martineau Bursary that was available to boys who weren't clever enough to get a scholarship but who were thought to be good all-rounders, who didn't have places at the school and who needed some help with the fees. I duly failed the scholarship examination - I was a sort of respectable near-miss - and was offered a Martineau Bursary (I was probably the only candidate that year). I then had to persuade my father to let me accept it; he was serving in Moscow at the time as the British Air Attaché. That was the only telephone call I made to my parents in the two years they were in Moscow. My father had a deep prejudice against Eton because he'd been a schoolboy in the 1930s at a minor public school in Windsor, and this had left him with huge animosity towards wealthy, preening Etonians. And it was almost over

his dead body that I accepted this place. I told him that it would save him quite a lot of money by comparison with Marlborough, and that was a clinching factor.

So I went to Eton without a great deal of family support, although my father later relented, and I was terrified of the place because it was huge and very confusing, and it required a lot of independence of small boys. You were in your own room from the very first day; and it had an appalling uniform which I didn't know how to put on, and put on completely wrong on my first morning. I eventually got the hang of it and I discovered that it wasn't as terrifying as I thought and that an awful lot of the boys, or a lot of my friends and contemporaries, came from perfectly ordinary families without huge wealth or hundreds of years of blue blood. So I spent five years very happily at Eton. Again I spent much more time playing games and, in due course, chasing girls and drinking beer than I did working. And the result of that was that I failed my A Levels comprehensively, or got such low grades as to constitute failure. I had to stay on an extra year at school to retake them; I managed to improve one of them, which was my history A level. My Russian A level was even worse – it went from an E grade pass to an O grade fail, so those were fine credentials for a later career spent in Russia. As I hadn't taken Russian O level, it had the small advantage that I got the O level after the A level.

My results were so bad that my applications to most universities were immediately rejected. Only one university offered me even an interview, and that was Leeds. So I went up to Leeds; in fact I hitch-hiked up to Leeds in order to save money and that turned out to be a wise decision. When I was interviewed, by a mediæval historian whom I later discovered was the secretary of the local Communist Party, his deeply sarcastic first question, looking at my application form and seeing where I came from, was, "Tell me, how did you get up here? Did the chauffeur bring you up in Daddy's Rolls Royce?" to which I replied honestly, "No. I hitch-hiked." At that point, I had him on the floor and that was how I got into university, despite having the worst qualifications of anyone in my

department in that year. So I did my degree at Leeds University. That was again a huge blessing because it was a complete contrast to Eton. In a way I had a very contrasting education, starting in a village primary school, then being in what at the time was a pretty unfashionable industrial northern university where, in those days unlike now, there were very few students from the south of England; indeed there was great prejudice against the south of England and most of the students came from the north or the south-west. There was prejudice even against grammar schools; public school boys were almost unheard of. I concealed where I had been at school from most of my friends; one of them, after knowing me for several months, discovered the truth and said that he would never have spoken to me if he'd known where I'd been to school. He was absolutely appalled.

MM: Were they all left-wing or Labour-supporting?

RL: In the mid-1960s Leeds had a reputation as a very left-wing university. That wasn't completely true. Leeds had a huge engineering faculty, one of the largest in the country, and the engineers were very Conservative, and some of them were pretty political. But the humanities tended to be left-wing. The President of the Union was a chap called Jack Straw who, in those days, was a left-wing firebrand before he became a very right-wing Home Secretary. When he became a very right-wing Home Secretary, he was banned for life from the Leeds University Union, and there was a plaque outside to that effect. Jack was trying to make his name in politics; we all knew that his ultimate ambition was to be a Labour Cabinet Minister and, in order to do that in 1967, you had to lead some demonstrations. He mounted a demonstration in the University buildings on the excuse that the University should open its files to us. I remember sleeping uncomfortably for one or two nights on the floor of the main administration building with a lot of others under his banner. We used to be bussed down occasionally to Grosvenor Square to protest against the Vietnam War or to Trafalgar Square to demand higher student grants. Jack then became the President of the National Union of Students on the back of his success as a rabble-

rouser at Leeds. I took some part in politics; I wasn't terribly active. I never belonged in my life to a political party. Then as now, I've always been more attracted to issues and causes which very often cross party lines. As a schoolboy, I became a member of the anti-apartheid movement. I remember taking part in a University debate on Northern Ireland in which my huge ignorance of the subject – this was just before the troubles broke out, we were approaching 1969 – was terribly exposed by an Irish republican speaker on the other side. But politics was fun and that was partly why .....

MM: Which side did you take on Northern Ireland?

RL: Well, I didn't know where I was at. I hadn't, like most of us, begun to appreciate the issues there, so I think I came out on the Unionist platform at the time when the Unionists were behaving extremely disreputably. But my opponent wiped the floor with me, comprehensively. One other debate I also remember losing spectacularly was in Wakefield Jail; a group of us went down to debate with the prisoners, who were mostly long-term prisoners in a high security jail, and their debating team was brilliant. It was led by an expert conman who was a natural debater, supported by a former university professor who I think had done away with his wife. And we were again made fools of.

MM: What were you studying at Leeds?

RL: I was studying history with a bias strongly towards the most modern bits. We were obliged to do some mediæval and early modern history but, on my elective courses, I steered towards international modern history. I did quite a lot of Russian history and I wrote a dissertation on negotiations that took place in Moscow just before the outbreak of war, when the British were trying to form an alliance with the Russians, which was of course then pre-empted by the Molotov/Ribbentrop Pact, and I wrote a rather third-rate paper on the subject,

which is probably somewhere in the files of Leeds University History Department, but best forgotten.

### **First contacts with the Soviet Union and the Diplomatic Service**

The one episode I can remember from researching the paper was that I discovered that the British Ambassador in Moscow in 1939 was still alive. I wrote to him and asked if I could come and talk to him, and he very kindly invited me down to have lunch with him in his club in London. And, when I arrived, he said that he couldn't remember a single thing about the negotiations but that it was very nice to have lunch, so we had lunch. Towards the end of lunch, he said, "Tell me, young man, what are you going to do when you leave the varsity?" and I said that my wife to be, as she was at the time – I got married in my final year at university – was keen for me to join the Diplomatic Service which her father had done. I'd rather wanted to join the Air Force; I had by then learned to fly and I was a member of the University Air Squadron. Sir William Seeds replied, "Oh, I wouldn't do that! It's all changed since my day. It's all nowadays about selling contraceptives to Lumumba Land." I quite liked the idea of selling contraceptives to Lumumba Land and, many years later when I became the British Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, the first agreement that I signed on behalf of the British Government was entitled 'Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the World Health Organisation on the free supply of contraceptives for a campaign against HIV/AIDS.' So Seeds was right!

MM: What was your wife's father?

RL: He was a diplomat; we met when he and my father were both serving in Moscow and Howard Smith, my wife's father, was at the time the Head of Chancery at the Embassy; he was there from 1961-'63 in that capacity. And so his family and my family were next-door neighbours in a Moscow apartment block. Howard later

returned to Moscow as Ambassador after I'd joined the Foreign Office in the late 1970s and, at that stage, I was the Desk Officer for the Soviet Union in the Eastern European and Soviet Department, so I was drafting the instructions that were sent to my father-in-law as Ambassador.

MM: Interesting!

RL: It was amusing to say the least.

MM: Well, it gave you a good background in Russian affairs.

RL: This all happened by accident. In 1944, my father, as a fighter pilot, was posted to Egypt to take charge of the Air Gunnery School. And out in the Egyptian desert in the evenings, when he had nothing to do, he found a Russian text book and started teaching himself Russian. And he passed the most basic Air Force exam in Russian. This went down on his files. Fifteen years later, when they were looking for a new Air Attaché in Moscow, somebody found a reference to his knowledge of Russian on the files and invited him to go there. I think he may have prompted the invitation. He had an interest in the subject, but it was that chain of events that led my father to Moscow, so I went to Moscow as a thirteen-year-old in the summer of 1961. I found it incredibly exciting. It was very sinister, it was the depths of the Cold War, KGB were everywhere, policemen were outside the house, the first Cosmonauts were flying – I remember standing on Gorky Street for a parade that welcomed back the second Cosmonaut, German Titov, after he'd circled the earth for twenty-four hours. Russia was a place that very few people went to; there were virtually no tourists, very few businessmen, only a very small number of journalists, and so it was a terrific story to tell when I went back to England.

And I was intrigued by it and by the barriers that were put up between us and the population by these people that you saw but couldn't speak to, and you wondered

what they were like. And so that was where my interest came from. I suppose the whole thing about Russia was that it clearly mattered. It was casting a shadow over all our lives and so it wasn't a frivolous thing to dig into. The more I dug into it – a little bit as a schoolboy when I got a bit into the literature when I was supposed to be doing A Levels, and very much at University when I started digging into Russian history. This was complex and again it was rich, it was fascinating and, the more one dug, the more complicated it became. And I found all my life, and I still find now, that there is never any danger of getting to the bottom of this subject. So, if you're going to spend a lifetime focusing on something – and I haven't spent my whole lifetime focusing on it, I've spent about half of my professional career on it – it's quite a good one to do because you never get the answers.

### **Entry into the Diplomatic Service in 1971**

MM: So how did you get into the Foreign Office?

RL: I think by accident again; life is a chapter of accidents. I applied in the winter of 1969 as a third year undergraduate. This was when Harold Wilson's Labour Government was still in power. It was one of those periods when the hue and cry goes up that British life is too dominated by Oxbridge and public schools, and the Foreign Office in particular was said to be a bastion of privilege. And there was a lot of pressure at the time on the Foreign Office to broaden its intake – not for the first time, not for the last. And so Foreign Office emissaries were sent to scour the provinces to see if they could find some half-credible candidates to leaven the mix of very clever boys coming from Oxford and Cambridge; and when I say 'boys', I mean boys because there were very few girls applying because, in those days, you still had this appalling rule which required lady officers to submit their resignations when they got engaged to be married. I remember a Foreign Office recruiter turning up at Leeds; this was Mr Hooky Walker, later Ambassador in Baghdad and other places, in his Prince of Wales checked suit – I can see it to this

day. He gave a very good talk. He made it very clear that the Foreign Office was not closed to students even from such unfashionable places as Leeds.

I anyway had three-quarters of a mind to apply because of my experience of the Embassy in Moscow, and the career looked interesting. I wanted to do something that involved working abroad and I was very strongly inclined towards public service. My family mostly had a background in public service. Apart from my father in the Air Force, my mother served in the Navy, my brother became a doctor, one sister became a teacher and the other sister became a nurse. And my wife was the daughter of a public servant. We just didn't have any obvious aptitude towards business.

So the Foreign Office ticked a lot of the boxes that I was interested in, despite the very negative image that it had on my peers and friends in the University of Leeds. So I applied. I kept it pretty quiet from most of my friends that I was doing so. I found that the entrance exams, as they were constructed in those days, might have been ideally constructed for somebody like me. It just so happened that they matched my own profile very well. I did surprisingly well in the written qualifying test – I say 'surprisingly well' because you'd expect that would show up the sort of people who had first-class brains and I had a second-class brain, but it required a mix of argument and writing that happened to suit me. It didn't probe into depths of intellectual knowledge or numeracy, which would have shown me up. I also found that the three-day assessment process in the Civil Service Commission was again the sort of thing that I could do reasonably well. I got through the system but am in no doubt at all that a critical factor in my getting through was that the recruiters were very keen to get some non-Oxbridge people and, best of all, some people from the far north and from red-brick industrial universities. I was almost the only applicant in that year from Leeds. I was one of the very few who came through at that time from that kind of educational background. So, as it turned out, the A level failure that propelled me to Leeds was probably a critical factor in my getting into the Foreign Office.

MM: Did you get into Branch A?

RL: Yes. If my background had been Eton and Oxford, I suspect I wouldn't have made it. So I benefited from inverted snobbery. I played down the Eton and I played up the Leeds.

MM: What sort of degree did you get?

RL: I got a 2.1, which we regard as the family degree in my family. I had some very good advice. During my first year at university I bumped into a Civil Servant who was working for my father, and he said, "For heaven's sake, don't do what I did. I spent my three years at university working incredibly hard to get a first, and I got a first. I didn't do anything else. I wasted my time at university because a first is useful only if you're going into academic life. If you want to join the public service, a 2.1 is perfectly sufficient, and you go out and have a good time." Well, I had a good time; I flew, I played games, I got married, I socialised, I did a little bit of work and I got a 2.1, and I was very happy with it.

MM: And you got into the Foreign Office.

RL: And I squeaked into the Foreign Office through the back door. I'd become pretty good by then at getting through back doors.

### **First job in the Foreign Office**

The Foreign Office showed what it thought of me because, at the induction course for new graduates, there was a moment when jobs were handed out and the Personnel Department went round the room with their clipboards allocating people to departments. It got to my name last, and I was allocated the most unfashionable and the least prestigious department that they had available:

something called the Commonwealth Co-ordination Department, which long ago ceased to exist; it had almost no functional purpose. When it was announced that that was where I was going, because I had hoped of course to go to the Eastern European and Soviet Department, all the heads in the room turned and looked at me, and I could see them thinking, “Gosh, he’s only been in two weeks, what’s he done wrong already?”

MM: So you went into the Commonwealth Co-ordination Department to start with. How did you get out of that?

RL: It was a very good place to be because, as a newcomer, you were dealing with things that didn’t matter in the slightest; there was no pressure. And so you could learn slowly. You could spend your time discovering the difference between blue draft paper and blue crested paper, and white minute paper. I had a very good task master, who was a friend for life; sadly he’s no longer alive, but his widow and children are still very good friends of ours; a man called Gordon Duggan, who ended his career as High Commissioner in Singapore. Gordon turned out to be a life-long socialist and a fierce supporter of Liverpool Football Club. As I was an equally fierce supporter of Manchester United Football Club, this led to a lot of debate across the table. But Gordon was rigorous in teaching me what I needed to know. At the same time, he had a pretty untraditional outlook on life, and it was an environment in which I was allowed to do things because, if I made an awful hash of them, it really didn’t matter. And it was a friendly environment. The other person I shared an office with in my first few months again is somebody that I’m still in touch with. She had to leave the Foreign Office because she’d committed the crime of getting married, but we stayed in touch for the past thirty-something years; thirty-six years now. So it was a good beginning.

### **Appointment to the Army School of Languages to learn Russian, 1971**

MM: Then I see that the next move was to get an attachment to the Army School of Languages.

RL: Well, there came a time when one took the language aptitude test and, if you did it all right, you were given the choice of learning a hard language. I of course opted for Russian. I was told I probably wouldn't be selected for Russian because there were much cleverer people than me who were applying to do Russian. But I was selected so I was sent as one of three Russian students to the Army School of Languages, which is what the Foreign Office used in those days, for accelerated Russian. You did it in about nine months there, if you take off holidays. We were told that it was a terribly intensive course but that wasn't actually true. I think that was an impression that the students on the course had tried to flog to the Training Department. As this coincided with the birth of our first child and I wanted to spend lots of time at home washing nappies and things like that, it suited me that life was pretty relaxed that year. It was a curious course; they were very good at schooling you in grammar, the best grammar teaching I ever had in any language, but you came out of it with a huge amount of military terminology and, when I arrived in Moscow, I knew seventeen words for a hole in the ground – whether it was an anti-tank trench or a fox-hole or a ditch or whatever. That wasn't a lot of use in conversation with the Foreign Ministry there, but it gave you a good basis from which you could build.

### **Posting to the Embassy in Moscow, 1972-74**

MM: And that was followed by a posting to Moscow as a Third Secretary.

RL: Yes.

MM: What did you do there?

RL: Well, I was one of the first wave of people to get visas to go back to the Embassy after a year in which the Russians had operated a block on visas in retaliation for the expulsion of the 105 spies from London in 1971. So when I arrived at the Chancery, which was supposed to have a strength of eight people, four on the external side and four on the internal, it was down to three and new arrivals were warmly welcomed. It meant that, initially, one had a rather wide portfolio and I was given the Middle East, Africa and one or two other bits and bobs, and I was notionally also the Ambassador's Private Secretary. I'll come back to that.

The Middle East was of course building up towards the 1973 war, so that was quite an active and interesting subject. I knew nothing about the Middle East at the time; I don't think I'd even had any briefing on it in London, so I picked it up on the spot. I did all right until a new Ambassador arrived. He was Terence Garvey, who knew how to expose the ignorance of young officers. At one of his first morning meetings, he turned to me as his supposed Middle Eastern expert and said, "Is Barzani dead?" I had no clue who Barzani was or where he came from, and had no idea that Barzani was the best-known Kurdish leader in Iraq. And so I flunked that question and Garvey put me firmly in my place.

As more people arrived, my portfolio got whittled down because they were coming in at a more senior level and so, by the second half of my second year in Moscow, I really didn't have enough to do, which was slightly frustrating. The Private Secretary part of my job didn't really exist. Previous Ambassadors, previous to John Killick, who was Ambassador when I arrived, had used Private Secretaries in rather old-fashioned ways. My predecessor had been required to put on a dinner jacket every time the Ambassador entertained, to greet his guests at the bottom of the stairs, walk them up to the top of the stairs, not sit down to dinner, and come back after dinner in order to escort them down again; pretty old-fashioned behaviour. Thank God John Killick hated pomposity – a man with a

huge sense of humour – and my duties were very light. They mainly involved organising his occasional tours to the interior of the country and going with him, which was great fun. I also organised the Queen's Birthday Party, which was not fun at all, and the annual Christmas cabaret at the Ambassador's staff party, which again was in the fun category.

MM: So that was Moscow. Presumably you didn't have much opportunity to speak Russian?

RL: Not nearly enough. A lot of my dealings involved going round to the Foreign Ministry and doing routine diplomatic processes, making *démarches* about incidents at sea – it was part of my stock in trade – talking to Foreign Ministry officials about the Middle East or Africa, that sort of thing. But most of the Foreign Ministry officials I dealt with had much better English than my Russian, so most of my dealings with them were in English. We were not allowed normal social contact with Russians with the small exceptions where one could penetrate the curtain. There were by then Jewish refuseniks in Moscow who were mixing with the diplomatic and journalistic communities; there were a few dissidents who were doing the same, people like Anatoly Sharansky. And we got to know some of these particular groups of artists – even occasionally going to their flats – and one would speak Russian to them. When I went on tour, there was much less English spoken out in the provinces, so there one did speak Russian quite a lot. And you'd speak day-to-day Russian but you weren't doing it continuously in the way that you do now.

MM: And what about reading the press? Was that one of your jobs?

RL: We all had to read the press. We all had to read the press because there wasn't much else to read! And so your day began with the dreadfully tedious task of reading through Pravda and Izvestia and some other dismal newspapers, in order to try to glean something from the turgid prose in which they were written. So

you had to be able to read the press and very quickly, and learn to scan through it for the bits that might tell you something. In the editorials of Pravda and Izvestia, you ignored the first two paragraphs. Very often the third paragraph would begin with the Russian word for 'however', and you would read that paragraph because that would be the bit that might say something.

### **Posting to Dakar, Senegal 1974-76**

MM: So, that was your introduction to formal diplomatic life. You were then posted to Second Secretary to Dakar, Senegal. French-speaking!

RL: That happened because, before I went to university, I spent a year in Africa, in Zambia as a volunteer teacher, and I loved it; it was a wonderful year of my life. Zambia was just post-Independence, a beautiful country, and I hitch-hiked all the way round southern African while I was working in Zambia. I had a great desire to go back to Africa. I thought it would be a wonderful contrast to life in Moscow in every possible way, climatically and atmospherically. We had by then two small children who'd been confined for long periods to a small Moscow apartment during long winters, so again an African posting would be a nice environment for them. So I wrote to Personnel Department in the Foreign Office and made an application for a posting in Africa as a contrast to Moscow, as part of my education and training. I asked if I could go to East Africa which sounded attractive to me. I think Kenya or Tanzania were my top two preferences. I had a splendid letter back that started, "Dakar is not in East Africa but ...". I had to look up the map to find where Dakar was, discovered Senegal, and that it was French-speaking. This was an advantage because it forced me to learn a bit of French. The Foreign Office didn't teach you French properly; it should have done, it didn't. I'd done a French O level so I picked French up on the streets of Dakar with the help of a local teacher - not brilliant French but fit for purpose. I spent just under two years there. The most interesting thing about it was that we covered five very diverse countries from one pretty small Embassy. We went

right up into the Sahara to Mauritania, which was essentially Arab rather than African, and had a little war going on with Morocco in the Western Sahara. We went into the interior to Mali, a splendid country with long cultural traditions. We went down to Guinea, although I never personally visited Guinea; it was still in the phase of Sekou Touré and there was very little we could do there. And I accompanied my Ambassador on the first visit to Guinea Bissau, which had just become independent at the end of a very long war against Portugal, to present his credentials. We drove in an old Land Rover down through tropical rain forest to get there. And we were also responsible for the Cape Verde Islands, but I never went there. So that was the extent of our responsibilities. I had been doing a very small job in a large embassy and now I was covering a lot of territory in a very small embassy. I was responsible for political affairs, information and also the administration of such aid programmes as we had. I was also the deputy to the Head of Chancery because there were only three of us; two of us in the Chancery, him and me. Occasionally both he and the Ambassador were away and so I would become the Chargé d'Affaires.

It was quite good experience in those respects. It wasn't terribly exciting because we had no major crises and British interests in that part of the world were very slight. It was completely dominated by the French, and so the volume of work that we had was low. No British minister came near the region while I was there; in fact hardly any senior officials came. So life was pretty quiet.

MM: Anyway that was good experience of Africa as it really is.

RL: Well, Dakar wasn't Africa; in those days it was a French provincial city. It had I think something like 40,000 French residents, it had a large French garrison, French shops – the town would empty for the month after the 14 July when all the French went back to France. The Senegalese were very oriented towards France; a lot of them had been educated in France and worked there. And you had all the creature comforts of France and didn't feel you were in Africa. We were living in

a sixth floor apartment, not in a house. It didn't have the smell of Africa to it, so that was a disappointment. I had got much more Africa in Lusaka, Zambia, than I had in Dakar. I got it when I was out travelling, but otherwise not.

MM: Were many of the Senegalese French citizens?

RL: Quite a lot I think had dual nationality. They were very reluctant to have too much to do with the British. I think they had absorbed from the French that Britain was a very primitive, cold, forbidding kind of place, and one of my jobs was to try to persuade Senegalese to accept all-expenses-paid invitations to Britain as sponsored visitors. In most countries this is not a difficult thing to do. People are quite happy to accept freebies. I remember that I had huge difficulties going to people like the editor of the local newspaper, pleading with him to visit Britain and getting a frosty response along the lines, "Yes, I have heard of it. It's somewhere up there in the north, isn't it." And I would say, "Well actually it's half an hour's 'plane flight from Paris where you go at least once a month." "Yes, it's very cold isn't it. They don't speak French there." And they wouldn't go!

The Senegalese elite were sophisticated. They were highly educated and spoke good French. And they did regard the British as some crude, primitive, uncultured northern tribe that they really didn't want very much to do with.

MM: Did they have anything to do with the former British West African territories: Nigeria, Ghana?

RL: Not a lot. Attempts were being made in those days to get the economic West African group, ECOWAS going but one of the failings of West Africa in that period was that the former French, former British and former Portuguese colonies really didn't communicate with each other. If you wanted to make a telephone call from Dakar in Senegal to Banjul in Gambia in 1974, the call went from Dakar to Paris to London to Banjul, although Banjul was actually effectively an enclave

within Senegal. So that is how poor communications were. Very often, if you wanted to fly from one West African country to another, you did so via Europe to get back to the same region.

MM: That is extraordinary, isn't it. You then went back to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and went to the Eastern Europe and Soviet Department.

### **Eastern Europe and Soviet Department of the Foreign Office 1976-79**

RL: Yes. At the time it was headed by Bryan Cartledge who had been my Head of Chancery in Moscow, a man for whom I had huge respect and admiration. I asked if he could assist me to get a place in his Department, and he had a vacancy coming up, and so there I went. I hugely enjoyed working there for the next three years. It was, I suppose, as always, an interesting time in British-Soviet relations. It was the time when human rights issues were beginning to become much more prominent as a result of the Helsinki Final Act. We had continuous complications of one kind or another in our relations. The issue of Soviet intelligence activities in the UK never went away so, from time to time, people were expelled and that always led to ructions.

MM: What sort of things were they doing?

RL: Anything they could lay their hands on. A certain amount of it was pretty innocuous: trawling public libraries for our scientific and technological knowledge. But clearly a more important task was to get at any military information, anything to do with defence research, to suborn people like that. They were also seeking to influence the political process – cultivating MPs is a normal part of the diplomatic process but sometimes their cultivation crossed the boundaries of propriety.

MM: Because they were offering money?

RL: Because they were offering money or other forms of inducement. And a very large part of their diplomat effort and their so-called trade effort in Britain was actually devoted to espionage. We had very large resources deployed in the Security Service to counter it and, when this came to the crunch, it would land on my desk in the Foreign Office with the Security Service, with whom I was in constant touch, saying that they didn't want to grant a visa to Mr X or they wanted to expel Mr Y. And one would have to look at the strength of the case, and sometimes the case was not 100% convincing. You had to weigh it against other things that were happening at the time that could affect the timing or the scale of the particular action or how it was done, and then of course we would be the people who carried it out; the people who would either summon the Soviet Ambassador to receive the complaint or we would instruct our Embassy in Moscow to go and take action. So that was one part of the job.

