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## BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

Interview with Sir Frank Roberts on 3 July 1996

Recorded by John Hutson

JH: Sir Frank, if I may, I would like to start with a rather inward looking question about the Diplomatic Service. You were a member of the Duncan Committee. What does that bring you to think about the subsequent enquiry under Sir Kenneth Berrill by the so called 'Think tank'? Were they all wrong, or did they have some good points?

FR: Well, obviously nobody is all wrong; how can they be? And the Foreign Service unfortunately, does usually get, about every seven years, somebody enquiring into them. Perhaps that is good for us. But I did think, I was also a bit involved in criticising the 'Think tank'. I knew some of the people, because one of the main features of the Duncan report which we were specifically told to look into was the promotion of trade abroad and we had done a good deal of that and then, of course, I moved into British companies; I was a director of Unilever and of Dunlop where I was employed and since then I have been a director of subsidiaries of German companies in this country. So I have seen it from both sides. Now, where I thought basically, I mean I haven't got the concluding report clearly in detail in my mind, but where we did feel that the Berrill Report - if I put it this way, and particularly Tessa Blackstone who is a friend of mine, and she did say to me once that she respected my criticism of it - went wrong was in the idea that diplomats were really hardly needed any more, because experts could be rushed into any country to do the negotiating. Well, of course, experts do often come in, but even the experts have to have their way prepared for them - and I am now talking about bilateral diplomacy - and if you haven't got an efficient Embassy knowing who the people are with whom they should be talking (and that applies equally to the business men who come for advice) then frankly they won't get on very well. We will have a terrible lot of misunderstandings and I think that was one of their main things and they thought money would be saved that way as well. I, we were very dubious and when I say 'we' I suppose the Committee no longer existed, but there were people like myself who were there and the Foreign Office itself and so I think the 'Think tank' really did go down the wrong road and in fact that was fairly clear.

Not surprisingly, I think, the Duncan Report was in one sense knocking at an open door because obviously we were, all of us, determined that we needed an efficient Diplomatic

Service and we wanted to help. What we couldn't do was suggest any more money for anything, but we were very determined that things like, for example, the British Council or the, above all the World Service of the BBC - and that's rather in the news at the moment - should not suffer. And in many ways in getting the Service more concerned in and interested in and competent to deal with - although they had not been incompetent before - with commercial matters and trade promotion as distinct from economic policy, which I think was a different subject in many ways, we were knocking at an open door in that respect; which made a big difference from our position and that of the Berrill people. Where the Duncan Report got into a bit of trouble was in - I think the idea in itself was perfectly all right, but perhaps the presentation suffered a bit where we were trying to explain that in the terms of the then modern Diplomacy, after all we are dealing with the period 1969, I think, or 1970, that you had a new kind of diplomacy coming in which was basically a multilateral diplomacy and becoming more and more important. So we, under the influence of one of our members Andrew Shonfield who was, of course, a thinker, a very influential political thinker, said 'well, we need one kind for what I think one night at one of our working dinners we called "the area of concentration" and the area of concentration was, of course, the United Nations in New York, NATO in Brussels and so on and so forth and then, of course, the difficulty arose that if you had an area of concentration, what was the rest? Well, the rest was not meant to be inferior in any way; it was just meant to be different. I mean obviously you did not have that same kind of diplomacy with, let us say, the States of Africa or with Saudia Arabia or with important countries like Brazil or Nigeria, but we did get rather a bit of stick for apparently suggesting that there was one superior kind of diplomacy and another inferior, which was not at all our intention and it was only that definitely diplomacy had got a new importance in the multilateral field.

JH: Yes, thank you. I remember that caused some dismay within the service- people who had felt that they had been classified as 'outer area' people - but I am sure that it was merely the phrase that was unfortunate. That does rather lead on to an interesting question about modern diplomacy - the importance of what you called multilateral diplomacy in the recently born European institutions and elsewhere, the United Nations, of course. How difficult was that for them and did they adapt speedily and what is the importance now, much later, of this multilateral diplomacy?

FR: Well, I think we have to distinguish here. There was one, of course, multilateral

institution which had gone on a good long time which was the United Nations which had developed hopefully and was, I think, in many ways, certainly a better version with more complete membership than the League of Nations. So there had been quite a long period which Churchill and Eden had also lived through the League of Nations and the United Nations, but where this particularly arose was with the new institution of the Atlantic Alliance and NATO and I remember the first meeting, I think, that they attended when they came back to power in 1951; we then had to go to a meeting in Lisbon which was quite important and I remember even Pug Ismay who later on became the first Secretary General of NATO and had worked very closely, of course, with Churchill during the War and who went on to become a member of the Cabinet indeed ... saying how do we do business with twelve people around the table like this? In the War we had difficulty enough dealing bilaterally with Americans. Well, of course, they gradually adapted to it. So that was a different kind of operation from the worldwide one.

JH: Was Mr Churchill comfortable with as many as eleven other people around the table?

