

**Peter Edward RAMSBOTHAM (b. 8.10.1919).**

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Head of Chancery, UK Delegation, United Nations, New York: (included dealing with Suez crisis), 1953	19-25
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## SIR PETER RAMSBOTHAM

This is Malcolm McBain interviewing Sir Peter Ramsbotham on Tuesday, 9 January 2001.

**MMcB:** “Sir Peter, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme. Could we start with your war service, which was in the Intelligence Corps in Europe. You went into the Control Commission after having been a Lieutenant-Colonel at a very young age. What were you doing exactly?”

**Sir Peter:** “I had polio when I was at Oxford in 1938, as a result of which I was wearing a small heel, on the right side. When the war started, I was downgraded medically so that I couldn’t join up, like so many of my friends were, and go straight out to Dunkirk or the various Divisions. I went for some time to the security part of the War Office, where I met my future wife, very agreeably. Then in 1942/43, they downgraded the medical level and I went into the army as a private (which was good for me), for about 7 or 8 months, up in the north. At that time, all the other people coming in were fitters from Liverpool or had left school at 14, so the standard, which I hadn’t been used to, became part of my daily life, and I learned a great deal there. Then I got a commission through what was called WOSB (War Office Selection Board), which was a way of recruiting officers, and went for training with a Canadian armoured division and was commissioned for service in the Reconnaissance Corps (which they abolished later on because it was rather too risky). I wasn’t very good at it because of my lameness, and on one of the last days, on the assault course, I was made to run (I knew I couldn’t do it) and leap over something, and the result was I broke my collar-bone. I went back then into the Intelligence Corps.

Later on, without much training, about a month or so after D-Day, we went across into Normandy and I led one of the special counter-intelligence units. Helped by those splendid things, enigma wireless interceptions, which you know all about nowadays, and double agents and all that stuff you hear about all the time now on our wireless, we were trying to intercept and arrest German stay-behind agents in the south-west. The Americans had come in through Montpellier and the Bordeaux area where the Germans had left stay-behind organisations. The Germans weren't fighting by this time. The dangerous thing about going down there in my four by four was that all the resistance was mostly communist French. They had got hold of all the brandy, guns and other supplies of the Germans and were far more dangerous than any remaining Germans, as I recall! We were quite successful there. We went on through into Germany. My promotion looks startling, but in point of fact it was rather specialised work, this counter-intelligence work. I knew rather a lot about it and I did get promoted that way, as you described. We crossed the Rhine, and into Germany, and I was then working with the Intelligence office there as a captain, then major GSOII at army HQ. That would be right up to and just after May 1945 when we anticipated that Hitler would leave stay-behind organisations in Germany on a big scale, as indeed we would have done in Britain in similar circumstances. That was what we were planning to oppose and of course forgetting that they are not such a resilient people, the Germans. Once Hitler was dead I think the idea of following the Nazi lead in that way was something that's not in their blood, as it would have been in ours, so we were wrong in that. I may say that quite a number of young military motor cycle messengers had their heads cut off. They put wire across the road which you couldn't see, so it was quite nasty in some places. The SS around Hamburg were quite nasty, but it didn't last, and that petered out.

I was then 26, and was posted to Hamburg as the regional intelligence and political officer. Germany was divided into zones of occupation. In the British zone we had four regions. The big one was North Rhine Westphalia, and then the Hanover region, Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg. Hamburg, apart from Bremen, was one on its own. A very good man called Vaughan Berry was regional commissioner. There was a head Scotland Yard chap who was running the police there; everything was from scratch; we

were de-nazifying. De-nazification stretched so far. You could be an SS vet, or something like that there. To try to get the balance right was difficult, to try to control our young soldiers and people like that who were up against problems of responsibility they really had no idea how to handle. Not enough has been written about that period of our Control Commission work from Norfolk House in London. At the time we were de-nazifying, so to speak, I was the regional intelligence officer. We had selected a good team of young people including a brave young Polish officer who came in with languages. I was also the regional political officer, which was a new invention then. This is where I come into your story.”

**MMcB:** “Are you a German speaker?”

**Sir Peter:** “I’m a very poor one. I was adequate then. At that moment we were trying to help the SDP, the Social Democratic Party. Adenauer was then a slightly doubtful figure as Mayor of Cologne. We had a new Labour government who were not so enthusiastic about putting their support entirely into the hands of the right-wing, as they thought they were. One of our corps commanders locked him up by mistake, I think. We were supporting the SPD, and they were based on the Hamburg area, Hamburg, with the docks and North Sea Hanseatic links really. So I was quite engaged on that side as well, which annoyed the regional commissioner, who was a good left-wing, clever Labour man. He thought that my intelligence side was spoiling my political role of helping to build up the SPD.”

**MMcB:** “After this period with the army, you joined the Foreign Office in 1948 and continued with more or less the same business.”

**Sir Peter:** “How did I enter the Foreign Service? What happened, very briefly, was this. In Berlin at the time we had the Kommandatura, with the Russians, French, Americans and ourselves, the four zone leaders, trying to run the city area. There you had Sir Christopher Steel, who was our ambassador there, working under Sir William Strang, head of the Foreign Office, who would come out for the overall top meetings, and

General Sir Brian Robertson, who had been Chief of Staff for Monty, they were our apparatus in Berlin. Christopher Steel was a good golfer. He was a scratch golfer. The golf courses in Berlin either had been bombed or were poor, and he could (one could in those days) commandeer an aeroplane and go wherever he liked. He would come down and play on the splendid golf course to the north of Hamburg, where I happened to be living, also in a splendid house, which I'd commandeered. I'm afraid one did live above one's station, no doubt about it, in those days. He used to stay with us and he was interested in what I was going to do. I hadn't thought much about the future. He said rather peremptorily, 'You must go into the Foreign Office.' I took the Foreign Office exam and failed. I failed because you had to pass in arithmetic for some reason. It took me nearly half an hour to work out the percentage test, so I failed. He was very annoyed and made me take it again five or six months later, by which time I'd had some exam training on arithmetic, and I passed rather well into the Foreign Office. I was then taken away from Hamburg, into the German Department of the Foreign Office at that time run by Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick. Sir Patrick Dean, who was the boss, really controlled our Foreign Office work in Germany (a splendid man, who was ambassador in Washington a little before me). It was a hectic time. We were bombarded with work, which we couldn't control. Things were fairly chaotic at that period. There was no one to train you. I let in someone from Poland; this was the time of the phoney government of Poland. He'd got to Lisbon and wanted to come to England, quite an important chap, and he looked good on paper. No-one was there to listen to me. I was the boss, you see, over that sort of thing. Three or four weeks later, I was summoned to the All-holy somebody. 'Are you responsible for letting in Mr Miholovsky (or whoever he was)? He's a thoroughly dangerous, communist-inspired politician.' I pass that to you to show you the sort of condition then in the German Political Department."

**MMcB:** "So that was actually a pretty good introduction to regular Foreign Office work."

**Sir Peter:** “After my start in the Foreign Office they sent me back to Berlin, where I stayed during the blockade. I stayed with Kit Steel. He was a father figure to me there, Sir Christopher Steel.”

**MMcB:** “What were you actually doing during the blockade?”

**Sir Peter:** “I was writing mostly about problems of the political situation in Germany. I also had a hand in helping to draw up the new German constitution, which would be better than the Weimar one which had really led to Hitler, in many ways. We were doing it with the Americans, and there was someone called Chaput de Saintonge (a Jersey name I think), who was our man, putting it all together. Not much has been written about what we were doing at that period, building up Germany before the Germans resumed control. I was doing it on the security side, I may say, because that had been my metier.”

**MMcB:** “What about relations with the Russians, our great allies?”

**Sir Peter:** “Well, there I was helping to represent Kit Steel and someone called Peter Garron, who has also died, who was quite a senior Foreign Office figure there, on the Kommandatura, the meetings with the Americans and the French. Maxwell Taylor, who became famous later on as the Chief of Staff for the United States, was the American chap, and we were trying, with the Russians, to run the city. They made it impossible because they placed their own political party in power (the SED) in their zone. I learned a great deal then about their powers of intrigue and infiltration, how they worked, of the technique of spying, on the Russian side.”

**MMcB:** “But the Russians had actually blockaded the city.”

**Sir Peter:** “Sorry, this was towards the end, you’re quite right, of the blockade of the city. We started the airlift. It was our idea. Like so many things, the Americans claimed that they did; the usual story. General Lucius Clay got the planes in, and so did we, and

as soon as they touched down and unloaded, they went back again. If you flew in from our zone, you flew in with dehydrated potatoes, which were filthy to eat, and you can't hydrate them again, everything was done just to keep the thing going. Willy Brandt then was a youngish man living on these things, in a very poor way in Berlin, and we were in touch with him, which was very useful later on. A small point, again making these personal contacts at that time paid off later on, you know, in Germany. I was asked to look after Ernst Reuter. Reuter was mayor of Berlin. I was asked to bring him to London to see Ernie Bevin. We got stuck in the fog for two days in Cologne or Dusseldorf (I can't remember which), and I got to know him rather well, because there was no-one else to talk to. He would later come to my house in Berlin. He represented the Volga Deutsch, you know for the River Volga in Russia. A whole lot of Germans settled there in the First World War. He was Jewish, and a brilliant, brilliant man, quite a different calibre from Adenauer, and I think, in some ways, if the chips had fallen differently, he would have been a great chancellor of Germany. He is never mentioned now. People forget very quickly."

**MMcB:** "Can we move on to your actual position in the Foreign Office. You eventually left Germany and joined the Foreign Office itself. What were you doing there?"

**Sir Peter:** "Before we get to the Foreign Office, I must tell you one story about Berlin, about the character of the Berliners. It couldn't happen in South Germany, it couldn't happen anywhere else. Berliners, like the London Cockneys, have certain characteristics, they could take great hardship, much like the Cockneys, under the spell of the blockade. At the Berlin university there was a dotty don called Kuhny, who would declaim about the world at large. He was a slight joke, though a clever man. At the worst time of the blockade, I remember, there were starving students marching along one day with banners saying, "Als Witzig Salz fur die Verdauung, so Kuhny fur die Weltanschauung". Something like "as Epsom salts works on your digestion, so Kuhny works for your philosophy of life". That was the atmosphere we were in at that time.