I suppose the most interesting part of the job was the analytical side of it. All the time, in those days, you were trying to work out what was going on in the Soviet Union, what their foreign policy was about, what was happening in their domestic affairs, what the state of the economy was and so on; from very slender materials. Our main instrument in this was not intelligence – intelligence really didn't have a lot to offer on that front – it was the efforts of the old Soviet section of the Foreign Office Research Department, which was a great team of huge life-long experts who were brilliant analytically. They weren't many in number, but the quality was extraordinarily high. Just to quote one little recollection I have of how they operated, I was asked by my Under Secretary to prepare a paper on the nationalities question in the Soviet Union and so, as usual, I turned to the Research Department for help and Martin Nicolson, who later became Head of the Soviet Section and then the senior man in the Cabinet Office, wrote a superb paper on the nationalities question in the Soviet Union, which I found a total education. The thrust of the paper was that Stalin's policies of repression of the minority nationalities had managed to put the lid on the kettle but, underneath the

lid (even though it wasn't very apparent in the mid 1970s), there were huge problems simmering away, to the extent that if instruments of repression were lifted, these would bubble up and become very troublesome. And of course he was dead right; this was precisely what happened in the 1980s and 90s. You only have to say things like Nagorno Karabakh, Chechnya, Tajikistan and so on, names that are now familiar to us but, at the time, most of us were not conscious of. But our experts in the Research Department were gleaning information from different sources; some of these countries, or these regions, were not even ones foreigners were allowed to set foot in, but they knew an enormous amount about what was going on inside the country, despite all the best efforts of the KGB to prevent information getting out. I was a parasite. I leached all this information and it was my job to gather it in, put it together in a submission and then take the credit for it. But, without the Research Department, our whole machine would have been much weaker.

MM: So a very useful period of education.

RL: Yes. At this stage, one was getting much more directly involved in policy. By that time, I was heading a section, I was putting forward recommendations on serious issues as they arose, and had more of a sense that my views and my opinions, and the quality of my work, might make some small difference here or there. I didn't have this feeling in my first two overseas postings when I was pretty well irrelevant to whatever happened.

MM: I see from your CV that you also had a short spell in the Rhodesia Department in 1979.

## **Rhodesia Department, 1979 and Assistant Private Secretary, 1979-82**

RL: Yes. By then I'd done nearly three years in the East European and Soviet Department. I wasn't agitating for a move; my children were in primary school and my wife was in no great hurry to pack up and go abroad again, and I would have been happy to stay where I was. But Personnel Department reckoned that three years was enough and they started looking around for somewhere to move me to. It was around the time of the 1979 General Election, the change of power with Margaret Thatcher coming in. She wanted to be shot of the Rhodesian problem, which had been like a millstone around the neck of British diplomacy for too many years, and she had rather firm ideas on the subject, not necessarily at the time very fully formed or particularly judicious ideas, but she did impart momentum. She had appointed Lord Carrington as her Foreign Secretary, and I think her first instruction to him was to resolve Rhodesia one way or the other. Before the election, emissaries of the Conservative Party had started exploratory trips to the region and made contact with the new administration that Ian Smith had set up with Bishop Muzorewa, which was designed to be an internal settlement that would essentially preserve the essence of white supremacy but with the acquiescence of a number of the Rhodesian black indigenous population. So it was a rather cosmetic exercise. Many people on the right of the Conservative Party were keen to recognise Muzorewa; they thought of him as a bastion against communism and they saw Nkomo and Mugabe as essentially communist Soviet-backed surrogates. And that was the situation that Carrington faced. A new Head of the Rhodesian Department was appointed, Robin Renwick, one of the most thrusting and dynamic operators at his level in the Foreign Office, and a new team was assembled. I was drafted in at a junior level to this exercise. I wasn't that keen to go but I was instructed and I went. It was educative. We were dealing with the issue, which, at the time, was top of the agenda. A lot of the work we did went straight to the Foreign Secretary's office. It didn't go through a lot of hoops and by-ways on the way, and Robin Renwick more or less had a direct line through to the Foreign Secretary's office and to Tony Duff, the

Deputy Under Secretary, who was the other lynch-pin of this operation. So I was helping to feed material into this operation. I was doing a lot of briefing, a lot of analysis of intelligence of different kinds, trying to work out the situation. And I was given small tasks by Robin Renwick in the build up of policy towards the Lancaster House Conference.

MM: When was that? 1980?

RL: No, it was the autumn of 1979. I remember well because, just before it opened, I was drafted into the Foreign Secretary's office to be the Assistant Private Secretary covering the world outside Europe and therefore including Lancaster House. I arrived in the office in September 1979 and the Lancaster House Conference opened in October. We thought it would probably last about a fortnight. Lord Carrington didn't think it was going to work. He thought it would probably break down within a couple of weeks and, when the delegates assembled, they were more or less told at the beginning that we were going to try to do this thing very quickly, and the whole issue would have to be resolved within the fortnight. In fact it took three months. Snow was falling by the time the Lancaster House Agreement was signed in December.

It was a fascinating exercise. I was working extremely close to a brilliant Foreign Secretary, watching him negotiate an issue that had defeated other people. He was a masterful negotiator. He had a tremendously clear strategic sense and a brilliant way of handling difficult people. And he was backed up by a pretty formidable machine, with Robin Renwick as the engine and with Tony Duff, who was an extremely wise head. The key actors were Renwick, Duff, and Carrington. What Carrington did was to completely scrap the approach of his predecessor, David Owen, although the thrust was in the same direction. The thrust was to try to get all parties into a settlement, not just to negotiate a deal with Smith and Muzorewa. Carrington was convinced that no settlement would work if you left Nkomo and Mugabe outside it. Even if you could get Nkomo to

agree, because there were always thoughts of detaching Nkomo, who was much more moderate, from Mugabe, it still wouldn't have worked. Mugabe would have carried on the conflict from Mozambique.

The Owen team had drawn up massively complicated, detailed plans which went on for pages and pages and pages. They had had teams under Field Marshal Sir Michael Carver who was drawing up military plans, and the whole thing was a mass of detail. The problem with a mass of details is that it's very difficult to negotiate because there is so much for people to argue about that you never get to the end of the argument.

Carrington's approach was the exact reverse. Carrington assembled them all with more or less nothing in front of them. They were just told to come to Lancaster House for a conference. They all came. We had to provide immunity from prosecution for some of them like Ian Smith. Smith wasn't arrested as a traitor and hauled off to the Tower the moment he landed! And they all arrived there, hostile and not wanting to talk to each another, sat around the table at Lancaster House smouldering. They stared at Carrington and said, "Well, where's the draft plan?" They were used to Owen and Vance's plans and expected to have a thick mass of documentation. And Carrington said to them, "Well, we'll start with the constitutional principles and then we'll advance through whatever the next few bits were." (I forget the details now). He chose that because the constitutional principles he saw as being the easiest bit and he wanted to get them over the first hurdle into agreement, get the process going, get people talking to each other before he tackled the more difficult issues. So he deliberately left the most difficult issues at the back; they weren't even on the table.

They said, "Well, we want to see the whole thing!" And he said, "No no!" He was very firm. "We're going to start with the constitutional principles." This led to a lot of argument at the beginning about the process and how things should happen. Some of the early meetings were very short because he would make an

announcement and they would say, “Well, we’ve got nothing to discuss here.” And then the meeting would break up. This was all a deliberate tactic on his part.

At some point, early on, he tabled a very short, I think only about one page, note of the constitutional principles. It was a few bullet points on the page. And they were all apple-pie and motherhood. So of course there wasn’t a great deal for people to disagree with. They tried to argue a bit here and there but basically they said, “Well, that’s all right. This is only headings; it’s only heads of agreement.” But, having got them over that hump, he was then able to announce – we had daily press conferences – that we had reached provisional agreement. On the constitutional principles, everything was subject to agreement on the whole package. And so, you started to get a bit of momentum.

The other thing you began to discover was that the chemistry between the participants began to develop, and of course a lot of the action was happening behind the scenes in hotel rooms, sometimes in Carrington’s office. He had a lot of bilateral meetings, some of them very stormy. I remember Nkomo thumping the coffee table in Carrington’s office time and again. He and Mugabe would come in glowering to complain, to threaten to walk out. Nkomo would do a lot of talking and shouting and ranting. He was a big powerful man and he’d bring his fists crashing down on the coffee table; we were always waiting for the day when the coffee table would break, but it never did.

Mugabe would sit there saying very little, but he was an extremely clever, very astute man. Then he would come in at a certain point with a rapier thrust. He would make some killer point, a point that was really difficult to answer. Nkomo and Mugabe didn’t like each other; they were rivals for power. They were very suspicious of each other, but they were also a pretty clever double act and tough to negotiate with; a very wearing process.

One of the keys to success was that Carrington said, with Margaret Thatcher backing him – and they knew she was tough, she had credibility – “We are going to settle this. Anybody who leaves the table and goes away,” (they were all threatening to walk out; Smith, Nkomo and Mugabe were threatening at different times) “Fine! If you walk out of this room, you will not be part of the settlement. We are going to settle with whoever remains.” And they were trapped. They wanted to leave London; they complained about being kept there and about the slow pace, though we paid very handsome expenses and put them in good hotels, so they were actually quite comfortable and they did quite enjoy themselves in their time off; some more than others. But they felt trapped inside this process because, if they walked out, it was going to be politically dangerous.

The other thing that trapped them– and this is where Margaret Thatcher was particularly important, she didn’t do the negotiating – was that we were trying to cut off their lines of retreat. So we worked very hard on the South African Government which, by this stage, had decided that Rhodesia was costing it more than it was worth and South Africa wanted to be shot of it. So we worked extremely hard, particularly on the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, who kept coming to London, mainly to complain on behalf of Smith that we were being too tough on the Rhodesian whites, but basically we were trying to use the South Africans to deliver the message to Smith that, if he didn’t settle, they weren’t going to back him. We were doing the same thing with President Kaunda in Zambia and with Samora Machel in Mozambique, and this extraordinary relationship developed on the telephone between Margaret Thatcher, from the right wing Conservative Party, and Samora Machel, a sort of fire-breathing Marxist. They actually got to like each other and, through an interpreter, they had these telephone calls and they developed a degree of trust. Machel was telling Mugabe that he wasn’t to come back to Mozambique and resume the war.

So the lines of retreat were cut off. We were trying to get strong backing in the Commonwealth. That was more difficult because Sonny Ramphal was not

supportive; he didn't trust the British. He was a very clever Guyanese lawyer and Commonwealth Secretary General at the time. He and Julius Nyerere thought that this was all a trick and that we were going to betray the Rhodesian Nationalists and do a settlement with Muzorewa and Smith. Ramphal and Nyerere at various points very nearly de-railed the conference. They on occasions appeared to be advising Mugabe and Nkomo to walk out. They tried to whip up support in the Commonwealth against our negotiation and to undermine it in various ways. They resented the fact that the Commonwealth was not represented at the table. It had been another strategic decision by Carrington that the Commonwealth was not going to sit inside the room. Again he was right. And they were supported by some rather surprising people. At times Malcolm Fraser, the Australian Prime Minister, was extraordinarily unhelpful.

Carrington and Thatcher drove their way through this and I had a ring-side seat. I was the guy who carried Carrington's briefs in his box into the room and wrote out the notes of his meetings. And it was fascinating. Carrington showed terrific political courage. He'd been Foreign Secretary for only a few months. It was the job he'd always wanted, and yet he knew that, by doing what he was doing, he was annoying the right wing of his own party, which regarded it as a form of treachery to sit down and talk to Marxists, let alone make an agreement with them. If it failed, the knives would be out for him. He might well have thought he would have to resign. I remember having this conversation with him on a number of occasions. There were times when things were going badly. I'd walk into his office on a November evening, a dark afternoon or evening, and Carrington would be standing by the window, hands in his pockets, sunk in despair, saying, "It's all going wrong." And I was far too junior and inadequate a person to be able to cheer him up, and my pathetic attempts to do so were no good. He'd say, "No, it's all going to fail and I'll have to resign." And that was a real possibility.

So he showed great courage in steering the thing through, and his sense of timing was right. He took a huge number of political risks, including the risk of sending Christopher Soames out to Salisbury, as it then still was, before the Agreement was actually enacted. Under the Lancaster House Agreement, elections would have to be held in Rhodesia to bring a new Government into a power. To send a Cabinet Minister out there was extremely risky. Soames didn't have a big force to protect him. We had a very small number of troops there. That was another risk: not to send a big force which would have required time to assemble. There was a real risk that Soames could be assassinated, that indeed all our troops could be assassinated - there was only a handful of them there - and that the thing could become a bloody fiasco, and the blame for that would have been on Carrington. Margaret Thatcher was rather keeping her distance from this. It was Carrington's show. He would have borne the responsibility. So he showed fantastic foresight, clarity and courage, and I felt humbled, really, to be able to see this at such close quarters.

MM: Completely fascinating episode.

RL: Now, with hindsight, everybody's forgotten, although Mugabe's recent behaviour has rather brought it back to mind. Objectively Rhodesia was a small problem in the face of the world, but we forget now how big an issue it had become and how damaging it was to our international reputation, that this piddling little colony of ours should rebel like this; cock a snook at the Queen, the British Crown, the British Forces and, for very many years, held out against sanctions and the rest of it. And we'd appeared impotent. We hadn't been able to resolve this issue. And it was important; it had taken up a lot of time and effort. We needed to get it out of the way. It was poisoning our relations with a lot of the world, a lot of the developing world, the Commonwealth. It was undermining our reputation in the United Nations and other places. We were constantly on the defensive over it. So Lancaster House dealt with that and it was a settlement that initially worked. The fact that it has gone wrong in recent years I don't think is the fault of the

settlement. It's a great tragedy that Mugabe went off the rails. He started out in his first few years very promisingly – he was a bright man who made a number of conciliatory moves, conciliatory towards Soames, towards the British, towards the whites in Rhodesia. Ian Smith was not strung up on a lamppost or thrown out of the country. General Peter Walls became the first commander of Mugabe's Forces, the head of the old Rhodesian Intelligence was appointed head of Mugabe's Intelligence. A lot of good work was done in the early days of independent Zimbabwe, and it's a tragedy that it hasn't lasted.

MM: Yes, it is.

**Appointment to UK Mission to United Nations, New York,  
1982-86**

RL: ... My baptism in Carrington's private office. I spent almost three years; I stayed there until the early part of 1982. I left to go to New York just before the Falklands war happened. The Falklands was in one part of the area of the world that I was dealing with. Even in February 1982, when I left the Private Office, we had no inkling that this trouble was going to happen. We had had an argument with the Ministry of Defence, which I remember, about the withdrawal of the Endurance guard ship. Carrington had quite rightly warned the Defence Secretary, John Nott, that withdrawal of the Endurance would send the wrong signal to Argentina. He was overruled on that.

MM: By?

RL: I can't remember now, but I'm sure the Franks Report would tell us about how high the argument went, whether it went to a Cabinet Committee or the Cabinet, or wherever. But the Ministry of Defence insisted on withdrawing the guard ship against Carrington's opposition. Not a very clever decision.

MM: Fatal decision! So were you involved in the negotiations over the Falklands?

RL: When the Falklands happened? I'd been in New York for I think four days. I was trying to find a flat. I wasn't doing dependent territories. Africa was my main responsibility, and I was also the Mission press officer. They'd amalgamated two jobs. They had decided that they no longer needed a full-time press officer, so that was rolled into my job. I rang up the Foreign Office News Department, never having dealt with the press or had any training in that area, just before I went to New York, and said, "Do I need any briefing or instruction from you?" And they said, "No, there's no possible media interest in the United Nations these days. Don't waste our time by coming down here for a briefing. It's only a notional part of your portfolio so forget about it and concentrate on Africa." So the Falklands happened and, for the next three months of my life, for almost twenty-four hours a day, I found myself dealing with the press. At the peak of the negotiations over the Falklands, before the fighting started, we had six teams of television reporters from the BBC and ITV alone. They sent reporters like Trevor McDonald over to New York to cover the story. And I made quite a number of basic errors in my handling of the press, one of which I remember with huge embarrassment, through naivety and lack of experience.

And I sat through those long, torrid meetings in the Security Council in which Tony Parsons was leading the charge. I wasn't in any way central to the process; it was being handled absolutely by Tony Parsons and his Head of Chancery, Mig Goulding, and his Legal Advisor, David Anderson. David was the man who drafted the resolutions on the Falklands, was it 502 and 505?, that were particularly important to us at the time. I was a bit part player but again, with hindsight, it was an interesting process to be a spectator at. It wasn't fun at the time because bad things were happening. Once the fighting started, we were losing ships and the whole thing was a disaster.

MM: What were the mistakes that caused you embarrassment with the press?

RL: The biggest mistake I made occurred one day when I was being battered by a veteran correspondent of a supposedly respectable British newspaper, who by then I'd got to know reasonably well, over what had passed in the meeting between Tony Parsons and the UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar. Perez de Cuellar had just done something – I forget what it was – that had seemed rather prejudicial to our case, and he was actually apologetic for what he'd done, and had in fact apologised to Tony Parsons for this in the meeting. We were not revealing this apology. It wasn't in our interests to embarrass Perez de Cuellar. We were trying to keep on side. So we weren't saying anything about the meeting and I was being tight-lipped with this correspondent who went on and on at me, and I said, "Look, I can't tell you what went on in that meeting, and that's it." Eventually we reached a point in the conversation where, under this battery, I said, "Look, I can tell you off the record why it is that I can't tell you on the record what went on in that meeting." But I said this would have to be completely off the record because it's not something that can be used. And he said, "OK, tell me!" So I told him what had in fact happened, and the reason why I couldn't be forthcoming with him, because de Cuellar had actually apologised for what he'd done. That was a stupid mistake on my part. This veteran journalist then did the dirty on me; he immediately rang up Tony Parsons and he said, "I've been told that, in the meeting, Perez de Cuellar apologised to you. I've been told that off the record but I'm going to run this story, and it will be front page tomorrow, so you'd better comment." And they did run it on the front page, and that was massively embarrassing, and it was entirely my mistake.

I later compared notes with a certain journalist that I trusted and respected over how I'd handled this, and he said, "Never ever tell a journalist something genuinely off the record, i.e. something that can't be used as opposed to something unattributable, because it's useless to the journalist – it's not helpful to tell him that. It actually makes it more difficult for him because, if he finds it out from somebody else, it makes it harder for him to use that material."

There was another mistake which I didn't make. On another occasion, when a crowd of journalists had gathered when Foreign Secretary Francis Pym was out in New York for a crucial meeting with Perez de Cuellar over the so-called Peruvian peace plan, the journalists were running up against their deadlines. Pym was late coming out from the dinner at which he and Perez de Cuellar were discussing the issue. I had not been in the dinner. After the dinner, Pym was having a confabulation with people before he went to talk to the press and I was sent to keep the press quiet while they were waiting, give them drinks and coffee and all that. They waited a very long time, somewhat fuelled by drink, and they were getting pretty irritated. They were under pressure from their editors in London because they were right up against their deadlines. With the time difference between New York and London, they were getting very late in New York for the last editions and were getting frantic for a story. They knew that I knew what had happened in the meeting, and so they started hammering away at me to give them a bit of news that they could use, because Pym was going to be too late. One of them, in particular, lost his temper and became very abusive and started abusing me personally, telling me that I was completely and utterly useless, that I wasn't fit to do the job I was doing, that if I was half as good as some of my colleagues, I would have been more forthcoming; that it was only because I was so useless that I wasn't telling them something. And we had a pretty violent row, but I held my ground and didn't say anything.

MM: You didn't hit him back!

RL: I didn't hit him back, and the episode passed. It was a heated moment. For many years after that, I loathed this particular journalist, but subsequently we became good friends; he's now retired and we're actually having lunch later this week! I now recognise that he was under a lot of pressure and was only doing his job. He shouldn't have lost his rag. The other thing, to their credit, was that quite a lot of the journalists came up to me afterwards and apologised, and said he shouldn't

have attacked me like that, but at least I stood my ground on that occasion. Dealing with the press is an uncomfortable process. You learn by experience. I probably made a few mistakes over the years, but it's very easy to get it wrong because, if you're a reasonably open person, you naturally want to be helpful. You tend to say a bit more than you should. When you look at it in print, it's very different when you say it, because all your qualifications are selected out, the nugget is there and things just look worse in print than they are when you say them. You've always got to hold yourself back a bit. The other thing you have to learn is which journalists you can trust and which you cannot. There are some you can trust, I'm very glad to say; there are some with whom you can have a conversation over a lunch table that is not on an attributable basis where you will not be quoted attributably. There are others with whom you could never have that conversation, and you have to learn to distinguish between the two.

You can get a lot back from the good ones when you have that relationship of trust because they know a lot of things that you don't know. So it can be a rather valuable kind of relationship if you handle it the right way.

MM: So, does that dispose of your time in New York? You were there throughout the Falklands and ...

RL: After the Falklands, my main preoccupation in New York was Namibia. Crises came and went in other areas. Problems happened in Africa. Namibia and South Africa, and South African sanctions. I found myself dealing with Middle Eastern crises when the Middle Eastern desk officers were away. I was a member of a so-called contact group on Namibia. There was a great plan for Namibia by the United Nations, drawn up some years beforehand, and we were supposed to be approaching the moment at which it would be put into effect. After the Lancaster House settlement, people said, "Well, now we've settled Rhodesia, we must do Namibia next." And this was supposed to create a favourable atmosphere for dealing with the Namibian issue; again it's an issue which now has been

completely forgotten, but at the time seemed quite important. It happened that, in the years I was in New York – 1982 to 1986 – Namibia went nowhere. After I'd left, it accelerated – I don't think it was cause and effect! And so the contact group used to meet, we used to draft communiqués, we used to have confabs from time to time and just exercised classical diplomacy.

There were some very high-quality people in the group. Martti Ahtisaari was the UN Under Secretary-General in charge of this exercise; he was the designated special representative for Namibia and I got to know him very well, and of course he's been one of the great diplomats in modern times. He became President of Finland. He's a very nice man, and he became a good friend, a man who is totally trustworthy, one of the most respected people in the entire United Nations. So getting to know Martti was a plus. My American colleague was a man called George Moose, who was one of the finest American diplomats I've ever worked with, who was later my American colleague in Geneva when we went as Ambassadors there. He was the Assistant Secretary for Africa at a later stage. My French colleague was Jean-David Levitte, who was later my counterpart when he worked in Chirac's office as Diplomatic Adviser when I was in Downing Street, an extremely sharp French diplomat whom I liked and respected. We didn't always agree, but he was very good quality opposition. My German counterpart was Joerg von Studnitz, whom I'd known in Moscow previously and was later my colleague as German Ambassador in Moscow, and I'm still in touch with him. So it was an interesting group of people to work with, even though the issue that we were working on wasn't going anywhere and was rather frustrating.

The South African issue was different in that, from time to time, the South Africans would behave outrageously. They would mount attacks in Angola and things like that. Margaret Thatcher's policy was not to defend the South Africans but she was opposed to tightening sanctions against South Africa, because she didn't think sanctions were effective.

MM: Why? Because only the UK would suffer by them?

RL: Well, there were various different arguments about that. Certainly we would have suffered. She thought that sanctions were hypocritical because a lot of other people were happy to supply South Africa while calling for more sanctions. She was more honest in that respect. The Russians were supplying, and the Warsaw Pact countries were supplying weapons to South Africa while calling for sanctions and so on, and she was against that kind of hypocrisy. I would have to stand up in the sanctions committee of the Security Council and defend our position with no support from anywhere. The Americans would keep their heads down; the Europeans were not supportive. It was quite a good exercise. One of my main objectives was to prevent the committee from ever meeting, and it didn't meet very frequently; it was pretty useless. On one occasion, the Russians caused it to meet and so I did a lot of research into what the Warsaw Pact were up to. I got quite a lot of information about weapons supplies from the Warsaw Pact countries to South Africa, and assembled a dossier. When the meeting opened, the Russian representative went on the attack, and I then opened my dossier and started reading rather slowly and at great length from it, to the point that people got pretty bored. They didn't want the meeting to go on all night and I decided I'd just keep it going for a very long time. So I caused a lot of frustration. I then showed the Russian, without reading it out, certain bits of the dossier that were most damaging to his country and I said, "I think perhaps we might pause here and have an adjournment but, if you wish to resume this discussion, I'll be very happy to do so, and we can have another meeting and I will go on." And I told the Russian that, if we did have another meeting, I'd get to the next part of my dossier, which he wasn't going to like at all. And we didn't have another meeting. The committee didn't meet for a very long time after that.

MM: Well, that's a useful example of our New York technique, I suspect.

RL: I remember another technique from this period when one began to waste an awful lot of time. There were desperately slow, unproductive, boring meetings of which type I was to suffer many more later in my career, of co-ordination among the European Union. It's a disease. It was bad then, and we didn't have so many members – we were perhaps only ten or twelve at the time – and it's got worse and worse and worse because the European Union will sit around for three hours producing some anodyne statement of a couple of pages, that says nothing; it's the lowest common denominator and the process of doing it is desperate. It involves arguing over commas and semi-colons when we really should have better things to do, like going out defeating our enemies, as I kept telling them, rather than wasting time with each other. It was like a board game they loved to play. And when we were discussing South Africa, I was in a minority of one against nine or eleven, whatever it was. Well, I was supposed to be in a minority but, in practice, I wasn't. The reason why I wasn't was that I'd taken up marathon running. Three of the other people round the table, the Dutchman, the Italian and the Belgian, had also gone in for this rather stupid pursuit and, at weekends the three of us would go long-distance running together, and we all took part in the New York marathon together. And, if you run twenty-six miles with somebody, it creates a sort of bond because you're suffering together. And we all became very good friends, our wives became friends, and we'd go out in the evenings and the rest of it. And, when I was under attack in these meetings, to the amazement of other people who could never understand why this was happening, the Dutchman, whose Government was totally opposed to us on South Africa, or the Italian or the Belgian would start chipping in in support of me and, instead of being isolated, I'd have a very decent phalanx of support. The others would say, "But that isn't your Government's position," and they'd say, "Well, it is right now!" And I got away with a lot of it; it was my secret weapon. If you can form a personal bond, sometimes it can be very helpful.

**Visiting Fellow at Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1986**

MM: When that came to an end, you were posted back to London as a Visiting Fellow to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House.