FR: Well of course, in - now wait a minute, it was Anthony Eden himself, I think, in Lisbon. I don't think Churchill was actually there - Churchill was wanting to get back to the old bilateral relationship which he, of course, had built up really so closely with Roosevelt in the United States and then during the War with Stalin in Russia and, of course, it was during his period of office in 1953 that Stalin died and Churchill - by that time was a relatively old man and the only survivor really of the people who had run the Second World War - suddenly had this idea that his last mission in life was somehow to re-establish with what he called the new leaders of Russia the kind of working relationship, admittedly a rather difficult one with Stalin. Nobody else thought the time was right for that and Eisenhower in America was dead against it, the French had not got any very important leader at that time, de Gaulle was back in Colombey les Deux Eglises, most of Churchill's Cabinet thought it was a bit premature and, of course, the man who was most important of all in many ways, Adenauer in Germany was horrified because if Churchill was suddenly going to dash off to negotiate with the so called new leaders of Russia then what was going to happen to the agreements almost ready for signature giving independence basically to the new Federal Republic of Germany? And again the question in my mind - as one of the senior officials having to deal with all this

- was, had we yet got any new leaders in the Soviet Union? In point of fact, I mean, when Churchill insisted upon sending a message, who did he get the reply from? Vyacheslav Molotov, who nobody could exactly describe as a new leader; the fact was that they hadn't yet sorted themselves out and they needed time; the new leader who was eventually to appear in 1955 or thereabouts was Khrushchev, but he wasn't yet in power; he was having a power struggle already, first with Beria who had been Stalin's security boss in the KGB and later with Malenkov; and it wasn't until later, 1955, that there was a new leader Khrushchev and then, of course the time had come, when Macmillan was Prime Minister, to meet him in Geneva, but 1953 was much too soon and if we had gone, I think, we would have found it very difficult to complete the arrangements which had been made for West Germany to become an independent and an important part of the Western society and we wouldn't have got a United Germany in exchange.

JH: Quite; because, as you point out, the way to German reunification was through consolidation of Western Europe and not the other way around.

FR: Quite right and this is, of course, what the Germans had to discover.

JH: Yes, indeed.

FR: And we too.

JH: The multilateral diplomacy is, I suppose, very much in practice now, also in the sphere of the European Union. Indeed, we read that there are voices calling for a common foreign policy and a common defence policy for the Twelve. They seem to have had a great struggle reaching that, even over Bosnia, so I wonder how practical it is. There was an earlier attempt at a common military policy, one might say a common defence policy, in the shape of the European Defence Community that you were much concerned with - is there any parallel with current events, current ideas on a common defence policy?

FR: Well, I mean, we could put it into that context. One thing, though, that I think it important to point out is that, in so far as you were saying that there appears to be now a common foreign policy over Bosnia, it is not a common European foreign policy; and it

would not have even got agreed if it had not been for the American involvement and basically leadership in the whole affair (and also, I think, it should be added that the Russians were also involved and they have nothing to do with the European Union) - so that I don't think Europe can suddenly say we have a wonderful common foreign policy in Bosnia and if and when the troops are billed to go in six months time, the American troops anyway, it will be interesting to see how common our policies still are: but anyway in Bosnia they go far beyond the European Union. As long as the idea has been to leave the Yugoslav problem to be settled first of all through a larger organisation - the organisation of the OSCE - but it had no powers and then, I think, the idea has been that the European Union should be brought in - though some of their leaders have been reluctant to get involved. It was no good; I mean, it didn't work: it wasn't until you had America coming back ... that was the difficulty. But where NATO succeeded particularly well not only as an organisation of security and defence, which was its basic purpose, but also in the enormously important area of political consultation. It did that in private. The European Union has basically to conduct its affairs in public: it's rather like the British Parliament so to speak. NATO was able of course to conduct its discussions in private and since the main object of its discussions was policy towards the then adversarial (I prefer that word to hostile) Soviet Union, there was an objective which they all had to agree upon for the common strategic purposes of the Alliance.

JH: Does that mean, Sir Frank, that to have a common defence policy you really need a given concrete common objective; you cannot forge one in advance?

FR: Well, basically, of course, in a defence alliance you do need, to put it rather bluntly, a common adversary; now, to-day of course NATO is actually going through a very important phase: there was a theory that with the Gorbachev reforms in Russia, the end of the threat of a hostile Soviet Union, that there would be no purpose for NATO. Now NATO is one international organisation with which I was really closely involved - I was a member of the Council between 1957-60 and since I retired I have been very closely involved with the then British Atlantic Committee and the Atlantic Treaty Association and so on - so I naturally talk with a little more experience of that than of the other major European institution which is the European Union. NATO has in a remarkable way found a new purpose for itself which is based upon its second aim of political consultation and this is to somehow find a way of profiting from the present situation in which we no longer - or we hope no longer - we are talking to-day when

there are elections in Russia - we no longer have a hostile Russia, but still we have to remember in the back of our minds that things are still anything but stable in Russia and we don't know quite what is going to happen; so you don't throw away your insurance policy or your fire brigade, which is what NATO started as, but NATO has got a much more positive policy which is to somehow develop a relationship, on the one hand with the new Russia, and on the other hand with the States of Central and Eastern Europe. Differentiating a good deal between them, I personally would say that it is very important to differentiate between those States which were not part of the Soviet Union, because these are presently the most probable new members for enlargement - countries like Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary; and although obviously the Russians are not going to like that very much, still I don't see that as a last resort that they can block it, provided that we are making it clear in the meantime that we have a very definite and very positive equal determination to have a new relationship with Russia. But, I think, if we do go on to say that we would also like to bring in the Baltic States, the Ukraine and countries which were part of the Soviet Union then we really are going to have great trouble with Russia; and almost legitimately because there is this awful phrase of "the near abroad" which illustrates what the Russians really think. Now, Poland and the Czech Republic have never been described as "the far abroad" - yet - but the near abroad is basically the former Soviet Union. I think a lot of Russians still think in the terms of a sort of relationship; they have a Union of Independent States, not a very active force for the moment. What I am really getting at is that NATO has been able to give itself a completely new function - I was listening only the night before last to the Commander in Chief talking here in London at a dinner of the Atlantic Council of the United Kingdom and he was attaching enormous importance to his relations with the Russian General he had there in his Headquarters - oddly enough, he said that the offices of the Russian General and his staff were in the room where they used to have the Berlin Crisis Centre which was intended that whenever there was a threat to Berlin we got together and discussed what needed, if anything, to be done about it. I don't regard NATO as an Organisation which is no longer needed - quite the contrary.