So, back I went to the Foreign Office, and my first post there was in Economic Relations Department, in 1950, working in the Locarno Room, which is beautiful today. In those days, you couldn't see the lovely decorations, it was all covered over, and we had little boxes where we worked. In my box, the young man opposite me was Douglas Hurd. He talked about this when he gave an account of his life on the BBC the other day. So we were very boxed up in that respect. I was in charge of the oil section, dealing with international oil problems working particularly with the American oil companies on the dollar-sterling problems which were very complicated. We were working out our agreements in the Gulf, new ones in Kuwait and Indonesia, just coming on."

**MMcB:** "Thank you, that's explanatory."

**Sir Peter:** "The Americans at that time were under suspicion for trying to take things over from us as we were so weak after the war with our resources. It isn't true, like many of the myths we have in the press today. On the whole, they never did that. They were much more concerned with protecting their own concessions in Venezuela and elsewhere; they didn't want to start something going they couldn't control. So that was what I was doing, and I went on doing that until early '53. At the same time I was also dealing with the sterling area interests from the Foreign Office point of view, helping with the negotiations. Iraq was there in the sterling area."

**MMcB:** "That was the sterling area, wasn't it, all the people we owed money to."

**Sir Peter:** "Yes. It was very important to us and we also owed money to so many. We were always in debt. The only time I talked to Winston Churchill, who was very old by then, was in the debate in the House of Commons about sterling, Egypt and repaying the sterling debts there. It was difficult to get him to accept my drafts. At that time there was a Foreign Office paper devised by Roger Makins, Lord Sherfield as he became later. He became a close friend and in fact I gave the address at his funeral a few years ago. He was a great man; then he was the deputy secretary in charge of all the economic departments, including ours. He wrote a paper, which became accepted by the Foreign

Office, on what our objectives were, our overseas objectives. I remember this clearly. There were four points to it. The first was to maintain the cohesion of the British Commonwealth and Empire. (Imagine today the equivalent of your four objectives.) This is 1950. Two, keep the sterling area together. Three, stay close partners with the United States Four, (no special mention of Europe as I recall), maintain the balance of payments. It is worthwhile recording those, because it is what governed our policies at that time, particularly the point you made about debts. At every turn we were aware of our weakness of resources. We'd sold up our great wealth and strength in Latin America (we'd owned the railways and all that). Our balance of payments had been covered by the surpluses we had there. We couldn't pay our debts to the Americans. Every point you turned to, there was a balance of payment problem. It governed our attitudes at that time. This idea of losing money, whether it was in foreign exchange, balance of payments, taxation. This is why Abadan became so important to us. Now we would say there are so many resources. There weren't those resources at that time, and, in a way, Germany, as you know, recovered more quickly than we did."

**MMcB:** "Because they hadn't inherited the same burden of debt?"

**Sir Peter:** "Absolutely."

**MMcB:** "...And been wiped out with all their wealth. Whereas we started off with negative balances everywhere."

**Sir Peter:** "And we were so reluctant to knock down our cotton factories and start again. They had to."

**MMcB:** "Well, they had them knocked down for them."

**Sir Peter:** "This is probably a waste of time doing this, because everybody knows these facts."

**MMcB:** “I think they don’t.”

**Sir Peter:** “You stop me if they do.”

**MMcB:** “They’ve forgotten.”

**Sir Peter:** “That’s why the Abadan crisis became so important. I should just refer at this point, because you mentioned before points of general interest in my work, to the significance of Anglo-American relations. How proud we were, including junior people like myself, of the wartime experience, and D-Day and everything else, of working with the Americans. Apart from de Gaulle, we hadn’t been working with anyone else during the war years, and the soldiers in particular were very powerful in those days. Later on I used to sit on the Chiefs of Staff committee on behalf of Pat Dean, with Mountbatten and all these top people, Solly Zuckerman and so on. We had resources; we were powerful in those days. These people had all their opposite numbers, (like General Bradley) whom they’d fought the war with, at hand. That’s why, later on, Eden thought as he did about General Eisenhower who had become President of the United States. He assumed he would support him over Suez. I knew that to be true, in a funny unconscious way. That’s an important aside, which people like me could notice. That is how the world had to be, particularly with people like Roger Makins. That took precedence over everything. He wrote, at the time of Suez, about how to handle the Americans. He was so effective as our ambassador. Yet he was also effective to the extent that he tended to ignore Europe, as reflected in our hesitancy, in ‘48/49, in the beginning of the European moves on coal and steel. It started building up then, our holding back on that story. A lot of it was due to a sense of unfamiliarity with the post-war Europe which contrasted with the familiarity we were so used to in the American context. It was very true of top mandarins like Sherfield, and partly true of even junior people like myself.”

**MMcB:** “Kirkpatrick was at one with Eden in connection with Suez, wasn’t he?”

**Sir Peter:** “Very much so. We’ll come to that. So, coming up to Abadan was this mandarin philosophy. We were impoverished, we would stick at all costs with the Americans, we mustn’t let the sterling area fall, we must keep our foreign exchange and our taxes flowing in.”

**MMcB:** “Can you remember why the idea of the sterling area was so important. It seems it was only a means by which we had to pay money we hadn’t got to other people.”

**Sir Peter:** “It was a world currency, which the French franc never was. That gave us access to resources of various kinds, in part with the Americans, which the others didn’t have. I think the IMF had just been created and the IBRD at this time. We had a status in that as a world currency which gave us advantages. It also, I think, was a question of pride in the Empire, which we hadn’t yet lost. Colonies were only just beginning to come under attack in the early fifties. We had lost India, but we (apart from Churchill) meant to lose India, and we had a policy of moving from colonial to Dominion status, which the French were never wise enough to pursue with their colonies. Rather like Rome, they were all tied to Paris. Dominions meant independence. My father, who went out to Ceylon to write the new constitution called for dominion status. We were very proud of all that. Sterling area, world currency, goes with this concept, I think. There may be other reasons, but I think that’s probably how it worked. So Abadan became rather important at that time.”

**MMcB:** “We’re talking about 1950?”

**Sir Peter:** “1951.”

**MMcB:** “1951. That was when Mossadeq nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.”

**Sir Peter:** “Yes. Now, my own views count for a bit at that time as I was later writing the papers of the Policy Planning Committee. I was aware then of Empire, of Commonwealth, because of my father too, who became Governor-General of Ceylon, the first and last white Governor-General of Ceylon, the good side of Empire, the moving side towards independence, and dominion status, and aware, as you say, of what happened in India. We were all quietly appalled at the way Mountbatten had handled partition; when you think of the good things we’d done in the Empire, and then the millions of people killed because of that kind of partition of Pakistan and India, and so on. I was aware of that. I was also aware, in 1949, of the Mandate of Palestine. It was our responsibility. We gave that up. Again it was Empire, of some kind, slipping away, India first, Palestine second, a sign of the times we were talking about. And then two years later, Abadan, four or five years later, Suez. This was a sequence of events which I became part of, and never free of. Nor am I now, free of, in a sense.

The Abadan story was exactly what we were talking about. It had two parts to it. One was the practical one of the value to the Treasury of this immense resource. Sterling was Iran’s reserve currency, with large gold holdings. We had to discourage Iran from asking for payments in dollars and urge her to buy as much as possible for sterling in the UK. We (AIOC) were rather mean about the oil payment to the Shah, but Abadan brought in enormous sums of money in those days, to the Treasury, in terms of our balance of payments. We hardly hear of balance of payments nowadays. The figures are so enormous, trillions or billions. In those days, I assure you, whether you were £500million above or below the line was crucial. When I was ambassador in Tehran some years later, we sold the Chieftain tank to the Shah. We sold him almost as many Chieftain tanks (he had so much money at that time) as we had in BAOR (British Army of the Rhine). I even had to lend him the one REME brigadier we had in BAOR, whom he rather needed, in order to help him with his new tanks. That’s an indication of the impact of the balance of payments, of foreign exchange, also all these budgetary matters. So the financial side was immensely important. Churchill had, after the First World War, switched over from coal to oil for the British Navy. That was the major reason why we took 51% stock of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which became BP. We took that as a

precaution, so we had always this resource. There's a wonderful passage, which I gave to the BBC, in which Churchill said how he'd saved money for the British taxpayer all the time, this oil for the British Navy from Abadan.

That was the one factor why it was so important. The second one was the prestige, one which we have already discussed. It stood for something still even after India and Pakistan. Here was the largest refinery in the world, the Americans had nothing like it, Germany and France, nothing like that, this was a unique thing which we had in the Middle East, of a colossal size. And we mustn't let that go cheaply, or, if it was going, then the compensation must be enormous.

We were talking about Abadan, in two respects, one as a very important resource for the Treasury in budgetary terms, balance of payments, foreign exchange, and so on; and the other, after the losses in India and Palestine, the nibbling away, so to speak, of our pride in our Commonwealth and Empire. This was a major factor compared with which the Americans did not have a comparable experience. So, faced with Mossadeq's challenge of nationalisation, the last thing we wanted was to lose this important refinery. I was handling the matter on our side, from the Foreign Office point of view in London. There was then the Ministry of Fuel and Power, with Sir Donald Ferguson, very much on the side of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and there was Willy Fraser, of course, the chairman of the Company. There were a lot of opinions about him and what he could have done. We were, at different times, being challenged, why didn't we use the government's 51% holding to insist on a rather more conciliatory, sensible policy than Willy Fraser was adopting. He was wholly in charge. He had some very good technical people under him, but no one to stand up to him in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, later BP. He used to annoy us very much by his attitude. He regarded the Foreign Office and the other people as 'the West-End gentleman' as he called us. He was the dour Scot and thought that we had no idea about business, certainly not doing business with Persians who ought to be kept where they were, happy, very well treated, they would never get what they were getting from any other source; we'd risked a lot, we'd taken the oil out, we had the tankers (which they didn't have), to dispose of it, so why all this nonsense and

bother. That was his attitude. We were vexed by this attitude, which we couldn't change even though HMG had this 51% holding, because it was safeguarded by a clause which said you can't interfere in commercial matters. We said we'd gone beyond this, it had now become a matter of national interest. All that went on, and I played a part in it. Then it was found that Mossadeq had not only nationalised the refinery, but was threatening to expel the British staff from Abadan. There were about 30,000 people working there, and I'm bound to say that they tended to live in ways, rather like in India, which excluded Iranians socially.