RL: Well sort of. What actually happened was I was offered the possibility of staying on in New York for another year by John Thomson, who had become Ambassador and UK Permanent Representative to the UN. Being promoted to be Head of Chancery was part of the proposed deal, because the then Head of Chancery, David Gore-Booth, was up for a posting back to London. John wanted a devil he knew rather than somebody else, but, for family reasons to do with the kids and their education and having two kids at boarding school and so on, though we loved New York and would have enjoyed living there longer, we needed to have a spell in London because we knew, by then, that we would be going to Moscow to succeed the then Head of Chancery, in the Autumn of 1987. So I asked the Foreign Office to let me have a year in Britain between the four years in New York and three years in Moscow. I'd reached the point in my career where I was eligible for a bit of a breather, and so that was why I went to Chatham House. They offered the alternative of Chatham House or Harvard. Harvard would probably have been more interesting but I needed to be in London for family reasons. So I did this spell at Chatham House which I used to research what was going on in the Soviet Union.

Again I was very lucky with my timing because the Soviet Union had become pretty boring in the early 1980s, which was the period at the end of Brezhnev and Chernenko and Andropov, the period of so-called stagnation. Gorbachev had come in at the end of 1985 and that began to change the picture in 1986. People were a bit slow to appreciate the significance of Gorbachev and there is a sort of myth now that Margaret Thatcher, having met him before he was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party, had realised that he was a completely different kind of animal and that, from the moment he came in, we started to latch onto that. It isn't quite true. I mean, I think anybody meeting Gorbachev realised that he was very different from Brezhnev and co. He was much more modern in his

outlook, he was bright, he was young, he was sober! But actually the analysis of Western governments and most of the Western pundit community, through 1986 the first year of Gorbachev in power, was that this man was not to be trusted, that yes, he made these speeches about perestroika and glasnost, but this was all a confidence trick: his real aim was to reform Communism in the sense of making it more effective, making the economy work better, and therefore making it more threatening rather than less to us, because it would be more dynamic; he was backed by the KGB and the Communist Party. We should keep our guard up, it was argued.

I sat down at Chatham House and I read every word that Gorbachev had uttered, and looked at everything else I could lay my hands on, and he really did feel different. He was starting to say things that were radically different from any previous leader. He was starting to tell the truth, which no previous Soviet leader had ever done, and this was revolutionary. I wrote an article for International Affairs, which I had to get vetted by the Foreign Office and was approved by them, in the Autumn of 1986; a very turgid, not very well-written piece called 'Making Waves', in which I argued that Gorbachev was trying to take the Soviet Union on a different course and that, from our point of view, it was a course that was to be welcomed and was beneficial and needed more serious attention.

Just after this was published, I was telephoned by somebody at the Foreign Office who asked if I realised Denis Healey had just quoted from my article in his final speech as Shadow Foreign Secretary in a debate against Geoffrey Howe. Howe having stuck to the Party line that the Soviet Union was not to be trusted, Healey had said, "Well, I think you should read what your officials are writing, because this guy has just written this piece in which he says the opposite of what you've just said." And the Foreign Office got in a tizzwozz over this and rang up to say, "What the hell have you been up to?" I pointed out that they had approved my article.

You didn't require great prescience. It became more and more obvious that things were changing. That was how I spent my time at Chatham House. And it was extremely useful to have this period to recharge the batteries; to read, because in the bureaucracy the pace of life was such that you very rarely got to read serious books; even reading articles was difficult enough. To have a period in which you could read what was being written outside the bureaucracy – and a lot of good, thought-provoking stuff was – and to fill in those gaps in your knowledge, charge up your batteries mentally as well as physically before going off on an arduous posting, was a very useful thing. I also did a little work on my Russian which, next time around, I was going to be able to use seriously.

### **British Embassy Moscow as Counsellor, 1987-90**

MM: You were posted as Counsellor and Head of Chancery in Moscow. What were your main interests as Head of Chancery?

RL: It was I suppose one of the most interesting and enjoyable jobs I ever did. I had two extremely good Ambassadors. The Soviet Union was approaching its collapse, a second Russian Revolution. It was a revolution that took effectively about five years from about 1987 to 1992 at least to impact, but almost every day things were happening in that country that one simply did not expect to see happening in one's lifetime. So it was fascinating, and it was exciting, it was the centre of world attention. One noticed how huge numbers of journalists, which is always a sign of what is happening, descended on the scene and the highest quality foreign correspondents in the world took up residence in Moscow in that period. They were finding two, and sometimes three, front-page stories a day. To be working there at the time, with Margaret Thatcher coming out from 1987 onwards, the Thatcher-Gorbachev relationship taking off, the run-up to the fall of the Berlin Wall which happened while I was in Moscow; the opening up of Russia; the opening up of Russians as people you could talk to and they would actually say things to you, all gave a completely different dimension to our work.

We were working extremely hard; we sent enormous numbers of reports back to the Foreign Office. We were reporting at a rate that almost was the highest rate of anybody in the world. I think we sent slightly fewer telegrams per year than Washington, but only just. And our output was being read! It was being read in Downing Street; it was discussed in Cabinet; some of our reports were being passed to other governments. We knew that our output was being read quite closely by the German Government who were being given copies of our reporting telegrams because they expressed great interest in what we were writing. So trying to interpret what was happening as well as dealing with it was the essence of my job.

I didn't travel a lot in that period because I had to play the part of anchor man. I had a team of thrusting, eager young people working for me who fanned out across Russia where, although we were still subject to travel restrictions, they were gradually easing. One of my officers went a lot to the Balkan States and started to get to know the people in the pro-independence movements there long before independence actually happened. Of course my Ambassador was out a lot of the time and I was the guy who sat back in the Embassy and tried to make sure that the machine was working the whole time. It was a great period.

MM: It must have been exciting to find that these people were suddenly prepared to communicate at last. And you suddenly found that they were Europeans.

RL: Well, we knew all along they were Europeans because we knew that culturally they were Europeans, and culture had really been the main element of normal human contact in the days of the Cold War. Our common interest in literature meant we were able to bring actors, orchestras, writers into Russia in those days and that had been a window. But of course that expanded enormously in the Gorbachev period. So we'd never been in any doubt that the Russians were Europeans. What we needed to find out was to what extent they were really Communists. We'd always assumed that most of them were not taken in by

Communist propaganda, and indeed they weren't. They were properly cynical about it. They knew they were being lied to even if they didn't know what the truth was.

I remember all sorts of episodes that illustrated this. One that sticks in the mind was that Granada Television – sometime, probably in about 1987, may have been 1988 – organised the first live current affairs debate on television between Russia, the Soviet Union as it still was, and the Western countries – the 'Telebridge' – and they had an audience in probably Manchester and maybe in London, and an audience in Moscow that were linked up in a live debate. The whole of Moscow was talking about this the following day but what Moscow was particularly talking about was not the debate itself, but the advertisements. The Russians had seen television advertising for the first time during this debate. Granada advertisements were being carried on Russian television, and they were staggered to see advertisements for dog food in which very nice looking chunks of meat with gravy poured all over them were being put into tins, neatly labelled and advertised on television. This was higher quality food than was being sold to humans in Russia. They were all saying, "Look! In the West, that's how they feed their animals! We want some of that!"

Something else that happened in that period was that a Russian film-maker made a film about a Russian girl who went to Sweden and became a prostitute. This was meant to illustrate the decadence of the West. When it was shown, again the viewers drew a totally different lesson from the film from the one intended. The Russian prostitute in Sweden was shown shopping in supermarkets that had goods you could only dream of in Russia and was seen driving around in a small Volkswagen. They said, "Even the prostitutes live much better in the West than the best people live in our country!" These little episodes helped to fuel the desire for change. We had some Russians to Christmas dinner – Russian Jewish refuseniks. There was still a problem in 1987 because some Russian Jews who wanted to emigrate were not allowed to. We gave the Russians a traditional

English Christmas dinner. Previously we'd never even been able get them into the house for this. When my wife brought the turkey in, they looked at it and they said, "By God! Your capitalist chickens get very big!" because they'd never seen a turkey. Then she brought in the Brussels sprouts, and they said, "Ah! But our cabbages are bigger than yours!"

MM: Opening windows!

RL: One of the windows that we were able to open was to the Central Committee. This was much to the credit of Rodric Braithwaite, who was a very special Ambassador. He had excellent knowledge of Russian, a deep knowledge of Russian culture, a manner that Russians could see as being sympathetic and understanding. Therefore he rather stood out; there were one or two others, but not very many. His American counterpart also, Jack Matlock, was another great scholar of Russia. Rodric was able to develop access to parts that Ambassadors had not been able to breach for very many years. Even as far as Gorbachev. He was able to have meetings with Gorbachev, which had previously been completely off-limits. He developed a very close relationship with Gorbachev's diplomatic adviser, Chernyayev, who was not, of course, an official of the Russian Government. Ambassadors had official access to the Government, the Foreign Ministry and so on, but Chernyayev was an official of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Previously the Central Committee of the Communist Party had been off-limits to Western embassies. Rodric was able to see Chernyayev, he had his telephone number, and I often accompanied him on meetings with Chernyayev and occasionally with Gorbachev. We were developing a dialogue which simply hadn't existed before. There were times when there were some very sensitive matters, especially as German Reunification approached. Margaret Thatcher, as is well known, had reservations about that and was concerned about its consequences. The critical question was really whether the Russians were going to allow it to happen; were they going to allow the Wall to come down and were they going to let East Germany go? They had huge

forces there and Gorbachev's intentions over Germany became an extremely important question. We were better able to understand them because of Rodric Braithwaite's access to Chernyayev and Gorbachev, and there were times when we carried out pretty delicate exchanges with them.

I remember we had instructions directly from Downing Street to deliver a letter from Margaret Thatcher to Gorbachev. We couldn't give it either to our own Russian staff to translate – Gorbachev didn't, of course, speak English, nor really did Chernyayev. We couldn't put it through the Russian Foreign Ministry either. Nor could we put it into the hands of many people in the Embassy! So I remember one Saturday morning sitting down to translate this message into Russian. I'm not a master of Russian prose by any means! But I had to type it, and I'd never typed in Russian. I had to find a Russian keyboard and I went over - it being Saturday, our management staff weren't there – I went over to the management room of the Embassy and pinched a Russian typewriter, worked my way round the Cyrillic keyboard (and of course this was before computers and word processors) and I typed this document. I made a lot of mistakes and it was a very slow process, and I had to use a lot of snopake so it came out looking as if it had measles, but I typed this letter. Quite shortly after that, we got the summons to go round to the Kremlin. We shot round there and handed over my measly bit of paper to the Russian President!

There were also still many aspects of the old Soviet Union that afflicted our lives. It took a long time for some things to change, and the old problem of intelligence officers was still with us. The KGB were absolutely unreformed and, in that period, a moment came when people in London had to expel a group of Russian intelligence officers and the Russians retaliated by expelling some of our staff. That was actually when Bryan Cartledge was still there, so it was some time before August 1988. Bryan Cartledge and I were summoned one evening – I think it was a Saturday – to the Soviet Foreign Ministry. It was dark, most of the lights were off in the building, and we were ushered up to the seventh floor where

Shevardnadze had his office, and the Russian Foreign Minister still has his office. And there was Shevardnadze with a bit of paper in front of him and, in a whispering voice in his strong Georgian accent, which was very hard to understand, he read out a list of names of people who were to leave the Soviet Union within two weeks. These were members of our staff and also one or two journalists, if I remember rightly Angus Roxburgh of the Sunday Times was one. He was extremely upset. We were very upset because these were friends and colleagues who enjoyed being there, they spoke the language, they'd trained to be there and were being expelled through no fault of their own but purely as an act of vindictive, stupid retaliation by the KGB who knew that we would never alter our policy in response to this kind of tactics. They were being expelled from the country so we had to go back, call them round to the Embassy and tell them to pack their bags. And that was a very emotional, very tough experience; the unpleasant side of serving in a country like that. We had to cope with it.

MM: Yes, it is astonishing that it should happen at the same time as these highly sensitive exchanges between Mrs Thatcher and Gorbachev.

RL: The KGB tried to throw me out. This is now in the public domain, curiously through a magazine article in a Russian glossy magazine a few years ago. What happened was that the Russian Intelligence Officer, Oleg Gordievsky, had defected to Britain a few years beforehand, not while I was in Moscow. That, together with Penkovsky, was the most serious defection the Soviet Union ever suffered. When Gordievsky left Russia, smuggled himself out of Russia, he left behind a wife and two daughters who had been completely unaware of his affiliation or his intentions, and he had no direct contact with them for several years after that. As things began to change, he and those advising him in London thought that they could try to make contact with his wife to whom he was still very attached. There had been the odd indirect message that came through family members but not a lot. It was decided by the powers that be that somebody from the Embassy – this was by 1990 when things had really relaxed – should go and

meet Gordievsky's wife and ask her if she wished to exercise what was perfectly her right under international law, to visit her husband in Britain. We had a certain consular responsibility for her as the wife of somebody who was by then a British citizen. It was decided by the powers that be that I should be the person, though I wasn't a consular officer, to go and see her. I pointed out that the KGB would not take this lightly; although it was 1990, they felt very strongly about Gordievsky's defection and they would undoubtedly retaliate against this, in all probability by expelling me from the country. I was told that I was wrong, that the judgement of people in London was that this wouldn't happen at all, that the KGB would perfectly understand, and it was fair enough for us to do this. I said I would of course carry out my instructions, which had been approved at a very high level before I was consulted, even though I personally felt that they hadn't necessarily got it right.

So I did as instructed. The first time I visited her, we clearly caught the KGB by surprise. I found myself in the very strange situation of carrying a message from a husband to a wife - I'd met the husband in England - about his feelings for her, and of saying to her that, you know, if she wished to come to our country, here was a form of application for a visa and she would be granted a visa to come, with or without her daughters. She was clearly extremely puzzled. She wasn't used to British diplomats suddenly turning up at her apartment. She wasn't sure really whether this wasn't some kind of a trick, whether I should be believed. We agreed to meet again and I said, "Why don't you come and have tea with me?" But she obviously wasn't able to do that. I went round a second time to receive her reactions to this. The second time I went, the KGB were waiting in strength and shoved cameras in my face and, though I wasn't physically attacked, they were around me. And within days Braithwaite was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and told that I was to leave by the following weekend.

As it so happened, this was just a few weeks before Margaret Thatcher was due to visit Moscow, and indeed Princess Anne. A highly publicised expulsion of a

senior member of the Embassy at this stage would have looked a bit odd, so a negotiation ensued under which, rather unusually, the Russians partially backed down. They were told that my posting was due to come to an end, as it was, six months later and that I would leave at that time, and it was so agreed. This wasn't comfortable because we had let Mrs Gordievsky down. We had raised certain hopes and then, I think predictably, the process had been interrupted by the KGB, who made it impossible to go and see her again, and we'd left her dangling; and I don't think that was a very clever or honourable position for us to have got ourselves into, though I think she's since forgiven us. But it wasn't actually very smart because we hadn't thought it through. When you're playing chess against great chess players, you need to think through all the moves, and we'd only thought through the first couple of moves, and then we'd got blocked.

The Russian Government, though by allowing me to stay in the country, tried to avoid having any dealings with me. I found that every request I made for meetings with the Foreign Ministry to discuss Margaret Thatcher's visit and other pressing business somehow never resulted in a meeting. So we reached a point when I said I wasn't going to stay if I was going to be treated like this, at which point they relented and I was more or less able to resume normal business for the last three months of my stay. There were no long-term consequences of this. If I had been formally expelled at that stage, it's likely that I would never have gone back to the country again, even though the country changed from the Soviet Union into Russia. The KGB effectively continues to this day under a different name and still has not got to been properly reformed and reconstructed. They continue to exclude people – innocent people, many innocent people – who were the subjects of action by the Soviet Union.

MM: Sad really! So you came back to the FCO as Head of Soviet Department.

RL: Yes. I moved from one end of the telephone line to the other. I drove out with my elder son through, among other places, Berlin on the night of German

Reunification; there was an extraordinary street party throughout the city. By the time I left in September 1990, the storm clouds were gathering over Gorbachev; the economy was running into trouble and worse trouble was clearly coming up. There was beginning to be talk about a coup against him, even a year before it happened. They were beginning to talk about the risk of civil war; the Ukrainians were beginning, not merely the Balts but the Ukrainians, to start agitating, which became stronger and stronger in the course of the following year.

### **Head of Soviet Department of the FCO 1990-92**

When I got back to London I took over the Soviet Department and, just over a year later, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The most dramatic event was the coup of August 1991. I was on holiday in France when it happened but, before I went on holiday, there'd been an awful lot of evidence in the two or three months before that that trouble was brewing and that this was possible.

MM: What was the root of the trouble?

RL: The root of the trouble was that Gorbachev got stranded. His power base had been in the Communist party and, to a degree, the KGB, the two most powerful institutions in the country. He had started to reform the country. He had gone well beyond the limits of tolerance that most people in the Communist Party had indicated that they could accept. Quite a lot of people had left the Party and Gorbachev had held a fairly free election in 1989 for the Congress of People's Deputies. This was a revolutionary act, probably the freest election that has happened, although it wasn't held on a Party basis. And the liberals who had helped him with Perestroika, people like Alexander Yakovlev, who had been in the Politburo with him and had been his main guru on Perestroika, were saying to Gorbachev, "You've got to go further. We now have to abandon communism and actually develop a completely different democratic liberal system." Gorbachev was not able to make that leap. Therefore, from about 1990 onwards, and maybe

a bit before that, he had started to lose the support of the liberal reformers. They became disillusioned with him because he wouldn't act. And of course he was starting to get unrest in the Baltic States, some of which was put down by the Soviet Forces in a violent way. That was a real dividing point for people. So he'd lost that support; they'd gone out ahead of him. And I guess there were two reasons why he had not made the leap: one was that he didn't really believe, and he doesn't to this day, believe in liberal (what we would call Conservative) politics. He genuinely believed in a reformist form of Socialism. Well, that has happened in some Eastern European countries but has not happened, and I don't think is feasible, in Russia.

The other reason why he couldn't make the leap was that his whole power base was the Communist Party. That was where he worked. These were the transmission channels for his authority and he didn't have an alternative, and I think he was to some extent trapped by them. But the Communists, of course, turned against him because he'd gone too far ahead for them, and he'd done things that so offended them, that they said, "We've got to stop the rot! The Soviet Union's going to collapse." Their analysis was completely correct, so they made a somewhat desperate, bungled, attempt to stop it in the 1991 coup. There has always been a bit of a debate about the extent to which Gorbachev himself might have been privy to the coup against him, but that may be too much of a conspiratorial interpretation.

Be that as it may, that was obviously a defining moment and then, after that, the Soviet Union started to break up very quickly. The Baltic States were independent within weeks, in September 1991, and, on 25 December 1991, my Christmas Day was enlivened, sitting here in England, by the announcement by Gorbachev that he was handing over power, and that the Soviet Union no longer existed. Yeltsin announced that he was the man who was taking power in the Russian Federation. By then, he had done a deal with the leaders of Belarus and the Ukraine under which they were going to become independent states. And all

the other Republics of the former Soviet Union, much to their surprise, found themselves to be independent countries. They weren't quite clear what to do in most cases, but this is what happened.

So I had gone from being responsible for one country to being responsible for fifteen. I had to get relations developed with these new countries and first we had to find out about some of them. Our knowledge-base of Central Asia was pretty skimpy. In fact, the level of expertise in Western Europe about Central Asia was very thin. One or two academics were found. We started holding seminars to discuss "What's Central Asia like? What's it about?" because we hadn't had that much contact with it; it had all been done through Moscow. So we had to get embassies opened. We drew up great plans for the opening of embassies around the Russian Federation. I rang up the management department of the Foreign Office and I asked, "Who's in charge of opening new embassies? Which bit of the Foreign Office does it?" They replied that they didn't know. "We don't open embassies these days, we close them! You'd better make it up for yourself."

And this I did. I recruited one or two extra people and we made it up for ourselves. We got three embassies opened in the Baltic States very quickly. We got ambassadors out there and found premises. Kiev was an obvious one, so we worked for that very quickly. Kazakhstan: I had a very good relationship with my German opposite number. The Germans had inherited a lot of East German property in the Soviet Union and they were using this for new representation and so had property in Kazakhstan. And there were a lot of ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan who had been historically transported there by Stalin. And so we agreed that they would offer us some space in their buildings and so on, and they did the same for us in Belarus. And then we started working on the Caucasus and we had to get visits going to these countries, formal agreements raising a number of difficult legal issues. It had been agreed when the Soviet Union was dissolved that in international law, Russia would be regarded as the successor State to the Soviet Union, which meant that Russia kept a permanent seat in Security Council.

Russia assumed responsibility for all the agreements that the Soviet Union had signed, and this was particularly important in the area, obviously, of armaments, the control of nuclear weapons and non-proliferation. One of our biggest concerns at this period was what was going to happen to all those nuclear weapons. We needed to have people in charge, people we could negotiate with. A major task of the 1990s was to ensure that nuclear weapons were brought within one country, because some of them were deployed in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and then kept under secure control. And Russia, as part of that deal, assumed responsibility for debts. They got the assets and the debts. There was a bit of a legal void with the fourteen new States, so that had to be filled, and a lot of work had to be done in all these areas. It had happened so suddenly that there was very little time to prepare for it.

MM: Fantastic, really! Are any of them what might be termed 'democracies'?

RL: Yes. I think the three Baltic States are certainly democracies. Power has changed hands through free and fair elections in the Baltic States. We had never recognised their incorporation into the Soviet Union. They had retained their distinctive characteristics, essentially Northern European. They are not Slavic countries, so culturally, religiously, ethnically and linguistically they were very distinct. And they embraced democracy and market economics very quickly. Those things put them in a separate category.

Of the others, Ukraine is probably the nearest. Ukraine has had two elections in the last year and a half, the first one of which was not conducted democratically but was overthrown by democratic pressure from the streets; the 'Orange Revolution'. The second, which recently happened, was conducted in a pretty fair democratic manner. There are a lot of issues still in Ukraine to be resolved; it's not a fully-functioning market economy by any means, and quite what is Ukraine's future, is pretty hard for anybody to say.

Of the others, none of them has yet established anything approaching a stable democracy, but it would be pretty unreasonable to expect it within such a short time span. It has taken hundreds of years to develop democracy in this country and other parts of Western Europe, and we haven't even perfected it yet. In fifteen years, with no previous experience of it, it hasn't happened in Russia. One of the reasons why it hasn't happened is that democracy in most countries grew out of individual property ownership, and individual property ownership was not a strong concept in the Soviet Union, or even in Tsarist Russia. There was no freehold ownership of land in Tsarist Russia or in the Soviet Union. The first laws providing for it weren't even adopted under Yeltsin but actually under Putin only four or five years ago. So it's going to take a long time to develop. It won't develop everywhere necessarily anyway. In Central Asia, the Republics have such a different cultural and historical tradition that Western democracy is not going to happen there in all probability in a very long time.

MM: How about the Government of Russia itself? The Russian Federation. It's huge in geographical extent; is it at all feasible that it might be run in a way that we would recognise as a democracy?

RL: Yes, it's feasible. There's no *a priori* reason why it shouldn't happen. There are other huge countries, like Canada which is a massive land area with a pretty small population spread across it. The United States is not a small country. These very large countries are run as democracies. Size doesn't make it impossible. Russia now has a population of about 143,000,000, about half the population of the United States. I don't think it's a question of size. I think it is a question of social development, of education, of generational change because there are a lot of people in Russia to whom democracy is still a fairly alien concept. The development of a middle class is a new phenomenon. A middle class is developing in Russia. There are probably forty, maybe fifty million, people in the Russian Federation that you might classify as middle class. Some would put it higher than that. I think there are gradations in this. They are becoming more

individualistic in a society that traditionally has been very collectivist. Russia is a country that regards itself essentially as European. I think there are aspirations among the Russian people to live like Europeans and to be received and regarded as Europeans. They regard themselves as partly European at least. I think they quite enjoy some democratic practices. They have enjoyed the ability to elect their local governors and their leaders; they quite like voting. They're people who enjoy political argument. All of these are elements that could come together in time, but you are dealing with a culture that traditionally has been authoritarian, not only politically but in the work place and in the home. And the whole concept of democratic decision-making, of checks and balances, strong multiple institutions, of the rule of law – these are all habits that are yet to be implanted.

MM: Of course you returned again as Ambassador in Moscow in 2000, several years after you'd left, from your period in the Foreign Office as Head of Eastern Department.

RL: 'Eastern' was what I called it when I could no longer call it Soviet, yes. I left there in January 1993 and I've never worked in the Foreign Office since then, and I went to Moscow in the middle of January 2000. Once again I was very lucky in my timing because Yeltsin had handed over power to Putin two weeks beforehand, and suddenly things had become interesting again. There was a new leader whom nobody knew and we had to work him out and get to grips with him, which happened rather quickly because Putin perceived that Tony Blair at the time was the pre-eminent European leader. The Americans were rather in the shadow of elections because it was Clinton's last year in office, so Putin didn't have a huge interest in investing a lot of time there building up a relationship with Clinton when he was going to go. He really reserved his main effort for the next President, who turned out to be George Bush.

So he picked on Blair and he sent a message through back channels, rather than the orthodox diplomatic channel, to Downing Street, because Putin was only the

interim, the acting President until he got himself elected in March (as he clearly was going to be) suggesting that the Blairs should pay a private visit to Russia, not to Moscow but to St Petersburg – which, from the protocol point of view made it rather easier - under the excuse of attending the première of the new production of Prokofiev's opera 'War and Peace'. The Prime Minister decided to accept this invitation because he, like everybody else, was very keen to meet the new man, find out what he was like and to see if we could work with him. So he came out. He had some fairly lengthy sessions of talks with Putin. The first was rather stilted. It was in the Catherine Palace with a big press attendance. Putin, with a number of his officials, the Prime Minister with me and two or three people from Downing Street, had a rather formalistic conversation. Putin didn't have briefs in front of him, but he'd clearly done his homework and he was speaking to his briefs. And then they held a press conference; again Putin's performance was rather stilted, particularly in reply to questions about economics. He was asked a question about economic prospects and relations with Britain, and the answer he gave was straight out of an old Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade brief. It wasn't 21<sup>st</sup> century economics. I think he learned fairly quickly. Then they met at the Opera and so there was quite a lot of informal contact in the box at the Opera and in the interval, and a warmer personal relationship developed.