JH: If I could stay with NATO for a moment; I have inspected our Mission to NATO - a long time ago now - but I was particularly struck by the regular rhythm of weekly or bi-weekly meetings, immediate consultation with London, immediate replies, so that twice a week there was instructions from London, advice from our Mission, consultation in NATO, this was going in and out like the tides absolutely regularly; and we don't

know if this was typical or not, but I suspect that this machinery was much better oiled than some, perhaps, more disparate international organisations like the United Nations where the numbers are so much larger, or maybe even the European Union.

FR: Well that could be so stated, yes. And, of course, going back to something we were discussing before, you had a good staff at NATO, very knowledgeable and good at debate in Council and so on, but that did not in anyway prevent experts coming out as required from the capital which they did, in addition, not instead of.

JH. NATO is a very good working model - the one very good working model of any international diplomacy.

FR: I have not worked in the European Union or the United Nations, but obviously the European Union is a different animal because it does not operate purely by consensus; it is not largely a vehicle for maintaining practical co-operation with the United States which is one of the most important features of NATO. I think that it was Pug Ismay who said that NATO was there to keep America in, and to keep Russia out, and to keep Germany down. Well, it is still there now to maintain the link with America. Well with Russia it is rather different now; it has to establish a new relationship, a very important one, and, of course, one would not use the phrase now to keep Germany down but I think nevertheless I think it is very important for the Germans - they would accept this as well as everyone else - to be in an organisation of which they are a very important member as is America. And that cannot be the case of the European Union.

JH: If I may move to a particular question - I believe one of the things that you had to deal with while Ambassador in Bonn was that of support costs of our forces in Germany at a time when our foreign exchange balances were not very good and foreign exchange was tight. Was this such a big running sore?

FR: Well, it was one of these difficult questions, undoubtedly, for both sides. Well, it was a difficulty inherited from the old days when we had been operating an occupation system and naturally didn't have to worry about the cost and equally in Berlin where we still had troops (but on a different basis) the Berlin authorities did contribute there to a lot of our costs: after all, we were there protecting rather than occupying - we did always feel that it was only fair, and so did the Americans: it was not only us who got

support costs. But we got a lot I suppose in kind, I mean arrangements for barracks, training grounds - I have rather forgotten what the actual arrangements were but they were not unfavourable if you put it that way. Although we did have a lot of trouble later on when the population began to object to having low flying aircraft and noisy tank games and so on; we did a lot of training even in Canada and other places but still I mean we had all those sort of facilities. When it came to the support costs specifically, we had reached a stage when I felt that if the Germans wanted to buy military equipment or even Post Office equipment from us they bought it. If it was labelled Offset they had a sort of feeling that it was not perhaps quite the kind of thing that they would buy if it was not labelled Offset and they can't get the credit for buying it and therefore it is a little second class and not first class - I mean I can't prove this and I haven't got a particular case in point at this late stage, but I think there were things that we could have sold better in the normal course of our economic exchanges than by labelling them Offset and I think that was eventually realised and the whole thing gradually disappeared. However there was a strong British feeling that Offset was only right and proper, although on the occasion of one Offset negotiation I had to discourage a British negotiator from combining with the negotiations in Bonn a British invitation to an expensive reception at a big German hotel ... instead of quietly in the British Embassy.

JH: The Petersberg was a symbol of the former occupation, was it not?

FR: Well, not only that; but of course it was rather more expensive in Deutsche Marks.

JH: If I may move from general question to personalities, I was very powerfully struck by what you wrote about Ernie Bevin, of whom I only had second hand knowledge myself, in your book and I recommend these passages to anybody who is interested; but I would like to ask what struck you particularly about the other Foreign Secretaries and indeed Prime Ministers that you worked very closely with in your time.

FR: Well, I worked pretty closely with Anthony Eden, I would say one of the two outstanding Foreign Secretaries of my time; there have been good ones since. Alec Home became a good Foreign Secretary and certainly Peter Carrington was an outstanding Foreign Secretary. Still it is rather more difficult to talk about living ones like Peter Carrington and I think during my period in office that the two outstanding