This is how it developed. A new Prime Minister called Razmara, had been appointed by the Shah, and was prepared to sign the supplemental oil agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Then he was assassinated. Trouble started, and Mossadeq took power against the Shah, then nationalised the company. He regarded it as the symbol of everything he hated; the foreign power, particularly the British, gaining this strong position in that world. He was an old nationalist, aristocrat and landowner.”

**MMcB:** “Was there anything we could do about it?”

**Sir Peter:** “Yes. At the crucial time we had been mean. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company were mean in what they were offering in terms of percentages and royalties and so on. We had this chap called George McGhee who came over. The Americans had just made an agreement with Venezuela, and an agreement with Saudi Arabia, what we called the 50-50 agreement, so they actually had a different basis for handing out a percentage to those governments. There was an agreement on prices, royalties and taxes on a 50-50 basis. The American companies could retain their necessary profits because the American Treasury gave them the tax relief. The British Treasury would not play that game.”

**MMcB:** “Who was McGhee? Was he British?”

**Sir Peter:** “George McGhee. No, he was the American State Department assistant secretary in charge of oil everywhere. He later became American ambassador to Turkey

and Germany. He was a very powerful figure. He worked for Truman as a young man and was regarded by all the old pundits in the Foreign Office as, 'who is this young fellow, coming in, telling us how to run this affair'. He regarded us, and the AIOC, as out of date trying still to reach a settlement for an oil concession by paying royalties. They had this example, which we then adopted, eventually too late, which was on the basis of a 50-50 arrangement."

**MMcB:** "But we had to accept nationalisation by the Iranians."

**Sir Peter:** "We had to. We were a Labour government who nationalised quite a lot of things in Britain themselves."

**MMcB:** "How was the compensation worked out?"

**Sir Peter:** "We never got proper compensation. We insisted on it, but they never gave us adequate compensation. We tried all sorts of things to try to make an arrangement, but we, at least I and others, knew that it was impossible for Mossadeq to reach a negotiated agreement. He wasn't dotty. He appeared dotty to us; he lay in bed and wept some of the time. He was quite difficult to understand, and, a traditional Persian landowner who had been a good governor of one of the provinces, of Fars, and he was quite popular in his way. All that he saw was this expropriation by the British, nearly fifty years before, of an Iranian resource, which should be theirs so he should lay down the terms who should run it, when and why. We said 'he can't run it, this is a very complicated affair, this refinery, there's a thing called a catalytic cracker, which is a complicated machine for refining purposes, and only we could run it'. He got hold of some Yugoslavs who did it perfectly well. Exactly the same with Nasser at Suez, 'only certain pilots, they must be British, could get you through', we said. We were in an unreal world dealing with him. At that time, we did make preparations for military intervention. A lot of people in the media today, or people doing research, come across this in what's been revealed from Cabinet files and so on. Mannie Shinwell (Emmanuel Shinwell), was the Minister of War at that time and very popular with our military

people. So often, Labour type people who become ministers of defence, get on particularly well with the chiefs of staff. Anyone looking at the record now might think that it was touch and go whether we would have invaded. We sent troops and a destroyer to Cyprus which was the potential invasion point in that part of the world, and there was the question whether we should just take the island of Abadan or just rescue our people on the island by using force. This threat of military action sounded off the alarm bells in Washington. I knew perfectly well, with Attlee there, there'd be no question of him approving such a thing."

**MMcB:** "So we're back to 1951? Before the election?"

**Sir Peter:** "Yes, just before. The election must have been September, October, something like that. Truman was there still, with his people, and (Dean) Acheson was his right hand. They were worried about it in Washington. They always thought we might mishandle our relations with Iran and push Iran into the eager arms of the Russians. This is what dominated their thought. It was the time of the Korean outbreak, the Korean War, where China was prepared to play a new offensive role. The Americans thought too much in cold war terms. They saw the Iranian problem differently; it wasn't depriving them of their budgetary resources or anything like that, but they were concerned that we were mishandling it with Mossadeq, were obtuse, too obtuse, not controlling Willy Fraser, and were allowing Mossadeq and these people to ruin the Iranian economy because they were not going to get sufficient revenue if they nationalised everything. And we were stopping them selling their oil because we controlled, with the Americans, all the tankers. If the economy collapsed, the Russians might come in (they had before tried to take over the north-west part of Iran for their own oil purposes), and this worried them. So they then sent Averill Harriman to Iran, in about July. They wanted us to make enough concessions to Mossadeq to keep him in power so that things wouldn't be so chaotic that he would be thrown out. We saw things quite differently. The British ambassador there, called Shepherd, who was a bachelor, was cut off by Mossadeq from all negotiations. He would only negotiate with Richard Stokes (the Minister of Materials who was, curiously, in the Cabinet in those days). He led the British Mission to negotiate

in the place of AIOC. Our team comprised the Treasury people, the Ministry of Fuel and Power, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company people, and myself, in control to the extent that I handled not only the communications to the Foreign Office, but I accompanied Stokes every day on our talks with Mossadeq in his little villa. Mossadeq spoke some terrible French he learnt in the Sorbonne in 1890, and Stokes couldn't speak it. So a lot of this was done through me."

**MMcB:** "You cut out the ambassador all together?"

**Sir Peter:** "The ambassador was cut out. We didn't cut him out, Mossadeq wanted to talk to the team from London (with Anglo-Iranian Oil within our team, so to speak), rather than to the British ambassador. I knew and reported at the time that the Americans were over-alarmed by this cold war fear and the communist bogey, while we wanted to make no unnecessary or risky concession. Our policy was a policy of what used to be called 'masterly inactivity', in other words 'let Mossadeq stew in his own juice'. That was approved. That's what happened.

Eventually, even Dean Acheson accepted, reluctantly I think, that you could not do a deal with Mossadeq because he was not capable of coming to a practical agreement. He was being threatened all the time by his own Frankensteins, all the extreme parties and strong personalities, which he had stimulated. A chap, rather like Khomeini, called Kashani, who was the Khomeini of his day, had stirred up fierce anti-British elements and that was what Mossadeq was having to contend with; so a deal became impossible. McGhee never realised that, but Acheson did towards the end. The final outcome involved Monty Woodhouse. He worked with Kermit Roosevelt, who was the CIA representative then, to oust Mossadeq and put someone else in power. They started doing it, then it didn't come off, and the Shah fled away to Rome for two days. A long story, I won't bore you with it all. But it only became a possibility after Winston Churchill came back to power in late 1951 and Eisenhower came back to power in Washington in 1952. They agreed together, these two, to mount this venture at the end of '52 to oust Mossadeq. That was one of Winston's last roles, as he was a bit past it himself by that time. Anyhow, the Shah

resumed control. How far it was due to MI6 and the Americans, and how far, as the Americans more or less claim, it was all them, we don't bother with that. It happened.

The Shah then, having been a timid figure, became encouraged to do a deal now with his new Prime Minister, General Zahedi, father of Ardeshir Zahedi, whom first I knew as Foreign Minister when I was ambassador in Iran in 1971 and, later in 1974 when we were both the respective ambassadors to the United States. I'm sure Denis Wright would have talked to you about the consortium, the multinational oil consortium there, because he had a hand in that, did he not? Anyway, whoever it was, he was very good at it.

I can't let this one go without blowing a small trumpet. On the British side, I think I invented it, at least I helped to invent it back in London, and it's quite good to know that although the Americans might claim now that it was all their invention, in point of fact, the basic idea also emerged from the Foreign Office. British Petroleum (they were called that under the new agreement in 1954), would return to Iran as part of this multinational consortium, with the Iran National Oil Company now owning all the reserves and facilities, and the consortium managing the oil and purchasing and disposing of the output, as we had the tankers and all that to go with it. Each company in the consortium sold its own share of the oil through its own marketing arrangements. BP again, curiously after all that had happened, were dominating the scene, owning 40% of the consortium, with Shell 14% and five American companies owning other little bits. William Roger Louis, of Texas University, one of the best American historians to have written major works on the British empire, Commonwealth and the Middle East wrote a book in 1988 on "Mossadeq - Iranian Nationalism and Oil". which says that the establishment of the consortium was a great turning point worldwide for the oil industry 'when the former concept of foreign concessions was replaced by negotiation and co-operation', and 'the actual architect of the reorganisation of the Iranian oil industry on the British side was Peter Ramsbotham, then at the oil desk at the Foreign Office'. So I have to put this in, of course."

**MMcB:** “Yes. Very good. So after that little episode, you went off as head of chancery to UKDEL New York.”

**Sir Peter:** “That’s right. I think I was asked to go there by Gladwyn Jebb who was our key figure, the ambassador, there, who incidentally had drafted a large part of the UN Charter at the formation. He had seen me when Mossadeq went to the Security Council. I went out to New York to advise Gladwyn on how to handle Mossadeq, who was in an impossible position at that time. We got on well, and he asked me to come out and succeed Denis Lasky as head of chancery in our UN delegation, which I did. That was quite fun. I was there right through to Suez, and I came back just after Suez.”