Then there was a second round of talks held in the Hermitage, again in rather grandiose surroundings, I think because there's a tendency to use grandiose surroundings where we would use perhaps more informal ones, partly in order to show what a great country Russia is. I agreed beforehand with the Prime Minister that we would try in a second meeting not to have any officials present, just interpreters, because he'd begun to develop a conversation with Putin, in the private context and this was clearly showing a different side to Putin from the more formal talks. I suggested to the Russians that this second meeting should be held without officials. The Russian officials were adamant that that wasn't going to happen; they didn't want to let Putin off the leash! So they all trooped into the meeting and we had the opening formalities...

MM: And did you?

RL: We did. We had the opening formalities and after they'd finished, I suggested to the Prime Minister that it might be best if we officials now left the two great men together, and I stood up with the Downing Street officials, and we started to walk out of the room, which more or less obliged the Russian officials to walk out of the room. And then the two men had a very long conversation in this vast echoing room, sitting on the thrones side by side, which was a pretty good conversation. So that was the beginnings of the dialogue. Tony Blair was able to report back to fellow European leaders on Putin. He was the first person to have met him and was able to encourage others also to get to know him which, over time, they did – particularly, obviously, Chancellor Schröder, who could speak to Putin in German. Putin's German is absolutely fluent. The process took off from there. Putin talked a lot to Blair about his intention to promote economic reform, which clearly needed doing after the chaos of the Yeltsin years. And Blair said that we were very happy to offer the benefits of our experience in this area, and he actually arranged for some of his advisers to come out not long after his visit to talk to the team of people who were preparing economic reform plans for Putin. So David Milliband, who at the time was the Head of the Policy Unit at No. 10, with Geoff Mulligan and Geoff Norris who were also working in No. 10 for Blair, came out and had talks with German Gref. This took place before his appointment as Minister for Economic Development. They also had talks with Dmitri Medvedev and others in Putin's team.

For the first three and a half years of Putin's administration, a lot of effective things were done in terms of economic restructuring; a lot of good legislation was adopted; things were achieved that had not been achieved in the Yeltsin period. And the results were really very good. On the foreign policy front you also had, by and large, a lot of progress. Putin withdrew from the old Soviet bases in Cuba and Vietnam; he restored very early on in his time a relationship with NATO

which had been put in the freezer because of events in Kosovo; he started to show an interest in a constructive relationship with the European Union. After Bush came to office in Washington, the Bush team initially were not very interested in Russia. They wanted to teach the Russians a lesson that they no longer mattered and so they deliberately didn't schedule an early meeting between Bush and Putin or even between Secretary Colin Powell and Igor Ivanov, at the time the Russian Foreign Minister. The message out of Washington to the Russians was that they could wait their place in the queue, and their place was quite some way down in the queue.

Tony Blair, I think, had some influence on that process. He argued to the Americans that Russia was still important on a lot of issues, which it is, and that it was better to talk to them than not talk to them. And Bush came round to this point of view. He had his famous meeting with Putin in Ljubljana and his relationship from there on was more friendly. That was extremely helpful to Bush when the 11 September 2001 events happened because Putin was highly supportive – more so than he would have been if he'd been cold-shouldered up to that time. He was the first foreign leader to ring Bush up after the attacks on the World Trade Centre. He offered full support and he was as good as his word. He helped to persuade the Central Asian leaders to let American forces use base facilities in Central Asia, in order to deal with Afghanistan. And in other ways he instructed the Russian machine to be co-operative over the operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Things went pretty well until the middle of 2003. There were imperfections. I've just concluded a long report on this subject for the Trilateral Commission ("Engaging with Russia: the next phase", a report to the Trilateral Commission by Roderic Lyne, Strobe Talbott and Koji Watanabe. Published by the Trilateral Commission in June 2006). Things really went on the turn from mid-2003 in Russia. I think there were two or three factors that caused this. One was that oil prices had gone rocketing upwards. They were somewhere around \$11 a barrel in

1998 at the time of the Russian economic crash, and they were in the low twenties when Putin took office in 2000. They went up to about \$35 by 2003. The Russian economy is massively dependent on export revenues from oil. Oil exports represent over 60% of Russia's exports by value. So suddenly a lot of money was coming into Russia. Foreign currency reserves were \$8.5 billion in early 1999. They shot up and they now stand, in April 2006, at \$229 billion – a pretty sharp rise.

Russia's debts had been seen as a big problem when Putin came into office and there was a debt spike approaching in 2003 that they were very nervous about. But Russia had made so much money by then from energy exports that debt had ceased to be a problem. And the effect of all this was that the pressure to press on with economic reform was eased fatally. Reform in any country is always painful; it upsets people; it needs real determination to carry out. A lot of people in power in Russia started looking at this money and saying, "We'll have some of that!" And so, instead of putting their efforts into modernisation and reform, they transferred effort into trying to seize control of some of country's most profitable assets. Levels of corruption which had gone down in the early Putin period went right back up again. I think money was a major factor. I think the approach of the 2003 Duma and 2004 presidential elections was the second factor. Putin needed to win his second term; there was no doubt that he was going to win the election but he wanted to win it big! He wanted to have a first-round victory which needed more than 50% of the vote. He wanted to make sure that he had packed the Duma with as many supporters as possible, so a lot of the focus in the Kremlin from 2003 went into fixing the election.

Then I think the challenge from Khodorkovsky was another factor. Again that related to the election, and Khodorkovsky had presidential ambitions, probably focused more on 2008 than 2004. I don't think he thought he could unseat Putin in 2004. Khodorkovsky was trying to build up a position in the Duma. He was trying to challenge the Kremlin right across the board. He was being extremely

independent and he represented a growing threat in the eyes of the Kremlin. He was invited to back off; he did not back off. He was warned to back off; he did not heed the warning. Then his closest friend and associate, Platon Lebedev, was arrested in July 2003. That was the final warning to Khodorkovsky to back off. It had the exact opposite effect. Khodorkovsky and Lebedev were very close and I think Khodorkovsky at that point felt that he wasn't going to abandon his friend. His friend was locked up and Khodorkovsky was not going to flee the country. So that took its course to the point where the inevitable happened and Khodorkovsky was arrested.

That locked the Kremlin into a confrontational course, and they pursued it in the Russian fashion to the bitter end, including destroying the best-performing oil company, one of the best-performing large companies in Russia, Yukos, and effectively stealing it. The main asset at Yukos was the Yuganskneftgas oilfield that now resides within the state-owned oil company Rosneft; 70% of Rosneft's production. The Chairman of Rosneft is Mr Igor Sechin, who is one of the most senior officials in the Kremlin.

All of these things started bubbling up from middle of 2003. The balance of power within the coalition – and it was a coalition of different elements that Putin headed in the Kremlin and the Russian Government, a coalition of St Petersburgers who had come in with him, economic liberals, KGB associates of his, old Moscow establishment, old Yeltsin people. The balance tilted in the direction of the so-called 'siloviks', the people from the KGB and other law-enforcement agencies. They're not one group of people; they're actually competing clans within that umbrella description.

They wanted control of power and assets, and they became the dominant force around Putin. His Chief of Staff, Voloshin, resigned. Prime Minister Kasyanov was sacked. They were both people who had been key players under the Yeltsin administration. In Putin's second administration, the period from 2004 to the

present day, money has continued to accumulate in Russia, because of high oil prices going up to \$75 a barrel, and more and more assets have been taken under Kremlin control, not in a genuine process of renationalisation, but through a process of using the power of the State to seize control of companies. The state's share of GDP has gone up from 25%-30% to something like 40% now. The state has taken over companies in aerospace, automobiles, airlines, metal production as well as energy. They've built up a massive gas company, Gazprom, which now has an oilfield that was a forced acquisition. It's very inefficient, very corrupt and it's controlled directly by the Kremlin. And that has become the pattern. As an economic model in the long term, it will fail. But in the short term, which is all that they're thinking about in the politics of short-term opportunism, it suits them very nicely. They are accumulating a lot of wealth and they are determined to hold power through to the next election in 2008. Theoretically Putin cannot stand for re-election, but he could find a way if he wanted to remain in post. The alternative is that he will nominate a successor and that person will be manoeuvred into power.

In the middle of this, the British-Russian bilateral relationship took a very sharp nosedive. In June or July 2003, Putin came to London on a State visit. He was the first Russian head of state to do so since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The invitation had been extended at a time when things were going pretty well. Doubts were beginning to surface by the time he actually arrived. Immediately after the visit, the Russians reacted very strongly to a decision by a British court to reject their request for the extradition of a Chechen, Ahmed Zakayev. Zakayev was a Chechen emissary – an emissary of the last elected President of Chechnya, Maskhadov – and Zakayev has been travelling in the West for some time. He was somebody with whom Putin's administration had themselves held talks at Moscow airport. When they did so, they said it was all right to talk to this man because he was not a terrorist; he didn't have blood on his hands. He was a political emissary. By the time he got to London, they claimed that he was actually a terrorist, although he hadn't been in Chechnya in the intervening

period. The extradition request had no realistic chance of succeeding. The British judge threw it out on grounds that any half-respectable judge anywhere in the world would have used. But the Russians of the old type are not really used to the independent exercise of the rule of law, and their understanding of this country is very imperfect. There was a belief on the Russian side that refusal to extradite Zakayev was a political act by the British Government and that, if the British Government had wanted, it could have simply overridden the courts. The Russians don't understand that our system does not work like that.

Shortly after the Zakayev decision, Boris Berezovsky, who had been effectively turfed out of Russia in Putin's first year and had taken up residence in London, applied for political asylum and, on legal grounds, there was no case under which he could have been denied it. He had no other country to which he could go and it was abundantly clear that, if he went back to Russia, he wouldn't receive fair treatment because he'd been accused of all sorts of things by the Russian Government. He was granted political asylum in the autumn of 2004. Again, this was a quasi judicial decision. It was taken by the Home Secretary acting in his judicial capacity, bound by the law. The Russian Government reacted very negatively to this. It pressured the British Government to return Messrs Zakayev and Berezovsky and it was told that this could not be done under the law. Zakayev and Berezovsky had their legal rights, and we wouldn't budge on this. The Russian Government then threatened retaliation if we did not send the two back to Russia. This was old Soviet-style behaviour led by the successor organisation to the KGB, the FSB (the KGB under another name). And the British Government stood its ground as it had no choice but to do. The Russians retaliated in a number of minor ways in the way that they conducted relations, but then they also retaliated by mounting raids by leather-jacketed agents of the tax police on the British Council's offices in Russia. They crashed into the British Council, broke down doors, interrogated staff and accused the British Council of evading Russian taxes, even in places where the British Council didn't actually take any money for any purpose at all but was merely lending books and

videotapes for nothing. The basis of this was that British Council had been trying to establish clearly its legal status for some years. An agreement that would have done this had been negotiated with the Russians and the Russians had found one excuse after another for not signing this agreement, the Council Centres' Agreement. The Russians had said very clearly that, pending the signature, the British Council should continue to do what it was doing. Most of what it was doing involved not taking money from Russia but spending several million pounds a year in Russia. So the whole pretext was very bogus. If the Russians had a disagreement with us, the way to resolve it was not to send people in leather jackets to smash down the doors of an official British organization. It should have been through civilised conversation, which hadn't taken place. And I was in no doubt at all that this was retaliation for Berezovsky and Zakayev.

The combination of all these events meant that the official relationship between us became pretty difficult. Word went around official circles in Moscow, completely absurdly, that Britain had become a centre of opposition to Russia. Quite a lot of fugitives from the Yukos affair had also taken up residence in London. Berezovsky, from London, was putting out hostile messages against Putin in the Russian media and in other countries but he wasn't breaking any British laws in doing so.

So that was the situation that had developed. We argued long and hard about it. The one argument that I found Russian officialdom could not answer was when I asked them to tell me what the British Government's motive might be in becoming the so-called centre of opposition to the Russian Government? They had absolutely no answer to that. It was totally absurd. It was particularly absurd because at this time British companies were leading the process of foreign investment in Russia. It was a time when BP did the biggest ever deal in Russia to form a joint company with a Russian oil company. It was a time when Shell were investing a lot of money in the development of a Russian gasfield in Sakhalin, none of which suggests that Britain saw itself as a centre of opposition

to Russia. But it was part and parcel of the change of mood, and it obviously made life quite difficult on the diplomatic channel in the period of 2003/4. Difficulties have continued since I left Russia in August 2004.

MM: Were we actually at that stage a leading investor?

RL: We were in the year 2003; we were the largest foreign investor in Russia.

MM: So it was a very sad note to end your official time in Russia on, but I suppose such setbacks are inevitable in the development of a long-term relationship.

RL: I think that's absolutely right. I think that the process of transition is not a neat, linear progression. The 1990s in Russia, when I wasn't living there, was a real seesaw, roller-coaster ride of good and bad things happening and chaotic things happening, and some progressive things happening. The Putin period again has gone forward and backward. I think that we'll find that this is the process over many years to come and one of the things we should not do is overreact to these sorts of swings. We have a long-term interest in engaging with Russia – not just the leaders who at times can be pretty difficult, but with the country as a whole, because it is a massive part of the European continent; it's a massive centre of resources; it is potentially an important and useful partner for Western Europe ...

MM: And a reliable partner?

RL: ... in all sorts of ways. It's not a reliable partner at the moment but, where Russian interests and our interests align, then there are a lot of productive things that we can do together. An awful lot of relationships are now developing in business of a very positive kind, and I think that Russian business has the potential to be a bit of a motor for change in Russia of a progressive kind. I think a change of generation will be important. We haven't yet had the first post-Soviet generation of Russian leaders. Anybody who is over the age of forty-five in

Russia now was born, brought up, and formed in the Soviet Union. When you speak to younger, educated Russians, they have a pretty different mindset. They're not all automatically democratic liberals; they of course absorbed the traditions of their country, but they do have a different mindset and things will be different as they progressively ascend to the top positions.

MM: What about the influence of the Russian Ambassador in London, in explaining the complexities of this society?

RL: Well, I haven't obviously been in a position to read the reporting of the Russian Ambassador in London. I don't think that, in general, Russian Ambassadors have a big influence on the Kremlin, and it's in the Kremlin that big foreign policy decisions are taken, not the Russian Foreign Ministry which is used as an implementing agency. The big decisions have all been taken by Putin and his team in the Kremlin. To what extent the Russian Ambassador in London has dared disagree with the perceived wisdom in Moscow or not, I have no means of telling.

### **Comparison of position of Mr Putin with British Prime Minister**

MM: How does that compare with the position of the Prime Minister in this country? You had an interesting spell on loan to No 10, where you presumably had a great deal to do with foreign policy aspects of the Prime Minister's work.

RL: It obviously depends on the particular Prime Minister in power. It is clear that, in the year 2006 and in general, I think, in the period of Tony Blair's prime ministership, in terms of foreign affairs there has been quite a shift of decision making into Downing Street. The apparatus in Downing Street that deals with foreign affairs has been substantially increased in that period, partly because the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this period has appeared to dominate domestic policy making. The main area in which the Prime Minister has been able to make

an impact has, by and large, been in foreign affairs. Sometimes his initiatives in domestic affairs clearly run into constraint from the Treasury, and so the Prime Minister has put a lot of time and effort into foreign affairs.

## **Reflections on working in Downing Street as foreign policy adviser to Prime**

### **Minister**

When I was in Downing Street, I think that John Major had deliberately, from the outset of his prime ministership, which was two years before I went to work there, tried to get away from the pattern set by Margaret Thatcher in her later years. The pattern, not only on foreign policy but on a lot of other issues, meant that No 10 had tended to ride rather roughshod over the opinion of other Cabinet ministers. Mr Major had reverted to Cabinet government. He wasn't trying to micro-manage departments in Whitehall. He had also appointed, or re-appointed, an extremely strong, capable and experienced Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, to add a level of experience and weight in that area that none of the three Foreign Secretaries appointed by Tony Blair had, certainly at the time of their appointment. And John Major worked in a collegiate way with Douglas Hurd and didn't seek to take over all the decision making. So that was different, I think, from the relationship between Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe, or certainly it was evident during Robin Cook's period as Foreign Secretary that No 10 didn't always pay a lot of attention to his views or cared too much what he thought.

So that was the atmosphere in which I worked at No 10. And it was a much more pleasant atmosphere in which to work. It wasn't one of confrontation within Whitehall but one of co-operation. We weren't physically in a position anyway to try to run a lot of foreign policy out of No 10. We simply didn't have the staff to do it. When I arrived there, I was the only official in the building dealing with foreign affairs, defence and Northern Ireland - and foreign affairs included the European Union. The European Union at that time included the monstrously complicated process of getting the Maastricht Treaty through the House of

Commons. The European Union on its own generates more than enough work to keep quite a lot of people busy. It was only one part of my portfolio. I was also trying to pay attention to a Bosnian war, to problems in Iraq, to other issues that arose, and then Northern Ireland became more and more time-consuming as the peace process took off. There was only one of me! I was simply not in a position, which is probably a healthy thing, to second-guess Government departments over what they should be doing.

So that was the situation. I was able, after a while, to recruit one additional person to assist me in this task, and that was it. Now there are vast regiments of officials in No 10 covering the ground that I covered. There are people at Permanent Secretary rank, one covering Europe, one covering foreign affairs other than Europe, and another person who deals with Northern Ireland – they all have batteries of people under them and there is a totally different atmosphere. However, it is not one I can speak of from personal experience.

MM: That's a fundamental shift, isn't it? Have you got any further comments to make about your time at No 10? I rather bounced you into that before perhaps we'd finished with Moscow.

RL: We'd probably finished with Moscow. As I say, I've just written 150 pages on Moscow.

### **Private Secretary to Prime Minister, 1993-96**

MM: Could we turn now to your period on loan to No 10 as Private Secretary to the Prime Minister during the declining years of Mr John Major's premiership?

RL: I could write a book about this but I won't. The declining point is relevant because 'Black Wednesday' had happened in the Autumn before I went to No 10. I had never met John Major before I went there but 'Black Wednesday' had

drained authority from the prime ministership that he was never able fully to regain. He was in retreat politically from there onwards. I think that, when historians can take a proper view of the Major period, they will credit him with running the Government very effectively in many ways. I wasn't there at the time and cannot really pass judgement on how 'Black Wednesday' was handled. I hesitate to say whether it would have been any better handled had Margaret Thatcher still been Prime Minister or not, but I don't think there were a lot of options. It was a tidal wave. The only serious option was whether or not the Chancellor or the Prime Minister should have resigned immediately afterwards, and I think with hindsight it would have been better if the Chancellor had resigned rather than hanging on and having to be sacked later. But I don't think that would have really solved the issue.

The main problem that the Prime Minister faced from 1992 through to 1997 was not on the Government side of his job, but on the party side of his job, which wasn't my responsibility as a Civil Servant. The difficulty was that he had inherited a very divided Conservative Party from Margaret Thatcher. Whoever had inherited that difficulty, whether it had been Michael Heseltine or Douglas Hurd who had won the election for Party Leader instead of John Major, I don't think that it would have been any better, and indeed, until the arrival of David Cameron as Conservative leader, all of John Major's successors had the same problem of a very divided party. You have to look back to Margaret Thatcher's time in office for the reasons for that. But that's rather outside the scope of this interview.

For my own time at No 10, on my front, there were three issues above all that dominated my three years there: the European Union, Bosnia and Northern Ireland. Before I get on to those, let me say a short word about process and a short word about Iraq.

Process is important. I talked a bit about it earlier. This was an extraordinary and unbelievably gruelling job the like of which, in the abstract, I can't believe I can have done. I was pitched into it very unprepared. First, I wasn't that senior a person. There was a tradition of taking a Foreign Office Counsellor, only half way up the pecking order, and putting him into Downing Street as the Prime Minister's Private Secretary. Well, that had actually changed and by the time I was appointed involved a promotion. It was a new thing that the Private Secretary had one extra rank. I'd been operating at this middling level in the Foreign Office and then suddenly, in one step, I found myself dealing directly with the Prime Minister – that is to say that there was nothing between me and the Prime Minister, I was the last port of call on the way to the Prime Minister and the first, as it were, port of call on the way out. I was dealing directly with Cabinet Ministers and Permanent Secretaries where previously I had been dealing with people three or four levels below that. I remember vividly one or two Ministers of State ringing me and sounding rather apologetic, saying, "I'm very sorry to bother you; I know I'm above my pay grade!" because the convention was that only a Cabinet Minister or Cabinet Minister's Private Office could speak to No 10. The Minister of State should go through the Cabinet Minister.

That was a situation that took some time to get used to. I was ill prepared, also, because I had no previous experience of dealing with the big subjects that I dealt with in No 10. I'd never dealt with the internal workings of the European Union, which are very arcane and very complex. I'd never dealt with legislation and yet there I was in the middle of the process of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty. I had not dealt with the Balkans and yet we had a Bosnian war going. The Middle East came up from time to time; I had not dealt with that. I didn't even know, when I was given the job, that it included Northern Ireland. Because Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, I thought it would have been dealt with by the officials who dealt with domestic departments. Only as I was approaching No 10 did somebody mention "Oh yes, Northern Ireland!" And I'd never set foot in Ireland, north or south! So I got on a 'plane and went to Northern Ireland for two

days, just to discover what the place looked like and felt like. So from this position of deep ignorance and deep lack of authority, I found myself pitched into that.

Then the physical demands were extremely heavy, just physically to get through the volume of work and a wide range of subjects. The range would start at one end with dealing directly with the National Security Advisor in the White House - and I had a direct link and confidential telephone sitting on my desk; I only had to pick my receiver off the hook and it rang on his desk, you didn't dial or anything! Then I might be dealing with big issues that could involve war and peace, life and death. Or potentially the Government falling if they'd lost the Maastricht Bill, at one end of the scale, to dealing with the minutiae of the Prime Minister's overseas affairs, travel arrangements for overseas trips, the *placement* at meals for foreign leaders, how the briefs were stuck together, correspondence of a fairly routine kind with Members of Parliament. Everything to do with foreign affairs had to go through my hands and into the Prime Minister's box - or not into the Prime Minister's box, because another facet of the job is that you can't throw everything at the poor Prime Minister; you have got to filter it down into what the Prime Minister can manage, so a lot of the job involves taking decisions on the Prime Minister's behalf and using his name, knowing his mind well enough that you can do that and get it right without actually consulting him. Again, it takes a bit of time to develop that when you're working for someone you've never met before in your life, and you can't immediately know how he would react to a particular situation.

I found that I needed to be in the office by 7 o'clock in the morning. I didn't have a driver (they do nowadays), so I was driving myself from home, sometimes falling asleep on the way into the office or on the way home at the wheel of the car because I was so tired. I was getting to my desk at about 7 o'clock. Very often the Prime Minister would ring down quite early because he wanted to consult over something, so you'd go up and he'd be working on his boxes in his

bedroom in his pyjamas. So you had to be in there and alert, ready for that if it was necessary. I found on average that I wouldn't get away from the office until somewhere between 10 pm, which would have been very early, midnight, which would have been about average, and 2 am, which was not unusual. So an average day might mean getting home at about 2.30 am, where I would cook up a quick supper because my wife was in bed long before that, read the following day's newspaper that I'd picked up on my way out of Downing Street, go to bed then for about two and a half to three hours, and then be up to start the next day. At least one day a week on average, normally a Friday night, I'd find myself working right through the night; Friday night because all Whitehall would empty its out-trays into your in-tray on a Friday evening, and you then had to get stuff processed and in to the Prime Minister for the weekend, because that was the time when the Prime Minister did most of his paperwork, because his weekdays were so full of things that heavy bits of paper, draft speeches, Government documents, that sort of stuff, he only really had a chance to look at the weekend. So, in the middle of Friday night, i.e. the early hours of Saturday morning, typically a car would go off to the PM's house at Huntingdon, arriving at breakfast with about three large red boxes stuffed with papers and sometimes another box or two to follow later in the morning, and that would be all the political paper, parliamentary paper, Home affairs, Treasury stuff, as well as foreign affairs. Quite often I would find myself doing things that are objectively absurd, like dictating a speech for the Prime Minister, which therefore, by definition, needs to be quite a good speech, at 2 o'clock in the morning when my brain is not at its most fertile. This was made possible, among other things, by a magnificent pool of support staff, people who were called duty clerks, who would keep me going through the night, as would the famous Downing Street Garden Room secretaries. There were about seventeen of them, they worked on a roster and they were available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day so that, if at 2 o'clock in the morning I needed to dictate, I had a very skilled secretary who would take my words down, so at least I could get through the stuff. The telephone operators there were fantastic. They were enormously supportive; you could ask them to

find you somebody anywhere in the world and they managed to track them – God knows how! By magic – and they were so nice that sometimes they would send me home-made scones in the middle of the night to keep me going. So it was a very supportive atmosphere. It was like a small family, really, or a small embassy. Messengers and everybody pulled together, and that made it physically possible, but it was tough.

MM: Did you have to see all the contents of all those boxes yourself?

RL: Only the papers to do with foreign affairs, defence and Northern Ireland. I not only had to see this material but would have to take decisions on it; very often I would need to put a note on a submission summarising the key points so that the Prime Minister wouldn't have to read it all, and offering him a bit of advice saying, "I suggest we do x or y". And then he would just tick it and I would convert that tick into a letter back saying, "The Prime Minister thinks the following," although the Prime Minister had simply put a tick on the page. If he ticked my note, that meant he'd endorsed my opinion. And that saved his time, and his time was in even shorter supply than mine.