ones were undoubtedly Bevin and Anthony Eden. I only saw very little of Anthony Eden in his first spell because when I came to London in 1937 from Egypt where funnily enough his career came to end, he only remained in Office for a very short time and, of course that takes one to the then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain with whom I did work fairly closely, rather oddly for a junior official - though of course, there were fewer of us at that time - and one thing I can say about Neville Chamberlain, far from his being a weak chap with an umbrella and all this, he was in fact a very strong minded individual. Anthony Eden himself had wanted a change from Baldwin, although his general ideas were much nearer to Baldwin's, to have a strong Prime Minister and welcomed Neville Chamberlain succeeding and moving over from being Chancellor to Prime Minister; only he was a rather Thatcherite figure. He was absolutely determined, he knew what should be done and what was the right policy and one can say there are arguments for his appeasement policy - I got into trouble with a broadcast once mentioning these arguments but concentrating on why I think it was nevertheless a mistake. The T.V. programme left out the second part and my friends rang me up and said since when did you become an appeaser! But anyway the reason we in the Foreign Office and Neville Chamberlain were poles apart was in the assessment of Hitler's character and ultimate aims. We were constantly reminding Chamberlain that he had not limited aims of stopping when he had re-established the German Reich with Germans who wanted to join it. On the contrary he had much wider aims which he had proclaimed in *Mein Kampf* to expand German interests and control in effect, and that is a mild word to use for what he had in mind, into Slav parts of Eastern Europe and eventually into the Ukraine and so on and, of course, this is where Chamberlain's policy collapsed when eventually in 1939 Hitler who had really wanted to move into Prague at the time of Munich - he had not wanted to have only a diplomatic success - he wanted to actually move his troops in just as he had arranged a victorious entry into Vienna the year before. He thought of Prague as a great city of the Holy Roman Empire of the German people which was very suitable for the German troops to go marching into and, of course, he was dissuaded from that by Mussolini and decided to settle for what he got, which was a great deal at Munich but, of course, six months later he did in fact march into Prague. Then, of course, Chamberlain suddenly realised that he had been completely wrong on a basic thing and not only that Hitler had completely ignored the famous piece of paper which Chamberlain was so proud of - 'peace in our time', 'if there is any other problem I will consult you' - notably had not happened. So I refrain from giving the arguments in favour of appeasement, though

there were many - it wasn't a dirty word at that time. Chamberlain was re-arming at what he thought was a suitable pace but, of course, in terms of what the Germans were doing not fast enough: but again he knew, advised by the Chiefs of Staff that we were already extended in the Far East with the Japanese peril - with the Japanese mopping up China - in the Mediterranean with Mussolini taking over in Abyssinia. We had problems in Egypt in 1937; we had most of the Mediterranean fleet in Alexandria harbour; so we did not want another problem in Europe on the mainland and again I think that he was not entirely wrong in his assessment of French weakness or rather unwillingness to fight at that time. We at the Foreign Office were inclined to say that the French on the day would be all right with Churchill - anyway we did test them rather far - but anyway Chamberlain was not a weak man but he had this unfortunate, this wrong assessment of the opponent.

JH: In the phrase that you used in your book of a few people, he thought he could do business with Hitler.

FR: That's right.

JH: But it was not possible.

FR: And even to-day, of course, we now have our new school of historians who say the same thing about Stalin. Well, with Hitler - when Hitler attacked Russia why didn't we wash our hands of all that and more or less give Hitler a free hand? Hitler never kept any agreement he had made with anybody else, so why should we imagine that if he had defeated Russia, which he might well have done, he would then sit back? Why shouldn't he have decided to polish us off too? Well, Neville Chamberlain having suddenly seen the light as it were, he saw it rather too clearly and thought that the Poles were going to be attacked imminently and so he signed very rapidly our agreement with Poland - he had to do something, but whether we had to do it quite so quickly in the light of history is arguable, because we did in fact remove any immediate pressure on Russia to join us in - the phrase to-day would be - deterring Hitler. But anyway to cut all that short I mean we had the Declaration of War, I was dealing with Germany in the Central Department of the Foreign Office and remained throughout the War until the end of 1944, first on the German desk, then as number two and before long as acting Head of Central Department. So I was dealing with Germany and its involvement in

things like War crimes, German Resistance, planning for the future and then with Allied Governments in London particularly the Poles, they took a lot of time, the Czechs but the Poles above all and then with Spain and Portugal and I had a lot to do with Eden himself at that time. He was a very good wartime Foreign Secretary. And Churchill also - with Churchill I was particularly involved on Poland; he gave a lot of time to Poland and the Polish Government in London and again I was involved a certain amount with General de Gaulle, because I was for a time interpreter when de Gaulle went to talk to Churchill: but I didn't deal with the policy - that was a separate Department of its own. Churchill was a great wartime leader but he could at times be a little bit stubborn; he had never been in the Foreign Office - of the few Departments he had never had. He and Eden got on pretty well but not always in complete agreement, but during that wartime period pretty well - the one great issue with which I was connected - well, Churchill had to be rather reluctantly brought round - was when in 1943 we were losing an awful lot of ships in the Atlantic and, I think, that had we gone on at that rate it would have been rather hard to have maintained supplies from the United States and to have gone on with the War. The difficulty was that the Germans concentrated their submarines in mid-Atlantic and our aeroplanes couldn't, in those days, reach them either from America or from us. So we needed a base in the middle of the Atlantic: the obvious one was the Azores and we had our ancient alliance with Portugal. We had agreed at the beginning of the War that we shouldn't call upon the Portuguese to enter the War because if Hitler pushed the Spaniards into attacking them we couldn't do anything for them; and of course we hadn't been able to do anything for them against the Japanese in the case of Timor, but we did feel that it was reasonable to ask for facilities at that time, because we had already landed in Africa and there was very little chance of Hitler reacting. Salazar the distinguished prime minister of Portugal thought that Franco would not either - but there was a question of how one did it. The Americans were going to use the facilities as well as us and they had no special rights under the Treaty so we had to get them under the Treaty. But, of course, they were Americans. Churchill was rather sympathetic towards them and said why are we wasting time negotiating with them - I went out with the Ambassador to help with the negotiations - my first sort of major personal negotiation - and Anthony Eden and Ronnie Campbell our Ambassador and I as Acting Head of Department said no - we were fairly confident that we could get the agreement but it could not be rushed; but every now and again Churchill would rather listen to the Head of the American Air Force and say why don't we just walk in and take them! I remember at one meeting, he started quoting from that famous poem