**MMcB:** “So you were really in rather a hot seat at the time of Suez.”

**Sir Peter:** “Yes, particularly hot when we got to Suez, but also the UN itself was changing at the time. We’ve forgotten that. When I got there in ’53 we were just closing the negotiation of the Korean problem. Nutting was the young Foreign Office minister in charge. He and I were engaged in much of this business, and also in helping the Americans over POW releases in China. We had quite a significant role then. I’m trying to contrast our position there before and after Suez, in the light of what we’ve been talking about; our standing in the Commonwealth, the sterling area, our world position. When I got there, the UN consisted of 53 members, and today it must be getting on for 200. We ran it, with the Americans. We were (the same pattern again) the small country still believing ourselves to be a global power, not really recognising our weaknesses everywhere, and the Americans were only beginning to be ready to play a major role in the Middle East or to take over our role in Greece. Germany, of course, was out. France, had its communist members and an uncertain government before de Gaulle had resumed power. France’s military resources were incomplete. Italy was not a UN member, another belligerent, nor was Japan. So we felt rather grand in the UN. We were running some of the committees. We did a lot of the drafting on the resolutions because we were good at that. The Americans were better at twisting arms. It worked quite well, at that period. We, the British, sat in between Cabot Lodge, who was representing the

Americans on the Security Council, and Vyshinsky, representing the Russians. Vyshinsky's head of chancery, or equivalent, who later became Soviet ambassador in London, was on my left. If I'd read Russian I could have read all his briefings, but I couldn't."

**MMcB:** "Could he read yours!?"

**Sir Peter:** "I hadn't thought of that! Anyhow, what was interesting was, at that time we had this position again where we were very much on the stage. The media were beginning to come into the world."

**MMcB:** "Gladwyn Jebb became a star of American television."

**Sir Peter:** "Exactly. That was the beginning of it. There were no stars like that before. In fact in 1953/54, as far as I know, I don't think we had television news in Britain."

**MMcB:** "I think we did."

**Sir Peter:** "In America they had few programmes nationwide; they may have had it in the different states. Gladwyn took on Vyshinsky, because the American representative, senator Austin, had no personality to answer Vyshinsky's clever denunciations; and Gladwyn, you know, Eton and Magdalen, in that lordly sort of way, appealed to the Americans, coast to coast, and that's what they listened to. He was very proud of this until one day Paul Wright, who was Information Officer responsible to me instead of chancery, came in and said, 'There's something terrible. The ambassador is grumpy. He won't do his work, and I don't know what's going to happen.' Anyhow, the story was that at that time he'd been No.7 coast to coast TV personality, and he'd just been pipped at that post by Marilyn Monroe, who'd appeared naked in a film called 'Niagara'. I've never heard of it since, but I remember it well. You used to have these great posters along the highways. And it took some time to coax him out of that."

We couldn't expand membership of the United Nations (this was before Suez) from 53. We wanted Jordan to be a member and all the people under our wing and protection. The Russians wanted some of their people in the Soviet Union, other than Belarus, who was already a member, and Ukraine. It all got stuck in the Security Council because of this Albanian Corfu problem of the gold which they owed us. So we would not allow her membership of the UN. When the votes came, they came in alphabetical order, Albania starting it, and Jordan further down the line, and so on, and we would never agree until they paid the 'Corfu' gold."

**MMcB:** "That's when they sank the RN destroyer, in 1946 I think it was, and refused to pay us compensation."

**Sir Peter:** "I can't remember the details of it. We still, at this time, would not let the UN expand, and it got stuck there at 53, and I, rather naughtily, worked my way through all these meetings and things like that by not encouraging it to go forward. I was all in favour of keeping the United Nations nice and small at 53 where we still exercised our Commonwealth power, whatever it was. I knew perfectly well that once you took that bloc away, they'd all come tumbling in from everywhere, as they have done now up to 200 members. We saw that picture, which wasn't good for our standing or our position. But then came a Canadian foreign minister, called Martin, I think, who came in and found a very clever procedural way (I've forgotten what it was now) of getting through this problem of Albania and the blocked voting, and they all came tumbling in at that point.

The whole of the United Nations was governed by the big power groups. The Latin American group was immensely powerful, (they're not now), and we had to have very able Latin American advisers with us going inside and helping present the thing correctly. And also, with Nehru and Krishna Menon, we had this powerful non-aligned group who were more pious than God, and who used to annoy us a lot, but they were powerful at the time of Suez. That was the atmosphere we had. We had all the big names on my side of

the house, Jebb, Pierson Dixon, Kirkpatrick, Norman Brook, Makins, Cadogan, Mountbatten, Fitzmaurice, Templar, and all that. Pierson Dixon managed it all in New York, a wonderful man and ambassador. I was with him most of that time, alongside him in New York.”

**MMcB:** “Another star of American television.”

**Sir Peter:** “He died so quickly after he’d retired in ’61 after being ambassador in Paris where he arranged for me to join him again in 1962. A wonderful man.”

**MMcB:** “So the Suez campaign broke, and you were there and saw our humiliation.”

**Sir Peter:** “Yes, it was appalling. A lot of us at the time were thinking, ‘Well should I retire?’ I helped Pierson Dixon send two telegrams on, I think, 5 November really saying, ‘If we go on planning to bomb Cairo or Port Said, and civilian casualties take place at a time when the Americans are absolutely insisting on a ceasefire, our name will be mud and linked up with the Israelis, and we will never raise our heads again for many years.’ One message sent by Dixon was, ‘In those circumstances we will have to withdraw from the United Nations.’ Pretty high thing to send, a private telegram. I was very much with him.”

**MMcB:** “Anthony Nutting. Was he still around?”

**Sir Peter:** “Anthony Nutting was in London. He couldn’t take it and he resigned. He was the minister of state.”

**MMcB:** “The only one to do so.”

**Sir Peter:** “I think so. There may have been one or two other junior people. I was too junior. I remember saying to my late wife, Frances, ‘It’s no good me retiring, I

couldn't earn my living tomorrow.' My role was helping Dixon defend Britain's case in the UN. The extraordinary way in which the American delegation treated us, I'll never forget. No other period in my career like it. We seemed to be untouchable to the American delegation. Not all of them; three or four. We had run the UN together, you know. They had the best whisky sours in the bar at the UN which we drank with our American delegation friends. We used to make arrangements 'You control that committee, I'll control this one,' that sort of thing. Here they were, turning their backs on us, literally. Cabot Lodge, who was a politician, his relations with Dixon were sorely tried to put it at the least. They tried to pass motions late at night without informing us, and all that. It was very bad.

On the third or fourth evening (we had a different time scale from London, my wife would bring in my shirts, it was like a wartime activity, in a way) a telegram came in reporting what Eden had said in the House that afternoon, which was, 'If the United Nations can take over responsibility of this police activity, then there'd be no-one happier than I.' That had been conjured up in London with Norman Robertson, who was the Canadian High Commissioner, and Kirkpatrick, under great pressure from Dixon, saying unless we can find some way of bringing the UN in, our position was very poor. I got it on the tape, I think, before the telegram to Dixon just in time for him to announce this in the General Assembly where the Americans and others had moved us from the Security Council, the first case of a "uniting for peace resolution". John Holmes, Lester Pearson's private secretary, said to me 'This has come from us here,' and between us we did help to get it spread around in the General Assembly. Rather ahead of the game, because the game was to show we were not aggressors going in with the Israelis; we were now policing/preventing a war by bringing in the United Nations who would try to have a presence in the Middle East to solve these problems, including the transit of the canal. The next day we gave a much fuller account of what had happened. Dixon from then on was finding ways of delaying American pressure for a cease-fire and gaining time. Anthony Eden was determined to land some forces in Cairo or Port Said, in order to have a position of strength to argue from – 'I won't withdraw my troops until . . .' But they were late in leaving Cyprus, under General Keightley, they were still on the high seas,

and the paratroops hadn't even gone in. On, I think, 5 November, Dixon was saying by telegram, 'You must announce now that there will be no further action of any kind, then we might be able to move forward and some of the heat will be taken off us and fixed on the Russians in Budapest (who were doing exactly the same thing).' Eden would not agree, he wouldn't allow that to happen, he had to have a military occupation first. Then Hammarskjold, rather unwisely I thought, circulated a document that evening in the General Assembly, stating that the British were about to attack non-military targets in Cairo. That was bad. Eden wouldn't give the cease-fire at that moment. I remember very well, about 3 o'clock in the morning our time, on the telephone in Dixon's flat, in between meetings, I had the extension of the telephone in the bathroom and he was talking to Eden in his room. They were friends from Yalta days, Eden and Dixon. Eden must have been high on drugs, I think, at that time, because of his pain, and was saying, 'Oh Bob (he talked in that terrible First World War Oxford accent), the para boys are just going in' and one cringed on the telephone. He couldn't have known what the General Assembly was like. 'The para boys are going in there, we're going to be there, everything is going fine, we are getting in our positions' and all the rest of it, at the very time when the cease-fire was due. So we got over that, and he finally did get some troops ashore, and because of what the Russians were doing in Budapest, some of the heat was taken off us, by chance, and it didn't appear as bad as it had appeared. We did bomb the radio station in Cairo.

The Americans went on, uncompromisingly pressing us. They had no idea of helping us at all, quite wrongly I think. They identified themselves with their own past, with sympathetic agreement with colonised people, because they'd got their own independence from us some years ago."

**MMcB:** "Yes, but they'd given Nasser some ceremonial dagger, hadn't they, at some stage, and of course they were also threatening to sell sterling."

**Sir Peter:** "They were. This is what actually turned it for us. It was so strange that row. Actually, between the moment I was listening on the telephone and heard Eden

saying 'The para boys are going in', seven hours later, in between that there'd been the Cabinet meeting in London, Macmillan (who was Chancellor of the Exchequer) had said, 'Sterling is in such a position of weakness, the Americans are not going to help us, we're running out of money, now, and unless we do it absolutely now we're in a really big jam.' Eden then immediately agreed the cease-fire following up what he had said in the House 'If you, the UN, could do this as well as us.' Lester Pearson then proposed a United Nations force should go in. Eden said, 'If they do that they must join up with my troops out there and do it with them.' Unrealistic of course, as the UN would never agree on that. But this went on. Selwyn Lloyd, who was foreign secretary, came out to negotiate how it should be done. He was complimentary to Dixon, helping Dixon have a bit of a rest, but the crisis was over in that sense.