If I may just quote one or two little episodes of having to make decisions when I was completely exhausted. I remember, when we were about to set off for a NATO Summit, at which NATO was going to launch a new initiative on Partnership for Peace, receiving some very dense paper from either the Foreign Office or the Ministry of Defence describing what our policy was going to be. I tried to summarise something that was badly written. I put it in the Prime Minister's box saying, "Here are the briefs for the Summit and here is this new proposal." I hadn't properly digested it; I was simply too exhausted. That must have been probably working through a Friday night. On the Sunday morning, a few minutes before 8 o'clock, I had a telephone call from the Prime Minister from a television studio. He said, "I'm just about to go on the David Frost Sunday morning programme. David is going to ask me about the Partnership for Peace. I

know you've put a heap of paper in my box but what is the key point about the Partnership for Peace?" He woke me up with this call because I had been completely exhausted, and he was asking me a question to which I didn't know the answer, and he needed a quick answer; he only had a minute to get it, absorb it and put it out on television, and I gave him some completely hopeless, waffly answer because I hadn't understood it myself, and he quite rightly said, "Look, that's a complete load of waffle. If I use that on television, I'll be killed!"

MM: So what did he do?

RL: He hacked his way through it and was tolerant of my uselessness. On another occasion, at a very critical moment of the approach to the ceasefire in Northern Ireland but about a month before it actually happened, I had a telephone call that woke me up at home, again I think probably in the early hours of Saturday or Sunday morning, from the White House, probably 2 or 3 in the morning, and it was the National Security Advisor at the White House saying, "We've had a request to give a visa to Mr Cahill." Of course, Joe Cahill was a celebrated IRA veteran who for years had been banned from going to America. And he said, "We are told that Cahill is coming over here to encourage supporters of the IRA in America to support the idea of the ceasefire and that if we admit him, this could be critically important in helping to get the ceasefire. But," he said, "we know that you would have very strong views on our making this huge change in our visa policy. We've got to take this decision more or less now. What do you think about it?" It was 2 or 3 in the morning; you can't exactly ring up the Prime Minister or the Northern Ireland Secretary unless it's a case of war or peace at that time in the morning. You have to make the decision. You can consult one or two other officials but basically you've got to make that decision, you've got to get it right and you've got to take responsibility for it. And you're exhausted and your brain is in a fuddle. And on that occasion I said, "Yes, go ahead. Do it!" And it turned out to be all right, but it might not have been.

The third occasion, which perhaps (in a minute I'll get back to Europe) was the critical point in the Maastricht Ratification process. The House of Commons was debating the issue before taking the final votes just before the summer break in the year 1993, and it looked as if the Government was going to lose some of these votes, as indeed it did, which then would require the Government to table a vote of confidence. If it lost that, the Government would then fall. So we were talking about quite high stakes. The Whips had been fanning out trying to count the votes and reporting back into No 10 on how it stood and all the rest of it, and I'd been having to monitor that side of it. But one of my principal tasks was trying to put together a speech by the Prime Minister, which needed to be as good as it could be to try to convince the last waverers in his party to vote the right way, including the Maastricht rebels. So I had drafted about an hour-long speech. I had put the draft speech in the weekend box the weekend before the vital debate, he had ticked it off and said, "That looks all right; we'll look at it again on the day before." We looked at it again that evening by which time he and I were both completely exhausted. It was a Wednesday evening, I think, and I remember sitting with him in the Cabinet Room in semi darkness towards midnight on that evening. The following day was going to be one the biggest days of his Parliamentary life when he was going to save his skin or lose it, and both of us were staring at this draft speech, absolutely exhausted so that we could hardly read a word; our eyes were just glazing over. And he was pretty depressed because the news coming in from the battle front was very bad. And he looked at his speech and I looked at his speech, and he said, "This isn't good enough. This isn't going to do." And at that point I remember all the adrenalin draining out of my body; I'd put a lot of effort into that speech and it had seemed all right a few days ago and now there was the Prime Minister saying to me at midnight, when I was totally exhausted, "This ain't good enough." We tried to fiddle at redrafting it but were too tired to do anything, and I said to him, "Go off to bed, Prime Minister. You need your sleep. You've got to be on your feet tomorrow," because we had a Cabinet meeting in the morning (it turned out there were three Cabinet meetings the following day as well as the big Parliamentary debate.) I

said, “You’ve got to get your sleep. Leave this with me and I will sort it out.” I said that but I didn’t really believe it. I just thought, “I’m so tired, I don’t think I can sort anything out.” So he went off to bed, depressed and exhausted, and I sat there depressed and exhausted and I looked at this thing, and I stared at it probably for about an hour in a paralysis of exhaustion. I then managed to rouse myself into making a few small changes – I put in a little bit of difference at the beginning or the end, but I was too tired to do much with it. And I stuck it back in his box with an optimistic note on saying, “Prime Minister, I’ve improved the speech. I think it’s all right. You go with it; you’ll be OK.” And I went off home, shattered, and came back a couple of hours later, not having had much sleep, expecting to find an even more depressed Prime Minister telling me that the speech was still useless and everything was a disaster. And I went upstairs to his bedroom and there he was, chirpy as anything. He had the steel of a man going into battle. This was the big day, he was up for it, he was really geared up, and he was clear in his own mind what he was going to do. And he thought he was going to lose the vote but he was going to drive this thing through the Cabinet, through the House of Commons and, if he lost one vote, he’d go for another. And he was absolutely steely. His morale was up and he was very determined. And I think I saw the very best of John Major that day, and it was impressive. I said to him, “What about the speech?” “Oh!” he said. “That’s fine! That’s absolutely fine. No problem at all!” And I thought, “Shit! Think what we both felt like at midnight!” And he drove through that day.

I’ll get back to Europe. Let me just digress briefly into Iraq so that I can tick it off, and then come back to Europe.

Digressing to Iraq simply because it’s a big issue now. It was a big issue at the beginning of John Major’s prime ministership. It was only a small issue in the period 1993-96 when I was in No 10 because he’d had the Gulf War. That had happened, and we hadn’t got into the next round of trouble though there were continuing skirmishes around Saddam Hussein, but we had the air exclusion zone

and occasionally he tested it out, and occasionally there would be a response; no really big problem. I can't remember when it was that Clinton launched his Cruise missiles. That did happen when I was there and that was a decision we had to take, and Clinton launched a few Cruise missiles, not terribly effectively but we didn't have a big agony over that decision. What I do remember that is relevant to subsequent history, which is why I mention it, is that on one or two occasions in this period we had quiet approaches from the American Government to the effect, "What are we going to do about Saddam? The guy's continuing to be a menace and we need to go back and deal with him."

### **Sir Roderic Lyne's interview continued at his home in London on 2 November, 2006**

MM: I think that before we broke off last time you were dealing with your time at No. 10 and that you had something further to say about Iraq and, later, Europe.

#### **Comments about the political situation in Iraq**

RL: The point that I was starting to make about Iraq is a very simple one. In the Clinton years, the United States and the UK were continuing to patrol the airspace above Iraq and we both recognised that there was a continuing problem with Saddam Hussein, who was not obeying Security Council resolutions that should have governed his behaviour. He posed a continuing threat to the region. He was also conducting appalling human rights abuses inside his own country, with people being tortured and murdered. There was an unexplained story about what had happened to a number of Kuwaiti prisoners of war from the first Gulf War. So there were plenty of reasons to try to take some form of action against Saddam Hussein.

MM: This was in which year?

RL: I'm talking about the period 1993 to 1996 when I was at No. 10, and before the eventual Blair/Bush Iraq War. From time to time, emissaries would come across

from Washington to London saying, 'Why don't we do something to get rid of Saddam Hussein?' That was happening even in those days. I recall at least one occasion when an approach was made to No. 10 on the lines of an American request of that kind. This was a standard, legitimate, and correct, part of our dialogue about Iraq. When the Americans raised the subject with us, we essentially replied with two questions: the first was, 'if it is your aim to remove Saddam Hussein, are you certain that you have a plan that will work?' At the time of the last American attempt after the end of the Gulf War of 1991, the Americans later backed off, and a lot of people had been executed as a result by Saddam. So question one was 'do you have a workable plan?' And question two was 'if you have a plan to get rid of Saddam Hussein, have you thought through what happens next? What do you then do with Iraq?'

At the stage that I'm talking about, the Americans did not have a totally convincing answer to question one, and even less did they have a convincing answer to question two. So our line was: when you have better answers to these questions, come back and talk to us again. In the meantime, we can continue a policy of containment, air exclusion zones and so on. That was essentially what happened. There was one point at which, as I said earlier, Clinton launched Cruise missiles against Iraq, but not with a clear strategic intention. It was retaliation after it was revealed that the Iraqis had attempted to assassinate George Bush.

Iraq wasn't one of the big continuous issues in my period in Downing Street. The three subjects that really dominated my life over the course of the three years were Northern Ireland, the European Union and Bosnia. I'll just take them in that order.

## **Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland story is told in great detail in John Major's memoirs. If you want to study what the British Government thought it was doing at the time, I would recommend that you read those memoirs. I helped, while he was writing the memoirs, to fill in some of the background. I think the John Major memoirs are as good an account as there is.

Shortly before I arrived in Downing Street, a message had arrived through intelligence channels – and this is not a breach of national security because it was later revealed in the House of Commons – which appeared to have come from the leadership of the IRA; it was thought to have come from Martin McGuinness, in collusion with Gerry Adams, both member of the IRA's Provisional Army Council, as well as being senior officers of Sinn Fein. This message said in effect that the conflict was over and that they needed help to bring it to an end. It was written in rather convoluted language because that was the language that the IRA always used – not what you would call plain English.

This message arrived before I actually started to work for the Prime Minister. He and Paddy Mayhew, the Northern Ireland Secretary, were scratching their heads over this message, wondering whether it was genuine or not, and whether the Government should react to it or not, or whether it was some kind of a trick. After a lot of consultation with the experts, John Major took the decision that we should explore this territory further to see if the IRA were serious about wanting to give up violence. If they were, he was prepared to help them. This was complicated by the fact that successive governments, including his own, had always said that they would not negotiate with terrorists. To get into a dialogue, albeit through rather indirect channels and not with John Major signing messages, let alone talking to the leaders of the IRA, was likely to be construed as negotiation. So that was a political risk he took.

So began a long and involved process in the spring of 1993. It was interrupted several times by acts of violence perpetrated by the IRA, including the Warrington bomb. Sometimes these came at a point when we were just about to send a message back acknowledging their message and encouraging them to state their position more clearly. If they thought in their convoluted way that letting off bombs in British cities was a means of encouraging the British Government to negotiate, then we had to disabuse them of that notion.

The Irish Government, at the time under Albert Reynolds, had also been receiving messages from the IRA. The Irish had been rather more actively and directly in touch with the IRA than the British Government had been, although they too had an official policy of not talking to the IRA. They denied that they were in touch, although they clearly were. And then John Hume of the SDLP had also been in an openly acknowledged dialogue with Gerry Adams, which was very controversial in Northern Ireland, trying to work out some form of declaration that might help to lead to political negotiation.

So we were getting quite a lot of signals from different angles suggesting that the leadership of Sinn Fein, Adams and McGuinness, had come to the conclusion that they weren't going to achieve their aims through armed struggle, which they clearly were not going to. By this stage of the struggle in Northern Ireland, the Republicans were losing more people as a result of Protestant para-military action than was happening the other way round. We were getting these signals that they were interested in talking but, from our point of view, we were not prepared to get into anything that really constituted negotiation unless they actually gave up violence and made it very clear that they were going to do so; and abide by that.

In the course of 1993, we therefore negotiated not with the IRA - their messages were part of the background - but with the Irish Government with Albert Reynolds. My opposite number in Dublin was a man called Martin Mansergh. We were working on a different version of the Declaration from the one that

Hume had been discussing with Adams. It had to be different because the fact that Hume had been discussing the Declaration with Adams meant that that document would inevitably be unacceptable to the Unionists. Our exercise with the Irish Government was designed to produce something that the two Governments could say was our view, as two Governments, not as players in the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. And by December of that year, after a very difficult and at times very emotional, very heated negotiations, as set out in the Major book, we did reach agreement on a document which then became known as 'The Downing Street Declaration'. It was launched in the middle of December 1993.

The Declaration wasn't a peace settlement. It didn't lead to any immediate ceasefire. It was a stepping stone, part of a process. When you read it you wonder why, if you don't know the ins and outs of Northern Ireland politics, it was important. There's a lot of verbiage in it and it is, in many ways, an appalling bit of drafting. John Major was subsequently awarded the gobbledygook prize for the year by the Campaign for Plain English because it was such a convoluted document. What the Campaign for Plain English didn't understand was that words have enormous resonance in Northern Ireland. Whether you call Northern Ireland 'Ulster' or 'Northern Ireland' is in itself a political signal. Buried within this convoluted prose were statements that were reassuring to the Protestants because they saw that the words to which the Irish Republican Government had signed up meant that the Irish Republican Government was accepting the fact of partition. And there were statements that the Republicans in Northern Ireland found encouraging, suggesting that, if they entered the political process, they would get a fair deal. One particular statement had been made by the previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, in November 1990. In his so-called "Whitbread" speech, Brooke had said, for the first time in public, that the British Government had no "selfish strategic or economic interests in Northern Ireland" – i.e. that, if the people of Northern Ireland at some point in the future decided by democratic means that they did not wish to be part of the United

Kingdom, the United Kingdom Government would not stand in their way, and would not force them to remain.

So we achieved the Downing Street Declaration. It had a terrifically positive reception around the world. But we then entered another phase. We tried to maximise pressure on the IRA to give up violence and come into the political process. Equally the Protestant paramilitaries had to do likewise. I suppose one of the most important things about the Downing Street Declaration was that we managed to carry the mainstream Unionist community with us. This was something British Governments had not always been very good at doing. They'd sometimes focused so much on the Nationalist side of the argument that they'd almost forgotten about the Unionists, whom they'd taken for granted. The Unionists had a very bad relationship with the Northern Ireland Office so, from No. 10 Downing Street, we worked very hard to rectify this. Paisley denounced the Declaration but then Paisley would, wouldn't he! He'd denounced everything that had happened on the constructive side for many years in Northern Ireland. (It is only now that he has the possibility of entering Government that he has started to take a constructive attitude.)

But James Molyneaux, the Unionist Leader at the time, was very courageous about this. He had a lot of discussions with John Major and with me about this document. It wasn't negotiated with him because he couldn't be party to any negotiations. He knew he would have a tough time selling the Declaration to his own party. He couldn't come out in support of it, but he did not object to it. We did not have a repeat of previous Unionist strikes or demonstrations. We had what was called "the non-expostulation factor" with Jim Molyneaux. If we tried out a formula on him, and Jim would look slightly pained but didn't actually say 'no, that's completely unacceptable,' then he was signalling to us, without as I say being party to the negotiation, that he thought that it would be acceptable. So he wasn't committed, he wasn't bound, but he was as good as his word. So the Downing Street Declaration worked in the sense that, when people actually

looked at it in a very sceptical way, whether they were Nationalist or Unionist, no reasonable person could find anything in it so horrible that they had to reject it. There was a sort of consensus built around it with very strong international support, including from the Americans and the Europeans.

We tried then to maximise the incentives to all those who were interested in peace in Northern Ireland, including economic incentives. We asked the Americans and the Europeans to help create a climate whereby the Northern Irish could expect to see more foreign investment, if there was peace. We had an investment conference in Belfast in 1994, after the ceasefire – that's leaping ahead a bit. Working on the economic front and social front was an important part of the exercise.

Throughout 1994, the name of the game was to try to get the ceasefire. We had a major blip early in the year. The Clinton administration had not been involved in negotiations in 1993 in any significant way; essentially we told them that the most helpful thing they could do would be to stay out of it, so, while they subsequently claimed credit for the process, they weren't part of it at the beginning. In 1994 we wanted them to apply maximum pressure to the IRA (who of course received a lot of financial help from Americans – they collected funds in America, and they got a lot of political support) to go for a ceasefire on the basis that they were being offered a fair deal. The Clinton administration agreed to this tactic. Gerry Adams applied for a visa to go to America, he was interviewed by the American Consul in Belfast and, on instructions from the State Department, the Consul asked if Adams was prepared to make a statement that he no longer sought to advance his aims through the use of violence. Adams refused to make such a statement, so at that point the Consulate said, "In that case we're not going to be able to grant you a visa." And that was the Americans' position.

The Clinton administration then came under pressure from people in the Irish-American lobby in the US and, as the Clinton administration tended to do, it

rolled over onto its back. And, without further consultation with us – indeed within a very short period of our being assured by the National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, that they were not going to give Adams a visa until he committed himself to a peaceful solution - they suddenly gave him a visa. And this caused the biggest row between the United States and the United Kingdom that happened in the Major period. It was a very poor way to treat an ally and of course it undermined us, because it made Adams think that he could use the Irish-American lobby to buy off pressure on him to make peace. It set back the cause of peace, I think, by probably a number of months.

Albert Reynolds was generally helpful in this process, though not a man you would call reliable. I forget when it was that he lost power and handed over to John Bruton, but Bruton was extremely helpful and supportive, and was a much more straightforward operator than Reynolds. In the Autumn of 1994, the IRA did declare a cessation of violence. They didn't declare in unambiguous terms that they were giving up for ever. Our response to this was that it had to be for good; that, if we were convinced that they were genuine, we would be prepared at that point to go into talks with them, and we set a period of about three months before we were prepared to do so. We came under a lot of pressure, including from the American and the Irish Governments, to open talks much sooner than that, which we resisted because we said they had to make the position clear to the people of Northern Ireland.

So talks began at the level of officials at the end of 1994 and ran through into 1995. A certain amount of progress was made discussing the terms under which Sinn Fein could become a legitimate political party and enter into the political process in Northern Ireland. But, in order to convince the people in Northern Ireland that the IRA had genuinely given up violence, we needed to have not just words from them – and they were always rather obfuscatory in their words and they talked in this sort of IRA-speak – we needed to have some evidence that showed that they'd give up violence, and that was why the British Government

required them to begin the process of decommissioning their weapons. We set up a commission to facilitate that process, headed by the American former politician, George Mitchell – a very good man who worked very hard on this; a very fair man. General John de Chastelain from Canada was in charge of the military side of decommissioning of arms.

This was a step too far for the IRA, or for some of them, and in early 1996 a bomb went off in Canary Wharf that ended what had only been fifteen months of ceasefire. The bomb went off just after I'd left my job in London. It wasn't completely clear – I think it probably was not the wish of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness that this should happen, but they had probably not been able to prevent it happening, because there was a feeling within their movement that these talks about talks were taking too long and they weren't seeing enough visible benefit from the process.

We weren't terribly surprised because we knew that the IRA had continued doing things like reconnoitering targets throughout this period, which was another reason why we were very insistent that we would have to see evidence that they were serious about giving up violence.

And that was as far as the story went in my time. Not a lot of forward movement happened during John Major's final year as Prime Minister, but Tony Blair was able to pick up the process and run further with it. I think it was fortunate that we had a change of leader at that time, not because Blair's policy differed from Major's, but simply because I think that you just needed somebody else in the seat to be able to make some of the moves that needed to be made to get the process going again, to break the logjam. Blair did this very successfully, and it's a fine achievement but one shared with many people going way back into the 1980s when steps were taken by people like Peter Brooke and people working for him, who'd helped prepare the ground for what then became the so-called peace process, which was carried through by the Major Government and then by the

Blair Government. Still, as we talk now in late 2006, it has not yet led to a final settlement. This may or may not come about, but what it has led to is effective peace. Even in the 1995 period when we visited Northern Ireland a lot, one could see the benefits, then, of peace – the economic activity, the very strong support for the peace process within the population. People were flooding up from Dublin to shop in Northern Ireland. The boil in British-Irish relations had been lanced. I remember the enormously enthusiastic reception that John Major received when visiting Dublin. We went for the second half of a concert there, and the audience just spontaneously rose to applaud a British Prime Minister, which must have been the first time that had ever happened.

### **The European Union**

So that, in a nutshell, is the Northern Ireland story. May I now turn to the European Union? As I said earlier, I landed in Downing Street in the middle of the Maastricht negotiation process – not the Maastricht Treaty, but the negotiation of the Maastricht Bill through the House of Commons, which was finally enacted in July 1993. Europe was a millstone around John Major's neck as Prime Minister and it did more, I think, to defeat him than any other issue. It was a millstone that had really been placed there by his predecessor. The way that Margaret Thatcher handled Europe had bequeathed to her successor, whoever it was to be, a divided party. We were always searching for a Europe policy that was reasonable, that corresponded to British interests and around which the governing party could unite.

Having secured the Maastricht Bill, there seemed to be a window of opportunity in which we could attempt to do so. In September 1994 John Major gave a major speech in Leiden in the Netherlands, on the European Union, trying to chart a way forward for Britain that was workable with our European partners and that could command support from the country. The path that he mapped out in the Leiden lecture was, for a while, a successful path. The lecture was well received right

across the Conservative Party. I remember it was praised in an editorial in 'The Times', which was a very Euro-sceptic newspaper at the time under the orders, one presumes, of Rupert Murdoch, whose hostility towards the European Union is well known. His influence over British political life, given that he's an Australian and is now a citizen of the United States, was and remains, it seems to me, excessive.

But the Leiden effect didn't last for very long. Further issues kept arising on the European agenda that the Euro-sceptic wing of the Conservative Party would then use to attack their opponents within the Party. The Labour Party had almost as many Euro-sceptics led, indeed, by one of the most redoubtable of them all, and the most intelligent, Peter Shore. But one of Tony Blair's very significant achievements was that he managed to persuade his own Euro-sceptics to keep quiet. Labour was desperate to get back into power and it was enjoying the spectacle of the Conservative Party dividing on this issue. Labour needed to appear united on Europe, which it succeeded in doing much more successfully than the Conservatives.

Among the issues that came up, there was a running debate the whole time about the single currency, which of course didn't exist at the time. But people like Mitterrand, Kohl and Delors, were dedicated to pushing forward the single currency, not for economic reasons, but for political reasons. They believed that this would be one of the acts that would really bind the European Union together in an irreversible way and would lead more actively towards political union. Their reasons for wanting to do this were perfectly noble; they wanted to avoid a situation in which Europe could fall apart again, particularly a situation in which different parts of Germany could ever find themselves in conflict. So I don't denounce their motives. The problem was that none of them understood economics. None of them had really thought through the economic effects of a single currency, which now again, in the year 2006, are very apparent. You've only got to look at the trouble, say, that Italy is in at this moment.

John Major was one of the very few European leaders who understood economics. One of the few others was the Portuguese Prime Minister, Cavaco da Silva, who had been an economics lecturer at York University at one stage. I remember Major patiently trying to explain to his European colleagues - bilaterally and in multi-lateral meetings - the economic problem that would occur by locking together interest rates between economies that were moving at different speeds. This would impose huge strains. And I'm afraid that this was beyond the comprehension of Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand; they were not ready to listen to any counter-arguments, they were so determined to go for the single currency.

A number of the other European leaders did get the point and they were worried by it, but none of them was bold enough to stand up to the enormous force that was represented by Kohl and Mitterrand. Germany was the biggest contributor to the budget; many of these countries were recipients from the budget. Germany was the pay-master of Europe. Kohl bestrode Europe like a colossus; he was a huge figure, a very dominant sort of figure, and you had to be a brave person to stand up to him. Very often, in private, on many different issues, the medium sized and smaller European countries would agree with the UK in principle but, when it actually came to making a decision, they would go whichever way Germany felt they should go. It was more than their lives were worth to stand up to Kohl. Kohl did not take opposition lightly, and he demonstrated this on many occasions.

One occasion on which he demonstrated it was when he withdrew support from the Dutch Prime Minister, Ruud Lubbers for the Presidency of the European Commission. It had been virtually agreed in Europe that Lubbers would be the Commission President; Germany had clearly blessed him. And then suddenly it became apparent that Kohl was no longer supporting Lubbers, who had said things or done things that had offended Kohl and that was it! He was struck off!

Kohl, we suddenly heard, had agreed with Mitterrand that the next President of Europe was to be the Belgian Prime Minister, Jean-Luc Dehaene. Dehaene was a perfectly reasonable guy, rather energetic, a good Prime Minister of Belgium. But he was one of the newest people in the club, rather junior in the European firmament, and he did of course come from the way-out integrationist end of the spectrum, as almost any Belgian does. (If I were a Belgian, I would feel the same way, because Belgium doesn't have much of a future except within the European Community. Its history as a sovereign state has been short, unhappy and conspicuously unsuccessful.)

Most of the Europeans resented the fact, whatever they thought of Dehaene, that the two great men had decided on behalf of them all who was to be their next President, but of course they didn't dare say this. The British not only resented the way this decision had been taken, and the assumption that this would then be the final decision, but also – though we had nothing personal against Dehaene, and indeed John Major had very good relations with him personally – we didn't agree with his views. He wasn't the sort of person we wanted in charge. And so Major made it clear that we were not going to accept Dehaene. There had to be agreement on the basis of unanimity on this. Major stood by that position. He came under intense pressure to change but he explained his reasons in a perfectly reasonable way and he stood by that position. This all came to a head at a summit in Corfu. Kohl and Mitterrand had intended that this Summit would bless Dehaene's appointment. We spent a very long evening at an appallingly badly chaired European Summit. Papandreou was notionally in the Chair but he was very old and very ill, and he couldn't last through the whole evening, and actually left mid-way through dinner-time discussion. There was then complete chaos. Some of the leaders summoned their cars and headed for their hotels, only to be ordered back to the dinner. The Chair was then taken by the Greek Minister for Europe, if I remember rightly, who was obviously out-gunned by the more senior people. Major stood his ground throughout the evening. Initially he had the support of two others: the Dutch, although Lubbers was no longer Prime Minister

but Wim Kok, were standing by their man, and Berlusconi was also supporting Lubbers.