by Tennyson from *The Revenge* beginning “Flores and the Azores where Richard Grenville lay, where a pinnacle like a fluttered bird came from far away” - and how our brave British seamen had fought against seventy Spanish ships and one day I had to say to him: look, Prime Minister we didn't win the battle! So we were allowed to negotiate. It was quite an interesting negotiation and more or less simultaneously we got longer range aeroplanes so they were not quite so essential but they were very valuable and once we got there the Americans were able to use them and they went on using them well after the War; so it was quite a feat. We had to promise Salazar that he would be supplied with anti-aircraft batteries just in case there were bombs, so we had to wait for that - everything was kept secret, very remarkable. The spy organisations of the whole world, Lisbon, Tangier, Madrid and Stockholm - they were the great spy centres. Then there was this wonderful moment when Churchill finally got up in Parliament and said I have an important announcement to make, arising out of the Treaty signed between King John of Portugal and Our Gracious Majesty Edward 111 in 1372, etc.

I saw Churchill really, most of all in connection with Poland; that was one of our main issues and that really brought me into touch with Russian policy as clearly Poland was one of the main issues between us and the Russians and we were then always trying to achieve some arrangement between the Sikorski Government which was in England and in charge of the Polish forces - the Polish Army which did a great service during the war, not only the Army but the Air Force in the Battle of Britain and also they had quite a good Navy later on - their Army landed in Normandy and also fought throughout the Italian Campaign and we always realised very clearly - I realised - when I went with Mr Eden to Moscow in December 1941 when the Germans were only 18 km. from central Moscow and Stalin opened the talks by saying I want Mr Eden to make it clear at the beginning of these talks that you will support me, when the War is over, in my claims to have returned to me what amounted to all the territories of the old Soviet Union which Hitler had given him under the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement; but Mr Eden had to say no; that with the Germans just outside, hadn't we better talk about winning the War first? But [Stalin said] I would like to be clear on this and Mr Eden said: sorry, no. From that moment on I realised very clearly that if we couldn't get an agreement on Poland before the Russians were - if they ever were - going to push the Germans back, we would not be likely to get one when the Red Army had 'liberated' Poland. And that in fact was what eventually happened. We were very unlucky that Sikorski died and that was one difficulty; the Katyn massacre of Polish officers in a Soviet concentration

camp was another and the final one was the Russian refusal to help the Poles when they rose in Warsaw to speed the Germans who were then retreating. The Germans came back and it was terrible! And, I think, it was the Polish question almost more than anything else which did begin to convince Churchill that it wasn't going to be easy, or even maybe possible, to work with Stalin after the War; but, of course, at Yalta he had to go on working with him on other issues and, of course, we lost Churchill at Potsdam when he was getting more realistic about Russia than Roosevelt had been.

Then, I went to Moscow and there I suppose the most important thing I had to do, probably the most important thing in my whole Diplomatic career looking back on it, was when in the Spring of 1946 - probably March - we had to reassess what had been the post-war policy of Roosevelt which was also accepted by the British Labour Government under Bevin, of trying to work with Stalin however difficult it might be - as we had to during the War - and particularly in places like Germany but it was becoming crystal clear that Stalin was not going to be easy to work with. After all he wouldn't join, even when he was invited, the European Recovery Programme and wouldn't allow the Poles and Czechs to join in; he regarded the whole of Eastern Europe as being his domain; we were not to interfere. So we had George Kennan at the American Embassy sending his famous "X" despatch and. I had to do much the same thing - I was asked to do it, I was in charge a great deal in Moscow as we had Ambassadors away or gaps between one and another and there again - a little bit like the Duncan Report at the end of my career - we were knocking at a relatively open door at the Foreign Office; they were already becoming worried about these problems but they wanted to have a long assessment on which, they could, as it were, base policy. George Kerman had a rather more difficult time because Truman had inherited the Roosevelt policy and it was a little more difficult to move away from it without going to the other extreme and treating Stalin as red in tooth and claw as in one way he was but as ready to go to War which he never wanted to do against America.

So that was an important period and that really, I think, brought me into direct contact with Bevin - our great post-war Foreign Secretary - Michael Howard the historian who wrote an assessment of British Foreign Secretaries since 1783 assessed Bevin as the greatest Foreign Secretary in the whole of that period with a possible exception, and he would have been an equal of Palmerston oddly enough, not Castlereagh. We in the Foreign Office admired him enormously and he had policies, he knew what he wanted

and he would get them through Parliament - he had weight in Cabinet, weight in every respect, and he treated us, when he got used to us, as his Trade Union more or less: we were loyal to him - he was loyal to us. And really I think it was from that, as I had been Minister in Moscow for some time, I was asked to go back and be his Private Secretary.