I had quite an important role there with Hammarskjold. Bob Dixon handed that one over for me to do, which was the clearing up in the Suez Canal. How do you get the ships through? The Egyptian foreign minister was called Fawzi, brilliantly clever, and Hammarskjold admired him. I remember going in and saying, 'I'm afraid my government really insists that we've got all the equipment, and nobody else has, to remove these blockaded ships.' The Egyptians had blockaded the whole thing. Hammarskjold, exhausted after days without sleep, felt it impossible that we, the sinners, should be brought in like that. He turned away to the window and wept, he was so emotionally wrought. In the end, the Dutch got some good salvagers in, we got a few advisers in, you know the usual compromise. That's when I saw a lot of him in those days and developed quite a close relationship. He liked to discuss things, and later he would send me the odd message to the Foreign Office recalling this or that event or problem."

**MMcB:** "I think that probably deals with New York, Sir Peter. You returned from there at the beginning of 1957. So what were you doing then?"

**Sir Peter:** "I had two or three months not doing very much. Then I was appointed, under Sir Patrick Dean, to the PUS Department. We started a little group of people

which developed into the Policy Planning Department of the Foreign Office. This was designed by Con O'Neill, a considerable figure in the reorganisation of the Office. Until Suez, we really had no feeling or need to have a central policy planning element in the British Foreign Service like they had in Washington, because of the old parody (I've forgotten how it goes) of Lord Salisbury, wasn't it, that you're in the boat going down the river and as long as the boat doesn't hit either bank you're doing very well in foreign policy and you don't need any elaborate forecasting. That was how it was. I think Suez showed that it wasn't altogether a healthy way of proceeding, and we ought to look ahead at problems rather more closely, and also more generally rather than department by department. That was the idea, and Hoyer Millar, who was PUS, was very much in favour of it. Con O'Neill actually recommended me for that job.

I started the Policy Planning Department. In the early stages, I remember, I used to attend, on behalf of Patrick Dean, some meetings of the Chiefs of Staff committee. A lot of our planning work came out of demands, particularly by Mountbatten, for clear forecasting by the Foreign Office of situations ahead, enabling him and the joint chiefs to plan whether they needed a headquarters for a theatre of operations here, there e.g. in East Africa. Mountbatten thought in those sort of terms. I would attend these meetings when Pat Dean couldn't get there. In those days we still had quite considerable forces. We went into Kuwait, you may remember, at that time, and into Jordan, with the Americans offshore Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, that period when we were active there, only to find that when we got into Jordan, we hadn't connected up our codes with the Americans' sea codes and we couldn't really operate very well. Communication with the navies was a problem. But we did have power.

Solly Zuckerman would attend these meetings. He was a defence adviser. He and I were the outsiders coming to these meetings. Mountbatten and his grand colleagues were like stoated rabbits when Solly, this strange South African Jew, started saying something about e.g. nuclear defence philosophy. He was quite outside their experience. It is difficult to explain, but they would almost say, 'Yes, Sir' to him in this funny

relationship. Casper John represented the Navy. They were great figures, so I learned a lot in that respect at that time.

Then, also on that side, the nuclear problem arose. It was a new phenomenon. The Chiefs of Staff and all the experts on the military and naval side, were totally unfamiliar with it in terms of policies. They had all studied Clausewitz, they knew all about ordinary battles and things of that kind. This was a new world.”

**MMcB:** “Is that where Solly Zuckerman got his power from, his greater knowledge.”

**Sir Peter:** “He did originally. He was a zoologist, I think, and he had a great deal of knowledge. He was in Oxford in the early war, studying the reaction of apes under certain bombing conditions, and that’s how he started. He came into touch with the professor Lindemann.

My little policy planning group had two or three people working with me. This was before Crispin Tickell and Philip Ziegler joined us. Then there was Henry Kissinger, whom I knew slightly, because, as a policy planner I used to meet him occasionally. This was in the early days when Kissinger was still at Harvard before he had joined Nixon. Anyhow, he had just written a long book (this was about 1958/59) on the problems of nuclear power in terms of the international balance of powers. He was an expert. He’d made his name on the study of the Congress of Europe. This was very much his field. It was an important book. I can’t remember how it arose, but I had a clever young man called Richard Wilding who later left the Foreign Office to join the Treasury. He was bright, and he summarised this critical book by Kissinger so well that we presented it to Mountbatten and the Chiefs of Staff, who were fascinated by this, because it was something that no one on their side was properly aware of. We had got outside the routine studies. These rather small things rather made one’s name. Before I knew where I was, I don’t think I’m exaggerating here, we were asked to write a paper on the question of ‘Can there be a limited nuclear war?’ A sort of Mountbatten question now. There was

nobody in the Foreign Service (in '58), or anywhere, who knew how to answer that question, so we tried. I know it sounds absurd, but we wrote the paper, which went up to the JIC (the Joint Intelligence Committee) and onwards. One of my additions to it was the possibility of the Pope intervening at a certain point.

I mention these things now to illustrate how, in those days, on the defence side, the Foreign Office was beginning to play a wider role in advising on defence security matters. I doubt if it had happened before. Anyway, we did play that role, and we wrote a number of papers on these subjects. Then they asked us to do a major study, again from Mountbatten, about the future, called 'The Future Policy study'. A major paper. I went to Chequers twice. The other day at a Ditchley conference, which I was also attending, Peter Hennessy, the historian, said, 'Can you get the paper which Peter Ramsbotham masterminded in 1960 because there's been nothing like it since?' One of the things in the paper was 'should we have an independent nuclear deterrent? If so, how independent?' The head of the RAF was wrapped up in the Union Jack. He thought it should be independent of everything, which I said was impossible because we were partly dependent on the Americans and so on. Or should it be independent from the point of view of 'it is our finger on the trigger, not theirs.' All these were major questions under the overall supervision of Norman Brook, who was the Cabinet secretary. There was considerable input from someone called Otto Clark from the Treasury. There were some big mandarins then. And we dealt with every conceivable aspect of our resources, our potential powers; everything you could think of for the next ten years."

**MMcB:** "Did the Ministry of Defence play no part in this?"

**Sir Peter:** "Yes they did. By this time, I was on another committee, with Solly Zuckerman in the Ministry of Defence chaired by Mottishead, preparing this sort of thing, dealing with these questions. In the end, we produced two major reports, through Norman Brook, both of them for Cabinet ministers. Macmillan decided they were so important, they would have two days at Chequers. The first report was analytical and descriptive, if you like, setting out the problem. The second was recommendations for

suitable actions on the first report. I enjoyed myself there, it was great fun. The first was approved, in the sense that you approve a report which is descriptive. When we came to the second one for approval, it arrived at a time when there was some great crisis which completely intervened, and the Foreign Secretary couldn't be there. They took the nuclear bit out of it and did approve that, which is rather good, but the whole thing was never properly approved. Peter Hennessy must have seen it sometime.

I mention that because it was the beginning of restoring the Foreign Office as policy planners for a wider field. People like a head of Northern Department, Tom Brimelow, who was quite outstandingly able, couldn't understand how anyone as amateurish as I was, and my people, as far as Soviet policy was concerned, should be writing papers on our attitude to Soviet policy. He thought the thing was not comprehensive and not understandable, so we had difficulties with him. We did do a good paper on the Middle East. It was acknowledged to be good. I don't think people realised, but I did begin bringing in people from outside the Foreign Office to discuss confidential reports. So many secret reports aren't secret at all if you're dealing with ideas. It was only secret if you were giving new information to the Russians, or something. So I used to give some of these reports to reliable people. Max Beloff was a friend of mine, people like that, to come and help us with our studies. I was also responsible for preparing for summit meetings and, for example accompanying MacMillan and Alec Douglas Home on the three day meetings in Washington with the new President Kennedy in February, 1961.

That was that side. The other side of policy planning was the Western Organisations Department. We merged the two into the Western Organisations and Planning Department. There, I was in charge of the political side of entering Europe. I worked closely with Ted Heath whom I got to know well at that time. It was the economic side of entering Europe inside the Foreign Office that was dealt with elsewhere. That was obviously the major side, particularly with Frank Lee at the Board of Trade, and all those people. I used to come in on the political side."

**MMcB:** "What were the political aspects with which you dealt?"

**Sir Peter:** “Well, there was a thing called the Fouchet Report. At that time (?’61), Fouchet, who was the French ambassador in Denmark under de Gaulle’s auspices, wrote a report which he tried to get taken up by the other five EEC governments. We were much supported by Stark (Sir Andrew Stark, later ambassador to Denmark) throughout all this, as Michael Palliser would know. The Fouchet Report was an attempt to develop a political forum for the Five to express themselves in various European ways. I would write to people like Tony Rumbold in Paris, with Michael Butler working for him, and to Nichols in Brussels and so on. We would co-ordinate, very subtly, our replies, how far we would encourage some of those like Paul-Henri Spaak in Belgium whom we wanted to play an active role and which showed how European we were, to overcome negative aspects on the trade, sterling or Commonwealth side. The detail of it amazes me that we were so subtle. I would come to Ted Heath’s meetings. Michael Wilford, his private secretary, used to try to bring me in. It was always the political side. We know this argument still goes on, with Ted Heath saying it was meant to be political at the start and Macmillan saying it was a purely economic venture, so we don’t have to worry about political integration. I was particularly involved with all these arguments. Philip de Zulueta, who was a good friend of mine, gave me a short cut into No.10. Those are the sorts of things I was doing. And I saw the other work going on at that time, of course, from all the official papers. After I got to Paris as head of chancery, from the end of ’62 (with Bob Dixon killing himself commuting between Paris and Brussels, trying to do both jobs), Ted Heath came to stay with us. We lived in the gate house of the embassy in Paris, and Ted played the piano in the evening that de Gaulle had given his final veto. It was terribly sad. I remember drafting telegrams for Bob Dixon to send off, with Michael Butler doing the first draft, saying that we really don’t believe, whatever he may be saying hopefully, that General de Gaulle would ever agree to this. He was so upset at the agreement in Bermuda of Macmillan with Jack Kennedy concerning missiles. Macmillan had come out and gone pheasant shooting with de Gaulle at Rambouillet and had discussions, but still held on to the hope that de Gaulle would not say no.”