The meeting broke up in the early hours of the morning with no decision and a lot of confusion. The outstanding question was whether the British would stand firm at the following day's meeting.

The following morning, Major had meetings privately before the session with the Dutch and the Italians. Wim Kok informed him that he was going to surrender. We didn't think that was a very brave act on his part. We made it clear that we were going to stand firm by the Dutchman and we were a bit surprised that the Dutch Government wasn't going to stand by the Dutchman. But I think this was another example of the way that the Netherlands' economy has become so dominated by Germany that they have effectively lost their independent decision-making when it comes to a disagreement with Germany.

Berlusconi said that he'd fought the battle but he wasn't going to die in the last ditch on this one, and that was perfectly reasonable, frankly. His national interests were not vitally engaged; he could clearly live with whatever outcome.

Major made clear that he was going to stand firm, and he did. It wasn't popular, it wasn't very pleasant, but it was correct. Of course it was very popular with the Euro-sceptic section of his Party; but that wasn't why he did it. He wasn't seeking to encourage them to ever-greater heights of anti-Europeanism. But they were very delighted.

The interesting thing about it was that the smaller Europeans were all very delighted that we had taken this stand; they wished that they could have been brave enough to stand with us. They were happy with the decision to veto Dehaene, and they were happy to have the British take the heat.

MM: Which are the smaller Europeans?

RL: In this affair, everybody except France and Germany. I think that only France and Germany really wanted Dehaene. The Belgians didn't particularly want Dehaene because they didn't want to lose him as Prime Minister. He was pretty important in holding the country together. But there was nobody else in the European Union who genuinely was that keen on Dehaene. A lot of them felt upset at the way that Lubbers, whom they'd greatly respected, had been treated and they didn't like the way a decision had been apparently stitched up by Mitterrand and Kohl. So we had a lot of messages from smaller European countries, basically saying 'you did the right thing; good on you! Sorry that we couldn't speak up too but we're only little countries.' Some of these countries aren't so little, but they weren't brave enough to join us in the trenches.

I think Helmut Kohl actually regarded this as a fair cop. We'd made our opposition clear all along. We'd told him what our views were, we hadn't been underhand about it. One of his officials took it very badly. This official had been going round Europe on Kohl's behalf telling people whom to support, and this had caused a lot of offence. We heard from one rather large European country that this official had caused a lot of offence by marching into their Prime Minister's office and saying 'the instructions are it's going to be Dehaene. That's the way we expect you to play it.' He was not a man known for his diplomatic skills. Let us put it this way – some very negative briefing against Lubbers by an anonymous German official had appeared in certain newspapers, including I think the Financial Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, doing the dirty on him, and it was pretty clear to most people who the German official was. He exploded in fury when he was confronted by a British official (not a million miles from our Ambassador at the time in Brussels) with having been the author of this defamatory briefing against Lubbers.

So a lot of things had really caused resentment in Europe.

The final episode – and this is mentioned in John Major’s memoirs, so I’m not breaking new ground here – was that a further Summit had to be held to resolve the issue. By then Jacques Santer, the Luxemburg Prime Minister, had emerged as an acceptable compromise. This brief summit was held to give a formal blessing to Santer’s appointment. At this summit, François Mitterrand was in much more of a sulk over the Dehaene outcome than either Dehaene or Kohl. Dehaene personally took it in very good spirit - and came to Downing Street for a very jolly meal with John Major not long after the meeting. Mitterrand was sulking like mad. He delivered a long speech at the Brussels Summit, which surprised everybody and didn’t impress people, saying that it was wrong to suggest that there was a right of veto over the appointment of the President of the Union: no such right of veto existed. After this long speech, he acquiesced grumpily in the decision to appoint Santer.

As the leaders left the European Council, I was walking down the corridor with John Major, and Mitterrand’s Prime Minister, albeit not from his party, Edouard Balladur, who was a very skilled, very smooth and sophisticated operator, came gliding up in his Savile Row suit and as he slid past John Major he touched him on the elbow and whispered into his ear, “Jean, moi, j’aime le véto!” And then he glided off, having completely undermined his own President. And that, I think, pretty accurately reflected the sentiment in Europe on the Dehaene veto.

So that issue we got right, but not without some blood on the floor. One that we got spectacularly wrong was the issue over qualified majority voting. QMV, rather technical, now long-forgotten, was not really an important episode in the history of Europe. But, after the Maastricht Treaty and the accession of new members, there was a need to re-examine the system of qualified majority voting. On certain votes, certain countries had more weight than certain other countries. There was a complicated formula under which this worked. There were a range of permutations which happily I do not remember. Certain permutations would

favour the bigger countries. Under qualified majority voting, the smaller countries got more votes than the bigger countries in proportion to their population. We weren't going to change the system completely. When voting together, Germany, France and Britain could win any vote in Europe, but we were going to shift the balance a little bit more in the direction of the bigger countries. In private discussions, in the months before this decision was due to be taken, we had evolved something pretty close to a joint position with the French and the Germans, but there was a very strong lobby in the opposite direction from smaller and medium-sized countries for a deal to favour them. As we got closer to the meetings that were to decide this, it began to become obvious that the French and the Germans – I think the Germans in particular – were looking pretty wobbly. The Germans, again for rather noble reasons, had helped to make Europe work by not throwing their weight around to excess, had always been rather restrained, and were rather sympathetic to the smaller countries. They were the biggest and they knew that they mustn't appear to be a bully. So they were starting to look like unreliable allies in this affair.

The Government's EU experts in the FCO and in our mission in Brussels were confident that we were going to win this battle. While some of us who were not European experts began to entertain increasing doubts as to whether the French and Germans would stay with us, they assured us that there was no need to worry: we would win this. And so, on the FCO's advice, we stood firm. And we dug ourselves into our position. The decision was taken at a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Greece in March 1994. There was a period from about November/December onwards when to some of us it seemed that we actually ought to start adjusting our position because we were going to lose. There was no point in going public and then being defeated. But we accepted the advice of the experts and, as we got near to the event, the Government was required to declare its position. There was a fatal Question Time in the House of Commons when John Major was asked about this. He said very firmly that the Government was going to stand firm. John Smith attacked this position, said we were going to

lose, and Major riposted by calling him 'Monsieur Oui, the poodle of Brussels', a phrase that went down extremely well with the right wing of the Conservative Party but immediately he came out of the Chamber of the House of Commons he recognised he'd been mistaken. I'm partly responsible for that because, when we'd sat around earlier that morning discussing the line he was going to take, I had slightly frivolously suggested 'the poodle of Brussels' and Mr Major had added 'Monsieur Oui'.

It wasn't a great phrase, and it rebounded horribly because the right wing of the Conservative Party, the Euro-sceptic wing, said now we were going to stand firm come what may, and we've got the Prime Minister with us. We're going to have a battle and there will be blood on the floor, which is what they always wanted.

Douglas Hurd went off to the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting to discover that his experts had been completely wrong; we had absolutely no hope of winning on this issue. And he was eventually obliged to make a compromise. It was, in no sense, damaging to the British national interest, not least because this system of qualified majority voting was only going to last for rather a short time before yet another system was introduced. But it appeared to be a spectacular defeat for the British and it caused a huge boomerang against John Major personally from the right wing of the Conservative Party which felt that he'd led his troops to the top of the hill and then he led them down again; that he was weak and had betrayed them, and so on. It did a lot of political damage.

So that was one that we got spectacularly wrong. The experts got it wrong; they gave the wrong advice to the Prime Minister. They then retreated leaving him to carry the can, and he and I didn't help things by the particular turn of phrase that he'd used in the House of Commons. You learn from your mistakes but they cost you.

I think that's probably enough about Brussels. There's an awful lot more of it and it was a rather nightmarish process all the way through because we were constantly on the back foot. But I think those episodes illustrate the sort of problem that the Prime Minister was having to deal with at this time, a balancing act involving the divisions in his Party on one hand and the differing complications of playing the game in Europe on the other. Can I just add one little codicil to that: the impression was always assiduously given by the British press and by his political opponents that we were the odd man out, and that we were isolated in Europe. Other people, however, quite often get isolated from Europe when they're pursuing strong national interests, but it doesn't seem to lead to the same questioning of their credentials. President Chirac has constantly vetoed things, particularly anything that touches on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and yet he's not portrayed as a bad European for doing that.

MM: Well, he's not portrayed as a bad European by the British press.

RL: Yes. I think that he's seen as standing up for French national interests in a way that's regarded as perfectly legitimate, but you don't get speculation as to whether France is going to leave the European Union. The French vetoed a constitutional referendum but nobody asks whether the French are going to leave the Union. Whereas, if the British had done that, that question would have been raised in that way by the continental press and the British press.

The other point I was going to make about Europe was that not everything was going the wrong way in this period, although we appeared, most of the time, to be on the back foot. The economic agenda was actually going our way. We need to remember that the British economy went back into growth in the early 1990s. The recession started at the end of Margaret Thatcher's period and John Major inherited it along with high unemployment. The period of non-inflationary growth that we are still enjoying in 2006, didn't begin on 1 May 1997, as you might imagine if you listen to the current Chancellor of the Exchequer who claims

credit for all of this. It actually began in the spring of 1992, I think it was. It may have been April 1992. It was becoming obvious by 1994/95 that the British economy was benefiting from the reforms of the Thatcher period at a time when other European economies that had done better than us in the 1970/80s, like Germany and France, were running into trouble. The Statist/corporatist economic model favoured by some of these countries clearly was not working as well as ours. And the debate within the European Union about economic policy was changing and evolving. I remember an occasion at an informal European summit in Majorca under the Spanish presidency when the main subject of the summit was economic strategy within Europe, and John Major more or less ruled the entire proceedings. He was invited by the Spanish to open, which he did very eloquently, but because his model was working, because he himself was economically literate, he almost delivered a seminar to his fellow leaders on economic reform, with which they all privately agreed; of course none of this was in public, there were no communiqués, there were no decisions to be taken, so there was nothing to disagree over. But I remember sitting there thinking here is this man performing on the subject he knows best and at the top of his powers, and all these other guys are sitting round listening and taking notes. The British public couldn't see it, the House of Commons couldn't see it and Major's detractors couldn't see it. But it showed that the British sometimes were ahead on certain subjects in Europe, commanded the consensus, could actually lead Europe in a particular direction, and that our Prime Minister, who was being given a terrible time in the press and was falling badly behind in the polls, could personally exercise that kind of leadership.

Those were the very few positive occasions I remember from Europe. Mostly I regarded Europe as a negative and the European Councils were things I absolutely dreaded, but this informal one was the most constructive and the most agreeable in this otherwise pretty dismal picture.

## **Bosnia**

RL: The Bosnian War was well under way by the spring of 1993 when I arrived in the prime minister's office in Downing Street. John Major had convened a conference in London during the previous summer, which I think he and Stephen Wall, my predecessor, had put together to try to achieve international consensus on how we could at least mitigate this conflict, and the UN Protection Force had been strengthened as a result. UNPROFOR, as it was called, was not a war-fighting army; it was not there as a peace-keeping force – people tend to forget that; it did not have a mandate that would allow it to act against the parties. It was there to protect the relief effort and it was drawn from about thirty-three countries. It was very lightly armed for self-defence. It was a very imperfect operation but it was the best that was achievable in the circumstances at the time. There wasn't wide enough support for consensus on a more muscular intervention.

There had been a series of international emissaries trying separately to broker a peace settlement: Carrington and Vance, David Owen. There were a number of perfectly reasonable plans diplomatically, but the parties had not reached a point where they were actually ready to settle. They were bent on fighting. Often in a conflict you have to wait for the moment. As we saw in Rhodesia, we had to wait until the parties were actually ready to stop fighting. In a sense Northern Ireland was another example. They were not prepared to accept any sort of settlement at earlier stages of the game. But the European efforts continued in Bosnia. We said our conscience demanded that we should try to do something about it.

The Clinton administration came into being and was very critical of the Bush administration for not having paid enough attention to Bosnia. The Clinton administration started to work up a strategy of its own and came up with the completely crazy idea that the best thing to do would not be to try to make peace, but actually enhance the fighting. It wasn't called that! It was known as 'lift and strike'. They wanted to lift the UN embargo against supplying weapons to any of

the parties. The Clinton administration's argument was that the embargo was unfair to the Bosnian Muslims; it allowed the Serbs and the Croats to maintain more heavily armed forces while the Serbs were receiving weapons from the Russians. If we lifted the embargo, the Americans would supply arms and training to the Bosnians and help to even up the struggle. We were convinced that this was barking mad, that it was going to lead to more and worse bloodshed, and that it wasn't going to resolve the conflict. It would only be an incitement to other people to come in on a bigger scale. If arms were being supplied covertly by the Soviet Union or Russia to the Serbs, from the Ukraine or wherever they were coming from, once the UN embargo was off then it would become a much more overt process. You could end up with a sort of Vietnamisation of the conflict. The Americans should have learned from Vietnam but they hadn't.

Clinton had just come into office when I got to No. 10. He arrived in January 1993 and I arrived in March, so John Major had had one meeting with him before I came to the task. Tony Lake was the National Security Advisor and he helped to put together this programme. So for about the next year we had quite a battering from the Americans trying to persuade us to abandon our efforts at diplomacy, mitigation, and relief and pull out UNPROFOR. UNPROFOR would have had to be withdrawn in the circumstances of an enhanced war. We would be giving up the relief efforts, supplying weapons, training the forces and going for a bigger war. That was their argument. Tony Lake tried to persuade me of this on the telephone; Clinton tried to persuade John Major; Clinton sent Warren Christopher, his Secretary of State. It was never clear whether Christopher believed in this policy or not because he was such a good lawyer. He was a man who concealed his emotions, delivered his brief extremely well in a very articulate way in a gravelly monotone, but whether he actually believed it or not you had no idea. I'm sure he'd be a brilliant poker player. Warren Christopher came over for talks with Douglas Hurd, which were held over a weekend at Chevening. John Major dropped in on these talks. Then Christopher was sent on a swing through Europe to try to convince the Europeans to buy this idea. None

of the Europeans would – we wouldn't – and we were not afraid to stand up to the Americans on an issue where we believed that we were right and they were wrong. We didn't believe our policy was perfect but we saw that theirs was worse.

So we stood firm on that and that led to quite a lot of bad feeling but not to a full-scale row between the United States and Europe. It led to a general willingness on Washington's part to criticize the European Union for its ineffectiveness in dealing with Bosnia, and to constant carping to the effect that we'd be much better off with lift and strike.

That went on for quite a time. Nasty events happened from time to time on the ground including the atrocious massacre at Srebrenica. This was the site of a massacre of Muslims in what the UN Security Council had unwisely designated a "safe area" and had put under the protection of a small Dutch peace-keeping force, not more than a hundred and ninety or so, who were powerless to defend the Muslims.

Eventually - fast-forwarding to 1995 – what happened actually was a change of tack on the part of the Americans. Richard Holbrooke, who had been the American Ambassador in Germany and was a very forceful character - very bright, doesn't take prisoners, not exactly touchy-feely on human relations but an incredibly dynamic man - was brought back to Washington as Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, took charge of this policy, and he realized – though he never said it in so many words in public – that lift and strike wasn't working, wasn't going to work, wasn't going to fly. In the end he changed American policy and essentially he swung through to buy the sort of policy the Europeans were trying to negotiate. But he of course added American force to it; the Europeans were on the right lines but didn't have the forcefulness to make it work. Holbrooke did. He had the United States behind him and he was an extraordinarily forceful operator. Clinton gave him a pretty free hand. Clinton just wanted things solved.

And Holbrooke, with European assistance – a lot of it mostly not very gladly acknowledged as this was all meant to appear a personal triumph for Holbrooke and the United States; people rather forget that the Europeans were there too - came together. We drove towards the Dayton Agreement. One element of driving towards it was another meeting held in London convened by John Major that helped to bring us all together.

Dayton happened; Dayton didn't produce, again, the perfect settlement but it did stop the fighting. Much credit is due to Holbrooke for that, but credit is also due to the Europeans for backing him. With all its imperfections, ten and eleven years on, Dayton has held. We must now succeed in the policy of incentivising the Balkan countries with the carrot of EU membership to remain at peace and concentrate on developing their economies and their societies. Slovenia already has become a member of the EU, Croatia is coming closer and Serbia knows that, if it conforms to the standards, it can attain membership as well. Ultimately we will have secured peace in the Balkans, even if at the moment the situation there can still be slightly fraught.

MM: I'm not quite clear what is the difference between Holbrooke's policy in Bosnia and 'lift and strike'.

RL: Well there never was lift and strike.

MM: Well, 'lift and strike' simply meant lifting the embargo and then.....

RL: Holbrooke's policy was to negotiate settlement, which we did, with UNPROFOR in place, without lifting the embargo and without taking sides – because you couldn't have had a settlement by taking sides. The critical thing there was to get Milosevic to come to the table and to play. It was to maximise diplomatic pressures, getting the Serbs, the Croats, the Bosnians (or 'Bosniaks' as they sometimes like to call themselves) around the table, and their backers. Therefore

you needed to have the Russians, the EU, the Americans all standing behind them saying, right, you guys! Here is a plan. This included a plan for Bosnia in its current form with partial autonomy in the Serb area but a single government that they were all prepared to live by. That kind of negotiation and that kind of plan was the sort of direction in which the Europeans had been working in the Carrington/Vance and the Owen/Vance diplomacy that was initially rejected by the Clinton administration. They said, no! We don't want to do the negotiation and try to broker a peace between the three parties! They wanted to come in and support the Bosnians against the others by arming and training them; and indeed bombing the others.

MM: Well, we had bombed the others.

RL: There was a brief period of that, but it was a very short episode; it lasted for about three weeks. And it actually demonstrated the limitations of air power in this theatre. We weren't going to go for all out destruction of Serbia; we weren't going to go in on the ground and the bombing campaign lasted for about three weeks. The problem was that we pretty rapidly ran out of targets to hit.

MM: Like the Chinese Embassy?

RL: No, that was a different campaign. That was during the Kosovo campaign which was carried out in a quite different way. During the 1995 campaign, we weren't allowed to hit the cities at all. We were trying to go for military targets but they were very dispersed, arms dumps, ammunition dumps, tanks if you could, and within a limited area. NATO had reached the point where they were really running out of targets when fortunately Milosevic gave way and conceded whatever it was we were asking him to concede. It may have been coming from Dayton, but I can't remember the details.

That was it. And it showed the limitations of air power as a means of forcing concessions. It really proved our point.

## **Prime Minister Major's key relationships**

### **Relations with President Clinton**

When Clinton arrived, Major obviously had obviously been very close to George Bush Sr. He remains close to him; they had been through the first Gulf War together. They have great mutual respect, they got on very well. George Bush Sr is a man of integrity; he gives his word on something and he stands by it. He and his team had been close to Major and his team. When Clinton arrived, there was an initial assumption that, as a Democrat, he would be closer to the Labour Party than to the Conservatives. As we have seen in current circumstances, that doesn't always hold good. Stirred up by the press, there were some rather trivial episodes in which it was suggested that the Conservative Party had been supporting his opponent; a couple of rather junior Conservative researchers had been over in America at the time and in fact this always happens. It happens in a much bigger way on the opposite side. And then there was an allegation that, at the request of the Republicans, somebody had searched Home Office records for compromising material on Clinton. The British press built the image of a rift right from the beginning between Major and Clinton, which was hugely exaggerated. As I say, I didn't go to the first meeting so I can't speak first hand about that, but I saw it from then on and, if there were some people in the White House who felt that the Conservatives had somehow tried to back Clinton's opponents, I don't think this featured big with Clinton. I don't think he's that kind of guy. I don't think it featured with Tony Lake, the National Security Advisor who, like Clinton, had been at university in Britain. Lake had been at Cambridge for a while. We had, on a personal level, perfectly good relations with him. And we didn't have any major issues that we disagreed on. As I say, some disagreement began to emerge on Bosnia but that became probably the biggest issue we disagreed on. And then

we had some arguments of a tactical kind at times over Northern Ireland. Apart from that, there were no big issues driving the two governments apart. When Clinton decided to launch Cruise missiles against Iraq, he rang up the Prime Minister and said that he proposed to do this a day later and I think that John Major was about the only foreigner that he consulted. Major immediately offered his support and was as good as his word. And so we continued to work very closely with the Americans.

Personally, they are two very different men. The conversations between them were often a bit stilted. Conversation didn't flow. I don't think they ever became great personal buddies, but they were always reasonable and indeed sometimes had rather interesting conversations; they were not frosty, and they certainly were not sharp. In fact Clinton is a man who doesn't like personal confrontation and always tries to avoid it. So we never had any face to face rows between the two leaders. The first meeting that I attended was one at the Tokyo G8 Summit when they were both very tired with jetlag, and we were mainly discussing Bosnia. I remember a series of others; one in particular sticks in my mind which was that, after we'd had this rather public row about Gerry Adams's visa, which the press had built up even further and the newspapers said that Clinton hated Major – which wasn't true – I faxed some of these articles back to the White House to Tony Lake and he took them to Clinton, and he said Clinton was furious. People on his staff had been briefing in that way and he wanted to demonstrate that it wasn't true that he hated Major. We were due to visit Washington and Clinton wanted to make it conspicuously successful and friendly. He recalled from one of his earlier conversations with John Major that Major had talked about how his father had worked in Pennsylvania in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the steel business and had played baseball there.

MM: Who, John Major's father?

RL: Yes. Clinton decided that we would meet in Pennsylvania in recognition of this fact. When we arrived in Pittsburgh from London, we were greeted by Clinton at a huge ceremony in a vast aircraft hangar filled with bands and banners, 'Pittsburgh welcomes John Major', and school kids and veterans and the rest of the American razzmatazz. And then we were driven around Pittsburgh in Clinton's motorcade and given a personally conducted tour of Pittsburgh by Clinton – taken to the industrial museums and the rest. Then we were driven up onto the heights above Pittsburgh for a private supper in a restaurant called The Blue Angel – or The Tin Angel, the something Angel. We had to park, I forget why, about a hundred yards from the restaurant; and both sides of the road were lined with cheering well-wishers and Clinton worked one side of the road and Major the other. Everything was laid on.

Then we went into the restaurant for a small supper party – I think there were six or eight of us round the table – no agenda, a completely off-the-record chat. And the two men sat back and talked about their childhood and their upbringing, and about social issues, and it became obvious that they both came from quite similar backgrounds; they'd had rather a tough childhood. Clinton had an alcoholic father and his parents split up and all the rest of it – well known – and Major had rather elderly and sickly parents, and left school at sixteen, didn't go to university and was sort of self-educated. They'd both grown up on the wrong side of the tracks; they both felt very strongly on social issues. Major is a well-known social liberal. Clinton talked in an extremely interesting and intelligent way about social issues in the United States. It was an extraordinarily good conversation, and a very good meal, very relaxed. As we came out of the restaurant, a huge firework display exploded over Pittsburgh.

Then we hopped into Air Force 1, pretty late at night and were flown down to Washington, landing at Andrews Airforce Base, then we transferred into the helicopter Marine 1. It was by now about midnight, which was 5 am London time so Major was pretty exhausted, but Clinton insisted on giving us a tour of

Washington by helicopter – I remember we circled the Washington Monument a couple of times – pointing out all the buildings. Then we landed on the White House lawn and at this point the party reduced itself to three, apart from the secret service detachment, just Clinton, Major and me. We wandered into the darkened White House. Clinton then gave Major a tour of the White House describing the furniture and all the rooms. Finally we went to bed. The following morning the two men had breakfast with Hillary, who was there by then. All this was done very personally, very Clinton, the man with an extraordinary personality, to show personal friendship. He went to enormous lengths in order to demonstrate that these stories that he and Major were in some way at loggerheads were not true.

We had a pretty good visit by Clinton to London in I suppose the end of 1995 when Clinton addressed both Houses of Parliament from the Royal Gallery, and gave a superb address. Again this was a visit that was a great success with Clinton and where we pulled out all the stops. So it wasn't a bad relationship, but it was never the easiest and in particular they were never very good at talking to each other on the telephone. They didn't gel on the telephone. I had to monitor all these calls as part of my job so, whenever they spoke on the telephone, I was silently on the line and my opposite number in Washington likewise, so that we could do the follow-up and people knew what had gone on. Somehow they just never mastered the art of speaking on the telephone. I think they just didn't understand each other well enough.

So that's Clinton and Major.

### **Relations with Chancellor Helmut Kohl**

Major's relationship with Helmut Kohl started off with Kohl very strongly supportive of John Major. John Major's great virtue in Helmut Kohl's eyes was that he was not Margaret Thatcher. The Kohl/Thatcher relationship was famously bad. Kohl could see that Major's tone when he spoke to the Europeans was quite

different from Margaret Thatcher's and of course Major early on went on and delivered his 'Heart of Europe' speech in Bonn. And Kohl treated Major almost as a protégé – the new boy in the European club. This relationship was still in that very warm phase when I first saw it in the spring of 1993, two years after Major became Prime Minister. Helmut Kohl had the habit every Easter of going to a mountain resort, I think in Austria rather than Germany, Bad Hofgastein, where he lived in a rather simple hotel for about three weeks, and he would fast; he lost some of his enormous weight but put it back on for the rest of the year. He'd just drink tea. But while staying there, he would invite buddies, including foreigners who were considered personal buddies, to come and visit him. In 1993 Major was invited to come and visit the great man at Bad Hofgastein very informally; no delegations so just him and me. So we flew out there and the two men had lunch together just with an interpreter while I lunched separately with Kohl's advisers, and then they went for a little bit of a walk together and they had tea half way up the mountain together. And this was a special sign that you were in Helmut's favour. Helmut, you've got to remember, was the king of Europe in those days and being in Helmut's favour for most Europeans was the ultimate thing to be.