I got to see a good deal of him, that was the time of the Marshall Plan, the European recovery programme was already well under way and that had to be completed with the building of NATO which was greatly assisted by the Russian blockade of Berlin and the airlift after that - Bevin was not very happy at the beginning, that we should negotiate with Stalin; he thought it was a sign of weakness to negotiate, but then he was persuaded because after all if we didn't, things might go wrong, we didn't think they would, not in terms of a War; but it could happen and it was therefore better to show public opinion that we had at least tried to negotiate. Our Ambassador was back at home with a heart attack and couldn't fly back again. So Bevin suddenly came in one morning and said you have got to pack your bags and go to Moscow - I was very junior, only a Counsellor. Bevin much preferred to have his own people negotiating for him rather than political colleagues - rather odd if you think of it today. So I suddenly found myself very much in the limelight and that was one of the key periods. We were for the first negotiations since the War with the Russians, in a position to try to reach an agreement, but if we couldn't on the right terms, then to say no.

Bevin's greatness as Foreign Secretary lay in many, many, respects in his character. He was more responsible than any one person, except Marshall himself I think, for the European recovery programme. He was then equally responsible with Marshall for the building up of NATO. He was equally responsible - mainly responsible, I think - for the decision to deal with the Berlin blockade by an airlift: to persuade the Americans that that was the way to do it and this, of course, led on directly to a complete change in our relationship with Germany from occupation to protection and West Germany becoming a very important member of the European recovery programme and of Western Europe and these were three pretty outstanding achievements. Although as a Labour Foreign Secretary he had tried to work with the Russians in the early period after the War - he was one who saw to it that realistic policies were followed, not only towards America and Europe, but also towards Russia.

Bevin had somebody who worked closely with him and always wanted to be another

Bevin and that, of course, was George Brown who became a very colourful Foreign Secretary and I worked with him - he was Foreign Secretary when I was Ambassador in Germany part of the time, in fact quite a lot of the time. During the time when he and Harold Wilson were trying to get us into the Community, this was a second attempt which failed. Now, George Brown had his weaknesses, a Jekyll and Hyde character, a great strain on many members of the Foreign Service who suffered from him. I was rather lucky because he had worked closely with Bevin and he knew I had worked closely with Bevin and he knew that by and large Bevin had got on with me and I with him; but on the other hand I did have experiences but I wasn't ever the victim of them in the way some people were. But on the major issues of the day which were Germany, dealing with Russia and the Middle East his policies were very right; he was highly intelligent; even after the most appalling nights when he had drunk far too much and behaved abominably he would always be there at the foot of the stairs at 9am the next morning able to conduct a perfectly effective conversation with the German Foreign Minister or whoever - he was a very remarkable man. In fact it was a great pity that he ruined his great qualities. It wasn't entirely his drinking; he could be equally carried away on one glass of whisky as by too many, but it was a pity because he had many, many considerable qualities.

Now a very different Foreign Secretary who I think you wanted me to mention was Selwyn Lloyd. Selwyn had never expected to be Foreign Secretary and he started by being appointed Minister of State in the Foreign Office by Churchill under Eden and Selwyn told me that when he went to Churchill, summoned by him to be offered a job, he hoped it might be Attorney General but he thought it would be Solicitor General and when Churchill offered him a post at the Foreign Office, Selwyn said there must be a mistake, I don't like foreigners and Churchill replied a very good thing too - Anthony likes them too much, or something like that! I don't know anything about foreign affairs - well, Anthony knows all about foreign affairs. So Selwyn started and when you think about what happened afterwards it is almost inconceivable. I was then Under Secretary of State for Germany, the whole of Germany, and for some things I reported direct to Eden or if not I went through Selwyn Lloyd. The other junior Minister was Anthony Nutting who was Eden's favourite really, a different character. I soon discovered that anything that went up to Eden through Selwyn Lloyd was liable to be sent back again because he and Selwyn did not get on - he had never been consulted, I think, and virtually you got things through via Tony Nutting. Then, of course, there came later the

Suez crisis and everything changed and Selwyn had to be a loyal supporter of Eden and indeed he was - and Tony Nutting took a decision in principle against the whole Suez adventure and ruined his whole political career. He was going to be the heir of Eden. So these personal things count for quite a lot.

But to be fair again to Eden because he had been a very sick man. He had had one great year in 1954 - he got the Garter. His achievements included the agreement with Germany and Germany coming into NATO, the agreement on the Western European Union, the agreement on Vietnam, the agreement on Trieste I remember and one or two others and then there was the agreement on the Suez Canal. I was summoned over by Churchill to go over these various things - he wanted to make a nice speech about Anthony - there were seven officials there; he wrote his speeches and then the officials checked; we were coming to the end of a page and I saw they had been listed and I noticed that there was one missing which was Suez; before I could say anything he said 'I know what you are going to say; you are going say that I haven't put Suez in. I don't think that it was an achievement' - so I said 'well, yes, but you had better not list them all' - we had quite a discussion and then he said, 'Have it your own way, but I still don't think that it was an achievement'. But anyway it ended that period on rather a nice note.

JH: Could I ask, was he right? Did the Suez crisis two years later prove that Churchill was right? Was he being far sighted?

FR: Well, I mean, it was rather easy to be far sighted in the Middle East and to know that agreements were very rarely going to work; however, I think, nevertheless the agreement had to be made; we would not have been any better off if we hadn't made it. But I wasn't dealing with that, actually.

We could go on about personalities but I think we have had enough of them, haven't we?