**MMcB:** “That’s a very important point you make about de Gaulle’s attitude.”

**Sir Peter:** “There was no question about it. Michael Butler, if he was going back as far as that in talking to you, must have covered that himself because he was very much our specialist. He knew the difference between a Gaullien and a Gaullist. He knew every subtle difference. He’d read all de Gaulle’s books and got into trouble, as you probably know, for mimicking de Gaulle and Gaullism at parties in Paris, and my job was to get him out of it.”

**MMcB:** “He didn’t tell me that.”

**Sir Peter:** “Well, it’s true. It’s known generally. It’s not a secret. I suspect that is why he never went back to Paris as ambassador. He would have been a good one.”

**MMcB:** “He must have been extremely good at the mimicry!”

**Sir Peter:** “He was. He was brilliant. I think that’s really all I can say about my political advice on Europe to Ted Heath, but it was a good and interesting relationship we had there. I admired very much what he was doing.”

**MMcB:** “And how about your relations with the French?”

**Sir Peter:** “At that time, I didn’t have many, until I went to Paris as head of chancery. I had good relations then. In fact so good that at that time one had to be careful not to get too involved with senior people in the Quai d’Orsay, who strongly objected to General de Gaulle wanting to remove France from NATO, on which I was much involved because of the defence side. Jacques de Granville was one of them, who really got into trouble because of that. So we were careful to watch our step; the Elysée was so quick to spot that sort of thing.”

**MMcB:** “How would they spot it?”

**Sir Peter:** “Because people were indiscreet, or had been talking at some dinner party with our French friends. The French, you know, were quite indiscreet in their houses at home, even when somebody else was there who could report back. Certainly Michael Butler was indiscreet and got into trouble. We’re not so bothered now as we used to be. We were so uptight about security in those days. Unless somebody really gets a secret, which is a real secret, which they shouldn’t get, I don’t think you have to put confidential on all those papers.

I enjoyed my time there in France, particularly travelling about. As head of chancery one had to travel visiting all the consular posts and consul-generals, and so on. It was a lovely job. Interestingly, Charles Lucet, who was directeur politique, like the PUS, at the Quai d’Orsay, and his no.2, Jacques de Beaumarchais, who became French ambassador to London later on, both of them could never quite understand how the junior officials at the Foreign Office were so well informed about what was going on. They were cleverer than we were, the French, the people I’m talking about, and guessed what was in our minds when we came to talk to them. We had an instruction to go to talk to so-and-so at the Quai d’Orsay about the problems in Africa, or some particular part of Africa, and you’d go in and he’d say, ‘Alors, Peter.’ I would say, ‘I want to talk about Nigeria’ or something. He would say, ‘Il y a trois points’ before I’d even started putting my questions to him! I would be pleased and send off a brilliantly clear telegram when I got back to the embassy. All that was true. What puzzled them so much was that they could do that so well, yet one department of the Quai d’Orsay didn’t really know what the other one was doing half the time. They were so grand and egotistical in so many ways. ‘How do you do it?’ They couldn’t understand. Everything that came into the Quai d’Orsay went down. They couldn’t understand how rather important dispatches came into the Foreign Office, and Miss Smith, a new third secretary looking after the Israeli desk, had every paper at hand, and knew exactly what was going on. If she thought nothing of the dispatch, which the ambassador had taken infinite pains to address to the secretary of state, she would put her initial on it, and it would disappear into the registry, or she would submit it upwards with a comment. Every telegram that came into the Foreign Office was distributed at once to every head of department. I knew exactly,

if I wanted to, what was going on in Madagascar. The French not. I'm talking about a long time ago, but it was interesting; it was their view of us at that time.

Anyhow, those were my days, and towards the end of that time (I did a lot of other things in Paris) I was already like one of those elderly perpetual students in a Chekhov play, I was perpetually head of chancery, and getting older and older. I'd been head of chancery right from Gladwyn Jebb in the early fifties, and here I was in the middle sixties, head of chancery still in Paris. And when Patrick Reilly took over from Bob Dixon as ambassador, they sent a telegram from London (I was now 47 years old) saying we want to send you as No.2 to our mission in Vietnam. I knew nothing about that area, I'd never been there, and I was getting on now. I said, 'my wife has headaches and things, it would be an absolutely impossible place for her.' 'No.' they were rather strict. And I said, 'Well, I don't want to go.' And they said, 'Well, you're entitled to say that, but it's not going to do your career any good.' So I said to Patrick Reilly, 'Will you support me? My friend, Alistair Buchan (we were at school together), who had started the Institute of Strategic Studies in London wanted me to come for a year or so to help him.' They wrote an annual report, which became quite famous, the ISS report. Patrick Reilly was wonderful. He wrote a powerful letter to the PUS, and back I went to London. I'd done four years or more in Paris. I had a nice time, took a long sabbatical. Among other things, I wrote this book (or 90% of it), but was disguised as a contributor because of my Paris embassy connection since the book was mildly critical of de Gaulle. We were giving in this book various models of Western Europe in the 1970s, and it's called 'Europe's Futures, Europe's Choices: Models of Western Europe in the 1970s.' It was edited by Alistair Buchan. At that time it was fashionable to have models, which were just coming into use in the academic world. These were frameworks for European choices each one taking into account likely American and Russian reaction. We produced six chapters. Evolutionary Europe, Atlanticised Europe, you can imagine, Europe des Etats, which Tony Blair is now introducing as a concept, which was de Gaulle's type of Europe. Fragmented Europe, which was an interesting one. Partnership Europe and Independent Federal Europe. You can imagine what that was. There were a

lot of references and two German students who were over here at that time contributed. It was quite well reviewed.

The end of that period would be 1968/69. I was 49, coming up to the last decade of my career, but still, there I was, not knowing what to do. When asked what I wanted to do I said I'd like to go as counsellor to Athens. They didn't want me to do that. Then came a Labour government. Paul Gore-Booth, the PUS, said, 'You've got to serve under a palm tree at some time or other. I know you haven't got much time left, but you haven't done any difficult posts.' Then they said, 'You're going as High Commissioner to Cyprus.' That suited me very well. I was High Commissioner with Makarios. Cyprus had been made independent in '60/'61, and was having a bad time with the Turkish Cypriots already in the north. My job was to try to see if we could get a settlement. I found some similarity with the cantons in Switzerland, that exactly fitted the situation. Rather like Northern Ireland, you can find intellectual solutions which are perfect in theory but useless in practice. I was negotiating (this is 30 years ago) with Mr Denktash in the north and Clerides in the south. Mr Clerides has now become president and Denktash looks exactly the same, 30 years later, in the north.

I'll give you a view, while of think of it, of Makarios. He was very popular, of course on the island, amongst the Greek Cypriots. In Washington, in 1974 where he'd escaped (he was being searched for by Greek colonels) when the Turks invaded in that period. I'd just become ambassador to the United States; so he wanted to see me when he got there. He'd come to see if the Americans would support him in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, and a notorious gangster from EOKA had seized the position as president. I can't remember what the details were, but once again, his poise, dignity and inherent courtesy were very much with him there. On the great Byzantine church feast days in Cyprus, there was his hieratic figure, a hot, hot day, there, with all his robes on, wearing a sceptre. He was the last surviving priest-king. He was a dignified, cheerful and confident man. I remember that people used to think that they would get his assent as he was so courteous. Not a bit. Anyhow, at certain times, one could get quite close to him. He believed, I think, that he was protected by providence, and in a sense he was. I

remember an extraordinary, rather miraculous escape, from assassination in 1970. One early morning I woke up (my High Commission office was not far away), to the crackle of machine-gun fire. In the mornings, he was always the archbishop and in the afternoons he was the president. He was just taking off in his small helicopter from the palace to attend some ceremony in a monastery in the south somewhere, and the would-be assassins, who had probably come from Greece, and had stationed themselves on the flat roof of a house nearby, opened fire at almost point blank range at the helicopter, not even grazing the archbishop on their side, but riddling his Greek pilot, almost killing him, on the other side. Somehow, the pilot managed to land the helicopter in the street, and Makarios commandeered a passing car and rushed to the President's house. The gunmen escaped. I immediately drove up to see him there. There was a weird atmosphere. You could see that a coup, in a sense, hadn't come off, and yet had, and there were weird, unknown figures moving around in the offices. It was one of those strange affairs. Makarios could escape from awkward situations like that. There's a very good account of his personal way of life in a book written in 1957 by a retired Indian Army officer, whose wife gave English lessons to Makarios whom we had exiled to the Seychelles. In teaching him, she would say, 'What was your mother like?' and he, unwittingly, miles away from anywhere, told her, and nobody else before or since, a great deal about himself, which is rather interesting."

**MMcB:** "Who did you take over from in Nicosia?"

**Sir Peter:** "I think it was Alec Bishop, I'm not sure."

**MMcB:** "Anyway, you went from there to ?"

**Sir Peter:** "I went from Cyprus to Iran. Later, in a rather curious way, I remember when I was pushed out of Washington, there were all these sympathetic letters in 'The Times'. I got a letter from Sherfield (Roger Makins) saying, 'Well, there's one thing you can claim, your unique position. I think you're the only member of the Service, ever, to have been a high commissioner, an ambassador and a governor and commander-in-chief.'