That relationship continued pretty good for quite a while. I remember we had a very good meeting with Kohl at Chequers when again the two men were very close, and John Major told one of his favourite anecdotes which, as it involved Margaret Thatcher and Winston Churchill, appealed hugely to Kohl. They sometimes disagreed a bit, obviously, on policy issues, but they were very much agreed on Bosnia and Russia; both men were supportive of Yeltsin. On one occasion, we were sitting in Helmut Kohl's study in Bonn when some trouble was brewing in Bosnia. Kohl said, "Let's ring up Boris!" and he rang up Russia and Yeltsin was tracked down, not in Russia but in Minsk where the CIS were meeting. Yeltsin had clearly had a very good and very liquid lunch and wasn't at his most articulate. We had structural problems on this telephone call because Kohl had his interpreter who would interpret German into Russian; Major didn't

have a Russian interpreter with him so, when Major took the telephone, he had to go from English into German into Russian in order to communicate with Yeltsin. But you barely needed an interpreter because Kohl was booming so loud that he could be heard in Minsk and Yeltsin again was booming back but not making a lot of sense in any language; but he'd more or less got the message that we'd rung up and we wanted him to get the Serbs to stop shelling Sarajevo, which they were doing that day.

But that was the kind of relationship that existed.

MM: How did John Major speak to Helmut Kohl? In English?

RL: No, through interpreters because Kohl doesn't have any English and Major doesn't have any German, so it all had to be done through interpreters. Kohl had an extremely good interpreter. She would convey nuance and everything. So it wasn't a big impediment.

Kohl used to play a joke at every meeting. I would go into the meeting with Major's briefs in one of those famous red boxes. Kohl would always make a lunge at the box and say what have you got in there? 'You've got your secrets, haven't you! And I'm going to have those,' and he would pretend to steal the box. At the final meeting I went to with Kohl and Major, we decided that, for our official gift on that visit, we'd get him a red box. So we had a red box made that was identical to the Prime Minister's except that the gold lettering on it said Bundeskanzler and the crest was not the British crest but the German crest. So I carried two red boxes into that meeting, one with our briefs in and the other one the one for Kohl. Kohl did his usual lunging act and John Major said, "All right, Helmut. You can have it!" And he picked up the box and pushed it across the table to Kohl who said, "No no no, John. I was only joking," and pushed it back again. Major said, Look at it! and Kohl looked at it and saw it had his name on it. He was absolutely delighted. I've never seen a grown man so pleased with a

present. He was just ecstatic with this, and then to everybody who came into the room, Kohl said, "Hey! Come over and look at this, you guys. I've got a red box!" So we had good informal, knock-about, friendly relationship; quite a lot of telephone contact between the two Prime Ministers. We probably should have had more telephone contact but, with interpreters, it's always a bit difficult when it comes to getting diaries together.

This relationship was beginning to fray by late 1995. I don't think that the vetoing of Dehaene, as I said earlier, did it. I think there was an accumulation of issues, particularly the way that Major had not succeeded in quelling the revolt in his party over Europe and Kohl was beginning to get disgruntled. He kept trying to offer John Major gratuitous advice on how he should deal with his back benchers, which was mainly on the lines of, not quite line them up and shoot them, but 'get rid of them', which, with the majority shrinking with every by-election, wasn't actually practical politics. Then there was an episode in which we opposed the Germans when they wanted the European Union to make an exception over rules for a steel plant in East Germany that was uneconomic and needed state aid. This was a breach of EU rules but was important to Kohl; he didn't like that. So things were getting frostier, cooler, by late 1995 and of course they fell apart the following year over BSE.

MM: Mad cow disease.

RL: Mad cow disease. But that wasn't on my watch. I'm not suggesting it would have been any different had it been.

### **Relations with the French Presidents**

Mitterrand was different. He was a very distant, lofty character. The Elysée doesn't help because it's so palatial. You've got all these guys dressed up in 18<sup>th</sup> century uniform, bowing and scraping at every door. You've got immensely

weighty protocol. It's an impossible place to have an informal conversation, and Mitterrand very much stood on his dignity as President of France and was no great lover of the British. In his declining years he was struggling with cancer. He hardly ever got to the point. Discussions with Mitterrand tended to get very discursive, and he would love to give long and sorrowful lectures. He would go back into the history of the Balkans from the year dot when we were trying to have a serious discussion about what should be done about Bosnia now. So we were trying to do things with the French; we were trying to build up British/French relations, particularly in the areas like defence where we had a lot in common. We were in Bosnia together. We had the two biggest units in UNPROFOR and so on. We weren't having big rows with the French, but you couldn't develop the personal relationship. Major and Mitterrand were too dissimilar ever to get on, whereas Kohl and Major were both much more down-to-earth people. Mitterrand was not at all like that.

One episode where they were all three together was when Kohl arranged a special day to say farewell to the Allied Forces that had defended Berlin since the end of World War II. It was just a few months before Mitterrand died, I suppose in the autumn of 1994. Mitterrand had just been on his summer holidays, and he'd been out of sight. He was very ill by this stage and had really been propped up by the doctors. He came to Berlin, Major went to Berlin, the Americans sent Warren Christopher. Kohl had arranged a whole day programme of events - it was a very emotional time - to thank the three Allies for having kept Berlin free over all those years. It was a great day, a wonderful day, and it ended up with a speech-making orgy in the concert hall, followed by a magnificent concert and then by a torchlight ceremony in front of the Brandenburg Gate. It was very moving and very Wagnerian. But I remember the speech-making for two reasons: one was the personal courage of Mitterrand who was extremely ill; he'd not been seen in public for several weeks and he'd defied his doctors to come to Berlin. He was determined to do it for his friend Kohl. It was terribly important to Helmut that he wanted to do this; it was almost a public leave-taking from Mitterrand who

really didn't have very long to go. Mitterrand had to be positioned in such a way that he could slip off stage quite frequently, I think in order to receive medication to prop him up for the next half hour. But he got up and he made a long speech – it wasn't a very good speech, it was rather rambling, but it was an emotional speech – without notes, elegant as always, elegant French, literary and so on, a bit too long, a bit unfocussed, but nevertheless everybody was spellbound by the courage of this clearly dying man with a waxy yellow complexion, standing in this huge concert hall on a day that was very important to Europe.

Major, who after all is not celebrated as a platform orator, then made I think one of the speeches of his life. I can remember one or two in the House of Commons like the one he made in the Maastricht debate. In this sort of competition – Kohl, Warren Christopher who came a clear fourth, Mitterrand and Major – you would not have expected Major's oratory to come out top. It was a very good speech largely written by Robert Cooper who, at the time, was the Head of Chancery at our Embassy in Bonn, that touched all the right chords in Germany and Major delivered it very well with a lot of feeling, and I think Kohl was in tears. It was universally applauded and was again one of those days when we were together with Europe.

I remember Chirac calling at Downing Street before he became President, when he was still campaigning. He and Major had met before of course but they hit it off very well then. They had some very good meetings after Chirac had become President. He was in many ways a breath of fresh air; he was an easier man to talk to than Mitterrand, he has reasonably good English so quite often would talk in English. They had quite a lot of telephone conversations, on the defence projects that we were working on together. We had a huge number of collaborative defence projects with the French at that stage, something like twenty of one kind or another – and we did a lot of work together on Bosnia. Major and Chirac didn't always see eye-to-eye on Europe because Chirac too was terribly keen to push ahead with the single European currency.

The problem with Chirac was that he was volatile and at times would go off at high speed in some unpredictable direction, even unpredicted by his own staff who we kept in close touch with, and was uncontrollable. I remember such an episode after the slaughter at Srebrenica. Chirac came on the telephone, very emotional, and said that we needed to go and recapture Srebrenica. His own military knew that this wasn't logistically possible. It was across, I forget, 70 kilometers of enemy-occupied territory and mountains, and we didn't have the military force on the ground there to fight a war. The French certainly didn't have the vehicles they needed or the helicopters; I think they had about one helicopter. We would have needed a very large force and a lot of planning. Chirac was almost out of control, demanding that we, the British and the French – the honour of France 'requires' it - that we should immediately go and recapture Srebrenica. He was deaf to any argument that this wasn't actually possible. We couldn't make any impression on him, and nor could his own advisers; the fact was that, whether one wanted to do it or not, and we'd have all liked to correct it, it simply was not feasible; it wasn't on this planet. It took him several days and several telephone calls to come down from that rather grumpily. While he was talking about that, it was rather difficult to have a rational exchange with him, so he'd gone off on a flight of fancy.

## **Visits with the Prime Minister**

### **Japan and the Far East**

I was just going to mention one or two trips that I made with the Prime Minister; again I won't go through all of them because there were lots, and not all very interesting. But just to pick out three from the memory bank, one of the first ones I made was to the Far East in the autumn of 1993. In the summer, we'd gone to Japan for the G7 Summit there, a rather stilted and formalistic affair, but the Japanese were very keen for John Major to go back on a bilateral visit and the Foreign Office were very keen that he should do so. They wanted him to make a

speech in Tokyo setting out a new British approach placing greater emphasis on Asia, which he duly did. So we flew to Japan and had what, in local terms, was a very successful visit. It was completely overshadowed in the British press, which barely bothered to report what he was doing in Japan, by the latest news on the domestic political front. This was the time of the men in flapping white coats episode when, in an unattributable off-the-record conversation with a journalist, he'd expressed some exasperation with three of his own back-benchers who were constantly rebelling over Europe. He'd suggested that the men in white coats should come and take them away. That caused a bit of a storm in the British press, though he had a point. I recall, also, that he was in the middle of doing a television interview for British television in Tokyo and was asked to comment on the latest opinion poll which showed he was the most unpopular Prime Minister since opinion polling began. Now, he hadn't been prepared for that question because, although his then Press Secretary had received advanced notice of the poll before the interview in Tokyo, he'd decided not to brief the Prime Minister on it because he thought it would demoralize him. The result of this was one furious Prime Minister who wanted to know why he hadn't been told in advance that this bit of news had come through.

So a rather successful visit in foreign policy terms was being portrayed in Britain as a disaster.

## **Malaysia**

We flew from Japan to Malaysia where again there was important Government business to be done with Dr Mahathir, a pretty awkward customer but leader of a country of some importance to us. We arrived, tired after a late-night flight, and the first item on the programme was to go straight from the airport to an official dinner hosted by Mahathir. This was not an ideal way to organize a programme but these visits are very tight. So we drove from the plane to the dinner.

Speeches were supposed to follow dinner; Mahathir, without asking, reversed the

order so that speeches came first. We were told that there would be no formal speeches but short after-dinner speeches. So Major had just prepared a few courteous words, not a substantive speech. Mahathir then blind-sided him and our High Commission there had no inkling of this, so we hadn't been warned of it. He stood up, with all the television cameras there, and launched into a long speech viciously attacking British policy over Bosnia, accusing us of more or less backing the Serbs and persecuting the Muslim Bosnians. It was an extraordinary way to greet a guest but of course it was designed to grab the headlines around the world. John Major replied off the cuff fairly robustly, but of course this meant that the story immediately was of a great snub and a 'Huge row with Mahathir.'

Mahathir having got that off his chest – he's a very volatile man, as his behaviour over the years has shown – engaged in talks the following day that went surprisingly well. The news agenda was by then overshadowed by news coming out of Russia, which started indeed after dinner that evening. It was the time that Yeltsin was going to war with his own parliament. I remember coming back from this disastrous dinner – absolutely exhausted, as was the Prime Minister – to receive the news that there was possibly a coup going on in Russia. We needed to react to that and telephoned Brian Fall, our Ambassador in Moscow, and to the Foreign Office; the time zone difference made it all the more complicated. And we had a third issue running which was an internal one; John had written an article for the Economist which derided the single currency, and this was due to go to press literally at about that moment, and there were arguments over the text. Sarah Hogg was ringing up from No. 10 about the final wording. So after dinner, late at night, after an aeroplane flight, in the wrong time zone, trying to handle three issues at once. It was a pretty grizzly night. As so often I didn't actually see my bed.

Somewhere in the middle of the night I had to re-write the Prime Minister's speech for the following day's event at the Chamber of Commerce. We had to deliver a speech about British/Malaysian trade but clearly, with events in Russia

on everyone's mind, we needed to comment on that. So I made most of the speech about Russia, which slightly baffled the businessmen who'd barely woken up to the fact that there was a crisis in Russia. But that bit of the speech was addressed to an international, particularly Russian, audience. It was I think the first statement by a Western leader on the crisis. I think that it went down reasonably well.

By the evening, we were having an informal supper with Mahathir in which he was being completely charming and the two Prime Ministers were getting on like a house on fire. So that was a most extraordinary visit.

### **Campaigning for Manchester as the site of the Olympic Games of 2004**

We went from Kuala Lumpur to Monaco because that was the final voting on the site of the Olympics for which Manchester had been campaigning, and Major was supporting Manchester's bid. Manchester got a tiny number of votes, thanks in part to inappropriate behaviour by opposing bidders. Again the press said everything Major does, he loses. So we came back to England absolutely exhausted from what looked like three disastrous visits on one tour although, in amongst that, actually he'd done a lot of good that wasn't really noticed.

### **South Africa**

Another trip of a much better kind, I remember, was South Africa, where we took a large party of businessmen. John Major had the idea that, because South Africa is sports mad, we should take some leading sportsmen, which we did. We had Bobby Charlton, we had Judy Simpson, the marvellous pentathlete who later became a Gladiator, we had Alec Stewart, the cricketer; Colin Cowdrey and Rob Andrew. The business tycoons who came with us were rather pleased to be rubbing shoulders with the sports stars. Various events were arranged with South Africa. I remember one in which our sportsmen were on a playing field in

Soweto giving clinics to South African kids. Major made an enormously good speech to the South African parliament. He went there only a few weeks after Mitterrand had been there and had given a speech that went down like a lead balloon, and was seen as patronizing. We had very good meetings with Mandela. It was a huge success. Nothing went wrong from start to finish. There were no negative stories for the press to write up. It therefore got favorable coverage but, because it wasn't a disaster, the coverage was tucked away on the inside pages. At the end of the trip, two of the correspondents who were with us on that trip from one particular newspaper, which shall be nameless but it was one of our leading broadsheets, wrote an article summing it all up. They told me about it, described the article to me, and it was very favorable. When they sent the article in, their editor spiked it because it didn't fit in with the editorial policy of not saying anything good about the Prime Minister. One wonders what instructions Mr Murdoch gave his editors, and about the objectivity of the press. [That clue makes it hard to work out which paper was nameless!!]

### **New Zealand: Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting**

The final visit I want to recall was to the Commonwealth Conference in New Zealand. I went to two Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, one in Cyprus that wasn't particularly memorable, and one in New Zealand. The one in New Zealand became memorable because, in the weeks before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Zealand, the French under Chirac had resumed testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific, which caused uproar in Australia and New Zealand, both of which countries were approaching general elections. You would have thought from the uproar in Australia and New Zealand that this was happening on their doorstep. It was in fact happening further away from them than China. The Australians and New Zealanders were not making much of a fuss about the Chinese tests of nuclear weapons, which was also happening at that time. But they were furious with the French and most of the world took the opportunity to dump on the French.

John Major decided not to take cheap shots at the French; he didn't agree with the decision to resume testing but he understood why it had been done. If you're going to keep your nuclear weapons safe and in working order, sometimes it is necessary to test. It is not always enough, or certainly wasn't in the technology of those days, to simulate tests, and these were very low-yield, underground tests and didn't seem to pose a very obvious risk to anybody. Chirac had a reason for doing it. So Major decided not to criticize Chirac in public, although as I say he didn't agree. He also had a political reason for this. It was the period when Chirac was new in office and Major was trying to build better relationships with France, and thought that cheap shots over this wouldn't be clever either.

Because the French were nowhere near the Commonwealth Meeting, the Australians and the New Zealanders couldn't kick them. The nearest they could do was kick their European partner, the British. As Major had not attacked the French, and publicly refused to do so, Paul Keating, who was no lover of Britain at all and whose relationship with Major had never been very warm or friendly (Keating is a man with very little sense of humour and, uniquely among all Australians of my acquaintance, and as I have Australian grandchildren I know a few, has no interest in sport.) Major often built up relations with leaders by talking to them about cricket and other such subjects; with Keating that got you absolutely nowhere. Keating took some cheap shots at Major on domestic radio programmes that he didn't really expect to be broadcast internationally. But they were personal attacks, and of course the British press picked this up and built it up into 'great rows at the Commonwealth Conference'. Jim Bolger, the New Zealand Prime Minister and the host of the Meeting, was fighting for his political life against Helen Clark and didn't want to be out-manoeuvred by Helen Clark on the issue, so he too was dumping all over the British and the French and everybody in sight about nuclear testing. So we were not the most popular people in town when we arrived. The press were doing everything they could to whip up this row and I remember that some British journalists saw Keating in his hotel

heading for a lift, so they jumped into the lift with him hoping to get some further anti-Major quote out of him. Keating, not a man who particularly loves the British press, looked at them as they got into the lift and said, “Gid atter here, you blowflies!” One of the correspondents, before jumping out at the next floor, had the presence of mind to say, “You do know, Prime Minister, what it is that blowflies gather around!” and leapt out of the lift before Keating could hit him; pretty good one-liner, that!

And sure, in the Commonwealth Meeting there was some discussion on nuclear testing, but it wasn't really an issue that the Commonwealth had any traction on. The meeting actually centred about a completely issue: this was the time when the Nigerians chose to execute Ken Sarawiva. They sent their Foreign Minister to the Meeting, not their Head of State, and we woke up literally on the first day of the meeting to the news that Sarawiva had been executed. Nelson Mandela got on the telephone to John Major at breakfast time and said the Commonwealth were going to have to get a grip on this. And Mandela did; he gave the first briefing. It was very important to have an African voice taking a lead on this. A small group of people worked very hard on how the Commonwealth would handle this, and it ended up with Nigeria being suspended from the Commonwealth. It was a pretty constructive, sensible meeting, again despite the build-up in the press to the effect that Britain was isolated over French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

### **Appointment as UKREP Geneva, 1997-2000**

I spent just under three years in Geneva, so almost as long as I did in No. 10, but it wasn't as interesting, and didn't have much bearing on history. I went to Geneva on 1 May 1997. I'd had a rather relaxed year after leaving No. 10. I had done six months or so on secondment to British Gas. I'd always wanted to get some private sector experience and it was a quite useful thing to do. Then I'd done about half the year in different forms of training. I had brushed up my

French. I went to Geneva on 1 May 1997, which happened to be election day in this country. I was appointed by the Conservative Government but my term in Geneva coincided with the beginning of the Labour Government. I was the UK Permanent Representative in Geneva to, as I discovered when I got there, eighteen international organizations, some rather small and technical like the World Meteorological Organisation, the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the International Telecommunications Union; and some rather large technical bodies like the World Trade Organisation, the UN High Commission for Refugees, the UN High Commission for Human Rights, the International Labour Office, the World Health Organisation and so on.

As you can't be an expert on eighteen different technical subjects, the result is that you tend to get shunted from one meeting to another to read out speeches written for you by your staff and you are 'representational.' But when action is required, it's done by experts, many of whom fly out from capitals. Some of them are on your staff. As the Permanent Representative, you're often excluded from the more interesting bits of the game. So it wasn't a fascinating job from my point of view, but it was quite a useful experience and it was a time in my life when, after No. 10, I was happy not to be working all the hours that God made.

One of the most interesting aspects of the job was that most of the work I was doing did not relate to the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office had very little understanding even of what happened in Geneva. It was mainly relevant to Home Departments in Whitehall; most of my instructions came from these home departments and from the newly-created Department for International Development. The Department for International Development had been given its own Cabinet Minister, Clare Short, a very forceful operator who was determined to carve out a significant empire for herself, and I think gave very strong leadership to her Department in its formative years, which it much appreciated. And the Geneva effect of this was that Clare Short and her officials were constantly seeking to intrude on what had been the turf of other departments. At

the ILO, for example, which was supposed to be the department where the Department of Employment in Whitehall led, DfID increasingly tried to play the lead role for Britain or to write our instructions; the same happened with the World Health Organisation. The World Trade Organisation was very much in the bailiwick of the DTI but again DfID said that trade was important to development and they needed a voice there. The UN High Commission for Human Rights was a Foreign Office fief but again DfID funded projects and actually took much more interest in UNHCHR than the Foreign Office. The High Commission for Refugees was a shared responsibility between the Foreign Office and DfID, and again DfID wanted very much to make its own voice heard. So I was often receiving conflicting instructions from different Whitehall departments on what we were to do. I remember for example that DfID wanted to get rid of the then head of the High Commission for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, who was up for renewal of her term of office. Mrs Sadako Ogata was greatly respected in the Foreign Office and No.10 Downing Street. When there was a contest for the new head of the World Health Organisation, the United Kingdom ended up backing Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former Norwegian Prime Minister who indeed made an outstanding head of the WHO. That was thanks to a decision having been taken by No.10. DfID was actually backing one of the other candidates. We found that different Government departments were encouraging different candidates in some of these competitions. When the leadership of the World Trade Organisation came up, there were four candidates; at one stage three different Departments in the British Government were backing three of the four candidates, which made my life a little complicated.

So one was acting in a way as an extension of the Whitehall game. You saw some of the weaknesses of Whitehall, and the failure of joined-up Government. You saw that the relative strengths of Cabinet Ministers would be played out in the kind of instructions you received. Sometimes I had to apply a Nelsonian eye to some of the instructions that I got in order that our position was sensible in Geneva.

Other than that, my main memory of Geneva was that there were simply too many meetings of every kind, all of which could and should have been shorter. The worst of these meetings were the co-ordination meetings among European Union representatives that I referred to earlier. The European Union would hold something like 800 co-ordination meetings a year at different levels, and the European Union Ambassadors on average met at least once a week, sometimes at meetings that dragged on for three hours. And they were incredibly wasteful because, if you were stuck in the “Bunker” – the building where the EU met – for three hours, a morning let us say, and you had fifteen or however many Ambassadors we had in those days, in there, then they were not out lobbying to achieve their objectives. And what we were doing there was never worth the time and effort expended on it because it was hair-splitting stuff over paragraphs and futile arguments. It wasn’t really productive work, just a very cumbersome process. Most of my EU colleagues loved it because they thought that sitting in the Bunker arguing over the commas and full stops of some draft statement was what real diplomacy was about, and it was much easier to do that than to go round the UN trying to persuade people who didn’t agree with you that they needed to do this, that or the other.

### **Further thoughts on Moscow**

RL: Finally, I was going to come back with a few further thoughts on Moscow. Shall I just touch on one or two events first that I haven’t talked about in our previous conversation?

### **Chechnya**

The second Chechnya war had started in the autumn of 1999. I arrived in Moscow in January 2000. It is still going on in a slightly different form, slightly lower scale, now in the year 2006. So it was a running issue throughout my term

in Moscow. The Russians were within their rights seeking to impose law and order within part of their sovereign territory, seeking to put down what was effectively a rebellion against the central government and to oppose terrorism. There is no argument there. So on most key points of principle we had no dispute with the Russians. We were not supporting – never have supported – Chechnian secessionists who have behaved in an extremely blood-thirsty way and have brought a lot of misery to their own country. They are certainly not people who believe in the rule of law, or humanitarian principles.

But the Russians have managed this issue about as badly, brutally and incompetently as it possibly could have been managed. What we tried to do early in the conflict was, first, to apply pretty well proven international standards, including international humanitarian law to this conflict; secondly, to draw on international experience. They had little experience of conflict of this kind. They do not have armed forces that are configured to deal with low-intensity conflict and civil insurgencies, of which we in Britain happen to have a lot of experience over fifty years, going back to Malaya and places like that, and certainly Northern Ireland. And of course there are bodies like the OSCE, different bits of the UN and so on which could have helped to play a role in trying to mitigate, or search for solutions to this conflict. But the Russians being the Russians were not going to accept outside advice, let alone any involvement of outsiders, and so they decided to try to crush the rebels. They failed to do so because of the incompetence of their forces, and the divisions between them. The net effect was that the population suffered horribly, the conflict became more polarised and radicalised, and the terrorists, who were completely ruthless, were encouraged to use more and more brutal acts of terrorism.

One that occurred on my watch was the siege of the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow when a complete theatre audience attending a performance of a musical called Nord-Ost was taken hostage by about fifty Chechnians, many of whom were young widows of Chechnian fighters who had explosives strapped to their belts.

They were under the command of a very hardened Chechnyan fighter with a number of pretty tough blokes with him. How they were able to drive in force into the middle of Moscow and seize this theatre is in itself remarkable, but they did. In the theatre there were a number of foreign citizens, including a family of three Britons, an Oxford student who was living in Moscow learning Russian with his parents who happened to be out visiting him that weekend. I was in London when it happened. I flew straight back to Moscow and arrived early the following morning, by which time my staff had done all the right things. My Deputy set up an emergency room, my Consul General was down at the site. He was organizing the European Union Ambassadors who were running around like headless chickens not knowing what to do. Many of them told me how grateful they'd been for the leadership of our Consul General, John Cummings. We tried to open up liaison with the Russian authorities because many of us had got our nationals in there, as had the Americans and one or two others – Australians, I remember – and offer assistance. We did manage to open a line of communication although it was quite difficult to do so. We were fobbed off with a number of briefings. The Red Cross were involved, properly, and at one stage were allowed into the theatre where a very brave local Red Cross representative came out with a number of children. The thing dragged on for a couple of days, unresolved, very tense, very unpleasant. One of the British hostages was let out because he had a heart complaint and the hostage takers decided to let him go, but he, poor man, was then in the horrible situation of having his wife and son still inside the theatre.

We became more and more concerned about the lack of information from the Russian side as to what was going on in the minds of the authorities. I managed to obtain a late-night meeting with a Deputy Head of the FSB, the internal security branch. I took along the German and American Ambassadors to this and I had instructions to offer British specialist assistance, and indeed a number of British specialists were flying into Moscow in case, so at least they would be on the spot. They were coming officially to advise me but of course we were ready to make their advice available to the Russians. They had got relevant experience

of hostage takers, from the police and forces. I made this offer; the Russians nodded politely but, much as expected, didn't show much interest in taking our advice or anybody else's on this. I asked if we could be informed before any severe action was taken, if they were thinking of storming the theatre. "Oh yes," I was told. "Of course we'll keep you informed."