JH: I think we probably have.

FR: We have been going on quite a long time. Maybe there are issues you would like to raise?

JH: Yes, thank you. Yes, I would like to revert to another remark in your book where you mention that Paul Henri Spaak tried even during the War to convert Eden to the idea of European leadership after the War. Britain, that is to say, taking the lead and Eden's reluctance and I myself remember a Foreign Office, probably a circular, telegram, where at the time the EEC was being formed Eden used the phrase - we feel in our bones that we cannot do this - which with hindsight seems a pity; but was the feeling really general at that time?

FR: I think that during the War, of course, we were one of the three major allies and the unfortunate countries of Europe which had been overrun, we weren't treating them "de haut en bas", I don't mean that particularly. We came out of the War with our Empire to restore, or rebuild and change into a Commonwealth and, of course, Europe had to be restored too - here we had the policy of the three legged stool, one of them being restoring Europe which we did a great deal for. Then it was Bevin who had to do it; Eden was not in power at the time. Then we had to bring the Americans back into Europe through NATO and through the European Recovery Programme which again was a major issue. The Labour Government was doing a great deal in the case of Indian Independence through reforming the Commonwealth - so I think we had reason for not feeling like Spaak of Belgium or Adenauer of Germany or even for that matter Bidault and Schuman in France - that the major issue was to stop another European civil war and get together in the way we might have felt had we been part of the defeated instead of one of the so-called victorious nations. Eden himself, unfortunately, although his culture was very European - he collected French pictures and spoke good French and for that matter he also spoke quite good Persian - but he once had a discussion with Bob Boothby, who was more European, and he said 'the trouble with you, Bob, is that you are an European animal, I am an Atlantic animal and you can't be both' - of course, you can be both; there is no reason not to be - and then he had a story he used to tell me - 'in my constituency in Leamington I have many people who have relatives in Australia, New Zealand and Canada' and he then added South Africa, 'but I don't have many with relatives on the Continent of Europe'; but these were not sensible themes. Now Bevin had been in favour of the Union of Europe; already in 1926 he had made a great speech on it in a Trade Union Conference but, of course, in the situation he was in after the War, he couldn't see Europe on its own; it just had to be with America and Canada which was important at that time. He wasn't so -" you can't be European at all"- and, of course, the Community started in rather a small way with I think Euratom; it was almost

the first actual body and then the Coal and Steel Community which, of course, we were not wanted in - we weren't even invited till the last minute, and then it was the kind of invitation that we were expected to refuse - and with a Labour Government that was nationalising coal and steel it would indeed have been difficult; but looking back on it I suppose we would have been more sensible if we had said 'how very interesting, what a pity you didn't tell us before, let us know more about it'; instead of the 'no, not on'. So they went ahead with that without us but then, of course, the whole European movement got diverted through the European Defence Community. Now it wasn't their choice to start with one of the most difficult things of all - a joint army; but what had happened was that there had been the Korean War with a divided country where the Communists had attacked the non-Communists in Asia. I was in India (this was 1951 or maybe 1950) and the fear was that it might happen in Europe in Germany, another divided country, where again the Russians might encourage the Communists to forge ahead; and at that time although we had signed NATO in 1949, the Atlantic alliance, there wasn't any NATO military structure and there weren't any American troops; the only troops were the Brussels Treaty troops with the Headquarters with Field Marshal Montgomery at Fontainebleau. So Bevin said we have got to get the Americans back into Europe, we need them, with their troops, not just their signature on the Alliance; and the Americans, not unnaturally said, what are you Europeans doing about it? and that includes the Germans - after all it is Germany we are talking about. And, of course, we and the Americans and the French had successfully persuaded the Germans that militarism was a bad thing - de-nazification, de-militarisation, democratisation were the three great slogans. De-militarisation had been a great success and still is today; the Germans are not terribly keen on joining the Army - I know a family in London who have a male German au pair and he did his military service as an orderly in a hospital; he thought that was a normal thing to do. So it wasn't easy and the French were horrified at the idea of a new German Army and Bevin only slightly less so. The French as always were ingenious and came up with the idea of the European Defence Community which, of course, Churchill, although he was very keen on Europe uniting - particularly France and Germany - he wanted it to be without us. Despite the Zurich and The Hague speeches he had just described this as 'a sludgy amalgam'. De Gaulle back in Colombey les deux Eglises - who had great influence with the Right wing in France - didn't like this at all: he didn't want the French Army which was operating in Vietnam and in Algeria coming under international colours and suddenly becoming God knows what. And it was so produced in order to meet this American concern; and then the real need