Ted Heath, who had just taken over as prime minister in 1970, surprising Wilson who thought that everything was there for him to take, flew out to Cyprus on an official visit, and shortly afterwards I heard that I was to go as ambassador to Iran, to succeed Denis Wright, who had been there for a long time. Not for any gifts I had, but for the gifts I hadn't! The Shah had made it clear that clever, Arab loving officers in the Foreign Service, who had all taken that special course at MECAS, were not acceptable. 'I hate the Arabs. They've all been colonialised by you. We've never been colonialised. Nasser's my enemy, so don't do that to me.' So they were looking around. There were a lot of other people I think who deserved it more than me but they had been to Arab posts. So I got it by default, if you like.

In Tehran, I had this wonderful two and half years with the Shah. That was a great period for me. When we got there, there was a great celebration at Persepolis, with the Shah showing himself at his best and at his worst at the same time."

**MMcB:** "Where is Persepolis?"

**Sir Peter:** "South of Shiraz?"

**MMcB:** "Is it a big city?"

**Sir Peter:** "It was. It was the spiritual city in 500BC of Cyrus the Great. Now it's just an open area with wonderful monuments. The Shah had invited all the world, every crowned head, everybody. It's a ruin, but there's some very remarkable murals and carvings. Well worth going to see.

The lovely embassy in Tehran, in the middle of Tehran; it was like having an embassy stretching from Green Park to Piccadilly Circus. It must have annoyed the Iranians so much, with this feeling that they were an old civilisation when we were running around in woad in Britain while they still had all this, and here they were, set back with all these

quarrelling countries, and they didn't like it. And they liked it still less when we started exporting (like the Americans) all the worst sides of our culture. What you export is not the best side of your culture, it's the cheap, the shoddy side, and that's what they saw. Not only that, every doctor in Tehran had to have his own new swimming pool. And the mullahs, the spiritual mullahs out in the countryside, got turned on very much by all that was happening. The Shah really wasn't aware of a great deal of this."

**MMcB:** "Did you get to see him much?"

**Sir Peter:** "I saw a lot of him, yes. I got to know him quite well. A lot of his questions to me were rhetorical. He would ask me, 'Why are my people so ungrateful to me?' There were always inclined to be revolutions, up in Tabriz or somewhere, and one had to explain to him, as I did, although I don't think he listened very much. I used to say, 'You're claiming credit, or the newspapers are claiming credit for you in everything that's done.' If there was a new bridge, it was the Shah who'd done it. 'In the end you'll be accused also of doing things you've never done at all' which is what happened really. He was very difficult at that time. I remember he would summon me at awkward hours. First, one had to dress up in one's diplomatic uniform, then, when I got to know him better, I could go in a black tie. He wanted to talk. He was a very intelligent man, who knew what was going on all the time, but he was really westernising his country so rapidly and alienating the mullahs and the older civilisation so quickly, and not really understanding the Shi'ite faith. He was a Zoroastrian, if anything, I think, so nothing really fitted like that. His own family were greedy. All his relatives were terrible and did him much harm by commandeering all the smart places, and so on.

We were going to withdraw from the Persian Gulf. This started with Ted Heath, - a withdrawing East of Suez. That was the plan. And part of the problem was the Persian Gulf. Of course, we had defence treaties with the Trucial States, and they depended on us to sustain them, all the way down. The Sheikh of Ras al Khaimah, people like that, depended on us; Sharjah, all these places. And overnight, we were going to withdraw, and change our defence treaties into treaties of alliance, with no defence responsibilities.

I had extensive consultations with the Shah about the consequences of this withdrawal. He was much exercised about the Iranian claims to sovereignty over some islands in the Gulf. One was called Abu Musa, and the other the Tumbs, the Greater and Lesser Tumbs. After our withdrawal, he sent down his son-in-law, Shafiq, who was married to Princess Ashraf, his sister. He sent him down with one of these military hovercraft which we'd sold him from Britain, with some Iranian Navy people on board, and they took over these islands. Two Indian policemen were killed on one of these islands which had a lighthouse. The temperature was 120 degrees, or something like that. The Sheikh of Ras al Khaimah complained bitterly that we cheated on him; we were meant to defend him, we'd handed his islands over, and so on. We negotiated, thereafter, with the Shah about how to manage the oil arrangement with these islands. I took part in those negotiations with a splendid man, Sir William Luce, who'd been a Governor of Sudan. The Iraqis then took us to the Security Council. The Shah said we'd opened him up, made him vulnerable, to Iraq. We were rather on the defensive with him, so we countered (this was partly me and partly Alec Home, together) with the poor Queen (she didn't want to do this at all, but she did, luckily) by getting her to invite the Shah and the Shahbanu, to Ascot, where he stayed over Ascot week in Windsor Castle, where my wife and I were invited. All the Royal Family were there, one after the other. We were laying it on thick to win our position back. You couldn't do that at the Elysée or the White House. It's one of our things which nobody else has. After the wonderful dinner late that evening, The Queen took us all round seeing things, quite amazing things, including ancient manuscripts of Persian history, which the Shah hadn't seen before. That paid off well at the time, except that, at night she beckoned me over and said, 'Tomorrow morning I will go riding in Windsor Great Park before we process in our coach, and I would like the Shah (a great horseman) to come riding with me. Can you advise me about his equestrian choice?' I'm not a great rider, but one thing I knew was that he would wish to ride a stud (male) horse. The Queen's face fell and she said, 'I don't have studs.' Then she said, 'But I think Anne has one, what about that.' I said, 'I think that looks splendid' then she said, with a twinkle I think, 'There's only one problem. The horse is called Cossack. The Shah's father was a Cossack colonel, so this was suppressed, and the Shah never knew.'

On the oil side, when I was there the Shah behaved very well, and very knowledgeably with the oil companies, never caused any problems. But just at the end of my time, the Arab OPEC countries started making a lot of trouble for us over oil at the time of the Yom Kippur war in October 1973. They were upset because Nixon had sent arms to Israel at the time of the war, when the Russians were sending arms to Egypt. It all got out in the open. They were incensed by it, and started embargoing oil to the United States. We, rather cowardly I think, separated ourselves from the Americans then, not wanting to be embargoed too much. The Shah's arrogance increased. He was leading OPEC at the time, and they were raising the price of oil, quadrupling it, quintupling it, at a time when we couldn't afford this in Europe. I would go to the Shah, and so would Dick Helms, the new American ambassador who had just arrived, and say to him, 'All right, you're entitled to raise the price of oil, but do it over four or five years, then the great bankers of the world can get used to this, otherwise it will be wholly inflationary and will be intolerable for the markets, particularly to the Third World countries with their debts.' He wouldn't listen to this. Nixon sent him a very, very private note, saying, 'Please stop this, it's going to be quite impossible.' We said, 'You will start importing your own inflation, because you only have a bazaar, you don't have a proper middle class, you don't have an effective civil service yet. You're getting your Chieftain tanks from us, you're jumping too quickly into an industrial age and you'll be covered with inflation and it will be ruinous for you.' He wouldn't listen. He said, 'Oil, this is a noble asset, I must protect it, it will probably disappear in thirty or forty years, I'm going to use my noble asset now; you're very rich you must pay for it.' He wouldn't listen at all, with disastrous consequences. If the central banks hadn't been so intelligent and able, we would not have got through that period. Four months later, I became the British ambassador to the United States. I was going around the United States talking to economic councils etc, trying to persuade the Americans that all was well in Britain, when our inflation was beginning to rocket up."

**MMcB:** "That was 1976?"

**Sir Peter:** “No, 1974. I went to Washington in early ’74. The Yom Kippur war was October 1973. Our inflation finally rose to 28% by 1976, but the real sufferers, to this day, are the Third World countries of Africa and elsewhere who are paying debts for oil supplies at prices that they could not afford. We’ve forgotten that. It all came out of this period.

I went straight from Iran to Washington where I had nearly three and a half years, and I served three presidents. During my five months with Nixon, I only saw him once or twice he was so absorbed by Watergate and taking the tapes down! I saw Kissinger a great deal. We used to have breakfast together in the State Department. Nixon had really delegated to Kissinger more than you would normally delegate to a secretary of state because he was fighting his Watergate problems. But he did have that wonderful breakthrough with China, which he and Kissinger did together. He did some remarkable things, no doubt about it.”

**MMcB:** “He got them out of Vietnam.”

**Sir Peter:** “Absolutely. He did that too. I think, on foreign affairs, he was probably better than any other president of the United States. Of course, the Watergate thing, it’s rather like the present president of the United States (Clinton) with Monica Lewinsky. The French simply cannot understand how one relates to the other. They cannot understand it. Watergate, they couldn’t understand what this had to do with foreign affairs. And if the girl is pretty enough, they couldn’t understand how this can affect his judgement.”

**MMcB:** “His standing.”

**Sir Peter:** “Yes. And they couldn’t understand it, of course, in London when we got rid of a minister because of Christine Keeler. She was so pretty, the girl.

Then I had two years with Ford. The strange thing there, was that he was able. He wasn't very clever, but able. He enabled the American people to overcome something unique in their experience, the humiliation of losing so many men in the war, and the confrontation with so many young men who didn't want to fight in Vietnam. If this had been England, we'd have had a mini-revolution. The number of people who would not fight, or let their husbands or children die out in Vietnam, was growing at such a pace. This enormous country could absorb it, but only just. We couldn't do it. Ford not only did that, he also pardoned Nixon, and, in my judgement, in pardoning Nixon he lost the vote later on to Carter. He only lost it by two places, Hawaii and Ohio. He restored confidence in the presidency, in himself, and he got them through that period of self doubt. He was disregarded, not quite as a joke (he slipped on banana skins, and that sort of thing) but largely because the American people had never voted him as president. If they don't vote for a president, they give less support for him. It's a curious phenomenon.

Then I had Jimmy Carter. A lot of my friends were democrats, and they got me to private parties in Washington where he would slip in, so I had a good start. I was the first ambassador to be invited to see him."

**MMcB:** "Didn't you give credit to your consul-general in Atlanta, Frank Kennedy?"

**Sir Peter:** "That's right. How did you know that. It's quite true. He was very knowledgeable, a good chap, who arranged it all. These little things count you know. Anyhow, after six months with Cy Vance as Secretary of State, the end came through David Owen, which you know."