I left that room annexed to the notorious Lubyanka at, I think, about 11pm. I was convinced that we'd just been fobbed off and that something was brewing. I drove back to my house via the scene of the siege where I'd been for most of the previous two days. We had, by then, established a liaison office in a building behind the theatre. I went in and called on the member of my staff who was on duty there and, as I drove away round the back of the theatre, I saw a line of army lorries with different kinds of troops, different from the ones I'd seen early in the day. These were guys with guns, helmets, flak jackets, backpacks, much more serious troops. They looked to me very much as if they were the sort of guys you would send in to storm the theatre. So I got back to my house and I rang up the relevant Foreign Office Under-Secretary and said that I thought they were about to storm the theatre. He said we had got to stop them doing so. I said I didn't think they were going to listen to anybody. Sure enough, the following morning they stormed the theatre. The hostage takers had, I think, shot somebody but the Russian explanation was that shooting had started inside and so they'd had to storm the theatre. I'm sceptical about that because I think that they were preparing to do it anyway at that point. They used gas of a kind that they were unwilling to disclose in order to knock out the hostage takers.

Now, it may very well be that you could never have negotiated a peaceful end to that siege on acceptable terms if, as appeared likely, the hostage takers were demanding safe conduct and an aeroplane to get themselves out of Moscow, carrying hostages with them. That's not terms that anybody would have accepted; or should have accepted. So I'm not saying that the decision to storm the theatre was wrong, but the way the operation was then carried out was highly

questionable. The Russians, with their innate secretiveness, had not prepared their medics or paramedics to deal with the consequences. They had not been told what was about to happen. If they had known what gas was going to be used they could have had their antidotes ready, and breathing equipment and all that.

After the storming of the theatre – I think altogether 129 people died – but several hundred were saved who might very well have died had the hostage takers exploded the explosives they had stacked around the theatre as well as having them on their belts. Not a single explosive went off. The gas was pretty effective. But, if paramedics had got in quickly and had put breathing tubes down the throats of those who were the worst affected by the gas, there could have been many fewer victims. What actually happened was that the assault troops carried hostages out of the theatre, those who weren't able to walk and were unconscious, like sacks of potatoes; they did not put them in the recovery position. They threw them into the backs of vans and ambulances and a lot of lives were needlessly lost in that way; that was absolutely clear. They were then driven off to different hospitals, under great secrecy.

The other thing that happened was that somebody put a bullet in the middle of the forehead of each of the hostage takers. The troops had been ordered to make sure that the hostage takers didn't come out alive. Now these guys were knocked out by gas. They could easily have stuck handcuffs on them and taken them out, and no doubt defuse their weapons. I don't think that it was necessary to go round and put a bullet in each of their heads. But it was rather convenient; there was nobody alive to be interrogated and tell the tale and go on trial. It's just left a lot of questions unanswered.

The Russian authorities then lied about this. They convened two briefings for foreign embassies in the course of the morning after the siege and two of my people went to them. One was given by a Deputy Foreign Minister and one was given by a senior FSB General. They showed a film of the inside of the theatre

including the neat holes through the heads of the hostage takers. The Deputy Foreign Minister had been instructed to tell the assembled diplomats that all of the hostage takers had been 'taken out' expertly by Russian snipers, which was self-evidently not true. The idea that, in a darkened theatre full of gas, you could pick out thirty or whatever it was hostage takers with a single bullet each in the middle of the forehead defies belief. And a lot of lying went on about the gas. Then we had great difficulty even finding out where the British hostages were. The mother and son had been taken to different hospitals. The mother turned out to be one of the least affected and she was returned to us in an ambulance that morning. By then we had located the hospital where her son was but we were not being allowed access. The hospital gates were barred and there were people who were clearly secret police standing at the gates preventing access. They didn't let any Russian relatives in. They put up names of people on the gates, but no access was permitted for relatives or consular officials or anyone. I went to the hospital where this boy was, after my staff had failed to get access. I drove up there as the British Ambassador and waved my credentials, and demanded access on Consular grounds and was told that I couldn't have it. I rang up Downing Street and I suggested that the Prime Minister should ring Putin, should congratulate him on the lives which had been saved and should, at the same time, ask if I could be given access to our national. I thought it was extraordinary that the British Prime Minister was having to ring up the Russian President so that we could exercise our consular rights. But Russia is a country where decisions like that go right to the top.

That happened; I was granted access. I was taken into the hospital and I found the young man looking bright and perky and playing cards with some Russian children who'd also survived. I told him to get his clothes on, and drove him straight out and took him back to his parents. None of the other foreign hostages were released until late the following day and it turned out that some of them were in very bad condition; one or two actually died. It was a very messy sort of episode.

## **Russian reaction to terrorist attack in United States in September 2001**

The Russians reacted very rapidly to 9/11 and it's well known that Putin was the first person to ring up Bush. Putin had quite a difficult decision to make because, while it might look like a no-brainer for the Russians to co-operate in an operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan, to support the Americans militarily went against the grain with the Russian military and the Russian political establishment. Putin decided to do so; he convened a famous meeting in which most of the people around the table were security chiefs and political leaders who wanted Russia to remain neutral. Putin said he'd support the Americans, which he did. He provided over-flight facilities, some intelligence briefing; he encouraged co-operation and allowed the Americans to use Russian airbase facilities. And for a while we had pretty good co-operation.

## **Russia and NATO**

Tony Blair came out not very long after 9/11 to have discussions with Putin. At the time, NATO was looking at enlargement; at least NATO wasn't looking to enlarge but countries were looking to join NATO, including the Baltic States, and that's pretty neuralgic for the Russians. But the Baltic States had every right to do so. Blair and Putin decided late at night that the best way of going forward was to set up a special new organisation to be known as the NATO-Russia Council. There had been a council previously but it wasn't functioning very satisfactorily. That was done; Blair then had to push it through against opposition from the Pentagon and some other NATO members but, by the following Spring, that came to pass. That was one of the consequences of Russia being very supportive over the Afghanistan operation. Russia was trying to build stronger bridges to the West.

## Iraq

Iraq was a different kind of example. In the approach to the conflict in Iraq, we had a pretty intensive dialogue with the Russians over several months. At No.10, the Prime Minister had it on his agenda; the Prime Minister's advisers were in touch with their Russian opposite numbers. I remember a number of discussions where we, on the British side, were preparing Foreign Ministry officials for the eventuality of conflict. The Russians, all the way through, were very sceptical about the notion that Saddam Hussein still had weapons of mass destruction; they said this wasn't true. We tended to attribute their scepticism to the fact that they had quite a beneficial relationship with Iraq and were clearly accomplices in some of the scandals of the oil for food programme; they were doing quite a lot of business with Iraq. They had traditionally been close to Iraq, they were traditional allies. They hoped to get further oil concessions in Iraq and so on. I remember one or two quite long meetings with Deputy Foreign Ministers at which I was carrying out instructions to put our case to them, explaining that we wanted to work with them on this issue and, as it became more and more obvious that we were moving towards conflict, trying to persuade them to accept the second UN resolution (authorising the use of armed force). Like other British ambassadors, I received what is now known as the "Dodgy Dossier", the dossier of evidence about weapons of mass destruction that turned out to be flawed. I was instructed to distribute the dossier to Russian officials but they regarded it with contempt. They thought it was a pretty second-rate bit of work. I remember on the back of the dossier that people came out from London of an expert kind to assure the Russians that we were certain that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, from our own intelligence sources. Well, it was a massive failure of British intelligence, and the dossier was obviously a failure of political intelligence.

On the substance of the issue, I remember very clearly a Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Saltanov, in charge of the Near East and a long-time expert in that part of the world, explaining to me what he thought would happen if the

operation against Saddam Hussein went ahead, how the conflict would develop within Iraq and the factions within Iraq, the Sunni and the Shias and all the rest of it. In his view, the proposed operation would be a huge mistake. I have to say in fairness, although I was on the other side of the argument when carrying out my instructions, that every word that he said turned out to be accurate. At the time, we were inclined to think he was saying what he said in order to cover up the fact that the Russians were allied to Saddam Hussein. But he was right and we were wrong.

MM: Had the Russians supported Security Council Resolution No. 1441?

RL: They had, otherwise it wouldn't have passed. They were fully prepared to continue downward pressure on Saddam Hussein not to develop weapons of mass destruction, and to comply with the numerous Security Council resolutions with which everybody agreed Iraq was not in compliance. Where the Russians disagreed with us was in our taking military action. They were not prepared to vote for a Security Council resolution that clearly authorized military action. Now I think that might have come out differently, not because they agreed with what we were doing, but because a principle of Putin's foreign policy at that point, and indeed up to this day, has been to try to avoid confrontation with the United States. In the run up to the failed attempt at the second resolution, the Russians that I talked to were fully expecting the French to change sides, and to swing across to the British and American line of argument. They could see that the French were making what appeared to be certain military preparations, possibly even to join in on the operation, and their own reading of French behaviour over the years and in the United Nations Security Council was that quite often the French did change sides. The Russians thought the French were going to rat on them, but Chirac had very cleverly manoeuvred a position under which Putin couldn't rat on Chirac before Chirac ratted on Putin. Chirac had got together with Schroeder who had used this issue as a means of winning an election. The two of them had agreed on a position. Then Putin arrived in Paris,

not on an Iraq-related visit but one that had been arranged for other reasons, and Chirac at that point put a piece of paper under his nose - a perfectly reasonable, rather cleverly drafted paper that exactly expressed the Russian position - and said, "This is the Franco/German position. If you agree with this, we can make it the Franco/German/Russian position, and we'll have an alliance of three of us. That'll be a pretty strong force and we'll probably win the day." There was nothing in it with which Putin could disagree even if he wanted to. The Russians are always quite happy to play games that split the Western Allies from each other. So he signed up to that and from then on he was locked in by the French into a Franco/German/Russian alliance, which they assiduously kept alive for a while. It doesn't exist now. It was a single-issue tactic.

From that point on, while the Foreign Office and the State Department were constantly trying to detach the Russians, I kept telling the Foreign Office that this tactic would not work. I told them that if they were going to make headway, the people they had to work on were the French, that if they could not get the French, they would not get the Russians. I told them that until I was blue in the face and the reason why I believed that was not only that the Russians genuinely wanted to avoid voting for a resolution that sanctified a war against their ally Iraq, but also how politically could Putin present to his own political establishment and to public opinion, which does exist in Russia, a position that was more pro-American, more hostile to Iraq than the position of France and Germany, two Western countries and NATO countries? He could only have taken that line if he had been able to say that everybody else was going along with this and Russia had better do so as well. I think the Chinese would not have stood out against it. But Putin could not be more catholic than the popes of Berlin and Paris; it was not politically sellable. So there was no way that he could have broken the Franco/German alliance. And of course he didn't; all the calculations that this alliance would crumble turned out to be, as it happened, false.

### **Any future in a Turkic Commonwealth?**

MM: Could I just ask you one supplementary on that? Do you think there's any future in the idea of a kind of Turkic Commonwealth?

RL: No. I've always been rather sceptical about this. I went to Ankara when I was head of the Eastern Department soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and had talks with the Turks about the country, because they obviously do have their own perspective on it. And it was a time when they were talking up this idea of a Turkic Commonwealth and the new Turkish policy that was designed to consolidate links with Turkish-speaking peoples; they were going to have transport routes – roads and air-routes and Turkish investment stretching right across the Turkish-speaking region. And they exaggerate the attraction that this might have had. I'm not an expert in the Turkish language but my understanding is that, if you speak Uzbek or Tajik or whatever, you are not mutually comprehensible to a Turk. There are significant similarities but there is a much weaker linguistic and ethnic link than the Turks would imagine. Turkey didn't have the resources to make a real difference to these countries; it is one of a number of routes for their trade but, in many cases, it doesn't solve their problems. The routes still have to cross a lot of Russian or other awkward territories. These countries don't get on that well together so putting them all together in a Commonwealth would be difficult. The Russians tried to put the former Soviet states together in the CIS and that didn't work. These states remain at loggerheads. I think the whole thing is vastly overblown and I think the Russians would not sit calmly by and let it happen; they're trying to build up their relationships with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the other Central Asians. It's the sort of idea you could imagine if you were playing 19<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy as a board game, but I don't think it's going to happen. I think there is some Turkish influence; but it has not happened.

## **Reliability of Russia as an energy supplier**

MM: Have you got anything to add about the reliability of Russia as an energy supplier to the European Union?

RL: Yes. I think there's exaggeration here too on the Russian part. A year ago, when the Russians cut off the gas supply to the Ukraine and the Europeans reacted to this because they'd also cut off Europe, the Russians started making very loud noises which they made throughout the year 2006 to the effect that they were an energy superpower. Putin has now banned the use of that term, but for the past year other Russians have been saying that Russia is a great country again. They say we in Western Europe depend on Russia and, if we won't admit the Russians to our downstream distribution networks, and if we won't do a deal favorable to Russia, they will send Russian gas elsewhere, and then Western Europe will be in trouble.

Well, that's classic Russian bluff. It reminds me very much of Khrushchev successfully threatening the Americans in the 1950s with the might of the Russian nuclear missile force. Khrushchev later admitted that he had greatly exaggerated this threat. He had said that the Russians could hit a fly in space and some such. At the time he had very few missiles capable of delivering a nuclear weapon to America, and they were extremely inaccurate. But the West was taken in by this bluff and it helped to generate the next stage of the arms race.

When you look at this gas threat, first, if the Russians wanted to send their gas elsewhere, can they? They don't have a single LNG export terminal; they've never done LNG; they don't know how to do LNG. They don't have a single metre of pipeline yet leading into Asia. They are very slow about constructing it, partly because the Chinese don't want to become dependent on the Russians and they're not offering a great deal on price. So there is nowhere else; the only place, other than the European Union, to which the Russians export gas at the

moment is Turkey. The Russians built the most expensive gas pipeline ever under the Black Sea to Turkey – it's called the Blue Stream and it's running at 30% capacity. It's not even commercially viable.

Actually Gazprom is more dependent on the European Union than the European Union is dependent on Gazprom. Why? Because Gazprom sells its gas at a loss in Russia because the domestic price of gas is very low and you can't raise it very rapidly because of the social consequences. Gazprom loses money on other ventures outside energy. It makes a huge profit on its exports into Europe, so it is absolutely dependent upon the European market for its profitability. Gazprom is by far the largest company in Russia.

How dependent is the European Union? Well, it would be very inconvenient if this cheap supply of gas from Russia were to dwindle or be turned off but it would not be curtains for the European Union. We have more possibilities of diversifying our supply than Gazprom has of diversifying its market. We can use other types of fuel, as we do. We need not only buy gas from Russia, but we're getting it from Norway, we're getting it from Algeria. We could in the future get much more from Libya and Egypt. We are going to be taking LNG from Qatar and that's just for starters. People say Germany imports a huge amount of Russian gas; yes it does. What percentage of Germany's primary energy consumption comes in Russian gas? Answer, last year 9.7%. So 90% of Germany's energy does not come from Russia; over 50% of German electricity is generated by coal. What about Poland? The Poles have been by-passed by this new pipeline that has been built to Germany. About, from memory, 6.7% of Poland's primary energy consumption is in the form of Russian gas; 96% of Poland's power generation is from coal. So you see this pattern across Europe. Only two European countries receive more than 25% of their primary energy in the form of Russian gas: Hungary and Slovakia, rather small and part of the East. Finland takes about 16% of its energy from Russia but Finland is at the moment

rebuilding its nuclear power industry. The Finns know Russia very well, they're very canny people and they do not want to be dependent on Russian gas.

So mutual interest indeed should imply more Russian energy coming to Europe but it's not a one-way business. The other factor that I should mention is that, while Russia has 26% of the world's proven gas reserves, they're no good sitting under the ground, and especially not sitting under the sea in the Arctic. Russia's capacity to produce is declining because of incompetence and corruption. Gazprom's production has roughly flat-lined for the last five or six years; it's going to peak in about two years' time. Three existing super-giant fields on which Gazprom depends are then all going to be in decline together. Gazprom has failed to invest in the next super-giant field, which should be Yamal, which will require an estimated \$70 billion of investment. So if they started investing now they wouldn't be bringing it on stream for years to come. Then they talk about Shtokman, which is well off shore, in deep water with floating icebergs in the Arctic Circle, an immensely difficult project, it isn't going to happen for years and years and years. Russia's biggest problem, therefore, is the inability to produce enough gas. This year Russian power stations are going to be switching from gas to fuel oil because of lack of production of gas. Russian industries will probably suffer shortages. Russian export volumes will probably go down. They will try to preserve supplies for domestic consumption.

So the question is rather more complicated than it looks, we are rather less dependent than we think, and they are rather more dependent than they care to admit. Sometime common sense will break through but they have succeeded in inducing a sense of dependency, which, certainly, they've done rather cleverly. But it's a bit unreal; it's not completely made up but it's got large elements of unreality.

MM: Thank you very much for that.

## **Running the Moscow embassy, 2000-2004**

RL: We're near the end of the tape but just to round this all off, I wondered if I should just say a few words about the atmospherics of running the Moscow embassy in the period from January 2000 to August 2004. I said a little bit about this earlier but I want to go a bit more into it. The reason why, for me, this was a marvellous job and really the most satisfying and rewarding job I ever did, was that it was a window of opportunity. I was rather conscious it was likely to be a window, but wasn't going to remain a window for ever. The Russia had opened it and we were able to do constructive things and penetrate areas where we hadn't before or where previously we'd been simply spectators or even opponents. And so we went full blast with this and, in almost every area of our activity, we were doing things that I couldn't have dreamed of a few years before.

Take Defence as an example: when my father was the Defence Attaché in Russia, he was there clearly essentially to spy. They didn't use the word; he was wearing uniform and acknowledged, but he was there to see what the Russian military were up to in so far as he possibly could, which was pretty limited. When I was in Moscow, there was no point in my doing that; our Defence Section was working 100% on co-operating with the Russians whether it was in peace-keeping exercises or trying to plan joint things together, or under-sea rescue. One of the remarkable things that the British Ministry of Defence was doing was to invest money, and we were able to do this very efficiently, about £1 million/£1½ million a year, in a scheme for the retraining of Russian officers for civilian life. And something like 20,000 Russian officers have now been through this retraining scheme; I think it's close to being wound up. I went round Russia to seven or eight centres where this was happening and saw Russian ex-military, still in their uniforms, going through four-month courses to give them skills to operate in the civilian arena, because they had no idea how to do it. The Russian military is so cut off from the rest of society that they needed to have their confidence raised. And this was done by Russian trainers funded by the British in classrooms

equipped by the British on programmes that had been designed by the British, and were monitored by a remarkable RAF officer who spoke the best Russian I've ever heard a foreigner speak, and spent his whole time on aeroplanes flying round the country making sure that it was being run properly. I would go to graduation ceremonies and have 150 officers who'd come up to receive their diplomas at the end of the course; people who had joined their armed forces to oppose people like me, and they would come up with tears in their eyes and they would say, "Thank you for changing my life. I'm now going to get a good job," and indeed employers would be lining up outside the door to employ these people. "But why have you done this?" They couldn't understand why the British would do it. And I said, "We have not done this for charity. We've done this because it's in our interests in that, if Russia becomes a successful, developed, peaceful country with a functioning economy, we will spend less on our defence budget because we will no longer feel threatened by Russia; we'll be partners together. And actually helping on your military to convert into part of the civilian life is priceless. So don't think we've got some deep nefarious aim; I mean that is entirely obvious."

We had surprisingly little support from the top of the Ministry of Defence. We have a great capacity for looking a gift horse in the mouth. It was a very fine project – I didn't invent it but I supported it. I was extraordinarily fortunate to see the results and to be able to play a small part in it. Similarly the British Council expanded in Russia. It had been banned from operating there in Soviet days, and it developed fifteen information centres around Russia, which were providing resources. They were helping local teachers; in some cases they were helping work on education reform programmes; they made a huge contribution to Russia, to our standing around Russia including in very remote provinces. They went right across to Siberia and so on. And whenever I visited those centres, and engaged in events of the British Council, I got a terrific buzz from it and, crucially, I was acting in an interface with the younger generation of Russia, the people who were going to shape the future. Similarly with scholarship schemes and Russians coming for education in Britain; again an area where we've got

something that they want. They want the English language, they have respect for our education system, and we actually make a lot of profit out of it because we spent a small amount on scholarships for Russia, but many Russians were coming and buying education here; that was an industry that I estimated to be worth \$100 million a year to Britain, if you total it all up. We had an active alumni club in Moscow to which returning Russians graduates would come to events; we'd have parties, we'd give lectures in my house and all sorts of events. They had sub-committees. We were engaging with 25-30-35 years old Russians, beginning to move up; very bright people, world class people but of the younger generation; very non-traditional work for a British Ambassador in Russia. Then directly going into universities: I think I spoke in over fifty universities in four and a half years there. I used to have round-table seminars with Russian students, so that I could feel where they were coming from and get a sense of it, and I could try to change the stereotypical image of Britain by interacting with these people. Some British universities are actually teaching in Russia. Heriot-Watt are teaching a course in petroleum engineering; Kingston University have got a wonderful business school going in Moscow, the best business MBA course in Russia, and I started giving seminars there. I am now, in my retirement, a visiting professor there and I'm going to teach there probably three weekends in the coming year. I got a huge lift out of this work because of the quality of the people I was meeting. It was a good antidote to some of the older, ex-Soviet bureaucrats and security types who could really depress you because they were so antediluvian. My staff were also fanning out into these areas.

Let's take another constructive example contrasting with the past. In the year 2003, I went to a place Severodvinsk, which is up on the White Sea just below the Arctic Circle. It was created by Stalin. It was a base for building submarines and it is where a lot of Russian nuclear submarines have been built. It was a super-secret place that foreigners were never allowed near. It also happened by chance to be the place where, in 1553, the English seafarer Richard Chancellor happened to be blown ashore in his ship with letters in his pocket, letters patent from King

Edward VI establishing the official relationship with Russia. We were partly marking the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the spot where he'd landed. But the other purpose of the visit was to go inside one of the places where they built nuclear submarines in order to mark the inauguration of a programme that we and other G8 countries were taking part in to cut up old nuclear submarines. The British Government, with other G8 governments, funded this work but this was our own bit of it, designed to promote the safe decommissioning of Russian nuclear submarines that originally were built to destroy us. I stood in this yard (I think a photograph that I have was taken probably by an FSB officer) with the Defence Attaché in his uniform and behind us the nuclear submarines waiting to be cut up, and I thought it was inconceivable that I should be here. If my father was staring down from the heavens at this point, he having been the Defence Attaché in Russia, his eyes would be popping!

We were able to do things like that in this period. It's getting a bit more difficult now with a change in atmosphere. We did an awful lot of work from the Embassy with different kinds of NGOs combatting violence against women, going into prisons to help deal with tuberculosis. We were working to help the Russians combat the spread of AIDS. We were working on the treatment of the disabled; on democratic studies; on the environment; and many other subjects. The wife of one of my staff founded a charity, which has been very effective and continues now, to protect Siberian tigers and snow leopards, of which I'm a patron. All these things were going on in this constructive atmosphere, a lot of this without much acknowledgment from the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office, for example, does not believe in education; I don't think it understands education. If they'd known I was spending a certain percentage of my time promoting British education overseas they'd probably have disapproved and said it wasn't my job. So I didn't really tell them; I just got on with it.

We were being bombarded by a lot of management-speak from the Foreign Office, which has developed a mania in recent years for hiring consultants, I think

under pressure from the Treasury. They think that's how you manage people. I have a very different philosophy; I don't think you manage people by trying to use fake business school terminology. We did it a different way; I tried to avoid spending a lot of my life filling in forms, which is what the Foreign Office would have had me do. I had very good people who could do it for me whom I trusted. I had an excellent management counsellor whom I trusted completely. And I tried to spend my time in the areas where I could make a beneficial impact outside the Embassy. My philosophy was that, if you select the right people, if you select round pegs for round holes, you get the appointment right – that's the first thing you've got to do. Then you've got to develop a collegiate atmosphere to encourage people to work together as a team – and you can do that, I think, more easily if you run it in a fairly informal way and you don't forget the work/life balance, and you have a sense of humour. People then share things and they're flexible. It is an important part of the job to develop the capabilities of individual officers. Above all you've got to allow them initiative; you can't programme them in management-speak from London. You've got to say to somebody: Here is your area of responsibility. You're the expert on that. I'm not going to tell you what to do whether I'm the Ambassador or I'm London. I want your own ideas. You go and expand into that. You do it your own way, and produce results. We had a very happy successful team of people who were able to do that without a lot of nannying. As I was retiring, an awful lot of this management speak stuff was coming through out of the machine. I was simply relieved that I didn't have to read it because I was going.

MM: A slightly sad note to end on!

RL: Yes. What was really sad for me was that our relationship with Russia was turning down in my last year – and I talked about that earlier – and the Russian assault on the British Council was something that I found incredibly painful. I had worked so closely with the Council building up their position, and then to find that cavemen, really primitive old thinkers in Russia were treating the

Council, which was doing so much good in their country, as a hostile organisation, was deeply depressing. It wasn't surprising. I knew there were lots of cavemen around. It was depressing that the cavemen were getting on top again. In fact there's been a lot of Neanderthal behaviour since then and, even as we speak, absolutely primitive behaviour is being applied to Georgians in Russia simply by virtue of their nationality. But that's another story.

So things were getting more difficult, but in some areas things were still improving and expanding. Business was a shining example. Britain in the year 2003 was the biggest foreign investor in Russia; BP made a huge deal, which has been very successful; Shell started developing a huge project; lots of other British companies were coming in. Now a lot of Russian business is coming into London and that's still a very positive picture. It's not all, by any means, negative.

MM: Well, thank you very much indeed for this second interview.

Transcribed by Joanna Buckley