for it passed as obviously East Germany wasn't going to attack West Germany; and the French got involved, particularly in the Vietnam fighting and they could never put the thing to Parliament in France to get a vote, neither Schuman nor Bidault, and we were constantly asking 'why don't you do it, get it settled' because meanwhile we wanted to get the German settlement and the French wouldn't agree to the German settlement which had already been negotiated - for Germany to become an independent country - until the military side was settled. So we in Foreign Office - I was in charge of that side of it at the time - with my colleague Kit Steel who was our first Ambassador to NATO - produced what became the eventual solution which was there would be no Defence Community because the French who had first produced it would not approve it and it would be Germany into NATO and building up the Brussels Treaty into the Western European Union and there would be a lot of agreed limitations on German armaments which the Germans would accept but nobody was to know about this otherwise we would have been accused of sabotaging the European Defence Community. So the paper was in my safe. Then time passed and we eventually had Mendes-France in power and he did want to get the thing settled - fighting was going on in Indo-China; Eden and Churchill had both been ill but were recovering at the time. So we saved the whole situation in Europe by going round and seeing everybody and offering what was in fact the Roberts-Steel plan. When I said to him we have got to go around with something he said well there is that bit of paper in your safe - Eden was very good at handling things while not always actually going into the detail of what should be handled - that solved that particular situation. But, unfortunately for us, it left us with the feeling that this European Community was never really going to get going if they couldn't even agree their own proposal. But it hadn't really been the way they wanted to start; it had been imposed upon them by this business of the Korean War and bringing American troops back to Europe. I went to Yugoslavia immediately after that at the end of 1954. And then the Fathers of Europe - Adenauer, Spaak, Jean Monnet, de Gasperi and Schuman said we have got to go on with it; rather like today Kohl says we have got to go on with it. I think they are as right today as they were then; but they had to find another way of doing it. They summoned a meeting at Messina to produce a European Economic Community which would go beyond Coal and Steel and invited us to join them and we very foolishly - I think it was a big mistake - we were very sceptical about it all - our representative at Messina was a junior official in the Board of Trade; he was sent there as an observer without being allowed to open his mouth. And then they signed the Treaty of Rome and we had to catch up later on. This was the decisive and

unhappy moment which Macmillan tried to put right afterwards by opening the negotiations interrupted by de Gaulle in the early sixties.

JH: I do feel that General de Gaulle really was not acting in the best interests of Europe when he excluded us.

FR: No, but on the other hand, if he were alive to day, he might say ' look at the situation in England even today - you have got all these Euro sceptics - you are always putting the brakes on ' - he wasn't entirely wrong.

JH: Perhaps not - some of that follows from the fact that we only got in so late because of him. If we had got in before they evolved the CAP and perhaps particularly nowadays the fisheries policy, then they would have been better policies and we would have been happier in the Community.

FR: I think that is absolutely right. But that was our fault; - well no - it was our fault that we hadn't gone in at the beginning - then, of course, we were so confident of getting in that - going back to Selwyn Lloyd - I remember I was in NATO and I was taking Selwyn Lloyd out to an airfield to get his plane and Selwyn Lloyd oddly started saying that we ought to leave Ambassadors longer in their Posts. I was very happy at NATO so said what a very good idea, but then he said it doesn't apply to you, you are going to Moscow but you are only going to stay there two years - which was very unlike Foreign Office posting policy; normally you didn't know so far ahead - and then you are going to go to Bonn, just after we become members of the Community; you will have a marvellous time. Well, what actually happened was that I went to Bonn just after General de Gaulle had stopped the negotiations which were going quite well and, of course, he had stopped the negotiations because he was supported by the Franco/German Treaty and so Adenauer, who I had known very well in the early period and was looking forward to working with again, was in the British dog house and I had no business with Adenauer. Mind you, the pro British or the more Nordic minded Germans like Erhard and Schroeder had insisted, I remember, on a change in the preamble of the Treaty which set the Franco/German Treaty within the framework of Germany's other alliances such as NATO and so on, which Adenauer and de Gaulle had not liked: but still the fact was that it was strengthened by that Treaty that de Gaulle had felt strong enough that he could say 'no' to the British; and then we had to catch up and

we have never really quite managed that.

JH: So between our mistake and de Gaulle's mistake, if you can call it that, we have the present rather unhappy situation.

FR: Exactly; and we haven't had very many periods when we have been, I think it was Major's phrase, 'feeling at ease with ourselves' in the Community. So many of the people today talk - the Euro sceptics and so on - as if it had always been intended to be just an Economic Community but it wasn't. It was always intended to be a political community, not necessarily a federal structure, to avoid countries going to war with each other again. And just as the first means had been the European Defence Union, clearly not from choice because that failed, the second means to the end had been the economic means which hadn't been the main objective. We had more to do with the building up of the internal market than anyone else, but why we should have thought that for the others that was the end I have never understood. It never was to have been the end.

JH: Perhaps it is our famous British pragmatism; we never look around the next corner.

FR: Well, yes, but we have got ourselves in a bit of a fix. We are always hoping that public opinion in these countries will somehow overrule their Governments and it never does; and we are always hoping that we can establish good relations with either France or Germany or both, which will somehow prevent them going ahead together with what they think for various different reasons is the right policy. Helmut Schmidt put it in London the other day, rather cynically, but not stupidly, at the end of a long speech: by the way, you want to know about Franco/German relations; well it is very simple; we are so frightened of ourselves that we hang onto France; the French are so frightened of us that they hang onto us and that's why we stay together and we shall continue to do so - where do the British fit in? We always want to be the third; but triangular relations are always difficult in ordinary life and would be equally difficult in international life.

JH: It is one of the great unintended meanings; there are quite a few of them in your book. You said that Dean Acheson may have unintentionally prompted Stalin to allow or promote the Korean War and, when de Gaulle did shut us out he used this phrase of Churchill's about preferring the Atlantic to the Continent but, of course, he didn't add

that Churchill said 'if I had to choose', but Churchill didn't want to choose - de Gaulle wanted to suggest that we were being exclusive. Well, I think we have reached a natural conclusion about something rather important there.

FR: I think that that is very important and very relevant today.

JH: Very relevant today. (That was the end of the interview)