**MMcB:** "I think this story needs to go onto the record."

**Sir Peter:** "OK."

**MMcB:** “How was your move out of Washington conveyed to you? That’s what I want to know.”

**Sir Peter:** “It was conveyed to me in a letter from Michael Palliser, the Permanent Under-Secretary, also enclosing letters from David Owen, a covering letter from him to Cy Vance, who had succeeded Kissinger as secretary of state. The awful thing is, I’ve lost them. I tend to lose things. Bob Dixon, when I was in New York, was so impressed by my close relations with Hammarskjold that he sent a dispatch to the Foreign Secretary about it all, and I’ve lost that! Anyhow, David Owen’s letter to Vance saying, ‘I want to introduce Mr Peter Jay.’ was awful. He went on to say something like ‘He is one of the cleverest men in England’ and that sort of thing, which he probably was, economically. ‘We’ve known each other many years, we’ve laughed together, we’ve sighed together, we’ve cried together.’ It went on like this, that sort of line. ‘I want him to explain Britain to you.’ Anyhow, I went to see Cy Vance who read the letter. His mouth fell open. He couldn’t say anything. He just got up and left the room. Then wrote me a very nice letter afterwards. I won’t go into all that detail. Of course, a Foreign Secretary is entitled, if he wants to, to remove somebody and put somebody else in. I had been there nearly three and a half years. I would have been entitled to another two years, until I was sixty. The annoying thing was I was just beginning then to be really useful, I knew people, I was really doing my stuff. It takes all that time, that huge country. It was silly to change, but the fact was (and I can say this to you) I was at Eton and Magdalen, I was the son of a Viscount, I wasn’t his man. He was very Labour, not SDP yet, but very Labour conscious at that time, and allowed it to spill over in his role as Foreign Secretary. So I can understand him wanting to get rid of me and persuading Callaghan as Prime Minister to approve it (although after I retired Callaghan told my wife at a party that it was a wrong decision). In fact Jay, who was very clever, didn’t do very well there, not particularly, and because his wife was having an affair with a prominent American. It was silly. They are so old-fashioned in Washington. I don’t think it was Owen’s fault, but I was smeared in London. They panicked. People roared with laughter when he announced to the press correspondents that Jay was going there. There were peals of hilarious laughter which upset him very much. He went off to Tehran that day, where he

had to go, and they panicked, the PR people at No.10, who put out stories, which appeared in identical terms in the two tabloid papers, that I was a fuddy-duddy, that I was not serious, and all sorts of things. I didn't mind that at all because I knew I wasn't a fuddy-duddy, but I did object when they started saying I was, professionally not very good. I know when I'm good and when I'm bad in my career, and I know that I was good in Washington. It was just my cup of tea. I wasn't so good in Paris. I mean, one knows these things. So that annoyed me, and I remained silent. There was an attractive British girl, who was a leading journalist for the 'Washington Star'. I said to her (I'm not a great economist or commercial man) 'I'm quite sure that Mr Peter Jay will be as good an ambassador in Washington as I would be economic editor of 'The Times'.' That was the only comment I made, until now, when I made that last comment about Owen." (referring to a comment made in the book Sir Peter then had in his hand. MMcB).

**MMcB:** "But that's in a slightly different context."

**Sir Peter:** "That's Bermuda."

**MMcB:** "Yes, in connection with Bermuda. And I do think that is an important point, one that we ought to include in this account."

**Sir Peter:** "Can I finish off with it?"

**MMcB:** "Yes, please do."

**Sir Peter:** "That meant that I had to go somewhere else. They said, 'Where would you like to go?' I'd got another two and a half years to earn my pension. What on earth were they going to do with me? They could not make me head of the Foreign Office, because Michael Palliser was a year younger. So I said I would like to go to Hong Kong because Murray Macle hose had been there for six years. They came back again and said, 'We're terribly sorry, we didn't know that, but he wants to stay on another five years.' Anyway, it went on like that, and finally they came in and said, blushing a little bit,

‘Would you go as Governor and Commander-in-Chief to Bermuda?’ I had to say ‘Yes’ because I had to earn my living and there was nothing else going. You can’t suddenly offend the Bermudians by saying ‘No’, and after me they did at least have the Home Secretary who went there as governor later on. So I said, ‘Yes’ and I was glad in many ways because my late wife, who was a good ambassadress in every way, was a gentle person, but found the life for an ambassadress in Washington with her own chauffeur, requirement to go on television, women’s affairs and all that, tiring. I think she was happy in Washington, but in Bermuda she could do her own thing. She started her own disabled home and so on. So that was good.

Before I got there, I went to London and learned what was happening about the two black men, Bermudians, who had assassinated my predecessor but one, Sharples, who was Monty’s Chief of Staff, was killed one night in his own grounds with a captain in the Welsh Guards who was his ADC. These same people also killed the Chief of Police and a Portuguese business couple. After several years, the investigation grinding along, they’d been sentenced to death by the courts in Bermuda. It had been to the Privy Council, which had confirmed the sentence, and that was how it was. The population was 60% black and 40% white, and you’d have had riots overnight if blacks were executed. In London (it must have been in July of 1977) I was assured that the Government intended to amend or abrogate what was called the Creech-Jones doctrine. Creech-Jones was a former Labour minister and colonial secretary. They were going to amend it so that a Governor’s recommendation for execution could be commuted in London. I was also told that, some time before, I think it was Alec Home had got The Queen to exercise her prerogative of mercy in a colonial case in Hong Kong. I was assured that this is what would happen. The Acting Governor, in between the last Governor and me, had received similar assurances, and what’s more to the point, the new Premier, David Gibbons, had been so assured, as he thought, by David Owen himself when he visited London and who had drawn his attention to it and said, ‘Please know that while you may have capital punishment on your books, we don’t have it and we don’t like it. I hope the Royal Prerogative of mercy is exercised and that your Government will abide by it.’ The message seemed to be quite clear to Gibbons. And yet, after I’d been

there a fortnight or so, a telegram came through from Owen to me saying ‘I have been unable to advise The Queen to intervene to prevent the law taking its course.’ When I went out to dinner with the Gibbonses I told him, ‘You’d better hire an executioner.’ We had to find one. I’m not allowed to say who it was or where he came from, but our chap, Pierpoint, had retired. I felt badly let down by the Foreign Office and by the Foreign Secretary. After the riots in Bermuda, the Permanent Under-Secretary, to whom I’d appealed, sent out Sir Anthony Duff (who was made a privy councillor for all the work he’d done on Rhodesia with Peter Carrington later) to help to investigate for London what had happened. I have a summary of his report and a note that the FCO Department concerned had “concluded that it was a sorry catalogue of errors and failures in communication compounded by the absence of key officials from London at the crucial time and by the Secretary of State taking matters into his own hands and refusing to allow the explanations of Ministers’ decisions to be sent to Bermuda.” It shows that I was kept deliberately uninformed by David Owen, who scratched a paragraph from a telegram by the Foreign Office. I wasn’t informed during this crucial period of two or three weeks, that the decision had been taken to leave it to the Governor for the recommendation to be carried out. It had to be, the sentence, because I had responsibility for capital punishment. My own prerogative of mercy committee had divided, six to four, in recommending it; and it had been so repeated in the House of Assembly, declaring that we should retain capital punishment, nearly two years before (the House could do that). I had no option. The sentence had been confirmed by the Privy Council. The opposition position was in London.”

**MMcB:** “Yes, I think you’re absolutely right. And, of course, the hanging was followed by extensive riots.”

**Sir Peter:** “As we knew it would be. As it was, one or two people died. After a bit I sent for my troops. I was Commander-in-Chief there, so to speak, and I was in charge of the Bermuda Army. But more than half of them were blacks, and were related to a lot of the rioters. I was up in my lovely residence, it was like a castle, great big towers, and they were burning down our supermarkets and other things. There we were, not in the

Caribbean, we were in the middle of the Atlantic. You can't bring in gendarmerie or military police, there weren't any. So what was going to happen? I was responsible. I rang up Callaghan, who mercifully had taken over a few months before from Wilson who would have consulted other people. Callaghan was an ex-Petty Officer, he knew about war and things of that kind. I always had excellent relations with him, and I still do when I see him.'

Anyhow, he got me troops from Belize, from British Honduras, and they sent troops in a Hercules out from London. And it rained. I don't know which was the most important, but we stopped the riots.

Two years ago Sir David Gibbons commissioned the research and writing of a short book about our work together in Bermuda; it was published in 2000 and is called "Partners in Peace and Prosperity. A Premier and a Governor in Bermuda 1977-1981". In a sense I made peace in Bermuda because I called for a Royal Commission to find out what had really caused these race riots and how you could stop it happening again. We chose Lord Pitt, who came out, the only black peer we had in the House of Lords, with a very good team. I chose members of the opposition party and the government party to join him, for three or four weeks. They allowed everybody in Bermuda who wanted to come, to say their piece, to say why they were upset by this, that or the other, in a racial sense, including all the dotty people. We had a wealthy local press who printed the whole lot out. So it all hung out. We followed that up by having a constitutional conference with a body from the Foreign Office and ourselves, and both parties were there, and we changed (Peter Carrington had now taken over from David Owen) what had been the vexatious point, constitutionally, which was called the Commonwealth vote. Young white people, who'd been in Bermuda for more than three years, had the vote at the elections just because they were Commonwealth and white. This had virtually deprived the black opposition party of ever really getting enough votes to get power. For thirty years, you'd had a one-party dictatorship there. So we eliminated the Commonwealth vote over a period of time. By doing so we reduced racial tension. Now the black opposition have

become the government. Whether they will control the racial problems, I cannot tell. But that was the peace.”

**MMcB:** “And the prosperity.”

**Sir Peter:** “Prosperity, that was mostly David Gibbons (Premier of Bermuda). He introduced the insurance act which was so good.”

**MMcB:** “Well, thank you very much indeed for that excellent interview.”